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**Reflections on Social Exclusion:
What is it? How is it different from U.S. Conceptualizations of
Disadvantage? And, why Americans might consider integrating it
into U.S. social policy discourse.**

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ABSTRACT

There are notable differences between US and European discourse on disadvantage, particularly in the way in which the phenomenon is conceptualized. In European social research and policy circles, disadvantage is typically thought of in terms of social exclusion. Social exclusion refers to the processes by which individuals and groups are rendered incapable of participating in the economic, social, political, cultural and other essential institutions that characterize the society in which they live and which are available to most other members of that society. This way of thinking about disadvantage is much broader than that typically employed in the United States where disadvantage tends to be conceptualized in terms of poverty (notably income, economic, or monetary) resulting from nonparticipation or limited participation in the economic institutions of society, and where non-participation in other (e.g., non-economic) institutions are subject to relative neglect.

My main goal in this paper is to present to an American audience the concept of social exclusion—a concept which, despite roughly two decades of increasing importance in European social policy dialogue, remains somewhat ambiguous and elusive. I also aim to present some thoughts as to why American researchers and policymakers might consider integrating social exclusion into U.S. discourse on disadvantage. This second goal reflects my concern (and clear evidence suggesting) that traditional income poverty-based analyses of disadvantage have not been entirely instructive and that the emergent public policy has not been effective in addressing disadvantage in the U.S.

This paper comprises four sections. In the first section, a brief description of social exclusion—its origins, definitions, attributes, and causes—is provided. In the second section, social exclusion is contrasted with conventional American conceptualizations of disadvantage which are largely based on poverty. The third part of the paper contains a brief discussion of why American researchers and policymakers might consider integrating social exclusion into their discourse on disadvantage. The paper concludes with a description of some likely impediments to American adoption of social exclusion discourse and why, nevertheless, serious contemplation should be given to the possibility.

Social Exclusion: Origins, Definitions, Attributes and Causes

Early reference to social exclusion is generally attributed to Weber for whom exclusion constituted a form of “social closure,”—the “...attempt of one group to secure for itself a privileged position [in society] at the expense of some other group through a process of subordination” (Parkin 1979.) Much later, in 1974, Rene Lenoir, the former French Secretary of State for Social Action who is credited with contemporary use of the term, used it to refer to individuals and groups of people who were administratively excluded from state social protection systems (e.g. the physically disabled, single parents, and the uninsured unemployed.) Subsequent French concerns regarding social problems that were emerging on housing estates located outside the nation’s urban centers led to an expansion of the term to include “disaffected” youth and others who were socially and/or economically isolated. Still later, meaning of the term evolved and expanded yet again to include the long-term unemployed, the ranks of which were greatly expanding as the French economy underwent massive restructuring. It was during the 1980s and 1990s, as other European economies came to be increasingly characterized by structural forms unemployment and “new forms of poverty and marginalization” emerging in response to unprecedented economic, technical, and social changes (Atkinson and Davoudi 2000: 428) that strained and, at times, exceeded the corrective capacity of state welfare systems, that the concept emigrated beyond France into continental and U.K social policy discourse. Today, social exclusion is a central focus of European Union (EU) social policy, and its amelioration (if not eradication) is reflected in many of the EU’s strategic goals, policies, and programs.¹

Some definitions

Notwithstanding its central position in European social policy discourse, social exclusion has no universally agreed upon definition.² As a consequence, there are numerous interpretations of the concept. In the following pages, a few of the most frequently cited are presented.

Within the social rights tradition,³ social exclusion is typically subject to two broad interpretations (Somerville 1998.) According to one interpretation, social exclusion is defined as long-term unemployment, or denial of the rights to labor market participation. Implicit in this interpretation is the primacy of the labor market—the belief that employment is necessary for social *inclusion*. According to the other interpretation, social exclusion is defined as the denial of the rights of social citizenship (due to, for instance, stigmatization,

¹ Combating social exclusion is one of the six EU social policy objectives pursuant to Article 136 of the EC Treaty Community policies.

² See Burchardt, Le Grand, and Piachaud 2002; Atkinson and Davoudi 2000; and Saraceno 2002.

³ Social exclusion discourse has evolved along two distinct analytic lineages (Saraceno 2002.) One lineage, which centers on issues of poverty and material deprivation, is embedded in the social rights tradition. It focuses on “...the social conditions by which individuals and groups are included in or excluded from relevant resources and particularly, social rights.” The other lineage focuses on such issues as “...social disintegration, marginality, un-belonging, up-rootedness...[that is, the]...processes by which individuals and groups belong to or are detached from relevant and meaningful social networks and share in the values and identifications within a given community.” Both analytic perspectives are key to understanding social exclusion. Yet, they are rarely considered together. Generally, the analytic focus is one perspective or the other—on resources and social rights, or on issues of (dis) affiliation. For a more detailed discussion of the intellectual roots of social exclusion, see Silver 1994 and Saraceno 2002.

restrictive or oppressive legislation and law enforcement, and/or institutional discrimination)—that is, the right to some minimal level of income or, more comprehensively, the right to some minimal standard of living (e.g., health, education, and housing.)¹

Saraceno (2002) points out similar interpretive distinctions and observes that meanings of the concept appear to “oscillate” between, on one hand, denial of the rights to employment, and, on the other, denial of the broad range of social citizenship rights—which includes not only the rights to employment, but to the rights to education and healthcare, and to judicial, civic, and political rights, as well.

Levitas (1998, 2000) identifies three meanings of social exclusion evident in research and policy discourse. In one instance, social exclusion is viewed as a consequence of poverty, where poverty is broadly defined as the inability of individuals and groups to participate in the customary life of the society in which they live.² In this interpretation of social exclusion, poverty means “...something more complex than [what] is colloquially understood by poverty, in that it is dynamic, processual, multidimensional, and relational, and it allows space for the understanding that discriminatory and exclusionary practices may be causes of poverty [broadly defined] ...” (Levitas 2000: 359.)³ In the second meaning, social exclusion is believed to be a consequence of unemployment and is defined as nonparticipation in the labor market. This interpretation serves, either explicitly or implicitly, as the basis of much of the public policy designed to combat social exclusion.⁴ The third meaning of social exclusion cited by Levitas attributes the phenomenon to the moral and cultural characteristics of the excluded—such attributes as criminality, unemployment, lack of work ethic, single parenthood, and welfare dependency.⁵

Tsakoglou and Papadopoulos (2002) distinguish between how social exclusion is defined in academic and policy circles. In the academic literature, social exclusion is defined rather comprehensively as “...the denial of social, political and civil rights of citizens or the inability of groups of individuals...to participate in the basic political, economic, and social functionings of the society” (pp. 211-12.) Alternatively, policymakers tend to interpret social exclusion in a more circumscribed manner as “...‘exclusion from the labor market,’ ‘acute poverty and material deprivation’ (or both) or less frequently, ‘inability to exercise basic social rights’...” (pp. 212.)⁶

¹ It is important to note that there are clear linkages between these two interpretations of social exclusion: exclusion from the labor market can lead to exclusion from the wider rights of social citizenship.

² According to Townsend (1979: 32) “Individuals, families and groups can be said to be in poverty when...their resources are so seriously below those commanded by the average individual or family that they are in effect excluded from ordinary living patterns, customs and activities.” Moreover, “resources” in this context refers to cash income and collective goods and services.

