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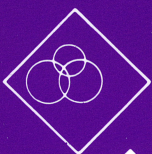
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# Prevalence and Correlates of Adolescent Dating Violence in Bangkok, Thailand

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*This study explored the incidence and severity of violence in dating relationships, and identified variables that explain dating violence perpetration by Thai youths. The sample consisted of 1,296 adolescents from high schools, vocational schools, and out-of-school adolescents, between the ages of 14 and 19. Findings indicate that Thai youths maintain very intensive dating relationships. The out-of-school adolescents hold the highest dating violent behaviors. While males' dating violence scores were higher, the females were involved in all types of dating violence, exceeding the males on verbal/emotional violence. The results provide useful information about cultural influences on dating violence, and have practical policy implications for school-based prevention programs and agencies in Thailand.*

*Key words: Dating violence, adolescence, Thailand, school-based prevention, cultural influences*

In the United States, 9% to 46% of all adolescents experienced physical violence in their current or past dating relationships (Glass, Fredland, & Campbell, 2003). Prevalence of dating violence ranged from 6.5% to 14.0% across state surveys and from 7.3% to 16.0% across local surveys (Grunbaum, Kann,



Kinchen, & Ross, 2004).

Dating violence is emerging as a serious public health issue with far-reaching societal implications for premarital relationships among adolescents and future marital violence. In addition to the physical and emotional injury caused, personal experience of dating violence may lead to greater tolerance of intimate violence within the family (Simons, Lin, & Gordon, 1998; Tilley & Brackley, 2004).

In Thailand, dating relations among adolescents have become more common in recent years. Young Thai men have premarital sex with girlfriends more often than in the past, whereas traditional sexual sanctions on Thai girls limit their power to practice or negotiate protected sexual intercourse (Ford & Kittisuksathit, 1996; Gray & Punpuing, 1999). This situation places adolescents and young women at risk of dating violence or other forms of sexual coercion.

The aims of this research are to assess the prevalence and correlates of dating violence among male and female Thai adolescents. Research on dating violence among adolescents will be useful not only in providing guidelines for intervention at the premarital stage, but also in facilitating early prevention efforts.

*Dating violence.* Dating violence can be defined as the perpetration or threat of violence by at least one member of an unmarried (same sex or opposite sex) couple toward the other within a dating or courtship relationship. Nevertheless, most studies use different and conceptually unclear definitions of dating violence, precluding generalization of findings. For example, the terms *courtship violence* and *premarital violence* are often used synonymously, and fail to distinguish between a variety of dyadic interactions that represent different levels of commitment within dating relationships (Sugarman & Hotaling, 1991). In the literature, dating violence is often used interchangeably with the terms *abuse*, *violence* and *aggression*. Although these terms are similar, they have distinct meanings. Aggression refers to the act; violence incorporates the consequences of the aggressive acts, for example, the resulting injury; abuse refers to harmful intentions and aggressive acts involving unequal or dominant power (Murphy & Cascardi, 1999).

Moreover, various studies have adopted operational definitions of dating violence reflecting more and less inclusive perspectives. The broader perspectives define dating violence as acts and threats of physical, verbal, sexual and psychological violence, regardless of their perceived severity; the narrow perspectives are limited to physical violence and acts without reference to intent, consequences or context (Sugarman & Hotaling, 1991).

*Correlates of dating violence.* Research on dating violence correlates pointed to multiple risk factors related to dating violence, including familial attributes (father's and mother's education level, family income, family status [intact or not], experience of violence in the family of origin); interpersonal (peer influence, peers' dating behavior, relationship commitment); and personal variables (gender, age, self-esteem, alcohol and drug abuse, criminal activity, school type) [Lewis & Fremouw, 2001]. The following variables will be included in our study of dating violence among Thai youths.

#### *Familial attributes*

*Family socio-demographic attributes and structure.* The relation between family structure and dating violence has been widely studied in the United States, expecting more problematic family characteristics to be associated with higher incidence of dating violence (Foshee, Linder, MacDougall, & Bangdiwala, 2001; Malik, Sorenson, & Aneshensel, 1997; Straus & Ramirez, 2004). However, Lavoie et al. (2002) found no association between family adversity index and dating violence in the U.S. Straus and Ramirez (2007), who studied dating violence among university students in the United States and Mexico, found the lowest rate in New Hampshire (29.7%) and the highest in Juarez, Mexico (46.1%).

*Experiencing violence in the family of origin.* Following social learning theory (Bandura, 1986), other researchers regard dating violence as a behavior learned from experiencing violence in the family of origin and in associations with peers (Kaura & Allen, 2004). Several studies in the U.S. have found that, for males, experience with parent-child aggression during childhood is a significant predictor of abusive behavior toward their dating partners (e.g., Alexander, Moore, & Alexander,



1991). A longitudinal study (Simons et al., 1998) indicated that corporal punishment by a parent was associated with later teen dating violence, suggesting that corporal punishment specifically "teaches that it is both legitimate and effective to hit those you love" (p. 475).

### *Interpersonal variables*

*Peer influence.* Male peer support is an important component of the adolescent culture that underlies influences and often promotes violence in dating relationships. The role of the peer group as a source of values, guidelines, feedback, and social comparison is invaluable in the process of self-construction (Harter, 1990). Peer relations may legitimize and define violence in dating relationships as normal and non-deviant behavior, by providing ideological and informational support for such violence (Silverman & Williamson, 1997). Kinsfogel and Grych (2004) found in the U.S. that perceived peer aggression predicted reports of the levels of both conflict and aggression in dating relationships. The relative contribution of friends' dating violence and of inter-partner violence to predicting adolescent dating violence remains largely unknown (Arriaga & Foshee, 2004).

*Dating characteristics.* Geiger, Fischer, and Eshet (2004), in a study of high school students in Israel, found a correlation between dating violence and interpersonal factors, including the duration and degree of relationship commitment. The literature confirms that males are more likely to control females or use violence against them to enforce their dominance in longer and more committed relationships (Hanley & O'Neill, 1997). Physical abuse among dating couples is more likely to occur as the relationship becomes more serious and the level of emotional attachment and personal investment increase. Individuals may then perceive a greater right to control their partners' behavior (Riggs & O'Leary, 1989) and regard the use of violence during conflict situations as an acceptable part of intimate relationships (Burke, Stets, & Pirog-Good, 1988).

### *Personal variables*

*Gender role.* One of the more consistent findings in the literature is that females report more sexual dating violence

victimization than males (Foshee et al., 2004). However, studies in the U.S. and in Israel have demonstrated that perpetration and victimization of dating violence are prevalent in both genders (Close, 2005; Pradubmook/Sherer & Sherer, 2008). Howard and Wang (2003, 2007) argue that there are strong indications that violence in adolescent dating relationships of youth in the states involves the reciprocal use of violence by both partners, although, as Miller and White (2003) claim, the meanings and consequences of girls' violence are strikingly different than those of boys', and that both are grounded in gender inequality.

Studies in Canada conclude that by reproducing a traditional concept of gender role stereotypes and power relations, patriarchal society encourages men to condone violence toward women and forces women to accept a subordinate role (Totten, 2003). Women victims who report an earlier onset of dating violence are more likely to endorse traditional gender values and express a greater tendency to forgive or dismiss the violence of their male partners (Schwartz & DeKeseredy, 1997). The role of gender in socialization and power relationships plays a crucial part in shaping dating behavior between males and females. According to Rose and Frieze (1993), first dates in the states are highly scripted along gender lines in the Western world. Males follow a proactive dating script, females a reactive one. In most characterizations of dating relationships, the female is portrayed as seeking to establish an enduring relationship while the male is portrayed as interested in sexual experimentation. The female is responsible for maintaining the relationship. These gender-based scripts confer more power upon males in the initial stages of the dating relationship.

In Thai society, dating is considered a romantic and interesting part of adolescence. Chinlumprasert (2000) found that adolescents perceive dating as the way men and women can get to know each other better before they become steady boyfriends/girlfriends or lovers. Dating means going out for fun with someone special, an activity limited to two persons. Thai gender role stereotypes and cultural values determine that it is more acceptable for men to initiate the dating relationship, although the women decide whether to accept or reject it. Dating has potentially negative consequences for women. This

is because many dating activities are inappropriate for traditional Thai women (e.g., going out alone with a man, holding hands in public, etc.). This is not the case for men. Dating relationships have different meanings for the two sexes. Women are more likely than men to relate premarital sex to love and serious emotional commitment, and men are more likely to view premarital sex as experimentation (Israpahakdi, 2000). Male adolescents view having multiple heterosexual relationships as a mark of "being a real man" (Boonmongkon et al., 2000). It is particularly in the early period of dating that male-female disagreement concerning their different reasons for dating and the asymmetry of what is considered proper sexual conduct can be a source of conflict and frustration.

*Age.* Despite some support for the relation between age and dating violence in studies in the U.S. and Canada (Lewis & Fremouw, 2001; Raghavan, Bogart, Elliott, Vestal, & Schuster, 2004; Wolfe et al., 2001), age has traditionally failed to emerge as a significant predictor of dating violence. While older adolescents have more opportunities for dating, and girls have a greater chance of experiencing sexual violence, less is known about the increase of aggression with age, or whether gender and age interact (Feiring, Deblinger, Hoch-Espada, & Haworth, 2002).

*Self-esteem.* Self-esteem reflects individuals' evaluations of their abilities and attributes, as well as their momentary feelings of self-worth, such as pride or shame (Brown, Dutton, & Cook, 2001; Gray-Little & Hafdahl, 2000). Self-esteem has been defined as the totality of an individual's cognitive thoughts and affective emotions regarding the self (Haney & Durlak, 1998), as well as social identity elements derived, in part, from processes of reflected appraisal (Rosenberg, Schooler, & Schoenbach, 1989). Pflieger and Vazsonyi (2006) indicated that low self-esteem has a significant effect on dating violence victimization, perpetration and attitudes among adolescents.

*Alcohol and drug abuse.* Alcohol and drug abuse are commonly associated with increased incidence of dating violence (Chase, Treboux, & O'Leary, 2002; Maxwell, Robinson, & Post, 2003). Research in Canada indicates that it is common for both the offender and the victim to be drinking at the time of a sexual assault (DeKeseredy & Schwartz, 1998). Maxwell et al.

(2003) found in the U.S. that about three in ten high school students reported having sex while either they or their partners were "very drunk, very stoned, or unconscious." Substance abuse was found to increase the likelihood that both males and females would perpetrate dating violence (O'Keefe, 1997). Women who reported binge drinking and cocaine abuse over the month preceding the incident were also more likely to be victims of dating violence than women who did not drink or use cocaine during that period.

*Criminal activity.* Some studies found a relationship between criminal activity and dating violence (Gorman-Smith, Tolan, Sheidow, & Henry, 2001). Thus, Straus and Ramirez (2004) indicate that a history of criminal acts is associated with an increased probability of dating violence.

*Study status.* Schwartz and DeKeseredy (2000) did not find a relation between school type and admitted levels of male violence in Canada. However, the customary division in Thailand into out-of-school youths, vocational school students and high school students determines, to some extent, the peer group influence and cuts across SES lines as well. Our research design will enable the study of these expected differences.

Given the social rather than personal nature of the phenomenon, a multidimensional approach—taking into account familial, personal, interpersonal and social dimensions—will be used to investigate the phenomenon. More specifically, the study examines the relationship between dating violence, with reference to four dimensions: (1) family violence and family characteristics; (2) individual attributes; (3) peers' effects; and (4) dating relationships.

## Hypotheses

- 1) *Family attributes.* The more aggressive the punishments received by individuals in their family of origin, and the weaker the family characteristics (lower education level of parents, lower family income, non-intact family), the greater the probability of perpetrating dating violence.
- 2) *Individual attributes.* Gender—Males will commit more dating violence than females; the more negative the personal characteristics (lower self-esteem, higher substance

abuse, higher delinquency rates, the lower the school type, the lower the grade and the older the age), the greater the probability of perpetrating dating violence.

- 3) *Peers' effects*. The more peers perpetrate dating violence and the more they advise their peers to commit dating violence, the greater the probability of perpetrating dating violence.
- 4) *Dating relationships*. The greater the importance of the dating relationship, the longer the duration of the relationship, and the higher the frequency and length of meetings, the greater the probability of perpetrating dating violence.

## Methodology

### *Sample*

Thai adolescents were randomly selected from three groups: out-of-school adolescents, adolescents attending vocational schools, and adolescents attending academic high schools (school type), using a stratified clustered random sampling procedure. First, a random sample of localities stratified by geographical area was drawn. Bangkok represents both social diversity (including a range of upper, middle and lower social classes) and cultural diversity (including adolescents with both traditional and modern perspectives), so the sample encompasses the possible variation of adolescents of Thailand. Following the classification determined by the Bangkok Metropolitan Administration (2005), the study divided Bangkok into four geographic areas: inner city, east adjacent city, west adjacent city and the suburb. Second, in each area, a systematic random cluster sampling method was used to select two high schools and three vocational schools, whereas out-of-school adolescents were selected by accidental random sampling technique from communities and workplaces. Third, we used simple random sampling to select two 10th and 11th grade classes in each selected school. All students attending school at the time of data collection were asked to participate in the study. Fewer than 10 pupils refused to participate. The final sample consisted of 1,296 participants (582 adolescents from nine high schools, 613 adolescents from ten vocational schools and 101 adolescents who were out of school).

*Instruments used in this study*

We used a Thai translation of some scales that were originally in English. The accuracy of the translation was verified using the back-translation method. When possible (like with the Rosenberg self-esteem scale) our translation was compared to others in the Thai language. The questionnaire was pre-tested with a group of 40 students. Proper adjustments were taken following these steps.

Individual attributes were measured by several instruments. A demographic questionnaire addressed gender, education and study status, age and last year's average grade score. Self-reported delinquency behavior was assessed by a revised version of Sherer's (1990) self-report delinquency questionnaire, which includes 24 categories covering the entire range of offences committed by juvenile delinquents in Thailand. To simplify the analysis, these categories were collapsed under the main categories used in the customary crime report classification system in Thailand: crimes against public order; crimes against persons; crimes against property; and violation of municipal ordinances (Ministry of Justice, 2006). The questionnaire consists of eight items; higher scores reflect a greater number of delinquent acts committed by the subject. Sherer (1990) found this instrument highly reliable in Israel. The Cronbach  $\alpha$  score in the current study = .743.

Alcohol/drug use was measured by three items—use of alcohol, use of light drugs and use of heavy drugs—on a 7-point scale ranging from 1 (not at all) to 7 (use every day). Self-esteem was measured by Rosenberg's Self-Esteem Scale (1979), comprising 10 items that measure overall self-esteem. This Guttman scale has a reproducibility of 92%, and was originally developed to measure adolescents' self-esteem. High levels of validity and reliability for the scale have been confirmed by several hundred studies (e.g., Burke, Stets, & Pirog-Good, 1988; Guimond & Roussel, 2001). Responses range from 4 (strongly agree) to 1 (strongly disagree), with higher scores indicating higher self-esteem. The scale has a cross-cultural equivalence that was validated in a study in 53 nations (Schmitt & Allik, 2005). It is probably the most used measure of personal self-esteem in ethnic identity and acculturation research (Moore, Laflin, & Weis, 2008). Many studies used the scale in Thailand



and its validity was proven (Charoensuk, 2007; Leelakulthanit & Day, 1992; Weisz, McCarty, Eastman, Chaiyasit, & Suwanlert, 1997). The Cronbach  $\alpha$  score in the current study = .749.

Family relations were measured by looking at socio-familial adversity and corporal punishment. Socio-familial adversity included information about parents' age, education, occupations, socioeconomic status and family income. Corporal punishment was measured using physical maltreatment indicators adopted from Lau, Chan, Lam, Choi, & Lai (2003). Participants responded to the following three items, representing different aspects of physical maltreatment: (1) "Did you receive corporal punishment from your family members in the last year?" (2) "Were you beaten for no reason by your family members during this year?" and (3) "Have you ever been beaten to injury by your family members?" In Thailand, beating for a reason is often seen as a method of discipline rather than as abuse; thus, a distinction is made between the first two items. The three categories are not mutually exclusive. The Cronbach  $\alpha$  score in this study = .689.

Interpersonal relationships with peers were measured by DeKeseredy and Schwartz's (1998) instruments, for which there are numerous indications of validity. Specifically, these scales include male peer support, informational support, and association with abusive peers.

This scale defined male peer support as association with peers who sexually and physically assault women, and the resources provided by peers to perpetuate and legitimize these behaviors (DeKeseredy & Schwartz, 1998a; Godenzi, Schwartz, & DeKeseredy, 2001). We used two sub-scales of these measures: informational support and association with abusive peers. Informational support refers to the guidance and advice that influence men to physically and sexually abuse their dating partners. This sub-scale includes six items, such as: "Did any of your friends ever tell you that it is acceptable for a man to hit his dating partner or girlfriend in certain situations?" The responses were scored on a dichotomous scale (1=yes, 0=no). DeKeseredy and Schwartz (1998) indicated a Cronbach  $\alpha$  = .70 for this sub-scale. The Cronbach  $\alpha$  score in this study = .767.

Association with abusive peers explores how many of the subjects' friends have actually engaged in physical, sexual or

psychological abuse of their dating partner. The three items were adopted from DeKeseredy and Schwartz's study (1998). Respondents were asked: "How many of your male friends insult their dating partners and/or girlfriends, swear at them, and/or withhold affection?" "Used physical force..." "Made forceful physical sexual attempts towards their girlfriends?" The response scale included 1 (none), 2 (1-2 persons), 3 (3-5 persons), 4 (6-10 persons), and 5 (more than 10 persons). DeKeseredy and Schwartz (1998) indicated a Cronbach  $\alpha = .65$  for this sub-scale. The Cronbach  $\alpha$  for this study = .667.

Dating violence, dating relations, dating partner characteristics and level of commitment were measured using the Conflict in Adolescent Dating Relationships Inventory (CADRI) [Wolfe et al., 2001]. This is a 35-item, self-report instrument that assesses dating violence and dating relationships. Dating violence/abuse includes five subscales: threatening, verbal/emotional, relational, physical, and sexual abuse. Each question about dating violence/abuse is posed twice, "...first, in relation to the respondent's behavior toward dating partners and second, in relation to dating partners' behavior toward the respondent" (Wolfe et al., 2001, p. 279). The response scale points are 0 (never); 1 (seldom, this has happened only one or two times); 2 (sometimes, this has happened about three to five times); and 3 (often, this has happened six times or more). Various exploratory and confirmatory studies have indicated high reliability and validity for this instrument (Wolfe et al., 2001). The Cronbach  $\alpha$  scores for the five violence subscales in this study were: for the threatening subscale  $\alpha = .811$ ; for the verbal/emotional subscale  $\alpha = .847$ ; for the relational subscale  $\alpha = .472$ ; for the physical subscale  $\alpha = .811$ ; and for the sexual subscale  $\alpha = .77$ .

This instrument includes 17 items relating to participants' dating relationships over the previous year, along with questions about leisure-time activities, dating partner characteristics and the length and importance of each relationship. To these, we added two questions about the frequency and length of meetings.

## Results

The sample consisted of 1,296 male (45.5%) and female (54.5%) adolescents from high schools (47.29%), vocational schools (44.90%), and out-of-school adolescents (7.7%) between the ages of 14 and 19. Most respondents reported that their parents lived together, although out-of-school students reported the highest rate of parental separation and divorce. We found demographic differences among the participants by school type. The out-of-school adolescent group is somewhat older than the high school student group, their families are less intact, their parents have higher unemployment rates, their families are somewhat larger and their income is lower than adolescents in schools (see Table 1). The characteristics of our participants and their families are similar to those of the Thai population at large (for comparisons, see National Statistical Office, 2000).

Among adolescents who reported alcohol use, 22% ( $n=22$ ), 13% ( $n=74$ ) and 1.8% ( $n=11$ ) of the out-of-school adolescents, vocational school and high school students respectively, were frequent drinkers (reported drinking every week to every day). Post hoc analysis (LSD) indicated that high school students drank less alcohol and used fewer drugs than the out-of-school group or the vocational school students.

Among adolescents who reported delinquency behavior, 42% had at some time taken part in a group fight, 36% had at some time caused intentional damage to public property, and approximately 10% had been arrested in connection with criminal activities. ANOVA indicated significant differences on participation in group fights by school type  $F(2,1278)=32.29$ ,  $p<.006$ ). Post hoc analysis (LSD) indicated that the three groups differed significantly with regard to involvement in group fights, with the out-of-school group scoring higher than the other two groups.

Most participants (58.8%) reported having friends who perpetrated psychological aggression toward their dating partners, and approximately 29% reported having friends who used physical and sexual violence against their dating partners. Significantly higher percentages of association with violent friends were found in out-of-school and vocational

Table 1. Demographic characteristics of participants who have started dating, by school type (N=635).

Variables:	Out of school n=101 (14.51%)	Vocational n=322 (46.3%)	High School n=272 (39.11%)
<i>Gender*</i>			
Male	46 (45.5%)	165 (51.2%)	69 (25.4%)
Female	55 (54.5%)	157 (48.8%)	203 (74.6%)
<i>Participant age*</i>			
Mean	16.13	16.08	15.56
SD	.86	1.50	.70
<i>Family Status*</i>			
Parents live together	68 (68%)	236 (74.2%)	202 (74.8%)
Separated or divorced	23 (23%)	60 (18.9%)	54 (20.0%)
One or two parents died	9 (9%)	22 (6.9%)	14 (5.2%)
<i>Father's employment*</i>			
Works	67 (69.8%)	256 (82.6%)	229 (84.8%)
Doesn't work	7 (7.3%)	11 (3.5%)	7 (2.6%)
Don't know	13 (13.5%)	23 (7.4%)	21 (7.8%)
Died	9 (9.4%)	20 (6.5%)	13 (4.8%)
<i>Father's education*</i>			
No school	5 (6.9%)	2 (.8%)	0 (.0%)
Primary	37 (51.4%)	87 (33.7%)	57 (25.4%)
Secondary	15 (20.8%)	86 (33.3%)	49 (21.9%)
Vocational/College	10 (13.9%)	46 (17.8%)	57 (25.4%)
BA	4 (5.6%)	32 (12.4%)	51 (22.8%)
MA or Higher	1 (1.4%)	5 (1.9%)	10 (4.5%)
<i>Mother's employment</i>			
Works	46 (47.4%)	200 (63.5%)	164 (61%)
Doesn't work	40 (41.2%)	90 (28.6%)	90 (33.5%)
Don't know	7 (7.2%)	16 (5.1%)	9 (3.3%)
Died	4 (4.1%)	9 (9%)	6 (2.2%)
<i>Mother's education*</i>			
No school	7 (9.9%)	4 (1.5%)	1 (.4%)
Primary	37 (52.1%)	128 (47.8%)	97 (41.5%)
Secondary	17 (23.9%)	67 (25.0%)	45 (19.2%)
Vocational/College	8 (11.3%)	42 (15.7%)	38 (16.2%)
BA	1 (1.4%)	21 (7.8%)	52 (22.2%)
MA or Higher	1 (1.4%)	6 (2.2%)	1 (1.4%)
<i>Family monthly income*</i>			
Up to 10,000	26 (44.8%)	85 (33.6%)	39 (17.1%)
10,001 to 20,000	19 (32.8%)	75 (29.6%)	82 (36.0%)
20,001 to 30,000	5 (8.6%)	33 (13.0%)	42 (18.4%)
30,001 to Highest	8 (13.8%)	60 (23.7%)	65 (28.5%)
<i>Number of siblings*</i>			
Mean	2.48	2.47	2.30
SD	1.43	1.34	1.21
<i>Religion</i>			
Buddhist	92 (91.1%)	300 (93.8%)	257 (94.8%)
Christian	2 (2%)	4 (1.3%)	4 (1.5%)
Muslim	7 (6.9%)	16 (5.0%)	10 (3.7%)

\* p &lt; .01

school groups than in the high school group. Out-of-school adolescents reported having stronger negative attitudes toward women than vocational school or high school students.

Only 53.47% (695) of participants had started dating (out of school: 55 females, 46 males; vocational school: 157 females and 165 males; high school: 203 females, 69 males), a somewhat lower proportion than in Western countries (Pradubmook/Sherer & Sherer, 2008); the mean age for initiation of dating in our sample was 15.88 (SD=1.18). Participants reported intense relationships, indicated by their frequency of meetings: 49.6% meet once a day, either in or out of school. Furthermore, the majority of participants (68.1%) regarded their relationships as important or very important.

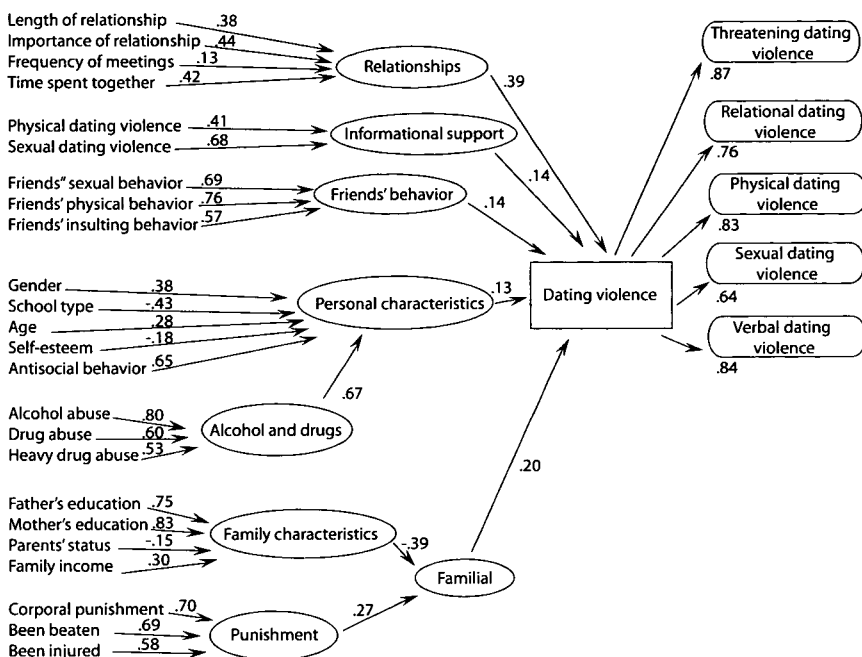
Of the 695 participants in our study who dated, 49.2% of the males and 46.7% of the females had been threatened by their partners; 49.2% of the males and 46.7% of the females reported being verbally or emotionally abused; 65.8% of the males and 59% of the females had been relationally abused; 41.9% of the males and 41.2% of the females had been physically abused and 43.2% of the males and 46.7% of the females claimed that they had been sexually abused by their partners. These figures (Table 2) indicate that Thai youths experience a very high incidence of dating violence, especially when compared to reports of dating adolescents in other countries (Ackard & Neumark-Sztainer, 2002; Howard & Wang, 2003, 2007; O'Leary, Slep, Avery-Leaf, & Cascardi (in press)).

To examine the hypotheses, we studied the dating group's answers. The relationships of the independent variables with the participants' own dating violence were used, analyzed by Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) with the AMOS program (Arbuckle, 1999). We conducted the SEM model analysis using a Full Information Maximum Likelihood (FIML), which is asymptotically unbiased for large samples, under the assumption of randomly missing data (Arbuckle & Wothke, 1999).

The model yielded a significant chi-square statistic,  $\chi^2(df=369)=1592.8$ ,  $p<.001$ . However, this may have been due to the large sample size. In such cases, fit indices offer a more reasonable estimation of the fit of the model (Kaplan, 1990; MacCallum, Browne, & Sugawara, 1996). The fit indices suggested that the model fits the data: Sample size  $\approx 695$ ; NFI=0.71;

IFI=0.76 CFI=0.76; RMSEA=.068, .0716 < RMSEA < .0812. (See Figure 1).

Figure 1. A model of precursors of dating violence.



The model produced the following fit results: Sample size  $\approx$  695;  $\chi^2(df=369)=1592.8$ ,  $p<.001$ . NFI=0.71; IFI=0.76 CFI=0.76; RMSEA=.068.

The various independent variables account for 25% of the dating violence. The highest loadings on the dating violence factor were for the relationships with partners, followed by family attributes' impact, peer influences and personal characteristics (see Figure 1).

Hypothesis 1 addressed family attributes. We confirmed this hypothesis. We found that the higher the frequency and severity of punishment, the higher the dating violence; the higher the parents' education level, the more intact the family and the higher the income, the lower the persons' incidence of dating violence.

Hypothesis 2 dealt with individual attributes. We confirmed this hypothesis. Males indicated higher incidence of dating violence. The higher the incidence of antisocial behavior, alcohol and drug abuse, the older the age, and the lower the school type and self-esteem, the higher the incidence of dating violence.

Hypothesis 3 dealt with peer group effects. We confirmed this hypothesis. The greater the support of friends in the use of violence and the more they behaved violently toward their dating partners, the higher the incidence of dating violence.

Hypothesis 4 addressed dating relationships. We confirmed this hypothesis. The greater the importance and length of the relationships, and the more frequent and intense are the meetings, the higher the incidence of dating violence.

## Discussion

Our results indicate that a high percentage of Thai youths are involved in various forms of dating violence in their relationships, typically involving both partners. Adolescents' academic status—attending high school, attending vocational school or being out-of-school adolescents—is significant with regard to dating violence. On the whole, the out-of-school group reported the highest dating violence rates. As expected, a gender-effect was found for dating violence. However, the multivariate analysis indicated that females are involved in all types of dating violence relationships. Their involvement rates exceed those of males in verbal/emotional violence, but they had lower sexual abuse scores.

### *Dating violence*

Thai youths perpetrate and experience much higher rates of dating violence than Western youths. This is evident from the much higher percentages of Thai youths who admitted experiencing abuse on all five dating violence measures (Grunbaum et al., 2004; Howard & Wang, 2003, 2007; O'Leary et al., in press; Raghavan et al., 2004; Silverman, Rai, Mucci, & Hathaway, 2004). This holds true for reported experiences of dating violence, both as the perpetrator and as the victim. In the U.S., 25% of dating adolescents have experienced



physical and/or sexual dating violence (Foshee, Linder, & Bauman, 1996). Cecil and Matson (2005) examined levels of sexual victimization among a sample of 14- to 19-year-old African American adolescent women: 32.1% reported having been raped, 33.7% had experienced sexual coercion, and 10.8% reported attempted rape.

With the exception of sexual abuse, we found a higher incidence of dating violence among the out-of-school group on all measures of dating violence. Sexual dating violence is probably a unique case. In Thai societies, sexual activity is highly controlled and has serious social implications for women. Dating behavior develops through socialization and ongoing experiences. Therefore, the cultural norms and beliefs embedded in one's personality, together with social values and norms, form the basis for dating violence. The literature indicated that more traditional gender role attitudes significantly predict male infliction of violence on women in intimate relationships (Bookwala, Frieze, Smith, & Ryan, 1992; Geiger et al., 2004; Sherer & Etgar, 2005). The mechanism underlying the perpetration of sexual dating violence in Thai society requires further clarification, although several possible interpretations of this result are proposed. First, while sexual activity has a very high priority during adolescence (Frydenberg, 1997), sexual power and sexual experience are key elements of masculinity in patriarchal society. A double standard for premarital sexual intercourse reveals that in Thailand men are encouraged by society to be sexually active without restraint, while women who respond to a man's desire are condemned (Boonmongkon et al., 2000; Chinlamprasert, 2000). Women are forced by their partners to consent to unwanted sex to prove their affection and fidelity. This situation places adolescents and young women at risk of dating violence or other forms of sexual coercion.

One of the more important differences in our assumptions and results derives from the expected influences of cultural effects. While some studies have concluded that more traditional societies prohibit violence in general, and dating violence in particular, our expectations and results support a contradictory effect. Thus, Sanderson, Coker, Roberts, Tortolero, and Reininger (in press) expect acculturation to be

associated with greater prevalence of dating violence victimization among Latino American females in the U.S. It is true that Thai youths are undergoing a process of modernization. But it may be impossible to evaluate and specify their exact point of progress, or whether they have reached the acculturation point at which they have adopted some Western norms that support dating violence. It appears to us, however, that the alternative explanation is correct, namely that results must be studied specifically with regard to cultural differences. While it may be possible that other traditional cultures do not support dating violence as a consequence of their values and norms, it seems that the Thai culture, which supports male privilege, paves the way to the endorsement of dating violence.

### *Dating characteristics*

We found that Thai adolescents maintain very intense dating relationships during adolescence. Participants reported having frequent meetings with their partners, with whom they maintain long and meaningful relationships. Ironically, this may be connected to higher dating violence rates among our subjects, for the literature indicates that males in deeper and more committed relationships are more likely to control females or use violence against them in order to enforce their dominance (Hanley & O'Neill, 1997).

Cleveland, Herrera, and Stuewig (2003) found that different degrees of relationship commitment affected many of the associations between female and male characteristics and the incidence of abuse among youth in the U.S. Thus, relationship commitment was a significant predictor of abuse in high-seriousness relationships, but not in low-commitment relationships (Cleveland et al., 2003). Similarly, the risk of violence against the dating partner generally increases as the relationship continues (Geiger et al., 2004). Therefore, the probability of dating violence increases in extended and committed relationships. This supports our finding of greater experience of dating violence among the Thai females who attributed greater significance to their long-term relationships than males. The finding that the out-of-school group meets with their partners more frequently, may, in itself, emphasize their level of relationship commitment, and thus be reflected in higher

rates of dating violence. Further research should involve these variables, as no data in Thailand has been collected on the relationship between the level of seriousness of dating relations and dating violence.

### *Peers' influence*

The literature attests to a clear influence of peers' behavior on dating violence (Arriaga & Foshee, 2004; Close, 2005; Harter, 1990; Kinsfogel & Grych, 2004; Silverman & Williamson, 1997). Our results confirmed these expectations. It seems that in Thailand, as in Western countries, youths exchange reports with their peers of having used dating violence, thus supporting and legitimizing this behavior. The more the peers commit dating violence, thus serving as behavioral models, the higher the incidence of dating violence. Social identity theory (Tajfel, 1981; Tajfel & Turner, 1986) offers another, plausible explanation—Thai youths' sense of identity with their peer groups motivates their identification and behavior. According to the social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1986), individuals gain a sense of personal worth from their collective associations, such as group affiliation. A person's social identity, a part of the individual's self-concept originating in the knowledge of membership in a social group, derives from belonging to the peer group together with the values and emotional significance attached to that membership (Tajfel, 1981). Thus, assuming that the values and norms of the peer group behavior support dating violence, we may assume that the dating violence will also be supported. This state of affairs may explain the higher rates of dating violence among our participants.

