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The Culture of Affluence: Psychological Costs of Material Wealth

Suniya S. Luthar

Suniya S. Luthar, *Developmental and Clinical Psychology Programs, Columbia University Teachers College.*

Abstract

Children of affluence are generally presumed to be at low risk. However, recent studies have suggested problems in several domains—notably, substance use, anxiety, and depression—and 2 sets of potential causes: pressures to achieve and isolation from parents. Recognizing the limited awareness of these issues, the objectives in this paper are to collate evidence on the nature of problems among the wealthy and their likely causes. The first half of the paper is focused on disturbances among affluent children and the second half is focused on characteristics of their families and neighborhoods. Widespread negative sentiments toward the rich are then discussed, and the paper concludes with suggestions for future work with families at the upper end of the socioeconomic spectrum.

In the contemporary child development literature, the phrase *at-risk children* usually implies those from low-income families. For the early part of the 20th century, children in poverty were largely ignored by scientists, and theories of child development were based on work with middle-class youth (Graham, 1992). Beginning in the 1950s, however, there was a growing recognition of the unique risks facing low-income children and a parallel growth in empirical studies of their development (Huston, McLoyd, & Garcia Coll, 1994). In contrast to this enhanced attention to disadvantaged youngsters, there has been almost no research concerning those at the other end of the socioeconomic spectrum—those living in affluent families.

The near total neglect of affluent youngsters probably reflects two interrelated assumptions among developmental scientists. The first is that they are no different from the middle-class majority (who have been amply studied); the second is that given their “privileged” circumstances, the lives of these youth must be utterly benign (and ostensibly, therefore, not worthy of scarce research resources). Neither of these assumptions has been subjected to careful empirical testing, however, and as is demonstrated in discussions that follow, both seem to be tenuous at best.

In this paper the objective is to highlight various adjustment disturbances that can be prominent among children in wealthy families and to appraise the potential causes of these disturbances. Toward this end, discussions begin with an overview of existing evidence on problems among suburban youth. The second section focuses on aspects of the contextual surrounds of these affluent children, with attention on the functioning of parents and families in upper-class suburbia. Consistent with the developmental psychopathology perspective (Cicchetti & Cohen, 1995; Sroufe & Rutter, 1984), evidence in both of these sections is drawn from different disciplines including sociology, economics, education, and psychiatry, as well as from social, clinical, and evolutionary psychology. Concluding arguments present some caveats and

Correspondence concerning this article should be sent to Suniya S. Luthar, Developmental and Clinical Psychology Programs, Teachers College Box 133, Columbia University, 525 West 120th Street, New York, NY 10027-6696. Electronic mail may be sent to Suniya.Luthar@columbia.edu.

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qualifications to major inferences that might be drawn from this paper, along with directions for future work with upper-class children across the domains of research, practice, and policy.

Evidence of Adjustment Problems Among Affluent Youth

One of the first empirical studies to provide a glimpse into problems of affluent youth was a comparative investigation of low-income, urban 10th graders and their upper socioeconomic status (SES), suburban counterparts (Luthar & D'Avanzo, 1999). Central aims were to explore potential differences, by sociodemographic context, in links between adolescents' internalizing problems (depression and anxiety) and their substance use, as well as ramifications of substance use for their behavioral competence at school (i.e., peer relationships and academic functioning). The sample included 264 suburban students who were mostly from Caucasian, white-collar families, and 224 inner-city youth who were predominantly minority and of low SES. Descriptive analyses in this study revealed that on several indexes of maladjustment, mean scores of suburban youth were substantially higher than those of their inner-city counterparts (Luthar & D'Avanzo, 1999). Specifically, affluent youth reported significantly higher levels of anxiety across several domains, and greater depression. They also reported significantly higher substance use than inner-city students, consistently indicating more frequent use of cigarettes, alcohol, marijuana, and other illicit drugs.

Appraisal of psychopathology among youth in this sample in relation to national norms yielded more startling findings. Among suburban girls in the 10th grade, one in five reported clinically significant levels of depressive symptoms, reflecting rates 3 times as high as those among normative samples. Incidence of clinically significant anxiety among both girls and boys in the suburban high school was also higher than normative values (22% and 26% vs. 17%). Similar patterns were seen for substance use. Of suburban girls, 72% reported ever having used alcohol, for example, as compared with 61% in normative samples, and parallel values for boys' use of illicit drugs were 59% versus 38%.

This study also revealed two sets of disturbing patterns concerning correlates of substance use. Among affluent (but not inner-city) youth, substance use was significantly linked with depressive and anxiety symptoms, suggesting efforts at self-medication (Luthar & D'Avanzo, 1999). These findings are of particular concern as substance use of this negative affect subtype shows relatively high continuity over time (e.g., Zucker, Fitzgerald, & Moses, 1995). Second, findings suggested that the teenage peer group might actively endorse substance use among suburban boys. High substance use was linked to their popularity with peers, and this association remained significant despite statistical controls in regression equations for various possible confounds, including both internalizing and externalizing problems (Luthar & D'Avanzo, 1999).