³ Levitas refers to this interpretation of social exclusion as “redistributive” discourse or “RED” because of its focus on poverty as the cause of exclusion and its policy prescription which calls for increases in benefit levels to reduce poverty and, thus, exclusion.

⁴ Levitas refers to this interpretation of social exclusion as “social integration” discourse or “SID.” Accordingly, labor market attachment is viewed as the sole (primary ?) means of tackling exclusion. See, for instance, the European Foundation (1994).

⁵ Levitas refers to this interpretation as “moral underclass” discourse, or MUD. It focuses on, what are considered to be, the pathological characteristics of the excluded, considered to be the main causes of their exclusion.

⁶ Mayes et al. 2001; Atkinson et al. 2002 - both cited in Tsakoglou and Papadopoulos 2002.

Often social exclusion is defined in a manner such that it is virtually indistinguishable from the concept of poverty. For instance, in an EU Joint Report on Social Exclusion, “the terms poverty and social exclusion refer to when people are prevented from participating fully in economic, social and civil life and/or when their access to income and other resources (personal, family, social and cultural) is so inadequate as to exclude them from enjoying a standard of living and quality of life that is regarded as acceptable by the society in which they live” (EU Council 2001: 11.)

Assuming a rights focused approach, the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) defines social exclusion as the non-recognition of basic civil and social rights (e.g., access to adequate healthcare, education, and other nonmaterial forms of well-being); and where such recognition does exist, the lack of access to the political and legal systems necessary to realize those rights.¹ Similarly, social exclusion refers to a “...lack of access to the institutions of civil society – legal and political systems – and to the basic levels of education, health and financial well-being necessary to make access to those institutions a reality” (Burchardt 2000: 386.)

At the London School of Economics, researchers at the Center for the Analysis of Social Exclusion (CASE) define a person as socially excluded if “(a) he or she is geographically resident in a society but (b) for reasons beyond his or her control, he or she cannot participate in the normal activities of citizens in that society, and (c) he or she would like to participate” (Burchardt et al. 1999: 229). Barry (2002) suggests that exclusion occurs even if the third condition (e.g., involuntary exclusion) does not hold. In subsequent work, Burchardt et al. (2002) proposed a narrower working definition of social exclusion: “An individual is socially excluded if he or she does not participate in the key activities of the society in which he or she lives” (p. 30).

In the U.K government, the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) interprets social exclusion as “...the processes by which individuals and communities become polarized, socially differentiated, and unequal” (1997) and, thus, unable to accommodate basic material needs, access essential services, or participate in social relations and civic activities. (2003). The government’s Social Exclusion Unit (SEU) defines the concept as “...a shorthand term for what can happen when people or areas suffer from a combination of linked problems such as unemployment, poor skills, low incomes, poor housing, high crime environment, bad health and family breakdown” ... (2001: 10).

Other definitions of social exclusion include patterns and processes of generalized disadvantage in such areas as education, healthcare, housing, and financial resources (Atkinson and Davoudi 2000); a lack of capabilities within a wide range of contexts including employment, healthcare, housing, education, social insurance, financial markets, facilities, politics and culture (Sen 1999); “the inability to participate effectively in economic, social, political, and cultural life, alienation and distance from the mainstream society” (Duffy 1995); “the dynamic process of being shut out... from any of the social, economic, political and cultural systems which determine the social integration of a person in society” (Walker and Walker 1997); and “a process through which individuals and groups are wholly or partially excluded from participation in the society in which they live” (European Foundation 1995). There are still other interpretations of social exclusion,² most

¹ Gore and Figueirido 1997 cited in Burchardt et al. 2002.

² Because social exclusion is a normative concept, its definitions and interpretations vary among the EU member states: because what constitutes “normal” or “customary” varies among states, what constitutes

of which share the key themes implicit in the definitions presented heretofore: Social exclusion is a process in which individuals and groups are rendered unable to participate fully in the social, economic, political, cultural, civic, and other institutions, entitlements, activities, and amenities (e.g., education, healthcare, housing, employment, social networks, and political decision-making) that characterize ordinary, customary, or generally accepted (often expected) quality life in the societies in which they live.

The breadth of meaning attributed to social exclusion allows the concept to move fairly easily among academic, professional and political discourses.¹ This “elasticity of meaning”² and resultant political flexibility is considered, by some, to be a key factor underlying its popularity in Europe.³ Its conceptual breadth allows EU member states to build broad-based coalitions, and to coordinate and collaborate among one another in efforts to address disadvantage despite their different, and some times conflicting, social welfare priorities, agendas, policies, and regimes. The concept’s popularity is also attributed to its political palatability relative to more contentious and problematic notions of poverty.⁴ Its breadth of meaning is also said to engender greater interest in and resources for addressing disadvantage.

Attributes

Social exclusion is characterized by six key attributes: multidimensionality, dynamism, relativity, and ruptured social relations, communal resource constraints, and limitations on agency. Each of these attributes is reflected in the debate and the analysis of exclusion.

There are many dimensions along which individuals and groups may experience social exclusion: housing, education, employment, healthcare, legal and political systems, and social networks.⁵ Because of social exclusion’s multidimensionality, its focus in and approach to the analysis of disadvantage extends beyond considerations of poverty, income, and other economic, monetary, and associated material variables (that are typical of poverty-based analyses of disadvantage) to include equally important non-economic and nonmaterial

exclusion varies, as well. However, the variances occur only within the context of the broad meaning attributed to social exclusion—that is, non-participation in mainstream social, economic, political, cultural, civic, and other institutions, entitlements, etc. that comprise society. Somerville (1998) suggests that though meanings of social exclusion are socially constructed or “...produced by [different] combinations of economic, social and political processes... what lies at the heart of all processes of exclusion, is a sense of social isolation and segregation from the formal structures and institutions of the economy, society, and the state” (762.)

¹ Saraceno 2002.

² Levitas 2002: 358.

³ Atkinson 1998 cited Micklewright 2002: 4; Burchardt 2002.

⁴ Social exclusion first gained prominence in the UK during the early 1990s when the political climate was such that the then conservative government did not recognize “poverty,” and notions of social exclusion were more politically acceptable (Burchardt et al. 2002; Micklewright 2002; and Atkinson and Davoudi 2000).

⁵The dimensions of social exclusion are conceptualized in many ways. Some authors distinguish between economic, social and political dimensions (Bhalla and Lapeyre 1997: 418); others between dimensions of the economy and incomes; families and family change; and communities and neighborhoods (ESRC 2000.) Researchers at CASE (Burchardt et al 2002: 31) identify four dimensions: consumption (e.g., the capacity to purchase goods and services), production (e.g., participation in economically or socially valuable activities), political engagement (e.g., involvement in local or national decision-making), and social interaction (integration with family, friends, and community.)

variables. Moreover, the multidimensionality of social exclusion analyses draws attention to the many linkages, causalities, and mutually reinforcing relationships that characterize the processes and conditions of disadvantage. This, in turn, allows for a more comprehensive and intricate understanding of the phenomenon and sets the stage for the development and implementation of more effective public policy.

Social exclusion is described as a dynamic process, one of “...descending levels [where] some disadvantages lead to some exclusion, which in turn leads to more disadvantages and more social exclusion and ends up with persistent multiple disadvantages” (Eurostat 1998: 24). Its dynamism is evident in relationships that exist between the past, present and future experiences, circumstances, and conditions of the disadvantaged.