### *Gender differences*

Males reported a higher incidence of dating violence than females, lending support to previously reported findings in the literature (Feiring et al., 2002; Geiger et al., 2004; Weisz & Black, 2001). However, we found that females were involved in all types of violent dating behaviors, consistent with findings of studies that found involvement of both genders in perpetration and victimization in dating violence (Close, 2005; Dutton & Nicholls, 2005; Howard & Wang, 2003; Sherer, in press).

Taking into account the overlap between delinquency-

related violence and partner violence (Holtzworth-Munroe, 2005), we must note the recent (Dutton & Nicholls, 2005) growing criticism of the role of the feminist theory of intimate violence in shaping theory, research and policies in the field, "that precludes the notion of female violence, trivializes injuries to males and maintains a monolithic view of a complex social problem" (p. 680). In fact, many indications exist that show equivalent rates of serious female violence.

Another possible explanation for the similar dating violence rates by gender is that young people who share similar beliefs about dating violence are attracted to each other. As a result, those who accept some form of dating violence and those who resent it will find their suitable—and distinct—partners. At the same time, it seems more reasonable to assume that dating violence is a learned and shared phenomenon, and involvement in a situation in which one of the partners uses violence legitimizes the use of violence by the other partner through modeling and reinforcement processes (Bandura, 1986).

### Implications for policy and interventions

Systematic interventions are needed to reduce violence in dating relationships (Foshee et al., 2004). Preventive educational programs must be established to confront male and female adolescents' beliefs that violence is an acceptable response to conflict. Preventive programs should be initiated in middle school when dating attitudes and behaviors first develop. Educating adolescents about sexual coercion and assault should also be part of the regular school curriculum and public service programs. Efforts to change social norms would also reduce young people's confusion regarding sex and enhance their responsibility with regard to sexual activities.

The present results also suggest several potential targets for prevention efforts. Given the influence of peers in this domain, effective programs should be group-based and should use peer power to influence adolescents. Moreover, dating violence prevention efforts should include activities designed to counter the negative influences of peer behavior. Same-sex interventions have been found to be more effective than gender-mixed

Table 2a. Dating violence by perpetrator

Variables	Don't study		Vocational		High School	
	Females	Males	Females	Males	Females	Males
	M SD	M SD	M SD	M SD	M SD	M SD
I threatened (n=4) ( $\alpha=.89$ )	1.99 .71	2.19 .79	1.26 .41	1.24 .49	1.33 .50	1.36 .46
I verbal or emotional (n=8) ( $\alpha=.94$ )	2.15 .65	2.40 .74	1.64 .49	1.47 .45	1.75 .55	1.64 .49
I relational (n=3) ( $\alpha=.81$ )	2.17 .74	2.13 .75	1.44 .52	1.31 .46	1.50 .60	1.43 .43
I physical (n=4) ( $\alpha=.90$ )	1.88 .63	2.09 .80	1.40 .59	1.21 .48	1.33 .51	1.32 .49
I sexual (n=4) ( $\alpha=.89$ )	1.96 .73	2.13 .85	1.21 .37	1.42 .58	1.16 .32	1.30 .41

Table 2b. Dating violence by school type and gender

Variables	School type			Gender	
	Don't study	Vocational	High School	Females	Males
	M SD	M SD	M SD	M SD	M SD
I threatened (n=4) ( $\alpha=.89$ )	2.08a** .75	1.25 .45	1.34 .49	1.39 .55	1.43 .65
I verbal or emotional (n=8) ( $\alpha=.94$ )	2.26** .70	1.56 .47	1.72 .54	1.76b** .56	1.67 .61
I relational (n=3) ( $\alpha=.81$ )	2.15** .74	1.38 .49	1.48 .56	1.57 .64	1.49 .61
I physical (n=4) ( $\alpha=.90$ )	1.98** .71	1.30 .54	1.33 .50	1.43 .59	1.38 .63
I sexual (n=4) ( $\alpha=.89$ )	2.04** .78	1.32 .50	1.20 .35	1.29** .49	1.51 .66

n = # of items in scale;  $\alpha$  = Reliability coefficient alpha; a = p for school type effects, b = p for Gender effects; \*  $p < .05$ , \*\* $p < .001$ ; Number of group members: 1). Out-of-school study females=55; 2). Out-of-school males=46; 3). Vocational school females=157; 4). Vocational school males=165; 5). High school females=203, 6). High school males=69.

groups for changing attitudes and behaviors (Feiring et al., 2002). Multi-faceted school-based educational and awareness programs that include videos, workshops, presentations, plays and classroom discussions are relevant and potentially effective prevention strategies. They create an atmosphere for students to demonstrate mutual respect, which can change attitudes, increase knowledge and change behavior intention (Jaffe, Sudermann, & Reizel, 1992).

The involvement of healthcare providers in prevention strategies (primary, secondary, and tertiary) is essential in reducing adolescent dating violence. Screening for dating violence may reveal exposure to multiple forms of violence in the adolescent's life, including experiences of parents' physical and sexual violence and witnessing family and community violence. The complexity of this issue should be brought to the attention of the healthcare providers.

### Limitations and research suggestions

These findings should be viewed with caution in light of several limitations. First, data were obtained entirely by self-report. Respondents were asked to recall dating violence occurring within the last year, with the risk of some memory distortion or deliberate response distortion. Participants may report to meet others' expectations (social desirability) or to hide certain information. Nevertheless, self-report is no less reliable than official data when reporting deviant behavior (Comes, Bertrand, Paetseh, Joanne, & Hornick, 2003).

Given the social rather than personal nature of the phenomenon, there is a need for further research concerning cross-cultural and social group differences, which takes into account race, ethnicity, gender and other related factors. Another warranted piece of research on dating violence is a longitudinal cohort study that addresses the onset of violence, which is crucial in identifying potential causes of dating violence. Such a study would determine whether risk factors, such as peer support of violence, negative attitudes toward women, attitudes supporting violence, and alcohol and drug use are the consequences or the causes of dating violence. The inclusion of adolescents from varied cultural and social backgrounds

would provide additional information about the extent to which the present findings can be generalized across different social contexts. Future research should also focus on intervention and assessment of dating violence education and prevention programs in school-based settings.

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# Child Care and Development Fund: A Policy Analysis

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*Legislated as part of welfare reform, the Child Care and Development Fund (CCDF) is the main source of child care government funding earmarked for low-income families. As a block grant, with broad federal guidelines, states have significant freedom in implementing this legislation to meet the needs of their citizens. This diverse implementation has challenged legislators and scholars trying to assess the success of CCDF across the United States. In considering the evaluation research of CCDF, as well as the original goals of this legislation, several major themes related to the diverse state implementation emerged, including access, equity, and stability. This paper provides an overview of CCDF, explains these themes, and uses the 2002 third wave of National Survey of American Families (NSAF) data to demonstrate how policy analysts and researchers might use these themes to structure comprehensive evaluations of CCDF at both state and federal levels.*

*Key words: child care policy, welfare reform, low-income families, National Survey of American Families*

The Child Care and Development Fund (CCDF) is the main source of government funding for child care, both in terms of support for low-income families and overall quality improvement of child care services in the U.S. (Greenberg, Lombardi &



Schumacher, 2000). Created as a component of welfare reform in 1996, it is a combination of child care funds available through Social Security, Child Care and Development Block Grant (CCDBG), and excess or transferred Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) funds; this combination of child care funds was meant to restructure, streamline, and simplify a somewhat complex child care support system (Long, Kirby, Kurka & Waters, 1998). Specifically, CCDF provides financial support through vouchers and grants to low-income parents needing non-parental childcare while employed outside the home. Generally, this legislation most significantly impacted low-income single mothers, 68 percent of whom are employed (Jones-DeWeever, Peterson, & Song, 2003).

Since welfare reform in 1996, marked by the passage of the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWORA) and CCDF's inception, numerous scholars, policy analysts, legislators and researchers have reported on the successes and challenges of this legislation, with the focus predominately on increased employment of single mothers and a reduction in the number of welfare caseloads. Given the complexity and diversity of CCDF, numerous researchers have reported on the different methods of its implementation across the country. However, fewer scholars have delved into the complexity of CCDF as a block grant, to understand how states' diverse implementations of CCDF serve families in the most successful ways. Utilizing data from the 2002 National Survey of American Families (NSAF), this paper examines how state variation in CCDF implementation is associated with maternal employment.

### 1996 Welfare Reform & CCDF

In August of 1996, President William Jefferson Clinton signed into law the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWORA), transforming welfare into a program emphasizing responsibility and employment as a means to gain independence from government support. This legislation authorized the creation of the Child Care and Development Fund to support the employment of mothers moving off welfare with their child care needs. The high percentage of low-income single mothers required

to work based upon the TANF regulations (Office of Family Assistance, 2006) and the notion mothers would be more likely to stay employed if they were confident their children were being well cared for (Gornick, Meyers, & Ross, 1997) were two major factors influencing the decision to add child care funding to welfare reform.

### CCDF Federal Guidelines

CCDF is a block grant, providing states with significant freedom to coordinate the child care support for low-income families in their state. However, there are certain broad federal guidelines related to funding, spending, eligibility, administration and services, as well as quality. The major federal funding sources for CCDF are a compilation of many child care programs operating during the mid-1990s. These sources include: (1) Child care funds traditionally part of the Social Security Act, including AFDC child care, transitional child care, and at-risk child care; (2) Child Care and Development Block Grant (CCDBG), the program authorized by the CCDBG Act of 1990 and the precursor to CCDF; and (3) Excess TANF funding, transferred to CCDF in each state or spent directly on child care as families moved off the welfare rolls (Child Care Bureau, 2006).

Eligibility regulations set by the federal government are very broad. States have significant freedom in determining and expanding families' eligibility for CCDF funding; as long as families are not discriminated against, parental rights are not limited, and federal rules related to CCDF are not violated. Federal requirements to receive CCDF funding state family income must not be greater than 85 percent of the state median income (Greenberg et al., 2000). In addition to being younger than 13, the child must reside with the parent(s) who are either employed, or participating in a "work activity" as defined by TANF guidelines.

Federally, CCDF is administered through the Administration for Children and Families within the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. At the state level, a lead agency is chosen (e.g.: Department of Social Services, Office of Children and Family Services) to administer CCDF. Services are provided through either vouchers for families, or grants paid directly

to the child care provider. Based on federal recommendations, families should not be paying more than 10 percent of their monthly income for child care (Greenberg et al., 2000).

States may use CCDF (at least 4%) dollars to create and coordinate activities aimed to achieve the following objectives related to quality: education of parents; and increased parental choice, quality, and availability of child care (Greenberg et al., 2000). Specifically, the federal government approves the funding of quality improvement activities that: improve the child care choices for families supported by CCDF; assist child care providers in meeting government regulations, especially health and safety requirements; and increase training, salary and benefits for child care providers (Greenberg et al., 2000).

In 2004, the U.S. Office of Management and Budget and Federal Agencies (OMBFA) assessed CCDF as a “moderately effective” program. OMBFA highlighted the successful collaboration among the federal and state governments, as well as the lead agencies in each state to create long- and short-term goals. Despite the overall positive evaluation from the federal government, with only 10-15 percent of eligible families nationwide receiving subsidies via CCDF (Matthews & Ewen, 2006), it is difficult to know how effective this legislation is in each individual state, or among individual families receiving the benefit, given the diversity of state implementation. Even evaluating each state program individually, with most states utilizing different approaches for program implementation, difficulties arise in choosing which elements of each state program to evaluate.

Empirical studies conducted on CCDF focus on issues associated with how this legislation has been implemented in different states (Long, Kirby, Kurka, & Waters, 1998; Matthews & Ewen, 2006; Meyers et al., 2006), as well as its effectiveness in supporting low-income mothers in their return to work (Gennetian, Crosby, Huston, & Lowe, 2004; Ross & Kirby, 2006; Schaefer, Kreader, & Collins, 2006). These studies have concentrated on various CCDF goals including its shortcomings and how this policy interacts with families and children. Three major themes that emerged related to the diverse implementation of CCDF include access, equity, and stability. These themes are examined using 2002 NSAF and CCDF policy data

in this paper.

### *Access to child care*

A major consideration of legislators during the original development of federal regulations for CCDF was the importance of equal access to high-quality child care for all parents. Access to child care among the states is operationalized by examining each state median income (SMI) eligibility requirement and the presence of a waiting list impacting maternal employment.

*Eligibility regulations.* Federal guidelines stipulate a family's income must not be greater than 85 percent of the state median income (SMI) (Greenberg et al., 2000) in order to receive CCDF support. For example, if the state median income for a family of four is \$50,000, then to be eligible for child care support this family must not have an income higher than 85% of \$50,000, or \$42,500. According to the National Child Care Information Center (NCCIC) (2002), the average income eligibility limit across the states was 57 percent of SMI, with a low of 35 percent and a high of 80 percent. Our first hypothesis examines access to child care and asserts that in states with higher SMI eligibility thresholds, low-income mothers will be employed more hours per week.

*Waiting lists.* As federal funding for CCDF remains stagnant, waiting lists to receive child care assistance continue to grow. For example, in Connecticut, without an increase in federal funding, from 2002 to 2004, 46 percent fewer needy families received a child care subsidy. During this time, the waitlist in Connecticut for a child care subsidy grew to over 130,000 families (Oliveira, 2005). In 2002 there were 21 states with CCDF waiting lists, with an average list size of 9,651 families, while in 2004, 23 states had waiting lists with an average list size of 24,000 families (NCCIC, 2002). The size of states' waiting lists is related to both eligibility and funding. Our second hypothesis related to maternal employment and access to child care support asserts that in states with CCDF waiting lists, low-income mothers are likely to be employed for fewer hours per week.

*Equity of child care receipt*

According to Meyers and colleagues (2006), "...essentially similar families have different likelihoods of receiving assistance depending on the state in which they live" (p. 198). Once in the system, families have differential costs and benefits related to CCDF depending upon location, raising important questions about whether or not the public child-care subsidy system is providing assistance equitably to needy families. Equity extends beyond considering access to CCDF support and reflects the amount of benefits received by eligible families based upon state policies. Equity is operationalized by considering how the variation in parents' co-payments at the state level impact maternal employment.

*CCDF co-payment variation among the states.* Federal CCDF guidelines state families utilizing child care support should not spend more than 10 percent of their monthly income on child care, and states should reimburse the cost of child care to families at rates high enough to include 75% of local providers (Greenberg et al., 2000). However, some states reimburse at higher rates, and/or include sliding fee scales based on income levels, thus families' child care financial burden varies by state. The percentage of family income paid by low-income families in some states exceeds 10 percent, while in other states it is significantly less than the federal benchmark; this discrepancy may lead to a difference in the abilities of families to move out of poverty. If child care costs are a greater proportion of families' incomes, in order to meet this financial burden, mothers may need to be employed for more hours per week. Therefore, our third hypothesis states mothers will be employed for a greater number of hours per week in states where co-payments are a higher percentage of the families' income.

*Stability of child care*

Stability refers to the length of time families receive the CCDF benefit once their income increases. Based on child care subsidies reported in five states, Meyers and colleagues (2006) found that:

Currently, the assistance families receive is not very continuous, does not last very long, and may be

associated with substantial turnover in their children's care arrangements. These dynamics do not bode well either for families' economic security or for children's healthy socioemotional development. (p. 198)

Stability was operationalized by considering how the presence of two-tiered eligibility impacted maternal employment.

*Two-tiered eligibility for child care assistance.* In 2002, 11 states had one income eligibility requirement for families just beginning to utilize CCDF subsidies, and a second tier of income requirements for families already receiving CCDF support (NCCIC, 2002). These tiered arrangements contribute to families' abilities to work towards self-sufficiency through increased earnings, without being at risk for losing their support for child care because they crossed the eligibility threshold. For example, in Massachusetts, the initial income requirement was 50 percent of SMI or 190 percent of the federal poverty line, and the ongoing income limit was 85 percent of SMI or 323 percent of the federal poverty line (NCCIC, 2002). Utilizing a two-tiered system requires the state to financially support more families, but it appears to be an effective method for assisting families in gaining self-sufficiency, without creating a cliff effect. Our fourth hypotheses asserts that in states with two-tiered income eligibility requirements, mothers will be employed a greater number of hours per week

## Methods

### *Data and sample*

The third wave of data from the National Survey of America's Families (NSAF), collected in 2002 was utilized to investigate the aforementioned research hypotheses (Abi-Habib, Safir, & Triplett, 2002). This nationally representative sample included 50,000 families. Of this total sample, 12,000 families had household incomes less than 200 percent of the federal poverty line (FPL) (Urban Institute, 2002). A sub-sample from these low-income families of single mother families with children less than five was drawn. Thus, the sample inclusion

criteria were: (1) Family income of less than 200 percent of the FPL; (2) Single women (including married women not living with their husbands) with children less than five years old; and (3) Mothers who reported being employed at least 15 hours per week. This selection yielded 1,390 mothers for the present study. See Table 1 for additional demographic characteristics. Four 2002 CCDF policy components related to access, equity, and stability of care were added to the data set. These policy variables were matched with NSAF participants based upon state of residence.

Table 1. NSAF Sample Demographics

	Employ- ment (Mean, in hrs.)	Race/ Ethnicity		Age of Mother (Mean, in yrs.)	# of Children < 5 (Mean in hh)	Mother's Education			
		Black*	White			<HS	HS	HS+	College+
NSAF Total Sample	41.82	14%	82%	37.4	0.72	11%	35%	26%	28%
NSAF Study Sample	34.78	45%	54%	32.1	1.24	2%	80%	16%	2%

\*4% of participants in the NSAF total were Hispanic, Asian, Native American, or "other"; 1% of the study sample participants were Hispanic, Asian, Native American, or "other". The NSAF Study Sample is the sample that was used in the present study.

Measures

*Level of maternal employment*

The outcome variable, level of maternal employment, was operationalized using the average number of hours per week mothers were employed in the last year. This variable was continuous and ranged from 15 to 110 hours per week with a mean of 34.8 hours per week for the analytic sample of 1,390 mothers. We only included mothers employed at least 15 hours per week to capture the experiences of mothers who had made a strong commitment to the labor market. Additionally, irregularities in data for the mothers who worked less than 15 hours per week resulted in a model that could not be estimated.

There were 447 mothers, or 32 percent of the sample, who reported working 40 hours per week, while 28 percent of the sample reported working 35 hours per week. There were a small percentage of mothers (8%) who worked more than 40 hours per week. However, overall, more than half of the mothers (60%) in the sample worked less than 40 hours per week.

#### *State policy variations related to access, equity and stability*

The state policy variations, the main predictor variables for the present analyses, were created from a data set based upon the 2002 CCDF state plans (Herbst, 2005). CCDF policy data from 2002 is utilized in this study as this is the year from which the NSAF data are drawn. Specifically, the measure for the *states' waiting lists* was dichotomous with "yes," indicating the state had a waiting list, and "no," indicating the state did not have a waiting list. There were 850 mothers (61 percent of the sample) who lived in a state with a waiting list. The measure for *tiered eligibility* was dichotomous, with "yes" indicating there were two tiers for eligibility. There were 321 mothers (23 percent of the sample) who lived in a state with tiered income eligibility. The variable *child care co-payment as a percentage of income* was measured continuously, ranging from 0 to 14 percent, with a national average of 3.68 percent. However, for the mothers in this sample, the mean, at 6.72 percent, was higher than the national average. *States' median income eligibility levels* were measured continuously. This variable indicates the percentage of state median income a family must be below to be eligible for the receipt of CCDF. This continuous variable ranged from 40 percent to 81 percent. The average state median income eligibility level across the states was 57 percent in 2002, as reflected in the sample for the present study (see Table 2).

#### *Control variables*

The following variables were controlled in these analyses: maternal characteristics (mothers' age, mother's level of education, race of the mother), household characteristics (number of children under age five in the household), and child care characteristics (center-based care or not). Maternal characteristics were controlled for because they may be highly



predictive of the amount of hours mothers are employed per week. Specifically, women who are older may have more experience and thus may be considered more employable, increasing the number of hours these mothers work outside the home per week. Similarly, women who have higher levels of education may have the opportunity to work more hours per week. Mother's age was measured as a continuous variable and the mean age of the women in the sample for the present study was just under 33 years; the natural log of maternal age was used in the present analyses to correct for the non-normal distribution of this variable. Education was categorized as less than high school, high school (includes those who received a GED), some college, and college/more than college. The number of children under five was selected as a control variable because mothers with younger children tend to be employed outside the home for fewer hours per week. Finally, a control related to being in center-based care was added to account for whether the mother worked standard hours or not. This control was considered appropriate for mothers' schedules, since most child care centers only operate during standard business hours. It is important to control for mothers' employment schedules because they may impact how many hours per week mothers are able to work outside the home.

Table 2. Maternal hours of employment and state policy adjustments—mean differences

State SMI eligibility level ***	<57% (33.48) <i>0.68</i>	>57% (37.55) <i>0.32</i>
Wait List***	Yes (35.99) <i>0.61</i>	No (32.91) <i>0.39</i>
Child care co-payment as a % of income***	<10% (35.29) <i>0.71</i>	>10% (33.56) <i>0.29</i>
Two-tiered income eligibility***	Yes (38.24) <i>0.23</i>	No (33.76) <i>0.77</i>

\*\*\*, \*\*, \* Statistically significant at the .1%, 1% and 5% levels. Mean hours of employment per week are in parentheses and proportions of mothers experiencing the particular state policy adjustment are italicized.

## Data Analyses and Results

First, t-tests were conducted to determine whether there were any statistical differences in the average number of hours mothers were employed per week in states with and without the specific CCDF policy variations. Second, a series of ordinary least squares (OLS) regression analyses were conducted; OLS regression was utilized based upon the continuous, interval level of measurement of the dependent variable average number of hours of employment per week. An alpha level of 0.05 or less was considered significant throughout these analyses. In the first step of the OLS regressions addressing each of the four hypotheses, the dependent variable of maternal hours of employment was regressed on the policy variables of interest, without any controls. In the second model, maternal hours of employment was regressed on the policy variables of interest, controlling for mothers' age, education and race/ethnicity. In the third model, maternal employment was regressed onto the specific policy variable of interest, adding a control for the number of children under age five in the household. In the fourth and final model, maternal employment was regressed on the policy variables, including an additional control for center-based care or whether or not the mother worked a standard schedule.

### *State SMI level of child care subsidy eligibility and maternal employment*

For the first hypothesis, mean comparisons indicated the average number of hours mothers were employed each week, in states where the SMI eligibility threshold was lower than the national average, was significantly less (approximately four hours per week on average) than their counterparts who lived in states where the SMI thresholds for child care subsidies were higher ( $p < .001$ ). It appears that higher SMI thresholds, which allow mothers to earn higher wages before they become ineligible for child care subsidies, may contribute to the amount of hours mothers are employed per week. Regression analyses indicated that as the SMI eligibility level increased, mothers' hours of employment per week tended to increase. In the first model, a one percent increase in an SMI

eligibility threshold was associated with a 0.75 percentage point increase in hours employed per week (see Table 3). SMI eligibility levels, along with the other policy adjustments of interest, accounted for eight percent of the variance in mothers' hours of employment each week. In the final model with all the controls, for every one percent increase in SMI eligibility thresholds, mothers hours of employment increased by 0.72 percentage points. Model 5 indicates that SMI, and maternal employment are positively related ( $p < .001$ ). Beyond their statistical significance, these results are practically relevant when one considers that some states shift their SMI eligibility levels fairly drastically—sometimes as much as 25 percentage points; this magnitude of a shift may be associated with a more significant swing in the number of hours mothers are employed and an adverse change in their earnings.

*State waiting list for child care subsidies and maternal employment*

The second hypothesis, mothers will be employed fewer hours per week in states where there are child care subsidy waiting lists, was supported by the multivariate regression analyses. Mean comparisons indicated a difference in the number of hours mothers worked in states with a CCDF child care subsidy waiting list versus mothers in states without a waiting list; however, it was in the opposite direction than expected, with mothers in waiting list states working three hours more per week on average than mothers in non-waiting list states. In contrast, the regression analyses suggested support for hypothesis two. In the first model, without any demographic controls, the policy variables explained eight percent of the variance in maternal hours of employment. Accounting for the demographic characteristics related to the mother and the household in models two and three added significant explanatory value to the model (Adjusted  $R^2 = 0.254$ ). In the full model, controlling for maternal, household, and child care characteristics, mothers who lived in a state with a wait list were employed 4 percent fewer hours ( $p < .05$ ). In the level model (Model 5) including all the control variables, mothers in wait list states worked 1.8 hours less than mothers in states with no wait list (Adjusted  $R^2 = 0.198$ ).

*Level of child care co-payment and maternal employment*

Mothers who lived in states where the subsidized child care co-payment was less than 10 percent of mothers' incomes, on average, tended to work significantly more hours per week ( $p < .001$ ) than their counterparts who were paying greater than 10 percent of their monthly income for subsidized child care. These findings do not support hypothesis three.

Table 3. Ln maternal hours of employment and CCDF state policy adjustments. OLS results, weighted

Variable	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5
SMI	0.0036*** (0.0003)	0.0075*** (0.0005)	0.0073*** (0.0005)	0.0072*** (0.0005)	0.2577*** (0.0231)
Wait list	-0.0432+ (0.0221)	-0.0386+ (0.0210)	-0.0382+ (0.0210)	-0.0424* (0.0211)	-1.8697* (0.9465)
% Co-pay	0.0040+ (0.0040)	-0.0181*** (0.0025)	-0.0190*** (0.0026)	-0.0202*** (0.0026)	-0.7489*** (0.1179)
Two-tier	0.1661*** (0.0204)	0.3039*** (0.0216)	0.3007*** (0.0217)	0.3112*** (0.0220)	9.3832*** (0.9894)
LnMother age	----- (0.0286)	0.2420*** (0.0287)	0.2465*** (0.0290)	0.2583*** (1.305)	8.2207***
<HS Edu	----- (0.0289)	0.1529*** (0.0291)	0.1488*** (0.0290)	0.1465*** (1.305)	6.8982***
>HS Edu (0.0154)	----- (0.0162)	-0.0283+ (0.0208)	-0.0208 (0.9332)	-0.0553**	-3.0549***
Race- Black	-----	-0.2201*** (0.0176)	-0.2193*** (0.0176)	-0.2262*** (0.0178)	-6.8425*** (0.7989)
Race- Other	-----	-0.1322** (0.0440)	-0.1272** (0.0442)	-0.1099* (0.0445)	-4.5084* (2.0025)
# Children <5	-----	-----	0.0196 (0.0136)	0.0327* (0.0145)	1.9914** (0.6497)
Center care	-----	-----	-----	0.0485** (0.0182)	0.5122 (0.8202)
Adj. R-squared	0.080	0.254	0.254	0.258	0.198
N	1390	1390	1390	1390	1390

\*\*\*, \*\*, \*, + Statistically significant at the 0.1%, 1%, 5%, 10% levels. Standard errors are in parentheses. Maternal hours of employment are logged in the first four models; in Model 5 maternal employment is level. Wait list (yes there is a wait list, no there is not a wait list) and two-tier (yes there is a two-tier policy, no there is not a two tier policy) are dichotomous. Maternal age is a logged variable, high school (comparison group is those who received a high school diploma) and race (comparison group is white). Center care refers to whether or not the child was in center based care. Each model contains 1,390 observations.

The multivariate findings did not support this hypothesis either. Model one of the regression analyses, in which only the policy variables are considered, suggests a one percent increase in the percentage of the mother's salary being used for child care is associated with a 0.4 percentage point increase in the number of hours the mother is employed per week ( $p < .10$ ). The controls added in the subsequent models adjusted the direction of the association between the state's co-payment level as a percentage of one's salary and maternal employment to be negative rather than positive as it was in model one. Thus in the final model with all the controls, a one point increase in the percentage of one's salary for the co-payment was associated with a two percentage point decrease in mothers' hours of employment. Model 5 indicates that a one point change in the percent of one's salary for child care cost was associated with a decrease in 0.75 hours of employment per week ( $p < .001$ ). It appears that as mothers needed to use more of their salary for child care costs, they chose to work less hours.

#### *Tiered income eligibility and maternal employment*

Mean comparisons provided significant support for hypothesis four in that mothers who lived in states with a tiered eligibility threshold were employed nearly five hours per week more than mothers who lived in states without tiered eligibility (see Table 2). The regression analyses indicated this relationship as well. In the first regression model, mothers who lived in states with tiered income eligibility were employed 16 percent more hours per week than their counterparts in states without tiered income eligibility ( $p < .001$ ) [see Table 3]. As maternal, household, and child care controls were added to models two through four, tiered eligibility remained statistically significant, with mothers who lived in states with tiered income eligibility working 30 to 31 percent more per week than mothers in states without this policy variation. Based upon model 5, mothers who lived in states with two-tiered income eligibility guidelines were working 9.38 more hours per week than their counterparts in states without this policy variation.

## Discussion

On average, 92 percent of the families receiving assistance from CCDF need this support in order to remain employed or to continue with school (U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, 2002). In addition, it is expected the percentage of parents in need of child care will continue to rise given the increase in TANF work requirements. Research suggests mothers who are employed tend to remain steadily employed, and have greater potential to move off welfare if their children are in high quality, stable care (Matthews & Ewen, 2006). The results of this study illustrate how states' chosen methods for implementing CCDF are associated with low-income mothers' levels of employment.

Mothers in states with higher state median income eligibility levels tended to achieve greater levels of employment. Given the fluctuations across states in terms of these thresholds, mothers earning identical sums of money in two different states could potentially have different child care subsidy eligibility statuses; one may get a child care subsidy and the other may not. The federal guideline for SMI levels is that they not exceed 85 percent. As federal funding for CCDF has remained static since 2001 (Matthews & Ewen, 2006), more states have decreased their state median income eligibility levels—motivated in large part by the desire to decrease waiting lists and to serve more eligible families. For example, in Connecticut, in response to funding restraints, the SMI eligibility level was decreased from 75 percent to 50 percent; with this shift, Connecticut claimed to be servicing 33 percent of eligible families rather than only 20 percent of families (Oliveira, 2005). In sum, it is important to consider that regardless of how much states change their definitions of families' eligibility for child care subsidies, the needs of families who are rendered ineligible by an arbitrary shift in eligibility typically do not change. Even if states change their levels of eligibility, it will not make a difference unless they have the financial means to meet these additional families' needs.

Over 40 percent of states have an average of 10,000 families on their waiting lists. The number of families on CCDF waiting lists has continued to increase as federal funding for

this legislation has plateaued. A greater number of families on waiting lists is indicative of the surprisingly low percentage (10-14% of 15 million eligible families) of CCDF-eligible families actually receiving child care subsidies (Greenberg & Laracy, 2000; Matthews & Ewen, 2006). Some states have responded to decreased federal funding and long waiting lists by including public-private partnerships that manage families' lack of access to child care. For example, in New York, the Non-Profit Assistance Corporation developed a project to provide high-quality, emergency back-up child care to low-wage earners (Gennetian, Crosby, Huston & Lowe, 2004). However, waiting lists still exist in many states, and are indicators of barriers to both care and ultimately employment for low-income, single mothers. Mothers who live in states with waiting lists experience more challenges obtaining care than mothers in states without waiting lists.

Mothers in this study who lived in states allowing a higher percentage of family incomes to be used towards child care tended to be employed fewer hours per week than their counterparts in states where a lower percentage of mothers' salaries were being used for child care. Thus, as co-payment levels increase, it may make greater economic sense for mothers to work slightly fewer hours, and care for the children on their own, rather than pay for care, since the less mothers earn, the greater the actual amount of the subsidy. The cost of care simply may be too great in comparison to one's earnings to remain employed, thus working fewer hours will actually allow the mother to receive a greater subsidy amount.

Finally, tiered levels of eligibility allow continuing receipt of subsidies even when mothers begin to earn more money. Recent qualitative research has shown mothers often experience a cascade of negative events from receiving a raise. An increase in income pushes mothers over the low threshold of eligibility for subsidies and unfortunately their wage increase is usually not enough to fill the gap in child care costs left by the loss in subsidy. Thus mothers are left to choose between an increase in pay risking the loss of subsidized child care, and turning down the promotional raise in wage. Mothers often opt for the latter, which keeps them dependent on the government rather than increasing personal responsibility. Evidence

presented in this paper indicates mothers' ability to be employed for more hours per week is increased when states implement a two-tiered system of eligibility.

### *Limitations*

Some limitations to the present study should be noted. First, this sample only included mothers who worked more than 15 hours per week; the policy effects may be different among mothers who are on the margins of work, or who appear to have a less intense commitment to the labor market. Second, as when utilizing linear regression there is the threat of omitted variable bias or not having controlled for all the possible factors contributing to the variation in mothers' hours of employment. To this point, individual state welfare policies were not controlled for in the regression models, thus the differences in mothers' employment cannot be causally linked to CCDF policy variations, as they may be simply reflective of the state's overall "generosity" in terms of social welfare programs. Despite these limitations, the focus of this study on state variations in CCDF implementation provides valuable first steps towards increased insight into how this policy affects the lives of low-income mothers and children and impacts mothers' ability to be actively employed.

## Policy Recommendations

### *Expansion of funding*

When CCDF became law as a block grant, significant financial responsibility was removed from the federal government and placed on state governments and ultimately families. Child care funding was no longer an entitlement grant, or a source of funding able to serve all families; as a block grant, the federal government provided states with a set amount of funding, and with this dollar amount states were supposed to serve as many families as possible. One could argue many of the decisions states have made subsequently regarding various aspects of CCDF have been driven by budget constraints.

