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Cannabis users have been historically stigmatized and criminalized for non-violent behaviors such as consuming, producing, and distributing cannabis. Racialized cannabis users in particular have been constructed as fundamentally different, dangerous, and mentally unstable, while state actors have benefited from the subjugation of this group. The following article reviews the history of cannabis prohibition with an emphasis on the social construction of racialized cannabis users and role of social workers in the treatment of this group. As laws liberalizing cannabis use and trade are passed across North America, an emergent legal framework is maintaining racial divides and marginalizing non-White cannabis users. Recommendations for social work professionals to advocate for change and take a stand on ongoing social justice issues are provided.

Key words: Cannabis, history, social work, criminalization

Introduction

Policies and attitudes related to cannabis consumption, production, and distribution are rapidly changing across North America, with significant implications for cannabis users and the social work profession. A drug once commonly available as medicine, later vilified and prohibited by state powers, is now
being exposed to neoliberal economic forces. For over a century, government actors, corporate interests, and xenophobic impulses have stigmatized cannabis users while shaping public perceptions around this drug. Racialized cannabis users in particular have been constructed as different, dangerous, and mentally unstable to suit the interests of North American elites (Covington, 1997; Potts, 1997). Social workers have played a variety of roles in the treatment of cannabis consumers and must be aware of the history of racism and exploitation experienced by racialized cannabis users in order to meaningfully address ongoing injustices.

Under the pretexts of public safety, moral hygiene, and health promotion, state actors have contributed to manufactured fears associated with cannabis to direct the lives of racialized peoples. Notions of civilized society and the “American dream” were developed by politicians, police, magistrates, and social workers to set certain types of drug users outside the boundaries of acceptable culture (Covington, 1997). While alcohol was widely consumed and normalized throughout Western society, with its health and social impacts known at every level of the socioeconomic ladder, cannabis use was made out to be particularly sinister. Homogenous narratives defining racially marginalized cannabis users as aggressive, unpredictable criminals were produced to justify state-sanctioned management through police profiling, incarceration, treatment, and supervision. These exercises of authority were applied because cannabis users were thought to pose a rebellious threat to the social order. Non-violent behaviors such as growing, distributing, or smoking cannabis represented acts of resistance that pushed certain groups who were already visible due to their skin color to the margins of mainstream society.

From the American criminalization of Blacks and Hispanics, to Canadian discrimination against Asian, Black, and Aboriginal peoples, laws and norms around substance use were essentially established to control minority communities. The historical analysis in the following section will demonstrate how people of color were used as scapegoats by powerful individuals who were driven by racist assumptions and self-interest. Incentives of career advancement, gaining public support, profit, and securing agency resources latently shaped how elites approached issues of race and substance use across
North America. Social workers operated within the legal and moral frameworks set by dominant groups and played a variety of roles in the lives of cannabis users, from enforcers of conventional morality to rehabilitation professionals. While the explicit goal of drug policies was to eradicate cannabis use, the reality of the "War on Drugs" was the widespread repression of racialized peoples. Alongside lawmakers and criminal justice representatives, social workers applied religious dogma, bigoted assumptions, and pseudoscientific explanations to separate and subjugate people they deemed to be different. A brief overview of the history of criminalization and intersections with the social work profession will shed light on how easily social workers can be pulled into implementing unjust policies. Through deconstructing public perceptions of racialized cannabis users, facts can begin to guide interventions needed to address ongoing contradictions and social justice issues.

Criminalization Across North America

Since the 1800’s, cannabis (like alcohol and opium) was a popular ingredient in American over-the-counter medicines for its analgesic and euphoric properties (Bonnie & Whitebread, 1999; Dolce, 2016). The drug became problematic for U.S. lawmakers once it began to be associated with Mexican immigration. Following the onset of the Mexican Revolution in 1910, Mexican citizens fleeing violence travelled north and introduced casual smoking of the dried herb mariguano for the first time in the United States (Warf, 2014). Immigration swelled alongside xenophobic fears throughout the Southern States, and Mexicans were frequently blamed for property crimes, sexual misconduct, and murderous rampages (Bonnie & Whitebread, 1999; Warf, 2014). American politicians seized on opportunities to villainize Mexican immigrants as violent, drug-dependent criminals. During early discussions of how to address drugs and immigration, one Texas state legislator proclaimed on the senate floor: “All Mexicans are crazy and this stuff [cannabis] is what makes them crazy” (cited in Dolce, 2016, p. 39). It did not matter that Mexican laborers were highly in demand and exploited on American farms after the abolishment of slavery; Americans wanted cheap workers and policies to manage them. At that time, the drug was deliberately referred to by officials as
marijuana (sometimes spelled marihuana) in a conscious effort to associate it with Mexicans and foreigners (Steiner et al., 2019). Lack of evidence and racial intolerance tied this drug to notions of danger, disorder, mental illness, and dark-skinned men, sowing the seeds of prohibition across America.

The 1920’s saw cannabis become popular in American counter-culture, with sailors and Caribbean immigrants introducing it to coastal cities and spreading acceptance among jazz musicians, bohemians, and some African American communities (Warf, 2014). Lawmakers observed the proliferation of cannabis among marginalized groups and attempted to consolidate power through amplifying pre-existing racial biases (Bonnie & Whitebread, 1999; Potts, 1997). Tough on crime narratives and legislation were promoted to broadcast concerns about intoxicated Black and Mexican men committing crimes and corrupting White youth. Regional laws criminalizing cannabis coincided with alcohol prohibition during the 1920’s and 30’s, though the Federal Bureau of Narcotics (FBN, now the Drug Enforcement Agency) made escalating bigoted fears around drug users a priority for subsequent decades to secure funding and expand operations (Abel, 1980; Dolce, 2016). Although representatives from the American Medical Association asserted there was no evidence of its alleged dangers in 1937, Harry Ainslinger (head of the FBN) claimed before congress, “marihuana is an addictive drug which produces insanity, criminality, and death” (cited in Dolce, 2016, p. 42). A well-funded propaganda campaign ensued. The FBN, alongside commercial industries with financial interests antithetical to cannabis propagation (such as alcohol and cotton corporations) began engineering moral panic through media outlets and movies to suggest cannabis caused mental illness, lawlessness, and indiscriminate murder (Warf, 2014). This resulted in harsh federal penalties for cannabis distribution, widespread misconceptions about the drug, and a billion dollar budget for the Drug Enforcement Agency.

Cannabis prohibition occurred north of the border at a time when most Canadians had not heard of the plant, though similar xenophobic sentiments drove reactions against immigrants and drug use (Carstairs, 1999; Gordon, 2006). The government’s reaction to opium use resembled its reaction to cannabis use. In 1907, thousands of White men held an anti-Asian demonstration in Vancouver’s Chinatown, which descended into widespread
destruction of property and threats against immigrants. When the Chinese community requested help from the Canadian government, then deputy labor minister William Mackenzie King investigated and sounded the alarm about opium manufacturing by Asians in British Columbia, emphasizing the risk of white women being corrupted by Chinese drug dealers (Allen, 2013; Carstairs, 1999). A police officer’s testimony at a government commission on immigration exemplifies attitudes during this time: “Opium is the Chinese evil...used in every house without exception. This evil is growing with the whites... principally working men...and white women prostitutes“ (cited in Gordon, 2006, p. 63). The movement against drugs like opium and cannabis was joined by women’s rights activist Emily Murphy shortly after she became Canada’s first female magistrate. In her book *The Black Candle* and related publications, Murphy reduced all mind-altering substance use to moral failure and enmeshed race, immigration, violence, and drug use in the Canadian imagination (Carstairs, 1999). In her words: “A visitor may be polite, patient, preserving...but if he carried poisoned lollipops in his pocket and feeds them to our children, it might seem wise to put him out” (Murphy, 1922, p. 187). Although police made their first physical seizure in 1937, cannabis was legally prohibited in Canada fourteen years earlier, shortly after publication of Murphy’s book in 1923 (Allen, 2013). As thousands of people of color were persecuted for drug and immigration offenses, Murphy’s profile in the national media rose and McKenzie King later became Prime Minister. Like in the United States, elite crusaders manufactured racist narratives using fear-invoking imagery to galvanize the public against the use of a substance and construct of a person deemed to be different and dangerous.

Laws against cannabis possession and distribution in Canada and the States have had a devastating impact on racialized populations. ”War on Drugs“ policies resulted in the disproportionate incarceration of Black and Hispanic men across America, creating a scenario where the number of Black men incarcerated in 2001 was equal to the number of men enslaved in 1820 (Boyd, 2001; Fornili, 2018; Warde, 2013). As the prison-industrial complex exerted pressure on courts and police to enforce harsh laws against non-violent drug infractions, twenty-first century scenes of racialized men working in prison labor camps
re-created images of chattel slavery across the United States. Between 2001 and 2010, cannabis arrests increased and accounted for 52% of all drug arrests in the US, with Black people three to six times more likely to be arrested than Whites despite similar rates of use (American Civil Liberties Union, 2013; Ashford et al., 2019). In 2018, people of color made up 84% of all federally sentenced cannabis convictions in America, though White people constitute more than 60% of the population (Rivers, 2019).

Prior to Canadian cannabis legalization, Black and Indigenous people were also overrepresented in possession arrests across major cities despite similar rates of use among White and racialized groups (Browne, 2018; Ejeckam, 2019). In Regina, Indigenous people were nine times more likely to be arrested for cannabis possession than Whites despite making up only 9.1% of the city’s population (Browne, 2018). In Toronto and Halifax, Black people with no criminal convictions were three to five times more likely to be arrested for possession. In Ottawa, Indigenous, Black, and Middle Eastern people are notably over-represented in cannabis arrests despite each group’s minority status (Browne, 2018). Systematic racial profiling of non-White people has been well-documented across Canada, and simple possession has historically served as a pretext for harassment and intrusive searches (Bundale, 2018; Ejeckam, 2019; Warde, 2013). Beneath the surface of these racially charged statistics and interactions lie socially constructed assumptions of dark-skinned people posing a threat to law-abiding (White) society. As cannabis laws are liberalized across the West, it is imperative for social workers to examine their professional past and position in relation to racialized people who use this drug.

Social Workers: From Christian Volunteers to Treatment Professionals

North American social workers have encountered individuals who use mind-altering substances and their families since the beginning of the twentieth century, with the roots of early practice steeped in Christian ethics and moral discernment (Hick, 2002; Straussner, 2001). Christian charitable organizations funded by wealthy businessmen and operated by upper class volunteers were known to apply dogmatic models of
“deserving” and “undeserving” poor to distinguish who was worthy of material relief (Hick, 2002, p. 41). While the deserving poor were often clean, tidy, and perceived to be of good moral character, the undeserving poor were deemed to be lazy and morally inferior. Due to the subjective nature of the deserving and undeserving categories (and considerable amount of discretion in the hands of faith-based workers) assumptions related to substance use and race could quietly influence who would be denied aid. Christian volunteers and missionaries working among the marginalized were known to decry the “vile weed” and generally framed all non-medical drug use as moral failure (Warf, 2014, p. 428). The perception of social workers as gatekeepers of resources and enforcers of conventional morality was established during this time and persisted through the progression of the profession, despite later efforts to depart from moral judgements of deservingness.

Notions of scientific philanthropy became popular from the 1920’s to 60’s and social work shifted from a religious and charitable practice to a more secular and state-administered vocation (Hick, 2002; Irving, 1992). Freudian thought, behaviorism, and diagnostic approaches became popular alongside the medicalization of the profession. The “scientific imperative” was central to social work research and education in the 1940’s and the scientific method was seen to be a key instrument in promoting social reform (Irving, 1992, p. 9). Social work courses and placements extolled the virtues of “objective” assessments and “rational” advice-giving while quietly guiding clients to conform to White, middle class norms. The work of Mary Richmond advanced notions of substance abuse as an incurable illness requiring physical and mental examination and affirmed the role of social workers in the treatment of people with substance use problems (Straussner, 2001). During this time, Alcoholics Anonymous and the Minnesota Model became cornerstones of addiction rehabilitation, framing addiction as a disease and promoting abstinence-based approaches for all illicit substance use (Anderson et al., 1999). Social workers grew to be a significant presence in addictions and mental health services, eventually constituting one of the largest groups of mental health professionals in North America (Bentley & Taylor, 2002). The venues of rehabilitation, child protection, and social service provision, as well as schools and criminal justice systems, became common
settings where social workers engaged with socially and racially marginalized cannabis users.