Social exclusion is also a relative phenomenon; it speaks to comparative disadvantage. The concept of social exclusion is premised on the belief that individuals and groups are socially embedded—that they exist within time- and place-specific contexts. Thus, exclusion occurs when certain individuals and groups are disadvantaged relative or compared to the other (e.g., the majority of the) individuals and groups that comprised the society in which they reside; that is, when they do not have access to the resources, opportunities, entitlements, powers, etc. that are considered normal, customary, or expected in their resident society.

Social exclusion occurs among people who live in communities that are subject to severe resource constraints. Implicit in the idea of social exclusion is the belief that disadvantage arises not only because of personal resource deficiencies, but also because of deficiencies in communal resources such as education, healthcare, and transportation facilities and services; recreational and leisure facilities; places to shop for nutritious food, clothing and other essentials; and a host of other services and amenities that serve integrative purposes.

Questions of agency are central to social exclusion. According to two of the three major schools of thoughts on the causes of social exclusion (to be described later), the responsibility for exclusion often lies beyond the excluded themselves; someone and/or something other than they—e.g., societal institutions and structures; and discrimination and unenforced rights—are responsible for (or, at least, play a large part in) their marginalization.

Finally, social exclusion is characterized by significant discontinuities or ruptures in social relations.¹ Issues of detachment, disaffiliation, disintegration, un-belongingness, and marginality relative to prevailing or mainstream social networks, values, and identifications within a given community are central to what it means to be socially excluded. Exclusion “...is primarily concerned with the relational issues ...the breaking of social ties and the marginalization of groups” (Atkinson and Davoudi 2000: 434). Social exclusion refers to horizontal segregation, isolation, breaches, and cleavages in social relations—e.g., those who are inside and those who are outside of the societal mainstream (unlike the concept of poverty, which focuses on vertical segregation.)

Causes

Because social exclusion has different definitions, interpretations and meanings; and because “...different meanings embody...different models of causality... (Levitas 2000: 358),

¹ Social exclusion discourse emphasizes “social and collective ties,” “normative integration,” “social cohesion in the sense of dominant consensual values, mores and social bonds,” and “embeddedness in...meaningful web(s) of belonging, affiliations” (Saraceno 2002: 4-6.)

social exclusion has a variety of different causes. Its variety of causes may also be attributed to its multidimensionality: multiple dimensions are rooted in multiple origins. Finally, social exclusion is attributed to a variety of different factors as a result of its analysis by several different intellectual disciplines (e.g., economic, sociological, political scientific, and psychological), each of which attributes the phenomenon to different causal factors.

Burchardt et al. (2002) have systemized the causes of social exclusion by analyzing them through the lens of agency.¹ They have identified three broad schools of thought, each of which is rooted in a different perspective on agency—that is, who or what is responsible for or gives rise to exclusion.

According to one school of thought, social exclusion arises from the combined effects of discrimination and unenforced rights. It is a consequence of the discriminatory decisions and actions undertaken by, for instance, a society's political, social, and economic majority and/or elite who, by acting in their own self-interest (e.g., retaining for themselves material, cultural, symbolic and other privileges) exclude the other members of society. Such "[p]owerful class and status groups, which have distinct social and cultural identities as well as institutions, use social closure to restrict the access of outsiders to valued resources (such as jobs, good benefits, education, urban locations, valued patterns of consumption) (Saraceno 2002: 7-8). The excluded are unable to remedy their disadvantage because they lack or are unable to enforce political, economic, social, and other rights that undergird inclusion.

The second, and possibly most prevalent, school of thought holds that social exclusion is a function of the organization and operation of societal institutions and systems.² Social (e.g., insurance and assistance), economic (e.g., regional, national, and international), political, civic and other institutions and systems cause exclusion by limiting access to the opportunities, resources, and powers required for inclusion. Sometimes the limitations are unintended, and often they are beyond the control of any single individual or entity (including excluded themselves who lack such resources as political autonomy and decision-making authority required to alter the structures and behaviors of societal institutions and systems.)

The European Commission (2000, 2001) cites a number of institutional/structural causes of social exclusion. They include (1) changes in the labor market (due to globalization, technological evolutions, and industrial restructuring) which have altered the relative balance between job flexibility and security, and marginalized the least adaptable individuals and groups; (2) expansion of the knowledge society (and the social and economic roles of information technologies) which has marginalized the technologically illiterate and others who lack newly requisite knowledge and skills; (3) socio-demographic changes (e.g., aging of the population; declining birth rates; evolutions in family and community structures and

¹ In defining the causes of social exclusion, Burchardt et al. (2002:8) also distinguish between past and present influences on outcomes. Past influences include capital stocks: human capital (a function of genetic inheritance, childhood experiences, education and training); physical capital (a function of ownership in land, housing, equipment, etc.); and financial capital (a function of ownership of financial assets and liabilities.) Present influences comprise external (e.g., current constraints facing and individual or community) and internal (e.g., choice that individuals and communities make) causes.

² Globalization and economic restructuring are among the most commonly cited institutional/structural causes of social exclusion. They have adversely impacted labor markets and employment, eroded financial and other forms of support that more advantaged individuals and groups are willing to provide to the disadvantaged, and undermined the capacity of state welfare-related institutions to provide social assistance.

patterns; immigration; migration; and increasing ethnic, religious, and cultural diversity); and (4) territorialism, or geographic bias and polarization of development, which has left some areas (e.g., old urban industrial sites) devoid of the financial, physical and other forms of infrastructure required for economic and social development and, ultimately, inclusion.

Similarly, in the UK, the SEU (2001) cites two main categories of structural causes of social exclusion. One category is economic and social in nature. They include (i) industrial restructuring (which has altered the relative importance of industrial sectors, forcing many people out of the labor market -- either permanently or for very long periods of time, allowing reentry only at substantially lower wages); (ii) family restructuring (which has resulted in an increased number of single parent and other fragile families); and (iii) community fragmentation and polarization (which have weakened social networks and other supports traditionally available to vulnerable individuals and groups.) The second set of structural causes of exclusion is rooted in failed government policy, working methods, and co-ordination. They emanate from such problems as (i) ambiguous issue ownership; (ii) organizational overextension; (iii) perverse, unintended, and/or unanticipated effects of public policy; (iv) poor interagency coordination; (v) limited or weak intersectoral partnerships; (vi) excessive focus on processes relative to outcomes, averages relative to extremes, short-term relative to the long-term, service providers relative to clients, and top-down relative to bottom-up problem-solving; (vi) poor data collection and analysis; and (vii) disconnects between rights and responsibilities.