For example, since 2002, federal funding has remained relatively stagnant, with the real value of child care dollars states



receive actually decreasing (Children's Welfare League of America, 2006; Matthews & Ewen, 2006). In turn, only a small percentage of the 15 million eligible families are being supported by CCDF (Matthews & Ewen, 2006). As child care funding has decreased over the last four years, TANF work requirements have increased, precipitating a greater child care need for low-income families while state governments are unable to respond appropriately. In 2005, the total amount spent by states on child care fell for the second year in a row; 22 states made actual cuts in child care spending and nine of these state cuts were at the level of 10 percent or more (Matthews & Ewen, 2006). The number of children covered by CCDF continues to decline, and it is predicted that by 2011, 25 percent less children will be served than in 2000 (Matthews & Ewen, 2006).

An increase in funding for states could potentially impact both families and child care providers. Over 90 percent of families who receive assistance from CCDF need this support in order to remain employed or to continue with school (U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, 2002). Mothers tend to remain steadily employed and have greater potential to move off welfare if their children are in high quality, stable care (Matthews & Ewen, 2006). If low-income mothers remain employed and gain skills as well as education, they can continue to move towards financial independence.

#### *On-going research and evaluation initiatives*

It is necessary to continue conducting research among all the states regarding CCDF in order to improve this program at both state and federal levels. Congress sets aside approximately \$10 million for CCDF child care research, demonstration, and evaluation (U.S. Office of Public Affairs, 2006). Much of this research focuses upon describing elements of CCDF such as the number of families served, the amount spent on families, local child care markets in various states, cost-benefits of different child care strategies, and quality ratings of child care facilities (Administration for Children and Families, 2006). Even though these studies have contributed significantly to what is known about CCDF, most do not focus on any of the qualitative aspects of families' experiences. Evaluations of policies like CCDF should qualitatively consider families' lived

experiences by focusing on the elements of how the CCDF has enhanced their family's lives. Such attention may point states in the appropriate directions for improving child care experiences for American families.

## Conclusion

CCDF represents a philosophical commitment to support low-income, welfare dependent families moving off government assistance and gaining financial independence; however, the diverse state implementation of this legislation is associated with varied levels of maternal employment, and in turn, potential for financial independence of these families. This study provides unique insight into how states' diverse methods of legislative implementation, particularly in relation to access, equity, and stability, impact levels of maternal employment.

With less than 15 percent of eligible families being supported by CCDF, mostly due to funding issues, there is undoubtedly a need to address the financial issues embedded in this legislation. When low-income families do not have an opportunity to select high quality care for their children, the entire family suffers. Parents spend their employed days worrying about who is caring for their children, while their children are in low quality child care environments, which ultimately may impact their overall development. Alternatively, parents sometimes terminate their employment to care for their children, since their work earnings barely cover the cost of child care. This undesirable scenario often leaves families in a dire financial position.

A staggering number of low-income children remain underserved or without high quality child care while parents continue to struggle with the decision to keep their job versus put their child in an undesirable child care arrangement. As long as children are in less than high quality child care, and low-income parents are forced to choose between self-sufficiency and the fate of their child's development, more work must occur in relation to child care legislation for low-income families.

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# Parental Assets: A Pathway to Positive Child Educational Outcomes

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*A growing body of evidence suggests parental assets have positive effects on children's well-being. Using 2004 data from the Survey of Income and Program Participation, this study tests the effect of parental asset holding on child educational outcomes, and explores whether parental involvement and expectations mediate this relationship. Results indicate that assets are a significant predictor of all child academic outcomes of our study; however, income is not a significant predictor for school outcomes when controlling for assets. The mediation analyses show the effect of assets on school outcomes is mediated by two of the three parenting measures: parental expectations and the number of parent-child breakfast days per week. We include implications for policy and practice.*

**Key words:** *Assets, child outcomes, parental involvement, parental expectations, income*

A large body of research has established that family income influences a variety of child outcomes related to school performance (Duncan & Brooks-Dunn, 1997; Gershoff, 2003; Costello, Compton, Keeler, & Angold, 2003; Morris & Gennetian, 2003). However, recent research has suggested that financial asset holding, or wealth, can also affect a child's academic outcomes (Conley, 2001; Mayer, 1997; Williams, 2003; Zhan, 2006; Zhan & Sherraden, 2003). This argument has important implications because, when compared to households without children, households with children are more likely to experience asset poverty. The concept of asset poverty is described as a household having insufficient assets or net worth to maintain itself at a poverty-level income for three months (Haveman & Wolff, 2005).

Assets, defined as the total amount of an individual's accumulated wealth held at a given time, offer resources that create opportunities for investment in long-term economic and social well-being (Sherraden, 2005). Therefore, assets may be particularly important for families because they provide stability, offer a cushion in difficult times, and improve future orientation.

Although there is some evidence that has suggested parental asset holding is important for children, less is known about the pathway through which assets affect child outcomes. One possible pathway that wealth and asset ownership may influence children's education is by improving parental attitudes and practices. By analyzing a longitudinal, nationally representative data set, this study examined the pathway through which parental asset holding affects child academic outcomes as well as the possible mediating effects of parental expectations and parental involvement.

## Literature Review

### *Assets and children's school outcomes*

Over the course of the past 10 years, policy makers, scholars, and social researchers have begun to give more attention to household net worth and asset holding as important indicators of a household's financial security and economic status. Furthermore, when considering the economic resources

available to a household, some scholars in this field have differentiated between income stream and assets (Oliver & Shapiro, 1995; Sherraden, 1991; Wolff, 1995). For example, Sherraden (1991) distinguished assets from the income flow by noting the importance of assets in providing economic security and a cushion for unpredictable events such as job layoffs, job loss, or prolonged illness that can create economic and financial stress for a family. In addition to buffering economic stress, and perhaps more important, assets may serve as a catalyst to change the way people regard their lives, their future, their positions and roles in their communities, as well as to expand the range of opportunities available to these households (Oliver & Shapiro, 1995; Sherraden, 1991). A growing body of empirical studies have tested the independent effects of assets (i.e., independent from effects of income) on the well-being of households, and the research findings have been consistently positive (Page-Adams & Sherraden, 1997; Scanlon & Page-Adams, 2001). One finding from previous research that is of particular relevance to this study was that the assets held by parents might enhance their children's well-being through a cushioning effect that buffers the negative effects of unplanned income loss. In addition, asset holding has shown greater stability across generations than income. Of all the forms of parental influence on children, financial assets may be the easiest to transmit (Sherraden, 1991).

In addition, findings from a substantial number of empirical studies have supported the distinct impact of household assets as independent from the influence of income on children's educational outcomes (Conley, 2001; Mayer, 1997; Williams, 2003; Zhan, 2006; Zhan & Sherraden, 2003). Some of these studies reported that after controlling for household income and other measures of socioeconomic background, net worth was positively related to educational performance (e.g., test scores) and achievement (e.g., postsecondary schooling) of children (Conley, 2001; Williams, 2003; Zhan, 2006). The impact of different types of asset holding (e.g., home ownership, savings accounts, stock/IRA account) on children's education also has been examined. For example, Zhan and Sherraden (2003) found that home ownership by low-income single mothers was positively related to their children's grade point average.



In addition, children whose mothers maintained some savings were more likely to graduate from high school. Interestingly, these researchers also found that when assets were included in the equation, parental income was not related to the children's education attainment. Other studies have specifically examined the impact of homeownership on children's educational attainment, and have indicated that children were more likely to graduate from high school if they lived in households in which the parents were homeowners (e.g., Aaronson, 2000; Green & White, 1997; Kane, 1994; Rossi & Weber, 1996).

#### *Assets and parental expectations and parental involvement*

In addition to its economic impact, several theorists and empirical evidence have also suggested that asset building produces an attitudinal and behavioral impact on families (DiPasquale & Glaeser, 1999; Rossi & Weber, 1996; Scanlon, 2001; Sherraden, 1991; Shobe & Page-Adams, 2001; Yadama & Sherraden, 1996). Sherraden (1991) indicated that owning assets can change the most fundamental ways that people think about their lives, and thus help to foster a personal orientation toward the future. This hypothesis has been supported by findings from other studies; for example, Yadama and Sherraden (1996), found that both house values and savings demonstrated positive links with families' attitudes including prudent behaviors, efficacy, social connectedness, and effort. Other studies that have examined the effect of assets on the attitudes of single mothers have shown a positive relation between assets and the mothers' educational advancement, increased participation in job training activities (Zhan, 2006), and increased work hours (Cho, 2001; Zhan, 2006). In addition, self-report surveys of Individual Development Accounts (IDAs) participants have indicated that these asset holders were more likely to plan for their children's education after joining the IDA program (McBride, Lombe, & Beverly, 2003).

Further, evidence has suggested that asset building and wealth accumulation may ultimately improve children's education through a positive influence on parental attitudes and behaviors. Specifically, compared to parents without assets, parents with assets have been shown to perceive a brighter future for their children and were more likely to have positive

parental attitudes and behaviors. In turn, these positive parental attitudes may help improve children's educational attainment (Zhan & Sherraden, 2003). In other words, parental attitudes and practices may mediate the relations between assets and children's school outcomes. In an analysis of a sample of single mothers obtained from the National Survey of Families and Households, Zhan and Sherraden (2003) examined the relationships among assets, parental expectations, and children's educational achievements among single-mother families. These researchers found that parental expectations partially mediated the relationship between assets (i.e., home ownership and savings) and children's educational achievement. Similarly, in a recent analysis of a sample that included different types of households, which was obtained from the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth, Zhan (2006) found that parent expectations acted as a partial mediator between net worth and children's educational achievement when measured by reading and math scores. This study further examined the possible mediating effects of parenting activities between the links of parental assets with children's education. Although the study findings demonstrated a positive relationship between net worth and parental involvement in the children's school activities, parental involvement was not a mediating factor for the positive relationship between net worth and children's test scores. In addition, this study found that net worth was not related to parent supervision of children's homework. Elliot (2007) analyzed the 2002 Panel Study of Income Dynamics (PSID) and Child Development Supplement to the PSID, and found that one form of asset accumulation—parent savings for child's college—was a clear embodiment of parental expectations that the child will go to college. This finding is important because this form of asset accumulation was found across all parental race and socioeconomic categories.

### Study Purpose

As seen from our review of the literature, studies have examined the impact of parental assets on children's educational outcomes and the mediating effects of parental expectations. Although these studies used different national data sets, their

findings are quite consistent. However, rigorous research is needed to further explore the relationship between assets and parental involvement as well as the possible mediating effects of parental involvement on the relationship between assets and children's education. In contrast to what researchers hypothesized, many studies have found weaker relationships between assets and parenting behaviors, and between parenting behaviors and children's educational outcomes (Zhan, 2006). At least in part, these findings could be the result of limitations in measuring parenting practices (e.g., self-report measurements by children). Therefore, researchers also need to examine how parental assets, expectations, and practices influence different dimensions of children's school outcomes (in addition to test scores and high school graduation). To help fill this information gap, our inquiry sought to answer the following research questions:

1. What are the effects of parental assets on child academic outcomes?
2. What are the effects of parental assets on parental involvement and parental expectations?
3. Do parental involvement and parental expectations mediate the effect of parental assets on child academic outcomes?

## Data and Method

### *Sample*

Data were obtained from the Survey of Income and Program Participation (SIPP), a longitudinal panel survey that has been collected three times a year by the U.S. Census Bureau since 1984. SIPP collects information from a nationally representative sample of U.S. households. The core module of the SIPP survey is conducted with each wave, and collects information on basic sociodemographic characteristics, income, and welfare program participation. In addition, each SIPP wave includes a topical module that obtains detailed information related to a specific subject or theme.

This study combined three data sets for analyses: the core module of the 2001 SIPP wave 6 for demographics and income information; the topical module of the 2001 SIPP wave 6 on

assets; and the topical module of the 2001 SIPP wave 7 on children's well-being. The data were collected between October 2002 and May 2003.

The unit of analysis was each child between the ages of 5 and 17 years. After removing extreme outliers of net worth (less than \$-500,000 or more than \$5,000,000), 4% of the sample was excluded from the analysis; the final sample included 12,392 children aged 5 to 17 years from 7,235 households.

### *Measures*

*Assets (independent variable).* The independent variable—parental assets—was measured as net worth values. These values were calculated by subtracting the total debt from total wealth in each household. Total wealth included the value of the home and other real estate; vehicles; business equity; interest-earning assets in banks or other financial institutions; stock and mutual fund equity; and retirement savings accounts such as IRA, KEOGH, 401(k) programs and Thrift Savings Plans. Total debt included mortgages on the home and other real estate (such as rental property); vehicle loans; margin and brokerage accounts; business or professional debt; credit card and store bills; medical bills; loans from individuals, or financial institutions; and educational loans. Because of skewed distribution of assets, the values of assets were transformed into a natural log.

*Parental expectation and parental involvement (mediator).* The parental expectation for each child was explored by asking the primary caregiver, "How far do you think the child will go in school?" The five response options were 0 (*less than high school graduate*); 1 (*high school graduate*); 2 (*some college or training*); 3 (*college graduate*); and 4 (*more than college graduate*). Because the distribution of this variable approached normality with a moderate negative skewness (-0.997), it was treated as a continuous variable in the analysis.

Parental involvement was measured in this study through two variables. The first variable—parent-child interactions—was a composite variable derived from two questions asked each child's primary caregiver: "How often do you and the child talk or play with each other for 5 minutes or more just for fun?" and "How often do you praise or compliment the child

by saying something like 'Good for you?'" The five response options ranged from 0 (*never*) to 2 (*a few times a week*) to 4 (*many times each day*). A composite variable was created by adding these items together (scores ranged from 0 to 8, Cronbach alpha = 0.78), and the composite variable was treated as a continuous variable in the analysis.

The second variable for parent involvement was measured by asking the primary caregiver to identify "The number of days you have breakfast with the child each week." Because the response scales for this question were different from our other two measures of parental involvement, we created a separate variable for this question. The response scale ranged from 0 to 7, and it was used as a continuous variable in the analysis.

*Children's school outcomes (outcome).* This study included three questions regarding child school outcomes, all of which were asked of the primary caregiver for each child. The three outcome questions included (a) has the child ever repeated a grade? (b) has the child ever been expelled or suspended from a school? and (c) has the child shown interest in schoolwork?

If a child had repeated a grade, the response was coded as 1, and otherwise it was coded 0. If a child had ever been expelled or suspended from school, the response was coded as 1, and otherwise it was coded 0. For the question of the child's interest in schoolwork, responses of *often true* were coded as 1, and all other responses were coded as 0.

Among these school outcome questions, two of the measures, "repeated a grade" and "interested in schoolwork" were related to the children between ages 5 and 17 years; another outcome "expelled from a school," was limited to children between the ages of 12 and 17 years.

*Control variables.* The control variables included child characteristics, primary caregiver characteristics, and household characteristics. The child characteristics included age (in years) and a dichotomous variable for gender (coded 1 for *boy*, and 0 for *girl*). The characteristics of the primary caregiver included: (a) age of primary caregiver (in years); (b) a dichotomous variable for the primary caregiver's gender (coded 1 for female, and 0 for male); (c) a set of dummy variables indicating race/ethnicity of primary caregiver (White [the reference category], Black, Hispanic, and other race/ethnicity); (d) a set of

dummy variables for the education level of the primary caregiver (do not have high school diploma, have a high-school diploma or GED [the reference category], some college, and bachelor's degree or more); (e) a dichotomous variable for marital status of primary caregiver (coded 1 for married, and 0 for non-married); and (f) a set of dummy variables for the primary caregiver's employment status (full-time defined as 35 hours or more a week [the reference category], part-time, and not employed).

The household characteristics included the following: (a) a dichotomous variable for location of household, (coded 1 for *metropolitan area* and 0 for *non-metropolitan area*); (b) the number of children living in the household; (c) the number of adults (18 years and older) living in the household; and (d) the total household income, which was defined as the total amount of monthly income. Because the distribution of income was skewed, income data was transformed into a natural log.

### Analysis

This study focused on the effects of net worth on child school outcomes mediated by parenting practice and parental expectation. The mediation model tested a direct path between the independent variable (parental assets) and dependent variables (child school outcomes), and an indirect link between the independent variable and dependent variable through a mediator (i.e., parental expectation and parental involvement; MacKinnon, Krull, & Lockwood, 2000). In mediation analysis, full mediation is supported if, when the mediator is controlled, the effect of the independent variable on a dependent variable becomes nonsignificant. However, the analysis supports partial mediation if, when the mediator is controlled, the effect of the independent variable on the dependent variable is reduced but still significant.

Based on the mediation model of this study, a series of regressions were run to examine the associations between assets and children's school outcomes, and the possible mediating effects of parental expectations and parental involvement. To demonstrate a mediated relationship between parental assets and child school outcomes, the regression results had to meet

the following conditions: (a) evidence of significant links between the predictors and outcomes, (b) evidence of significant relationship between the predictors and the mediator, (c) evidence of significant links between the mediator and the outcomes, and (d) controlling for the mediator must remove or reduce the relationship between the predictor and the outcomes (Baron & Kenny, 1986).

A mediation analysis was conducted using the four steps recommended by Baron and Kenny (1986). First, each of the child school outcomes was regressed on assets to test direct effects of assets on child school outcomes. Second, parental expectation and parental involvement were regressed on assets to test direct effects of assets on possible mediators. Third, the child school outcomes were regressed on parental expectation and parental involvement to test direct effects of possible mediators on child school outcomes. Fourth, child school outcomes were regressed on assets and parental expectation and parental involvement to test indirect effects of assets on child school outcomes.

To satisfy the conditions of being mediators, each of the three mediators tested in this study (i.e., parental expectation, parent-child interactions, and number of breakfasts with a child each week) had to be shown as associated with assets and with each of child school outcomes. Further, controlling for the mediators must eliminate or reduce the significance of the association found between assets and the child school outcomes.

## Results

### *Description of sample characteristics, mediators, and child school outcomes*

Table 1 illustrates the child, primary caregiver, and household characteristics of the sample. The mean age of children was 11 years old, and the sample was nearly evenly divided between genders. Although a majority of children lived with both parents, nearly one-quarter of children lived only with their mother. The majority of primary caregivers were female, White, with some college education, employed full-time, and lived in a metropolitan area. The mean household income was \$5,045 per month, and the mean of total household assets was

\$132,612.

Table 1 also includes the mean and frequency of the three mediator variables and the three child school outcomes used in this study. The means of parental expectation, parent-child interactions, and the number of breakfast days with the child a week were 2.9, 6.3, and 3.5 respectively. About 8% of children had repeated a grade, 12% of children had been suspended or expelled from school, and the majority of children were interested in schoolwork.

#### *Assets and child school outcomes*

Table 2 presents outcome data from logistic models for the three child school outcomes: "repeated a grade," "expelled from school," and "interested in school work." After controlling for demographic differences and social backgrounds of each child, the effect of assets on each of the child school outcomes was found to be significant. Children from households with higher net worth were less likely to have repeated a grade ( $p < .001$ ) or to have been expelled from school ( $p < .01$ ). In addition, our analysis showed that children from households with higher net worth were more likely to be interested in schoolwork ( $p < .001$ ). These findings supported the direct relationship of parental assets on child school outcomes.

Among the control variables, child characteristics were found to be significant for child school outcomes. Boys and older children were more likely to have repeated a grade, been expelled from school, and less likely to be interested in schoolwork ( $p < .001$ ).

In addition, the characteristics of primary caregivers had significant influence on child school outcomes. Compared to children with a White primary caregiver, children with Black primary caregivers were more likely to have repeated a grade ( $p < .001$ ), and more likely to have been expelled from school ( $p < .01$ ). However, children with Hispanic primary caregivers were less likely to have repeated a grade ( $p < .001$ ), less likely to have been expelled from school ( $p < .001$ ), and more likely to be interested in schoolwork ( $p < .001$ ). Further, when compared with children whose primary caregiver had a high school education, children whose primary caregiver had less than a high school education showed less interest in schoolwork ( $p < .05$ ),



Table 1. Sample characteristics, mediators, and child school outcomes

	Mean or freq.	Std. or %
<i>Child</i>		
Age	11.20	3.59
Gender (Male)	6,254	50.47%
Parents		
Both present	8,342	67.32%
Mother only	3,019	24.36%
Father only	474	3.83%
None	557	4.49%
<i>Primary Caregiver</i>		
Age	39.30	7.58
Race		
White	7,825	63.15%
Black	1,934	15.61%
Hispanic	2,013	16.24%
Other	620	5.00%
Education		
Less High	2,061	16.63%
High Grad.	3,664	29.57%
Some College	3,968	32.02%
College and More	2,699	21.78%
Marital Status (Married)	8,611	69.49%
Work Status		
Full time	5,959	48.09%
Part time	2,527	20.39%
None	3,906	31.52%
Metro Area	9,420	76.02%
Gender (Women)	11,782	95.08%
Total N of Adults in HH	2.05	0.81
Total N of Children in HH	2.48	1.25
<i>Financial Resources</i>		
Mean total HH income	\$5,045.42	4,879
Median total HH income	\$3,888.00	
Mean total HH asset	\$132,612.50	281,194
Median total HH asset	\$38,471	
<i>Mediators</i>		
Parental expectation (0-4)	2.90	0.90
Parental involvement		
Parent-child interactions (0-8)	6.33	1.65
Days breakfast with the child (0-7)	3.50	2.71
<i>Child outcomes</i>		
Repeated a grade	1,019	8.22%
Expelled, suspended from school	692	11.78%
Interested in schoolwork	7,388	64.32%

Note. HH = household

and were more likely to have repeated a grade ( $p<.001$ ). Children whose primary caregiver had attained greater educational background (i.e. some college or a bachelor's degree or more) were less likely to have repeated a grade ( $p<.001$ ) and were more interested in schoolwork ( $p<.001$ ). Children from households with a married primary caregiver were found less likely to have repeated a grade ( $p<.001$ ), less likely to have been expelled from school ( $p<.001$ ), and more likely to be interested in schoolwork ( $p<.001$ ) when compared with children from households with a non-married primary caregiver.

Furthermore, the primary caregiver's work status was shown to be significant, and related to both child school outcomes of repeating a grade and school expulsion. Compared with children whose primary caregiver was employed full-time (i.e., 35 hours or more per week), children whose primary caregiver was not working were more likely to have repeated a grade ( $p<.001$ ) and more likely to have been expelled from school ( $p<.01$ ).

The analysis provided interesting results for household characteristics such as the number of adults and household income. After controlling for a primary caregiver's marital status (to account for children living with both parents), the number of other adults living in the household was found to be significant and negatively related to the child school outcome of interest in schoolwork ( $p<.05$ ). Further, when controlling for household net worth and social demographics, our analysis showed household income was a nonsignificant predictor for any of the child school outcomes examined in this study.

#### *Parental expectation, parenting practice, and child school outcomes*

Table 3 summarizes a series of logistic models constructed for the three child school outcomes of repeating a grade, school expulsion, and interest in schoolwork. Models 2, 3, and 4 tested the changes in the effect of net worth by including one of the three study mediators: parental expectation, parent-child interactions, and the number of days per week the primary caregiver had breakfast with the child (hereafter number of breakfasts). Significant mediators were included together in Model 5.

Table 2. Estimates from logistic regression models of child school outcome measures

Variables	Repeated a grade		Expelled from school		Interested in school work	
	b	S.E.	b	S.E.	b	S.E.
Intercept	5.096*	2.20	4.219	2.56	-2.697*	1.08
Child gender (boy)	0.467***	0.07	0.664***	0.09	-0.574***	0.04
Child age	0.142***	0.01	0.133***	0.03	-0.081***	0.01
Primary caregiver						
Gender (female)						
(Male)						
Female	0.008	0.15	0.343	0.19	0.013	0.09
Age	-0.012*	0.01	-0.023***	0.01	0.011***	0.003
Race/Ethnicity						
(White)						
Black	0.349***	0.09	0.326**	0.11	0.056	0.06
Hispanic	-0.365***	0.11	-0.508***	0.14	0.398***	0.06
Other	-0.084	0.17	-0.065	0.20	0.345***	0.10
Education						
Less high	0.361***	0.10	0.365**	0.12	-0.138*	0.07
(High school grad.)						
Some college	-0.296***	0.09	-0.126	0.11	0.117*	0.05
College grad. +	-0.368**	0.12	-0.165	0.14	0.269***	0.06
Marital status						
Married	-0.295***	0.08	-0.531***	0.11	0.274***	0.05
(Non-married)						
Work status						
(Full time)						
Part time	0.014	0.10	0.192	0.11	-0.019	0.05
No work	0.369***	0.08	0.301**	0.11	0.002	0.05
Residency						
Metro area	-0.144	0.08	0.160	0.10	0.091	0.05
(Non-metro area)						
# of children in HH.	0.049	0.03	0.046	0.04	-0.006	0.02
# of adults in HH.	0.007	0.05	0.042	0.06	-0.055*	0.03
Total income log	-0.015	0.03	-0.023	0.03	0.009	0.02
Total net worth log	-0.660***	0.17	-0.590**	0.19	0.281***	0.08
N	12,392		5,875		11,487	
-2DLL	6,543.92		4,000.63		14,410.20	
Likelihood Ratio	499.29***		258.67***		559.14***	
Wald	462.31***		242.89***		523.66***	

Note. Reference groups shown in parentheses. HH = household

\* $p < .05$ . \*\* $p < .01$ . \*\*\* $p < .001$

When parental expectation (Model 2) or number of breakfasts (Model 4) were included in the regressions, the effects of net worth on each of the three child school outcomes

(i.e., repeated a grade, school expulsion, and interest in schoolwork) were diminished or removed. However, including parent-child interaction (Model 3) did not decrease the effect of net worth on any of the child school outcomes, and therefore, it was omitted from the final model (Model 5).

When we included the combination of parental expectation and number of breakfasts in Model 5, the effects of net worth on school expulsion and interest in schoolwork were removed, and the absolute points of coefficients of assets on repeated a grade decreased by 21.4%.

Regarding other covariates in full model (Model 5), significances and directions of each covariate were very similar to the models without any mediators (Model 1) except primary caregiver education and number of adults living in the household. However, when we included two mediators—parental expectation and number of breakfasts—the effects of caregiver education level on child school outcomes were diminished, and the effects of number of adults in the household became nonsignificant for a child's interest in schoolwork.

The direct impacts of three possible mediators (i.e., parental expectation, parent-child interactions, and number of breakfasts) on outcomes of repeating a grade and school expulsion were also tested in Models 2, 3, and 4 to evaluate a criterion for a mediator. Both parental expectation and number of breakfasts were found significant for all child school outcomes in this study; however, parent-child interaction was shown to be a significant predictor only for the child's interest in schoolwork.

#### *Assets and parenting involvement and parent expectation*

Table 4 shows the outcomes of ordinary least squares regressions (OLS) on parent-child interaction, parental expectation, and number of breakfasts. After controlling for demographics of both the child and the primary caregiver, the level of household net worth was found a significant and strong predictor of both parental expectation ( $p < .001$ ) and the number of breakfasts with the child each week ( $p < .001$ ). However, household net worth was not a significant predictor for parent-child interaction. These results supported the direct effect of assets on parental expectation and parent involvement measured by number of breakfasts.

Table 3. Estimates from logistic regression models of child school outcome measures with mediators (continued next page)

Variables	Repeated a grade				
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5
Intercept	5.096*	5.249*	5.028*	4.987*	5.134
Child gender (boy)	0.467***	0.428*	0.468***	0.465***	0.425***
Child age	0.142***	0.127***	0.143***	0.134***	0.121***
Primary caregiver Gender (female) (Male)					
Female	0.008	0.059	0.007	0.013	0.064
Age	-0.012*	-0.012*	-0.012*	-0.012*	-0.011*
Race/Ethnicity (White)					
Black	0.349***	0.483***	0.352***	0.323***	0.460***
Hispanic	-0.365***	-0.231*	-0.362***	-0.377***	-0.244*
Other	-0.084	-0.015	-0.079	-0.106	-0.030
Education					
Less high (High school grad.)	0.361***	0.264**	0.362***	0.348***	0.260**
Some college	-0.296***	-0.205*	-0.297***	-0.292***	-0.204*
College grad. +	-0.368**	-0.204	-0.369**	-0.363**	-0.202
Marital status					
Married (Non-married)	-0.295***	-0.243**	-0.296***	-0.270**	-0.222**
Work status (Full time)					
Part time	0.014	0.025	0.013	0.032	0.043
No work	0.369***	0.351***	0.366***	0.400***	-0.066***
Residency					
Metro area (Non-metro area)	-0.144	-0.066	-0.143	-0.140	-0.202
# of children in HH	0.049	0.0004	0.049	0.050	0.064
# of adults in HH	0.007	-0.019	0.008	0.008	-0.011
Total income log	-0.015	-0.006	-0.016	-0.015	-0.006
Total net worth log	-0.660***	-0.540***	-0.660***	-0.633***	-0.519**
Parent expectation	---	-0.455***	---	---	-0.446***
Parent-child interactions	---	---	0.010	---	---
Days breakfast with a child	---	---	---	-0.067***	-0.056***
N	12,392	12,392	12,392	12,392	12,392
-2DLL	6,543.92	6,371.42	6,543.69	6,543.69	6,353.71
Likelihood Ratio	499.29***	671.78***	499.52***	499.52***	689.49***
Wald	462.31***	626.68***	462.52***	462.52***	638.08***

Note. Reference groups shown in parentheses. HH = household

\*p&lt;.05. \*\*p&lt;.01. \*\*\*p&lt;.001

Table 3. Estimates from logistic regression models of child school outcome measures with mediators (continued next page)

Variables	Expelled from school				
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5
Intercept	4.219	3.721	4.609	4.232	3.716
Child gender (boy)	0.664***	0.631***	0.658***	0.664***	0.625***
Child age	0.133***	0.122***	0.128***	0.117***	0.108***
Primary caregiver Gender (female) (Male)					
Female	0.343	0.459*	0.342	0.346	0.469*
Age	-0.023***	-0.019**	-0.023***	-0.022**	-0.019**
Race/Ethnicity (White)					
Black	0.326**	0.479***	0.316**	0.309**	0.467***
Hispanic	-0.508***	-0.356*	-0.523***	-0.509***	-0.358*
Other	-0.065	0.019	-0.090	-0.077	0.019
Education					
Less high (High school grad.)	0.365**	0.284*	0.356**	0.346**	0.278*
Some college	-0.126	-0.005	-0.121	-0.123	-0.007
College grad. +	-0.165	0.027	-0.163	-0.170	0.022
Marital status					
Married (Non-married)	-0.531***	-0.466***	-0.528***	-0.498***	-0.441***
Work status (Full time)					
Part time	0.192	0.195	0.199	0.218	0.224
No work	0.301**	0.256*	0.314**	0.337**	0.287**
Residency					
Metro area (Non-metro area)	0.160	0.294**	0.158	0.153	0.282**
# of children in HH	0.046	0.001	0.044	0.043	-0.001
# of adults in HH	0.042	-0.007	0.038	0.050	0.006
Total income log	-0.023	-0.012	-0.020	-0.027	-0.016
Total net worth log	-0.590**	-0.409*	-0.594**	-0.552**	-0.381
Parent expectation	---	-0.583***	---	---	-0.562***
Parent-child interactions	---	---	-0.045	---	---
Days breakfast with a child	---	---	---	-0.118***	-0.100***
N	5,875	5,875	5,875	5,875	5,875
-2DLL	4,000.63	3,818.01	3,996.92	3,952.49	3,785.09
Likelihood Ratio	258.67***	441.28***	262.37***	306.81***	474.20***
Wald	242.89***	400.30***	246.11***	279.83***	421.51***

Note. Reference groups shown in parentheses. HH = household

\*p&lt;.05. \*\*p&lt;.01. \*\*\*p&lt;.001

Table 3. Estimates from logistic regression models of child school outcome measures with mediators

Variables	Interested in schoolwork				
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5
Intercept	-2.697*	-3.380**	-0.400***	-2.605*	-3.290**
Child gender (boy)	-0.574***	-0.544***	-0.570***	-0.578***	-0.548***
Child age	-0.081***	-0.069***	-0.067***	-0.070***	-0.060***
Primary caregiver Gender (female) (Male)					
Female	0.013	-0.025	-0.010	0.012	-0.025
Age	0.011***	0.011***	0.012***	0.010**	0.010**
Race/Ethnicity (White)					
Black	0.056	-0.077	0.110	0.089	-0.047
Hispanic	0.398***	0.254***	0.471***	0.413***	0.270***
Other	0.345***	0.299**	0.428***	0.372***	0.319**
Education					
Less high (High school grad.)	-0.138*	-0.024	-0.106	-0.116	-0.008
Some college	0.117*	-0.005	0.110*	0.108*	-0.011
College grad. +	0.269***	0.047	0.267***	0.261***	0.044
Marital status					
Married (Non-married)	0.274***	0.225***	0.266***	0.245***	0.200***
Work status (Full time)					
Part time	-0.019	-0.064	-0.050	-0.047	-0.090
No work	0.002	0.030	-0.033	-0.038	-0.007
Residency					
Metro area (Non-metro area)	0.091	-0.020	0.091	0.082	-0.027
# of children in HH	-0.006	0.048**	0.003	-0.005	0.049**
# of adults in HH	-0.055*	-0.025	-0.040	-0.055*	-0.025
Total income log	0.009	0.0004	0.002	0.010	0.001
Total net worth log	0.281***	0.134	0.284***	0.250**	0.110
Parent expectation	---	0.675***	---	---	0.664***
Parent-child interactions	---	---	0.174***	---	---
Days breakfast with a child	---	---	---	0.079***	0.069***
N	11,487	11,487	11,487	11,487	11,487
-2DLL	14,410.20	13,627.71	14,210.10	14,303.83	13,553.15
Likelihood Ratio	559.14***	1341.63***	759.24***	665.51***	1416.19***
Wald	523.66***	1148.36***	695.35***	615.31***	1200.76***

Note. Reference groups shown in parentheses. HH = household

\*p&lt;.05. \*\*p&lt;.01. \*\*\*p&lt;.001

Among other covariates, child's age and the primary caregiver's race/ethnicity, education, marital status, and work status were found to be significant determinants for all three mediators (i.e., parent-child interactions, parental expectation, and number of breakfasts). The child's age was shown to have a negative relationship to parent-child interaction ( $p < .001$ ), parental expectation ( $p < .001$ ), and number of breakfasts ( $p < .001$ ). Compared to White primary caregivers, primary caregivers who were Black, Hispanic, or other race/ethnicity reported less time playing with and praising their children ( $p < .001$ ), and fewer breakfasts with their children. However, primary caregivers who were Black, Hispanic, or other race/ethnicity reported higher academic achievement expectations for their children as compared to White primary caregivers.