In an effort to follow up on these preliminary signs of disturbance among affluent teens, Luthar and Becker (2002) conducted a study of suburban middle school students with two major goals: to determine whether the problems previously detected might generalize to preadolescents as well, and to explore causes of high distress in the context of material affluence. These issues were examined in a cross-sectional study involving sixth and seventh graders in another high-SES community, similar to that studied by Luthar and D'Avanzo (1999). Again, the group was predominantly Caucasian; median annual family income in the town sampled was more than \$125,000.

Results of this study showed that suburban sixth graders reported low levels of depression, anxiety, and substance use, but seventh grade students showed some elevations in these domains. Rates of clinically depressive symptoms, for example, were twice as high among suburban seventh-grade girls as compared with rates in normative samples, that is, 14% versus 7% (Luthar & Becker, 2002). Similarly, 7% of seventh-grade boys reported drinking until

intoxicated or using marijuana approximately once a month, whereas no sixth-grade boys had. Finally, analyses of data from this middle school cohort replicated earlier findings on correlates of substance use: There were significant links with various internalizing symptoms among both boys and girls, and with high levels of peer popularity among the older (seventh-grade) boys (Luthar & Becker, 2002).

In exploring causes of suburban students' distress, Luthar and Becker (2002) examined two constructs likely to be salient in affluent milieus: achievement pressures and isolation from adults. In upwardly mobile communities, children are often pressed to excel at multiple academic and extracurricular pursuits to maximize their long-term academic prospects—a phenomenon that may well engender high stress. With regard to isolation, sociological research has shown that junior high students from upper-income families are often alone at home for several hours a week, as parents believe that this promotes self-sufficiency (Hochschild, 1997). At an emotional level, similarly, isolation may often derive from the erosion of family time together because of the demands of affluent parents' career obligations and the children's many after-school activities (Luthar & D'Avanzo, 1999; Rosenfeld & Wise, 2000; Shafran, 1992).

To operationalize major constructs, Luthar and Becker (2002) considered two facets each of achievement pressures and isolation from parents. Students were asked about their own perfectionistic strivings as well as perceptions of their parents' emphasis on children's personal accomplishments, relative to their character and well-being. Isolation was considered both literally and emotionally, that is, in terms of the absence of adult supervision in the hours after school and the degree of emotional closeness to mothers and fathers.

Findings of this study showed patterns largely consistent with expectations. Links between hypothesized predictors and adjustment outcomes were examined using hierarchical regression analyses, with statistical partialing of variance due to shared measurement in self-reports. Results showed significant associations for all predictors with one or more maladjustment domains—internalizing symptoms, delinquency, and substance use—corroborating the likely role of overemphasis on achievement and isolation from parents in the adjustment disturbances of affluent youth (Luthar & Becker, 2002).

Obviously, no inferences about generalizability can be made based on the two previously described studies; at the same time, there are other findings in the literature that resonate with the major themes highlighted. In a study involving more than 800 American teens, for example, Csikszentmihalyi and Schneider (2000) found a low inverse link between SES and emotional well-being. The most affluent youth in this sample reported the least happiness, and those in the lowest SES reported the most.

There is also consistent evidence on findings on substance use. Data from the Monitoring the Future study (Johnston, O'Malley, & Bachman, 1998) showed that during preadolescence, family SES had low associations with drug use. By the 12th grade, on the other hand, high-SES youth reported the highest rate of several drugs, including marijuana, inhalants, and tranquilizers. Regarding correlates of drug use, Way, Stauber, Nakkula, and London (1994) found, as did Luthar and D'Avanzo (1999), that high-SES youth (but not their inner-city counterparts) often used substances in efforts to alleviate emotional distress. Similarly, Cooper (1994) noted that among adolescent boys in general, more so than girls, alcohol use is often tied to social conformity motives such as drinking to fit in with a crowd, and Feldman, Rosenthal, Brown, and Canning (1995) showed that popular preadolescent boys were among those most prone to partying and heavy drinking later as high school students.

Various case study and clinical reports lend support to suggestions on causes of children's distress in the context of upper-class suburbia. With regard to the role of achievement pressures,

for example, family social scientist William Doherty has cautioned, “We’re losing our kids to overscheduled hyperactivity. Dance and karate, these are all good things...but we want parents to say, ‘Am I overdoing the providing of activity opportunities and underdoing the providing of family time?’” (cited in Belluck, 2000, p. A18). In the words of developmental psychologist William Damon (cited in Kantrowitz & Wingert, 2001, pp. 51–52), “These are supposed to be the years that kids wander around and pal around, without being faced with the pressures of the real world.... Instead, the parenting experience is being ruined and parents’ effectiveness is being diminished.”

Also resonant are views of psychotherapists working with wealthy families. Describing the “intensely competitive society of the rich,” Pittman (1985, p. 464) noted that in such milieus, successes are expected and failures are both highly visible and apparently inexplicable. Faced with unrelenting pressures to excel (to be average is tantamount to having failed), many children develop stress-related symptoms such as insomnia, stomachaches, headaches, anxiety, and depression (Gilbert, 1999); some youngsters come to exaggerate the slightest of health problems to attain “acceptable” routes out of competing with others (Pittman, 1985).