Atkinson and Davoudi (2000) cite a framework for organizing and understanding the main institutional causes of social exclusion. The framework distinguishes between four institutional subsystems, the failures of which are thought to cause exclusion. Those subsystems are (i) the democratic and legal systems, which foster civic integration; (ii) the labor market, which fosters economic integration; (iii) the social welfare system, which aids social integration; and (iv) the family and community system, which enables interpersonal integration. In principle, social exclusion may occur when any one of these institutional subsystems fails, but generally occurs when more than one fails as part of a chain reaction. Central to this (and other) institutionally-focused perspectives on the causes of social exclusion is the degree and manner in which individuals and groups are embedded within institutional systems. The nature of their embeddedness determines the effects that institutions have on their welfare—that is, their inclusion or exclusion.¹

The final school of thought on the causes of social exclusion, as proposed by Burchardt et al., attributes it to the perverse, pathological, antisocial, and self-destructive (e.g., extra-normal) behaviors, morals, and values of excluded individuals and groups. According to this perspective, the excluded are themselves responsible for their marginality.²

Other authors (Lupton 2003) distinguish between micro and macro-level causes. Macro-levels factors originate beyond the purview and control of the excluded, and tend to be structural, institutional, or systemic in nature. They include many of the factors cited above—economic restructuring, globalization, population movements, discrimination, and public policy. Micro-levels factors include the characteristics of disadvantaged areas (e.g., disinvestment, and lack of jobs, services, amenities, and other integrative supports) and/or the

¹ Because social citizenship rights are embedded in and actualized through institutional systems, systems' failures lead to the weakening or loss of those rights and hence exclusion.

² This viewpoint is analogous to that articulated in the U.S. underclass debate in which the behaviors, norms, values, etc. of low income individuals and groups are thought to lead to their disadvantage.

people who live in them (e.g., socially perverse, non-normative behaviors, values, and morals; the lack of human, social, political, and financial capital.)

Finally, within the context of the three meanings of social exclusion earlier attributed to Levitas (2002), exclusion is caused by (1) income poverty, (2) unemployment,¹ and/or (3) socio-pathological behaviors.

Social exclusion contrasted with American conceptualizations of disadvantage

In the US, poverty is typically defined in terms of lowness or inadequacy of income and is the prevailing conceptualization of disadvantage. A key assumption implicit in this custom is the idea that low income is an efficient proxy for disadvantage.

The conceptual differences between social exclusion and poverty are rather ambiguous. This ambiguity appears to emanate from several factors. One is that the two concepts are conceptually linked: poverty is a key indicator of social exclusion; the concepts exhibit mutual causality (e.g., poverty can lead to social exclusion, and social exclusion can lead to poverty);² and often, they are highly correlated (e.g., many who experience poverty also experience social exclusion; and many who experience social exclusion are poor.)³

A second factor giving rise to ambiguity in the conceptual distinctions between social exclusion and poverty is that while some authors identify clear and unequivocal differences between the two (Sen 1999; Hobson 2002), other authors use the concepts interchangeably, thus implying their equivalence. For instance, in the EC's Joint Report on Social Exclusion "...the terms poverty *and* [emphasis added] social exclusion refer to when people are prevented from participating fully in economic, social and civil life and/or when their access to income and other resources (personal, family, social, and cultural) is so inadequate as to exclude them from enjoying a standard of living a quality of life that is regarded as acceptable society in which they live" (p. 11). Additionally, in some official UK government documents, identical statistics are employed as indicators of both poverty and social exclusion (Micklewright 2002). That the two concepts are, at times, perceived to be interchangeable and equivalent is also evident in the frequent use of poverty to proxy social exclusion (Atkinson and Davoudi 2000).

A third factor underlying the ambiguous conceptual distinctions between social exclusion and poverty is an ongoing debate as to whether social exclusion is really fundamentally different from poverty (Whelan et al. 2002; Sen 1999). Somerville (1998: 763) suggests that "Social exclusion in general...is not so very different from poverty, construed

¹ This is among the most commonly cited causes of social exclusion. Implicit in this cause is the idea that social inclusion is synonymous with labor market participation. "Unemployment is a root cause of social exclusion" (European Foundation 2004.) This perspective can be found in much EU and especially UK literature on social exclusion.

² Income poverty is a strong predisposing condition for social exclusion; and social exclusion is a strong predisposing condition for poverty.

³ For instance, Piachaud (2002) defines poverty as a lack or denial of resources necessary to obtain access to the conditions of life (e.g., the diets, amenities, standards, and services which allow people to follow the customary behavior which is expected of them by virtue of their membership in a society [p. 1]). He goes on to distinguish that from social exclusion which he defines as not participating in the in the key activities of the society in which one lives (p. 2). Although these definitions differ, there is clear overlap.

in relational terms rather than relative or absolute terms.” And, Bhalla and Lapeyre (1997: 415) assert that “...social exclusion is close to that of poverty, broadly defined.”

Other authors (Nolan and Whelan 1996) have actually advocated for the retention of poverty as a focus of social welfare discourse. They argue that, contrary to a widely held perception that conducting social welfare discourse in social exclusion terms yields a more comprehensive analysis of disadvantage relative to discourse conducted in poverty terms, social exclusion analysis is not necessarily more comprehensive than poverty analysis; and that poverty analysis is potentially as conceptually broad as social exclusion analysis—capable of integrating such considerations as relativity, agency, dynamism, multidimensionality, communal resource constraints, and relational discontinuities into its investigations of disadvantage.¹

Broad conceptualizations of poverty that exhibit breath of meaning typically associated with social exclusion are evident in such definitions as those articulated by the United Nations (UN). Accordingly, poverty is defined as a “lack of income and productive resources to ensure sustainable livelihoods; hunger and malnutrition; ill health; limited or lack of access to education and other basic services; increased morbidity and mortality from illness, homelessness and inadequate housing; unsafe environments and social discrimination and exclusion...[and] lack of participation in decision-making and in civil, social and cultural life” (1995); or, “...a human condition characterized by the sustained or chronic deprivation of the resources, capabilities, choices, security and power necessary for the enjoyment of an adequate standard of living and other civil, cultural, economic, political and social rights” (2001.) These definitions reflect a belief that while low income is a central feature of poverty, it “... does not take account of the myriad of social, cultural and political aspects of the phenomenon. Poverty is not only deprivation of economic or material resources but a violation of human dignity too...” Thus, the UN’s rights-based definition of poverty “...gives due attention to the critical vulnerability and subjective daily assaults on human dignity that *accompany* [italics added] [economic] poverty...” (2001). In UN parlance, then, there appears to be little difference between social exclusion and poverty, the latter *broadly defined*.

The debate as to whether and to what extent poverty and social exclusion are conceptually distinct continues. Nevertheless, there is general agreement that social exclusion discourse has added value to the analysis of disadvantage, at the very least, by sensitizing researchers and policy makers to the breadth of considerations that should be addressed in its investigation (Micklewright 2002: 7-8).²

However, most authors consider social exclusion and poverty to be conceptually distinct pointing out that the former is *inherently* more inclusive and conceptually broader than the latter. Whereas ‘...poverty studies have concentrated on a lack of access to material resources, the concept of social exclusion provides a framework to look at the social relations of power and control, the processes of marginalization and exclusion, and the complex and

¹ American and other researchers do inject notions of relativity, dynamism, and multidimensionality into poverty analyses (Micklewright 2002: 24-25; Saraceno 2002). In fact, some have suggested that the evolving focus on social exclusion in Europe may reflect a change in emphasis rather than a change of focus because of the existence of poverty studies that address the multidimensionality, dynamism, agency, and relativity of disadvantage.

