CONCENTRATED DISADVANTAGE AND BELIEFS ABOUT THE CAUSES OF POVERTY: A MULTI-LEVEL ANALYSIS

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ABSTRACT: Studies of beliefs about social stratification have generally focused on how individual-level factors shape people’s explanations of poverty and inequality. In this article, the authors contribute to this literature by adding a community-level measure of “concentrated disadvantage” (poverty and associated conditions) to models predicting support for individualistic (person-centered) and structuralist (system-challenging) beliefs about the causes of poverty. Using data from two Los Angeles County surveys and the 1990 Census, multi-level linear and logistic regression models reveal that higher levels of concentrated disadvantage are associated with increased support for both individualist and structuralist explanations of poverty—a “dual consciousness” pattern the authors attribute to increased exposure to social conditions that simultaneously foster sympathetic and antagonistic attitudes toward the poor. These findings add useful information to our knowledge of stratification beliefs and contribute to a growing body of studies showing that “place-level” factors can be important determinants of beliefs and attitudes net of individual-level covariates.

Keywords: poverty; community; attitudes; multi-level models

In recent years, scholars interested in the social bases of subjective experience have devoted increasing attention to neighborhood and community-level factors shaping sociopolitical beliefs and attitudes (Hunt, Wise, Jipguep, Cozier, and Rosenberg 2007; Oliver and Wong 2003; Welch, Sigelman, Bledsoe, and Combs 2000). Improvements in the nature and accessibility of multi-level statistical modeling procedures contribute to this trend (Duncan, Connell, and Klebanov 1997), as does a growing...
appreciation of the ways in which larger social structures shape opportunities for, and the nature of, social interaction (House 1981; Stryker 1980; McVeigh 2004). While research on topics such as urbanism and tolerance (Stouffer 1955; Tuch 1987; Wirth 1938), and the social foundations of whites’ racial attitudes (Blalock 1967; 1984; Key 1961; Pettigrew 1998), has examined community- and interpersonal-level dynamics for several decades, our knowledge of how community context shapes stratification beliefs, what people believe about “who gets what and why,” is much more limited (but see Lee, Farrell, and Link 2004).

In this study, we take a step toward addressing this gap in the stratification beliefs literature by using multi-level modeling techniques, and data from two survey samples of Los Angeles County residents and the 1990 Census, to examine the association between zip code–level “concentrated disadvantage” and persons’ beliefs about the causes of poverty. “Concentrated disadvantage” refers to the geographic concentration of poverty and associated social conditions and has been linked to numerous social and psychological outcomes, including violent crime, neighborhood disorder, collective efficacy, and health (Parker, Stults, and Rice 2005; Ross 2000; Ross and Mirowsky 2001; Sampson and Bartusch 1998; Sampson, Raudenbush, and Earls 1997). Given that community-level factors may impact people’s explanations of poverty by shaping the nature and degree of their exposure to poverty and disadvantage (Lee, Jones, and Lewis 1990; Lee et al. 2004; Wilson 1991; 1996), “concentrated disadvantage” is an ideal construct with which to explore possible place/context effects on stratification beliefs. In the next section, we take a closer look at how community-level concentrated disadvantage may affect people’s outlooks on the causes of poverty (e.g., in sympathetic versus antagonistic directions) by reviewing past work on poverty beliefs and our knowledge of how they are shaped by interpersonal contacts with the poor.

BACKGROUND

Beliefs about Poverty

Stratification researchers have long been interested in how socially shared beliefs contribute to the legitimation and reproduction of stratified social orders (Della Fave 1980; Kerbo 2006). One such example is research on people’s ideological beliefs about the causes of poverty (Feagin 1972; 1975; Hunt 1996; 2004; Kluegel and Smith 1986; Nilson 1981). Such research has identified two primary types of beliefs: individualistic, which place responsibility for poverty on poor persons themselves (e.g., lack of effort), and structuralist, which focus on the role of the social system itself (e.g., unemployment) in creating poverty and inequality.

A substantial amount of past research suggests that Americans are decidedly individualistic in their thinking about poverty—that is, Americans generally hold the poor primarily responsible for their plight, believing that the poor have different values, morals, and motivations compared to their more advantaged counterparts (Feagin 1975; Kluegel and Smith 1986). This relatively unsympathetic view of the poor stems logically from widespread beliefs about the ready availability of opportunity and relative lack of obstacles to social mobility in the United States (Kluegel and Smith 1986). Along these lines, Huber and Form’s (1973) “dominant
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The "ideology thesis" offers a logical syllogism to account for the strength of individualism in the United States. Specifically, widespread belief in equality of opportunity means that success and failure are seen as a function of individual-level qualities, and belief in democracy bolsters the perception that any existing systemic injustices are quickly rooted out via popular participation in government.

Research suggests that public support for the "dominant ideology" of individualism is widespread but generally strongest among persons of higher status (Huber and Form 1973; Kluegel and Smith 1986). In addition, research suggests that individualistic beliefs about poverty weaken support for redistributive policies aimed at ameliorating social inequalities (Bobo 1991; Kluegel and Smith 1986). The widespread adherence to individualistic beliefs in the United States has been framed as evidence for "consensus" models, holding that cross-class ideological agreement is necessary for the stability of stratified social orders (Abercrombie, Hill, and Turner 1990; Bobo 1991; Della Fave 1980).

Despite the relatively high levels of support for individualistic beliefs in past national surveys (Feagin 1975; Kluegel and Smith 1986), notions of individualism's dominance (and any across-strata consensus on beliefs) are challenged by research documenting structuralist explanations for poverty (Abercrombie et al. 1990; Hunt 1996; 2007; Kluegel and Smith 1986; National Public Radio, Kaiser Family Foundation, and the Kennedy School of Government 2001). Often framed as an ideological alternative to individualism and rooted in a competing cultural logic stressing notions of egalitarianism and social responsibility (Bobo 1991; Kluegel and Smith 1986), structuralist beliefs are generally less popular than individualistic ones as well as more prevalent among persons of lower social status. These patterns are consistent with basic "conflict theory" assumptions stressing the differential experiences and perceptions of persons at varying locations in the stratification system. From this perspective, individualism appears hegemonic primarily because those who adhere most strongly to ideological alternatives such as structuralism tend to be the politically weakest voices in the crowd (Bobo 1991; Hunt 1996; Mann 1970).