Regarding the issue of parents’ presence in their children’s lives, survey findings (Capizzano, Tout, & Adams, 2002) indicate that 10- to 12-year-olds are more likely to be unsupervised by adults after school if they are Caucasian and if their families are of higher SES (possibly reflecting wealthy parents’ beliefs in the relative safety of their neighborhoods). An investigative report following the outbreak of syphilis among teens in a prosperous Georgia town involved interviews with a cross-section of the town’s youth (PBS Online, 1999). Repeatedly mentioned in these interviews were themes of sexual promiscuity, yearning to fit in and have friends, and desire for attention and even discipline from parents. Comments by developmental scientists, in reaction to this show, were as follows: “What is (particularly) disturbing...is the tremendous disconnect that exists between the children of Rockdale County and their families” (Blum, 1999). “We heard a lot about emptiness. Houses that were empty and devoid of supervision, adult presence, oversight. There was for far too many of the adolescents a fundamental emptiness of purpose; a sense that they were not needed, not connected to adults, to tasks, to anything meaningful other than the raw and relentless pursuit of pleasure” (Resnick, 1999). (For a full report on this show and transcripts, see <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/georgia/etc/synopsis.html>.)

On the issue of low psychological closeness, child psychotherapist Shafran (1992) has underscored the costs of unpredictability regarding caregivers. Noting that children in wealthy families are often cared for by housekeepers or nannies, he argued, “Fluctuations in the presence and attentiveness of the primary caregiver... whether that person is the biological mother or father or is an employed nanny, will interfere with the development of a secure sense of self, with the confidence that one’s needs will be respected and met and that the world is populated with people who can be counted upon” (Shafran, 1992, p. 270). Pittman (1985) similarly indicated that parents who have strong drives toward competitive success are also highly invested in the “star qualities” of their offspring. The children therefore fail to develop secure attachments based on the knowledge that they are valued for the individuals they are and not just for the splendor of their accomplishments. Finally, national survey data (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 1999) showed that among 12- to 17-year-olds, closeness to parents was inversely linked with household income. Feelings of high closeness to resident biological mothers, for example, were reported by approximately 75% of adolescents whose family incomes were below \$15,000, but by only 65% of those with family incomes more than \$75,000. Comparable statistics for closeness to resident biological fathers were 66% and 54%, respectively.

The Ecological Context: Suburban Parents and Communities

Although there has been comparatively little empirical research conducted with wealthy children, more has been done with their adult counterparts, and relevant evidence is presented here. Consideration of these findings is important even for those interested primarily in child development, inasmuch as the processes that affect rich adults will affect their children too, both indirectly (through their parents) and directly through exposure to the same subculture. Discussions in this section begin, accordingly, with a brief summary of scientific evidence on adjustment problems associated with material wealth. This is followed by more detailed descriptions of conceptual arguments offered to explain such problems, which collectively implicate processes that operate at the level of the individual, of the community, and of the broader culture of affluence.

Affluence and Well-Being: Research With Adults

In a special issue of the *American Psychologist* published at the turn of the 21st century, several scholars argued that high material wealth can be associated with low psychological well-being. Reviewing cross-national epidemiological data, Buss (2000) noted that rates of depression are higher in more economically developed countries than in less developed countries. Considering the United States, historical trends show that Americans have far more luxuries than they had in the 1950s, with twice as many cars per person, plus microwave ovens, VCRs, air conditioners, and color TVs. Despite this, they are no more satisfied with their lives (Diener, 2000). In the words of Myers (2000b, p. 61), “[Americans] are twice as rich and no happier. Meanwhile, the divorce rate doubled. Teen suicide tripled.... Depression rates have soared, especially among teens and young adults. ... I call this conjunction of material prosperity and social recession *the American paradox*. The more people strive for extrinsic goals such as money, the more numerous their problems and the less robust their well being.”

Wealth – unhappiness associations: Individual-level processes Links between wealth and unhappiness have been explained, by some, in terms of high stress levels and dearth of intrinsic rewards. Diener (2000), for example, has argued that to the extent that the high productivity associated with affluence involves little leisure time, people become increasingly prone to distress, as economist Schor (1999) has described how the pressures to work, acquire, and consume tend to deplete personal energies. Csikszentmihalyi (1999, p. 823) has reasoned that “to the extent that most of one’s psychic energy becomes invested in material goals, it is typical for sensitivity to other rewards to atrophy. Friendships, art, literature, natural beauty, religion and philosophy become less and less interesting.”

Other scholars have specifically implicated individuals’ lack of intimacy in personal relationships. Pittman (1985), for instance, has argued that people who accumulate high wealth often have a special talent and are single-mindedly dedicated to its development and marketing, resulting in scant time for personal relationships. Warner (1991) has noted that the very attributes that make for success in the world’s marketplace, such as self-protectiveness and opportunism, can inhibit the development of intimacy, as these attributes represent a generalized lack of trust of others. In a series of studies, Kasser, Ryan, and their colleagues (Kasser & Ryan, 1993, 1996; Ryan et al., 1999; Sheldon & Kasser, 1995) established poorer mental health and lower well-being among individuals who disproportionately valued extrinsic rewards such as fame and wealth over intrinsic rewards such as interpersonal relatedness, personal growth, and community service. Perkins (1991) similarly showed that adults with Yuppie values—preferring affluence, professional success, and prestige over intimacy in marriage and with friends—reported being fairly or very unhappy twice as often as did others.