A consequence of the 1960’s "War on Drugs" policy and 1980’s "Just Say No" anti-drug campaign was that cannabis use and abuse became conflated (Bonnie & Whitebread, 1999). All cannabis consumption was perceived to be problematic due to its criminal status, no matter the frequency, effects, or motivations for use. Cannabis consumers caught by family, police, school administrators, and courts were routinely chastised and referred to abstinence-based programs to manage their disease and cure their moral failures. Across North America, social workers became responsible for identifying, reprimanding, monitoring, and managing cannabis users through drug testing in settings such as child welfare, drug courts, and probation/parole (Christensen, 2018; Dietz, 2013; National Center on Substance Abuse and Child Welfare [NCSACW], 2019; Roberts et al., 2014). To this day, penalties for using cannabis and failing a drug screen in certain circumstances can range from incarceration to losing access to one’s children. In states where obtaining income support involves submitting to drug tests, case workers of clients who test positive for cannabis are required to mandate drug treatment or cut people off life-sustaining benefits (Greenblatt, 2010; Widelitz, 2011).

Over the past three decades, social workers have become a “natural gateway” to rehabilitative services for people with cannabis-related problems (Thyer & Wodarski, 2007, p. 185). Approximately 30% of American cannabis users develop problematic consumption patterns and associated family, financial, academic, employment, legal, and psychological difficulties (Hasin, 2018). In many mental health and addiction settings, people with Cannabis Use Disorders (CUDs) are treated through assessment, individual psychotherapy, group support, and pharmacotherapy (Sherman & McRae-Clark, 2016; Thyer & Wodarski, 2007). These programs are built on the foundations of the Minnesota Model and typically utilize evidence-based approaches such as motivational enhancement, contingency management, relapse prevention, and cognitive-behavior therapies (Davis et al., 2015; Gates et al., 2016). Abstinence from all mind-altering substances is mandatory, even when clients wish to decrease rather than discontinue use. These models continue to conceptualize addiction as a disease originating within the individual,
family, and social environment while broader socioeconomic forces are ignored. Evidence-based treatments tend to decontextualize substance-related challenges, leading to the omission of discussions related to race, history, and social policy during treatment. This can facilitate clients being blamed for their legal and psychosocial problems rather than educated about root causes such as racism, stigma, and unjust laws. Importantly, stigma toward cannabis and its users have produced barriers to recovery for those who may be struggling with CUD’s, mental illness, and related life challenges (Kerridge et al., 2017).

Cannabis use among adolescents is of particular concern for school social workers due to the potential for this drug to impair memory, learning, and academic functioning (Coyle, 2017; Melchior et al., 2017). Almost all secondary schools in the United States and Canada have drug deterrence guidelines, and in some regions social workers play important roles in policy development, enforcement, and counselling. School social workers are often tasked with identifying and reforming "at-risk" youth who use cannabis while coordinating surveillance with guardians. This counselling can occur alongside threats of suspension, expulsion, or criminal charges. Drug policies and police presence in schools have been linked to the “school to prison pipeline,” wherein young people of color are disproportionately arrested for cannabis possession, fall behind in studies, disengage with school, and end up at risk for criminal justice involvement (Lee, 2014). In addition to exacerbating racial disparities, this approach has proven to be ineffective in deterring cannabis use. A longitudinal study of schools in Washington State and Australia reported students who attend schools with harsh punitive drug policies are actually more likely to consume cannabis than peers at schools without such policies (Evans-Whipp et al., 2015; Ingraham, 2015). Furthermore, referring cannabis-using students to drug education programs, school counselors, or police has been found to have no significant impact on cannabis use. Due to the heavy focus on cannabis-related risks, many school social workers have adopted a "zero tolerance" ethos, though this approach may be further marginalizing non-White students who use this drug.

The professional orientation of social workers begins with their education and training. Conventional social work instruction typically emphasizes the need for change at the individual
level alongside limited social reform while minimizing systemic problems such as racism or regressive legislation (Mullaly & Dupré, 2018). In an analysis of major social work journals, Corley & Young (2018) report social work literature and educators are “still failing to address institutional racism and are relying heavily on micro-level interventions when working with minoritized groups” (p. 317). Badwall (2015) suggests social workers’ desire to be “good” and socially just often collides with race-based realities in daily practice. The North American history of colonization and imperialism is generally overlooked in social work schooling, leading to a centralization of Whiteness in the profession which assumes professional moral superiority over people of color. Vinsky (2018) describes racial anxieties, reactivity, and fragility on the part of White social workers which inhibit confrontation of historic and current systemic mistreatment of racialized people. These factors have shaped social workers to maintain a social order that racializes and criminalizes cannabis use.

The function of social work professionals in the lives of racialized cannabis users over the past century has been complex. Since the 1970’s, some social workers have diverged from conventional practice and adopted progressive roles through resisting unjust drug policies, supporting the harm reduction movement, and advocating for alternatives to criminalization (Hick, 2002; National Association for Social Workers, 2013). Others have acted as paternalistic overseers through coercing people to stop using this drug or face dire consequences. Mullaly (2001) describes oppression as a process by which people are “excluded from full participation in society or assigned second class citizenship not because of individual talent, merit or failure, but because of...membership in a particular group or category of people” (p. 312). Historically, social workers have participated in the oppression of racialized cannabis users by disregarding their histories and facilitating their exclusion from schools and communities. Social workers have also been tasked with drug testing clients, withholding material benefits, and preventing parental access to children for using cannabis. Non-White cannabis users have been inordinately affected by these practices and it is essential to deconstruct the forces behind the differential treatment of this group in order to begin exploring viable solutions to ongoing injustices.
Deconstructing the Different,
Dangerous, and Deranged

Across nations, cultures, and races, a variety of factors contribute to cannabis use, including biological, psychological, social, familial, political, and societal influences (World Health Organization, 2016). People also take cannabis to alleviate medical conditions, as there is substantial evidence cannabinoids are effective in treating chronic pain, chemotherapy-induced nausea, and multiple sclerosis symptoms (National Academies of Sciences, 2017). There is additional anecdotal evidence supporting its use in the treatment of other health problems, though more research is needed to substantiate claims of broader medicinal benefit. Regardless of racial or ethnic background, people have personal reasons for using this drug. However, the color of a cannabis user’s skin has been demonstrated to impact the manner in which they are depicted and treated in the public sphere.

Contradictions between social perceptions toward cannabis use among White and non-White people are glaring. While consumption among minorities has been linked to deviance, dysfunction, and crime, use among White people in affluent communities has been portrayed as normative and essentially harmless (Covington, 1997; Ejeckam, 2019). Perhaps the clearest example of this was Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau’s unapologetic admission of subverting laws by smoking cannabis as a sitting member of Parliament in 2013. Though his confession was seized upon by political opponents and some who lamented his lack of judgment, Trudeau’s ability to joke about the matter and frame it as a minor indiscretion during a poolside dinner party made the event largely uncontroversial (The Canadian Press, 2013). This occurred while significant numbers of Black and Aboriginal people across Canada were being harassed by police and pushed into the criminal justice system for the same behavior (Browne, 2018). The discrepancy between how White and racialized cannabis users are treated is directly related to the perception that Black and Brown people are inherently more aggressive than Whites.

Dark-skinned people have been fallaciously constructed as dangerous in the West for centuries (Bell, 1993; Delgado &
Stefancic, 2017; Potts, 1997; Ross, 1998) and cannabis has been a part of that problematic narrative. Since the colonial era, Canadian and American economies have relied on the exploitation of cheap labor from immigrants and racialized communities, though fears of labor market disruption and nonconformity to norms facilitated racist policies and speculation to control these groups (Gordon, 2006). Media outlets fuelled the conjecture by repeatedly showcasing faces of Black and Brown men during stories of violence and drug seizures to solidify the misrepresentation of these groups as more dangerous and drug-consuming than others (Potts, 1997). Television news, talk shows, advertisements, Hollywood movies, and the commercial music industry have been especially insidious avenues for corporate elites to profit from the construction of non-White, cannabis smoking men as dangerous. Moreover, minority drug use has been coupled with “ghetto pathologies” like unemployment, crime, gang violence, and moral breakdown in policy literature, resulting in risk discourses around racialized young men in government bureaucracies and policy settings (Covington, 1997, p. 136).

Research examining the relationship between cannabis and aggression tells a more nuanced story. Studies have indicated that cannabis-intoxicated humans and animals are less likely to act aggressively than non-intoxicated controls, though withdrawal from regular use may be related to elevated irritability (Abel, 1977; Hoaken & Stewart, 2003). One literature review identified contradictory findings in the research and cautioned against inferring causation between cannabis and aggression, noting that confounding variables such as alcohol/other drug use, geographic location, learning disabilities, and violent victimization may lead to spurious associations (Ostrowsky, 2011). The World Health Organization (2016) suggests social disadvantage, childhood adversity, and negative peer associations may explain the links between cannabis use and psychosocial outcomes such as aggressive behavior. In spite of the evidence, some journalists and media figures have continued to propagate sensationalized stories of cannabis use causing violent and homicidal behavior.

To address the issue, an open letter signed by dozens of scholars and clinicians states: “Associations between individual characteristics and violence are multi-factorial. Thus, establishing marijuana as a causal link to violence at the individual level is both theoretically and empirically problematic” (Ashford et
Deconstructing the Racialized Cannabis User

al., 2019, para. 1). Separating the social effects of cannabis from its historically criminal status and other confounding variables is difficult due to the American classification of cannabis as a schedule one substance (Angell, 2018). This policy, which categorizes cannabis as a drug with high abuse potential and no medicinal value, has restricted rigorous study in the United States. Limited empirical analysis has set the scene for anecdotal evidence, biased accounts, and studies with unrepresentative samples to maintain erroneous perceptions of cannabis users.

Although the construct of racialized cannabis users as violent criminals can be debunked as a translucent control mechanism, claims that connect cannabis use to mental illness are less propagandistic. Substantial evidence suggests frequent and high dose intake of the cannabis component Δ-9 tetrahydrocannabinol (THC) in youth with genetic predispositions can increase risk for psychotic disorders and psychiatric hospitalizations (Hasan et al., 2019; Large et al., 2011; Proal et al., 2014). Though the link exists, the association between cannabis and psychosis is complex and multi-faceted (Baudin et al., 2016; Compton & Manseau, 2017). There is also considerable evidence connecting traumatic experiences and stress in childhood to the development of psychotic symptomology, including paranoia and hallucinations (Bailey et al., 2018; Bendall et al., 2008; Seow et al., 2016). Trauma and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) have additionally been implicated in the emergence of CUD’s among young people (Cornelius et al., 2010; Kevorkian et al., 2015). One study examining the relationship between cannabis and psychosis that adjusted for childhood trauma found the effect of cannabis on psychotic symptoms was attenuated and not statistically significant (Houston et al., 2011). While elites have historically painted a picture of racialized cannabis users as crazed due to their cannabis use, it is now clear that trauma, THC dosage, genetic pre-disposition, and frequency of intake are more relevant factors than race when considering the relationship between cannabis and psychosis. Furthermore, recent studies have highlighted the potential for the non-intoxicating cannabis component cannabidiol (CBD) in producing therapeutic effects for people with psychosis and/or PTSD, though more research is needed in these areas (Bhattacharyya et al., 2018; Greer et al., 2014; Lake et al., 2019; McGuire et al., 2018; Shishko et al., 2018).
Over the past decade, North American governments have been loosening cannabis regulations and public perceptions toward the drug are softening. A 2017 national survey reported only 28% of Canadians felt cannabis use was socially acceptable, though the number increased to 45% in a follow up survey after the drug was legalized in 2018 (Government of Canada, 2017, 2018). At the onset of 2020, 11 States and Washington D.C. had fully legalized the drug and 33 States had legalized for medicinal purposes (McNamara, 2020). Several other states are debating further liberalization, with the potential for increased tax revenues weighing on government decision-making. According to a recent poll, 65% of Americans now support federal cannabis legalization, including groups traditionally opposed (McNamara, 2020). This data suggests cannabis is becoming a mainstream mind-altering substance. As the stigma diminishes, the once fear-invoking image of the aggressive, unhinged, dark-skinned cannabis criminal may begin to fade as well. However, this does not mean historical injustices or racial inequities have been overcome. A new landscape of power and privilege is taking shape in a climate of contradiction that implores social workers to re-examine how racialized cannabis users are treated.

The Business of Cannabis and Role of Social Workers

As cannabis transitions from criminalization to commodification, racial divides are being maintained and unexpected actors are capitalizing on financial opportunities within the legal industry. In the United States, former conservative lawmakers are downplaying their involvement in criminalization and taking positions as shareholders in multinational cannabis corporations (Breslow, 2019; Gangitano, 2019). In Canada, former law enforcement officials are joining politicians at lucrative cannabis companies despite a range of conflicts of interest in their profiteering (DiMatteo, 2018). A reflection of the power dynamics in the legal North American trade is the racial make-up of the industry. At the time of this writing, 81% of American companies are owned by Caucasian men and only 3% of the top five Canadian producers have hired people of color in managerial positions (Ejeckam, 2019; Rivers, 2019). Many non-White
producers and distributors who operated in the black market are now shut out of employment in the legal trade due to strict restrictions and mandatory criminal background checks. The preponderance of wealthy, White, politically connected men making millions in this industry is concerning, especially given the thousands of racialized people currently serving sentences in the United States for distributing cannabis. In the words of Ferrell Scott, a Black man incarcerated in Pennsylvania for trafficking cannabis, “You would think that selling marijuana is the worst thing in the world because I was given a life sentence for it” (Rivers, 2019, para. 5).