Building on both the consensus and conflict imagery from past research on stratification ideology, James Kluegel et al. (Kluegel, Csepeli, Kolosi, Orkeny, and Nemenyi 1995; Kluegel and Smith 1981; 1986) have advanced a "split-consciousness" perspective stressing the ideologically mixed nature of most persons' thinking on inequality. Rooted in Gramsci's (1971) theories of hegemony and contradictory consciousness, this perspective highlights how (non-elite) actors' thinking is simultaneously shaped by ideas reflecting dominant-class interests (e.g., individualism; equity norms) as well as those stemming from lived experience and the practical realities of life in stratified social systems (e.g., structuralism, equality norms) (Cheal 1979; Sallach 1974). Consistent with this imagery—and in direct contrast to most early empirical studies of stratification ideology that assumed individualistic and structuralist beliefs represented opposite ends of an attitudinal continuum—research over the past several decades has shown that these two types of belief are not mutually exclusive (Hughes and Tuch 2000; Hunt 1996; Kluegel and Smith 1986; Lee et al. 1990). Rather, individualistic and structuralist beliefs are distinct but overlapping constructs that persons often combine in what have been termed

For Kluegel and Smith (1986), this mixing of beliefs stems from individualism’s place as a stable and pervasive cultural belief that shapes the views of Americans at all social locations, alongside structuralist beliefs that are more variable and—depending on persons’ personal and group-based experiences—are “layered onto” an existing individualistic base (Cheal 1979; Kluegel et al. 1995; Kluegel and Smith 1986; Parkin 1971). Consistent with this pattern is work suggesting that disadvantaged strata such as the working classes and racial minority groups are especially likely to combine individualistic and structuralist reasoning in their thinking (Cheal 1979; Hughes and Tuch 2000; Hunt 1996; Mann 1970; Parkin 1971). Thus, a key question for the current research is whether greater exposure to poverty and associated social conditions, via geographic proximity to conditions of concentrated disadvantage, shapes persons’ consciousness of inequality in similar or different ways. That is, does exposure increase adherence to individualistic, structuralist, or both types of poverty beliefs? To explore this further, we turn next to a discussion of prior research on the effects of poverty exposure on stratification beliefs.

Poverty Exposure and Poverty Beliefs

Research on the ideological and attitudinal consequences of exposure to poverty suggests that the nature of the association between exposure and attitudes depends on the type and quality of the contacts that people have with the poor. This basic insight is consistent with theories holding that intergroup contact can have positive (e.g., increased tolerance or sympathy) or negative (e.g., increased sense of threat or antagonism) effects depending on the conditions governing the intergroup exposure (Allport 1954; Blalock 1984).

Studying a particular category of the poor—the homeless—Lee et al. (2004) find support for basic “contact theory” assumptions (Allport 1954) in the form of increased sympathy for homeless persons where the homeless population is larger. Importantly, Lee et al. (2004) document that exposure—by increasing opportunities for various types of contacts—is the key mechanism by which community-level forces (e.g., the size of the local homeless population) shape individuals’ attitudes. Also supporting the general logic of contact theory are Wilson’s (1996) and Lee et al.’s (1990) findings that exposure to the poor in ways that reflect relatively equal status (e.g., friendship) and/or intimacy (versus anonymity) fosters more sympathetic explanations of poverty and disadvantage. For instance, Lee et al. (1990) find that persons who had had an informal conversation with a homeless person (about something other than money) were significantly less likely to view homelessness as a function of “personal choice.” Additionally, Wilson (1996) observes that having a friendship with a poor person significantly predicts support for structuralist beliefs about poverty. These findings are generally consistent with past research showing that greater inter-class social contacts can at times undermine support for individualistic accounts of inequality and increase the perceived importance of structural explanations (Lipset and Bendix 1967; Vanneman and Cannon 1987; Wilson 1996). In Wilson’s (1996:417) words, “personal contacts with
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the poor constitute another manner in which beliefs that are contrary to the dominant ideological explanation of poverty causation can be constructed.”

In contrast, research also demonstrates that exposure to poverty can involve forms of social contact that increase intergroup animosity (Allport 1954; Blalock 1984). Specifically, research suggests that exposure to the poor in primarily impersonal or anonymous ways fosters relatively unsympathetic explanations of poverty and disadvantage. For instance, both Lee et al. (1990) and Wilson (1996) observe that exposure to behaviors such as panhandling (money requests) increases individualistic beliefs about poverty. Further, these authors present evidence that indirect exposure to the issue of poverty—in the form of informal conversations with friends about the subject (something that is presumably more common where the prevalence of poverty and inequality are greater)—either increases the perceived importance of individualistic explanations (Wilson 1996) or decreases the perceived importance of structural ones (Lee et al. 1990). Thus, certain types of exposure to the poor may foster primarily antagonistic rather than sympathetic viewpoints. This insight that contacts with the poor can shape attitudes in divergent ways resonates with the oft-cited “deserving/undeserving poor” distinction noted in American public opinion (Gans 1995).

