Members of stigmatized groups often live with the expectation that they will be overscrutinized, overlooked, underappreciated, misunderstood, and disrespected in the course of their daily lives. How do they interpret and respond to this lived reality? What resources do they have at their disposal to do so? How are their responses shaped by neoliberalism? How can responses to stigmatization foster social resilience?

This chapter enriches our understanding of social resilience by considering whether and how stigmatized groups may be empowered by potentially contradictory contextual forces – more specifically, by cultural repertoires that enable their social inclusion.

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“We consider repertoires to be social scripts, myths, and cultural structures and that the content of these repertoires varies to some extent across national contexts” (Lamont & Thévenot 2000). We also consider that certain repertoires can foster resilience by feeding the capacity of individuals to maintain positive self-concepts; dignity; and a sense of inclusion, belonging, and recognition. We argue that societies provide individuals with different means for bolstering their identity and building resilience. This is accomplished by making available repertoires that are fed by national ideologies, neoliberalism, and narratives concerning the collective identity of their groups.

The research was presented in a number of settings where the reactions of the audience broadened our thinking: the Institut Marcel Mauss; Ecole des Hautes études en sciences sociales; the Centre Maurice Halbwachs; Ecole normale supérieure; the Observatoire sociologique du changement, Sciences Po; the seminar “Cities are Back in Town,” Sciences Po; the Humanities Center, University of Pittsburgh; the Departments of Sociology at Yale University, Boston University, Brandeis University, and Brown University; the Faculty of Social Sciences and History of the Diego Portales University, Santiago de Chile; the POLINE conference on Perceptions of Inequality, Sciences Po (Paris, May 2011); the Nordic Sociological Association meetings (Oslo, August 2011); the Adlerbert Research Foundation Jubilee Conference on “Creating Successful and Sustainable Societies” (Gothenburg, November 2011); and the meetings of the Association for the Study of Ethnicity and Nationalism (London, March 2012). Funding for the comparative study of responses to stigmatization and for data gathering in Brazil was provided by a faculty grant and a Weatherhead Initiative grant from the Weatherhead Center for International Affairs, Harvard University. Research on African American responses to stigmatization was funded by a grant from the National Science Foundation (# 701542). Research on Israeli responses to stigmatization was funded by a grant from the US-Israeli Binational Science Foundation. Michèle Lamont acknowledges the generous support of the Canadian Institute for Advanced Research. We thank Travis Clough for his technical assistance.

2 On repertoires, see Swidler (1986), and Tilly (2006). Although collective imaginaries provide to a group a sense of shared past and future, as well as shared identity (see the introduction to Hall & Lamont 2013, pp. 1-31), the term “repertoire” can be apply to such collective imaginaries, as well as to other relatively stable schemas or cultural structure.

3 On recognition, see Taylor (1991), Honneth (1996), and Fraser and Honneth (2003). Walton and Cohen (2011) have shown that social belonging increases self-reported well-being among African American college students. In future research, we will consider how various types of responses to stigmatization influences subjective well-being. On collective imaginaries and health, see Bouchard (2009).

4 Other repertoires may be more relevant in other societies and historical periods. We take Jenkins (1996) theory concerning social identity as a point of departure: we understand it as resulting from both self-identification (e.g., what it means for African Americans