Social workers have a unique responsibility to take a stand on current social justice issues while advocating and educating for change. At the professional level, social workers must support the scrapping of laws in regions where cannabis criminalization persists and propose shifts in policy toward a public health (rather than free market) approach (National Association for Social Workers, 2013). This includes fighting for the release of people currently incarcerated for cannabis offenses and the expungement of cannabis-related criminal records. There is also a need to advocate for racialized communities most negatively affected by prohibition to benefit from legalization through government intervention, redistribution of resources, and corporate responsibility programs. In the words of Ejeckam (2019), revenue obtained from legal cannabis sales and taxes should be used to fund “meaningful reparations for communities targeted for decades by racist drug laws and enforcement” (para. 4).

At the organizational level, social workers in criminal justice and child welfare systems can strive to resist policies that maintain intrusive and unreasonable surveillance of their clients. Anti-oppressive practices and recognition of latent and overt racism in organizational settings are valuable in addressing systemic social problems (see Mullaly & Dupré, 2018). School social workers should advocate for harm reduction strategies which discourage “zero-tolerance” policies and promote interventions that foster meaningful student-teacher relationships (Evans-Whipp et al., 2015). One-size-fits-all approaches are ineffective in deterring drug use or helping young people achieve their potential. Therapeutic discussions should avoid lecturing and be tailored to meet the unique needs of students (Coyle, 2017).
At the individual and family level, social workers have an integral role in fighting stigma and dispelling myths. As the evidence base expands, there is a need to bridge the gap between budding research and public knowledge. Social workers can apply fact-based, inclusive, non-judgmental educational frameworks that mobilize the most recent findings regarding the risks and benefits of cannabis consumption (see Valleriani et al., 2018). In treatment settings, contextualized psychoeducation which acknowledges systemic factors can be integrated with evidence-based therapies to reduce unproductive emphasis on individual deficiencies. Workers must also strive to distinguish cannabis use from dependence or abuse through utilizing validated assessment tools and client-centered approaches (López-Pelayo et al., 2015). Harm reduction strategies (Marlatt et al., 2011) and lower-risk use guidelines (see Fischer et al., 2017) are practical when addressing the known harms related to cannabis use, though gaps in knowledge should candidly be acknowledged. The foreseeable loosening of restrictions around cannabis research is sure to spark a rapid increase in studies from the scientific community. However, a need remains for multidimensional analyses which take into account the intersecting structural, historical, socioeconomic, and political contexts that shape drug use and policy. Most importantly, social work researchers, educators, and practitioners can help change the discourse around cannabis and its users through listening to, learning from, and amplifying the voices of the people with whom they work.
References


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Deconstructing the Racialized Cannabis User


School Lunch Participation 
and Youth School Failure: 
A Multi-Racial Perspective

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In the United States, students from low-socioeconomic status and minority ethnic groups graduate from high school at lower rates than their peers. Limited studies exist about the risk and protective factors that affect the disproportionate graduation rates by income and ethnicity. Using the 2016 Arizona Youth Survey data (N = 32,178), this study aims to explore the relationship between the National School Lunch Program (NSLP) participation and school failure, and other risk and protective factors from a multi-racial perspective. Logistic regressions were conducted on the total sample and the six ethnic subsamples (i.e., White, Latino, Black, American Indian, Asian/Pacific Islander, and Mixed). Results showed a significant difference in school failure between free lunch participants and nonparticipants for the total youth sample and for the White, Latino, Black and Mixed subsamples. However, a significant difference in school failure between free lunch participants and reduced price lunch participants was only found for the total sample but not for any of the six ethnic subsamples. Significant risk factors across most ethnic groups include the participant being suspended from school and peer suspension/dropout. Protective factors across most ethnic groups were family management and school commitment. Findings highlight the need for more culturally responsive interventions to target school failure for low-income students across ethnic groups.
In the United States, the average high school graduation rate in the 2015 to 2016 school year was 84% compared to 77.6% for students from low-income families (DePaoli et al., 2018; U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, 2018). Research has demonstrated that low-socioeconomic status (SES) is a significant predictor for dropping out of high school (Bradley & Renzulli, 2011; Rumberger, 1987; Rumberger & Lim, 2008; Weis et al., 1989). Other common predictors include poor course performance, absenteeism, and behavior problems (Battin-Pearson et al., 2000; U.S. Department of Education, 2016). Less conclusive research exists about how other risk and protective factors relate to differences in academic performance for students from low-SES backgrounds (Okilwa, 2016; Suh et al., 2007). Furthermore, previous studies have mixed findings on the relationship between ethnic groups and the risk and protective factors of high school dropout (Rumberger & Lim, 2008). Additional research is needed to examine the factors associated with high school dropout rates for students by ethnic groups and SES. Therefore, the current study aims to explore the relationship between National School Lunch Program (NSLP) participation (as an indicator of SES) on school failure and to examine whether that relationship differs by racial and ethnic groups.

**Disparities in Educational Outcomes**

In the United States, high school graduation rates vary by ethnicity. In 2016 to 2017, national high school graduation rates were highest for Asian/Pacific Islander students (91%), followed by White (89%), Hispanic (80%), Black (78%), and American Indian/Alaskan Native students (72%) (Snyder et al., 2019). Rumberger and Lim (2008) conducted a systematic review of research from the 1980s to the early 2000s examining factors that influenced high school dropout. More than 200 studies examined the relationship between ethnicity and school dropout.
This review found mixed results in the studies, which suggests that dropout may be better explained by additional risk and protective factors, including family background or educational performance (Rumberger & Lim, 2008). Despite being widely studied, as referenced in the systematic review conducted by Rumberger & Lim (2008), there are still inconclusive results about which risk and protective factors most influence the disproportionately low graduation rates for minority groups.

About 77% of students from low-income families graduate from high school compared to 90% from students from non-low-income families (DePaoli et al., 2018). A meta-analysis with 101 articles from before 1980 found SES to positively correlate with academic achievement with a mean correlation of .343 (White, 1982). In 2005, another meta-analysis, following the same methods as White, found a medium to strong correlation between SES and academic achievement with a mean correlation of .229 from studies between 1990 to 2000 (Sirin, 2005). The change in correlation could be related to improved measures of SES and academic outcomes, overall social and policy changes, or other contributing risk and protective factors. Additional studies are needed to understand the risk and protective factors that affect the relationship between SES and educational outcomes.

Before dropping out of school, students typically display a pattern of behaviors including course failure, absenteeism, and behavioral problems (Balfanz et al., 2007; Battin-Pearson et al., 2000; Rumberger & Lim, 2008; U.S. Department of Education, 2016). These behaviors are considered to be risk factors for high school dropout; however, additional risk factors may also influence school failure and dropout. A meta-analysis on 53 cases from 34 studies found a significant positive relationship between school suspension and dropout (Noltemeyer et al., 2015). Students who have a friend drop out of high school have been shown to also be more likely to drop out (Carbonaro, 1998; McIntyre, 2013; Mora & Oreopoulos, 2011). Poverty has been associated with more frequent school mobility, which can affect academic success (Fang et al., 2020; Friedman-Krauss & Raver, 2015; Rumberger & Lim, 2008). Students from low-socioeconomic status who are experiencing course failure may need different levels of support than students from families with higher income levels.
The Food and Nutrition Service of the United States Department of Agriculture administers the program. In 2016, 30.4 million children in the United States participated in the NSLP (U.S. Department of Agriculture, 2017). Free lunch participation has been used as a proxy measure for SES in educational research since the development of the NSLP in the 1960s. However, there is some controversy over whether it is an appropriate measure to assess SES (Chingos, 2016; Harwell & LeBeau, 2010; Randolph & Prejean-Harris, 2017). While this may not be the most accurate measure of SES, it is the measure most commonly collected in school settings and is therefore frequently accepted as a valid measure of SES in research studies. Although studies have examined the relationship between SES and academic achievement, few have specifically examined educational outcomes related to participation in the NSLP (Anderson et al., 1992; Colgren & Sappington, 2015; National Center for Educational Statistics, 2011; Tash, 2018; Williams, 2003).

In 1992, a national study found that average test scores for students receiving free or reduced price lunch (low-SES) were lower than for students who did not participate in the school lunch program (Anderson et al., 1992). However, some low-SES students achieved high academic scores. High-achieving, low-SES students were more likely to have the protective factors of living with both parents, arriving to school on time, attending classes, and having limits on the amount of time they could spend with friends on school nights (Anderson et al., 1992). Since then, additional studies have compared short-term educational outcomes for students receiving free or reduced price lunch and those who did not. Measures of educational outcomes have included test scores and high school graduation rates. Studies found that students receiving free or reduced price lunch experienced poorer educational outcomes than students who did not participate in the NSLP (Colgren & Sappington, 2015; National Center for Educational Statistics, 2011; Williams, 2003). However, little is known about the other risk and protective factors.
that affect this relationship. The limited number of studies examining the NSLP participation and school failure calls for additional research to further explore the relationship and other contributing factors.

Involvement of School Social Workers and Student Educational Outcomes

School social workers provide student supportive services designed to narrow academic achievement gaps between low-SES and minority students and their White majority peers across several different school performance indicators, including rates of school dropout (Rumberger, 2011). Schools and districts can employ social workers directly, though less than a third of schools with a majority of students qualifying for free or reduced price school lunch have a dedicated school social worker on staff (Stone, 2015). Schools without a dedicated school social worker may instead provide supportive services through collaborations between schools and community agencies, such as mental health service providers and child and family services (Franklin, 2000; Stone, 2015). These services are often viewed as ancillary rather than integral to the academic success of students (Adelman & Taylor, 2006), and are subject to budget cuts and institutional dynamics (Frey et al., 2012; Tyack, 1992). School social workers are tasked with improving academic outcomes directly through the reduction in disruptive behaviors and mental health problems among adolescents (Stone, 2015). The addition of social workers to schools that previously did not employ any has been associated with positive academic achievement trajectories and lower rates of truancy (Stone et al., 2013). Social workers indirectly improve academic outcomes of students by positively affecting school settings.

Theoretical Framework

Although students with more risk factors are more likely to drop out of high school and experience negative educational outcomes, many students with risk factors still graduate from high school and experience positive educational outcomes. The educational resilience framework can be used to understand this paradox. Educational resilience is defined as “the heightened
likelihood of success in school and in other life accomplishments, despite environmental adversities brought about by early traits, conditions, and experiences” (Wang & Gordon, 1994, p. 46). Educational resilience develops through continuous interactions between a child and characteristic features of their environment (Wang et al., 1997). Contexts that can foster the development of educational resilience include the family, peer group, community, and school (Wang et al., 1998). These environments can possess both risk factors and protective factors that can influence the development of educational resilience. Educational risk and protective factors at the individual, peer, family, school, and community levels are used in this study as covariates. By controlling for these educational risk and protective factors, we can explore the relationship between income level and school failure. Therefore, using the educational resilience framework can help researchers understand both the educational risk factors for students receiving free or reduced price lunch and the protective factors that promote educational resilience.

Using the educational resilience framework, the current study aims to broaden the understanding of the impacts of the NSLP participation on school failure by ethnic groups by addressing the following research questions:

1. Do youth who receive free lunch report different levels of school failure than students who receive reduced price lunch or neither free nor reduced price lunch (nonparticipants)?

2. Does the relationship between NSLP participation and school failure differ by ethnic group?

Materials and Methods

Data and Sample

This study used data from the 2016 Arizona Youth Survey (AYS). The AYS is administered by the Arizona Criminal Justice Commission’s (ACJC) Statistical Analysis Center on a bi-annual basis. AYS aims to examine the frequency and prevalence of risky behaviors by Arizona youth. The survey also collects information about youth risk and protective factors at individual, peer, family, school, and community domains (ACJC, 2016). The
survey was conducted throughout the state of Arizona in all fifteen counties by eighth, tenth, and twelfth-grade students. All public, private, and charter schools in the state were eligible to participate and were recruited by ACJC (2018). Data was collected using a self-administered, paper-and-pencil questionnaire on a Scantron sheet in schools with limited student computer access. In schools that preferred an online survey, a self-administered online survey was used to collect data. The same questions were used for both data collection methods. Additional details about AYS are provided in ACJC (2018). For AYS 2016, 57,170 youth participated from 249 schools within fifteen counties. Of the survey participants, 50% were male and 50% were female. By ethnic groups, the sample was 47.9% White (n = 15,408), 37.3% Latino (n = 11,999), 3.0% Black (n = 970), 3.1% American Indian (n = 1,006), 3.0% Asian/Pacific Islander (n = 963), and 5.7% Mixed (n = 1,832; ACJC, 2016). The final analytic sample for the current study was reduced to 32,178. Participants with missing data were removed from the sample.