The current research investigates whether and how exposure to poverty via proximity to conditions of concentrated disadvantage enhances the deserving (sympathetic), undeserving (antagonistic), or perhaps both of these views of the poor. We make no specific a priori predictions regarding the impact of concentrated disadvantage on the two ideological belief outcomes we model. Further, absent direct measures of the nature of respondents’ exposure to the poor (see Methods section), we rely heavily on the findings of the research reviewed above in our reasoning about links between concentrated disadvantage and beliefs about poverty. With those caveats in mind, certain scenarios seem most plausible. Exposure to concentrated disadvantage likely brings a multitude of types of experiences. Past research suggests that if those experiences are primarily negative or antagonistic in nature, greater exposure to concentrated disadvantage should increase persons’ adherence to individualistic accounts and decrease adherence to structuralist accounts. On the other hand, if conditions fostering relative sympathy predominate, greater exposure to concentrated disadvantage should heighten structuralism, though not necessarily at the cost of support for individualism (following the “split consciousness” logic that individualism is hegemonic and largely immune to status or experience effects). Finally, should respondents’ contacts with the poor be mixed in nature, both ideological accounts of poverty may be enhanced—in effect producing a “dual consciousness” regarding poverty wherein the views that the poor are both deserving and undeserving are simultaneously heightened. This latter scenario is consistent with the view that people’s beliefs about poverty are often “compartmentalized” (Kluegel et al. 1995; Kluegel and Smith 1986) and not necessarily considered together (e.g., if the “competing” cognitions are below the level of conscious awareness). It is also consistent with an image of genuine ambivalence about poverty, possibly reflecting the belief that different “types” of poor people, requiring different types of explanation, exist (Hochschild 1981; Wilson 1996)—something the conditions of concentrated disadvantage may make especially likely.
DATA, MEASURES, AND METHODS

Sample
We use a combined data set that links observations from two independent probability samples of households in Los Angeles County, California, drawn in 1993 and 2000. In both surveys, interviews lasted an average of 30 minutes and were conducted in either English or Spanish, depending on the preference of the respondent. In addition, both surveys oversampled telephone exchanges in census tracts that were at least 30 percent black (Hunt 1996; 2004). All variables used in the current analyses were collected with identical wording across the two surveys, and an indicator variable is used in the reported regression analyses to adjust for any systemic differences between the two samples (see below).

The 1993 data are drawn from a survey of five Southern California counties (Los Angeles, Orange, San Diego, Riverside, and San Bernardino) collected using random digit dialing. The survey included all working exchanges in the five-county region and achieved a response rate of 70 percent. The 2000 data come from a random digit dialing sample survey of Los Angeles County alone. The response rate for the 2000 survey was 64 percent. Our combined data set includes only residents of Los Angeles County (i.e., part of the 1993 sample and all of the 2000 sample) with the final analytic sample consisting of 2,166 individuals nested within 182 zip codes. We combined these two samples to achieve sufficient sample size to estimate our presented statistical models (see Blanchard, Bartowski, Mathews, and Kerely 2008; Hunt 2007; Messner, Bauman, and Rosenfeld 2006; Smith 2003; Unnever and Cullen 2007 for examples of studies combining data from different waves of repeated cross-sectional surveys).

Dependent Variables
We use two dependent variables that measure the degree of importance attributed to “individualistic” and “structuralist” explanations of poverty, respectively. Each dependent variable is a multi-item scale constructed using items originally developed by Feagin (1975), adapted by Kluegel and Smith (1986), and included in the two surveys drawn upon in the current research (Hunt 1996; 2004). A principal components factor analysis revealed a two-factor solution that informed construction of our two dependent variable scales (not shown, results available on request). Each scale represents the mean of responses to four survey items, with higher scores representing greater perceived importance in explaining poverty (range: 1–4).

For the individualistic beliefs scale, the items measure the degree of importance attributed to “lack of effort,” “lack of ability and talent,” “personal irresponsibility and lack of discipline,” and “lack of thrift and personal money management” in explaining poverty ($\alpha = .67$). For the structuralist beliefs scale, four items tap the perceived importance of social structural forces generating poverty: “low wages in some businesses and industries,” “failure of society to provide good schools for many Americans,” “prejudice and discrimination,” and “failure of private industry to provide enough good jobs” ($\alpha = .67$).
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Community-Level Independent and Control Variables

In the data set we draw upon for this study, individuals are nested within 182 five-digit zip codes in Los Angeles County. Information on zip code–level variables was derived from the 1990 U.S. Census Long Form data files prepared by Geolytics Inc. (1996).7 In the 1993 and 2000 surveys we utilize, respondents were asked what street that they live on as well as the nearest cross street; these responses were linked to zip codes by researchers familiar with Los Angeles County.

Zip codes are arbitrary groupings created for the convenience of the United States Postal Service, yet many researchers have successfully used attributes of zip codes to represent “community-level” factors (Fossett and Kiecolt 1989; Oliver and Mendelberg 2000; Oliver and Wong 2003). Additionally, selected research suggests that results from community-level analyses do not differ substantially when alternative operational units (e.g., zip codes versus census tracts) are utilized; thus, our basic results are likely generalizable to other geographic groupings (Ross 2000; Sampson, Morenoff, and Ganon-Royle 2002). Further, the 182 Los Angeles County zip codes used in the current analyses show substantial variability in their demographic profiles. For instance, populations range from 2,342 to 99,420 (mean = 40,031), the percentage of residents living below the poverty line ranges from 2 to over 40 (mean = 13.7 percent), and racial composition varies from 4 to 96 percent white (mean = 59 percent), 0 to 86 percent black (mean = 11 percent), and 4 to 95 percent Latino (mean = 32 percent). This diversity suggests that zip codes in Los Angeles County may be meaningfully associated with patterns of social interaction and individual-level beliefs.

Our primary explanatory variable is concentrated disadvantage (CD), which measures the degree of poverty and associated social conditions in each zip code (Ross 2000; Ross and Mirowsky 2001; Sampson et al. 1997). Higher scores represent greater concentrated disadvantage, which we use as a proxy for exposure to poverty and disadvantage (Lee et al. 2004). Concentrated disadvantage is the first principal component of an analysis of seven zip code–level variables (not shown, results available upon request): percent in poverty, percent of population with less than an eighth grade education, percent of population with less than a high school education, percent foreign born, percent unemployed, percent of female-headed households in poverty, and percent black. This analysis resulted in one extracted component, which explained 70 percent of the variance across these items, and a pattern of factor loadings similar to other published measures of concentrated disadvantage (Ross 2000; Ross and Mirowsky 2001; Sampson et al. 1997).8 We measure concentrated disadvantage as a standardized factor score variable, an approach with advantages over single-item indicators of the factors comprising the concentrated disadvantage measure. Conceptually, concentrated disadvantage represents a more complete and nuanced picture of conditions of poverty and disadvantage at the community level; it is also more parsimonious than inclusion of a series of substantially intercorrelated variables in the estimated regression models.