In addition, primary caregivers who had less than a high school education reported fewer parent-child interactions and lower parental expectations as compared to primary caregivers who were high school graduates. Married primary caregivers reported greater parent involvement and higher parental expectations for their children when compared with non-married primary caregivers. Further, although unemployed primary caregivers reported more parent-child interactions and more breakfasts per week with the child, these caregivers reported lower parental expectations for their children as compared with primary caregivers who worked full-time.

Household characteristics, especially household composition, were shown to be significant in several areas. When controlling for a primary caregiver's marital status, both the number of children living in the household and the number of adults living in the household were found to be significant and negative determinants for parent-child interaction and parental expectation. However, we found total household income was significant and positively related to parent-child interaction and parental expectation for their children.

In summary, this study found that the effect of parental assets was partially mediated (for repeating a grade) and fully mediated (for school expulsion and interest in schoolwork) by two mediators: parental expectation and number of breakfasts. Specifically, this study found that: (a) parental assets were a significant predictor of all child school outcomes included in



our study; (b) parental assets were a significant predictor of parental expectations and parent involvement measured by number of breakfasts with the child per week; (c) two mediators (parental expectations and number of breakfasts) were significant determinants of child school outcomes; and (d) when controlling for household net worth, household income was found to be a nonsignificant predictor of the child school outcomes included in our study.

## Discussion

The purpose of this study was to examine the effects of parental assets on child academic outcomes, parent-child involvement, and parental expectations. Consistent with other research, our findings indicated that parental assets were a significant predictor of the measured child academic outcomes (Scanlon & Page-Adams, 2001; Williams, 2004; Zhan, 2006). Interestingly, although we found that assets were a significant predictor of all child school outcomes, we also found that household income was not significantly related to these measures. Study findings also showed that asset ownership was associated with (a) parental expectations for their child's educational achievement, and (b) the parental involvement variable that measured the number of days a parent eats breakfast with their child each week. In addition, parental expectations and the number of days the primary caregiver ate breakfast with their child were both significant mediators between assets and child school outcomes.

The findings of this study are consistent with other research and provide additional evidence of a relationship between asset ownership and parental expectations for their child's education. Further, the findings support that the relationship between assets and parental expectations mediates the impact of assets on a child's academic performance (Zhan, 2006). This finding is in line with both the theory and research that has explored how asset holding can change an individual's outlook as well as their plans for the future, which, in turn, can affect their behaviors and habits (DiPasquale & Glaeser 1999; Rossi & Weber, 1996; Scanlon 2001; Sherraden, 1991; Shobe & Page-Adams, 2001; Yadama & Sherraden, 1996). Similar results

Table 4. OLS regression models of three measures of parent-child involvement and parent expectation

Variables	Parent-child involvement		Parent expectation		Days breakfast with a child	
	b	S.E.	b	S.E.	b	S.E.
Intercept	7.11***	0.57	1.99***	0.30	-0.70	0.93
Child gender (boy)	-0.07**	0.03	-0.10***	0.02	-0.03	0.05
Child age	-0.09***	0.004	-0.03***	0.002	-0.13***	0.01
Primary caregiver						
Gender						
(Male)						
Female	0.14*	0.07	0.07	0.04	0.01	0.11
Age	-0.003	0.002	0.001	0.001	0.01***	0.004
Race/Ethnicity						
(White)						
Black	-0.29***	0.04	0.20***	0.02	-0.44***	0.07
Hispanic	-0.36***	0.04	0.25***	0.02	-0.18*	0.07
Other	-0.40***	0.07	0.08*	0.04	-0.32**	0.11
Education						
Less high	-0.18***	0.05	-0.20***	0.03	-0.27***	0.08
(High school grad.)						
Some college	0.06	0.04	0.19***	0.02	0.15*	0.06
College grad. +	0.04	0.04	0.34***	0.02	0.20**	0.07
Marital status						
Married	0.08*	0.04	0.10***	0.02	0.41***	0.06
(Non-married)						
Work status						
(Full time)						
Part time	0.16***	0.04	0.04*	0.02	0.35***	0.06
No work	0.20***	0.04	-0.04*	0.02	0.58***	0.06
Residence						
Metro area	0.004	0.03	0.16***	0.02	0.15**	0.06
(Non-metro area)						
# of children in HH.	-0.05***	0.01	-0.08***	0.01	-0.02	0.02
# of adults in HH.	-0.08***	0.02	-0.04***	0.01	-0.02	0.03
Total income log	0.042***	0.01	0.01*	0.01	-0.002	0.02
Total net worth log	0.02	0.04	0.15***	0.02	0.36***	0.07
N	12,392		12,392		12,392	
R <sup>2</sup>	0.07		0.10		0.06	
F	49.88***		78.59***		46.85***	

Note. Reference groups shown in parentheses. HH = household

\*p<.05; \*\*p<.01; \*\*\*p<.001

have been seen in research on IDA programs, which are an initiative aimed at fostering asset accumulation among low-income participants by promoting saving toward asset-building purposes. Examples of these changes include increased

self-confidence, increased hope for the future, increased ability to set and achieve goals, greater sense of responsibility, and reduced levels of stress. Moreover, some IDA participants with children have reported feeling reassured that their savings would benefit their children by paying for their children's education, improving their living environment, or generally providing for their children's future (McBride, Lombe, & Beverly, 2003; Sherraden et al., 2005).

Research has provided mixed findings regarding which types of parental involvement activities are most beneficial to child outcomes. Parental involvement in school has been significantly associated with positive child outcomes, and, although to a lesser extent, parental involvement in the home has also been shown significant (Barnard, 2004; Fan & Chen, 2001). In our study, the number of breakfasts was found to be significantly positive for all child school outcomes, and the effect of assets on child school outcomes was found to be mediated by the number of breakfasts with a child a week. In their analysis of over 20 studies that examined the relationship between breakfast habits and academic performance of children, Rampersaud, Pereira, Girard, Adams, and Metzl (2005) reported that many studies found a significant effect between children and adolescents eating breakfast and academic achievement. This academic achievement may be the product of improved nutrition that promotes better concentration in school among these children. On the other hand, the higher academic achievement of children who share breakfast with a caregiver may be the result of interaction with the adult during that time. For example, parents who eat breakfast with their child may be more likely to provide emotional support and encouragement regarding a child's school performance than parents who do not breakfast with their child. Further research is needed to clearly identify the factor or combination of factors that produce the improved academic outcomes. However, researchers are careful to note that a child's socioeconomic status is an important variable when considering the breakfast and academic relationship (Rampersaud et al., 2005). This research finding provides new evidence that eating breakfast with a child is a positive parenting practice that influences educational outcomes. Eating breakfast with a child is a health

habit that may have positive effects for both social and emotional reasons.

## Conclusion

By examining the effect of parental assets on child school outcomes and parental expectations and involvement, this study provides additional support for the inclusion of assets in measurements of child and family economic well-being. In line with other research that has demonstrated that income alone is insufficient as a predictor of child outcomes (Gershoff, Raver, Aber, & Lennon, 2007), our study found that income was not a significant predictor of any of the child school outcomes, although assets were shown a significant predictor for all of the child school outcomes. This study also provided information useful for a range of policies and programs directed toward children and families. The findings support the importance of developing and including wealth and asset-based interventions in efforts aimed at addressing child and family poverty. For example, interventions focused on improving parenting skills, strengthening family functioning, or improving child school outcomes should consider exploring the inclusion of a financial component, specifically asset-based programming.

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# Promoting Positive Outcomes for Healthy Youth Development: Utilizing Social Capital Theory

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*This article discusses the central tenets of the theories of social capital, which include exchanges, trust, obligation, bonding, bridging, and issues concerning the marginalization of certain groups. Included is an exploration of the limitations of the approaches of the key theorists, followed by the presentation of a theoretical framework and model of the development of social capital among youth. Additionally, the article discusses the relevancy of social capital for social work practice.*

*Key words: youth, social capital, social support, youth development*

Contemporary social capital theory links an individual's ability to acquire resources through the connection of social networks, and other social commodities, to positive outcomes (Portes, 1998). The empirical research indicates that the various applications of social capital include the notion that it may be a predictor of positive outcomes among adolescents, e.g., healthy development, as well as negative outcomes, e.g., juvenile

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delinquency and violence (Wright & Fitzpatrick, 2006). Clearly, youth can derive benefit from their social relationships, their families, and membership in their communities. For example, Masten and Coatsworth (1998) indicate that youth with higher social capital demonstrate improved academic competencies, and Roth and Brooks-Gunn (2000) discuss the importance of social capital for facilitating cooperation, mutual support, and resilient functioning among adolescents.

Conversely, a range of problematic outcomes such as delinquency, depression, substance use, and sexual acting out has been found to be related to the lack of supportive relationships in a youth's life (Laser, 2003; McCubbin, McCubbin, Thompson & Thompson, 1998; Werner & Smith, 2001). The role of social capital in providing individual and social resources, and potentially buffering the effects of problematic outcomes, is well cited in the literature (Putnam, 1995a). Disadvantage is related to the breakdown of the infrastructure of supportive networks, and increased sources of human capital have been found to be positively related to youth successfully negotiating high-risk environments (Fitzpatrick, Wright, Piko, & LaGory, 2005).

The field of social work and other related professions have acknowledged the importance of understanding the various conceptualizations of social capital, which differ by the central theorists. This article will discuss some tenets of the theories of social capital, which include exchanges, trust, obligation, bonding, bridging, and issues concerning the marginalization of certain groups. We will then explore the critique and the limitations of the approaches of the key theorists, followed by the presentation of a theoretical framework of the development of social capital among youth. Finally, we will discuss the relevancy of social capital for social work practice.

### Theoretical Considerations

Putnam's (1993, 1995a) notions that social capital is related to connected community networks contributed to thinking of social capital in sweeping generalizations, to describe relationships and the acquisition of resources by insiders versus outsiders. This has created a diluted or simplified version of the original theories of social capital. Though the actual

"inventor" of the terminology social capital is somewhat in controversy, most credit is given to Bourdieu (1983), who purported three forms of capital: economic, cultural, and social. Bourdieu's definition of social capital is "the aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possessions of a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition" (1983, p. 248). Bourdieu's pragmatic position regarding economic capital, for instance, characterizes some of the contemporary social capital discourse, which upholds the value of social capital as asset building. Theoretically, this characterization of social capital translates into a pathway of possibility to improve the lives of youth and families.

However, through other social capital research it has been found that there are other factors at work between individuals or groups than the simple exchange of goods and services in transactions. Individuals and groups demonstrated preferential treatment and received benefits when they had a relationship with another individual or group (Bourdieu, 1983; Coleman, 1988; Fukuyama, 1995, 1998; Lin, 1999a, 1999b; Portes, 2000; Portes & Landolt, 1996; Portes & Sensenbrenner, 1993; Putman, 1993, 1994, 1995a, 1995b). Preferential treatment and benefits increased when the individual or group had feelings of sympathy and obligation to another individual or group (Robison & Schmidt, 1996). In essence, relationships do matter; they change both the psychodynamic process and outcomes for individuals and groups.

### *Exchanges that create social capital*

There are several major components to social capital theory. First, there are several types of exchanges that create social capital. These exchanges can also be found in the social support literature as types of support (Boger & Smith, in press; Crockenburg, 1988). They are instrumental exchanges, emotional exchanges, informational exchanges, and informal socializing.

Instrumental exchanges are the trading of goods and services. Emotional exchanges are expressions of caring, buffering the individual from adverse effects of stress (Vaux, 1988) and validations. These exchanges give the individual an

emotional sense of belonging—of “being assured and recognized of worthiness as an individual” (Lin, 1999 p. 31). Informational exchanges are knowledge that is gained through contacts with others, such as opportunities, and information (Lin, 1999a). The information that is provided and the utility of that information for future actions create social capital for the individual (Coleman, 1988). Informal socializing allows the individual access to individuals, places and organizations and to make connections to people they would otherwise not encounter (Putnam, 1994, 1995a, 1995b). Additionally, understanding some of the important tenets of social capital, such as trust, obligation, bonding, bridging, and marginalization, elucidates the benefits, as well as the possible pitfalls, of promoting social capital with youth.

### *Trust*

Trust is a primary ingredient for maintaining, accruing and supporting the development of social capital. Putnam states “trust lubricates social life” (1993, p. 2). He believes that trust is gained by the belief in reciprocity (Putnam, 1993, 1994, 1995a, 1995b). Fukuyama asserts that one “needs to trust one another and to cooperate in the formation of new groups and associations” (1995, p. 89). He states that societies may be high or low trust societies, but in either incidence the individual trusts that the group will continue to exist and that her needs will be met when asked (Fukuyama, 1995, 1998). High trust societies are characterized by large organizations where kinship ties are not predominant. The organization perpetuates itself through the continual addition of new members. In contrast, low trust societies are characterized by small organizations and are frequently linked by kinship ties. In low trust societies, there are often large struggles between successive generations when control is passed on and the ability to resolidify control over the kin network is often difficult to secure.

In both low and high trust societies, a great deal of social capital can be created. However, in low trust societies the social capital is often stratified within a small subset of the population with kinship ties. Social capital is centralized within a group that views the insider verses the outsider very differently. In these low trust societies, social capital can be seen in the

practice of nepotism. In high trust societies, both the informal networks and the formal networks create social capital for its members (Fukuyama, 1995, 1998).

### *Obligation*

Fundamental to the concept of social capital is the importance of the "buy-in" of the individual to the community. The individual must feel that it is in her best self-interest to support the greater good of the group. It is also important for the individual to believe that her involvement now will pay dividends later. She feels obliged to support the group today, so that the group can support her at some later date. Obligations, expectations and trustworthiness are a form of social capital which relies on the reciprocal nature of relationships (Coleman, 1988). As youth interact and give support and services to other youth, there is an expectation that the recipient will feel obligated to give support and services in return. These "credit slips" are often never used but create an atmosphere of cooperation and shared dependency of outcomes. In youth culture this is very similar to the adage that "I have your back and you have mine."

This obligation has been further refined by cultural or group norms (Portes & Sensenbrenner, 1993). It is the obligation toward socialization of the individual to the group that creates culturally expected social protocol and culturally responsible behavior within the group where they are accruing and receiving social capital.

### *Bonding*

As individuals, families or groups are more bonded to each other, the network will become more dense (Boudieau, 1983). As density increases, there will be a greater sense of obligation of group members to each other, a greater sense of recognition of group members to each other, an increased need to keep the group intact and a heightened sense of watching out for the group's best interests. Bonded solidarity is the creation of a common cohesive bond between individual members and the sharing of a common purpose (Portes, 1993). It is typified by team sports and the fervor of school spirit in youth.

### *Bridging*

Strong ties are important for group cohesion and a more dense social network. However, weak ties are ties that connect two individuals from different groups together, thereby acting as a bridge between two different social networks (Granovetter, 1978). This ability to bridge allows both networks some unique advantages in the creation of social capital for both the individuals who bridge the two networks and their networks in general. There is a greater flow of information and a more direct flow of that information between the two groups through the bridging of the networks. There is also the opportunity for greater mobility between the two groups if there is bridging. The distinct networks begin to know each other and create new ties. These ties create a greater integration between the two groups. It also creates greater opportunities for the youth in the networks that have linked. This can be demonstrated in youth exchanges, round tables and youth forums. Youth who are able to bridge between two social networks are often aware of more information, able to gain information more quickly, synthesize information from a variety of sources, and gain advantages from that information. The connections of youth in the network who have connections to youth in other networks are very beneficial. The ability to have contacts that can "put in a good word" creates a great deal of social capital (Lin, 1999a).

Interestingly, Burt (1998) studied gender in the density versus bridging debate, and has found that in general, men are more skillful at bridging and women are more skillful at creating dense networks. This could also be attributed to socialization of gender roles.

### *Marginalization of certain groups, particularly women, minorities and low SES*

There are some less-than-rosy aspects of social capital. Fukuyama states "social capital and the propensity to work cooperatively in the groups that constitute civil society are not evenly distributed among different social classes, ethnic groups, or other strata within a given society" (1998, p. 64). The benefits of social capital are not accessible to all people. Access to these groups that build social capital, whether they

are informal or formal, may be out of the reach of some individuals. Therefore, even though social capital is an important asset, many poor and minority youth may not have the opportunity or the propinquity to be involved in clubs, sports, and youth organizations that build social capital.

Portes sees several negative outcomes of social capital: (1) the exclusion of outsiders; (2) excessive demands on the resources of the individuals from within the group; and (3) restrictions of individual freedoms and downward leveling pressures (2000). The clannish nature of social capital affects the ability of the individuals to gain social capital. "Newcomers often find themselves unable to compete, no matter how good their skills and qualifications" (Portes & Landolt, 1996, p. 19). Simply put, those youth outside of the group will not be able to gain social capital.

However, youth within the group may feel some negative effects of social capital as well. The weight of excessive demands placed upon them by members for whom they feel compelled to reciprocate, even when it is against their own best interests, is difficult to endure. Members within the group may also resent their inability to determine their own destiny and decisions. This negative sort of group functioning can be seen in youth gangs.

Social cohesion and social capital for a subset of the population does not create outwardly perceived social capital for the greater community. Portes discussed the example of the ghetto, stating "there is considerable social capital in the ghetto areas but the assets obtainable through it seldom allow participants to rise above their poverty" (Portes & Landolt, 1996, p. 20). Therefore, social capital may be across economic strata but not between economic strata.

Additionally, Lin states, "capital inequality creates social inequality" (2000, p. 13). Lin sees that these inequalities develop in two different areas: capital deficits and return deficits (2000). Capital deficits can create social capital inequality in two manners by differential investments and differential opportunities. Differential investments are created by the fact that some youth are the recipients of more investment than others. For youth, it can be a matter of receiving better and more education, improved nutrition, improved medical care

and greater monitoring by caring adults. These investments can be financial or emotional.

The emotional investment the parent places in the child is extremely critical. The richness of a life with strong attachment, strong social interaction and support, feelings of competency and self-efficacy create a basic inequality for those that have not been so blessed with those advantages. Youth with more opportunities will undoubtedly have a greater richness of understanding and greater competency. These inequalities affect a segment of the population. In some aspects, social capital can reinforce the divide between the "haves" and the "have-nots."

Furthermore, if the youth does not receive return for her investment in the network, then no social capital is generated. Individual return deficit can manifest itself either in perceptual deficits of the youth or a lack of reciprocal resources (Lin, 1999b). The youth may not be aware of the social capital she possesses or may not know how to use the resources. The adolescent may have some social capital, but if she does not perceive it as social capital or know how to use it, it lies dormant. A similar concept is true in social support theory of perceived social support: "Social support is only considered social support when it is perceived as social support from the supportee" (Boger & Smith, in press). In both instances, if the youth is not aware of the support or capital, or the adolescent feels incapable of accessing the support or capital, it simply does not exist for the youth.

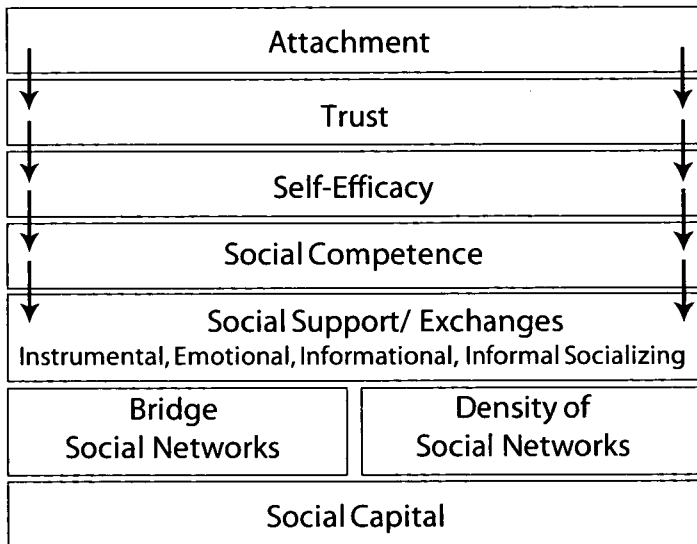
Lack of reciprocal resources is the second return deficit for the youth which creates inequalities in social capital. Social capital is gained when the reciprocal resources are used by the members of the network. If youth are not reciprocating favors or resources, then inequalities are created. The adolescent may feel incapable of reciprocating the favor or may feel fear of asking to have the favor reciprocated. In either instance, inequalities begin to accrue (Fong, Bowles, & Gintis, 2003). This has broad implications for social work.

Lin (2000) also points out that capital deficits and return deficits can work jointly or individually to create inequalities of social capital for youth. There are great benefits to the acquisition of social capital, but youth who are not within a network

or who are within a network that creates social capital are, simply stated, “out of the loop.”

But from where does social capital come? How does the youth gain or obtain social capital initially? How does it evolve? And how can social capital be generated to a larger sphere of the population, other than those who have the connections already?

Figure 1. The development of social capital



### The Development of Social Capital in Youth

In youth, the root of social capital can be traced all the way back to the primary, fundamental relationship between caregiver and child (see Figure 1). The ongoing success of the caregiver-child relationship creates attachment (Ainsworth, 1983; Bowlby, 1988; Sroufe, 1983) between the caregiver and child. This primary building block to all future relationships lies within this relationship. The ongoing interaction and attention between caregiver and child creates a strong attachment between child and caregiver. In Sroufe’s (1983) research, he was able to quantify a marked difference between those



children entering preschool who had strong attachments to their caregiver and those who did not. Those children with strong attachments to their caregivers exhibited greater ego resiliency, self-esteem, greater independence, were more emotionally responsive and empathetic to their peers and were less impulsive. These are all traits that will enhance an individual's ability to gain both social support and increased social capital in the future. Coleman discusses the social capital within a family. He states "social capital within the family gives the child access to the adult's human capital depends both on the physical presence of adults in the family and on the attention given by the adult to the child" (Coleman, 1988, p. 111). We believe that Coleman's understanding of social capital in the family can be interpreted as a rudimentary understanding of attachment theory. He does not conceive of the inter-dynamic nature of the relationship, but does understand the fundamental nature of the caregiver-child relationship and the long-term ramifications of secure attachment.

With a secure caregiver-child attachment, the child trusts the caregiver. She can then trust herself and, in time, trust the world around her (Erikson, 1959) [see Figure 1]. Erikson's theory of psychosocial development emanates outwardly from the primary trust that is gained through the psycho-social relationship of child and caregiver. In each successive stage of development, the individual is expanding her environment and sphere of interaction. The individual's ability to trust herself and her interactions with others is extremely important in the development of, and the ability to access, social support and social capital. She must feel that her actions have merit and that those individuals she is interacting with can be trusted, and the interaction she is engaged in can be trusted (Coble, Gantt, & Mallinckrodt, 1996). Fukuyama (1995, 1998) has written extensively about high trust and low trust societies. Although his use of trust pertained to a society rather than an individual, the general premise is that a society with greater trust, like an individual with a greater ability to trust, is more successful.

Through her ability to trust herself, the child believes in her own self-efficacy (Bandura, 1995, 1997). She can trust herself to gain control over her life (see Figure 1). She is capable of exerting control to help create positive outcomes in the future

and to help prevent negative circumstances from occurring. She is not invincible, but she is not helpless. She gains greater self-efficacy through mastery experiences and vicarious experiences provided by social models, such as parents, relatives, and neighbors. She also receives positive feedback for her actions (Bandura, 1995, 1997, 2002). Through self-efficacy, she can prepare for her future and trusts her ability to impact it. An individual sense of purpose and a desire for future attainment is fundamental to eliciting social support. The desire to prepare for the future makes social capital pertinent. If one has no expectation or interest in improving future outcomes, then accruing social capital is meaningless. Another tenet of Coleman's family social capital is that the mother's expectations for the child's future educational attainment create social capital for the child. This seems to be close to Bandura's (1995) development of self-efficacy through social persuasion. Individuals close to the youth can strengthen her resolve to continue to persevere through verbal persuasion, even if the youth is facing adversity.

Through her expectancies of future events and ongoing supportive attached relationships, her self-confidence grows and she gains social competence (Von Aken, 1994). She begins to understand how to interact socially and is confident of her interactions (see Figure 1). Social competency is necessary to develop and maintain social relationships and to perceive support to be available (Rohrle & Sommers, 1994). If the individual is not socially competent, the individual may not be aware of the resources of social support and social capital available to her. Value introjections are defined as "value imperatives learned during the process of socialization" (Portes & Sensenbrenner, 1993, p. 1323). It is akin to what we call in social work the process of acquiring social competence.

Through her social competency she is able to perceive, elicit, and receive social support (see Figure 1). Social support can be support in the form of instrumental goods and services, emotional support, informational knowledge-based support or informal socializing (Boger & Smith, in press; Crockenburg, 1988; Whittaker & Garbarino, 1983). In social capital literature, these types of support are called *exchanges* (Robison, 1997). The supportive relationship is bi-directional, with the supporter

and the supportee both being enriched by the interaction.

It is here that the direct connection between social support and social capital occurs. In many instances, social capital is an outcome of social support. Sometimes the outcome of social support is greater social support, but in many instances, social capital can be a direct outcome of social support (see Figure 1). Connections that are made through the supportive relationship can create social capital. Opportunities, information, access, sharing, formation of organizations, validations, expressions of caring, economic goods and services can all be outcomes of social support that are considered exchanges between the supporter and supportee. Additionally, the reduction of perceived fear or apprehension can happen through social support (Ferguson & Mindel, 2007). The many beneficial outcomes of social support increase the social capital for the individual.

Social capital can also be increased by the involvement in a more dense or larger social network through the individual's ability to access social support (see Figure 1). Increasing the density of a social support network can either primarily increase social support for the individual or can increase both social support and social capital for the individual.

Social capital can also be an outcome of bridging social networks (Burt, 1997; Granovetter, 1978) (see Figure 1). The ability to connect two groups that previously did not have contact is a powerful form of social capital. The individual who through her social support connections, in turn makes connection to another individual outside of her initial social support network has increased her social support and often her social capital as well. She feels that she can take the risk to connect to others (Freire & Macedo, 1998), thus bridging social capital.

There is also a relationship between bridging and density. Bridging can create a larger and eventually more dense network, especially if the individual who is bridging to another social network is well integrated in her primary social support network. A dense network can also reach out to bridge other networks (Robison, 1997). The cycle seems to perpetuate itself. With increased social support, the supportive network continues to grow and with growth in the network comes more opportunity for the individual to increase her social capital.

However, when youth are faced with a very harsh,

threatening or stressful environment, resources can be inadequate and social capital is held onto individually and not shared with others, creating less social capital in the system. When youth allow themselves to share their meager resources, social capital can be created even in the most hostile or resource-poor environments. For those that are already experiencing resource-poor environments, increased social capital can help to overcome the limitations of their environment. Therefore, the knowledge of the development of individual social capital is extremely pertinent and necessary for improved adolescent functioning and the ability of youth to function at their full potential.

### Implications for Social Work

If the ultimate goal is increased social capital for all youth, then focusing on how individual social capital develops is an important issue. The developmental map shows how the individual will progress to the acquisition of social capital. At each of these junctures, policies and programs could be created to enhance the likelihood that the developing person would experience positive outcomes. For instance, social support programs designed to support the caregivers of the developing person would enrich the caregiver, and thereby enrich the developing person through strengthening their relationships (Boger & Smith, in press). This would promote the creation of secure attachment (Ainsworth, 1983) between the developing person and the caregiver. Dramatic long-term effects, including the ultimate attainment of greater social capital for all youth, can be created through the promotion of secure attachment between the developing person and the caregiver at the genesis of their relationship. Particular attention given to the successive important developmental milestones of trust, self-efficacy, social competence, and social support will also lead to the attainment of greater social capital. Similarly, a greater emphasis on the youth's human potential can be achieved by increased social competence, social support, the bridging of social networks and the density of social networks.

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# The Failures of American Poverty Measures

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*How we think about need or deprivation—how we judge its severity, its causes and effects, and the progress we have made (or not made) over time in reducing it—has much to do with how we define and then measure it. And, we measure it poorly. The insufficiencies of official data on American poverty are reasonably well known, yet they continue, nonetheless, to be the principal means by which we gauge need in the United States. After a review of such official measures, this article discusses alternative means of evaluating need in the United States, highlighting the benefits of examining poverty across the life-course, and attending to inequality and other indicators of a relative poverty; it then discusses the advantages of turning toward human rights- and human development-based frameworks for better defining and quantifying deprivation. It concludes with a brief review of the political obstacles to such policy reform.*

*Key words: deprivation, need, poverty, measures, human development, policy*

## Official Poverty

There may be no measure so universally acknowledged to be inadequate—and so resistant to change—as the official measure of American poverty. According to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, a family of three was poor in 2005 if its annual income was below \$16,090; it was

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not poor if it had income above that. For a single person, the number was \$9,570; for a family of five, \$22,610. So, by official Census Bureau measures, which use that threshold, 37 million Americans were poor in that year, 12.6 percent of the population—the equivalent of the combined populations of California, Alaska and Wyoming (U.S. Census Bureau; Glasmeier, 2006). The official rates were substantially higher among African-Americans (1 in 4 was poor that year), Hispanics (1 in 5), and children under eighteen (nearly 1 in 5). Those over age 65, by contrast, had a poverty rate of just over 10 percent. Rates vary by geography, too: fully one-third of all Detroit residents were poor, as were a quarter or more of people living in Philadelphia, Buffalo, Milwaukee, Long Beach, Atlanta, Newark, Miami, and El Paso. According to the Community Service Society of New York, in 2005 “the number of poor people in the five boroughs would form the fifth-largest city in the United States” (Levitan, 2006). At the time of the hurricane that devastated the American gulf coast in that same year, almost 40 percent of all New Orleans children lived in poverty; throughout the states of Louisiana, Mississippi, and Alabama, over 40 percent of black children lived in poor families (National Center for Children in Poverty, 2005). While these data might still have some power to shock the conscience, they nonetheless likely underestimate the problem.

The method of calculating this “poverty line” has remained largely unchanged since it was devised in the 1960s by the Social Security Administration’s Molly Orshansky. Even then she warned that her calculation was a “research tool” that would inevitably minimize poverty, and that it was “not designed to be applied directly to an individual family with a specific problem” (Katz, 1989, p. 116). That’s nonetheless how we use it now. She took the Department of Agriculture’s estimate for the cost of an emergency survival-level food budget, adjusted it for family size, and multiplied it by three, since it was then estimated that food represented one third of a family’s total expenses. That’s the poverty line. Critics of the left and right find legitimate fault with this method. The former argue that it understates the problem of poverty: its design presumed a minimal budget only practicable for short-term emergencies, yet it now forms the basis for evaluating longer-term

well-being; food now typically represents much less of a family's budget (with housing costs often 40 percent or more; in some locales transportation alone can be 20 percent of household expenditures) [Center for Neighborhood Technology, 2005]; it doesn't take into account unavoidable out-of-pocket expenditures (especially for medical care) that can make it impossible for a family to provide for basic needs even if their income is above the official threshold; and the index doesn't vary by region, so the poverty line is the same dollar amount in San Francisco as it is for rural Mississippi, despite large differences in their relative costs of living. Other critics, by contrast, argue that the measure overstates the extent of American poverty, notably because income calculations do not include the value of "in-kind" government benefits like Medicaid, housing subsidies, or food stamps.

One in a series of alternative official measures developed by the Census Bureau (from studies done by the National Academy of Sciences), adds in most in-kind benefits and the Earned Income Tax Credit and deducts expenses for health care and payroll taxes: this had the effect of raising the 1999 poverty rate by 3.2 percentage points, and similar alternatives add an average of about two percentage points to the official calculation each year from 1999-2003 (Mishel, Bernstein, & Boushey, 2003, p. 323; U.S. Census Bureau, 2005, p. 12). Given just how poorly the official thresholds capture what is required to adequately support a household, many public aid programs use cut-offs of between 125-200 percent of poverty to determine eligibility; indeed, one effort to create a typology of four hundred separate family budgets found that the median family need in the U.S. was about twice the official poverty rate (Boushey et al., 2002; Lu et al., 2003).

Yet even these alternatives fail to account for how poor poor Americans are; in 2004, while almost 13 percent were officially poor, 5.4 percent were *very poor*, with income at or below one-half the poverty line. By 2005, deep poverty had reached a 32-year high (Pugh, 2007). And, as with any absolute measure with an essentially arbitrary cut-off, official poverty lines cannot account for the fact that families just above the line may experience the same hardships as those just below, but a binary poor/not-poor definition identifies one as a social and political

problem (and captures it in the data), but excludes the other. Official data will not get us far in evaluating or understanding the lived experience of poor Americans, or of adequately gauging their numbers.

### Poverty over the Life-Course

There is another problem with poverty data, which also serves to obscure the extent of poverty in America. Official rates are “snapshots”: they seek to count how many people are poor at any one point in time. But Americans move in and out of poverty over the course of their lives—the line between working class, working poor, and poor can be very thin indeed. Many families are poor one year, not poor (at least officially so) the next, and then poor again the following year. One harsh winter, fire or natural disaster, epidemic or illness (cholera, smallpox and yellow fever swept through the ghettos in the past; today poor households face AIDS, diabetes, asthma, tuberculosis, or gun violence), divorce, the death or incarceration of the main breadwinner, an injury or disability, or the sudden loss of a job—these can push a family from just getting by into dire crisis (McKernan and Ratcliffe, 2002).