Measures

Dependent variable. To explore school failure, participants were asked, “Putting them all together, what were your grades like last year?” Five response categories were provided: mostly A’s, mostly B’s, mostly C’s, mostly D’s, and mostly F’s. The variables were recoded into a dichotomous variable: 0 = Mostly A’s, B’s, or C’s (indicating not failure), 1 = Mostly D’s or F’s (indicating school failure).

Independent variable. The aim of the study was to explore whether free lunch participation had an impact on the school failure of adolescents. Free lunch participation was used to indicate household SES. To answer this question, participants were divided into three groups based on responses to the question, “Do you get a free or reduced cost lunch at school?” Three response categories were provided and were recoded as 3 dummy variables: free lunch (reference group), reduced price lunch (1 = yes, 0 = no), and nonparticipation (1 = yes, 0 = no). Overall, about 40% of participants reported receiving free or reduced price lunch. The only indicator of SES in the Arizona Youth Survey is free lunch participation.
**Covariates.** We also controlled for variables of youth demographics, risk factors, and protective factors that related to school failure at the individual, peer, family, school, and community levels on all the analytic models that were identified in the literature. At the individual level, we controlled for gender (1 = male, 0 = female), age (as a continuous variable with a range of 12 to 19 years old), and grade. Grade was the school grade level when youth participated in the survey. It was recoded as three dummy variables: 8th grade (reference group), 10th grade (1/0) and 12th grade (1/0). Youth ethnicity was recoded as six dummy variables: White (reference group), Latino (1/0), Black (1/0), American Indian (1/0), Asian/Pacific Islander (1/0), and Mixed (1/0). We also controlled for whether the participant had ever been suspended from school during the last 12 months (1/0) and the total ACE score. For the total ACE score, participants were asked whether they had the following six different ACE conditions: “(a) living with anyone who was a problem drinker or alcoholic; (b) living with anyone who used illegal street drugs or who abused prescription medications; (c) living with anyone who served time or was sentenced to serve time in a prison, jail, or other correctional facility; (d) parents separated or divorced; (e) having adults in home ever slap, hit, kick, punch, or beat each other up; (f) having an adult in your home ever swear at you, insult you, or put you down.” Each of the ACE conditions was recoded into a dummy variable (1 = yes, 0 = no). The total ACE score became a continuous variable by adding the scores from the six different ACE conditions. A higher total ACE score indicated more ACE conditions.

At the peer level, we controlled for peer suspension/dropout and negative peer interactions. For peer suspension/dropout, participants were asked, “How many of your best friends have been suspended or dropped out of school in the past year?” We recoded it as a dummy variable, indicating whether any of their friends had been suspended or dropped out of school (1 = yes, 0 = no). For negative peer interactions, participants were asked the following four questions: “(a) How often do other students make fun of you?; (b) How often do other students push or hit you?; (c) How often are other students mean to you?; and (d) How often do other students exclude you from activities?” Responses were given on a five-point scale (1 = never/almost never and 5 = always/almost always). We averaged these four scores to
calculate negative peer interactions. The higher the score, the more negative peer interactions the student experienced.

At the family level, we controlled for mother’s education level (continuous variable, from 1 = 8th grade or less to 7 = graduate or professional) and family management. For family management, participants used a four-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree, 4 = strongly agree) to answer the following questions: “(a) My parents ask if I have gotten my homework done; (b) My parents would know if I did not come home on time; (c) When I am not home, one of my parents knows where I am and who I am with; and (d) If I skipped school, my parents would catch me.” We averaged these four scores, with a lower score indicating poorer family management.

At the school level, we controlled for school safety (1/0), and low school commitment. For low school commitment, participants answered by a five-point Likert scale the following questions: “(a) How interesting are most of your courses to you?” (1 = very interesting, 5 = not at all interesting); “(b) How important do you think the things you are learning in school are going to be for you later in life?” (1 = very important, 5 = not at all important); “(c) Now thinking back over the past year in school, how often did you feel that the school work you were assigned was meaningful and important?” (1 = almost always, 5 = never). Low school commitment was treated as a continuous variable by averaging the scores for the questions. A higher score indicated lower school commitment. At the community level, we controlled for community safety (1/0) and community attachment. For community attachment, participants answered the following questions using a four-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree, 4 = strongly agree): “(a) If I had to move, I would miss the neighborhood I now live in; (b) I like my neighborhood; (c) I’d like to get out of my neighborhood.” It was treated as a continuous variable using the mean score of the three variables. The higher the score, the higher level of community attachment.

Analytic Strategy

First, descriptive statistics were run for all of the variables by the whole sample and each of the six ethnic groups. Then—while controlling for the demographic and socioeconomic factors at the individual, peer, family, school, and community levels—logistic
regressions were conducted for the whole sample and by the six ethnic subgroups to examine the relationship between school failure and school lunch participation. We also controlled the clustering effects (Primo et al., 2007) at school levels. All the analyses were conducted using Stata 15.0 for Windows.

Results

Descriptive Statistics

Table 1 shows the descriptive statistics for each variable for the entire youth sample (Column 1) and for each of the six ethnic subgroups (Columns 2–7). Overall, about 6% of participants reported a school failure in the last year. American Indian youth (11%) reported the highest school failure rate, followed by Black (9%), Latino (8%), mixed racial groups (6%), White (4%), and Asian/Pacific Islanders (4%). The percentage of free lunch participation for the total sample was 33%. The highest rate of free lunch participation was found among American Indian youth (70%), whereas the lowest was White participants (15%). The reduced price lunch participation rate for the total sample was 8%. The highest rate of reduced price lunch participation was Black participants (11%) and the lowest was White participants (6%). The nonparticipation in the NSLP for the total sample was 60%. White youth had the highest nonparticipation rates (79%) while American Indian students had the lowest rates of nonparticipants (23%).

Of the total sample, 47% were male and the average age was 15.54 (SD = 1.71) years old. The majority of youth were in tenth grade (35%) followed by eight grade (34%) and twelfth grade (32%). Nearly half (48%) of the total sample were White youth, followed by Latino (37%), mixed racial (6%), Black (3%), American Indian (3%), and Asian/Pacific Islander (3%) youth. The mean ACE score across ethnic groups was 1.13 (out of 6). About 10% of youth had been suspended from school in the last year and 32% of youth had a friend who was suspended or dropped out of school in the last year. The average negative peer interaction score was 0.78 (SD = 1.43) and the mean score for family management was 2.13 (SD = 0.71). Their mothers’ average education level was some college. Overall, 82% of youth felt safe at
school, whereas 80% of youth felt safe in their community. More details are provided in Table 1.

Relationship Between Free Lunch Participation and School Failure

The results of our analysis on free lunch participation and school failure are shown in Table 2. Overall, free lunch participation was a significant predictor of school failure. Column (1) in Table 2 shows that, in comparison to participants with free lunch, a statistically significant lower odds of school failure was associated with participants receiving reduced price lunch for students overall (OR = 0.78, \( p < .05 \)). However, we did not find any significant differences in school failure between free lunch and reduced price lunch participants by all six ethnic subgroup samples. In comparison to participants with free lunch, a statistically significant lower odds of school failure was associated with nonparticipation for the total sample (by 36%; \( p < .001 \)), as well as for the White (by 41%; \( p < .001 \)), Latino (by 24%; \( p < .01 \)), Black (by 48%; \( p < .05 \)), and Mixed (by 70%; \( p < .001 \)) subsamples.

For the covariates at the individual level of the total sample, other things being equal, Latino (\( p < .001 \)), Black (\( p < .01 \)), and American Indian (\( p < .001 \)) students had significantly higher odds of school failure than White students (reference group). Being male was associated with higher odds of school failure for overall participants and some ethnic groups including White, Latino, and Mixed groups. Having a higher ACE score was also associated with higher odds of school failure for the total sample and some ethnic subgroups including White, Latino and Black subgroups. Higher odds of school failure were associated with participants having been suspended for the total sample and for all six ethnic subgroups.

For covariates at the peer level, other things being equal, a significantly higher odds of school failure was associated with participants having friends who had been suspended or dropped out of school for the total sample and for all ethnic subgroups besides Black. Significantly higher odds of school failure were also associated with a higher score of negative peer interactions for the total sample of youth and for some ethnic subgroups including White, Latino, and Black youth.

For covariates at the family level, other things being equal, every one unit increase in family management scores
Table 1. Sample Descriptions by Ethnic Groups

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Table 1. Sample Descriptions by Ethnic Groups (continued)

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Peer level:

**Peer Suspension/ Dropout**
- Mean: 0.32
- SD: 0.47

**Negative Peer Interactions**
- Mean: 0.78
- SD: 1.43

Family level:

**Family Management**
- Mean: 2.13
- SD: 0.71

School level:

**School Safety**
- Mean: 0.82
- SD: 0.39

**Low School Commitment**
- Mean: 3.01
- SD: 0.91

Community level:

**Community Safety**
- Mean: 0.80
- SD: 0.40

**Community Attachment**
- Mean: 2.88
- SD: 0.81

Observations:
- Total: 32,178
- White: 15,408
- Latino: 11,999
- Black: 970
- AI: 1,006
- API: 963
- Mixed: 1,832
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<td>1.55**</td>
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<td>American Indian (AI)</td>
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<td>0.793 - 1.419</td>
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<td>1.09***</td>
<td>1.28**</td>
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<td>1.13***</td>
<td>1.09***</td>
<td>1.28**</td>
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*P < 0.05, **P < 0.01, ***P < 0.001

Table 2  Results of Logistic Regression Analyses: School Failure
### Table 2  Results of Logistic Regression Analyses: School Failure  (continued)

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<td>1.69***</td>
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<td>0.84***</td>
<td>0.85***</td>
<td>0.88*</td>
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<td>1.66**</td>
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Notes: Robust 95% confident intervals were in brackets ; *** p<0.001, ** p<0.01, * p<0.05
significantly decreases the odds of school failure for the total sample (by 19%, $p < .001$), and for White (by 18%, $p < .001$), Latino (by 19%, $p < .001$), Black (by 30%, $p < .05$) and American Indian (by 38%, $p < .01$) ethnic subgroups. Every one level increase in mothers’ education significantly decreases the odds of youth school failure for the total sample and for some ethnic subgroups including White, Latino and Black groups.

For covariates at the school and community levels, other things being equal, every one unit increase in school commitment scores significantly decreases the odds of school failure for the total sample and for all ethnic subgroups but Asian/Pacific Islander. Results also show that feeling safe at school was significantly associated with lower odds of school failure for the total sample, and the White and Latino ethnic subgroups. For covariates at the community level, feeling safe in the community was significantly associated with lower odds of school failure for the total sample and for the White and Black subgroups. More details are provided in Table 2.

**Discussion**

This study examined the relationship between NSLP participation and school failure of youth from Arizona. We found that youth who did not participate in the NSLP lunch or received reduced price lunch reported significantly lower odds of school failure than students who received free lunch at school. Overall, this finding is consistent with other studies, which found that students who received free lunch experienced higher levels of school failure (Anderson et al., 1992). Other studies have also found lower academic achievement scores for students from minority ethnic groups receiving free lunch (Colgren & Sappington, 2015; National Center for Educational Statistics, 2011; Williams, 2003). The current study contributes to the literature by further exploring the variations of the relationships between welfare participation and school failure across six ethnic groups (i.e., White, Latino, Black, American Indian, Asian/Pacific Islander, and Mixed). We found a statistically significant difference in school failure between free lunch participants and nonparticipants for the total youth sample and for the White, Latino, Black and Mixed ethnic subsamples. We also found a statistically significant difference in school failure between free
lunch participants and reduced price lunch participants for the total sample, but not for any of the six ethnic subsamples.

This study also found that a participant being suspended from school or having a friend who was suspended or dropped out of school were significant risk factors for school failure for most of the ethnic groups. This is consistent with studies that found having a friend dropout of school increases the likelihood of a student dropping out (Carbonaro, 1998; Mora & Oreopoulos, 2011). A qualitative study of students at high-risk for dropping out found that peer relationships could push students to also drop out or stay in school (McIntyre, 2013). Male students were more likely to fail courses than female students. Most studies have found that males drop out of school at higher rates than females, but several studies have found that the rates may vary by ethnic group (Crowder & South, 2003; Rumberger & Lim, 2008).

