

Interaction Design, Society and the Public Sector

The Poor: *Poverty*

Jon Kolko

3A



Poverty

[3A] Dean Spears



...In these three cases, poverty appears to have made economic decision-making more consuming of cognitive control for poorer people than for richer people. Poverty causes difficult decisions, which deplete behavioral control.

Wait, what? Explain.

[3A] Dean Spears



The experiment had three stages. First, participants played a "store game" that required some of them to make an economic decision. Second, participants' performance was measured on two tasks. Third, participants were asked a set of economic and demographic survey questions.

Describe how the experiments worked.

[3A] Dean Spears



Economic decision-making had negative effects on performance or behavior when participants were poorer. This may be because for poorer participants, decisions required more difficult trade-offs, and were more depleting of cognitive resources.

Explain this, and offer your own take on the hypothesis/explanation.

[3A] Dean Spears



Random assignment of experimental 'poverty' in the lab experiment and regression-controlled and subsample analysis in the field experiment and survey data underscore that, in these data, poverty causes depleted performance, rather than the other way around.

Yikes. What do you think of that?

[3A] Dean Spears



'Bad' decision-making by poor people may undermine support for anti-poverty programs and policies for two reasons: deservingness and effectiveness. Bad decisions may make poor people seem less worthy of aid, and may indeed complicate or crowd out the benefits of attempts to help. Understanding how poverty influences decision-making and behavior is important for both of these reasons. It is evidence against the folk theory of the 'undeserving poor,' and can be used to improve programs and policies responding to poverty.

If this experiment is valid and the implications are true, how would this change policy? How would it change design ideas?

[3A] Chris LeDantec & Keith Edwards



In some urban areas the lack of affordable housing can preclude even the working poor from maintaining a residence; individuals have jobs and are 'productive' members of society but are unable to secure housing.

Describe the relationship between housing, employment, transportation, and technology.

[3A] Chris LeDantec & Keith Edwards



...lower levels of education and literacy restrict access to information, a lack of economic independence restricts access to computers and Internet resources, and limited access to training hinders uptake of digital technology when it is made available. These factors converge, leading to a situation of economic poverty along with what has been called information poverty—a dearth of access to useful information resources.

Is this true for your users? Describe.

[3A] Chris LeDantec & Keith Edwards



The first theme was the importance of staying connected to family members and friends during spells of homelessness... Displacement, becoming newly homeless, and the affect of losing contact with [a participant's] immediate family all converged at once.

Relate to your research.

[3A] Chris LeDantec & Keith Edwards



All of the participants had voicemail accounts through local organizations. These accounts were meant to provide a stable number of contact and aid in job searches and managing appointments or other personal business. The difficulty for a number of participants was in accessing their voicemail, leading to a decidedly asynchronous style of communication when using the telephone.

How would this asynchronous style of communication impact or change your research synthesis?

[3A] Chris LeDantec & Keith Edwards



Homeless persons interact with a number of different social groups and identity management was a key aspect of their lives. For participants in our study, different forms of identity management came out through their use of technology and social institutions. Some forms of identity management were used when facing close family or friends while others were employed as defense against the social stigma of being homeless.

How does this identity management manifest in your synthesis?

[3A] Chris LeDantec & Keith Edwards



The social network was the primary mechanism participants in this study used to navigate the world around them. As noted above, maintaining a social connection with a larger world is critical for individuals dealing with homelessness. These connections are immediately sought out on the street, as much for survival as to get plugged into support infrastructure.

How can you build these social connections in your research findings?

[3A] Chris LeDantec & Keith Edwards



The cumulative effect of these two systems is an inability to plan ahead with budgeting for communication and public transportation. In the case of cell phone service it affects a homeless person's ability to stay connected to a vital social network and in the case of public transportation it complicates travel planning and creates situations of public embarrassment when attempting to board public transport with a card that has been used up.

Relate to your research.

[3A] C.K. Prahalad



“When the Indian industrial and technology conglomerate ITC started building a network of Internet-connected computers called “e-Choupals” in farming villages in India’s rural state of Madhya Pradesh in 2001, soy farmers were suddenly able to check fair market prices for their crops. Some farmers began tracking soy futures on the Chicago Board of Trade, and soon most of them were bypassing local auction markets and selling their crops directly to ITC for about \$6 more per ton than they previously received.”

Is this good or bad?

Why?

[3A] C.K. Prahalad



“The ITC network is one example of how access to information can increase productivity and raise incomes. It also reveals what happens when large businesses stop regarding the world's 4 billion poor people as victims and start eyeing them as consumers. For decades, corporate executives at the world's largest companies-and their counterparts running wealthy governments-have thought of poor people as powerless and desperately in need of handouts. But turning the poor into customers and consumers is a far more effective way of reducing poverty.”

What do you think about turning the poor into customers?

[3A] C.K. Prahalad



“The market for goods and services among the world's poor-families with an annual household income of less than \$6,000 is enormous. The 18 largest emerging and transition countries include 680 million such households, with a total annual income of \$1.7 trillion – roughly equal to Germany's annual gross domestic product.”

What are your reactions to this?

[3A] C.K. Prahalad



“Poor families benefit in several ways when large companies target them as consumers. Access to new products, expanded choices, and increased purchasing power improves one's quality of life. New services and information that improve efficiency help increase productivity and raise incomes among poor citizens. Processes that are fair to the consumer and treat poor customers with respect-as when ITC uses electronic scales that give accurate weights for grain and offers a farmer a chair to sit in while the sale is completed-builds loyalty and trust in the company and in the global economic system. And the exercising of collective consumer market power forces attention to the needs of poor people.”

Do you agree?

Why?

[3A] Chris Le Dantec



In this effort to broaden the scope of participation with and through technology it has become apparent that there are deep challenges in reaching certain user communities even within the relative wealth and privilege of western society. Especially in efforts that fall toward expanding access to people who live at the margins of contemporary society, we must focus on understanding how they might appropriate technology as a function of their cultural and social identities rather than through their capacity for consumption.

What does it mean to appropriate technology as a function of a cultural or social identity?

What's an example?

[3A] Chris Le Dantec



To address these issues we build on the position forwarded by DiSalvo et al. that ICTs, especially those meant to engage users in participation, can be effectively informed by recognizing and constituting “publics”. This notion of a public is based on Dewey’s ideas on how people organize around collective action. For Dewey, a public is brought into existence by action around a shared social condition, through mobilizing either to mitigate or promote its consequences. DiSalvo et al. note, however, that publics can also be constituted around the introduction of new technologies designed to create opportunity for reflection and action.

What is an example of a “public”?

What role does it serve in life?

[3A] Chris Le Dantec



Social conditions that define the homeless as a public:

- Managing many sources of information
- Maintaining social support
- Trusted relationships
- Transient and impermanent

Despite these challenges, constituting a public of homeless individuals around co-designed technologies is arguably an opportunity to express and sustain an urban network of support and knowledge that is otherwise opaque and fleeting.

[3A] Chris Le Dantec



A public:

- *can become a useful boundary for design by highlighting existing social conditions, suggesting a conceptual space within which to engage potential users around reflecting and acting on that condition*
- *not only expose common issues, but also are a means for dealing with conflict and controversy around those issues*

3A



Poverty

In groups of two or three, synthesize these readings into a single cogent argument of no more than five sentences. [Fifteen Minutes]