Although inordinately high desires for wealth can impoverish relationships, causal links can also operate in the opposite direction. Kasser, Ryan, Zax, and Sameroff (1995) found that teens

exposed to cold, controlling maternal care came to develop relatively materialistic orientations, whereas better nurtured teens came to more strongly value intrinsic goals such as personal growth and relationships. Adults who are unhappy also tend to seek solace in the acquisition of material goods (Diener & Biswas-Diener, 2002). Experiments by Chang and Arkin (2002) indicated that people tend to turn to materialism when they experience uncertainty either in relation to the self (feelings of self-doubt) or in relation to society (e.g., questioning the meaning of their existence in society).

Individual-level explanations of affluence – unhappiness links have also implicated discontent following habituation to new wealth, in a process similar to any unfolding addiction. Following Brickman and Campbell's (1971) suggestion that people tend to labor on a "hedonic treadmill," psychologists have argued that when individuals strive for a certain level of affluence and reach it, they become quickly habituated and then start hankering for the next level up, becoming frustrated when this is not achieved (Meyers, 2000b; Schor, 1999). Csikszentmihalyi (1999) has noted that wealth, like many good things, is beneficial in small quantities, but it becomes increasingly desired and ultimately becomes harmful in large doses. Resonant is Pittman's (1985, p. 470) characterization: "Wealth is addictive. It enticingly offers happiness, but it cannot provide satisfaction, so those who attain some of it keep thinking more of it will provide satisfaction.... [Those] who have become addicted to it... can experience severe withdrawal when they can't get it. Withdrawal from wealth, and the hope of wealth, can be terrifying."

Community-level forces—Competitive structures of market economies can promote distress by inhibiting the formation of supportive relationship networks. Political scientist Putnam (1993,2000) has argued that when there is high use of market-based services, there is, correspondingly, limited engagement of individuals outside the marketplace, low levels of cooperation for shared goals, and growing use of the market to acquire child care and other services historically provided by family and neighbors. Collectively, such trends erode social capital, as exemplified by diminished attendance at PTA meetings, churches and temples, or community development groups, all groups that are vital for the well-being of communities.

Evolutionary psychologists have suggested, furthermore, that wealthy communities can, paradoxically, be among those most likely to engender feelings of friendlessness and isolation in their inhabitants. As Tooby and Cosmides (1996) argued, the most reliable evidence of genuine friendship is that of help offered during times of dire need: People tend never to forget the sacrifices of those who provide help during their darkest hours. Modern living conditions, however, present relatively few threats to physical well-being. Medical science has reduced several sources of disease, many hostile forces of nature have been controlled, and laws and police forces deter assault and murder. Ironically, therefore, the greater the availability of amenities of modern living in a community, the fewer are the occurrences of critical events that indicate to people which of their friends are truly engaged in their welfare and which are only fair-weather companions. This lack of critical assessment events, in turn, engenders lingering mistrustfulness despite the presence of apparently warm interactions (Tooby & Cosmides, 1996).

These contentions are relevant to processes among the affluent inasmuch as material wealth reduces the need to depend solely on friends. Affluent individuals are amply able to purchase various services such as psychotherapy for depression, medical care for physical illness, and professional caregivers for children, and in not having to rely on friends for such assistance, they rarely obtain direct "proof" of others' authentic concern. In essence, therefore, the rich are the least likely to experience the security of deep social connectedness that is routinely enjoyed by people in communities where mutual dependence is often unavoidable (Myers, 2000a).

Physical characteristics of wealthy suburban communities may also contribute to feelings of isolation. Houses in these communities are often set far apart with privacy of all ensured by long driveways, high hedges, and sprawling lawns (Weitzman, 2000; Wilson-Doenges, 2000). Neighbors are unlikely to casually bump into each other as they come and go in their communities, and children are unlikely to play on street corners. Paradoxically, once again, it is possible that the wealthiest neighborhoods are among the most vulnerable to low levels of cohesiveness and efficacy (Sampson, Raudenbush, & Earls, 1997). When encountering an errant, disruptive child of the millionaire acquaintance next door, neighbors tend to be reluctant to intervene not only because of respect for others' privacy but also, more pragmatically, because of fears of litigation (e.g., Warner, 1991).

The culture of affluence—At the wider systemic level, the individualism of cultures of affluence can exacerbate people's unhappiness because of the relatively transient nature of social groups. Cross-cultural researcher Triandis (1994) noted that in complex, individualistic settings, people can belong to many groups without being strongly committed to any. They can choose their churches or clubs from among many choices, for example, and they tend to remain with these or leave them as suits their needs. In simpler, collectivist societies, by contrast, choices are fewer and groups (such as village or tribe) are often assigned. As allegiances shift less often, there are concomitantly more opportunities for the development of strong group-based relationship networks.