In addition, this study found family management and school commitment were significant protective factors across most ethnic groups. Better family management was correlated with a reduction in school failure. This finding is consistent with other studies that have found family management to be a protective factor of child school engagement (Bartle-Haring et al., 2012). The findings from this study suggests that knowing with whom and where children are spending their time, setting clear rules, and checking on homework completion are associated with better educational outcomes for youth. Studies have also found that higher levels of school commitment or engagement have been associated with higher academic achievement (Bryan et al., 2012; Sciarra & Seirup, 2008).

Implications for Social Work Practice

The study highlights the need for both school-wide prevention programs and selective interventions that are culturally responsive. School-wide prevention programs can help to improve educational outcomes for all students. For example, school-based health centers and wraparound services have shown some promising links between academic outcomes, including dropout rate, adolescent health, family environment, and psychological well-being (Walker et al., 2010). School-based health centers (SBHCs) provide access to health and mental health services to
youth who are traditionally underserved within community health settings (Brown & Bolen, 2003; Walker et al., 2010). These centers have been found to increase GPA and attendance and reduce high school dropout rates (Walker et al., 2010). Multidisciplinary teams coordinate wraparound services for youth and families related to health, mental health, education, safety, and welfare (Suter & Bruns, 2009). When compared with youth not receiving services, adolescents receiving wraparound services had better mental health and school functioning outcomes as well as more stable living environments (Suter & Bruns, 2009). These programs can improve access to health and mental health services through school systems, which are important sources to access care for adolescents (Keeton et al., 2012).

Additionally, community school models, such as The Harlem Children’s Zone, integrate community services into schools to service student, family, and community needs (Dryfoos, 1994; Stone, 2015). These models have been gaining increased interest in recent years, though approaches between schools and districts vary widely and it is unclear what role social workers play in these models (Stone, 2015). The community school model promotes student involvement in service learning and volunteer opportunities to encourage community engagement, improvement, and development (Stone, 2015). This model also identifies the importance of social services, health and mental health services, and community development on academic outcomes among adolescents. For schools and districts with a high percentage of youth on free and reduced lunch, funding for social programs that provide social services, health and mental access, and family/community intervention strategies are needed to obtain positive academic outcomes and lower dropout rates.

In addition to school-wide prevention programs, schools can use selective interventions to target students who have identified risk factors for dropping out. This study suggests that participants across ethnic groups who had been suspended at least one time had a higher likelihood of school failure. Additionally, peer suspension or dropout was associated with school failure for most ethnic groups. This suggests that dropout intervention programs in schools could target students who have been suspended or had a friend who was suspended or dropped out. Further, higher family management scores were associated with
lower odds of school failure for all ethnic subgroups but Asian/Pacific Islander and Mixed. Aspects of interventions for family management could include teaching families how to check on homework and academic progress, ensure youth are attending school, talk to youth about with whom they are spending time, and monitor where they are spending their time. This finding suggests that intervention programs aimed at improving positive family management skills could help to improve educational outcomes. However, the finding was not statistically significant for Asian/Pacific Islander and Mixed youth. Family management interventions may need to be culturally responsive for families of Asian/Pacific Islander and Mixed youth or focus on other protective factors that are significant for those populations.

Limitations and Strengths

The current study has some limitations. One limitation of the study was that it did not use a probability sample. All schools in the state of Arizona were eligible to participate, and schools in all 15 counties in Arizona participated. However, participation by the schools was optional and the study did not utilize random selection. Another limitation is that the study did not address missing data given the non-probability sampling method. A third limitation is that the sample was not a national sample but was limited to one state. Given the sample was limited to Arizona, caution is needed when generalizing results to other areas.

Nevertheless, this study has several strengths. While not nationally representative, this study had a large sample size of youth across a diverse state. The sample included rural, urban, and suburban areas from multiple racial groups. This study utilized a multi-racial group comparison, which provided more precise predictors of positive educational outcomes for different ethnic groups. Thus, this study can support researchers and practitioners in developing school-wide prevention and culturally responsive interventions to improve educational outcomes. Multiple control variables at the individual, peer, school, family, and community levels were utilized, which can help to yield better understanding of the risk and protective factors from different levels.
Conclusion

Our findings highlight the need for more educational interventions for youth with low-socioeconomic status. Across ethnic groups, participant suspension and peer suspension/dropout were strong risk factors for school failure for students who received free lunch. Early interventions to target course failure and suspension could help to improve school performance. Additionally, interventions to support positive family management and higher school commitment could be protective factors to improve school performance. Future research could examine the effect of positive family management on school failure for students from a low-SES. Findings from this study highlight risk and protective factors affecting school performance for low-SES students across ethnic groups.

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References

Chapter Title

School Lunch Participation and School Failure


McIntyre, K. (2013). *At-Risk students and the dropout rate: What influences student decisions to remain in school or drop-out in a suburban high school*? ProQuest Dissertations and Theses.


Illiberalism: A Primer and Call to Action for Social Workers

Loring P. Jones  
San Diego State University

David Engstrom  
San Diego State University

Liberal democracies had been ascendant in the post-World War II era. President Trump is part of a wave of nationalist, anti-immigrant politicians with autocratic tendencies who are challenging liberal democracy. The term given to the governing philosophy of these leaders is illiberalism. This paper is meant to be a primer on illiberalism for social workers, describing this ideology and the threat illiberalism poses for democracy, our social welfare system, and the interests of social work clients. We conclude with a discussion on what social workers can do to defend democracy in light of the historic mission to advance social justice.

Keywords: Illiberalism, social policy, advocacy, President Trump

Purpose

An unexpected turn of events that is occurring in previously democratic countries is the rise of leaders who are willing to flout the norms of democracy. President Donald J. Trump fits within—and exemplifies—this trend. He is part of a wave of nationalist anti-immigrant politicians with autocratic tendencies who are coming to power throughout the world. The term for their governing philosophy is illiberalism. The ascendancy of Donald Trump and his ilk represents a serious threat to our democracy, as the policies he brings with him endanger civil
and human rights, the environment, economic justice, and our fragile social welfare system. As such, he represents a danger to the interests of social work’s clients (Lens, 2018). This paper is meant to be a primer on illiberalism for social workers, describing the threats this ideology poses to democracy, and suggesting what we as social workers and citizens can do about it.

Definitions

As defined in the in the United States, liberalism is frequently just another way of saying a person is a Democrat. However, it has another definition as a philosophy that developed during the Age of Enlightenment (1685–1815), which holds that societies are built on individual rights, the rule of law, the sovereignty of the people as exercised in free and fair elections, and rationality in decision making (Rawls, 1971; Zackaria, 1997). This conception of democracy is widely shared throughout the world and can accommodate differing political points of view from both the right and left, such as Scandinavia’s Social Democrats, and—until recently—the U.S. Republican Party.

Illiberalism was a term first used by Zackaria (1997) to describe hybrid political regimes that were somewhere in between a liberal democracy and an authoritarian state, but illiberal states lean towards authoritarianism. Illiberals are populists, but can be differentiated from what is usually understood as populism. Bernie Sanders and Elizabeth Warren are populists. Populists whether illiberal or traditional, both champion the “common man” against elites that they view as corrupt and exploitive of “the people.” Both populists and illiberals come to power through democratic elections, but they diverge after taking power. In governing, traditional populists work through existing democratic intuitions after they come to power (Kurkijuntio, 2018). In contrast, once in power illiberal populists display a willingness to subvert democratic institutions in favor of a more authoritarian form of governance. What all illiberal politicians have in common are a willingness to attack individual rights, the rule of law, the concept of a multicultural society, and a penchant for suppressing opposing political opinions (Lev- itsky & Ziblatt, 2018; Mounk, 2018).

 Mudde (2017) describes illiberalism as “majoritarian extremism,” where governing is viewed not as a compromise
among competing interests meant to serve the needs of all groups, but as a zero-sum contest between the will of the people as expressed by the leader, and anyone who might oppose that leader. In practice, rather than returning power to the people, illiberal leaders consolidate power for themselves and their supporters. Corruption accompanies illiberalism. Illiberal leaders cultivate cults of personality through which they claim a special relationship to the people. It is this relationship, rather than a constitution, that is the basis of their claim to power (Weyland & Madrid, 2019). Current examples of illiberals include Vladimir Putin (Russia), Viktor Orbán (Hungary), Recep Erdogan (Turkey), Rodrigo Duterte (Philippines), Matteo Salvini (Italy), and the latest entry, Jair Bolsonaro (Brazil).

What Brought About Illiberalism?

*Conditions under Which Liberal Democracies Flourish*

It is not guaranteed that the established democracies in the world—including the United States—will remain so. Liberal democracies flourish under four conditions that may be considered ideal types, all of which are under threat. First, economic growth and its benefits are widely shared in society, and this prosperity assures a person’s economic status in the present and social mobility for that person’s children. Second, political parties agree to conform to norms of fair play, and do not use the institutional powers available to them when in power to oppress the opposition (Levitsky & Ziblatt, 2018). Third, if a society is not ethnically and racially homogenous, it must be committed to combating racism and xenophobia, and to including marginal groups. Lastly, the media and political parties are able to block the rise of fringe antidemocratic political groups into the mainstream (Mounk, 2018).

*Failure of Institutions and Dissatisfaction with Government*

Illiberalism becomes attractive to a portion of the population when institutions are not seen as responsive to people’s needs and are instead viewed as serving unseen interests, be they state bureaucracies, economic or cultural elites, globalism, or perceived villains or scapegoats such as migrants or racial
and religious minorities. Rule by a strong leader to subdue these behind-the-scenes powers is viewed as a way to return power to the people. The illiberal leader is viewed as someone who will restore the “good old days”—which may never have existed—when government worked well. The people who vote for illiberals may feel that this form of government is more democratic than liberal democracy, because they see themselves as being empowered against elites (Mounk & Foa, 2016).

Ample evidence exists to document this dissatisfaction with democracy in the United States. According to a 2016 Gallup poll, only 38% of Americans were satisfied with “our system of democracy and how well it works,” which was much lower than in a 2008 poll which showed that 53% of respondents were satisfied with our form of government (Duggan, 2018). Foa, Mounk, and Inglehart (2016) noted that in the past, dissatisfaction with the government usually referred to the current administration. This dissatisfaction did not translate into the public wanting to replace the system. Citizens were content to live in a system where they could protest and vote the current office holders out. Just the opposite is occurring today: the dissatisfaction is with democracy itself as practiced. The danger is great when the public supports a political party that is willing to address that dissatisfaction by nondemocratic means.

Economic Change

Changes in global political and economic life are working against democracy. Neoliberalism and its commitment to globalization and free markets replaced the Keynesian economic paradigm that had once governed Western democracies’ economic and social policies. The Keynesian paradigm envisioned prosperous economies where the benefits of prosperity were spread out across the populace. Under this paradigm, government regulated markets and actively taxed the wealthy at high rates. The neoliberals wanted to end Keynesian state interventions in the economy and replace them with a more efficiently functioning free market. Whether or not a free-market economy has ever worked well within a liberal democracy is in doubt (Polanyi, 1944). Neoliberalism created and exacerbated economic inequality, concentrated wealth and power in the hands of economic elites, and saw living standards for the middle and working classes decline (Cohen, 2018). The resulting
inequality has bred resentment among those left behind, making them more likely to heed illiberal politicians and their promises. Despite having run a campaign that catered to working class economic grievances, President Trump’s governing actions, including his tax cuts, have exacerbated wealth differences in America. The inequality also undermines the legitimacy of the governing system in the perceptions of many citizens who wonder how democracy can exist alongside such disparities of wealth and power (Foa & Mounk, 2017).

Immigration

The most recent wave of immigration from points south on the globe to Europe, Australia, and the United States has prompted anxiety among many native-born people, which has led them to view multiculturalism and racial and religious diversity as a threat to their position in society. In Europe, from Poland to Sweden, illiberal political parties that embrace anti-immigrant policies have been gaining strength. Australia’s ruling liberal party has sent asylum seekers who wish to enter Australia by sea to distant detention centers on Nauru and on Papua New Guinea’s Manus Island, where they are held under deplorable conditions (Hollingsworth & Watson, 2019). In the United Kingdom, the Brexit vote was driven in large part by anxiety over immigration (Broder, 2019). Donald Trump’s declaration of his candidacy for the U.S. presidency fed on this anti-immigrant sentiment when he launched a racist attack on Mexican immigrants in which he labeled them drug dealers, criminals, and rapists (Lopez, 2019). Under President Trump, immigrants are viewed as “the other,” a dangerous class to be feared, who threaten our way of life and the economic well-being of the country (Appelbaum, 2019; Jones & Kiley, 2016). President Trump’s anti-immigrant message has resonated with evangelicals who see immigrants threatening the hegemony of Christianity in the United States (Whitehead et al., 2018).