Thus, it would seem productive to ask how many American are *ever* poor, and perhaps to factor that into our thinking about the scale and scope of the poverty problem and the urgency with which it should be addressed. For many years now, Mark Robert Rank and Thomas A. Hirschl have sought to do just this, and their research findings strike at the heart of the claim that poverty is a state confined to a minority of Americans (Rank, 2004; Rank & Hirschl, 1999, 2001a, 2001b). They find that between the ages of twenty and seventy-five, 58.5 percent of Americans will be officially poor at least once, with income at or below 100 percent of the Orshansky poverty line. The numbers are even more striking if we take seriously the extent to which the official line understates poverty, as discussed above: some 68 percent of Americans will survive at some point on 125 percent of the official standard, and fully three-quarters of American adults will have incomes below 150 percent of the poverty line at least once. Worse, by age seventy-five, almost one-third will be *very* poor, with incomes at only

half the official poverty line. And, lest we conclude that these are isolated incidents of one-time hardship (or data distorted by the “voluntary” poverty of college students), of those adults over twenty who are poor at least once, for some 30 percent it is for five years or more. This is not some measure of a very brief episode these data magnify beyond reason. For a majority, it’s an event, and for nearly a third, a durable condition.

Still we misdiagnose the problem, for these are data about the entire population, and it is worse for particular groups of Americans. As Rank and Hirschl also show, by the time they reach age seventy-five, over 90 percent of African Americans can expect to have experienced poverty. If you are black and female, expect to be among the 98.8 percent of your peers who will be poor at least once. For people with less than a high school education, the lifetime poverty-incidence rate is over 75 percent, and we can expect one-third of all American children to live in poverty at some point. If they are black, the number is 69.5 percent (compared to 25.9 percent for white children). If they are raised by a single mother with less than a high school diploma, 99.4 percent will be poor. And while we make much (and rightly so) of the advances that Social Security has brought us, between the ages of sixty and ninety, over 40 percent of Americans will nonetheless be poor at least once.

When we move away from point-in-time analyses and examine the incidence of poverty throughout the life spans of Americans, a much larger problem emerges, for we see that Americans move in and out of poverty more frequently than official data can reveal. Hardships are part of our national experience, and poverty is not the exception, but the rule; no anomaly confined to some marginal and marginalized population, poverty in America is endemic.

### Relative Poverty and Inequality

Some will insist, however, that poverty isn’t what it used to be. For instance, according to Robert Rector and his colleagues at the Heritage Foundation, by the late 1990s, 41 percent of all households who were officially poor nonetheless owned their own homes, almost 70 percent owned a car or a truck (and 27 percent owned two or more), 60 percent had a washing

machine, 48 percent had a clothes dryer, 66 percent had air conditioning, almost all had a refrigerator, 87 percent had a telephone, and more than half had a stereo, color television, VCR, or microwave. For these reasons, and more, "we have triumphed over poverty," they claim (Rector, Johnson & Youssef, 1999).

There's much that we might find wrong with the implication and this method of argumentation, however. First, people do not compare themselves to their ancestors, but to their neighbors. To suggest that because poor families today have televisions and microwaves they are therefore less poor than their nineteenth century cousins is a nonsensical comparison. And as Timothy Smeeding (2005) notes, "lower-income Americans are no better off and often worse off than low-income persons in other nations." That is, looking not to the past, but to other nations in the present, living standards for many are better elsewhere. Second, few of these indicators shed light on the quality of life of the family under investigation—owning a car, for example, is now a necessity in most parts of America if one is to work (a lesson that poor and welfare-reliant families have tried to tell policymakers over and over again, as their ability to hold down a job is hampered by transportation expenses and car problems). Moreover, having a car is at best a double-edged sword, for with it comes a monthly payment, mandated insurance expenses and licensing fees, the cost of gasoline, and maintenance expenses. Does commuting in a car indicate a better quality of life than taking a streetcar to the factory, or walking to the mill? Similarly, homeownership should not be read as meaning too much, since it too can be as much burden as opportunity, and we should be careful about what we mean by ownership—for most Americans what we really mean is that they possess not a home but an enormous mortgage, which, if paid regularly for three decades, will result in ownership. It's an important distinction if we are going to suggest that home ownership rates should be used to suggest that poverty today is of a different kind than in the past, and a claim rendered even more problematic by the recent crises in the residential mortgage market.

Nonetheless, it seems accurate to suggest that the nature of material poverty has changed, and, even while perhaps

disagreeing, it is not hard to understand how the Heritage Foundation could elsewhere say that:

To the average man on the street, to say someone is poor implies that he is malnourished, poorly clothed, and lives in filthy, dilapidated and overcrowded housing. In reality, there is little material poverty in the U.S. in the sense generally understood by the public. (Albelda, Folbre, & CPE, 1996, p. 12)

In the 1300s, to take a most extreme contrast, up to one third of the population of Western Europe was killed by plague, while well into the 1500s and beyond most all people lived in constant fear of hunger (Geremek, 1994). We face many grave public health threats today—gun violence and exploding AIDS caseloads in low-income communities being perhaps the most dramatic—but nowhere near a third of our population will die of sudden disease. It can serve as one reminder of how far we have, in fact, progressed. More recently, in Colonial Philadelphia, perhaps 25 percent of all free men (whom one would presume to be the richest of residents) were what we might call poor or near poor. Jacob Riis reported that in late nineteenth century New York, “in a population of a million and a half, very nearly, if not quite, half a million persons were driven, or chose, to beg for food.” By 1900, fully 40 percent of all Americans were still poor, and even by 1950 the American poverty rate was likely 30 percent. Only very recently has any sustained reduction below this level occurred in official measures. By the mid-fifties, U.S. poverty had declined to 25 percent; the rate was at 17 percent in 1965, and by the early 1970s, hit 11 percent. While that rate has now climbed again, and still understates the problem, the official estimate is nonetheless some 300 percent lower than its equivalent at the beginning of the century (Trattner, 1994; Riis, 1890; Patterson, 1994; Jansson, 2001; Jencks, 1992).

One might plausibly argue that never before in human history has so much real progress been made, and made so quickly. Compared to feudal societies, early industrial economies, or even America at the beginning of the last century, we no longer have widespread incidence of abject poverty in

the U.S., as the Heritage Foundation claims. But we don't live in a feudal or early industrial era, of course, nor do we live at the turn of the century. We live here, now. While historical comparisons of official poverty rates may reveal general trends (though they may not, given the historical variation in methods used to count poor persons), such measures are, at best, of limited practical use if our goal is to evaluate the degree of want that faces Americans. And again it does not "reckon with the tendency of men to compare themselves with their contemporaries rather than their ancestors," in the words of historian Robert Bremner (1956, p. 13).

Moreover, living standards may be subject to what Richard Layard (2005) calls the "hedonic treadmill." As he puts it, it's "like alcohol or drugs. Once you have a certain experience, you need to keep on having more of it if you want to sustain your happiness." People adapt and adjust to their surroundings and to their living standards, and we know that people feel a loss more acutely than an equivalent gain (Kahneman & Tversky, 1979). As Amartya Sen observes, "in a generally opulent society, more income is needed to buy enough commodities to achieve the *same social functioning*" (Sen, 1999, p. 89).

This is why many seek definitions of poverty that move beyond mere brute calculations of money income. One relative measure, and the one often used in international comparisons of poverty, sets the line at half the median income. By this way of counting, poverty in the U.S. was 17 percent in 2000 (almost 6 percentage points higher than the official measure, or some 16 million more people who would be counted as poor) [Luxembourg Income Study, 2000]. For much of its life, the Orshansky measure actually equaled about one-half the median income; but it is about one-third now, and if current trends continue it will soon be one-fourth median income—yet another indication that our official measure does not fully capture the extent of poverty in the U.S. (Glennerster, 2002).

Any relative measure requires us to think differently about need, and to understand human deprivation within a social context. Such efforts have a long pedigree. For example, the 1986 National Conference of Catholic Bishops' report *Economic Justice for All* defined poverty not in terms of absolute money

income but as the “denial of full participation in the economic, social and political life of society and an inability to influence decisions that affect one’s life” (in Katz, 1989, p. 180). Economist John Kenneth Galbraith (1958, p. 323) wrote similarly:

People are poverty-stricken when their income, even if adequate for survival, falls markedly behind that of the community. Then they cannot have what the larger community regards as the minimum necessary for decency, and they cannot wholly escape, therefore, the judgment of the larger community that they are indecent. They are degraded for, in the literal sense, they live outside the grades or categories which the community regards as acceptable.

Dwight MacDonald (1963), in a *New Yorker* review of Galbraith’s *The Affluent Society* and Michael Harrington’s seminal *The Other America*, said it more succinctly: “Not to be able to afford a movie or a glass of beer is a kind of starvation—if everybody else can.” Even Adam Smith (1776) concedes the utility of such an approach: “Every man is rich or poor according to the degree to which he can afford to enjoy the necessities, conveniences, and amusements of human life.” He elaborates later in *Wealth of Nations*:

By necessities I understand, not only the commodities which are indispensably necessary for the support of life, but whatever the custom of the country renders it indecent for creditable people, even of the lowest order to be without. A linen shirt is, strictly speaking, not a necessary of life. The Greeks and Romans lived, I suppose, very comfortably, though they had no linen. But in the present times, through the greater part of Europe, a creditable day-labourer would be ashamed to appear in public without a linen shirt, the want of which would be supposed to denote that disgraceful degree of poverty, which, it is presumed, no body can well fall into without extreme bad conduct. (quoted in Sen, 1999, p. 73)

Smith won’t go as far as MacDonald, and explicitly excluded beer, ale, and wine from the list, since “Nature does



not render them necessary for the support of life, and custom nowhere renders it indecent to live without them," but he did have a notion of poverty that would make him something of a wild-eyed radical today, given the value he placed upon "the ability to appear in public without shame."

Such ideas of a relative poverty—a poverty defined by one's relation to others and one's freedom to act as others do—are not widely accepted in the United States today. That is to say, we don't apply middle-class standards of living to poor people on relief, and don't expect our relief programs to attempt the kind of egalitarianism of status or social functioning suggested in the poverty definitions just highlighted, even Adam Smith's. Quite the opposite—most Americans relief programs are designed and implemented to provide minimal benefits to as few as possible, thereby abiding by English Poor Law standards of "less-eligibility" (Piven and Cloward, 1987; Somers and Block, 2005).

Yet poor Americans nonetheless aspire to more than mere subsistence, and in a culture in which advertising businesses earn some \$63 billion in annual revenue, it is perhaps not rational to expect those messages to inspire non-poor households to purchase goods they don't strictly need and simultaneously expect poor people to resist those same enticements (U.S. Census Bureau, 2004). One may well enter dangerous territory by presuming to know what constitutes "necessities" for a poor black woman in New York if you are a rich white man in Washington, D.C., and vice versa, for that matter. Poverty can't be assigned an absolute measure, for what we think of as poverty not only varies over time, it is relative among people at any point in time. As has been said of power, perhaps poverty is a relationship, not a thing unto itself.

Thus, if poverty is best thought of as a relative measure, it is inevitable that if some have great wealth while many have little or none, those with little will perceive themselves to be more poor than they would if everyone were in the same boat: in this way, inequality exacerbates poverty. And income inequality is higher in the United States than in any other advanced nation, and has been increasing for the past forty years, after a brief period in the mid-twentieth century when it was in decline (Smeeding, 2005). While official poverty has declined

over the past forty years (from 17.3 percent in 1965 to 12.6 percent in 2005), inequality is worse, of late at levels not seen since the Gilded Age or on the eve of the Great Depression. From 1947 to 1973, incomes of all Americans rose, with those of the poorest rising the most, but since 1973 income gains have been concentrated among the top wage-earners, with incomes stagnant or declining for the rest (Smeeding, 2005). This has not been lost on the public—a late 2004 poll by the Maxwell School at Syracuse University (2005) found that more than two-thirds of those surveyed agreed that “we are becoming a society of the haves and have-nots” and half thought that government should do more to reduce inequality. Less than one-third thought that “everyone in American society has an opportunity to succeed.”

The causes of growing inequality are likely complex and varied—some combination of the declining value of the minimum wage, falling rates of unionization, regressive changes to tax policy, the declining real value of welfare and other public benefit programs, the effects of international trade and immigration, and changes in the labor market wrought by deindustrialization (Lenz, 2003; Page & Simmons, 2000). The effects of inequality are pernicious: as British sociologist T. H. Marshall asked, “how can equality of citizenship coexist with capitalism, a system based on social class inequality?” (in Quadagno, 1987). One recent study of 129 countries found that inequality even increases corruption (the use of public power used for private gain). It both legitimizes it and makes it easier to achieve; and that corruption, in turn, exacerbates inequality. This dynamic is especially true in democratic societies—and makes clear that without economic equality, political equality is in jeopardy (Yoo & Khagram, 2005). Similarly, as economists Samuel Bowles and Herbert Gintis write:

Economic inequality—particularly when overlaid with racial, ethnic, language, and other differences—increases social distance, which in turn undermines the motivational basis for reaching out to those in need. Indeed, surveys consistently reveal that the support for those in need is stronger in societies whose before-tax and -transfer incomes are more equal. (Bowles & Gintis 1988/1999; see also Uslander & Brown, 2003)

The American Political Science Association convened a Task Force on Inequality and American Democracy in the fall of 2002. Their report, published in December of 2004, was generally a measured, cautious affair, yet they concluded:

We find disturbing inequalities in the political voice expressed through elections and other avenues of participation. We find that our governing institutions are much more responsive to the privileged than to other Americans. And we find that the policies fashioned by our government today may be doing less than celebrated programs of the past to promote equal opportunity and participation. Indeed, trends in all three areas—citizen voice, government decision making, and public policy—may together be amplifying the influence of the few and promoting government unresponsiveness to the values and needs of the many. (APSA, 2004)

In short, inequality matters, and may itself exacerbate conditions that limit policy changes that could ameliorate poverty. Attending to both, poverty and inequality can be justified not merely on humanitarian or moral grounds, but as a necessary means toward maintaining a democratic polity. Just as by focusing on point-in-time analyses we have underestimated the extent of American poverty, by failing to pay attention to the causes and consequences of inequality or of relative poverty measures, we have understated the dangers posed to the health of the republic itself. Poverty and inequality are matters of concern for a majority, not a minority, of Americans, something else that is obscured by our reliance upon official poverty measures.

### Poverty, Freedom, and Independence

Traditional poverty measures are blunt instruments, generalized efforts to define and quantify the abstraction that we call poverty. To take seriously, by contrast, a “bottom-up” approach to poverty analysis (Schram, 1995; Pimpare, 2007, 2008), that is, to shift analysis away from mere poverty policy to an examination of the varied, lived experience of those who are poor and otherwise marginalized, we might attend

to economist Amartya Sen's (2000) re-definition of poverty as lack of freedom, or capability deprivation. Freedom here is the "capacity of people to live the kinds of lives they value—and have reason to value." To shift our thinking about what constitutes poverty in this manner would focus our attention upon how well Americans have managed to survive and thrive, and how that has differed for different groups, in different places, at various times throughout our history. For Sen:

Development requires the removal of major sources of unfreedom: poverty as well as tyranny, poor economic opportunities as well as systematic social deprivation, neglect of public facilities as well as intolerance or overactivity of repressive states. (p. 3)

Thus, the United Nation's Millennium Development goals include reducing poverty and hunger, as we might expect, but also encompass 48 distinct criteria focused upon such things as child and maternal health, combating disease (especially HIV/AIDS), environmental sustainability, improving education (especially for women), and forging ties between rich and poor nations, all within a larger commitment to expanding civil and political liberty (U.N. Millennium Development Goals, 2008). Poverty matters, but is insufficient alone if we truly seek to improve people's freedom in the way Sen understands it. One way in which the World Bank has thought of this is through the ostensibly simple move from "ill-being" to "well-being," or from what they identify as powerlessness, bad social relations, insecurity, material poverty, and physical weakness to freedom of choice and action, good social relations, security, having resources enough for a good life, and physical well-being (Narayan et al., 1999, Figure 1). This reveals one means by which relative poverty measures seek to expand the evaluation of an individual's well-being to much broader effect, acknowledging that poverty must be judged by how one person's or family's circumstances relates to the well-being of others, and by how well any person or family fares according to their reasonable aspirations.

Similarly, the U.S. Agency for International Development and the Population Reference Bureau have evaluated the well-

being of women throughout the world not only in terms of wealth or income, but along such dimensions as women's lifetime birth rates; their access to and use of contraception; the share of all births attended by trained medical personnel; maternal deaths per 100,000 live births; AIDS/HIV, literacy, and school enrollment rates; the percentage of women in the labor force; their percentage in national legislatures; and more (BRIDGE, 2008). These, too, give us a richer sense of capabilities, of freedom, than mere poverty data can. Or, looking just at the United States, Heather Boushey and her colleagues (2002) broaden the traditional poverty measure by evaluating instances of *critical* hardships (missing meals, eviction, disconnected utilities, or not receiving essential medical care) and *serious* hardships (lack of child care, worries about access to food and stable shelter, missing utility payments, disconnected phone).

The Annie E. Casey Foundation (2008) has tracked children's well-being since 1990 for all 50 American states along 75 measures, and created an index comprised of 10 key indicators: infant mortality, low birth rate, child death rate, teen death rate, teen birth rate, high school drop-out rate, parents' employment, number in two-parent households, number not in school, number employed or in the military, and the child poverty rate. Similar national-level efforts have been undertaken by the Federal Interagency Forum on Child and Family Statistics (since 1997) and the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (since 1996), among others, all in the belief that aggregate measures of poverty, whether absolute or relative, convey too little information (Lippman, 2005). Whether these more complicated approaches enable us make sense of the world is another matter. The Federal Interagency Forum's 2005 report, for example, showed that since its previous report, the child population was up, births to unmarried women were up, child poverty was up, food security was down, incidences of overweight were up, immunizations were up, low birth weight and infant mortality were both up, but child mortality was down, as were births to adolescents, and drug use was down, while the number of young people who were victims or perpetrators of violence were both up (Child Stats, 2008). But, of course, the goal is to create richer measures of well-being,

not simpler ones.

American organizations are also turning to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights to make evaluations about well-being in the United States. The National Economic and Social Rights Initiative goes so far as to identify an American "Human Rights Crisis":

Civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights have all been attacked and undermined in the courts, legislatures, workplaces and the streets. Economic and social rights in particular are virtually unrecognized in the U.S. The United States faces: the highest rate of child poverty among industrialized nations, over 45 million people without health insurance, over 36 million people suffering food insecurity, a shortfall of 5 million affordable housing units and 14% of households with critical housing needs, 20% of the population being functionally illiterate, the longest working hours in the industrialized world, and working families that cannot afford basic needs such as housing and health care. (National Economic & Social Rights Initiative, ¶4)

It's not traditionally the way in which we think about poverty (FDR's failed Economic Bill of Rights notwithstanding), but this broader look at citizens' well-being may be a more useful way to judge the effectiveness of the welfare state. Other organizations throughout the United States have adopted international human rights claims in order to try to change policy, whether it's advocating for increased funding for and easier access to food stamps by citing Article 25 of the Universal Declaration (*everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and of his family, including food, clothing, housing and medical care*), or by seeking reform of domestic violence and child custody laws in the language of both the Universal Declaration (*no one shall be subject to torture or cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment*) or the U.N. Convention on the Rights of the Child (which requires that governments *protect the child from all forms of physical or mental violence, injury or abuse, neglect or negligent treatment*). Others use similar frameworks to focus on the rights of immigrants and indigenous peoples, gender and race-based

discrimination, environmental justice issues, or the rights of workers or prisoners (Massoud, 2006; Neubeck, 2006; New York City Welfare Reform and Human Rights Documentation Project, 2000; Wellesley Centers for Women, 2002; Ford Foundation, 2004; Williams, 2006, Chs. 1-3).

Such multi-faceted efforts to evaluate the needs and rights of people might help us better make sense of poverty and highlight the virtues of moving away from our narrow income- and wealth-based measures toward something like Sen's conception of poverty as the lack of freedom. In comparative welfare state analyses, a similar idea of *independence*, as measured by the extent to which it permits citizens to survive apart from the labor market ("decommodification") or their ability to establish autonomous households ("defamilialization"), has been a useful heuristic (Esping-Andersen, 1990; O'Connor, Orloff, & Shaver, 1999). But decommodification fails to account for the fact that poor people historically have not sought to be independent of the labor market; and defamilialization elevates autonomy to the status of virtue, and leaves out those who choose dependence, who do not wish to be entirely self-sufficient, and who expect to live as part of a family or as a community. Sen's standard of freedom might thus be a better measure than Esping-Andersen's now standard focus on dependence/independence.

Whatever the relative merits of redefining poverty along any of the lines described above, or according to other approaches, there are profound impediments to change. A shift to any new poverty measure, even those that have been sanctioned by the Census Bureau, like the NAS-based alternatives, would have implications for some 82 federal programs (Blank, 2008). And any new measure that overcame the failure of current tools to account for geographic variation across states would have to contend with bitter legislative battles as those whose constituents would stand to lose fought to maintain the status quo. The possibility for positive change is further limited by the fact that, unlike most other formal, national statistics, control of the poverty line rests in the Executive Branch, within the Office of Management and Budget. Given that virtually any change in the official measure would increase poverty in an instant, and have massive implications on all programs that used it to

calculate eligibility for and the generosity of government aid programs, it would be the rare President indeed who would be willing to adjust the measure (Blank 2008; Glennerster, 2002). Indeed, the political pressure is likely to push in the opposite direction, and in 2006 the Bush Administration's Census Bureau appeared to have abandoned the NAS measures, publishing only an alternative that better calculated income, but took no realistic account of expenses, having the effect of reducing the poverty rate without any of the complicated and expensive measures necessary to reduce poverty itself.

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# Structuration Theory and Critical Consciousness: Potential Applications for Social Work Practice

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*Anthony Giddens' structuration theory provides concepts that can be used to think differently about oppression and consciousness raising. Structuration sees society as being recursively created through its members' social practices, and oppression as being but one of these social practices. Consciousness raising, then, is recognizing that a given social practice is oppressive, and then deliberately working to change the practice. This is done by altering one's social performance and disrupting the recursive process that maintains the oppressive practice. Implications follow for empowerment-oriented social work practice and narrowing the gap between clinical and community social work practice.*

*Key words: Structuration theory, empowerment practice, consciousness raising, critical consciousness, Giddens*

## Introduction

### *The agency/structure debate*

In the field of sociology, theorists have traditionally focused either on issues related to social structure or issues related to human agency, leading to much disagreement about the most fruitful path for explaining society. Those theorizing agency, Garfinkle (1967) and Weber (1925/1962) most prominently, have typically been concerned with issues surrounding the capacity

to act, and the way people make meaning in their life-world. In this tradition, social structures are believed to create context for and set limits upon the meaning people create in the world (Giddens, 1987; Ritzer, 1992). Structural theorists, on the other hand, are concerned with how social structures impact human consciousness and behavior (Durkheim, 1893/1947; Marx, 1964). Their primary argument has been that human actors are always responding to or resisting social systems and institutions, and their focus of study is how social life and awareness are impacted by these institutions (Giddens, 1987; Kondrat, 2002; Ritzer, 1992). This difference parallels, or perhaps forms the foundation for, a similar divergence in social work theory and practice.

### *The micro/macro division*

A long standing issue in social work has been the divide between micro and macro practice perspectives. Micro practice can be understood as "activities that are designed to help solve the problems of individuals, families, and small groups" (National Association of Social Workers, 2003, p. 272), while macro practice is commonly thought of as "practice aimed at bringing about improvements and changes in the general society" (National Association of Social Workers, 2003, p. 257). The differences between these two perspectives springs in great part from varying positions about social work's primary mission and the types of practice activities in which social workers should engage. While sociology's theoretical work has advanced within its distinct yet related avenues of inquiry, social work may be better served by conceptualizing interventions in ways that more explicitly incorporate both micro and macro concerns. After all, social work is practical as well as theoretical, and we have work to do with our clients. Generalist social work practice models' emphases on multi-level intervention across fields of practice have attempted to address the separation of clinical and community work. Another promising development in overcoming this bifurcation has been the emergence of empowerment as a widely recognized practice modality.

### *Empowerment*

Empowerment practice with an emphasis on consciousness-raising has contributed greatly toward bringing these perspectives together. Consciousness-raising has long been an important activity for social workers engaged in social justice and community organizing with disenfranchised populations. It was first introduced to mainstream social work practice by social workers who practiced with marginalized groups (Bricker-Jenkins & Hooyman, 1986; Gutierrez, 1990; Solomon, 1976), and who advocated for empowerment as an orientation to practice that should be used in both micro and macro settings. Most empowerment theorists, however, retain some concept of an Other: society, the patriarchy, capitalism, etc., which is external to the client and responsible for their oppression. Although empowerment perspectives have greatly reduced the gap between micro/macro and agency/structure, they have not overcome it.

### *Structuration*

Anthony Giddens (1984) developed structuration theory as a way to bridge the agency/structure division in sociological theory, and his work holds promise for social workers seeking to devise practice methods and philosophies that are holistic and consider all dimensions of a person. With its conceptualization of society as a phenomenon that is recursively created and recreated through the social practices of its members, structuration theory suggests that there may be alternative understandings of consciousness-raising that can positively impact empowerment practice.

## Discussion

### *Consciousness-raising*

Paulo Freire (1970) was one of the first to identify and discuss critical consciousness through his popular education work with Brazilian peasants. The peasants were struggling within a politically, economically, and socially oppressive system, and over generations had become resigned to their circumstances. Freire held "culture circles" in which peasants met to discuss their lives, learn from one another, and develop

a political analysis of their situation. He called this process consciousness raising, the ability to challenge the prevailing hegemony, critically perceive the root causes of one's oppression, and to act in one's self interest to confront the oppression. The process is the transformation from an acted-upon Object to an acting Subject who can "...perceive the causes of reality" (p. 131).

Jane Mansbridge (2001), a social movement theorist, uses the term "oppositional consciousness" to discuss the development of liberation movements within subordinated groups. She defines it as "...an empowering mental state that prepares members of an oppressed group to act to undermine, reform, or overthrow a system of human domination" (p. 4). In order for a person to begin developing oppositional consciousness, he must (1) identify with an unjustly subordinated group, (2) recognize the injustice of the mechanisms oppressing the group, (3) oppose the injustice, and 4) see that others within the subordinated group also wish to oppose the injustice. In Mansbridge's conceptualization, a person with fully developed oppositional consciousness is able to identify a specific oppressor who benefits from the oppression, and understand that the oppressor is part of a system of domination that pursues its own interests to the detriment of the oppressed.

In social work, Piven & Cloward's (1964) classic *Poor People's Movements* explored the development, achievements, and duration of a number of social liberation movements. In discussing what is required for a movement of poor people to begin, they conclude that a "transformation of consciousness" (p. 3) must occur within each individual who is contemplating participation. First, the system that oppresses her must lose legitimacy in her eyes. After this has happened, she can shift from a fatalistic belief about the situation, begin to assert her rights, and develop the self-efficacy required for successful movement participation. When enough people experience this transformed consciousness, a social movement to challenge the prevailing powers can be born.

#### *Empowerment perspectives*

Empowerment theorists, including Solomon (1976), Lee, (2001), and Gutierrez (1990), have brought consciousness-

raising from community organizing, social action, and social movement theory into the mainstream of social work, developing practice approaches to facilitate critical consciousness without being part of a social liberation movement.

Solomon (1976) was the first in social work to explicate empowerment, and although she did not address consciousness-raising in depth, her theoretical work provided the foundation for the more definitive empowerment practice models that would follow. She described empowerment as "...a process whereby the social worker engages in a set of activities with the client or client system that aim to reduce the powerlessness that has been created by negative valuations based on membership in a stigmatized group" (p. 29). The goal of these activities is locating and addressing direct and indirect power blocks that inhibit opportunity and skill development among powerless groups.

Lee (2001) utilizes Solomon's concept of power blocks, but her discussion of empowerment is more explicitly political. Drawing heavily from Freire and a variety of liberation movements, she develops a method of empowerment practice that sees the social worker's role as facilitating critical consciousness, praxis, and changing "oppressive, unjust structures" (p. 47). Oppression manifests both internally and externally, and has its origin in the social system that denies opportunity and resources. Central to Lee's perspective is "multi-focal vision" (p. 94) which the social worker utilizes to gain the fullest possible understanding of clients' lives and past experiences, especially those of clients experiencing multiple oppressions.

Building upon Gutierrez's (1990) earlier writing on empowerment and the work of Lee (2001), Solomon (1976) and others, Parsons, Gutierrez, and Cox (1998) offer one of the most thoroughly developed models of empowerment practice. They envision intervention occurring across four dimensions, with tasks particular to each. As the client and social worker move through the individual, group, local environment, and sociopolitical dimensions, the client builds relationships, participates in group activities that reduce isolation and self-blame, learns skills that will help him participate in political work, and begins the consciousness-raising process. He also learns how to influence institutions, locate resources in his local commu-



nity, and engage in political action to press for social change.

Parsons, Gutierrez, and Cox developed this approach based on four important themes they identified in the empowerment practice literature: (1) Developing positive attitudes, values, and beliefs about self-efficacy and power; (2) Validating personal experience through collective experience; (3) Developing the knowledge and skills necessary for both critical thinking and action; and (4) Taking action following reflection. These themes are not steps that must be approached one at a time or in a particular order, but processes that take place organically and fluidly over the course of the client's and social worker's time together.

A common element among these consciousness-raising and empowerment perspectives is that the oppressed and marginalized are seen as recipients of ill treatment by an Other who is separate and apart from them. The oppressed are dominated by the Oppressor, the System, the Patriarchy, or the larger Society, and an important step in working toward critical consciousness is claiming the right and the power to resist being oppressed by the Other. In the final analysis, these perspectives maintain the notion of separate personal and social spheres, and so do not entirely solve the problem of micro and macro division in social work. For help in addressing this dilemma, social work can look to Anthony Giddens' theory of structuration (1984), particularly his proposal that social structures are recursively created phenomena held together through social relationships.

### Structuration Theory

Few American social work scholars have used structuration theory to inform a research problem or theoretical exploration. Kondrat has used aspects of structuration theory to consider new ways of thinking about professional self-awareness (1999) and person-in-environment (2002), and Tangenberg (2005) has applied Kondrat (2002) to working with faith-based human service organizations. Stoddard (1992) explored the potential for using structuration in community practice and theory. European social work researchers including Ferguson (2001, 2003), Garrett (2003, 2004), and Roberts and Devine (2004) have

written about Giddens in greater numbers, but tend to focus on his *Third Way* political work (Giddens, 1998) which was the foundation for welfare reform in Britain and the United States.

### *Major principles*

Giddens (1984) contends that theorists of social structure have tended to provide unsatisfactory explanations of human agency, while theorists of agency have paid insufficient attention to the development and persistence of structural arrangements. After considering the limited explanatory ability of both schools he developed the theory of structuration to explain the dynamic relationship between the two, and thus gain insight into the ongoing relationship between human beings and social structures.

*Recursive processes.* Structuration examines the recursive practices that create and re-create the social world, emphasizing that society and its structures are both conditions and outcomes of the actions of human beings. Structuration is the process of configuring social relations, usually called "social practices." As human agency and social structure continuously influence and co-create each other, social practices, the points of mediation between them, are born (Cohen, 1989, Giddens, 1984). Society, therefore, is not a static entity, but a social construction created and maintained by social practices.

*Levels of consciousness.* This understanding of society raises two important questions for Giddens. First, how aware is the average person that social structures and social arrangements influence his consciousness and behavior? Second, how aware is the average person of the way his daily activities create and recreate social structures? In response to these questions, Giddens proposes that human beings have three types of consciousness, or knowledge, which order their experience and interpretation of the world around them: practical knowledge, discursive knowledge, and mutual knowledge (1987). They are nested, with mutual knowledge being comprised of practical knowledge and discursive knowledge. Practical knowledge is tacit, an inextricable component of a given community's social practices. It is "what actors know or believe about social conditions, including especially the conditions of their own

actions, but cannot express discursively" (Giddens, 1984, p. 375). Practical knowledge is accepted or assumed by the actor with little thought unless it is somehow challenged. This challenge forces the actor to bring his assumptions to a higher level of consciousness for examination, the discursive level. Discursive knowledge, then, is being aware of one's own actions and being able to describe the reason for engaging in them. It is knowledge that can be used for discussion, "what actors are able to say, or to give verbal expression to, about social conditions, especially the conditions of their own actions" (Giddens, 1984, p. 374). Mutual knowledge is the highest level in Giddens' schema. It is a "common sense" type of understanding, the knowledge of important day to day information that is held by all members of a given community. It is "the knowledge of convention that we must possess in order to make sense of what we do and what others do during the course of our social lives" (Giddens, 1987, p. 65). Mutual knowledge, this knowledge of convention, is what holds social practices together.

*The knowledgeable agent.* The concept of the knowledgeable agent is the linchpin in structuration theory. The social actor is an agent because she always has the capacity to act, and she is knowledgeable because she has a tremendous amount of social information in practical, discursive, and mutual forms. Even though most of her knowledge is practical, and therefore difficult to articulate, if pressed and given the opportunity to reflect, she is able to provide an explanation for her action or belief (Giddens, 1982). Although social location certainly determines what and how much one knows, every social actor still acts knowledgeably since she is always aware, on some level, of her actions in the recursive performance that creates society. And, most significantly, she is capable of reflecting upon her performance (by bringing it from practical consciousness to discursive consciousness) and deciding to alter the performance (Giddens, 1987). For Giddens, the true measure of a knowledgeable agent is that she "...could have acted otherwise" (1982, p. 9). That is to say, her course of action was of her own choosing, a performance based upon her social knowledge, rather than being determined by social forces (Cohen, 1989).

### An Alternative Conceptualization of

## Critical Consciousness

How might social work think about and pursue critical consciousness if society were perceived as a dynamic social process or recursively created phenomenon, rather than a static structure to be fought and overcome? According to structuration, oppression is a social relationship, a set of social practices maintained by members of society who participate in the relationship. Consciousness-raising, then, would not involve identifying an Oppressor who is separate from the oppressed and then rising up against that Oppressor to stop what is being done. Rather, it would entail an individual recognizing that a relationship is oppressive, and consciously working to change the social practices that maintain the oppressive relationship. Applying structuration's concept of a recursively created society provides tools to reconsider the dichotomy of oppressed and Other, allowing us to extend empowerment theory and think of social justice and social work practice in new ways.