We also note that, while concentrated disadvantage is associated with racial composition at the zip code level, it is not simply a proxy for the latter. Table 1 uses 1990 Census data to show the racial composition of communities with varying
levels of concentrated disadvantage. Not surprisingly, concentrations of racial minority populations are higher (and those of whites are lower) where concentrated disadvantage is higher. Specifically, specifying three equal categories (low, medium, and high) of community-level concentrated disadvantage in Los Angeles County shows that the average “low concentrated disadvantage” community is approximately 4 percent black, 12 percent Latino, and 82 percent white, while an average “high concentrated disadvantage” area is approximately 18 percent black, 56 percent Latino, and 37 percent white. However, Table 1 also demonstrates that substantial race/ethnic diversity exists within each of the three specified levels of concentrated disadvantage. With the sole exception of Hispanics in the “low concentrated disadvantage” category, each race/ethnic group represents the numeric majority (“maximum” in Table 1) in at least one zip code at each of the three specified levels of concentrated disadvantage. Finally, since residents of areas with greater social and economic diversity have been shown to exhibit distinctive social and political attitudes (Stouffer 1955; Tuch 1987; Wirth 1938), we also control for the degree of income variability at the community (zip code) level using a measure of economic heterogeneity (EH). Our EH measure is similar to a Gini coefficient, with scores ranging from 0 (perfect equality) to 1 (perfect inequality) within a zip code. The correlation between concentrated disadvantage and EH in our data set is .28, indicating that areas with greater concentrated disadvantage also tend to have more income inequality. Thus, controlling for EH allows for better specification of the nature of the association between concentrated disadvantage and stratification beliefs. Finally, for ease of interpretation, we transformed our EH measure into a standardized variable prior to its inclusion in the reported regression models.

### Individual-Level Controls

We also control for a number of individual-level covariates based on findings from past research (e.g., Hunt 1996; 2004). Political orientation is measured with a 7-point scale ranging from extremely liberal (coded 1) to extremely conservative
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Education is measured as years of schooling. Household income is a twelve-level ordinal variable ranging from “less than $10,000” to “over $75,000.” Race/ethnicity is measured with two dummy variables coded: black = 1, other = 0, and Latino = 1, other = 0 (owing to sample size limitations, Asians are excluded from our analyses). Gender is coded as female = 1 and male = 0. Nativity status is coded as foreign born = 1 and native born = 0. And, as mentioned earlier, we include an indicator variable for our data source (coded: 2000 sample = 1; 1993 sample = 0) to control for any systematic differences between the two samples comprising our data set. A robust set of individual-level (i.e., “Level I” below) predictors is essential to our analysis because these factors account for “compositional” differences between communities (zip codes)—that is, differences in mean levels of our outcome variables that are attributable to different types of residents living within zip codes.10 As we control for most of the known predictors of beliefs about poverty, our “Level I” model should be sufficient for specifying and controlling for existing compositional differences.

Analytic Strategy

To explore the impact of concentrated disadvantage on stratification beliefs, we utilize Multi-Level Modeling (MLM) techniques using the SAS 9.1 PROC MIXED program. In MLM, Level I coefficients become outcome variables for equations at Level II; thus, MLM models allow us to estimate the effects of Level II variables on parameters of the Level I model. The Level II coefficients are interpreted as the change in the Level I parameter for a one unit change in the community-level independent variable.

For each dependent variable, we first fit Model I using the individual-level covariates and a random intercept. Then, we estimate Model II by adding the effects of the Level II measures on the Level I intercept. For each outcome the main model is:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Level I} & \\
\hat{Y}_{ij} &= \beta_0 + \beta_1 + \cdots + \beta_k + e_{ij} \\
\text{Level II} & \\
\beta_0 &= \gamma_{00} + \gamma_{01}(EH) + \gamma_{02}(CD) + u_{0j} \\
\beta_1 + \cdots + \beta_k &= \gamma_{10} \cdots \gamma_{k0}
\end{align*}
\]

In these models, the “\(\beta_0\)” and “\(\beta_j\)” coefficients are analogous to unstandardized OLS estimates of the intercept and effects of Level I variables. The “\(\gamma\)” coefficients represent the effects of Level II variables on the Level I intercept; more specifically, a “\(\gamma_k\)” coefficient is interpreted as the effect of a Level II independent variable on the zip code mean of the dependent variable, controlling for the effects of the other included independent variables. In addition, \(e_{ij}\) represents the individual-level error term, or the difference between individuals’ observed and predicted scores, and is distributed as \(\sim \mathcal{N}(0, \sigma^2)\). Finally, “\(u_{0j}\)” represents between-group variability or the difference between observed and predicted group (zip code) means and is distributed as \(\sim \mathcal{N}(0, \tau_{00})\).
RESULTS

Table 2 reports descriptive statistics for all study variables. These results show that respondents average just below the midpoint on conservatism, average 13.5 years of education, and have a mean household income in the $25,000–$35,000 range. In addition, 28 percent of respondents are foreign born, and 40 percent are from the 2000 sample. Further, our data set overrepresents females (59 percent) relative to the roughly equal gender balance of Los Angeles County and is approximately one-third each Latino, white, and Black; thus, the sample overrepresents blacks and underrepresents Latinos in Los Angeles County (which is unsurprising given the oversample of blacks). Additionally, the means for the dependent variables show somewhat greater perceived importance for structuralist (3.47) compared to individualistic (3.23) beliefs—a pattern documented and discussed in prior research using these data (cf., Hunt 1996; 2004). Regarding the Level II variables, the mean and standard deviation of the concentrated disadvantage variable are 0 and 1, respectively, and the economic heterogeneity control variable (prior to standardization) has a mean of .40, which is similar to Census estimates of the Gini coefficient in the United States for 1990.