Racism

The current crisis in American democracy is a result not only of our deep polarization over partisan politics, but also of our present culture wars. The crisis has deep roots in the
American struggle with the country’s original sin of racism and slavery and is aggravated by the social changes brought about by an increasingly diverse and multicultural society. Some Americans have a desire to halt the demographic flux occurring around them. This group has been prone to accept illiberal arguments where tolerance of differences among people go by the wayside, thus challenging our democratic norms (Badger & Cohn, 2019; Horowitz, 2019; Ostiguy & Roberts, 2016).

It is hard to ignore the role that race played in the rise of President Trump. His first foray into public discussions of race was to pay for an advertisement in New York City’s major newspapers advocating the death penalty for the Central Park Five, a group of young Black males falsely accused of raping a White female jogger in the late 1980s. Even after their innocence was established, Donald Trump continued to insist on their guilt. His ascent in the ranks of Republican Party presidential contenders began with his championing of the “Birther” movement in 2011. The Birther movement, with its undercurrent of racism, questioned the legitimacy of Barack Obama, the forty-fourth president to hold that office, based on the false contention that he was not born in the United States. This belief found widespread support among Republicans: in mid-2016, an NBC News survey of more than 1,700 registered voters reported that 72% of Republicans had doubts about whether President Obama was born in America (Clinton & Roush, 2016). Those subscribing to this belief viewed Obama as an “other” who did not belong in America, let alone qualify to be its president.

Many commentators suggest that the reason working-class voters deserted the Democrats, their traditional party, was because the Democrats ignored their deteriorating economic circumstances brought about by neoliberal policies. Challenging that class-based explanation, Coates (2017) asserts that President Trump’s election could not be a working-class phenomenon, because both African-American and Hispanic working-class voters voted overwhelmingly Democratic in 2016. Only the White working class gave a majority of their votes to President Trump. Something other than economic distress accounted for Donald Trump’s victory. The election of President Trump can be viewed as a backlash against demographic change represented by the election of an African-American president (Badger & Cohn, 2019; Coates, 2017).
Coates extended his analysis of race and politics by observing that in the 2012 Democratic presidential primary in West Virginia—a reliably red and pro-President Trump state, where 95% of voters were White—41% of voters cast their ballots for a White felon who was serving time for extortion in Texas. Coates asked readers to consider whether an incarcerated African-American felon could do as well against a White candidate. Coates’s interpretation was that voters would have preferred any candidate, whatever that person’s flaws, to an African-American candidate.

**Status Loss**

Marchlewska, Cichocka, Panayiotou, Castellanos, and Batayneh (2017) studied the rise of illiberal politics in the United States, Poland, and the United Kingdom. Their findings suggest that illiberalism has its roots in changing demographics whereby a group perceives that its status is falling relative to other rising groups. The group losing status clings to issues of identity and defines emerging groups as threats and scapegoats who are responsible for their lost status. The result is an “us versus them” mentality in the threatened group, which seeks a champion who promises to restore their previous status.

**New Communication Technologies**

An additional factor in the rise of illiberalism is the development of new communications technologies, such as the Internet, conservative talk radio, and cable TV networks. All of these technologies give previously fringe illiberal viewpoints access to the mainstream. In the United States, the rise of the right-wing media coincided with the abolition of the “Fairness doctrine” during George H.W. Bush’s presidency. This doctrine had required that all media outlets give time for rebuttals by opposing ideological points of view. The ending of the doctrine meant that any particular ideology, along with supportive claims of dubious veracity, could be presented unchallenged by a particular media platform (Anderson, 2017). The modern right-wing political reincarnation began in the 1980s with the advent of Rush Limbaugh and talk radio, followed by the rise of similar ideologues in the right-wing media. Rupert Murdoch brought Fox News, an extension of talk radio, to television, where it
presented an increasingly conservative political-social-cultural reality in high dosages to a national audience in a manner that had not been done before. Thus, the far right was able to stoke the discontent among those who felt threatened by economic and demographic change (Anderson, 2017; Dionne et al., 2017). Fox News also gave President Trump something every autocrat wants, and what no other American president has had: “a servile propaganda” organ at his disposal. Fox can be counted on to supply a pro-President Trump narrative to counter whatever scandal or controversy he faces (Mayer, 2019).

The press is not, as President Trump has called it, “the enemy of the people,” but rather the protector of our constitution. We need to search for and support evidence-based journalism. Justice Clarence Thomas, the most conservative Supreme Court justice, has called for reviewing libel laws for the purpose of making it easier for aggrieved parties to sue the press—something the President has said he would like to see happen. Such a change in libel laws would make it harder for the press to fulfill its role as a watchdog of government (Liptak, 2019).

Beyond television and radio, social media outlets such as Twitter and Facebook made it possible for Trump and others to reach millions without the filter of the media. He has shown an astonishing willingness to embrace fringe ideas, retweeting racist memes and alt-right conspiracy theories. The peer-to-peer nature of Internet communication limits the ability of gatekeepers such as the media to filter out extremist ideas or narratives that have no basis in reality. The Moynihan dictum “that you are entitled to your opinions, but not your facts” has no place in the new social media environment. The reality of American politics and life is that in this new digital environment, people can easily find material that confirms their preconceived notions—regardless of facts, evidence, or logic—and share this material with like-minded people as a way of showing that they are loyal members of the same tribe in good standing. Large echo chambers for the like-minded enable fringe ideas to spread rapidly. Political discussion across partisan lines has diminished, and with this reduction has come increased polarization (Shattuck, 2016).
Warning Signs of the Coming of Illiberalism

Norms and Forbearance

Levitsky and Ziblatt (2018) note that democracies need two basic norms to operate, which they call the “guardrails of democracy.” The first is that political parties must all grant the others’ legitimacy, and accept the results of elections. An example of a violation of this norm can be found in Turkey. The Turkish municipal elections in 2019 resulted in victories for the opposition to the illiberal party of Recep Erdogan in the major cities. This election was seen by international observers as legitimate. Erdogan’s party demanded a recount. After losing that recount, the Erdogan party appealed to the Turkish courts to annul the results and authorize a redo of the election, which they did. Erdogan again lost this election (Somer, 2019). Another example of the breaking of this norm, from closer to home, is Trump’s assertions that he would not accept the outcome of an election that did not go his way. He insisted that if he lost the 2016 election, it would have been because of fraud (Healy & Martin, 2016). This threatened non-acceptance of an election outcome was the first by a U.S. candidate for president and was an attack on the very foundation of democracy.

The second norm is forbearance, whereby political parties agree to conduct themselves by a set of rules, and winners restrain themselves from utilizing their full institutional power to gain partisan advantage. Forbearance demands that political leaders refrain from using constitutional powers available to them in ways that undermine or circumvent the checks and balances under which our government operates. Such powers can be utilized to weaken the opposition, other branches of government, and watchdogs for good government, such as the press. In the United States, violations of the norm of forbearance include gerrymandering, the refusal of the Republican-majority Senate to consider Obama’s Supreme Court nominee, the collapse of “regular order” in the Senate, presidential threats to withhold federal funds from states viewed as bastions of the opposition, and the President’s use of national emergency powers to do an end-run around Congress, as he did with the border
wall. Accompanying all of these actions is the disappearance of respect and comity among politicians of different political persuasions as polarization increases (Levitsky & Ziblatt, 2018). After the 2018 midterm elections, Republican legislators in two states (Wisconsin and Michigan) followed the example of a third (North Carolina): In these states, after losing an election, Republican incumbents passed legislation meant to limit the power of the incoming Democratic administrations, and reserve as much power as they could for themselves (Hohmann, 2018).

Denigrating Government Institutions

President Trump has been engaged in almost continuous conflict with U.S. law enforcement and intelligence agencies. He has condemned the courts when they disagreed with him. Judges who do not agree with him are labeled “Obama judges,” using their supposed political affiliations to call into question the validity of their rulings. He cast doubt on the impartiality of a judge born in Indiana on the basis of that judge’s Hispanic ethnicity. He has challenged the credibility of the Federal Reserve System as well as the electoral system. President Trump dismissed the views of all U.S. intelligence agencies on his appraisal of the threats posed by Iran and North Korea, as well as Russian interference in our elections. President Trump’s accusations, criticisms, and denigrations were picked up by the right-wing media, and their reporting reinforced his supporters’ belief in a conspiracy by the “deep state” (the federal bureaucracy) against the President (Landler, 2019). The term deep state seems to have been imported into the United States from Turkey, where it was used by President Erdogan to justify crackdowns on his perceived opponents within the Turkish governmental bureaucracy. The first use of the term in the United States, according to National Public Radio, was by Breitbart News, which used the term in 2016 to refer to a cabal of unelected bureaucrats with Democratic sympathies, who would seek to undermine the policies of any Republican administration. The term was quickly adopted by the right-wing media (Nunberg, 2018). A U.S. example of the consequences of this belief is the Republican-led House Intelligence Committee’s attempt, with the help of conservative media, to discredit the Special Counsel’s investigation into Russian interference in the 2016 election by constructing
an imaginary plot in which the Justice Department and the FBI were conspiring against Trump to end his Presidency (Frum, 2018). Both the intent and effects of these attacks are circular. The alleged conspiracies generate more dissatisfaction with the government among the President’s supporters, who become even more tolerant of the Administration’s abuse of power as necessary for accomplishing Trump’s objectives.

Condoning Violence

One mark of an antidemocratic leader is a willingness to condone violence (Levitsky & Ziblatt, 2018). President Trump has encouraged violence to advance his political agenda. In a March 2019 interview with Breitbart, President Trump asserted that his supporters in the military, police, and civilian groups (such as “Bikers for Trump”) would be willing to use violence on his behalf against opponents (Chait, 2019). The President urged his supporters to use violence against demonstrators at his campaign rallies, and offered to pay any legal expenses that supporters might incur if they followed his suggestions (Tiefenthaler, 2016). He refused to unambiguously condemn violence by the neo-Nazi marchers in Charlottesville. The President’s remarks normalize “Brown Shirt” behavior, and both further erode political discourse and encourage violence, as evidenced by a rise in the number of extremist-related murders in the past four years. The proportion of that violence coming from the extreme right, including White supremacists, has increased since President Trump was elected. An Anti-Defamation League (ADL) Report (2018) observed the largest one-year increase (57%) in anti-Semitic incidents (harassment, vandalism, physical assaults) since they have been tracking these incidents, occurred during in the first year of the Trump administration. The FBI reported hate crimes against all groups were up 17% during the same period (Uniform Crime Reporting Program, 2018). A time series analysis of this FBI database from 1992–2017 found this increase to be statistically significant, with the greatest increases found in counties that voted for President Trump (Edwards & Rushin, 2019). The ADL linked this increase to the President’s rhetoric and a seeming tolerance by the Administration of far right groups such as the Alt-right (Anti-Defamation League, 2018).
The perpetrator of the Christchurch (New Zealand) massacre cited President Trump as one of his inspirations (Durkin, 2019). Trump praised President Duterte of the Philippines, saying he was doing an “unbelievable job on the drug problem,” at a time when Duterte was employing death squads for extrajudicial executions of drug offenders (Zilber, 2017). The President openly admires authoritarian leaders, and autocrats return the admiration (Hart, 2016). Putin (Russia), Maduro (Venezuela), and Al-Assad (Syria) have all adopted Trump’s characterization of “fake news” for news reports that put them in an unfavorable light (Erlanger, 2017; Pigman, 2018). President Trump welcomed into the Oval Office Viktor Orbán, the poster child for European illiberal democracy. Orbán was praised effusively by the President as doing a “tremendous job…and respected all over Europe,” in stark contrast to Western European leaders who regard him as a threat to European unity and democracy (Baker, 2019).

Facts and “Alternative Facts”

Democracy depends on a culture that respects the truth. Davies (2019) asserts that illiberal leaders encourage their followers, through fear, to substitute emotions and vague beliefs for facts. Stanley (2018), a Yale University philosophy professor, has studied the way authoritarian regimes use propaganda. He notes that authoritarian leaders seek to create their own reality based on lies, and attempt to restrict access to countervailing views, represented by an independent press, as a means of remaining in control. The Washington Post has been fact-checking Trump’s statements since he assumed the presidency and reported that he has made, on average, 16 false claims a day since being elected (Kessler et al., 2019). Many of the Trump claims are meant to make the public doubt the reports of a free and independent press. The President has attacked the press as “enemies of the people,” characterizing all their reports and investigations as “fake news.” President Trump has disregarded norms meant to assure the freedom of the press. He has attempted to exclude reporters and entire news media outlets from press conferences, and he has stated a wish to change libel laws to make it easier to muzzle press outlets he views as hostile (Mayer, 2019).
Paul Weyrich, one of the charter members of the conservative Heritage Foundation, was quoted in a speech to Christian evangelicals as saying, “I don’t want everyone to vote. Our voting leverage goes up in elections, quite candidly, as the voting populace goes down” (Jackson, 2020, para. 1). Weyrich became instrumental in helping to write state legislation that restricted potential non-Republican voters’ ability to vote (Anderson, 2018). Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell appears to concur with Weyrich. In response to the House Democrats’ proposed electoral reform bill, which included various items that sought to remove barriers to voting (For the People Act, H.R. 1), McConnell said “he did not wish to do anything that would make it easier for Democrats to win elections” (Benen, 2019, paras. 4–11). The Senate never took up the bill.