Arguments offered by Schwartz (2000) are also based on cultural emphases on individualism, except in this case the mechanisms involve high choice and control on the one hand, and vulnerability to depression on the other. The reasoning in this case is as follows. Extraordinary material wealth usually implies high levels of autonomy and choice, so that many affluent people can live exactly the kind of lives they want. They are able to purchase an endless variety of goods and services, and given high professional skills, they are able to move from one job to another with relative ease. Whereas all these options might be assumed to engender happiness, they often lead to depression instead. Why? Because increases in experienced control are accompanied by increases in expectations about control. "The more we are allowed to be the masters of our fates in one domain of life after another, the more we expect to be.... In short, life is supposed to be perfect" (Schwartz, 2000, p. 85). Continuing this argument, Schwartz noted that when perfection is not achieved, the ethos of individualism biases people toward attributing failures to personal rather than to external causes. As Seligman's (1975) seminal works established, this sort of causal attribution is just the type that fosters depression.

Finally, cultures of materialism carry the strong message that affluence brings happiness—with the implicit corollary, of course, that wealthy people who are unhappy must be ungrateful, self-indulgent, or both. Psychotherapists report, in fact, that affluent individuals commonly struggle with confusion and guilt about their distress (e.g., Wolfe & Fodor, 1996), as captured in the following report: "I cannot begin to count the number of times that an expensively dressed, immaculately groomed woman drove her luxury car into my parking area, walked gracefully into my office, sat down, and announced, 'My life is perfect. I have everything I could ask for,' and then, bursting into tears, 'Why am I so unhappy? This makes no sense at all—I must get over this!'" (R. Tower, personal communication, April 7, 2002). Our own work with suburban teens has revealed similar themes. Over the years, several troubled youth have reported that disclosure of their depression has elicited negative reactions ranging from incredulity (that they could have anything to be unhappy about) to dismissal or even scorn of what are seen as self-centered and entirely unwarranted complaints. The cultural trivialization of their depression—via the ubiquitous message that the rich have no right to feel emotionally deprived—only exacerbates existing feelings of isolation and alienation.

Gender-specific stressors—Aside from intrapersonal, community-based, and cultural factors that contribute to wealth – unhappiness links, there are also some challenges relatively specific to women in upper-class communities and other challenges more salient for men. To consider women first: Many affluent mothers do not work outside the home. Despite excellent qualifications and, frequently, stellar early career trajectories, several of these women leave the work force once they have children. As a result, they are deprived of various work-related gratifications, including the self-efficacy and positive identity that derive from jobs well done (Csikszentmihalyi, 1997) and the vital networks of supportive relationships and sense of community that can be accessed in the workplace (Myers & Diener, 1995). As sociologist Hochschild (1997) has demonstrated, American parents in general—from diverse backgrounds and socioeconomic strata—tend to prefer being in the office to staying at home to care for young children, perceiving the former as generally more gratifying and the latter as comparatively more stressful.

Mothers who do remain employed, conversely, often experience the dual pressures of having to excel not only at fast-paced, demanding jobs such as investment banking or corporate law but equally in their roles as mothers (e.g., Berger, 2000). The professional culture demands that they put as much time and effort into their jobs as do their male colleagues (although women are particularly uneasy about outperforming others in traditionally male domains, such as income or occupational prestige, see Exline & Lobel, 1999). At the same time, many of these women set very high standards for themselves as parents. Thus, the disdainful moniker “soccer mom” often refers to women who find themselves, frequently, “on their mobile phones taking care of business while they’re cheering their kids on the football field, [and]... working late at the office, correcting their kids’ homework by e-mail and fax” (Kantrowitz & Wingert, 2001, p. 51).

The pressures faced by upper-class women, along with a strong subcultural emphasis on privacy, lead many of them to self-medicate through alcohol or prescription drugs (Wolfe & Fodor, 1996). Describing this phenomenon, Dr. David Brizer, Chair of Norwalk Hospital’s Department of Psychiatry, has said, “The drug problem is endemic to wealthy suburban areas, due in part to social isolation... Women who live in parts of the country such as ours may have gone from a very culturally and intellectually rich atmosphere of being in college to being stuck at home—and it can be maddening, not to mention the very real challenge of raising children” (quoted in Duff, 2002, p. 102).

Also believed to be highly prevalent are eating disorders such as anorexia, bulimia, and crash dieting, all of which derive from the strong emphasis on physical appearance in the upper classes (Wolfe & Fodor, 1996). Although this concern with appearance may be disparaged by some as a shallow preoccupation unique to the rich, evolutionary psychology experiments suggest otherwise. As Gutierrez, Kenrick, and Partch (1999) and others have argued (e.g., Buss, 1989), the ability to attract mates is linked with characteristics strongly valued in the opposite sex, and these among women are signs of fertility (i.e., healthy and youthful physical attractiveness). Thus, women in general can come to doubt their own appeal as mates when surrounded by others who are highly physically attractive. Consistent with this reasoning, results of experiments established that female participants, when shown pictures of other physically attractive women, subsequently reported lower feelings of personal adequacy and decreased ratings of their own attractiveness as marriage partners (Gutierrez et al., 1999; see also Brown, Novick, Lord, & Richards, 1992; Richins, 1991).