² Some suggest that the evolving focus on social exclusion may reflect a change in emphasis rather than a change of focus because many poverty studies have elements of multidimensionality, dynamism, agency, and relativity, as well.

multifaceted ways in which these operate' (Williams and Pillinger 1996: 9). Social exclusion is often described as a conceptual shift away from poverty as the focus of discourse on disadvantage: an evolution from static to dynamic, from unidimensional to multidimensional, and from distributional to relational analyses; an evolution that has moved the discourse away from an almost exclusive focus on economic poverty and material deprivation to one that incorporates social, political, cultural, and other dimensions of disadvantage, as well.¹

Abrahamson (2001) provides a useful description of some of the main differences between the concepts of poverty and social exclusion. He draws attention to how they differ in terms of the situations to which they speak, the causes of those situations, their time perspectives, the forms of social stratification they address, their prevailing policy prescriptions, and the main disciplinary approaches used in their analyses. (See Table 1.) Accordingly, the situation that characterizes poverty is a lack of sufficient resources; the situation that characterizes social exclusion is the inability to exercise rights. The cause of poverty is unmet needs; the cause of social exclusion is discrimination, or the denial of access to institutions of social integration. Poverty is a static condition; social exclusion is a dynamic process. The form of social stratification addressed in poverty analysis is vertical, with the poor on the bottom and the nonpoor on top; the form of stratification addressed in social exclusion analysis is horizontal, with the excluded on the outside or peripheral to the insider mainstream. The main policy prescription for poverty is income generation through work (primarily) and social welfare transfers; the main policy prescription for social exclusion is enabling access to key (e.g., integrative) service delivery systems and institutions. The main disciplinary approach in poverty analysis is economics; in social exclusion analysis, it is sociology.

Table 1: Main Distinctions between Poverty and Social Exclusion

Poverty	Social exclusion
• Situation – insufficient resources	• Situation – denial of ability to exercise rights
• Cause – unmet needs	• Cause – discrimination/denial of access to institutions of social integration ¹
• Perspective – static condition	• Perspective – dynamic process
• Stratification – vertical (e.g., lower vs. upper classes)	• Stratification – horizontal (e.g., outsiders vs. insiders)
• Policy – social transfers (e.g. minimum income guarantees)	• Policy – social services (e.g. activation measures to ensure access to service delivery institutions)
• Discipline – economics	• Discipline – sociology

Adapted from Abrahamson 2001

Barnes (2002) also contrasts the two concepts, stating that poverty is unidimensional, static, and focused on physical needs and distributional (e.g., economic) issues. Moreover, it is measured indirectly with the use of outcome indicators and income analysis undertaken at the level of the individual and/or household. He contrasts this with social exclusion, which he characterizes as multidimensional, dynamic, and focused not only physical needs, but also on relative material needs and societal participation, and addresses both distributional and relational issues. Its measurement is undertaken directly, through the use of outcome indicators, process indicators and risk factors, and through analysis of non-monetary

¹ Saraceno (2002) suggests that the shift remains incomplete—that social exclusion it is not yet a fully theoretically and methodologically developed concept.

resources and participation capabilities as well as income resources at the level of the individual, the household, and the community.

In general, the literature cites the following main points of distinction between social exclusion and poverty, and their analytic focuses and approaches:

- Private vs. Public income – Poverty analyses focus on private income; social exclusion analyses account for publicly provided income and resources, as well.
- Absolute vs. Relative measures - Poverty is typically measured in absolute terms (e.g., in terms of income needed to purchase a particular bundle of goods and services); social exclusion is measured in relative terms (e.g., in relation to the expectations, norms, etc. that characterize a specific social context.)¹
- Individual vs. Group units of analysis – Poverty is typically analyzed at the level of the individual and/or the household; social exclusion is analyzed at the level of the individual, the household, *and* whole communities or groups of people.
- Endogenous vs. Exogenous agency – In poverty analyses, agency for disadvantage lies mainly with the disadvantaged themselves; in social exclusion analysis, agency lies more heavily with groups (e.g., insiders) and factors (e.g., institutions, systems) over which the excluded have little or no control.
- Individual vs. Structural culpability – Related to issues of agency, poverty analyses tend to focus on the personal characteristics and behaviors of the disadvantaged as among the main as causes of their plight; social exclusion analyses focus more heavily on economic, social, political, and other structural/institutional characteristics of society as the primary causes of disadvantage.
- Material vs. Non-Material disadvantage - Poverty analyses tend to focus on material forms of disadvantage, specifically, on the lack of income and associated opportunities and resources (such as housing, food and clothing.) In social exclusion analysis, much of the focus is on non-material forms of disadvantage, such as social disintegration/disconnectedness, political powerlessness, discrimination, geographical isolation, and poor health. However, because many non-material forms of disadvantage have (at least part of) their origin in material disadvantage, the latter are also important considerations in social exclusion analysis; but, they are understood to merit only part of the analytic focus.
- Unidimensional vs. Multidimensional attributes – Poverty analysis is often characterized as unidimensional because of its heavy, sometimes exclusive, focus on income and associated economic/monetary variables (e.g. employment); social exclusion is characterized as multidimensional because it focuses on many other—non-economic—dimensions of disadvantage, as well (e.g., housing, education, health, social networks, justice, and politics.)²

¹ In the US, absolute measures of poverty do dominate, but some poverty researchers do employ relativity in their analyses when they, for instance, calculate poverty levels relative to median incomes (Micklewright 2002: 24).

² This point is controversial: many assert that the concept of poverty is, in fact, multidimensional. However, others suggest that the multidimensionality of poverty studies is an “add on,” in contrast to social exclusion analyses in which multidimensionality is conceptually inherent.

- Static Condition vs. Dynamic Process - Poverty is characterized as a static condition; social exclusion is viewed as a dynamic process through which disadvantage may arise, persist, and evolve over time.¹
- Distributional vs. Relational focus – Poverty analyses tend to focus on distributional (e.g., economic) aspects of disadvantage; social exclusion analyses, while it too addresses distributional issues, tends to focus more on relational aspects of disadvantage (e.g., social integration, affiliation, and belonging; ties to family, friends, colleagues, community, and society, including public services and institutions.)

Predictably, the conceptual and analytic differences between social exclusion and poverty give rise to different kinds of public policy. For instance,

- Public policy that is based on poverty analysis (which tends to assess disadvantage in terms of private income and not total consumption, thereby excluding the welfare benefits derived from public consumption) tends to be designed to increase the private individual and/or household incomes (e.g., through employment) of the disadvantaged, and less to increase their access to publicly provided income, goods, and services. Alternatively, while increasing private income is an important element of public policy that is based on social exclusion analysis, increasing the access of the disadvantaged to publicly provided resources is central.
- Policy based on poverty analysis (for which the main units of analysis are individuals and households) tends to focus more on addressing individual and household needs. Policies based on social exclusion analysis also addresses the needs of whole communities of marginalized people (e.g., ethnic minorities, women, youth, the elderly, the mentally and physically impaired, and the territorially isolated.)
- Policy that is based on poverty analysis (in which the characteristics and behaviors of the disadvantaged are considered to be the main causes of their hardship, and, in which agency is, thus, deemed to lie heavily with them) places much of the responsibility for addressing disadvantage on the disadvantaged themselves. Policy based on social exclusion analysis (in which the disadvantaged are perceived to have limited agency as regards their hardship, and in which structural and institutional factors are understood to be major causal factors) places greater responsibility for addressing marginalization on the state and the non-disadvantaged members of society.
- Because poverty analyses tend to be unidimensional, focusing mainly on the economic dimensions of disadvantage, anti-poverty policy will tend to focus most heavily on issues like income and employment. While social exclusion policy does address issues of income and employment, it also focuses heavily on many non-economic dimensions of disadvantage such as social disconnectedness, political impotence, poor health, and inadequate education. Poverty analyses can certainly be multidimensional, but unlike social exclusion analyses, it is not inherently so. The inherent multidimensionality of social exclusion analyses reflects the belief that while addressing such issues as employment and income are necessary in dealing with disadvantage, it is not sufficient.
- Poverty is typically defined, measured, and analyzed in absolute terms (e.g., in terms of the amount of income required to purchase a particular quality of life) giving rise to policies that are designed to encourage economic growth. The conventional premise