The 2016 presidential election was the first in five decades to be held without the full protection of the Voting Rights Act. The Supreme Court weakened key portions of the Voting Rights Act in 2013, with Chief Justice Roberts claiming that the country had changed much since the act was passed in 1965, such that protection against voter discrimination was no longer needed in the states addressed by the Act. Justice Ginsburg, in a dissent, noted that the number of election complaints about civil rights violations was actually increasing, suggesting that it was not time to reduce federal oversight of elections (Kendi, 2018). The Republicans used the opportunity presented by the Court to reshape the rules of the game so that, in the words of Donald Trump, the game is rigged. Voter suppression efforts are evident in the passage of voter identification laws, voter roll purges, closure of voting venues that served minority neighborhoods, reductions in early voting, maintenance of felon disenfranchisement, and the like. These restrictions were meant to do what poll taxes and literacy tests once did: deny minorities the right and/or ability to vote (Anderson, 2018).

The Republicans did this under the cover of preventing voter fraud. Electoral fraud has been a constant theme of President Trump. He claimed—utterly without evidence—that his loss of the popular vote in 2016 could be attributed to 5 million undocumented immigrants voting for Clinton. President Trump also
claimed voter fraud in the 2018 midterm elections when it appeared that the Democrats might win Senate and gubernatorial races in Florida (Martinez, 2018; Parks et al., 2018). No evidence has ever been offered to support these claims of rigged elections. On the contrary, the data and the evidence that is available suggest that election fraud (e.g., non-eligible voting) is rare to nonexistent. An investigation of more than 1 billion ballots cast in the United States over a 14-year period, conducted at the Loyola University Law School, found just 31 cases of voter fraud through impersonation (Levitt, 2014). The fraud claims are meant not only to undermine faith in the electoral system, but also to justify Republican efforts—which predate Trump—to make it harder for the opposition to exercise their voting rights. Trump appointed a commission to investigate voter fraud headed by Vice President Mike Pence and Kansas Attorney General Charles Kobach. Both men are known for championing voter suppression in the name of fighting fraud. In his home state, Kobach used a data-matching program to catch persons registered in more than one jurisdiction. Minority voters were disproportionately purged. An independent team of investigators found a 99% error rate in the program. Kobach also championed a Kansas law that required proof of American citizenship prior to registering to vote. Results were used to purge the voting rolls (Stewart, 2018). This law was struck down in federal court when he was unable to demonstrate that significant numbers of non-citizens were voting in Kansas’ elections (Huseman, 2018). The commission was quietly disbanded after accomplishing nothing.

The Flawed Electoral Process

The Electoral Integrity Project (EIP), housed at Harvard and the University of Sydney, surveyed several thousand electoral experts to assess the quality of election processes around the world. More than 3,200 experts were asked to rate the fairness of elections from 2012 to 2017 on a number of factors, such as electoral boundaries, voter registration procedures, and the effectiveness of campaign finance regulations. Based on their findings, the project rated the United States as 52nd among 153 states assessed, trailing all of the Western European democracies and such countries as Costa Rica, Benin, and Cape Verde. The EIP indicates that the most troubling aspect of U.S. elections is
the state-level partisan control over the election process, which leads to distortions as the party in power seeks to advantage its position at the expense of opponents. As a result, the U.S. has a variation in voting procedures and rules among the states with the actual voting overseen by part-time volunteers. The way elections are run leads substantial portions of the population to believe the system is unfair and rigged (Norris, 2017). Gallup reported in 2017 that only 30% of Americans in 2017 expressed confidence in the integrity of American elections (Porter, 2017). These feelings are partially responsible for the low turnout that is a characteristic of American elections.

Republican Complicity in the Rise of Trump and Illiberalism

Donald Trump’s surprise electoral college victory was made possible not only by White Americans’ resentment at their economic status and the perceived threat from societal demographic changes, but also by the Republican Party’s failure to block a man with authoritarian and racist tendencies from securing their nomination for president. Fear of the “base,” opportunism, and a miscalculation that the nominee could be controlled by establishment figures resulted in the Republicans acquiescing to a man who is temperamentally, intellectually, and morally unfit to be president (Levitsky & Ziblatt, 2018). Having secured power, the Republican Party did not question the Trump Administration’s and Trump family’s self-dealing for their own enrichment, his turn away from traditional Republican dogma such as free trade, his cozying up to foreign autocratic dictators who before him were viewed as adversaries by Republicans, his often racist and reckless speech, and his frequent lies—because all of these advanced long-held conservative policies. Illiberalism will be tolerated by many Republicans if it comes with lower taxes on the wealthy, a gutting of the regulatory functions of government, and a conservative judiciary (Dionne et al., 2017).

Levitsky and Ziblatt (2019) also provide an explanation for why Republicans stick with President Trump—fear of political irrelevance. The Republican post-2012 election analysis of their loss (also known as the “Autopsy”) pointed to a need for the party to broaden its electoral base from primarily White Christian
aging males to one that would begin to approximate the diversity of America. Otherwise, the party faced permanent minority status (Franke-Ruta, 2013). Trumpism and illiberalism offer the party an alternative to adaptation that would allow White males to continue to maintain their status without change.

How Does a Democracy End?

_A Slow or Quick Death for Democracy?_

In the past, a democracy’s death has taken the form of a military coup d’état (as in Spain and Chile), a declaration of martial law (Marcos in the Philippines), or the suspension of elections or a constitution (the end of the Weimer Republic). Luhrmann and Lindberg (2019) conducted extensive studies of illiberalism and concluded that illiberalism arrives in slow motion. Like the frog in a pot being brought slowly to boil, citizens might not recognize the danger until it is too late. The models of Erdogan in Turkey and Orbán in Hungary of how democracy can deteriorate are instructive. In these countries, newspapers still publish, but journalists are under continued threat and harassment, which can lead to self-censorship. Dissent occurs, but dissenters often find themselves in trumped up legal troubles. Elections take place, but they are neither free nor fair. Only the veneer of democracy remains. People do not immediately realize what is happening and may continue to believe they are living in a democracy (Levitsky & Ziblatt, 2018).

_The Weimar Model of How Democracy Ends_

Christopher Browning (2018), a noted historian of German National Socialism, has written on the parallels between the political climate in the last days of the Weimar Republic (Germany’s first genuine democracy) and the United States today. The traditional German right-wing parties mistrusted Hitler, but they entered into a coalition with the Nazis in order to contain the threat they felt from the political left. These parties thought that if they disagreed with Hitler’s actions, they could always withdraw from the coalition. Under democratic rules, such a step would cause the Nazi-led government to collapse. The German President Hindenburg, an ally of the right, subsequently
appointed Hitler chancellor. A democratically-elected government handed over power to someone who was determined to subvert it. Hindenburg loathed Hitler, describing him as a “lunatic, but a manageable one” (cited in Browning, 2018). Hindenburg’s death shortly after Hitler’s ascension to power meant he never had a chance to manage Hitler. A crisis brought about by the Reichstag fire gave Hitler the excuse to declare a national emergency that soon brought about the end of Germany’s first experiment with democracy. Browning (2018) notes that a flaw in the Weimar constitution was the ease with which a national emergency could be declared, as this provision gave the government the authority to rule by decree without the need for legislative assent, opposition, or oversight. In Nazi Germany, the new chancellor used the emergency powers to arrest communist and other left-wing parliamentary opponents he deemed responsible for the Reichstag fire, which caused the balance of power of power in the legislature to swing decidedly to the right. The German Parliament, the Reichstag, then voted democracy out of existence.

The United States’ history of commitment to democracy is longer and deeper than that of the Weimar Republic, Turkey, and countries in Eastern Europe currently flirting with illiberalism, but there are parallels with today’s occurrences and their experiences may serve as warnings to America. Browning draws parallels to the behavior of the Republican Party, particularly by Mitch McConnell, in refusing to curb the worst instincts of the Trump presidency (Browning, 2018).

There are dangers inherent in the emergency powers given to the president under the National Emergency Act of 1976 (NEA). The use of emergency powers to stifle dissent is another standard armament in the toolkit of authoritarian leaders. Thirty “states of emergency” are in effect today. One emergency, proclaimed during the Korean War, was used as a basis to prosecute the Vietnam War (Goiten, 2019). One caution in regard to the NEA should be drawn from the fact that these emergency powers were used to intern Japanese citizens during World War II. Justice Robert Jackson, writing in dissent to the Korematsu decision that upheld the internment of these Americans, said emergency power “lies about like a loaded weapon, ready for the hand of any authority that can bring a plausible claim of urgent need” (Korematsu v. United States). The Korematsu decision
upheld the right of the executive branch to arrest and detain individuals, including American citizens, without the oversight of the courts (Goiten, 2019). Although the *Korematsu* decision has been criticized by the current Supreme Court, it has never been officially overturned (Bomboy, 2018).

President Trump’s declaration of a dubious emergency under the NEA in order to spend money on his border wall—which Congress had expressly rejected—marked one of the lows in his administration’s failure to exercise forbearance. Two foundational principles of our democracy, the separation of powers and congressional control of the power of the purse, have been ignored. Emergency power has never been used this way. Forbearance means that the executive branch does not use emergency powers in nonemergency situations to accomplish policy objectives that were rejected by the legislative branch (Savage, 2019). Congress has two choices. The first is to limit the presidential powers under the NEA, which would constrain the ability of future presidents to react to a real crisis; the second is to risk further abuse of the emergency power by the Trump Administration. The Republican Senate, despite some initial misgivings about the President’s directive, acquiesced to President Trump’s action.

Empirical Evidence on Whether the Threat Is Real

Those who point out the coming and present dangers to democracy may be dismissed as acting hysterical, exaggerating the threat, or crying wolf. However, empirical evidence is available to support the assertion that democracy is in danger. Freedom House, a bipartisan think tank founded by Eleanor Roosevelt and Wendell Willkie to be a watchdog of democracy, releases yearly reports on the state of the world’s democracies. Freedom House has developed a democracy index that measures the political rights and civil liberties enjoyed by individuals in the countries assessed. The U.S. scores on this index show these freedoms to be declining since the ascension of Trump to the presidency. One particular problem Freedom House noted was related to diminishment of the rule of law as applied to asylum seekers and refugees. In 2018, Freedom House, in conjunction with the George W. Bush Institute and the Penn Biden Center, conducted a nationally representative poll on the state of American democracy. Fifty-five percent of respondents said that U.S.
democracy was weak, and 68% thought the situation was worsening (Freedom House, 2019).

The World Values Survey (WVS), conducted by the European Research Institute, also raised concern about the state of American democracy. This longitudinal survey collected data 7 times in the past 4 decades in 47 counties. Each country’s sample was composed of 1,200 randomly chosen respondents (World Values Survey, 2017). In 2014, the WVS found that 16% of Americans thought it would be a “good thing” for the military to take over the government. In 1995, only 6% of Americans agreed with that sentiment. Surprisingly, younger Americans were more in favor of military rule than older citizens. The same researchers found that 43% of older Americans thought military rule would be illegitimate under any circumstances. However, only 19% of millennials agreed with their older counterparts on the legitimacy of military rule (Inglehart, 2017).

Reporters Without Borders (RWB) has been publishing the World Press Freedom Index (WPFI) every year since 2002. The WPFI rates countries according to the amount of freedom accorded journalists. The index measures press independence, the countries’ laws governing the operation of the media, pluralism, and how safe is it for journalists to go about their business. The index is translated into 20 different languages and is sent to journalists, media lawyers, academics, and researchers specializing in press issues in 180 countries. An overall score on the WPFI allows a comparison by rankings on how freely the press operates in a given country or region (Reporters Without Borders, 2019a). The 2019 RWB index showed the United States dropping from 45th on the WPFI to 48th among countries from the previous year. This 2019 ranking lowers the United States from a “satisfactory” environment for journalists to work in freely to one that is “problematic.” The WPFI said that “never before have US journalists been subjected to so many death threats or turned so often to private security firms for protection.” The lowered ranking is also the result of Trump’s attacks on the press as “the enemy of the people,” the use of the term “fake news” to describe unflattering press coverage, the attempts to restrict specific news organizations’ access to the White House, and his threats to revoke broadcasting licenses of sources he regards as critical of him (Reporters Without Borders, 2019b).
Aftermath

Where will this end? Will the nation be confronted with an international crisis, perhaps provoked by Trump, that is beyond his capacity to handle? Will he force a constitutional crisis through declaring a national emergency, or will he disregard a court order? Perhaps our constitution will work. Many of Trump’s attempts to subvert our democracy have been limited by the courts, the press, bureaucracy, activists, and even occasionally by the Republican Congress and members of his own administration (based on the Mueller Report).