Following Bryk and Raudenbush (2002), we first estimated an ANOVA model for each dependent variable that allows for unconditional estimation of the $\sigma^2$ and $\tau_{00}$ parameters in the equations presented above. These results (not shown) indicated that approximately 6 percent of the variation in individualistic beliefs, and 11 percent of the variation in structuralist beliefs, represents between community variation ("$\tau_{00}$"), and each of these estimated variance components is significantly

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TABLE 2</th>
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<tr>
<td>Means and Standard Deviations for All Study Variables</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Standard Deviation</th>
<th>N</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Level I Dependent Variables</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Poverty-individualistic</td>
<td>3.23</td>
<td>.61</td>
<td>2,166</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poverty-structuralist</td>
<td>3.47</td>
<td>.52</td>
<td>2,166</td>
</tr>
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<td><strong>Level II Independent Variable</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Concentrated Disadvantage</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>182</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Level I Controls</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Conservative</td>
<td>3.89</td>
<td>1.66</td>
<td>2,166</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>13.50</td>
<td>3.62</td>
<td>2,166</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Household income</td>
<td>3.82</td>
<td>2.21</td>
<td>2,166</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>.59</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>2,166</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>.34</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>2,166</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black</td>
<td>.34</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>2,166</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latino</td>
<td>.31</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>2,166</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foreign born</td>
<td>.28</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>2,166</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000 sample</td>
<td>.40</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>2,166</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Level II Control</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Economic heterogeneity</td>
<td>.40</td>
<td>.04</td>
<td>182</td>
</tr>
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different from zero \((p < .001)\). It is this between-community variability that the community-level variables may explain. While the ANOVA results indicate that a relatively modest amount of variance exists at the community level, Bryk and Raudenbush (2002) advise that a multi-level analysis is appropriate in any case where the Level II variability is significantly greater than zero. Indeed, the purpose of the MLM is to estimate appropriate standard errors and \(t\) statistics for the Level II parameters when using nested data. Further, OLS versions of these models showed fixed effects estimates that were nearly identical to results reported here.

Table 3 presents the results of the MLM analyses of beliefs about poverty regressed on the independent variables. The first two columns report results for

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level II Independent Variable</th>
<th>Model 1</th>
<th>Model 2</th>
<th>Model 1</th>
<th>Model 2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Concentrated disadvantage</td>
<td>.050**</td>
<td>(0.17)</td>
<td>.050**</td>
<td>(0.14)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Economic heterogeneity</td>
<td>-.053**</td>
<td>(0.18)</td>
<td>-.010</td>
<td>(0.17)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intercept</td>
<td>3.07***</td>
<td>3.08**</td>
<td>3.18***</td>
<td>3.18***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conservative</td>
<td>.031**</td>
<td>(.009)</td>
<td>-.045***</td>
<td>-.045***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>-.024***</td>
<td>(.004)</td>
<td>-.005</td>
<td>-.006*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Household income</td>
<td>-.019**</td>
<td>(.007)</td>
<td>-.019***</td>
<td>-.020***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>-.018</td>
<td>(.019)</td>
<td>.115***</td>
<td>.113***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black</td>
<td>.175***</td>
<td>.159***</td>
<td>.331***</td>
<td>.300***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latino</td>
<td>.162***</td>
<td>.136***</td>
<td>.314***</td>
<td>.280***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foreign born</td>
<td>.181***</td>
<td>.185***</td>
<td>.080**</td>
<td>.070**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000 sample</td>
<td>-.010</td>
<td>(.027)</td>
<td>-.033</td>
<td>-.031</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level I (R^2)</td>
<td>.11</td>
<td>.11</td>
<td>.09</td>
<td>.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level II (R^2)</td>
<td>.55</td>
<td>.66</td>
<td>.86</td>
<td>.90</td>
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</table>

Note: Standard errors in parentheses.
\(^* p < .05; \quad ** p < .01; \quad *** p < .001.\)
individualistic beliefs, and the last two columns for structuralist beliefs. For both outcomes, the Level I effects (Model 1) essentially replicate those published by Hunt (1996; 2004). For individualistic beliefs, Model I accounts for approximately 11 percent of variation at the individual level (Level I) and 55 percent at the community level (Level II). For structuralist beliefs, Model I accounts for approximately 9 percent of the variation at Level I and 86 percent at Level II. These findings suggest that a considerable amount of community-level variation in these outcomes is a function of compositional factors—different types of individuals living within each zip code. As noted previously, the function of the Level I model is to account for these compositional differences before the Level II effects are estimated.

Turning to the effects of concentrated disadvantage (CD), we see in the second column of Table 3 that CD has a significant positive association with individualistic beliefs ($\gamma = .050, p < .01$). Thus, as CD increases, so do individualistic explanations of poverty. This result suggests some preliminary support for the expectation that relatively unsympathetic accounts of poverty will be more prevalent where exposure to the poverty and disadvantage is greater. However, the fourth panel of Table 3 reveals that CD also has a positive association with structuralist beliefs ($\gamma = .050, p < .01$). While this result is consistent with the expectation that “system-blaming” will increase with greater exposure to poverty and disadvantage, when coupled with the prior finding, it is apparent that higher levels of CD are associated with increased adherence to both types of poverty belief. Thus, higher levels of concentrated disadvantage, like (individual-level) racial minority status in some prior research (Hughes and Tuch 2000; Hunt 1996), appear to foster a “dual” consciousness with respect to explanations of poverty, involving increased adherence to both types of belief. Finally, it is worth noting that the range of the CD variable is approximately 4.6 standard deviations; thus, the predicted group mean of each dependent variable is about .23 higher in the most versus least disadvantaged zip codes.