### *Individual and social change*

The consciousness-raising and empowerment literatures often address actors' personal experience in oppressive situations through the concept of internalized oppression, but this may not be adequate. Internalized oppression can be described as bringing into our own consciousness (internalizing) the negative and hurtful attitudes of the Other (oppression). The Other's oppressive acts and attitudes are put upon the oppressed, who, before experiencing critical consciousness, are passive "acted-upon Objects" (Freire, 1970, p. 131). After their consciousnesses are raised, the oppressed are imbued with insight and ability that can be used to recognize the source of oppression and take action to end it.

Structuration, in contrast, argues that individuals always have agency and knowledge, and actively co-create all of their relationships, even those that are oppressive. Critical consciousness, then, is being actively aware of one's agency and the role one has in creating social practices. This is simultaneously disheartening and liberating. It can be disheartening because actors bear greater responsibility for

their present status or situation, whether they are oppressed, oppressor, or someone who has not moved beyond practical consciousness to an understanding of their place in the social system. It is liberating because each actor has greater opportunity and ability to recursively influence social processes with which she is unhappy. Possessing critical consciousness and believing themselves to be agents of change gives actors the ability to influence their own lives and the very structure of society.

### Implications for Empowerment Practice

Structuration theory provides a way for empowerment theory and practice to move beyond the concept of an Other who oppresses from outside the sphere of the oppressed, a dichotomy that has been theoretically problematic. This dichotomy can be replaced with an expanded understanding of human agency in which individuals are knowledgeable, powerful, and able to change social structures through their action. Such an understanding encourages an integrated form of social work practice that addresses the structural and political realities of clients' lives as well as their beliefs about themselves. Two implications for practice follow the incorporation of this idea.

#### *First: The social practice should be the focus of intervention*

If social institutions have no existence apart from the human actions that constitute and re-constitute them, society is not an oppressive entity that must be overcome, but a social construction that can be shaped through our actions. Given this, an important practice implication for social workers employing an empowerment framework may be to shift the focus of intervention from the structure/situation or the individual to the relationship between them. The goal would be for individuals to bring existing social practices to higher levels of consciousness for examination, and then alter performance within the social practice to create a new relationship pattern.

As an example, let us consider the experience of a Puerto Rican community struggling to resist the effects of gentrification. To meet the demand for upscale housing in

their city's downtown, real estate development companies purchased residential buildings that were vacated as older residents died and young people moved away. Over time, the developers transformed these residential properties into lofts and single family homes that local residents were unable to afford, and young professionals who were not Puerto Rican began to move in. Restaurants and businesses opened to cater to the tastes of new residents rather the people who had lived in the area for many years.

When this process began, a handful of residents had attempted to outbid the development companies when properties were available for sale, and held protests outside the companies' offices on several occasions. However, the residents had neither the finances nor the political power to keep ownership within the community and stop the block by block gentrification. Resigned to their relative powerlessness and unhappy with the changing character of the neighborhood, Puerto Ricans continued to move away in high numbers. These vacated properties were also purchased, remodeled, and sold by developers, continuing the cycle.

A turning point occurred when a group of local leaders convened a series of community meetings to discuss the neighborhood's situation. People attending the meetings realized that they had been reactive to the developers' actions and paralyzed by the belief that they could not stop what was happening. Through their discussion, they became convinced that gentrification could be halted if they were proactive rather than reactive in their approach, changed the way they were responding, and drew upon how important their neighborhood and culture were to them.

A plan of action emerged that included strengthening individual residents' identity and pride as Puerto Rican Americans, re-building the sense of community that had been lost, developing ways for the neighborhood to retain its residential and business properties, and encouraging the neighborhood to support locally owned businesses. A Puerto Rican Community Center was created that sponsored traditional celebrations and block parties, taught culture and history classes in local schools, developed an elder day program, and offered affordable family counseling to residents. A Puerto Rican

Business Council was established to nurture existing local businesses, assist others in starting new businesses, and provide job training for residents who wanted to work in a local business but lacked the needed skills. To address the loss of housing stock, the Community Center and Business Council together created a program to develop affordable rental housing for seniors and a program to purchase and rehabilitate properties to be sold to local residents.

After a time, the Community Center and Business Council approached two of the larger real estate developers the community had protested against. They requested technical assistance with an aspect of the rehabilitation program, and asked if the companies would be interested in discussing the development of mixed-income housing in the neighborhood. To their surprise, the companies agreed to both requests. These firms and the Puerto Rican community have worked on collaborative projects for the last several years, with each developing a better understanding of the other's motivations and goals. They have not always agreed or done what the others have wanted, but the pace of gentrification has slowed noticeably.

The community's process illustrates moving from an understanding of oppression based on identifying and challenging an oppressor to one that addresses social practices, as advocated by structuration theory. Initially, residents attempted to compel the real estate developers to stop purchasing property by publicly protesting, but their efforts were ineffective. They were not organized, were small in numbers, and significantly, did not evaluate their own beliefs and behavior that betrayed a lack of confidence and sustained interest. The social practice that they had recursively created with the developers was oppressive and further solidified with each interaction in which they reacted in a reliable fashion. However, when they began to examine this relationship and discuss it among themselves, their understanding of their own beliefs and behavior moved from a practical level, at which they were unaware of their role in the social practice, to the discursive and mutual levels. At these levels, they were able to share their beliefs about themselves, the community, and the ongoing relationship with the real estate companies. This led to a more complex view of their role within the social practice, and the realization that they, as

individuals and as a community, could select new ways of interacting, thus changing the relationship. Because they persistently and deliberately changed their social performance, the real estate companies had no choice but to change their performance as well, and a new social practice was developed.

*Second: Individuals must act to change an oppressive social practice*

A second practice implication of applying structuration theory to critical consciousness and empowerment practice is that individuals (or groups of individuals) in an oppressive social relationship must act if they want the relationship to be altered. Giddens (1984) argues that before social practices can be transformed, they must be dispassionately examined so that all parties' performances may be more fully understood. Once a thorough assessment is done, it will be possible to specify which aspects of the relationship must be different to reach the desired end. Although oppressor and oppressed jointly maintain the oppressive social practice, in all likelihood, significant change in the relationship will only be initiated when the oppressed alter their attitudes and social performances. This must not be construed to mean that the oppression they experience is their fault. It is simply acknowledging that the more powerful agent in the relationship is benefiting in some way from the current social practice, and has little incentive to pursue change that might decrease their power or introduce discomfort. If the less powerful, oppressed actor wishes for the situation to be different, they will need to begin the process by altering their performance in such a way that the more powerful will need to modify their performance as well.

For example, members of the Puerto Rican community recognized that they needed to take action to stop their neighborhood's gentrification. The real estate companies were making a profit and had few connections with the neighborhood or its residents, so they had no motivation to change the way they were doing business. After the community began its internal change process, it developed the ability to initiate change in its social relationship with the companies. Responding to the community's new pattern of interaction, the companies re-evaluated their situation and decided that it was in their interest to work collaboratively on some projects rather than



fight. Although the new relationship is still undergoing change, community members are happy to have a measure of control in their neighborhood's direction.

At this point, it is important to acknowledge that many social work clients will have difficulty initiating this process and will benefit from support and guidance as they begin. The models of consciousness-raising and empowerment practice described earlier have emphasized the importance of group work in providing support and facilitating critical consciousness, and applying structuration theory does not change this emphasis. Structuration does, however, suggest that the group's focus should be identifying oppressive social relationships and devising ways to change them, rather than identifying the outside oppressor and developing ways of overcoming that oppressor. An ideal group environment would ease the stigma and shame that often accompany oppression, serve as a forum for exploring actors' social performances, and provide encouragement and support as group members pursue more equitable relationships. Advocacy organizations may be able to initiate change in oppressive social practices for the most vulnerable client groups who are less able to engage in this work on their own.

## Limitations

### *Blaming possibility*

A primary concern when applying structuration theory to social work and critical consciousness is that if taken to its logical conclusion, the theory can be used to blame people for the difficult circumstances in which they find themselves. If every person is a knowledgeable agent who "could have done otherwise," how is society to respond to people who are poor, homeless, unemployed or underemployed? Welfare policies in Britain and the United States were transformed through the Third Way, Giddens' most fully developed application of structuration theory (1994a, 1994b, 1998). The Third Way argues for a participatory democracy that would be dialogically created by society's individuals and groups. The constructed democracy would be situated between left and right political traditions and bestow both rights and responsibilities

upon its citizens. Britain and the United States have been quick to embrace personal responsibility (grounded in Giddens' description of the knowledgeable agent), but less willing to consider citizens' right to employment, housing, and a minimum standard of living. If structuration is to be a viable theoretical tool for social work, the profession will need to fully address structuration's association with Third Way politics and press for adequate emphasis upon the rights portion of the right/responsibilities equation. An additional strategy for social work may be to develop new practice models utilizing the alternative conceptualization of critical consciousness. Grounded in a commitment to social justice and informed by a deep understanding of the challenges oppressed people face, it will be important that these practice models strike a balance between agency as opportunity and agency as responsibility.

#### *Privilege and disadvantage*

A related concern is that structuration theory does not more explicitly address the problem of entrenched privilege and disadvantage. Although Giddens (1984) acknowledges that access to knowledge and opportunity varies with social location, and that social location may be affected by discrimination and power, he does not offer a solution to this problem. Garrett (2004) attributes this to Giddens' reluctance to recognize that social class is an influential, if often unacknowledged force in industrial societies. Gledhill (2001) joins Garrett in observing that the restricted range of choices available to society's less powerful members is only narrowly acknowledged by Giddens and the political elite to whom he provides consultation. Structuration's foundational concept is the knowledgeable agent who can always choose to do otherwise, but it is unclear how this notion of agency can be applied fully to agents with significantly limited choice or no choice at all. While a choice made from a limited range of options is still a choice, it is not as satisfying or powerful as a choice made from a wider range of options. For example, two 18-year-olds, one from a low income family and poorly financed schools and one from an upper middle class family and high quality schools (and perhaps private schools) may both choose which career to enter, but their range of choices and actual degree of agency

differ significantly. People whose social identities place them in a position of relative disadvantage are of special concern to the social work profession. Structuration theory needs to more fully account for the lives of these populations and the lack of agency they experience.

## Conclusion

Structuration theory has strong concepts that would seem to have potential for positively influencing social work theory and practice, and yet it has been utilized very little. It is significant that Kondrat (1999, 2002), Stoddard (1992), and Tannenbergl (2005), the only American researchers to apply structuration to social work, have not published further in this area. It could be that although the approaches they explored seemed to hold promise in the abstract, they did not easily translate to practice situations.

Another possible reason for structuration's lack of purchase in the social work literature may be that it has been overshadowed by Giddens' writing in his Third Way political philosophy. The Third Way has been viewed negatively by welfare state advocates (Garrett, 2003, 2004; Gledhill, 2001), especially following its use in radically restructuring the welfare systems of the United States and Britain. Perhaps, by association, structuration is perceived as an instrument of neo-liberal politics instead of a useful practice theory.

By considering how recursive social practices and the expanded understanding of agency can be used to change oppressive social relationships, structuration can be distanced from Third Way philosophy and politics and seen as a tool for thinking more expansively about social work. It is a framework social workers can use to develop an integrated, holistic form of practice that focuses on all dimensions of their clients' lives. Utilizing structuration theory, community-oriented social workers may be reminded of the importance of attending to the inner lives of the people involved in community organizing and development activities, and clinically-oriented social workers may be more attuned to the political and social implications of their clients' intrapsychic and interpersonal troubles. Giddens' effort to mediate the agency/structure

debate in sociology gives the social work profession a tool to overcome our micro/macro practice division.

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Welcome to the Neighborhood:  
Does Where you Live Affect the Use of  
Nutrition, Health, and Welfare Programs?

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*Despite the recent upsurge in neighborhood effects research, few studies have examined the impact of neighborhood characteristics on the use of nutrition, health, and welfare programs. To explore these issues, this study used data from Welfare, Children, and Families: A Three-City Study, a longitudinal dataset comprised of low-income neighborhoods in Boston, San Antonio, and Chicago (n=1,712). Using hierarchical linear models, the results indicated that both individual (education, employment, and marriage) and perceived neighborhood disorder factors were related to social service use.*

*Key words: neighborhoods, social services, poverty, social isolation*

Researchers have long sought to understand how living in poor inner-city neighborhoods influences the well-being of residents. In fact, research in this area has more than doubled

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since the mid-1990s (Sampson, Morenoff, & Gannon-Rowley, 2002). Spatial dimensions of urban inner-cities, characterized by chronic poverty, joblessness, welfare dependency, broken families, widespread teen parenthood, and crime, have increased in importance as poverty has become more concentrated over time (Tienda, 1991). Various theories of neighborhood influence, such as social disorganization, social capital, collective efficacy, and social isolation offer explanations as to how these neighborhood characteristics relate to a number of outcomes, including child well-being (e.g., Cantillon, 2006; Caughy, O'Campo, & Muntaner, 2003; Coulton, Korbin, & Su, 1999), crime (e.g., Bellair, 1997; Lambert, Brown, Phillips, & Ialongo, 2004), mental health (e.g., Aneshensel & Sucoff, 1996), and physical health (e.g., Hill, Ross, & Angel, 2005; Subramanian, Kubzansky, Berkman, Fay, & Kawachi, 2006; Thompson & Krause, 2000). Distinct neighborhood characteristics may also uniquely affect social service use; however, this relationship has received little examination.

Use of social services, including nutrition, health, and income maintenance programs, is key to the well-being of low-income populations. Nutrition programs, such as the Food Stamp Program (FSP) and Women, Infants, and Children (WIC), reduce the likelihood of experiencing food insecurity, the uncertainty of having the ability to acquire enough food due to scarce resources (Anderson, 1990; Cook, 2002; Tarasuk, 2001; Vozoris & Tarasuk, 2003), and improve the nutritional status of participants (Basiotis, Kramer Le Blanc, & Kennedy, 1998; Devaney & Moffitt, 1991). This is of particular importance for residents of low-income communities who consume less fruit, vegetables, and fish (Diez-Roux, Nieto, Caulfield, Tyroler, Watson, & Szklo, 1999). Individuals with health insurance are more likely to see a doctor regularly and be in better health, and are less likely to delay treatment for illness or injury than those without coverage (Albrecht, Clarke, & Miller, 1998; Kaiser Family Foundation, 2003; Seccombe & Lockwood, 2003). In addition, income-maintenance programs, such as Section 8 housing assistance and cash assistance (AFDC/TANF), increase family income, decrease poverty, and help families obtain decent and affordable housing (Turner, Popkin, & Cunningham, 1999; Rainwater & Smeeding, 2003).

Social services take-up rates vary greatly. For example, participation in TANF increases with both the size of the benefit and when information about eligibility is readily available (Currie, 2004). Further, take-up is higher for Medicaid than for the State Child Health Insurance Program (SCHIP), possibly due to the associated stigma, high transaction costs, and lack of information about program eligibility and access. As evidence of this, the poorest households are less likely than slightly better off households to live in public housing, possibly because the poorer families were less able to complete the complicated application process (Reeder, 1995). In addition, lack of knowledge about the program negatively impacted participation in the FSP (Daponte, Sanders, & Taylor, 1999). Participation rates are higher where public and private institutions are incentivized to assist people to take-up benefits for which they are eligible (Currie, 2004). Social service utilization also differs by neighborhood, although little is known about how neighborhood context is related. Still, we do know that poorer and less organized communities are generally at a disadvantage for health services, recreational facilities, and supermarkets (Ellen, Mijanovich, & Dillman, 2001; Huie, 2001; Morland, Wing, Roux, & Poole, 2002).

Using data from the *Welfare, Children, and Families: A Three-City Study* that includes extensive neighborhood-level data, the present study examined the impact of the neighborhood environment, including perceived neighborhood disorder, perceived trust and cohesion, dwelling problems, informal social control, residential tenure, and social support on the use of a wide variety of nutrition, health, and welfare programs to get a broad look at access to these services, controlling for the effects of family context.

## Literature Review

Four general processes provide an explanation of how neighborhood effects operate: (1) contagion; (2) socialization; (3) institutionalization; and (4) social comparison (Tienda, 1991). The contagion mechanism results from imitation and peer pressure conditioned by the varying susceptibility of individuals to conform. Socialization operates through the



internalization of social norms and learning the limitations of appropriate behavior. Institutionalization mechanisms produce behavior through structured and semi-structured organizations and actors, such as employers, schools, enforcement agencies, and other social institutions. Social comparison theories involve levels of relative deprivation and status organizing processes.

While all of these theories are viable, perhaps the most appropriate to the take-up of health and social services is Wilson's (1987) structural model of social isolation, akin to what Tienda (1991) termed institutionalization. In his structural model, Wilson (1987, 1991) asserts that labor market conditions, demographic changes, racial discrimination and racial segregation have converged to create an "underclass" in the inner city. One of the central tenets is the impact that deindustrialization has had on inner-city residents. Prior to deindustrialization, low-skilled workers earned a better wage and were able to support families. A racial division of labor was established by long years of discrimination and prejudice, such that much of the underclass was clustered in low-wage, low-skill industries. Deindustrialization reinforced this division. Individuals in this group were disproportionately impacted by economic shifts, such as the "shift from goods-producing to service-producing industries...and the relocation of manufacturing industries out of the central cities" (Wilson, 1987, p. 39). When these jobs became scarce, families with the wherewithal to do so moved away. These factors resulted in a concentration of poverty, increased joblessness and welfare dependency, few middle class neighbors and working role models, and less economic mobility. Further, neighbors fail to look out for each other as who belongs and who does not becomes increasingly difficult to determine (Wilson, 1987). Wilson (1987) asserted that "a person's patterns and norms of behavior tend to be shaped by those with which he or she has had the most frequent or sustained contact and interaction" (p. 61). This, combined with the available jobs in these communities, increases the chances that these individuals will choose underground illegal activity, public assistance, and/or idleness. These characteristics were maintained by the social isolation inherent in these neighborhoods. Whereas residents of more advantaged communities

have access to social networks essential to learning about or being recommended for available jobs, socially isolated inner-city residents lack such networks. As Wilson (1987) wrote, "social isolation highlights the fact that culture is a response to social structural constraints and opportunities" (p. 61), and the patterns and norms of behavior are transmitted to children and carried on by them.

The social disorganization of poor, inner-city communities leads to fewer institutional resources than are available in more affluent areas. With more disadvantage, residents are less likely to come to each other's aid, especially in times of financial need. Compounding this situation, there has been historical disinvestment in the African American community (Massey & Denton, 1993). Declining public resources led to little political power within these communities. Local institutions collapsed and the destruction of the social fabric resulted in the social ills described above. Conditions in these impoverished communities made it difficult to achieve societal norms of work, marriage, and family formation. As contact with more socially mobile and higher income individuals declined, the remaining neighborhood residents developed a deep suspicion and a lack of trust in the motives of others and institutions. Female role models who corrected children's behavior were no longer present, leading to a breakdown in feelings of community (Anderson, 1990).

Prior research has used Wilson's model as a framework to assess the effects of neighborhood characteristics on individual well-being. Fernandez and Harris (1992) used data from the Chicago-based *Urban Family Life Survey* to test key propositions of the social isolation theory. Their findings indicated that, of three groups—the working poor, the non-working poor, and the non-poor—the non-working poor (those theoretically most impacted by social isolation) were least likely to participate in community organizations. This finding supports the assertion that this group, the "underclass" in Wilson's model, tends to be isolated from local institutions that provide interclass contact. This group was also found to have the narrowest range of contacts, whereas the non-poor had the broadest range. Fernandez and Harris (1992) also found a consistent pattern of neighborhood and class effects on the nature of social relations. They

found that poor African American, female respondents in poor neighborhoods suffered independent isolating effects of class and neighborhood. Further, members of these disadvantaged individuals' social networks were less likely to be employed or possess higher education, and were more likely to receive public assistance benefits. These researchers concluded that "the fact that we found some evidence that at least certain dimensions of social isolation are structured along neighborhood lines is encouraging for those researchers pursuing the issue of neighborhood effects on other outcomes" (p. 290). Similarly, Tigges, Browne, & Green (1997) examined race, class, and neighborhood effects on social isolation, finding that poor African Americans have narrower networks and are less likely to have a college-educated network member. Supporting the social isolation theory, these researchers demonstrated that, for African Americans, living in a very poor neighborhood increases isolation and decreases access to social resources.

In a similar vein, Rankin and Quane (2000) investigated the extent to which the social isolation of poor, inner-city residents is due to poverty, other forms of disadvantage, or neighborhood environments characterized by limited contact with socially connected people and access to institutional resources. With a sample of poor and middle-class African-American mothers ( $n = 546$ ), Rankin and Quane found that the net effect of living in a high poverty neighborhood was a reduction in the numbers of college-educated and employed friends and an increase in friends on public assistance, analogous to previous findings. Interestingly, they also found that families were more likely to participate in community organizations if they resided in the poorest neighborhoods, surprising because the researchers anticipated that poorer neighborhoods would have fewer opportunities for community involvement because of the typically weaker institutional resource base and lower propensity to participate if social avoidance behaviors predominate. This finding may indicate that those in the poorest neighborhoods attempt to deal with the effects of neighborhood disadvantage by taking proactive measures to defend against disorder and deterioration.

Researchers have found evidence that social isolation is associated with a wide variety of outcomes including

employment experiences (Elliott, 1999), access to social resources (Tigges et al., 1997), educational achievement and child development (Brooks-Gunn, Duncan, Klebanov, & Sealand, 1992; Vartanian & Gleason, 1999), physical health (Collins & Williams, 1999; Thompson & Krause, 2000; Tomaka, Thompson, & Palacios, 2006), and crime and violence (Renzetti & Maier, 2002). However, even with the recent upsurge in neighborhood effects research, little has been done to examine the impact of neighborhood characteristics on the use of social services such as the FSP, public housing, health care, welfare, and participation in neighborhood organizations. Some researchers have explored the quality, quantity, and diversity of community institutions that serve youth, such as libraries, schools, child care services, recreational activities, medical facilities, and the like, although use of these community institutions was not used as an outcome (Sampson et al., 2002). Other researchers have evaluated the use of medical services as an outcome based on a neighborhood characteristic, in this case, affluence (Brooks-Gunn, McCormick, Klebanov, & McCarton, 1998).

While researchers examining social isolation have used different operationalizations of the construct, the evidence is fairly clear that residing in high poverty neighborhoods characterized by the conditions Wilson (1987) described and offering little interaction with middle-class individuals has negative impacts on a wide variety of outcomes. Though none of the existing research has explicitly addressed the neighborhood influence on health and social service use, it reasonably follows that these outcomes will also be affected. Therefore, we hypothesize that high social isolation, defined here comprehensively by low levels of trust and cohesion, high levels of neighborhood disorder, high numbers of dwelling problems, low levels of social control, and low social support, will result in greater use of services as a result of greater need and reduced social networks key to obtaining jobs or help during crises.

For the current study, we explored the nature of neighborhood characteristics in relation to the take-up of social services. These social services included public housing, the Food Stamp Program (FSP), the Women, Infant, and Children Nutrition program (WIC), Medicaid, Social Security Insurance (SSI), and Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF). Multilevel

modeling via the procedures described by Snijders and Bosker (1999) and Raudenbush, Bryk, Cheong, and Congdon (2004) was used to assess the effects of neighborhood characteristics on the take-up of social programs.

## Methods

We used data from Wave 2 (September 2000–June 2001) of the *Welfare, Children, and Families: A Three-City Study Data Archive* (Cherlin, Angel, Burton, Chase-Lansdale, Moffitt, & Wilson, 2001). The *Three-City Study* is a longitudinal study of children and their caregivers, including those who received public assistance and those who did not, residing in low-income neighborhoods in Boston, San Antonio, and Chicago (Mince, Ruiz, McKean, & Peterson, 2003; Winston, 1999). The objective of the *Three-City Study* was to explore the consequences of policy changes related to the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996 (PRWORA). The purpose of the present secondary data analysis was to assess neighborhood effects on social service program participation. Recent studies have also used this data set to assess neighborhood effects on various outcomes (Coley, Morris, & Hernandez, 2004; Hill, Ross, & Angel, 2005).

In some studies, neighborhood-level social process measures are obtained from a single respondent's report. However, there is often considerable measurement error associated with this method. One solution, implemented here, has been to survey multiple respondents, typically at least 25 individuals per neighborhood, and use the collective assessment to create neighborhood indicators (Sampson et al., 2002). In addition, many researchers have now turned to characterizing neighborhood conditions through resident perception rather than through census-based variables, such as poverty and unemployment rates. Cantillon (2006), who looked at the impact of perceived neighborhood structural characteristics, such as stability and income, on neighborhood and youth outcomes, chose to look at perception of neighborhood conditions as it is important to understand how people respond to conditions in their local environment. Further, MacIntyre, Ellaway, and Cummins (2002) asserted that characterizing neighborhoods

with census data may not adequately capture the multidimensional nature of these contexts, while Subramanian and colleagues (2006) maintain that researchers need to go beyond census-derived indicators to “understand what it is about neighborhood deprivation that produces differential patterns of risk and protection” (p. S154). As a result, we chose to use the perceived neighborhood variables provided in the *Three-Cities Study*.

Study participants were children and their female primary caregivers residing in Boston, Chicago, and San Antonio. For this analysis, only caregiver data ( $n=1,712$ ) in 330 neighborhoods were analyzed. All participants lived in households with incomes below 200 percent of the federal poverty line and resided in neighborhoods with high numbers of low-income households based on the 1990 Census, though more than half of the participants came from non-concentrated poverty neighborhoods, where concentration was defined as more than 40% poor (Winston, 1999).

A subset of data was extracted from the full data archive and downloaded to SPSS. Individual demographic predictor variables included age, race, citizenship, marital status, employment status, educational attainment, and monthly household income. A number of individual and neighborhood perception variables were also extracted and used to construct one individual-level social variable and four neighborhood scales, described below. Additional individual-level variables included having family members to help pay bills, residential tenure (number of months in the neighborhood), and desire to move from the neighborhood (indicative of satisfaction with one's neighborhood). Outcome variables related to current social service program participation were TANF, WIC, the FSP, Medicaid, SSI, emergency food (use in the past two years), and public housing assistance through Section 8. For the purpose of aggregating neighborhood responses, *Three-City Study* neighborhoods were defined as block groups based on the 1990 U.S. Census (Winston, 1999). Neighborhood perceptions were based on what respondents considered to be their neighborhood.

Three individual-level variables, “has others for emotional support,” “has others to do small favors,” and “has others for emergency loans” on a scale from “enough” to “no one to

provide support," were used to construct a mean scale score of amount of perceived social support ( $\alpha = .77$ ). Four neighborhood-level predictor variables were constructed: number of dwelling problems, informal social control, perceived trust and cohesion, and perceived neighborhood disorder. A count variable of the number of dwelling problems (Kuder-Richardson reliability coefficient = .66) was created by summing the number of affirmative answers to eight questions about one's home: "housing has peeling paint," "housing has a leaky roof," "housing has broken windows," "toilet/hot water/plumbing does not work," "housing has exposed electrical wiring," "housing has rats/mice/cockroaches," "furnace/heater does not work," and "stove/refrigerator does not work" from the Dwelling/Status section of the *Three-City Study* codebook. The items used to construct the social control scale and the perceived trust and cohesion scale came from Sampson's 10-item Collective Efficacy scale (Sampson, Raudenbush, & Earls, 1997). Informal social control ( $\alpha = .87$ ) was a mean scale score consisting of five items on a six-point scale where 1 = *very unlikely* and 6 = *already happened*: "neighbors would act if children were loitering," "neighbors would do something about graffiti," "neighbors would do something about disrespect to adults," "neighbors would do something about a fight," and "neighbors would do something if the fire station budget was cut." The four cohesion and trust items ( $\alpha = .85$ ) included: "this is a good place to raise kids," "the neighborhood is close-knit," "people around here help their neighbors," and "people in this neighborhood can be trusted." These were scored on four-point scales where 1 = *strongly disagree* and 4 = *strongly agree*. Selected from the Neighborhood/Community/Cognition section of the codebook, the 11 perceived neighborhood disorder items ( $\alpha = .90$ ) asked whether the following conditions were a problem in the neighborhood: high unemployment, teen pregnancy, abandoned houses, theft, assaults, gang activity, drug dealing, unsupervised children, unsafe streets, unavailability of police, and presence of undesirable children (adapted from the Denver Youth Study and the Chicago Youth Achievement Study; Elliot, Wilson, Huizinga, Sampson, Elliot, & Rankin, 1996). Each item was rated on a three-point scale where 1 = *no problem* and 3 = *a big problem*. Last, a

composite outcome variable was created of the total number of social services utilized of the seven possible services: TANF, WIC, FSP, Medicaid, SSI, emergency food, and Section 8.

Data were screened to assess the normality of all variables. Next, level-one and level-two data sets were created. The following variables were included in the level-one (individual-level) data set to control for background demographic factors: age, race, citizenship, marital status, employment status, educational attainment, monthly household income, total perceived social support, having a family-member to help pay bills, whether respondent would move from the neighborhood, number of months in the neighborhood, the neighborhood identifier, and the weighting variable.

To create the level-two dataset, the four variables to be used at the neighborhood level were aggregated to the neighborhood. This was done using the AGGREGATE DATA command in SPSS (SPSS, Inc., Chicago, IL), which calculated the mean for each variable for each level-two unit (neighborhood) using individual-level scores. This mean was then used to represent the neighborhood. Level-two variables included mean number of dwelling problems, mean level of informal social control, mean level of perceived trust and cohesion, and mean level of neighborhood disorder. The data sets were linked via the neighborhood identifier. The two data sets were exported to HLM6, a multilevel modeling software package, to create a new multilevel data set (Raudenbush, Bryk, & Congdon, 2000). To determine whether multi-level modeling was appropriate for the data, using HLM6, a model was run without predictors included (called an empty or unconditional model) predicting the number of social services utilized. An Intra Class Correlation coefficient (ICC) was then calculated to determine how much of the variance in the dependent variable was explained simply by the grouping/clustering within neighborhoods without the addition of any predictors. The larger the ICC the greater the similarity among individuals within neighborhoods in terms of the variable of interest, here social service use.

Next, variables at level-one and level-two were entered to ascertain their contribution to the multi-level model. The full maximum likelihood estimation method was used. This



analysis was conducted in accordance with the procedure laid out by Snijders and Bosker (1999). The cases were weighted to account for the complex sampling design of the *Three-City Study*, such that individuals from the largest city, Chicago, had less chance of being selected to participate than individuals in San Antonio, who, in turn, had less of a chance of selection than individuals in Boston (Mince et al., 2003).

## Results

The study sample was predominately Black (53.9%) and Latina (36.1%). The majority of participants did not have a high school diploma (53.9%) and about half were employed (52.7%). About two thirds (70.5%) were unmarried, and monthly family income was low (\$1,745.62, SD = \$1,300.10). The female caregivers reported having an insufficient network to provide social support. Nearly three quarters (73.8%) of respondents reported having a family member to help them pay bills, while 57.4% reported that they would be likely to move from their neighborhood if they were able. Finally, respondents had lived in their current residence for two and one half months on average (SD = 3.6).

Correlations, also presented in Table 1, were conducted to examine the associations between sample characteristics and the outcome of total social services used. Each predictor was significantly correlated with the outcome, though the highest correlation was only 0.32 for income. Age, being Latina and other race/ethnicities, education, employment, marriage, and income were negatively related to the number of services used, whereas being Black, social support, being likely to move if able, and residential tenure were positively correlated with services used.

There were 330 neighborhoods represented in this study. Table 1 gives the results for neighborhood characteristics. Respondents reported a small number of neighborhood dwelling problems, such as peeling paint or broken windows (mean = 1.4, SD = 1.6, out of a possible 8), and a moderate level of neighborhood informal social control (mean = 3.1, SD = 1.3, out of a possible 6). In terms of neighborhood characteristics, respondents reported moderate levels of disorder (mean = 1.9,

Table 1. Sample Characteristics

Characteristic	Mean (SD) or Percent	Correlation with Total Services Used
<i>Individual Characteristics (n = 1712)</i>		
Age (mean)	34.2 years (10.4)	-0.14***
Race/ethnicity: Black	53.9%	0.30***
Latina	36.1%	-0.30***
White/Other	5.5%	-0.02***
Education: Less than high school	53.9%	
High school or more	37.4%	-0.21***
Employed	52.7%	-0.27***
Marital Status: Married	29.5%	
Not married	70.5%	-0.31***
Family income (mean)	\$1,745.62 (\$1,300.10)	-0.32***
Social Support (range 1-3)	1.6 (0.6)	0.07***
Has family to help pay bills	73.8%	-0.01**
Desire to move: Unlikely	25.7%	-0.13***
50-50 chance	16.9%	-0.07***
Likely	57.4%	0.17***
Months in residence (range 0-24)	2.5 (3.6)	0.13***
<i>Neighborhood Characteristics (n = 330)</i>		
Number of dwelling problems (range 0-8)	1.4 (1.6)	0.09***
Informal social control (range 1-5)	3.1 (1.3)	-0.16***
Perceived trust and cohesion (range 1-4)	2.4 (0.8)	-0.14***
Perceived neighborhood disorder (range 1-3)	1.9 (0.6)	0.32***

\*p < .10. \*p < .05. \*\*p < .01. \*\*\*p < .001.

SD = 0.6, out of a possible 3) and trust and cohesion (mean = 2.4 SD = 0.8, out of a possible 4). Each of these neighborhood

characteristics was significantly correlated with the number of services used, with the highest correlation of 0.32 found for neighborhood disorder.

We began the HLM analysis with an empty, unconditional model to determine whether there was sufficient between-neighborhood variance to warrant the use of HLM methods. The Intra Class Correlation (ICC) for the empty model was found to be 0.21, suggesting substantial clustering within neighborhoods (Snijders & Bosker, 1999). The formula for calculating the ICC is:

$$\tau^2 / \tau^2 + \sigma^2$$

Where  $\sigma^2$  is the level-one variance component and  $\tau^2$  is the level-two variance-covariance component. The value of the ICC, above 0.10, indicated that multilevel analysis was appropriate (Snijders & Bosker, 1999). In terms of their social service utilization, individuals residing within the same neighborhood were more similar to each other than to individuals in other neighborhoods.