¹ This point is subject to debate since there is much poverty research in the US that incorporates a temporal element. Longitudinal studies such as the US Panel Study on Income Dynamics are clearly dynamic in character.

underlying this approach to dealing with disadvantage is that “a rising tide lifts all boats.” Alternatively, a key policy implication of social exclusion, which is defined, measured, and analyzed in relative terms (e.g., compared to societal norms), is economic (and other forms of opportunity) redistribution. Thus, while implicit in anti-poverty policy is the belief that economic growth is sufficient for improving the welfare of the disadvantaged, implicit in social exclusion policy is the idea that economic growth, while important, it is not enough; redistributive measures are also required.

- Finally, poverty analysis focuses primarily on distributional issues (e.g., economic resources), so corrective policy seeks to increase the incomes of the disadvantaged. Social exclusion focuses more heavily on relational issues (e.g., social ties to family, friends, colleagues, community, etc.) leading to policy designed to foster social, political, and economic integration—policy that dismantles barriers to inclusion (e.g., discrimination based on race, gender, class, citizenship, etc.)

Why American researchers and policymakers might integrate social exclusion into U.S. discourse on disadvantage

In US discourse on disadvantage, the concept of poverty is front, center and dominant. With the exception of the work of a few scholars (Silver 1994, 1999; Aber and Brooks-Gunn 2001; and Kamerman and Kahn 2003; Sandefur et al. 2004), social exclusion discourse is virtually nonexistent in the US.¹

Yet, there are important reasons why Americans might introduce social exclusion into U.S. social policy discourse—at the very least, as a *complement* (not replacement) to the conventional focus on poverty. One of the main reasons we might do this lies in the unambiguous shortcomings of public policy based on poverty analysis. No doubt, analyses of poverty have taught us much about causes, consequences, and useful policy prescriptions for addressing disadvantage. However, after decades of anti-poverty policy, it remains to be seen how it might effect substantial and sustained improvements in the quality of life of disadvantaged people and their communities: witness the horrendous and increasingly problematic conditions of many of the nation’s urban communities.

Among those factors underlying the ineffectiveness of anti-poverty policy are limitations in its implicit conceptualization of what constitutes, causes, and indicates disadvantage—that is, low income. The problem is that, while low income is clearly an important element, origin, and measure of disadvantage, its association with disadvantage is not as tight as is implied by its use to *proxy* disadvantage. In fact, the literature is replete with evidence indicating that poverty is an incomplete and, at times, wholly inaccurate proxy for disadvantage.² Whelan et al. (2002) concluded that the relationship between “...current income and deprivation often appears to be remarkably low”; that “...a great many factors other than persistent income poverty play a role in determining deprivation...” (p. 102); and, that “...different sorts of factors [other than poverty] are involved in determining the different types in deprivation” (p. 98). These observations are supported by Micklewright’s

¹For an historical perspective, see W.E.B. Du Bois (1899) for references to the “exclusion” of blacks in late 19th century Philadelphia.

² Some people who have low incomes, do not experience disadvantage either because their family generates income or because they are protected by state administered social assistance systems.

(2002) statement that “...persistent low household income...may indeed proxy much long-term disadvantage...but this can’t pick up everything by any means” (p.11). Barnes et al. (2002) demonstrate that “the correlation between monetary and non-monetary material deprivation looks relatively weak...” (p. 44), suggesting that there are forms of disadvantage that are not captured in analyses of monetary income, or poverty. Moreover, Laderchi et al. (2003) found that “...monetary poverty does not [even] consistently point to failure to achieve certain *material* [italics added] objectives...” (p. 34) such as adequate nutrition, basic education, and decent housing, suggesting that income-based analyses of disadvantage do not even pick up those forms of disadvantage (e.g., material) that tend to correlate highly with income.¹ Thus, “...the relationship between income and deprivation is rather looser than would be expected *a priori*” (Mack and Lansley 1985; Callan et al. 1993).² Saraceno (2002) argues further that the almost exclusive focus on income in poverty analysis does not allow for much understanding of the role that non-income/employment related factors play in causing disadvantage: “concern over...unemployment seems to obfuscate all other reasons for social and economic vulnerability...” (p. 9). Thus, while poverty may well be a reasonable or (more relevant) *convenient* proxy for some forms of disadvantage (e.g., economic/monetary and certain material types), it is of far less value as a proxy for, or in the identification and analysis of many other, equally important, forms of disadvantage—notably those that are non-monetary and/or non-material in nature.

The existence of forms of disadvantage that are not well captured in poverty analyses is evidenced by the experiences of non-poor (e.g., upper-middle and upper income) women and ethnic minorities in the US. Welfare analyses that are based on their income levels reveal little about the disadvantages they face as regards, for instance, access to the opportunities, powers, resources, and freedoms that, in principle, are available to all American citizens. These groups must often endure such privations as unequal participation in political decision-making processes; inability to integrate into key social networks³; imposed immobility—residential, physical (e.g., as in the ability access public places without the threat of confrontation, assault or other unpleasant encounters), employment and social; unfair treatment under the law; and limited access to public services. For non-poor women and minorities, poverty analyses are of limited use in illuminating, explaining, measuring, and thus effectively tackling their disadvantages, suggesting that variables other than income (e.g., discrimination, unenforced rights, institutional and systems’ behaviors) are determinative and should instead be investigated.

Another example of the limitations of poverty-based analysis of disadvantage is evidenced in the experiences of many middle and working class Americans—of all ethnicities and both genders. Technically, many are not poor. So, poverty-based analyses of their welfare will not necessarily identify the disadvantages they may experience. In fact, many middle and working class Americans are unable to accommodate their basic material (e.g. income linked), needs such as adequate nutrition, healthcare, education, and housing. Importantly, to the extent that poverty analyses fail to identify certain forms of disadvantage—either the nonmaterial disadvantages endured by upper middle and upper

¹ Evidence has been emerging that quantitatively middle class families are having difficulty housing, feeding, and educating themselves (New York Times 3/23/04; Los Angeles Times 5/18/04.)

² Cited in Barnes 2002: 4.

³ For an illuminating description of the differential effects of race on integration into social networks for business development opportunities, see Harmon (2001.)

income ethnic minorities and women, or the material disadvantages endured by many middle income and working class people—its resultant public policy is unlikely to be effective in addressing the full range of disadvantages experienced by certain groups in our society.