It is also worth noting that our community-level control variable—economic heterogeneity—shows a significant negative association with individualistic beliefs ($\gamma = -.053, p < .01$). This suggests that persons living in areas with more income inequality are less wedded to the individualistic interpretation of poverty—a finding consistent with sociological work showing that more heterogeneous social environments increase tolerance and liberalism (Abrahamson and Carter 1986; Tuch 1987; Wilson 1985). Overall, Model II accounts for 11 percent of the variation in individualistic beliefs at Level I and 66 percent of the variation at Level II. For structuralist beliefs, Model II accounts for 9 percent of the variation at Level I and 90 percent at Level II. The difference between the Level II $R^2$ values from Model I to Model II represents “contextual” effects—that is, the net effects of community characteristics on the outcome, controlling for compositional differences in the communities. Thus, the current results indicate that—beyond the substantial compositional effects (indicated by the large Level II $R^2$ values for each Model I)—the contextual effects of concentrated disadvantage and EH explain an additional 11 percent of community-level variation in individualistic beliefs ($.66 - .55 = .11$) and an additional 4 percent of community-level variation in structuralist beliefs ($.90 - .86 = .04$).
Given the close associations between poverty, disadvantage, race, and socioeconomic status (SES) in the United States, and the significant effects of individual-level race/ethnicity and household income in our models, we pursued additional analyses to test for possible effect-modification by these individual-level covariates in the association between concentrated disadvantage (CD) and our outcomes. Inferential tests of cross-level “Race × CD” interactions showed no significant differences in the effects of CD, by race, on either poverty-belief outcome. Inferential test of a cross-level “Household Income × CD” interaction term (γ = .014, p < .01; full results not shown) suggests that community-level CD significantly moderates the effect of household income on structuralist beliefs. Specifically, the observed inverse association between household income and structuralist beliefs (Table 3) is significantly weaker at higher levels of community-level concentrated disadvantage. This effect is displayed graphically in Figure 1, which depicts the relationship between household income and structuralist beliefs for communities at three levels of CD. Thus, for persons in higher CD communities, relative to their counterparts in lower CD areas, higher household income appears to be less inhibiting of the structuralist view of poverty. This pattern suggests that, beyond the direct association between concentrated disadvantage and structuralist beliefs, concentrated disadvantage may also modify the associations between individual status variables and beliefs about poverty.

We pursued supplementary analyses to further ensure the veracity of our “dual consciousness” interpretation of the results in Table 3. To review, our multi-level models showed that concentrated disadvantage is associated with higher mean scores on both individualistic and structuralist beliefs about poverty, a pattern

![Figure 1](image-url)
that we interpret as evidence that individuals’ adherence to both types of poverty beliefs is higher where exposure to poverty and disadvantage is greater. However, it is possible that this pattern reflects greater bifurcation across rather than within individuals in the studied areas (i.e., greater concentrated disadvantage may simply move some people to greater system-blaming and others to greater person-blaming).

To adjudicate between these alternative interpretations, we constructed a variable measuring the tendency of respondents to simultaneously perceive both individualistic and structuralist beliefs as important. We did so by splitting each poverty belief scale into three ordered categories. We then coded respondents who scored in the top third on both scales as “1” and all other respondents as “0,” a strategy resulting in 47 percent of respondents being categorized as exhibiting a “dual consciousness.”14 We then regressed this binary dual consciousness outcome on the same set of predictors used above, using multi-level logistic regression (Guo and Zhao 2000). Results shown in Table 4 confirm that higher levels of concentrated disadvantage are associated with greater levels of dual consciousness at the individual level (γ = .248, p < .001, OR = 1.28). In addition, Table 4 shows that dual consciousness has significant inverse associations with economic heterogeneity (Level II), education (Level I), and household income (Level I) and significant positive associations with being black, Latino, and foreign-born (all Level I)—each of these patterns suggest that this dual consciousness pattern is generally more prevalent among persons of lower social status.

### Table 4

Multi-Level Logistic Estimates for “Dual Consciousness” Belief Pattern Regressed on Concentrated Disadvantage and Individual- and Community-Level Controls

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level II Independent Variable</th>
<th>Dual Consciousness</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Concentrated disadvantage</td>
<td>.248*** (.061) 1.28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Economic heterogeneity</td>
<td>-.176** (.062) .838</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level I Controls</th>
<th>Dual Consciousness</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Intercept</td>
<td>.883***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conservative</td>
<td>-.032 (.028) .968</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>-.060** (.016) .941</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Household income</td>
<td>-.087** (.024) .916</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>.155 (.091) 1.16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black</td>
<td>.902*** (.120) 2.46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latino</td>
<td>.793*** (.146) 2.21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foreign born</td>
<td>.533*** (.135) 1.70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000 sample</td>
<td>.063 (.093) 1.05</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Standard errors in parentheses. ex (b) = Odds Ratio.

*p < .05; **p < .01; ***p < .001.
DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

The current study examined the association between community-level concentrated disadvantage and individuals’ beliefs about the causes of poverty and produced several noteworthy findings. Persons residing within geographic areas with more concentrated disadvantage displayed significantly higher levels of both individualistic and structuralist beliefs, suggesting that with stratification beliefs researchers should look beyond individual-level status characteristics when modeling beliefs about “who gets what and why” (Kluegel and Smith 1986). Our interpretation of these patterns is consistent with the sociological premise that community-level social structures impact the person by constraining opportunities for interaction (House 1981; Stryker 1980) and exposure to the “evidence” upon which sociopolitical beliefs are based (Blau 1977; McVeigh 2004). In the case of the current study, we posit that community-level concentrated disadvantage—by regulating the nature and degree of persons’ exposure to different aspects of poverty (Lee et al. 2004)—shapes individuals’ explanations of poverty.

We presume that the primary causal flow is from community-level conditions to the person. Nonetheless, use of cross-sectional data in multi-level analyses makes it notoriously difficult to rule out the problem of selection—that is, persons selecting into particular communities rather than being shaped by them (Harding 2003; Sampson et al. 2002). Our data preclude use of a state-of-the-art method to deal with possible selection effects (e.g., instrumental variable or propensity score modeling approaches). Thus, we rely on theory (House 1981; Kohn 1989) and past research on similar topics (e.g., Lee et al. 2004) to support the contention that the most plausible rendering of causal ordering involves conditions of concentrated disadvantage impacting individual-level beliefs rather than vice versa. Nonetheless, future research should seek to further specify the nature of the association between community-level factors and sociopolitical beliefs and attitudes.