Table 2 presents the coefficients and standard errors for both individual level and neighborhood level predictors of social service use for each model. We first created a multi-level model with only individual-level demographic and neighborhood-level variables. This model included such individual variables as age, race/ethnicity, employment, education, and citizenship, and neighborhood variables, including number of dwelling problems and social control. All variables were grand mean centered and treated as fixed effects. The inclusion of these predictors significantly reduced the ICC compared to the unconditional/empty model, from 0.21 to 0.13. As predictors are added to the model that explain the difference in the dependent variable over and above the grouping/clustering, the ICC should decrease, as group differences decrease when explanatory variables are added to the model. Therefore, when differences in a predictor variable are controlled for there is less difference attributable to a grouping system, such as living in a particular neighborhood (Snijders & Bosker, 1999).

Further, the deviance scores, a measure of the magnitude of difference between the model and the data, provided evidence that Model 1 improved the fit of the model to the data at a statistically significant level ( $p < 0.05$ ).

Table 2. Multilevel model results predicting number of social services utilized from individual and neighborhood-level factors.

Predictors	Number of Services Utilized			
	Model I. Individual demographics		Model II. Individual social predictors	
	Coefficient	SE	Coefficient	SE
<i>Individual-level Demographic Predictors</i>				
Race				
Latina	-0.33	0.24	-0.28	0.25
Other/White	0.57*	0.23	0.33	0.25
Age	-0.02*	0.01	-0.02*	0.01
Citizen	0.46†	0.26	0.60*	0.23
Employed	-0.54***	0.12	-0.57***	0.13
Income	-0.0002*	0.0001	-0.0001†	0.0001
Education				
High school or above	-0.52**	0.16	-0.50**	0.16
Married	-0.75***	0.19	-0.83***	0.19
<i>Individual-level Social Predictors</i>				
Months in residence			0.02	0.03
Family to help pay bills			-0.16	0.18
Desire to move				
Unlikely to move			-0.25	0.19
Chances are 50-50			-0.16	0.20
Social support			0.02	0.12
<i>Neighborhood-level Predictors</i>				
Dwelling problems	-0.01	0.15	0.01	0.16
Informal social control	0.12	0.16	0.15	0.15
Perceived neighborhood disorder	1.05**	0.34	0.98**	0.33
Perceived trust and cohesion	0.08	0.21	0.03	0.22
Estimated parameters	15		20	
Deviance	4170.58		4086.00	
Comparison to empty model ( $\chi^2$ )	2062.28(12)***		2146.85(17)***	
Comparison of Model 1 to Model 2 ( $\chi^2$ )			84.58(5)***	

Note: Black, less than high school, likely to move are the reference categories.

†p < .10. \*p < .05. \*\*p < .01. \*\*\*p < .001.

Both separately and together, each of these predictor variables reduced the amount of residual error and improved the fit of the model to the data.

Individual-level social variables (social support, desire to move from the neighborhood, residential tenure, and having family members to help pay bills) were then added to the multi-level model (referred to as Model 2 below and in Table 2). The addition of these variables into the model was done to allow for the assessment of the unique effects of those variables as compared to a model with only individual demographic and neighborhood variables.

There was a significant decrease in deviance from Model 1 to Model 2 ( $\chi^2 = 84.58$ ,  $df = 5$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), indicating that Model 2 was a better fit for the data compared to the first model without individual-level social variables. We found significant predictors of social service participation at the individual and neighborhood levels. In both models, the individual demographic-level variables of age, employment, education, and marital status were found to be predictive of social service use. Citizenship status displayed a trend toward significance in Model 1 and became significant in Model 2. Other/White moved from significant to not significant from Model 1 to 2, while income went from significant to a trend. At the neighborhood level across the two models, only the neighborhood disorder scale predicted social service utilization. While the addition of the individual-level social factors into the second model significantly improved the fit of the model to the data, none of the variables were significant predictors of service use.

Assessing the full model (Model 2), for individual-level demographic predictors, older participants ( $\gamma = -0.02$ ,  $p < .05$ ), those who were employed ( $\gamma = -0.57$ ,  $p < .001$ ), those with more education ( $\gamma = -0.50$ ,  $p < .01$ ), and those who were married ( $\gamma = -0.75$ ,  $p < .001$ ) accessed fewer social services, while citizens ( $\gamma = 0.60$ ,  $p < .05$ ) accessed more services. The neighborhood disorder scale ( $\gamma = 0.98$ ,  $p < .01$ ), the only significant neighborhood-level predictor, was related to increased service use.

## Discussion

The present study examined correlates of social service use in low-income neighborhoods in three urban cities. Respondents reported fairly high social isolation,

characterized by little social support, moderate informal social control, minimal neighborhood trust and cohesion, and a relatively high level of disorder in their neighborhoods. The multivariate results suggested that both individual and neighborhood characteristics were related to the use of nutrition, health, and welfare programs, providing some support for the social isolation theory (Wilson, 1987). In terms of individual demographic characteristics, age, employment, education, and marital status were significantly related to social service participation. Older caregivers took up fewer social services, perhaps because older respondents were more likely to be working and above poverty (age ranged from 16 to 75 years). We found that those who were employed also utilized fewer services, possibly because they were more advantaged or had wider social networks through which to seek assistance. This finding was consistent with previous research suggesting that workers derived much of their social support through their co-workers (e.g. Hochschild, 1997; McGuire, 2007). We would expect that unemployed participants would have fewer such resources and, therefore greater need for social services. Respondents who were unmarried, whether cohabiting or not, accessed more services than those who were married. Married families most likely had access to a greater pool of resources than their unmarried counterparts (for a review of the benefits of marriage see Waite & Lehrer, 2003). For example, married caregivers in this sample had significantly higher household incomes than unmarried caregivers. Last, those with more education used fewer social services, again suggesting greater advantage and wider social networks.

In both models, the explanatory power of the neighborhood measures was fairly weak. Only one neighborhood measure in the full model, the neighborhood disorder scale, was a significant correlate. Residents in neighborhoods with greater perceived disorder, such as problems with gangs or teen pregnancy, accessed more services than participants who lived in neighborhoods with fewer of these characteristics. This finding corresponds to previous research suggesting that increased neighborhood disorder is associated with negative influences on health (Hill et al., 2005; Robert, 1998); mental health (Latkin & Curry, 2003); and parenting (Pinderhughes, Nix, Foster,

Jones, & the Conduct Problems Prevention Research Group, 2001) all of which may create a need for social services, though we did not look at potential indirect effects. Interestingly, the other indicators of social isolation in our models, informal social control, perceived trust and cohesion, and dwelling problems, were not related to service use, though they were significantly related to outcomes in past studies (e.g., Smith & Jarjoura, 1989). This study also did not find that residential tenure was associated with service use, similar to findings by Pinderhughes and colleagues (2001) for parenting behaviors and Smith and Jarjoura (1989) for burglary risk. However, in other studies tenure was a significant neighborhood predictor of alcohol use (Ennett, Flewelling, Lindrooth, & Norton, 1997), health (Hill et al., 2005), and participation in community organizations (Rankin & Quane, 2000).

These findings indicate that those with more resources, in the form of a marital partner, employment, education, and neighborhood quality, were less likely to use health, nutrition, and income maintenance programs, suggesting less need. Further, this must accrue to more than simply a higher income as income was controlled for in the models and all families in the *Three-Cities Study* were low-income and, therefore, eligible for many of these programs. Prior research suggests that those with the fewest resources, such as low educational attainment or lacking a spouse/partner, also lacked strong social support networks, such as friends and relatives, who may provide child care, transportation, financial assistance, or emotional support, should it be needed (Harknett, 2006). These factors may, in part, explain our findings.

This research has implications for policy, practice, and future research. First, according to these findings, both neighborhood-level and individual-level conditions were associated with social service utilization. Residents of the most blighted neighborhoods, characterized by high crime and other social problems, were accessing more health, nutrition, and welfare services. Perhaps, as considered by Latkin and Curry (2003), residents in the most blighted neighborhoods have social networks so disadvantaged that they are unable to provide social support capable of helping to reduce stressors, and, hence, residents must turn to public support. This may also explain

why social support was not a significant predictor of service use. This finding corresponds with Wilson's (1987) work, demonstrating that in these disadvantaged neighborhoods, fellow residents are not readily identifiable making it difficult for individuals to turn to neighbors in times of need.

Numerous programs exist to improve neighborhood conditions in such disadvantaged communities, such as through improving educational and skill development, increasing employment, raising wages, and providing universal health care coverage. Though it does not address issues of selection into these more challenged communities (Duncan & Raudenbush, 2001), community development initiatives may prove valuable in increasing neighborhood resources and decreasing impoverishment. One potential mechanism is the Comprehensive Community Initiative (CCI), an effort to improve the lives of individuals, families and their communities by working comprehensively through social, economic, and physical systems (Connell & Kubisch, 2001).

One such program, targeting entire neighborhoods, is the Neighborhood Jobs Initiative (NJI) developed by the Manpower Demonstration Research Corporation with the goal of increasing "employment and earnings among a large number of residents within the targeted neighborhoods so that regular employment would become a community norm" (Austin & Lemon, 2005, p. 67). Increasing employment may also decrease social disorder, found to negatively impact take-up of social services in this study. The NJI was implemented from 1998 to 2001 in five high-poverty neighborhoods in five cities, including Chicago (Project JOBS). Programs focused on three components: (1) employment services, including job development, training, and counseling; (2) financial work incentives, such as increasing use of the Earned Income Tax Credit, earnings disregards for TANF participants, child care subsidies, Medicaid, Food Stamps, and wage subsidies; and (3) community work support, such as improving the quality and quantity of social networks to facilitate information sharing. NJI focused specifically on addressing the social isolation of whole neighborhoods by targeting services to the neighborhood level, in the belief that helping enough residents to attain and retain jobs would create positive change in the neighborhood in general.



With 2,772 participants, the Chicago site achieved a high rate of voluntary program participation. Though Chicago was already a service-rich environment, with a few organizations with national reputations in the arena of workforce development, NJI provided a strategic approach for implementing new programs on a broader scale (Molina & Howard, 2003).

In addition to enhancing neighborhood quality overall, individuals should be able to access services for which they are eligible as these programs have been shown to improve well-being (e.g. Basiotis et al., 1998; Seccombe & Lockwood, 2003; Turner et al., 1999). Findings from the present study indicated that the mean number of services used was only about two, out of a possible seven. Given that all the respondents were below 200% of the federal poverty line there is evidence that individuals were not utilizing services for which they were most likely eligible. Some social services, such as the FSP and TANF, are stigmatizing, which results in lower take-up rates among those eligible (e.g. Stuber & Schlesinger, 2006). Researchers found that when aid was provided in voucher form allowing families to select their own products, stigma was reduced and take-up increased. Further, many safety net programs require complicated and intrusive application procedures or frequent recertification. Minimizing these barriers, by lengthening the periods between recertification or allowing recertification to be conducted over the phone or by mail, may improve utilization (Ratcliffe, McKernan, & Finegold, 2007; Ribar, Edelhoch, & Liu, 2005).

The primary limitation of this analysis is the operationalization of neighborhood. According to Sampson and colleagues (2002), neighborhoods are ecological units that are nested within larger communities, however, in practice, most social scientists and many neighborhood-level studies utilize geographical boundaries defined by the US Census Bureau or other administrative agencies, such as school districts or police districts. However, these definitions are often imperfect and may not be how residents themselves would describe their neighborhoods. We avoid this, in part, by using neighborhood variables based on resident perception, however, census-derived neighborhood definitions are used to aggregate the data. The findings are also limited in their generalizability

as the sample is drawn from three cities and is not a national sample. The relationship between individual and neighborhood characteristics and social service utilization may differ in a national sample.

In terms of future research, analyses should be extended by looking at binary outcomes focusing on types of services used, such as nutrition, health, and welfare program combinations or specific programs like WIC or TANF. Further, it may be valuable to look at the role that the location of social services plays in their use. For example, when looking at utilization of non-profit social services, Kissane (2003) found that respondents did not use services they otherwise would have because the services were located in dangerous sections of the community, characterized by prostitution, drugs, and violence. Further, service location may also be highly stigmatizing for potential recipients, if, for example, they must pick up food from a food bank that is highly visible in their community.

The main contribution of this paper is to draw attention to the potential importance of individual perceptions of neighborhood characteristics for understanding the dynamics of health, nutrition, and welfare service use among low-income mothers. Very little previous research has analyzed this relationship. A focus on this area may improve the well-being of some of the most vulnerable of United States residents.

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# Testing the Relationship of Formal Bonding, Informal Bonding, and Formal Bridging Social Capital on Key Outcomes for Families in Low-Income Neighborhoods

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*The development of social capital among families living in low-income neighborhoods has become a popular poverty reduction and economic advancement strategy. However conceptual scholarship suggests the broad use of social capital has diminished its importance. Scholars have begun to identify the multiple and overlapping characteristics of social capital and the field now needs empirical studies to show how specific types of social capital are important for families living in low-income neighborhoods. This study tests the relationship between three types of social capital (informal bonding social capital, formal bonding social capital and formal bridging social capital) and important outcomes for families in these neighborhoods. Data for the study come from a national neighborhood survey conducted by the Annie E. Casey Foundation (N=6,031). Findings confirm a differentiated relationship between the three types of social capital and family outcomes. Study findings suggest that applying a broad understanding of social capital to interventions in low-income communities may be inadequate and instead interventions should match a "type" of social capital to the community's presenting issue(s).*

**Key words:** *social capital, neighborhood, poverty*

Social work has addressed issues facing low-income, urban families since its inception as a profession (Leiby, 1978).

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Despite these efforts, families living in low-income neighborhoods continue to face issues of personal safety, poor health, and limited access to educational, vocational, and economic opportunities (Jencks, 1992; Wilson, 1987). In the past 20 years the development of social capital has emerged as a strategy within theories of economic advancement for addressing the multitude of issues facing impoverished families. Social capital is the resource embedded in trusting networked relationships (Coleman, 1988; Lin, 2001; Putnam, 2000). Since its emergence, a wide range of professionals have applied social capital to their work in low-income urban neighborhoods (Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2002; Saegert, Thompson & Warren, 2001). Social capital offers hope that low-income families, despite limited access to resources, can build capital or wealth through investments in relationships with friends, neighbors, politicians, police, business owners, and everyday citizens.

Unfortunately, there is limited empirical support to demonstrate how social capital functions in people's lives. The lack of empirical support is not due to a lack of conceptual attention. In fact, an enormous amount of cross-disciplinary scholarship has been devoted to how social capital functions. Scholarship has focused on the dichotomous dimensions of social capital. One of the most common distinctions is made between bonding and bridging social capital (Dominguez & Watkins, 2003; Frank, 2003; Putnam, 2002; Vidal, 2004). Bonding refers to intra-community relationships and bridging refers to extra-community relationships. Another distinction is made between formal social capital, the kind developed through organizational relationships, and informal social capital (Wuthnow, 1998). Closely aligned to formal and informal types are open and closed networks (Coleman, 1988; Servon, 2003). Open networks refer to a group of relationships with permeable borders so that members can enter and leave the group easily. Closed networks refer to a group of relationships with impermeable borders where membership is permanent. Lin (2001) makes a distinction between social capital in less dense networks and social capital in more dense networks. Briggs (1998) writes about social capital for "getting by" versus "getting ahead." "Getting by" refers to relationships that help maintain the status quo, while "getting ahead" refers to relationships that advance an economic

situation. Briggs (1998), as well as Dominguez and Watkins (2003) note that the “getting by” versus “getting ahead” distinction is related to outcomes of social support versus social leverage. One of the earliest distinctions was made by Granoveter (1973) who identified strong and weak network ties. Since his work, many other scholars have noted the importance in this distinction (Briggs, 1998; Burt, 2001; Dominguez & Watkins, 2003; Portes, 1998). Strong ties refer to close knit relationships, like those that would often be seen in a closed network.

Even scholars supporting the utility of social capital agree that a major shortcoming in social capital’s emerging theory is its rather general application or its ability to try and be “all things for all people” (Judge, 2003). Briggs (2004) refers to the broad over-use of the concept as having a “circus-tent” type quality. Some fear that the mis-application of social capital could render it worthless as a theoretical and intervention approach to helping poor families (e.g., Woolcock, 2004). This issue is complicated by the fact that, in many cases, a broad application may rightly speak to the many networks that can be considered a “type” of social capital. For example, there are neighborhood bonding networks, bridging networks, organizational networks, informal networks, and civic networks, just to name a few. The challenge for scholars is to organize these network types in a way that is useful to practitioners and to find out how the social capital embedded in these networks is associated with different and important outcomes.

There is one further caveat when defining social capital; scholars are still debating the notion of whether social capital should be defined as an individual good or a collective good (Briggs, 2004). Tenets of social capital can be measured and tested at the individual level, the community level, or both as long as scholars adhere to the measurement assumptions of each unit of analysis (particularly important are the dangers of aggregate measures at the community level). In this manuscript, social capital is conceptualized and tested as an individual good.

### Three Types of Social Capital

Before reviewing the types of social capital tested here

it is crucial to define the study context. The range of context for studying and applying social capital is boundless. Social capital has been applied to nation-states and neighborhoods, online communities and organizations and to the wealthy, middle class, and the poor. Self-evident is the fact that social capital will look very different in each of these contexts; therefore, it is crucial to first define the context in which one is applying social capital. As noted earlier, the context in the present study is families living in low-income urban neighborhoods. Therefore the discussion that follows is limited to types of social capital relevant to families living in low-income urban neighborhoods.

As presented earlier, possibly the most common typological distinction in the literature is between *bonding* and *bridging* social capital (Dominguez & Watkins, 2003; Frank, 2003; Putnam, 2002; Vidal, 2004). Bonding social capital refers to the presence and enhancement of within community relationships while bridging refers to extra-community relationships, or those relationships forged with members outside the community. A second typological distinction is found between formal and informal social capital (Wuthnow, 1998). Formal social capital refers to relationships developed while people are participating in a formal group and informal social capital refers to relationships developed without membership in a formal group (Wuthnow, 1998). Distinctions within and between social capital types are not mutually exclusive and in some cases have considerable overlap. This manuscript will test three aspects of the overlap: informal bonding, formal bonding, and formal bridging on the key outcomes of safety, employment, savings and hardship for families living in low-income urban neighborhoods.

### *Informal bonding social capital*

In the context of this study, low-income urban neighborhoods, informal bonding social capital is defined as non-organizationally affiliated trusting relationships with neighbors. Examples of informal bonding social capital include when a group of neighbors casually discuss a neighborhood issue when they meet on the street or at the local park; or when neighbors discuss a neighborhood issue at the grocery store.

Informal neighborhood bonding social capital might result in neighbors attending a town hall meeting to voice opposition to new business development, or the relationships may simply result in the swapping of child care services.

#### *Formal bonding social capital*

Formal bonding social capital is defined as trusting relationships with neighbors based on organizational membership. Examples of formal bonding social capital include relationships among members of a neighborhood watch group or between board members of a community organization. An example of residents utilizing formal bonding social capital is when members of a neighborhood association attend a meeting and vote to deny a liquor license to a new club that is a block away from the neighborhood elementary school.

#### *Formal bridging social capital*

In the context of this study, formal bridging social capital is defined as organizationally affiliated relationships with those outside the immediate neighborhood. Examples of formal bridging social capital include when a neighborhood resident develops a trusting relationship with a city politician, or when a resident develops a relationship with members of the police department. Corresponding to these two examples, formal bridging social capital may result in neighborhood residents learning about crucial city budget cuts for a neighborhood school or it may result in police car patrols changing to foot patrols in the neighborhood.

One point that becomes clear is that relationships *developed* as one “type” of social capital may *function* as a different “type” of social capital. For example, two residents may meet at a neighborhood watch group (formal bonding social capital) but then forge a friendship that functions as informal bonding social capital—meeting at each others houses, borrowing baby items or lawn tools. Another example would be when two neighborhood residents meet while sitting on the board of a community non-profit organization. One of the board members may be a city council woman while the other a concerned resident. While they have a formal bonding relationship on the non-profit board, the concerned resident might attend a city

council meeting to petition for neighborhood friendly policies; the city council woman is now functioning in a role outside the neighborhood and this interaction can be seen as formal bridging social capital.

### Outcomes for Families Living in Low-Income Urban Neighborhoods

The development of social capital is a popular strategy for low-income neighborhood programs (Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2002; Saegert, Thompson & Warren, 2001) and there is a long list of issues facing families in low-income neighborhoods for which social capital is supposed to have an effect. For programs in low-income neighborhoods social capital is supposed to improve grades and health, safety and income, violence, teen pregnancy and physical dilapidation, just to name a few. Research suggests, and few would question that social capital is a mediating variable for delinquency, violence (Sampson, Raudenbush & Earls, 1997), and some characteristics of health (Kawachi & Berkman, 2000) in low-income neighborhoods. However, evidence of social capital's effects on other outcomes is limited. This study will look at four important outcomes for families (safety, employment, savings and family hardship) and test their relationship with the three different types of social capital.

#### *Research questions*

1. Is there a relationship between informal bonding, formal bonding or formal bridging social capital and safety for families living in low-income neighborhoods?
2. Is there a relationship between informal bonding, formal bonding or formal bridging social capital and employment for families living in low-income neighborhoods?
3. Is there a relationship between informal bonding, formal bonding or formal bridging social capital and savings for families living in low-income neighborhoods?
4. Is there a relationship between informal bonding, formal bonding or formal bridging social capital and family hardship for families living in low-income neighborhoods?

## Method

### *Sample*

Data for this study come from a survey administered by the Annie E. Casey Foundation (AECF) as part of their ten year commitment to the *Making Connections* initiative. *Making Connections* is a comprehensive community change initiative in designated low-income neighborhoods in ten U.S. cities. The cities participating in the initiative are Denver, Des Moines, Hartford, Indianapolis, Louisville, Milwaukee, Oakland, Providence, San Antonio and Seattle. The Making Connections survey was first administered in 2002-2003 to a stratified probability sample of households in designated Making Connections neighborhoods in each of the ten Making Connections cities. A sampling frame of households in designated Making Connections neighborhoods was constructed for each city participating in the initiative. A probability sample of households in each city was selected to participate in the survey. Once a household was selected for the survey a household roster was constructed and one adult respondent was selected at random to respond for the household. The present analysis uses the cross-sectional data from 2003 to test the relationships between different types of social capital and key outcomes in low-income neighborhoods. A total of 6,031 households are included in the analysis. Median income for households in the analysis is between \$15,000 and \$20,000 per year.

### *Measures*

The focus of this analysis is on the relationship between different types of social capital and key outcomes for families living in low-income neighborhoods. The three types of social capital are: (1) informal bonding social capital, (2) formal bonding social capital, and (3) formal bridging social capital. The four key outcomes are safety, employment, savings and family hardship.

Informal bonding social capital is measured using five indicators, originally tested in the Project on Human Development in Chicago Neighborhoods (Sampson, Raudenbush & Earls, 1997). Four of the indicators measure the network of

relationships among neighbors and one of the indicators measures trust among neighbors. A weighted composite score of these five indicators provides the most valid and reliable psychometric properties ( $\text{Alpha} = .71$ ) and will be used to measure informal bonding social capital. The mean informal bonding social capital score is 3.44 ( $\text{SD} = .80$ ;  $1.05 = \text{low}$  to  $5.27 = \text{high}$ ).

Formal bonding social capital is measured using an indicator of neighborhood civic engagement. Residents were asked if over the past 12 months they had volunteered in their neighborhood. "Yes" responses measure residents with formal relationships in the neighborhood. Analysis indicates 22% of respondents have volunteered in their neighborhood in the past 12 months.

Formal bridging social capital is measured using respondent's connections to political officials. Residents were asked if they had spoken with a local political official about a neighborhood problem or improvement. While this measure may not capture the complete array of possible formal bridging relationships, it does measure one important aspect of formal bridging social capital—political connections. From the sample 19% of respondents had spoken with a political official about a neighborhood problem or improvement.

The four outcome variables in this study are safety, employment, savings and family hardship. Safety is measured using three items captured on a seven point Likert type scale with one representing low safety and seven representing high safety. The three items ask: 1) if the neighborhood is a safe place for children, 2) if the respondent feels safe at home at night, and 3) if the respondent feels safe in the neighborhood alone during the day. A respondent's average score for the three items is used to measure safety. The coefficient alpha for the safety scale is .77 with a mean score of 4.96 ( $\text{SD} = 1.53$ ).

Employment is measured as the dichotomous condition of the respondent or their partner having full-time employment over the past 12 months. Descriptive statistics show that 52% of households had full-time employment. Savings is measured as the dichotomous condition of the respondent or their partner saving for any of the following: a house, school, a car, retirement, emergencies or anything else. Findings for this indicator show that 56% of households are saving for something. Last,

family hardship is measured as the dichotomous condition of the household experiencing any of the following within the last year: postponing or not filling a drug prescription; inability to pay mortgage, rent, or utilities; having any belongings repossessed; or not having enough money for food. Analysis indicates that 42% of families experienced at least one of these hardship conditions.

### Data Analysis

Four models are tested—one for each of the outcome conditions. The first model uses ordinary least squares regression to examine the relationship between social capital types and safety. The second, third and fourth models use logistic regression to test the relationship between social capital types and employment, savings and family hardship respectively. Gender and race/ethnicity variables are controlled in all of the models.

### Results

Table 1 shows results for the four regression models. First, examining the model for safety, findings indicate a significant relationship between informal bonding and neighborhood safety. Controlling for other types of social capital and controlling for gender and race/ethnicity, a unit increase in informal bonding social capital is related to a .97 unit increase on the neighborhood safety scale. Females are the reference group for gender. Male respondents reported significantly higher feelings of safety. The largest number of respondents to the survey identified as Black (34%). Therefore identifying as Black was chosen as the reference category in the analyses. Findings also show that Asian's feel significantly less safe than Blacks. The safety model explains 27% of the variation in residents' perceptions of neighborhood safety.

Next, results for the employment model are that, controlling for other types of social capital and for gender and race/ethnicity, respondents with formal bonding social capital are 14% more likely to have full-time employment. Additionally, significant findings were revealed for the relationship between race and employment. Analysis revealed that Blacks were less



likely to be employed than Asians, Hispanics, Whites, and those identifying as some other race in the analysis.

Third, examining the savings model we see that both formal bonding social capital and formal bridging social capital are related to an increased likelihood that the respondent or their partner is saving for something. Respondents with formal bonding social capital are 45% more likely to be saving than respondents without formal bonding social capital. Respondents with formal bridging social capital are 18% more likely to be saving than respondents without formal bridging social capital. Findings also indicate that male respondents are more likely to be saving than female respondents and that White respondents are more likely to be saving than Black respondents.

The final analysis examined the relationship between social capital types and family hardship. Findings show a unit increase in informal bonding social capital is related to 21% lower odds that a family experienced a hardship over the last 12 months. Surprisingly, findings indicate that formal bonding social capital is related to a 16% increase in the likelihood that a family experienced a hardship and formal bridging social capital is related to an 18% increase in the likelihood that a family experienced a hardship. Findings from the family hardship model also indicate that female respondents were more likely to experience a family hardship and that Asians, Hispanics and Whites, compared to Blacks are less likely to experience a family hardship.

## Discussion

Study findings confirm that different types of social capital are important for different outcomes in low-income neighborhoods. First, examining informal bonding social capital results suggest that informal relationships formed within a neighborhood have a positive relationship with perceptions of neighborhood safety and a negative relationship with family hardship. Interestingly, no relationship was found between informal bonding social capital and employment or savings. These results may suggest that bonding is related to outcomes of support (feelings of safety and staying away from hardship),

but these informal relationship do not seem to be related to the direct economic outcomes of employment and savings. As the analysis is correlational, it may be the experience of hardship that allows neighbors to reach-out and build informal bonding relationships. The correlational analysis does not allow us

Table 1. Regression findings for social capital types with employment, safety, savings and family hardship

	Safety**	Employment***	Savings***	Family hardship***
Intercept	1.58* (.08)	.81 (.12)	.83 (.12)	2.35* (.13)
Gender (Female is reference)	.229* (.04)	1.11 (.06)	1.34* (.06)	.68* (.06)
Race/Ethnicity (Black is reference)				
Asian	-.24* (.07)	1.44* (.11)	1.11 (.11)	.28* (.13)
Hispanic	-.02 (.04)	1.47* (.07)	.93 (.07)	.76* (.07)
Other	-.05 (.08)	1.66* (.12)	1.08 (.11)	1.00 (.12)
White	-.03 (.04)	1.92* (.07)	1.47* (.07)	.58* (.07)
Informal Bonding (scale)	.97* (.02)	.97 (.03)	1.04 (.03)	.79* (.03)
Formal Bonding (volunteer)	-.07 (.04)	1.14* (.07)	1.45* (.07)	1.16* (.07)
Formal Bridging (political connections)	.06 (.05)	1.08 (.07)	1.18* (.07)	1.18* (.07)

\*  $p < .05$

\*\* unstandardized coefficients are provided with standard errors in parenthesis

\*\*\* exponentiated coefficients are provided with standard errors in parenthesis

to distinguish which variable is sequenced first. Briggs (1998) found two functional elements of social capital—social capital for *getting by* and social capital for *getting ahead*. The results here suggest that informal bonding social capital may function to help families *get by* but not *get ahead*.

Results for formal bonding social capital suggest that formal relationships within a neighborhood (measured here as neighborhood civic engagement) are positively related to employment and savings. Intuitively it makes sense that residents connected to formal neighborhood systems are also connected to other formal opportunities such as a job or the

opportunity to save money. However, it does not make intuitive sense that formal bonding social capital is positively related to family hardship. It would seem that if a family understands the benefits of formal systems such as civic opportunities or employment, they would also be able to avoid negative aspects of formal systems such as having ones utilities shut off. Further studies are needed to fully understand this unexpected finding.

The final social capital type tested in the analysis was formal bridging social capital. Formal bridging social capital refers to organizationally affiliated relationships with those outside the immediate neighborhood. Results indicate that formal bridging social capital has a positive relationship with families who are saving money and a positive relationship with family hardship. One explanation for the latter finding is that families experiencing some hardship are speaking with political officials about the situation that has led them to their hardship. While study findings for formal bridging social capital are interesting, they may be incomplete. This is because our measure only captures one dimension of formal bridging social capital—political relationships—and not other dimension of formal bridging social capital such as business relationships, relationships with police, service providers, churches and religious institutions, and others. Table 2 summarizes which types of social capital are related to important outcomes for families in low-income neighborhoods.

Table 2. Type of Social Capital (in *italics*) Related to Key Outcomes for Families living in Low-Income Urban Neighborhoods

	Safety	Employment	Savings	Family Hardship
Type of Social Capital	<i>Informal Bonding</i> (+)	<i>Formal Bonding</i> (+)	<i>Formal Bonding</i> (+) <i>Formal Bridging</i> (+)	<i>Informal Bonding</i> (-) <i>Formal Bonding</i> (+) <i>Formal Bridging</i> (+)

Although the cross-sectional nature of this study precludes making causal inferences into the nature of the noted

relationships several lessons are still pertinent to social work practitioners. Social workers may use these findings to assist in neighborhood assessments. For example, if a neighborhood has a persistent problem with crime and safety, a practitioner may also look at the nature of the informal bonding relationships in the neighborhood to see if these relationships are related to the crime problem. Findings also suggest that there are multiple types of social capital and that they matter differentially for different outcomes. For practitioners this means that a one size fits all social capital approach to intervention is inadequate. Instead, practitioners must think more carefully about the type of relationships, or the type of social capital, that can best address a community's presenting issue(s). Further, this study provides practitioners survey items to measure and test social capital in the neighborhoods in which they work. Further study in this area, particularly longitudinal studies, are necessary so social workers can build interventions that develop one type of social capital to effectively address the presenting issue in a neighborhood—be that issue neighborhood safety, chronic neighborhood underemployment, family savings, or a prevention strategy for family hardship.

The surprising finding that formal bonding and formal bridging social capital are related to a higher likelihood of family hardship illuminates an important limitation of the study. Data for the study are cross-sectional and therefore significant relationships do not provide any evidence of a cause and effect relationship between variables. While study results confirm that different types of social capital are important for different family outcomes, more research needs to be done to understand the causal relationship between types of social capital and family outcomes.

In addition to the cross-sectional nature of the study other limitations exist. One limitation is that a spurious effect by an untested variable may explain the relationship between social capital and the tested outcomes. For example, a person may possess strong social skills that lead to increases in social capital and an increased likelihood of employment. Limitations imposed by the measurement of bridging social capital must also be considered. The Making Connections data-set, although rich in important neighborhood social indicators, does

not provide a complete set of bridging social capital measures. Study findings show significant relationships for the indicator of formal bridging social capital however, literature in the field suggests that bridging relationships are some of the most important for families in low-income neighborhoods (Dominguez & Watkins, 2003; Frank, 2003; Vidal, 2004). Therefore a complete array of bridging social capital indicators, including measures of participation in a religious institution, should be tested to fully understand the effects of this important concept.

An additional study limitation involves the shared variance of the indicators of the three social capital types. As mentioned in the literature review social capital relationships may develop as one type and then function later as a different type. One example provided earlier is two residents who meet at a neighborhood watch group (*formal* bonding social capital) and then develop a close informal relationship (*informal* bonding social capital) which results in service provision such as watching each others children. The result of the overlap of these two types of social capital is shared variance among the independent variables in the statistical models. While we are still able to observe the tested effects, this shared variance results in a downward bias, or a conservative estimate, of the relationship between social capital types and outcomes.

## Conclusion

This study identifies multiple types of social capital and tests how these "types" are differentially related to safety, employment, savings and family hardship for families living in low-income urban neighborhoods. Findings revealed that informal bonding social capital is related to safety and family hardship; formal bonding social capital is related to employment, savings and family hardship; and that formal bridging social capital is related to savings and family hardship. Findings from the study show that building social capital is not enough, but that scholars and practitioners, considering a community's presenting issues, need to be deliberate about the type of social capital they are trying to build.