Juxtaposed with women’s adverse reactions to pictures of physically attractive others, Gutierrez et al.’s (1999) research showed, in parallel, that men’s reports of their desirability as marriage partners suffered when they were exposed to socially dominant men (see also Kenrick & Keefe, 1992; Kenrick, Neuberg, Zierk, & Krones, 1994; Sadalla, Kendrick, and Vershure,

1987). Given that dominant and influential men are likely to be ubiquitous in the most high-paying professions, there is again considerable potential for the festering of self-doubt and insecurity among men working in such settings.

Furthermore, failures can be particularly painful for those most accustomed to power and success. In their studies of vervet monkeys, Raleigh, McGuire, Brammer, Pollack, and Yuwiler (1991) found that the highest ranking (alpha) males had levels of the neurotransmitter serotonin that were twice as high as those of other males in the group. When these alpha males lost their position, however, their serotonin levels fell and their behaviors resembled those of depressed humans: They huddled, rocked, and refused food. These behaviors were then reduced with the administrations of drugs that raise serotonin levels, such as Prozac. As Buss (2000, p. 20) concluded, "Perhaps the most difficult challenge posed by our evolved psychological mechanisms is managing competition and hierarchy negotiation, given that selection has fashioned powerful mechanisms that drive rivalry and status striving."

A final problem stemming from men's career patterns pertains to their fluctuating levels of integration with family life. Based on her ethnographic research with families of fishermen, Mederer (1999) has provided a vivid view into stresses experienced as a result of the fathers' frequent trips away. Frequently, spouses and children find it difficult to readjust their role boundaries and everyday routines to accommodate to the men's reentry after prolonged absences. Mederer correctly noted that such struggles are not unique to fisherman's families but generalize to any situation where a parent is frequently away for work (e.g., in military or corporate careers).

Judgments About Choices and Control

Undoubtedly, the preceding arguments will evoke, in some, the equivalent of the sardonic colloquialism, "I should only have their problems!" Many have scant sympathy for the rich, believing that they can and should walk away from their frenetic lifestyles. High-income professionals are commonly seen as excessively ambitious, volitionally choosing their fast-paced careers given lopsided priorities concerning the importance of money or fame versus the welfare of their families.

Although there may be some validity to such views, there are at least three factors that bear consideration before making sweeping judgments in this regard. One is that it is a universal human phenomenon to want more—more than one currently has, and more than what others in one's life space have. As cryptically noted by Myers (2000b, p. 60), "Thanks to our capacity to adapt to ever greater fame and fortune, yesterday's luxuries can soon become today's necessities and tomorrow's relics." A cardinal premise of Festinger's (1954) social comparison theory, similarly, is that people evaluate themselves not so much by objective standards as by comparison with people around them (see also Exline & Lobel, 1999; Tesser, Millar, & Moore, 2000). Illustrating this, Myers (2000a) pointed out that most people are happier making \$50,000 when those around them make 40,000 than they are making \$60,000 when those around them make \$70,000.

The second consideration is that many parents in upper-class communities can be reluctant to give up their high-paying careers not out of shallow greed or insatiable consumerism but because it could imply reductions in opportunities for their children (cf. Wolfe & Fodor, 1996). In this regard, again, rich parents are not unique: All parents want to do the best they can for their young. Whereas fencing lessons or designer clothes might be viewed as frivolous indulgences, the desire for high-quality educational experiences is less easily dismissed. There could, therefore, be at least two interpretations of economist Linder's (1970) assertion that as income and therefore the value of one's time increases, it becomes less and less rational to spend it on things other than making money. To be sure, this could reflect parents' selfish

acquisitiveness. Equally, however, it could—given the materialistic culture of contemporary America—reflect their guilt at voluntarily choosing not to work hard at acquiring all they possibly could, for the next generation.

Finally, parents' resolute commitment to fast-paced careers does not necessarily stem from egotistical, narcissistic self-absorption but may often derive from deep-seated personal unhappiness. As previously noted, research has shown that many people become highly invested in acquiring wealth and prestige in reaction to, or as compensation for, lack of emotional gratifications (Kasser et al., 1995). Consistent with this view is Miller's (1995) vivid description of *The Drama of the Gifted Child*, where the lack of early parental acceptance of the whole child—with all of his or her imperfections—leads some highly intelligent children to become excessively invested in their achievements as a source of their self-worth. As they move through life, the driving sentiment increasingly becomes, "I am what I achieve," with the chilling corollary, of course, "Without my achievements, I will become a failure."

Negative Judgments: The Rich and the Poor

Interestingly, some negative views of the very rich are similar to those applied to their counterparts at the other extreme of the economic continuum. In her literature review, Lott (2002) noted that the poor are often characterized as being dishonest, indolent, promiscuous, uninterested in education, and personally responsible for their plight. There is a parallel set of adjectives commonly applied to the rich: unethical, entitled, arrogant, superficial, and narcissistic, and entirely responsible for their own unhappiness (Pittman, 1985; Pollak & Schaffer, 1985; Shafran, 1992; Warner, 1991; Weitzman, 2000).

The wealthy may actually evoke more widespread dislike than the poor given their status as the keepers of the power rather than those excluded from it (much as the schoolyard bully is usually more disliked than is the victim). Social psychologists have suggested, in fact, that misfortunes of the wealthy can evoke a malicious pleasure in others, for people in general feel some satisfaction in the downfall of those far more successful than they themselves are (a phenomenon labeled *schadenfreude*; see Brigham, Kelso, Jackson, & Smith, 1997; Feather & Sherman, 2002; Smith, 2000; Smith et al., 1996).

