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Scaling the socioeconomic ladder: Low-income women's perceptions of class status and opportunity

Abstract

This study examined how 69 low-income women enrolled in an educational training program perceived social class and upward mobility. Participants identified their social class during childhood, their current status, and their anticipated post graduate status. Beliefs about income inequality and attributions for wealth and poverty were also assessed. Respondents expected to achieve middle class status and perceived higher education as a route to upward mobility, although the accessibility of post-secondary programs was questioned. Consistent with previous research involving low-income groups (Bullock, 1999; Kluegel & Smith, 1986), structural attributions for poverty and wealth were favored over individualistic causes. Also, respondents perceived income inequality as unjust. The construction of class identity and implications for class-based mobilization are discussed.