This study tests *associations* between different types of social capital and outcomes for families in low-income

neighborhoods. We still do not know if the types of social capital are *the cause* for improved outcomes in low-income neighborhoods. Future studies should focus on: (1) continuing to test the multiple types of social capital; (2) testing the relationship between social capital types and key outcomes in a longitudinal context to be able to make inferences about cause; and (3) testing social capital types in structural equation models to refine measurement and path assumptions. If research on "types" can continue to provide fruitful results, emerging social capital theory may be able to provide empirically tested practice guidelines for practitioners working on issues facing families in low-income neighborhoods. More specifically, social workers can design interventions that build a specific type of social capital that address the presenting issue(s) in the community.

One example of a social intervention using a specific type of social capital for a specific outcome can be seen in the recent emergence of Individual Development Accounts (IDAs) (Sherraden, Schreiner & Beverly, 2003). IDAs utilize formal bridging social capital (implicitly), in the form of trusting relationships with institutions, to impact economic outcomes. While evidence accrues on the success of IDAs social work practitioners do not have strong empirical support for social capital strategies in other community-based programs. As the research in this article suggests, social workers would do well to focus on specific types of social capital to improve specific community issues as is seen in IDAs.

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## Book Reviews

Stefan Svallfors (Ed.). *The Political Sociology of the Welfare State: Institutions, Social Cleavages and Orientation*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2007. \$55.00 hardcover.

Stefan Svallfors's book assembles a collection of empirical studies that extend the typologies developed by Wilensky and Esping-Andersen on welfare state regimes. By using new data available in the European Union, including the International Social Survey Program and the European Social Survey, these articles are able to connect welfare state regimes to the structure of political institutions, within country differences based on race, gender and class and the political orientations and ideologies manifest in welfare states. In doing so, this collection moves the knowledge base of political sociology incrementally by testing explanatory theories and their normative implications.

In chapter two, Edlund uses latent class analysis to reject the hypothesis that poor economic conditions lead to conflict over welfare benefits in favor of general preferences for the status quo. The next chapter by Kumlin asks if dissatisfaction with the welfare state leads to it being overwhelmed by advocates for increased benefits or undermined by the frugal taxpayer and finds no clear answer. In chapter four, Oskarson, finds a strong relationship of welfare dissatisfaction and social risk such as employment prospects on a Marx/Weberian political alienation scale. This supports the marginalization hypothesis and identifies negative consequences for welfare retrenchment. Next, Pettersson identifies an increased log likelihood for political action in the health care arena in Swedish regions that have a lower quality evaluations. Svallfors contributes in chapter six a comparison of class attitudes on wealth redistribution. He is unable to definitively refute the hypothesis that all social classes have resigned themselves to the market but does

present texture to institutional responsiveness to the demands of different groups. Perhaps the most interesting chapter unequivocally rejects fears that recommodification, immigration and the European Union has led to the death of the nation state. Hjerm uses a multi-level model to find no significant differences between 1995 and 2003 panels of attitudes towards national sentiments. The book closes with a brief summary of scholarship on voting behavior and the welfare state.

The strength of the edited work is in its use of cutting edge statistical procedures on large multi-country data sets to test hypotheses grounded in the rich literature of political sociology. The editor acknowledges the limits of the cross sectional data and recommends that the European Union launch a true longitudinal social survey so that individual level attitude changes about the welfare state may be modeled directly. The biggest absence in the volume, arguably driven by comparable data, is the failure to include nation states outside of the OCED.

I recommend this book for active empirical researchers of the welfare state. It may be too technical for scholars in related fields because it assumes working knowledge of the literature. However, any emerging scholar who works with large clustered data may find it instructive because the methods are described in operational detail.

*Richard J. Smith, University of California, Berkeley*

Paul V. Dutton, *Differential Diagnosis: A Comparative History of Health Care Problems and Solutions in the United States and France*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2007. \$29.95 hardcover, \$19.95 papercover.

Although many social policy scholars believe that the French health care system is substantially more socialized than the U.S. system, this is far from accurate. The U.S. system is more socialized than many people realize due to tax breaks employers get for employer-based health care, the increase in the rolls of both Medicaid and Medicare, recent Medicare expansion, and the high costs of care associated with an aging

population who heavily rely on Medicare. Although there are meaningful differences in the two countries' systems, there are also similarities. In France, despite enjoying the WHO-ranked best health care system in the world (the U.S. is 37<sup>th</sup>), insurance is universal, but as in the U.S., disparities exist between the rich, who often have employment-based supplemental insurance in addition to public insurance, and the poor, who rely on the public plan and who must pay the difference between physician fees and reimbursement rates. Those without supplemental insurance in France are far less likely to seek medical care than are those with supplemental insurance, in the same way as care seeking differs in the U.S. between those with and without health insurance.

Dutton discusses these phenomena and traces the evolution of health care in both countries starting in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, emphasizing the similarities in ideals of the countries and discussing where they diverged to result in such different health care systems. Both countries have traditionally embraced ideals of patient choice of physician, physician sovereignty, and fee-for-service medical care. U.S. doctors have historically been opposed to government-subsidized, compulsory insurance, fearing government control over medical practice. French doctors, alternatively, have reached an agreement with the government where they enjoy autonomy and freedom to set fees, but the government sets reimbursement rates and allows for a booming private insurance sector to cover the difference between fees and reimbursement.

In both countries, health care costs began to increase significantly in the 1940s with the rise in insurance utilization, expensive new lifesaving technologies and fee-for-service reimbursements that encouraged doctors to treat more while having no incentive to maintain or restore patients' health. The two systems have evolved in different ways to control costs, with the U.S. system adopting a capitation and salary-oriented system with the rise of HMOs, and the French maintaining the fee-for-service system, but with restrictions in place.

Both countries also tie insurance firmly to employment. In the U.S., most health insurance is obtained through employers, and the majority of uninsured individuals are workers and their dependents whose employers do not provide insurance,

or whose work group is experience-rated such that insurance is too expensive for employers to subsidize. In France, payroll levies finance public health insurance, and only wage earners and their employers pay for public health insurance, though everyone benefits, including those whose income comes from investments and property. Dutton argues that this connection is outdated, and that the link between insurance and employment stymies economic growth and must be cut for meaningful reform to occur. In the U.S., workers are hesitant to switch jobs for fear of losing insurance, resulting in a mismatch between worker and job, and thus lost productivity. In France, companies are hesitant to hire workers because of the increased levies they must pay to finance the health care system.

Dutton's conclusions and suggestions vis-à-vis the U.S. health care system are insightful, if not entirely novel, and most experts would agree with him. His discussion of interest groups including insurance providers, employers, unions, and physicians suggests that major health care reform is an extremely challenging task that will not be easily accomplished, if history is any guide.

*Krista Drescher Burke, University of California, Berkeley*

Felicia Kornbluh, *The Battle for Welfare Rights: Politics and Poverty in Modern America*. Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007. \$49.95 hardcover, \$24.95 papercover.

For most of human history the concept of social welfare has been linked to charitable giving and has been regarded as the responsibility of the churches, mosques or temples or otherwise of the benevolence of charitable individuals or organizations. The charitable conception was gradually undermined in the 20th century as governments expanded social service programs and assumed greater responsibility for welfare. It was also undermined by the increasingly popular argument that welfare is a human right and that all citizens are entitled to receive support when in need. Today, international human rights instruments proclaim the duty of the state to provide

social assistance and increasingly, domestic law in many countries has asserted the right of needy people to be provided with income benefits and social services.

In the United States, this idea became popular in academic circles in the 1950s and gradually filtered through to advocacy organizations representing the interests of welfare recipients. As Felicia Kornbluh shows in this informative study, the welfare rights movement was originally fueled by resentment against the bureaucratic and intrusive way government social services agencies dealt with their clients. In some cases, clients who had been abusively treated were aided by social workers who refused to comply with directives that they believed, demeaned welfare recipients. In addition, some academics actively supported the emergence of the welfare rights movement. However, Kornbluh points out that the movement was primarily driven by women welfare recipients themselves most of whom were African-Americans.

These women began to mobilize in urban centers such as New York by asking public social service agencies for additional assistance with clothing, furnishings and other items that were not covered by cash benefits but which, they insisted, were essential to maintain a decent standard of living. As they attracted more support, these informal grassroots associations were transformed into a number of dynamic and effective local organizations which, in 1967, established a national organization, the National Welfare Rights Organization or NWRO. This organization and its affiliates were able to make effective use of legal advisers, public relations specialists and staff who were schooled in Alinskyan community action techniques. Following marches, demonstrations, sit-ins and legal battles in the courts, important concessions were secured. However, by the mid-1970s, as the economy experienced a serious recession and as antagonism to the racial character of the movement increased, it lost momentum. Many local organizations disintegrated and at the NWRO, the organization's leaders became increasingly divided over tactical and governance issues. Finally, as sponsorship from large foundations which were concerned about the organization's strident rhetoric dried up, core staff resigned and the organization shut down.

Kornbluh has produced a scholarly and informative

account of the welfare rights movement and particularly of the work of the NRW. She has drawn on an impressive range of sources including interviews, archival records, court decisions and previous academic analyses to provide what is probably the most detailed and comprehensive documentary history of welfare rights in the United States. The book will be a major resource for scholars who are interested in the topic. In addition to its academic contribution, it will hopefully rekindle the commitment to advocacy that characterized much social welfare and social work at the time. As poor families continue to struggle to meet their basic needs, the notion of welfare rights, which has been largely discarded, deserves great attention and debate.

*James Midgley, University of California, Berkeley*

Frank Stricker, *Why America Lost the War on Poverty – And How to Win It*. Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2007. \$59.95 hardcover, \$19.95 papercover.

Why didn't the anti-poverty programs of the 1960s work? Frank Stricker's new book answers this question by tracing poverty policy and programs in the United States from a refreshingly structuralist point of view, refreshing because the overwhelming majority of the classic literature on poverty focuses on cultural explanations. Stricker's argument is structuralist at its core, and is not only coherent, it is robust and compelling without being dogmatic.

Starting in the 1950s, each chapter is devoted a decade by decade analysis of how poverty was addressed through policies and programs as well as how it was talked about. Stricker's thesis is that the 1960s liberal War on Poverty was mis-focused on individual weaknesses and rather than on structural forces, and that the resulting wave of programs aimed at helping individuals was ultimately ineffective. In the 1980s, when poverty was still significantly present in the U.S., the debate shifted to the claim that generous welfare programs did not solve poverty. As the 1990s progressed, the debate about poverty became even more individualistic. This culmi-

nated in the end of welfare entitlements in 1996, despite high unemployment rates caused by a slowing economy and jobs leaving the country. In this decade, Stricker argues, the debate about poverty and corresponding policies and program is essentially idle.

This book is both an impressive account of the historical mechanics of poverty in the United States and a rich description of how politics and culture shape the poverty discussion and resulting policy interventions. Stricker's writing style is engaging, and he often uses Socratic questioning that engages the reader with his discussion. Not only is the writing in this book appealing, it is graphically pleasing as well. Illustrations, photos, cartoons, and charts pepper the pages and enhance the central argument. Accessible enough for the layperson and undergraduate student, the richly detailed appendices provide the scholar with abundant supplementary material.

While Stricker does a first-rate job of addressing the first part of his title, the "how" of "How America Lost the War On Poverty", the weakness of this book is that the second part of the title, "And How to Win It" is much less developed. Out of 243 pages, he only devotes eight to outlining "What needs to be done." What does this mean? It perhaps shows just how profoundly difficult the issue of poverty is to solve, even for a scholar who is devoted to unraveling the mystery of why the anti-poverty programs of the 60s failed. Despite this disappointing flaw, this book is a very worthwhile examination of complicated questions about poverty policy, programs, and debates over the past fifty years.

*Mary Ager Caplan, University of California, Berkeley*

Lisa DiCaprio, *The Origins of the Welfare State: Women, Work, and the French Revolution*. Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2007. \$ 40.00 hardcover.

Historical accounts of the evolution of modern day social welfare policies have made a major contribution to scholarly understanding of how the welfare systems of different countries emerged and currently operate. Numerous historical



studies have shown how the Elizabethan Poor Laws contributed to the subsequent development of social welfare in both Britain and the United States while in Germany, the introduction of social insurance by Chancellor Bismarck in the 19th-century shaped contemporary European income protection policies. On the other hand, few accessible histories of social welfare in other countries are available, and knowledge about the way social welfare policies have been molded by historical events in other countries is limited.

Lisa DiCaprio's analysis of the 18th-century historical roots of social policy in France is therefore to be welcomed. Although social policy scholars in the English-speaking countries are aware of the importance of family allowances in the evolution of the French welfare system, the struggles to extend statutory involvement in social welfare at the time of the French Revolution and the subsequent influence of these struggles on the development of country's welfare system are not well known. Filling a major gap in the literature, the author provides an interesting account of the efforts of women campaigners to secularize social welfare and create a centralized, state managed welfare system.

DiCaprio contrasts the largely church sponsored welfare system that existed prior to the revolution with the adoption of policies by the Jacobin government. The earlier practice of incarcerating the poor and other needy people in Dickensian institutions was replaced largely through the influence of French Enlightenment thinkers such as Jacques Turgot, who subsequently became Controller General, by a system of workshops where destitute, able-bodied women engaged in textile manufacture and were paid an adequate income which allowed them to care for themselves and their families in the community. Although the creation of the *atelier de filature*, as these workshops were known, was resisted by the guilds, Parisian women campaigned successfully for their expansion. Their activities were supported by the Jacobin government which introduced legislation in 1793 that would have further expanded state provision. However, with the overthrow of the Jacobins, the activism of women campaigners and the expansion of the *atelier* were halted. Nevertheless, as the author shows, these activities fostered the subsequent expansion of statutory pro-

vision and the secularization and centralization of welfare.

These activities also created a direct link between welfare and work. Rather than containing institutional provisions or providing cash transfers, needy people were given jobs in publicly run productive workshops. Unfortunately, the author does not examine the implications of this development for the subsequent development of social policy in much detail. Given the current emphasis on active labor market and welfare to work programs, the early French revolutionary experiments are of considerable interest. Nevertheless, the book makes for fascinating reading and provides an extremely detailed and richly documented analysis. Although it is highly specialized, it should be consulted by anyone interested in the way social policy is today being increasingly linked to economic activities.

*James Midgley, University of California, Berkeley*

Rachel A. Pruchno and Michael Smyer (Eds.), *Challenges of an Aging Society; Ethical Dilemmas, Political Issues*. Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2007. \$49.95 hardcover.

With our rapidly increasing aging population, much attention has been given to the issues faced by the aging society. However, this book edited by Rachel A. Pruchno and Michael Smyer is unique in that it explores issues and challenges at hand with the current aging society through an "ethical" lens, and brings together experts in a wide range of fields covering sociology, social work, economics, public policy, theology, public health, bioethics, nursing and neurology. Their expertise is well tied together under the topic of aging in this volume, extending discussions from two conferences, "The Science and Ethics of Aging Well: End of Life" and "The Science and Ethics of Aging Well: Public Policy and Responsibility across the Generations."

The editors employ the three ethical principles of autonomy, responsibility and distributive justice to explore problems and prospects of aging. These principles allow them

to approach the challenges and decision-making processes faced by different entities—individual, family and society—and important issues such as end of life decision, long term care, intergenerational issues, Social Security, and Medicare drug benefit. In particular, decisions about autonomy at the end of life, both legally and spiritually; responsibility across generations for long term care; and distributive justice with respect to resources between the young and the elderly are discussed in detail. Some policy challenges are also addressed, including issues of Social Security reform and Medicare drug benefit.

The editors' choice of the three ethical principles (autonomy, responsibility and distributive justice) serves as a good instrument with which the essential issues and challenges facing an aging population are well explained. Most readers may have read this volume with some prior awareness or knowledge of aging issues. However, it is with this volume that they will be introduced to a well-organized layout of debates on what an aging population brings to individuals, families and society. As a result, they will have a better and clearer understanding of what is at stake. Policy makers, researchers, practitioners, and students in sociology and social work are all likely to benefit from this book. One aspect that may have been developed in this volume is the infusion of diversity, especially cultural diversity. Individuals and families living in the U.S. with a culturally different background may encounter different (or similar) challenges. In addition to the editors' thoughtful consideration of the health of minority elders in one of the chapters, it would have been helpful if the discussion of cultural diversity was infused as each of the ethical principles mentioned earlier was discussed. With regards to the ethical principle of responsibility, for instance, a family of Asian decent may have different concerns or different intergenerational challenges in caregiving due to their roots in Confucianism. However, perhaps such a detailed discussion may deserve an additional volume geared toward the challenges of a "diverse" aging society.

*Erica Yoonkyung Auh, University of California, Berkeley*

Julian Le Grand, *The Other Invisible Hand: Delivery Public Services*

*through Choice and Competition*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2007. \$24.95 papercover.

As government spending on the social services increased rapidly in the middle decades on the 20th century, the notion of state responsibility for welfare was not only institutionalized but accompanied by the idea that government itself would be the primary provider of social services. Accordingly, a sizable number of administrators, social workers and other social services personnel found employment and government agencies and the proportion of labor force working in statutory social service programs increased significantly. In many cases, social services unions became powerful advocating not only for the interests of their members but for the continued expansion of these programs.

Today, the situation has changed dramatically as many governments have sought to contain costs and to curtail the apparently inexorable expansion of social programs. Social service budgets have been cut and increasingly, these services have been outsourced to nonprofit and commercial providers. The result is a growing market (or quasi-market as it is technically known) in social welfare in which a variety of nonprofit and commercial providers compete for government social services funds. As Julian Le Grand points out in this readable book, this has allowed consumers to exercise greater choice in utilizing the services they need.

The purpose of the book, Le Grand points out, is to determine how best public money can be used to meet social needs through high-quality, accessible and efficient social services. One approach is to rely on professional providers who have a strong commitment to quality and who have secured the trust of consumers. Another is to use a "command and control" approach in which planners set targets and can monitor performance. A third is to rely on the "voice" of consumers and on their ability to pressure providers to meet standards. The fourth is to create viable markets in which different providers compete and consumers purchase services. The creation of markets still requires governments to fund the social services, but different providers compete to provide consumer choice and maximize efficiency.

Although Le Grand is careful to point out that all of these approaches have merits, he clearly prefers the choice and competition model. Indeed, a whole chapter of the book is devoted to an exposition of this model and objections to the model are systematically dismissed. His claim that high-quality public services will only emerge as a result of the creation of markets is then applied to a discussion of choice and competition in school education and health care. In addition, he examines the prospect of expanding choice through the provision of what are known as direct payments by which resources are allocated to consumers to allow them to purchase the services they need. The book ends with a discussion of some of the ideological and political implications of these recommendations and two leading experts, Alan Enthoven and David Lipsey provide commentaries on Le Grand's proposals.

Although many of Le Grand's ideas are familiar to readers in the United States, he provides an interesting and incisive account of the case for the "reform" of the British social services through promoting markets. The author's own preference for the expansion of market behavior in social welfare will of course be contested by many social policy scholars not only in the United States but in Britain and elsewhere. Although Le Grand examines some of the objections that have been made to the expansion of social service markets, others are given little attention and some are ignored. Nevertheless, the book provides a lively, and well written polemic that should be widely consulted particularly by those who are skeptical about the merits of a market approach to social welfare.

*James Midgley, University of California, Berkeley*

Lynn R. Horton, *Grassroots Struggles for Sustainability in Central America*. Boulder, CO: University of Colorado Press, 2007. \$55.00 hardcover.

The 2002 Johannesburg World Summit on Sustainable Development was heralded as an opportunity to rejuvenate and inspire continued attention to issues of sustainable development worldwide. However, despite these lofty goals, the Summit has been criticized by some as a step backward in the attempt to achieve sustainability due to its unclear and

nonbinding outcomes. While many international intergovernmental organizations, national governments and civil society organizations emphasize the importance of sustainable development, there remains great variability in the conceptualization of sustainable development depending on one's perspective. For example, the discourse surrounding sustainable development is often intertwined with issues of power and distribution of resources. In this way, a World Bank official and an indigenous farmer in a developing nation will likely have distinct perceptions regarding the meaning of sustainable development. While a large body of literature documents dominant sustainability discourse, relatively little has been written about grassroots perspectives on issues of sustainable development.

This book gives voice to three rural and indigenous communities on the subject of sustainable development: Miraflores, Nicaragua; Ipetí, Panama; and Puerto Jiménez, Costa Rica. Through qualitative research carried out over the course of 18 months in 2000 and 2001, Horton explores the meaning of sustainable development for residents and leaders of the case study communities. Sustainable development practices, such as ecotourism, cultivation of alternative exports, and collective land titling as well as dominant practices linked to sustainable development, such as neoliberal reforms and environmental protection policies are examined based on findings from in-depth interviews. Using a triadic framework that emphasizes empowerment and disempowerment and considers environmental, social, and economic factors tied to sustainable development policies and practices, the author carefully analyzes the ways in which sustainable development is carried out on the local level. Economic, political and cultural implications that sustainable development policies and practices pose for rural and indigenous communities are highlighted.

Chapter 1 provides background information on the varied approaches to sustainable development discourse, both dominant and alternative. The remainder of the book is devoted to exploring community visions of sustainable development in the case-study communities and situating these views within the larger sustainability dialogue. Chapter 2 introduces the communities of study and describes the social, historical, eco-

nomie and political context of each community in the post-World War II. Chapters three through eight are focused on the individual case study communities and the ways in which community discourses of sustainable development complement or contradict those of dominant institutions, such as the World Bank and other international financial institutions. The final two chapters utilize a comparative framework to summarize findings across the three case studies and contextualize these findings within the broader theoretical debate over the meaning of sustainable development. Detailed indices are provided to elucidate the author's data collection methodology and analysis techniques.

Horton's book is an important contribution to scholarly literature on sustainability in the developing world. The book is intended for sociologists, anthropologists and others who study the theory and practice of sustainable development. Given the academic nature of this book, prior knowledge regarding sustainable development discourse would be helpful to the reader. One of its major strengths lies in its detailed descriptions of the transactional manner in which state and local governmental and non-governmental policies affect the individual communities of study. The impact of these policies, including neoliberal economic reforms, expansion of environmental regulations, and implementation of specific sustainable development projects are dissected and evaluated under a framework that highlights empowerment and disempowerment of local communities. The result is a thoughtful, nuanced analysis of sustainable development policies and practices in Central America at the grassroots level.

*Ian W. Holloway, University of Southern California*

George J. Borjas (Ed.), *Mexican Immigration to the United States*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2007. \$60.00 hardcover.

The large-scale immigration of Mexican-born persons to the U.S. continues to fuel a number of contentious policy debates that are rooted in economic and cultural concerns. The growing

research literature on immigration's economic consequences mirrors the debates. "Mexican Immigration to the United States" consists of a collection of papers that reflect the fourth in a series of research conferences on immigration sponsored by the National Bureau of Economic Research. Collectively, the authors place Mexican immigration in historical context and address several interrelated policy questions connected to the economic assimilation of Mexican immigrants over time and across the generations.

In Chapter 1, George Borjas and Lawrence Katz document the evolution of the Mexican-born workforce in the U.S. labor market and analyze its economic performance over the course of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Major findings highlight the importance of educational attainment in explaining the wage disadvantage experienced by Mexican immigrants as well as the wage gap that persists between U.S.-born workers of Mexican descent and non-Mexican descent. Importantly, these findings also demonstrate the ways in which the rising influx of low-skill Mexican workers has affected the U.S. wage structure and workforce. Next, Francine Blau and Lawrence Kahn examine trends related to gender and Mexican American assimilation into the U.S. labor market, both within and across generations for the period 1994 to 2003. Later, Brian Duncan and Stephen Trejo use 2000 Census data to determine whether the understudied factors of intermarriage and ethnic identification bias measures of economic assimilation for later generations of Mexican Americans.

Casting linguistic assimilation as a prerequisite for economic assimilation, Edward Lazear addresses the question of why Mexican immigrants gain English fluency more slowly than other immigrant groups, again using 2000 Census data. He concludes that U.S. immigration policy, which admits large numbers of Mexicans on a family basis versus job basis, contributes to the formation of ethnic enclaves that lower the linguistic assimilation rate of Mexican immigrants. In an examination of the recent geographic diffusion of Mexican immigrants over the 1990s, David Card and Ethan Lewis find that ethnic enclaves have the effect of raising the relative supply of low-skill workers in a city, raising questions of how communities adapt to these demographic shifts.



Four additional studies incorporate data from Mexico to compare populations and examine the impacts of U.S. immigration policy on migration. Robert Fairlie and Christopher Woodruff use the 2000 PUMS and 2000 Mexico Census to examine differences in self-employment rates between Mexicans and Mexican immigrants in the U.S. by industrial sector and gender. Pablo Ibarra and Darren Lubotsky use similar data in Chapter 5 to compare the educational attainment of Mexican migrants to that of non-migrants, the latter of whom they find to be more educated. In Chapter 8, Susan Richter, J. Edward Taylor, and Antonio Yunez-Naude use the 2003 National Mexico Rural Household Survey to test the effects of the 1986 Immigration Reform and Control Act, the North American Free Trade Agreement, and increased border enforcement on the flow of migrant labor from rural Mexico to the United States. They find that while policies and macroeconomic effects significantly influence migration, these effects are small when compared to the effects of migration networks. Gordon Hanson's examination of how Mexican emigration has affected regional labor supply and regional earnings in Mexico also highlights the salience of the strength of migration networks for the economic outlook of certain Mexican states.

In a political climate strong on opinion about Mexican immigration but weak on viable policy solutions, this data driven collection is one that should be of interest to academic audiences, policymakers, and students of immigration generally. An important limitation of many of the studies is the undercount for undocumented Mexican immigrants in analyses based on U.S. Census data. Though undocumented individuals participate in the Census, undercount estimates have ranged from 6 to 40 percent depending on the year. Despite this caveat, the papers enhance knowledge of the economic consequences of immigration for both Mexico and the U.S. and point to important directions for future research.

*Michelle Johnson, University of California, Los Angeles*

*and Kids-First Politics*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007. \$26.95 hardcover.

The disproportionate number of children living in conditions of poverty is a major topic in social policy today. To address the problem, social policy scholars have proposed that a number of anti-poverty interventions ranging from universal family allowances to subsidized child savings accounts be introduced. However, they have paid relatively little attention to the role of early childhood intervention programs such as child care and preschool in poverty alleviation. Although long regarded as the proper concern of educationalists and developmental psychologists, scholars in social welfare and social policy will benefit from knowing more about the field.

David Kirp's lively new book should certainly spark interest in the topic. Although not focused specifically on child poverty, his broad ranging overview of the preschool movement in the United States has implications for poverty reduction. He provides an engaging history of the emergence of preschool education in the late 19th century and its expansion in numerous experiments including the Perry preschool program in Ypsilanti, Michigan, the Chicago Child-Parent Centers, Headstart and the Abecedarian project in Chapel Hill, North Carolina. He also discusses the emergence of child care provision with the Kaiser Child Service Centers during World War II and the expansion in child care as a result of welfare reform over the last decade. An interesting comparative chapter reviews Britain's Sure Start program and the efforts of the current Labour government to abolish child policy.

Kirp is emphatic that long-term outcome research into the impact of a high-quality preschool experience demonstrates that these programs are very successful. The effects of these interventions, he contends, last well into middle age. Those who participate in these programs acquire higher educational credentials and are more successful in their subsequent careers than those who do not participate. However, he recognizes that much of this research has methodological problems, and he does not shirk from airing the strong opinions of those who oppose public investments in preschool education. They include traditionalists on the political right who believe that

children should be raised at home by their mothers as well as market liberals who criticize government spending on social programs and particularly programs such as Head Start which, they claim, do not achieve their goals.

Despite opposition from traditionalists and market liberals, the author reveals the growing bipartisan political support for public preschool and child care provision. This is largely because of a substantial body of cost-benefit research that demonstrates the investment effect of these programs. Hard-nosed economists including Nobel Prize winners have shown that the rates of return to preschool education are considerable. However, Kirp repeatedly points out that the positive outcomes of preschool and child care are dependent on quality. Large classrooms with poorly trained teachers have few positive effects and indeed, as one study revealed, may even promote antisocial behavior.

Although Kirp writes for a popular readership, he provides a wealth of carefully documented statistical and other research information and examines the issues with care and thoughtfulness. It is an extremely readable book which will hopefully capture the attention of the social policy community. It will also be of major interest to social workers who are on the front-line of the provision of services to poor families and children. Hopefully they will have a better understanding of the role of preschool education and day care in addressing the pervasive and apparently contractible problem of child poverty today.

*James Midgley, University of California, Berkeley*

Karyn R. Lacy, *Blue-Chip Black: Race, Class, and Status in the New Black Middle Class*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2007. \$60 hardcover, \$22.95 papercover.

To understand social identities in black communities, scholars have conducted ethnographic studies regarding the black middle-class community using single site designs. However, the communities they have studied are not uniformly middle-class but often include members of the black working-class and in some instances, the black poor. By not differentiating the classes from each other within these communities, they

have not actually focused on the black middle class.

In fact, a general criticism of the sociological literature is that it studies and examines poor or working-class African-Americans and compares this group to middle-class whites; thus, not comparing "apples to apples." Consequently, we know little about middle-class African-Americans and their values, beliefs, behaviors and goals for their families and communities. Instead the research perpetuates the existing negative and stereotypical image of African-Americans, which essentially associates black people with poverty and lower-class status. Much of the literature highlights challenges that confront the black community, such as racism, AIDS, disproportionality of black males in the prison system and black children in the foster care system. In short, the literature about black people and the concerns that the black community seem to face are about the same old issues viewed through the same lens.

Karyn R. Lacy assumes a different posture by highlighting different relevant issues that impact the black community. Lacy brings to our attention that middle and upper middle class black communities have concerns and are as "worthy of study" as are the issues facing the poor black community and that there are variations within the black middle-class community. Using a research methodology common to anthropological fieldwork, Lacy conducted in-depth interviews with 30 black middle-class couples and carried out ethnographic observations in three suburban communities in the Washington metropolitan area: a majority white middle-class suburb, a predominantly black middle-class suburb, and a majority black upper-middle-class suburb.

As a result of her research, Lacy shows how middle-class blacks construct and maintain five distinct social identities: public identities, status-based identities, racial identities, class-based identities, and suburban identities. These identities are housed in a tool kit and Lacy documents middle-class blacks' practices of choosing from the tool kit and the circumstances under which they are used, such as in public settings where they may encounter white or black strangers who are not aware of their middle class status. Lacy asserts that the black middle class employs an essential strategy to differentiate themselves from lower class blacks and accentuate their similarities with the white middle class. Lacy's research reveals that the middle-

class black families in each of their communities make different choices about how and when to use any of the identities that are housed in the black middle-class tool kit. These choices varied according to the families' residential location, their economic stability and their proximity to other racial groups.

The primary concern with Lacy's research is the narrow focus on middle class blacks who reside who in communities in the Washington metropolitan area. It would be worthwhile to compare these east coast families to black middle class families who reside, for example, on the west coast in comparable communities to see how they use the black middle class tool kit in similar or different ways to construct their social identities. But of course Lacy's book provides a model for what we need: additional research on the African-American middle class throughout the country.

Finally, the book is much more than another narrative about the challenges that confront the black community. It should be required reading for anyone interested in expanding their understanding of relevant issues that are important to the black middle class community that are rarely discussed in the literature.

*Paul G. Wright, California State University, East Bay*

Franklin E. Zimring, *The Great American Crime Decline*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2007. \$35.00 hardcover, \$21.95 papercover.

Crime statistics are fascinating. Perhaps no other numbers are so regularly embraced or ignored, manipulated, dismissed, debated or embellished than those showing changes in crime rates and patterns. Politicians might spin high crime rates to garner support for "tough on crime" legislation while lower rates are heralded as a sign of their success while in office. Media coverage, public outcry and fear likewise often drive crime policies that are ignorant of crime statistics and trend lines. For example, tragic shootings like those at Columbine High School propelled the implementation of numerous school safety strategies despite evidence that school crime and vio-

lence generally was declining.

Speaking of declines, the 1990s were marked by an unprecedented and unexpected fall in crime in the United States. However, this trend was not usually discussed outside of academic circles. This decline occurred all around—in cities and rural areas, across geographic regions, in schools and in suburbs. As Franklin Zimring describes in his new book, *The Great American Crime Decline*, while the homicide rate in the United States climbed and remained high from 1964 to 1992, it dropped dramatically beginning around 1993 and reached close to pre-1964 levels by the year 2002. Moreover, the rates for key “index” offenses included in the FBI’s Uniform Crime Report all dropped by 23% to 40% in the 1990s. Pessimistic reports from the decade warned of an explosion in crime rates and the emergence of especially dangerous and violent juvenile criminals. Fortunately—and surprisingly—such expectations proved to be inaccurate.

Zimring’s insightful new book examines this phenomenon and attempts to understand just why crime declined so dramatically beginning in the 1990s. The first part of the book reviews relevant crime statistics and their change across the past several decades. There also is discussion about government actions and various crime control policies. Zimring then moves to a critical appraisal of the different reasons offered for why crime declined, including changes in the nation’s demographics and economy as well as abortion and changes in policing. The meticulous and systematic approach used by Zimring to dissect these reasons, their related literature and statistics makes this a particularly strong section of the book. The third part of the book takes a closer look at changes in New York’s crime rate as well as a comparison of Canadian and American crime rates. The parallel between the two countries’ decline in crime rates is intriguing given their different crime control policies and economic developments. Finally, Zimring ends the book by considering the future of crime in the United States, the long-term consequences of the 1990s’ crime decline, and what this decline teaches us about crime and how it is studied.

As in his previous books, Zimring writes with a style and language that makes this book accessible to readers both inside

and outside of academia. His comprehensive review and explanation of crime statistics will be understandable to more casual readers while his critical review of the various reasons offered to explain the crime decline is done in the careful, thorough, well-researched, and thought-provoking way that is expected in Zimring's work. The book focuses on declines across crime categories rather than in any one type of offense or offender so there is no specific focus on adolescents or juvenile crime. Yet, given Zimring's many important books and articles focused on this population, he undoubtedly has interesting thoughts and insights about the crime decline as it pertains directly to juveniles and juvenile crime rates. This would have been an interesting addition to the book, though the book does not lack for content in its absence. Instead, this book is a rich compilation of numbers, analysis, and insight that is organized to give the reader a deeper understanding of American crime rates and the complex interplay of factors that might explain its decline in the 1990s.

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