We interpret the simultaneous increased adherence to both main types of poverty belief in areas characterized by greater concentrated disadvantage as likely stemming from greater exposure to divergent evidence regarding the etiology of poverty in society (Dixon 2006; Lee et al. 1990; Lee et al. 2004; McVeigh 2004). That is, persons living in areas characterized by higher levels of concentrated disadvantage may be afforded more opportunities both for (1) relatively intimate/non-threatening contact with the poor (e.g., friendships) and (2) myriad undesirable and anonymous behaviors such as aggressive panhandling (Dixon 2006; Lee et al. 1990; Lee et al. 2004; Lee and Farrell 2003; McVeigh 2004), thus possibly reinforcing both sides of the well-documented “deserving/undeserving poor” dualism in American public opinion (Gans 1995; Gilens 1999). Also notable is that while the dual consciousness pattern is more prevalent in poorer (i.e., higher concentrated disadvantage) neighborhoods, nearly half of the current sample displayed this pattern (as modeled in Table 4). Thus, it seems likely that many persons are exposed to poverty—either directly or via societal images (e.g., see Gilens 1999 for a useful discussion of media effects)—in ways that foster a mixed belief system regarding the poor (Kluegel and Smith 1986). What the current study demonstrates is that persons exposed more directly and consistently to conditions of concentrated
disadvantage—a particular amalgam of poverty and associated conditions—are especially likely to exhibit such “dualities” in their reasoning about the poor. This pattern is first observed in models regressing our individual-level poverty beliefs outcomes on community-level measures of concentrated disadvantage, and then verified using an individual-level measure of the tendency to see both types of poverty belief as important (i.e., “dual consciousness”). Together, these patterns support our contention that individuals in high-poverty neighborhoods share experiences with poverty and disadvantage that shape beliefs about the causes of poverty in distinctive ways.

The degree to which such dual or mixed beliefs systems are recognized by actors is an important question that lies beyond the scope of the current investigation but that deserves more study. That is, to what degree is a dual or split consciousness a conscious matter? One possibility, following Kluegel and Smith (1986), is that this belief pattern reflects a “compartmentalization” of ideas such that persons rarely consider potentially conflicting cognitions together. Another possibility is that individualistic and structuralist accounts are not seen as particularly contradictory at all—that is, each could be seen as corresponding to an aspect of social reality following a “yes, structural barriers exist, but anyone who works hard enough can overcome such obstacles” logic (Hunt 1996). Still another possibility is that a split or dual consciousness reflects a genuine and unresolved ambivalence (Hochschild 1981) or dissonance (Abelson, Aronson, McGuire, Newcomb, Rosenberg, and Tannenbaum 1968) such that the poor are seen as victims both of circumstance and of their own behavior. Finally, this combination of ideological beliefs could reflect a perception that different “types” of poor people exist (Wilson 1996)—some more “deserving” than others—and for persons with the greatest proximity to conditions of concentrated disadvantage, this dualism is simply magnified and enhanced. Future research should seek to adjudicate between these possibilities.

While existing research (Lee et al. 2004; McVeigh 2004) supports the contention that exposure to poverty and disadvantage is likely the key mechanism by which concentrated disadvantage affects stratification beliefs, future research should seek to more concretely verify and specify these associations. In addition, the processes underlying our observation that individualistic beliefs are weakened in areas with greater economic heterogeneity (income inequality) should be further explored and specified; if past research is correct in suggesting that cross-class social contacts are key (Wilson 1996), what is it about such contacts that undermine support for individualistic accounts of poverty? Finally, research should also seek to clarify (1) any relationship between individual-level poverty status (i.e., whether persons reside below or above the poverty line) and beliefs about poverty—something beyond the scope of the current investigation owing to data limitations on incomes and household size. Our finding that persons with lower income levels are more likely to exhibit a dual consciousness (Table 2) is suggestive but not definitive on this point. Future work should also seek to specify whether persons living in or near higher concentrated disadvantage neighborhoods—apart from actual individual-level poverty status—are more likely to perceive themselves as poor and
whether this has implications for stratification ideology. Our observation that the inverse association between household income and structuralist beliefs is weaker in areas high in concentrated disadvantage (Figure 1) suggests that concentrated disadvantage does have implications for beliefs about poverty beyond its direct effects—something that future work should further explicate.

Ethnographic and other qualitative research methods could be useful in further specifying the interpersonal pathways by which social structure impacts socio-political beliefs and attitudes, as could future survey-based investigations using direct measures of intergroup contact and exposure (Lee et al. 2004). In short, nailing down with greater specificity the “meso-level” channels through which larger social structures exert their effects would help determine how interaction between groups with divergent economic interests alters persons’ thinking about the poor (House 1981). In so doing, research should seek to specify, through finer-grained analyses than were possible in the current study, what specific geographic factors determine whether exposure to the poor is disproportionately “positive,” “negative,” or a roughly equal mix of the two. Finally, conducting such research using nationally representative survey samples would be invaluable in assessing the degree to which our findings are replicable and generalizable beyond our data from Los Angeles County.

Our finding of an increased “dual” consciousness of poverty among persons living in areas with the greatest concentrated disadvantage is reminiscent of past research suggesting that racial minorities are more likely than whites to exhibit this belief pattern (Hughes and Tuch 2000; Hunt 1996); both sets of findings suggest that this pattern is associated with conditions of structural disadvantage (Mann 1970). That the coefficients for the race/ethnicity variables are diminished somewhat (~10 percent) when controlling for concentrated disadvantage and economic heterogeneity in our models suggests that some of the “race” pattern is attributable to the community-level factors we measure (Sampson and Bartusch 1998). That race/ethnicity continues to have robust direct effects is consistent with the premise that persons of color face substantial disadvantages in society beyond living in areas with more poverty and inequality (Feagin 1991; Hughes and Thomas 1998). Future research should more thoroughly explore various individual- and community-level sources of the belief patterns we observe—including whether variables from each level of analysis are competing or complementary explanatory factors (e.g., does specifying additional indices of structural disadvantage further explain the observed “race/ethnicity” effects).