It should be noted, too, that affluent, powerful people are likely to be well aware of others' resentment of them and to be troubled by this. Based on their extensive literature review, Exline and Lobel (1999) concluded that outperforming others can be privately satisfying, by engendering, for example, feelings of pride and efficacy. At the same time, it can be a source of much stress—and most so among those highly successful—because of feelings of guilt or embarrassment; empathic sadness for those outperformed; worries about conflicted relationships with them; and fears of provoking their envy, exclusion, or retaliation. Exline and Lobel noted, furthermore, that wealth and possessions are among the domains in which people tend to experience high stress about having outperformed others, an assertion that implies, in turn, that wealthy folk are probably well aware that societal attitudes toward their difficulties will be unsympathetic at best. To summarize, then, families in poverty are obviously greatly handicapped from the standpoint of basic necessities such as food, shelter, and education, but in terms of being disliked or distanced by society in general, the affluent may be at least as disadvantaged if not more so.

Parallels in negative attitudes toward the poor and the rich are also apparent in service providers' countertransference reactions. Clinicians working with poor heroin-abusing mothers are often cautioned about reactions such as judgments of their moral depravity or neglect of children (e.g., Luthar, D'Avanzo, & Hites, 2003; Luthar & Suchman, 2000). In parallel, therapists working with the very rich are warned of reactions ranging from dismissiveness at the one end to envy and active contempt at the other. Weitzman (2000), for

example, reported that many service providers trivialize complaints of spousal abuse from affluent women, assuming that they have all the resources needed to leave their abusive partners; consequently, assistance is often denied and referrals not made. Several authors have written of envy among psychotherapists (Pollak & Schaffer, 1985; Shafran, 1992; Warner, 1991), which stems from their typically lower access to material possessions and life opportunities than their very wealthy clients. As envy is an emotion that is particularly socially disapproved (Exline & Lobel, 1999), furthermore, many therapists (and no doubt, many in society more generally) then defend it by converting it into other less repugnant emotions. These usually include pejorative or contemptuous attitudes such as scorn about their self-indulgent, querulous complaining or covert pleasure in seeing the rich get “knocked down to size” (Pollak & Schaffer, 1985, p. 351; see also Shafran, 1992).

Counterarguments, Caveats, and Future Directions

While discussions presented thus far highlight the psychological costs of affluence, several counterarguments warrant consideration in weighing the overall magnitude of the problems suggested. The first of these concerns the authenticity of disturbance reported by affluent youth. Although a few samples of high-SES teenagers have shown elevated levels of depression, anxiety, and substance use, it is possible that these problems reflect normative complaints in the culture of upper-class suburbia rather than serious psychopathology. In other words, for some if not many youth, reports of adolescent angst might reflect conformity to what is expected (or even approved of) in the subculture of affluence (Luthar & Becker, 2002). In the years ahead, longitudinal research will be critical in illuminating this issue, identifying the degree to which high self-reported distress among suburban teens does in fact presage subsequent deterioration in critical domains, by affecting their school grades, for example, or leading to diagnosable mental illness.

A second issue concerns the geographic generalizability of problems among affluent youth. Extant evidence of modest inverse links between family wealth and positive adolescent outcomes (i.e., subjective happiness and closeness to parents) has derived from cross-national samples (Csikszentmihalyi & Schneider, 2000; U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 1999). On the other hand, the studies showing elevations in negative outcomes—greater psychopathology as compared with normative samples—were conducted in Northeastern suburbs (e.g., Luthar & Becker, 2002; Luthar & D’Avanzo, 1999). It is plausible that regions of the country vary in the degree to which affluence implies highly stressful, competitive lifestyles and, thus, increased vulnerability to symptoms. In a similar vein, it is not clear whether the problems suggested represent a largely suburban phenomenon or might generalize to high-SES children in large cities.

The third issue constitutes a critical caveat to the substantive take-home messages that might be gleaned from this paper: that it is not the surfeit of riches in itself but rather an overemphasis on status and wealth that is likely to compromise well-being. All things considered, it is better to be rich than to be poor; cross-national data clearly show that money enhances subjective well-being when it implies the difference between being able versus unable to meet basic life needs (Diener & Biswas-Diener, 2002). It is only when individuals become disproportionately invested in extrinsic rewards, concomitantly neglecting intrinsic rewards such as closeness in relationships, that there are likely to be ill effects on their mental health outcomes (Kasser, 2002; Tooby & Cosmides, 1996; Triandis, 1994).

In the years ahead, it is vital that developmental scientists critically examine the conditions under which parents’ affluence spells high risk for children. To be sure, epidemiological evidence will be required to ascertain the degree to which child psychopathology rates are truly elevated among the wealthy. Even as we await such evidence, however, it would be wise to

recognize that (a) no child is immune to stressors from the environment, (b) extreme environments of all kinds are likely to have their own sets of problems, and (c) there is almost no developmental research on the ecological context of affluence. In the decade since Graham's (1992) admonishment that developmental research until then had involved mostly middle-class children, there has been, appropriately, growing attention to youth in poverty. It is critical that we now begin to consider the other extreme that has remained ignored thus far, making a concerted effort to illuminate the challenges particularly salient for children of affluence, along with the severity and continuity of problems they might develop.