Many of the disadvantages that are likely to be overlooked in poverty analysis and, thus, poorly addressed in resultant public policy are those that are generated by the evolution, organization, and/or operation of institutions, structures, and systems that comprise U.S. society—e.g., economic, social welfare, family, community, legal, political, and public service delivery systems, and labor and housing markets.¹ In fact, the ways in which these institutions, structures, and systems have evolved, and are organized and operate are among the main causes of disadvantage experienced by many of the residents of our urban communities. For instance, economic restructuring has led to their high rates of unemployment, under-employment, employment in low wage sectors, and, consequently, growth in the material (e.g., housing, food, and clothing) and non-material (e.g., education, healthcare) forms of disadvantage they endure. Through its effects on employment, economic restructuring has also weakened traditional family structures—an important source of support and stability for individuals and the communities they comprise. Many of the emergent family structures are far more vulnerable to disadvantage and thus less effective as sources of support relative to their predecessors. Community support systems, which might have helped to mitigate the ill-effects of economic and family restructuring, have also become weaker. In some communities, the traditional systems have all but disappeared and been replaced by systems and network (e.g. gangs) that do little to reduce, and sometimes exacerbate, disadvantage. Moreover, social welfare systems, which might also have helped to mitigate the ill-effects of economic, family, and community restructuring, have themselves been restructured and thereby weakened as sources of social support.

The manner in which our political, legal, and public service institutions and systems, and labor and housing markets operate are also key among factors giving rise to disadvantage in the nations' urban communities. Implicit (and sometimes explicit) in the operations of these systems are discriminatory procedures, practices, and customs that undermine the ability of urban residents to access the opportunities, resources, entitlements, freedoms, and powers they needed to avoid and/or overcome disadvantage. For instance, some voter registration processes have embedded in them what are, in effect, discriminatory laws, practices and procedures that disadvantage certain groups of people (e.g., those who work double shifts or two jobs; and others who are unable to find the time, for instance, to accommodate registration deadlines), thereby depriving them of opportunities to participate in electoral processes and to thus ensure that elected public officials represent and address their issues. Similarly, other political decision-making processes (e.g., decisions regarding the allocation of funds and other scarce public resources) operate in a discriminatory manner by, for instance, altogether excluding urban residents or relegating them to marginal/symbolic roles. In either case, their ability to inform and shape key decisions that affect their lives is minimized. Discrimination in the legal (especially, the criminal justice) system also disadvantages urban residents, particularly, African American men who disproportionately comprise the nation's corrections population; many are either in jail, on probation, incarcerated, or on parole. Depending on where they are in the criminal justice system, they are subject to enormous loss of opportunities, resources, entitlements, freedoms,

¹ These factors tend to be overlooked in poverty analysis because of the focus on individuals and households as opposed to institutions and structures.

and powers. These losses, in turn, give rise to innumerable disadvantages, such as unemployment, underemployment, relegation to low wage work, and all of the associated material disadvantages, such limited access to decent housing and adequate nutrition. These disadvantages affect not only the men themselves, but the families and the communities of which they are a part. These men also suffer a litany of non-material disadvantages, including social ostracization and political impotence.¹ In fact, the economic, social, and political marginalization of large numbers of African American men as a consequence of discrimination in the criminal justice system constitutes one of the most destabilizing forces undermining the welfare of urban families and the communities they comprise.

Discrimination and bias inherent in public sector service provision processes have also disadvantaged urban residents with respect to the types, levels, and locations of housing, healthcare, education, transportation, and other essential services and supports. Discrimination in the labor (e.g., hiring and promotion processes) and real estate (e.g., by agents, landlords, sellers, and lenders) markets also disadvantage urban residents by limiting their employment opportunities and residential choices.

In addition to dissatisfaction with results of public policy that is based on poverty analyses, as second set of reasons why American researchers and policy makers might find value in incorporating the concept of social exclusion into US discourse on disadvantage are intellectual and political in nature (Micklewright 2002). From an intellectual perspective, adding social exclusion to our discourse would allow us to reframe and reconstitute the debate, to introduce fresh thinking and innovative ideas that would challenge conventional perceptions and understandings of the characteristics and causes of disadvantage, and thereby aid our efforts to develop and implement more effective policy prescriptions. From a political viewpoint, social exclusion discourse may be less emotive and contentious, and more palatable than discussions of poverty (as it has been in Europe.) To the extent that this might be true, its introduction into U.S. discourse may help to broaden the national dialogue on disadvantage and increase the levels of attention, energy, and other resources allocated to addressing the problem.

A third set of reasons why Americans might benefit from importing the concept of social exclusion is its potential to strengthen the capacity of our institutions to operate in accordance with the democratic principles upon which the nation was founded—such principles as equality, participation, inclusion, self-determination, freedom, and justice. Among schools of thought regarding the performance of democratic institutions, exists the viewpoint that socioeconomic factors are central, that “...the prospects for effective democracy depend on social development and economic well-being” (Putnam 1993: 11.) Similarly, Katz (2001: 357) has stated that “...the practice of democracy depends of the wide diffusion of social citizenship,” which, as defined by Marshall (1950), is everything from ‘...the right to a modicum of economic welfare and security to the right to share to the full in the social heritage and to live the life of a civilised being according to the standards prevailing in the society’² Thus, to the extent that the introduction of social exclusion discourse leads to a better (more comprehensive) understanding of the nature and causes of

¹ Under certain conditions, they may not vote.

² Quoted in Katz 2001: 343-4. Social citizenship also refers to “...welfare state provisions – the supports that are designed to lessen the risks of sickness or disability, old age, unemployment, lack of income (Handler 2004: 9)

disadvantages and to better corrective policy, it also serves to strengthen our capacity for effective democracy.

Concluding Thoughts

Despite compelling arguments in support of the introduction of social exclusion into American discourse on disadvantage, the effort would probably encounter host of institutional, ideological, methodological, political, and intellectual challenges. A few of the more obvious are cited below.

Institutions are contextually constructed: They are the products of the particular political, social, cultural, economic, and historical milieus in which they develop—the product of the legacies, precedents, expectations, and norms implicit therein. Moreover, they required a great deal of time to be established. Therefore, once established, their vested interests perceive the costs of change to be (prohibitively) high, and, thus, they seek to maintain the status quo. Those vested interests are supported in their efforts to preserve the status quo by the mutually reinforcing characteristics and behaviors of institutions. The difficulty inherent in institutional change constitutes a formidable obstacle to the development, integration, and establishment of new thought, ideas, and concepts, especially those that are perceived to be inconsistent, incongruous, or disruptive to the institutional status quo. Thus, institutions can inhibit international flows and global integration of ideas.

This possibility evokes important questions as regards the feasibility of importing social exclusion into U.S. social policy discourse. Among them is, Can a concept (even one that is politically flexible) that has been conceived and initially developed within the institutional context French Republicanism,¹ and, subsequently, further cultivated within the broader institutional context of Europe's social democracies,² be adapted for use within the liberal American institutional context?³ More pointedly, can such a concept as social exclusion—in which two of the three major schools of thought regarding the causes of disadvantage (e.g., opportunity constraints imposed by societal institutions and systems; and discrimination and unenforced rights) perceive the disadvantaged as having limited and, at times, no control over the forces that give rise to their unfortunate experiences and circumstances; and, in which, implicit notions of collective responsibility dictate that the state, and that society in general, assume responsibility for addressing the needs of the disadvantaged—be integrated into the U.S. political/ideological context where agency for disadvantage is thought to lie heavily with the disadvantaged themselves and where neither the state nor the broader society is deemed responsible for addressing their needs? Some answers to these questions might be gleaned from observations of the U.K. case, where the concept of social exclusion has been introduced into an institutional context shaped by Anglo-Saxon liberalism.