Finally, we encourage future researchers to explore the association between community-level factors and support race- and income-targeted redistributive policies (Bobo and Kluegel 1993). For instance, do the sympathy-inducing effects of our community-level control variable (economic heterogeneity) extend beyond stratification ideology to actual public policy support? And what are the political implications of the dual consciousness tendency we observe in association with concentrated disadvantage? Is this pattern reflective of kinds of political compromise (Kluegel & Smith 1986; Lee et al. 1990) and/or pragmatic acceptance of the status quo (Mann 1970)? Or does one see effects reflecting greater sympathy for
the disadvantaged, or the reverse, when associations between concentrated disadvantage and more concrete policy viewpoints are examined? Understanding such dynamics would add further insights to the important and novel findings we report on the relevance of community-level socioeconomic variation for stratification ideology.

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NOTES

1. There are mixed findings regarding race, however, with some studies showing that racial minorities may exhibit greater support for individualistic explanations of poverty than do whites (Hughes and Tuch 2000).

2. The imagery of simultaneous adherence to individualistic and structuralist beliefs contrasts with long-held assumptions that thinking about inequality follows an “either-or” logic such that ideologies and belief systems exist in opposing pairs—for example, “right” versus “left,” individualism versus structuralism—reflecting a basic cognitive tendency (Levi-Strauss 1966). This line of reasoning survives in theories holding that all beliefs can be scaled along a single dimension (e.g., liberal-conservative), as well as in “cognitive consistency” theories (Abelson et al., 1968) viewing inconsistency as an unpleasant state creating a motivational drive toward resolution and consistency (Kluegel and Smith 1986:15).

3. Some early interpretations of greater value “inconsistencies” among relatively disadvantaged strata took the view that disadvantaged groups lack the education or political sophistication to develop coherent/consistent ideologies regarding social issues (Converse 1964). Others, such as Lane (1962) disagreed, arguing that prevailing survey techniques failed to tap deeper layers of complexity in the political reasoning of laypersons, observable via the use of in-depth interviews and related methodologies. With respect to beliefs about poverty, some have questioned whether a split or dual consciousness of poverty in fact reflects “inconsistency” or is simply a more nuanced or complex understanding of the issues characterizing persons at selected social locations (Hughes and Tuch 2000; Hunt 1996).

4. As noted by Winship and Radbill (1994), use of unweighted data does not bias regression coefficients when the selection variable (here, race) is included in the model (and, in fact, yields more efficient estimates of coefficients); thus, we use unweighted data for the statistical analysis presented herein.

5. Analysis of the two samples shows that the 2000 respondents have significantly higher education and income than the 1993 respondents.

6. Despite the prevalence of the practice, from a strictly technical standpoint, the results of reported statistical tests should be interpreted with appropriate caution given that our data do not derive from a single independent sample of the given study population.

7. Considerations of sample sizes in multi-level models are somewhat more complex than in individual-level models. For standard individual-level OLS models, statistical power is determined by the sample size and the estimated effect size. Multi-level models have both an individual-level sample size (n) and a community level sample
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size (n). Thus, when estimating multi-level models, the power of statistical estimates at Level I (i.e., the Level I coefficients) is determined by the Level I sample size and the power of tests at Level II is determined by the sample size at Level II. Since the purpose of the current study is to estimate Level II effects on the intercept, sample sizes should be maximized at both of these levels (Snijders and Bosker 1993). Thus, all zip codes with at least two respondents are used in the analyses (n = 182). Given that we use this somewhat liberal standard for exclusion, and to ensure that the patterns reported here are robust to alternate specifications of the model, we conducted sensitivity analyses on the model using both different inclusion criteria and a range of control variables at the community level, including racial/ethnic composition, total population, number of sample members, and number of sample members of different races. These models yielded similar results, suggesting that the patterns reported here are robust to alternate specification of the statistical model and alternate inclusion criteria for zip codes.

8. Our factor analysis revealed a lower factor loading for the percent black variable compared to other indicators (i.e., .5 vs. .8 or greater). Thus, models were estimated with and without this indicator. Both approaches yielded identical substantive results; thus, we chose to retain percent black in the measure for consistency with past studies.

9. Since construction of a true Gini coefficient is not possible owing to the lack of individual-level income data in publicly available Census files, we created our economic heterogeneity (EH) measure by multiplying the number of persons in each of ten Census-supplied income categories by the midpoint of each category, which yielded an estimate of the amount of earnings obtained by each income grouping (Gastwirth 1970). We then used these results to carry out the standard calculation procedure for a Gini coefficient (Allison 1978).

10. This aspect of the Level I model also guided our inclusion of conservatism. Conservatism could be considered endogenous to our community measures. However, because our focus is on stratification beliefs, we choose to include it in the model as a control. Its inclusion allows us to control for differences in political orientations across communities when assessing the coefficients for the Level II independent variables; models estimated with and without self-reported conservatism showed no substantive differences.

11. The Census Bureau estimates that in 1990 Los Angeles County was approximately 31 percent non-Hispanic white, 10 percent black, and 45 percent Latino.

12. $R^2$ values at Level II are usually substantially higher than those found in standard individual-level regression models, as this value represents the amount of community-level variation that is explained. As noted earlier, for these analyses, community-level variation represents about 6 percent and 11 percent of the total variation for individualist and structuralist explanations for poverty, respectively.

13. Models estimated without EH showed effects of concentrated disadvantage that were substantially (~40 percent) weaker than those reported here (though still significantly different from zero), indicating that EH acts as a suppressor variable in this context, further justifying its inclusion as a control.

14. We explored other ways to categorizing individuals as displaying a dual consciousness pattern as well as including more expansive categorizations (e.g., above the median on both measures) and more restrictive categorizations (e.g., being in the top 20 percent on both measures). In all cases results were substantively similar: Concentrated disadvantage was positively associated with dual consciousness (results available on request).
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