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Single mothers from the lower socioeconomic class face many cultural and psychological barriers in the attempt to achieve upward social mobility. The governmental assistance policy assuming that 'work first' is the means to leave poverty, doesn't take into account the need for education, the lack of social and interpersonal skills, the cultural factors that affect women's employability, or the lack of sufficient, satisfactory employment for these women. Psychological issues around self-concept, abuse issues, and identity confusion are also ignored. Counselors can help women with these issues, and with other problems that women face in attempting to escape poverty. Specific concerns and competencies for counselors are presented. Persons who identify with or are otherwise accorded membership in marginalized groups face many cultural and psychological hurdles in the attempt to achieve goals that are normally beyond the accomplishments of those groups (Arredondo, 2002; Bettie, 2002; Harrington & Boardman, 1997; Higginbotham & Weber, 1996; Kastberg & Miller, 1996). The effects of cultural factors (i. e. stigmatization, stereotyping, and discrimination) are difficult to separate from the psychological factors (worldview, attitudes, behaviors); in actuality, cultural frameworks guide psychological development (Bettie, 2002; Harrington & Boardman, 1997; Kastberg, 1998). Nonetheless, cultural transformation has to begin somewhere; attempts to create lasting transformation(s) can begin with change at the level of the individual. The marginalized population of interest in this paper is that of single mothers in poverty, most especially those single mothers who are attempting to change their social status. In the current political climate, wherein single mothers receiving cash assistance from the government are required to work, interventions that improve work outcomes become

particularly relevant (Blank, 1997; Negrey, Golin, Lee, Mead, & Gault, 2001; Pavetti, 1997). The cultural factors that have contributed to lower socioeconomic women's psychosocial development are interesting and of import in the consideration of social status change. Also, this paper will consider the psychological issues and problems that these women are likely to face. To this end, review of a few works that have studied upward mobility of women from lower class backgrounds is illuminating. Research and Rationale

Currently, research on single mothers attempting to leave welfare through work tends to reflect structural explanations from a sociological perspective, or to examine governmental programs that can assist women in escaping poverty. The general consensus from within these areas of research is that a multi-pronged approach is necessary to really begin to eradicate poverty (Blank, 1997; Kastberg, 1998). Education is the proposed as the primary exit route from welfare, although most programs provide this benefit to only a few recipients (Blank, 1997; Negrey et al., 2001; Pavetti, 1997). While a great deal of research on the structural factors that keep women poor exists, and many studies on the most effective ingredients of public policy (programs) are also readily available; there is very little research that focuses on ways in which the individual practitioner can assist women in achieving self-sufficiency (Kastberg; Pavetti). To consider women from the lower socioeconomic class as a distinct cultural population requires some rationalization. Researchers have found that there are very different practices, beliefs, attitudes, and patterns of behavior between the lower, middle, and upper classes (Arredondo, 2002; Kastberg, 1998; Kastberg ; Miller, 1996). Methods of earning, spending, and saving money, the proper roles of family members, and the purpose of conversation are merely a few.

Different cultures have markedly different worldviews. For women attempting to escape poverty, these worldview differences are many, vary from those of lower socioeconomic class men, and have a profound effect on their ability to accomplish their goals (Arredondo; Kastberg). Culture and Worldview Effects Incorporated into the worldview of women in poverty are perceptions of lack of control in their own lives, learned helplessness, low self- image and efficacy (Arredondo, 2002; Kastberg, 1998), and strong traditional gender role expectations (Harrington ; Boardman, 1997; Higginbotham ; Weber, 1996; Kastberg; Kastberg ; Miller, 1996; Negrey et al., 2001). Other aspects of this worldview are a strong sense of commitment to family (Harrington ; Boardman; Kastberg), solid community connections (Higginbotham ; Weber), and a desire to help others in need. In working class families with strong traditional gender role expectations, girls are supposed to grow up, get married, and have a family (Higginbotham ; Weber; Kastberg). To even consider a career requires an assessment of the rewards and costs-an assessment that is not necessary for men or for women with more cultural resources. Success is assumed to carry a cost in terms of loss of interpersonal relationships (Harrington ; Boardman; Kastberg; Kastberg ; Miller). This worldview is not only limiting for women who desire socioeconomic mobility, it is also a source of identity confusion and internal conflict (Kastberg). It seems that the conflicts between the two cultural perspectives would be especially difficult for women in poverty to resolve due to negative self-concept and related issues. People in poverty are stigmatized and ostracized, due to widely held perceptions that have little or no basis in reality (Blank, 1997). These perceptions allow development of an 'us and them' dichotomy-an otherness-that encourages stereotyping and

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prejudice (Arredondo, 2002; Blank). While not all people believe explicit stereotypes, implicit stereotypes are more insidious, and so more difficult to vanquish (Myers, 1999). Also, our lack of awareness of these attitudes is (unconsciously) communicated to persons in marginalized groups (Arredondo), affecting the interpretation of the entire interaction for all parties involved (Myers). Thus, implicit stereotypes color all interactions with others. Beginning early in the educational process, cultural differences and stereotypes have a negative impact on girls from lower socioeconomic backgrounds (Blank, 1997; Kastberg, 1998). Home life is markedly different from school life for these students. Lower levels of parental education influence home interactions-in that less time is spent on academics, and that parents lack positive educational experiences and knowledge of the educational system (Harrington ; Boardman, 1997). Consequently, these girls enter the school environment less prepared than students from higher socioeconomic classes (Kastberg, 1998). The lack of exposure to school type situations, positive educational influences, and school language affects teacher perceptions of lower socioeconomic students' level of intelligence. While actual differences in intelligence may or may not be present, lesser intelligence is often assumed (Kastberg, 1998). Language, the main way in which intelligence is communicated, is quite different between the social classes. The language used in schools is different from the language used in lower socioeconomic homes. The function of language is different in this culture; families in lower socioeconomic classes use language for practical, concrete communication-for who and what, not how or why (Kastberg). Lower socioeconomic class students typically are less able to utilize abstract reasoning, are more likely to focus on concrete and practical language

topics, generally have a more limited vocabulary, and have a style of conversation that is not used in school settings. There is some evidence to indicate that these differences are sufficient to leave an impression of lesser cognitive ability (Kastberg).