Another possible challenge to the American adoption of social exclusion discourse emanates from one of the concept's main policy approaches to dealing with disadvantage —

¹ The French republican tradition (social conservative welfare regime) emphasizes social cohesion, solidarity, bonding, notions of collective ties, normative integration, and consensual values and mores.

² The European social democratic tradition emphasizes notions of conflict, group monopolies, domination, hierarchal power relations, the material and symbolic privileges of some groups (the included) over others (the excluded), and inequality and economic exploitation.

³ The liberal tradition emphasizes individual agency, individualistic competition and market forces.

government (re)distribution of resources, opportunities, and powers. In the U.S., where disadvantage is generally perceived to be an individual affliction (not one of groups or communities of people), caused by individual behaviors (not macro-level institutions and structures), and typically defined in terms of low income and poor material welfare (as opposed to non-monetary/non-material welfare), public policy has sought to foster personal responsibility for dealing with material disadvantage through policies of economic growth and job creation that are designed to increase employment opportunities and thus the private incomes of the disadvantaged. This approach is fundamentally different from a central policy approach emanating from social exclusion analyses in which disadvantage is generally (but not exclusively) perceived to be a group affliction, caused by macro level factors, and defined in non-monetary/non-material terms: that is, societal responsibility for addressing both material and non-material forms of disadvantage through active government (re)distribution of social, political, as well as economic opportunities, powers, and resources required for social integration.

Methodological issues—notably, a lack of reliable data—pose another impediment to the uptake of social exclusion discourse in the U.S. Even in Europe, where the concept is central to social policy dialogue, the databases required for its analysis are limited. Much of the data problem is rooted in the irresolution of the definition of social exclusion; and, following from this, the identification of its key dimensions and underlying indicators, and the logistics of the data gathering processes (e.g., how should the relevant reference community be defined? And, how should the indicators be measured and monitored?) Methodological problems are further complicated by the inevitable local, regional, and national diversity of the answers to these questions arising from the relative and relational nature of social exclusion. The high financial costs likely to be incurred in the processes of creating the databases constitute another key methodological issue.

Moreover, because of its relative conceptual breadth, a social exclusion analysis of disadvantage in the U.S. is likely to yield a larger disadvantaged population when compared to that produced in poverty analyses. This is because, under established poverty-based conceptualizations of disadvantage, the disadvantaged are generally perceived to be only those individuals and groups with low income. The introduction of a social exclusion-based conceptualization of disadvantage would no doubt expand the disadvantaged population to include such groups as upper middle and upper income ethnic minorities—groups who are not disadvantaged in the classic income-based sense, but in the sense that they are socially and politically marginal to the mainstream, and subject to limitations on their rights and access to opportunities, resources, and powers that are commonly available to the ethnic majorities that comprise American society. Social exclusion's broader definition of disadvantage would also likely encompass many middle income and working class people—again, people who may not be officially poor, but who are certainly disadvantaged in the sense that they have difficulty accommodating basic material (e.g., income-based) needs. Thus, the introduction of social exclusion into American social policy discourse would probably call for a reevaluation of and adjustments in such perceptions as *what* constitutes disadvantage (i.e., are political and social isolation and marginalization “legitimate” forms of disadvantage?); *who* is disadvantaged (i.e., are politically and socially marginalized upper and upper middle income minorities disadvantaged?); and, if so, *what* would be the appropriate policy response (i.e., Should society be called upon to address their disadvantage? Should the state be called upon to redistribute social and political opportunities and powers?)

In a context in which disadvantage has historically been defined almost exclusively in terms of low income, and in which dealing with disadvantage is generally perceived to be the responsibility of the disadvantaged themselves, generating the political and financial support necessary to enable state and societal assistance to populations whose disadvantage is *not* based on low income, but on more esoteric notions of political and social inclusion and exclusion, is likely to be a challenge.

American adoption of social exclusion discourse might also be vulnerable to the perception that the conceptual differences between poverty and social exclusion are limited, perhaps non-existent. It could be argued that, like social exclusion, evolving American conceptualizations of disadvantage address the phenomenon's multidimensionality, dynamism, and relativity; that they also address issues of communal resource constraints and agency; and that, given this, there is no need to import a European concept of disadvantage. However, it might also be argued that U.S. conceptualizations of disadvantage do not address such issues as social attachment, integration, belonging, and affiliation, and marginality—the relational issues that are central to notions of social exclusion. This is a fundamental distinction between the two ideas. Moreover, they are distinct in that considerations of the multidimensionality, dynamism, relativity, communal resources constraints, and social relations are *inherent* in social exclusion discourse—they are to the fore and central to the dialogue; while in poverty discourse, their roles have been more adjunct to the central issue of lowness of income.

These and other challenges¹ that stand to complicate efforts to introduce social exclusion into U.S. discourse on disadvantage should, by no means, be viewed as reasons to abandon the idea. The concept has considerable potential as regards enhancing American understanding of the nature, causes, and possible policy prescriptions for dealing with disadvantage. In particular, its perspective on issues of agency and the key roles played by structural/institutional factors, discrimination, and unenforced rights in causing disadvantage would be immensely instructive.

In fact, there is considerable empirical evidence to suggest that the disadvantaged do *not* embody the levels of agency implied in our strong national commitment to notions of personal responsibility (as reflected in popular opinion and public policy)—that structural/institutional factors, discrimination, and unenforced rights do play a major role in causing their plight.² For instance, research on the effects of globalization and economic restructuring (Sassen 2002; Bluestone and Harrison 1982; Harrison and Bluestone 1988; Wilson 1997), concomitant real wage declines and relative increases in the size of the low wage service sector (Blank 1997; Mishel, Bernstein, and Schmitt 2001); hiring, pay, and promotion practices of employers (Moss and Tilly 2001); racial attitudes and beliefs (Bobo and Massagli 2001); and public policy (Massey and Denton 1993; Anyon 1997; Kozol 1991)

¹ Other possible obstacles to the introduction of social exclusion in US social policy circles might include political reluctance to address issues of inequality, injustice, and the cultural and social aspects of disadvantage; and politico-ideology regarding citizenship and welfare regimes (Atkinson and Davoudi 2000.) Underlying rights' philosophy and social psychological notions of "otherness" (in which the social rights and welfare of individuals and groups with which a social mainstream cannot or chooses not to identify, such as ethnic, racial minorities and immigrants, are devalued.)

² Social exclusion discourse does not completely absolve the excluded from their predicament, but it does reflect a greater willingness to acknowledge causal factors that are exogenous to and/or outside of the control of disadvantaged individuals and groups.

all strongly suggests that institutional/structural factors, discrimination and unenforced rights play an unambiguous role in marginalizing certain individuals and groups—in constraining their social, economic, political, and other opportunities, resources and powers, thereby giving rise to their disadvantage. Even within the context of perspectives on agency which hold that individual behaviors, morals, and values are the main causes of disadvantage, research has shown that discrimination that occurs within societal institutions, structures, and systems, and the lack of rights to redress the resultant ill-effects are, at a more fundamental level, causal (Wilson 1986, 1997; Anderson 1999.)

Like the lowness of income, societal structural and institutions, discrimination and lack of enforced rights play an immensely important, perhaps even more fundamental role in causing disadvantage in that they are important causes of low income. As such, they should be clearly and forthrightly addressed in the analysis of disadvantage and resultant public policy. The introduction of social exclusion into our analyses of disadvantage may well constitute an important and helpful first step in this direction.

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