As researchers begin to clarify these issues, it would also be prudent for applied professionals—educators, pediatricians, and other clinicians—to remain vigilant to the mental health vulnerabilities of high-SES youth. Research on child psychopathology has shown that, in general, most parents tend to be aware when their children are emotionally troubled but, at the same time, tend not to seek help for these problems (Puura et al., 1998). Affluent parents are less likely than most to seek professional help, partly to protect the veneer of perfection they feel compelled to maintain (Wolfe & Fodor, 1996) and partly for fear that this may constitute a significant impediment for the child's academic and professional future (Pollak & Schaffer, 1985). By the same token, if school personnel are concerned about children's adjustment, they are cautious in exhorting professional care for fear of parental displeasure (or even litigation). Paradoxically, therefore, children of the wealthy can be deprived of the school-based mental health services that are routinely accessed by those from more modest backgrounds (Pollak & Schaffer, 1985).

In considering the need for any external interventions, some might protest that the scant policy resources available for children's mental health should be reserved only for the truly needy—those in poverty—but this position would be questionable from an ethical and pragmatic perspective. Classism is unconscionable whomever the target; a child who is suicidal or dependant on drugs deserves help regardless of how much money his or her parents earn. From a practical standpoint, furthermore, it is useful to consider that the external resources needed to foster children's mental health will be exponentially lower for the rich than the poor. In most low-income communities, the creation of quality mental health services would necessitate considerable financial support. In communities where such services are already in place, an expedient first step, as Doherty (2000) has argued, would simply be to raise adults' awareness of the psychological costs of overscheduled, competitive lifestyles. Such awareness promotion can be effectively accomplished through books comprehensible to the lay public (for excellent examples, see Kasser, 2002; Myers, 2000a; Rosenfeld & Wise, 2000), interviews with journalists (e.g., Belluck, 2000; Julien, 2002; Smith, 2002; Wen, 2002), and workshops with parent, school, and community groups (see Kantrowitz, 2000, p. 49). Although obviously not panaceas for extant ills, such efforts could begin to sensitize caregivers to potentially insidious stressors in the context of affluence, stressors that they (like we, in developmental science) may have been only faintly aware of in prior years.

Conclusions

Although children of the very affluent are typically seen as low risk, there are some suggestions that they manifest more disturbance than others, particularly in relation to substance use, anxiety, and depression. Exploration of causes suggests two factors as being implicated: excessive pressures to achieve and isolation from parents (both literal and emotional).

Extant studies with adults have also suggested psychological costs of material wealth. At the individual level, inordinate emphasis on material success can limit attainment of other rewards critical for well-being, such as close relationships. At the community level, material affluence can inhibit the formation of supportive networks, as services tend to be bought and not shared.

At the systemic level, the subculture of affluence emphasizes personal autonomy and control, with the associated dangers of blaming oneself when control is not achieved.

Some adults' stressors are gender specific. Many upper-class mothers give up professional careers and are thus deprived of work-related gratifications; those who remain employed can face exacting demands both in their jobs and at home. Fathers, in turn, can contend with the substantial ramifications (or fears) of losing positions of power—the higher the status, the greater the fall—and with frequent absences from home due to professional obligations.

Many might believe that rich people should simply walk away from their pressured lifestyles, but to relinquish a lucrative career can be hard for anyone. Although not all possess wealth, the desire for more of it is universal. Moreover, many rich parents may stay with their high-pressure jobs not out of personal greed but to provide their children with the best they can (in many cases, a stellar education).

Classism is directed to some degree at the rich, as it unambiguously has been directed at the poor. Without question, for those concerned about the next meal, the misery borne of ennuï can seem ludicrous. On the other hand, the desire to be liked and accepted by others is universal, and the rich are not only often the focus of envy and dislike—from society in general and sometimes from clinicians—but are also aware that their misfortunes tend to evoke malicious pleasure in others.

Additional developmental research is clearly needed to illuminate the nature, magnitude, and continuity of problems particularly salient in subcultures of affluence. Also critical is the need to consider the mental health needs of high-SES children, who unlike adults cannot obtain therapy for themselves, and many of whom may be discouraged from using services available in their schools or communities. As a beginning step in this direction, much can be accomplished by promoting parents' awareness of the emotional damage incurred by the unrelenting pursuit of "more."

Although in no way detracting from the myriad and formidable challenges faced by the poor, it is vital that psychologists correct their long-standing lack of concern with the isolation unique to affluence. No child should want for either food or affection; at the same time, it is worth remembering Harlow's (1958) findings that forced to choose, baby monkeys preferred the latter, just as Mother Teresa noted that the hunger for love is much more difficult to remove than the hunger for bread. In our approach to the affairs of the wealthy, the time is nigh to heed Csikszentmihalyi's (1999, p. 827) exhortation: "The job description for psychologists should encompass discovering what promotes happiness, and the calling of psychologists should include bringing this knowledge to public awareness."

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