It is possible that our encounter with an illiberal president could provoke a progressive reaction. Much of the turmoil in America comes from the continuing struggle to make America actually conform to its ideals. The work ahead involves repairing the damage done. In other countries, the opposition to illiberals often turns to antidemocratic means such as military coups (Venezuela, Turkey, and Thailand), strategies that merely strengthen the hand of antidemocratic forces, and leave those countries in an even worse state.

While in power, illiberals can alter governing institutions. The effects of some of these changes will remain even after they leave. When President Trump finally leaves office, toxic residue will be left behind. Will the country continue to confront an ongoing crisis of government ineffectiveness, crippling and still-growing polarization, expanding inequality, and the accompanying loss of faith in democracy? A much more conservative judiciary that is willing to accede to creeping illiberalism is one example of lingering effects that will not change for years to come. Another example is Trump’s attempt to change America’s very notion of itself.

The U.S. sense of exceptionalism developed from a set of beliefs, rather than from geographic place and ethnic identity, as in most countries. In 1783, George Washington sent an open letter to recent immigrants from Ireland which stated “the bosom of America is open to receive not only the opulent and respectable stranger, but the oppressed and persecuted of all nations and religions” (National Archives, 2018, para. 5). The United States established itself on principles of liberty and equality that would be shared with other people who choose to come to this country (Sullivan, 2019). America stays true to its historic values
when it strives to reach the ideal of America as a refuge where people from around the world can come together to build a society that is just and prosperous for all. Admittedly, America often falls short of these ideals, as the country has struggled with racism and inequality since its inception. Despite these shortcomings, the commitment and the hope “to form a more perfect union” underlie and color much of the dissatisfaction with the current president. Former Secretary of State Albright (2018) has called for us to make American great again, but with a different notion than President Trump’s meaning of greatness. Albright asserts that America is great when it is committed to human rights, and when the country stands in opposition to autocrats and totalitarians. Greatness also comes when we are leaders in the movement to save the earth’s environment, and are not contributing to environmental degradation (Albright, 2018).

**What Can Social Work Do to Defend Democracy?**

How can the discipline of social work and social workers help defend democracy in the U.S.? There are actually several ways that social workers and the profession can make a difference in defending democracy, the first of which involves advocacy.

*Advocacy for Human Rights and Democracy*

The mission of social work includes advocacy to advance social justice, empower the oppressed, promote social cohesion, and work to achieve human rights (International Federation of Social Workers, 2014). This advocacy was always an intrinsic part of social work’s mission in the United States. Early social workers played important roles in advancing child welfare, juvenile justice, health care, amelioration of poverty, and integration of the immigrant population into American society (Stern & Axinn, 2012). These lessons of the past must be harnessed by social workers today to meet the current crisis.

An instructive lesson in how mobilization and advocacy could stop the march toward illiberalism occurred in the first week of the Trump presidency. Trump issued a ban on the entry to the United States of Muslims from seven different countries. This move was seen by many as the first step toward illiberalism. The quick and inept implementation of the ban created
chaos at many airports. The ACLU, volunteer lawyers, and civil society activist groups descended on airports to offer assistance to stranded travelers. In response to habeas corpus petitions filed by the ACLU, a federal district court judge issued an order that the Trump Administration cease and desist enforcement of the ban. These efforts delayed implementation of the ban by more than two years (Goldsmith, 2018).

Trump’s White nationalist rhetoric has mobilized the far right, played a role in events such as the “Unite the Right” rally in Charlottesville, Virginia, and coincided with a surge in violence against religious and ethnic minorities. It is incumbent upon social workers to join in solidarity efforts to support targeted groups and to advocate for approaches that see diversity as an asset, not something to be feared.

**Citizen Activism**

The survival of democracy demands active engagement by an informed electorate to keep politicians accountable. Citizen activism, as evidenced by women’s marches, high school students organizing against gun violence in schools, demonstrators protesting Muslim bans or immigrant detentions, and crowded town halls to defend the Affordable Care Act, shows a desire to defend liberal democracy. Social workers should be quick to participate in these efforts, and identify friends and colleagues who could become parts of a coalition to resist illiberalism (Goldsmith, 2018).

**Fact-Based Reality**

We must commit to a fact-based reality. Our students and children must be taught to distinguish truth, lies, disinformation, opinion, and belief. They need to be trained to think critically in order to counteract both blatant falsehoods and subtle misrepresentations. Citizens with these abilities will not sway emotion-based believers on either end of the political spectrum, but they may create a reality-based community that is more vibrant and responsive in resisting falsehoods (Anderson, 2017). In both public and private forums, we should call out false information. This may not change the mind or words of the speaker, but those listening might be influenced. Social workers can
take a role in gathering and disseminating accurate information to counter untruths. Social work advocacy has been most successful when the profession uses data derived from research to illuminate societal problems (Reish & Jani, 2012). Indeed, the profession’s emphasis on evidence-based practice provides a strong foundation for advocacy, as it allows the discourse to move from being anchored by opinion to being tied to scientifically derived evidence. Blogs, op-eds, and social media are all vehicles that can be used for advocacy.

The Right to Vote

Self-determination, a core social work value, is inherent in the act of voting. Voting is the main mechanism whereby we determine the public policies that frame our lives. The right of all Americans to vote must be maintained. Stiff resistance must be exerted against voter suppression efforts. As social workers, we can take part in voter registration drives to assure that suffrage remains as wide as possible. Too many eligible Americans are not registered to vote. The people most affected by efforts to make voting more difficult are part of social work’s constituency: people who are poor, non-White, young, and elderly (Haynes & Mickelson, 1997; Johnson & Feldman, 2020). Beyond having the right to vote, the defense of democracy requires actual voting. In the United States, both voting and political party affiliation have been in decline since the 1960s (Foa et al., 2016). This disengagement does not bode well for democracy. Removing barriers to voting, and mobilizing voters on election day—not only at the federal level, but also at the state and local levels—is crucial for maintaining democracy. Additionally, social workers can partner with organizations that facilitate people’s transportation to the polls, thereby allowing the often-disenfranchised to have their votes influence elections.

Refugees and Immigrants

Social work must continue its historic commitment to refugees and immigrants, now some of the most demonized people on the planet, who are being used as a foil by illiberals such as President Trump to undermine democracy. The United States has had a remarkable history of incorporating immigrants into
its social and institutional fabric. Social workers should tap into that success story to counter the narrative that immigrants are weakening or destroying America. The often-repeated fiction of immigrants threatening the country—said of Germans, Irish, Catholic, Japanese, and Chinese immigrants, to name a few—has been proven over the arc of history not only to be wrong, but also to represent a stain on our legacy. The current “othering” of Central Americans, Muslims, and refugees mirrors that nativist tradition. The International Federation of Social Work (IFSW) has challenged the violation of human rights and migrant deaths on the US/Mexico border (IFSW, 2019), and human rights organizations have documented deplorable conditions in immigrant detention centers (Austin-Hillery & Long, 2019; ACLU, 2020; Amnesty International, 2018). Social workers can counter nativism by highlighting fact-based immigration analysis and working with immigrant committees to mitigate the effects of ICE raids and family separation.

Reducing Polarization

As has been done in California, the responsibility for the drawing of electoral districts must be taken out of partisan hands and given to independent bodies; this action alone would greatly increase democratic integrity. Ending gerrymandering might reduce polarization because candidates would have to think about appealing to constituents who hold broader ideologies.

Tomasky (2019) has suggested an interesting initial step toward reducing polarization. He recommends that red states and blue states develop student exchange programs that would give rural and urban high school students a chance to get to know one another and learn about each other’s point of view. This understanding might lead to a less politically polarized citizenry.

Embracing Changing Economic Conditions

Social work education curriculums must continue to address the inequalities created by the economic system. Schools of social work must strengthen the macro-level content being offered so that practitioners are informed and ready to address the shortcomings of an economic system that allows for the concentration of wealth in so few people, and threatens the
economic well-being of so many others, including most of the profession’s clients. Social policies that address income inequality and enable lower and middle income workers’ salaries to grow would take much of the wind out of the illiberal argument that thrives on economic grievances which target immigrant workers. Economic conditions are not a zero sum economic game, as Trump would have people believe.

Concluding Comment

This paper may seem to blame Republicans and the Republican Party for the rise of illiberalism in the United States. In fact, neither party is entirely blameless for the current deterioration of U.S. democracy. Recently, the Democratic-controlled New Jersey State Senate proposed an amendment to that state’s constitution to enshrine gerrymandering that would have guaranteed perpetual legislative control for the Democrats (Corasaniti, 2018). A backlash across the state stymied the effort. The New York Times reported that some Democrats used Internet deception schemes similar to what the Russians used in the 2016 presidential election to aid the Democratic senatorial candidate in Alabama (Whitcomb, 2019). Many on the left have expressed a willingness to limit free speech in the name of political correctness. However, there is a definite imbalance in the political parties’ willingness to break democratic norms in order to gain and maintain power, as outlined in this paper (Mann & Ornstein, 2012). Democracies rely on vigorous competition between political opponents who are committed to a fact-based contest over policy, playing by rules that ensure the fairness a democracy needs, and respecting the governing institutions which are essential to a healthy democracy.
References


Tomasky, T. (2019). If we can keep it: How the republic collapsed and how it might be saved. Liveright Publishing.


The objective of this research is to investigate the relationships among childhood poverty, maternal depressive symptoms, internalizing and externalizing childhood behavioral problems, and depressive symptoms and alcohol use in young adulthood. Using longitudinal data from a nationally representative sample and path analysis, a special case of Structural Equation Modeling (SEM), the results indicate that both childhood poverty and maternal depressive symptoms are associated with negative behavioral outcomes in childhood and young adulthood. This study also examines mediating effects of maternal depressive symptoms, and both externalizing and internalizing childhood behavioral problems. The findings indicate that the relationship between childhood poverty and young adult depressive symptoms is mediated by maternal depressive symptoms. Furthermore, the results indicate that the relationship between childhood poverty and young adult alcohol use is mediated by both maternal depressive symptoms and externalizing behavioral problems. These findings support the family stress model, which signifies the role financial strain can play in creating poor parental mental health, which in turn creates deleterious behavioral outcomes for children. The research presented in this study suggests that the family stress model can
be expanded to include negative outcomes in young adulthood. It is clear that a comprehensive understanding of the implications of economic instability on the life course cannot exclude mental health.

Keywords: poverty, maternal depression, young adulthood, family stress model, alcohol use

Decades of social science research have shown that economic instability in early childhood has vast implications for the well-being of children. Children living in poverty have been found to have a higher rate of cognitive and emotional problems (Atkinson et al., 1983; Duncan & Brooks-Gunn, 1997; Kiernan & Huerta, 2008). These emotional problems include internalizing behavioral problems (such as depression and anxiety) and externalizing behavioral problems (such as bullying, cheating, and lying). Children from impoverished families are more likely to express antisocial behaviors and engage in delinquent acts (Sampson & Laub, 1994; Shaw & McKay, 1969). Research indicates that the relationship between poverty and childhood behavioral problems can be understood in the context of social capital and parenting behaviors. Financial stability allows parents to invest in tangible and intangible goods and services that provide for a child’s well-being (Becker, 1991). Furthermore, parents suffering from the woes of economic instability may exhibit more depressive symptoms, which in turn diminishes their ability to effectively parent their children (Conger et al., 2000; Elder & Capsi, 1988). Although depression as genuine diagnosable mental illness can impact children through genetic exposure, the social implications of parental depressive symptoms also have vast implications for children throughout the life course. The disturbance of family life that is associated with parental depression has real implications for the cognitive and behavioral health of a child (Goodman et al., 2011).

Research has also shown that maternal depression is more detrimental to the cognitive and emotional development of a child than paternal depression (Beardslee et al., 1998; Meadows et al., 2007). One in five women will be affected by depression over the life course, and women in childbearing years are especially susceptible (Weissman & Jensen, 2002). Every year
approximately one in 10 children have mothers who experience depression (Ertel et al., 2011). Considering the vast number of families that are impacted by poverty and maternal depression, it is vital to cultivate a better understanding of the longitudinal impact of these two variables on cognitive and behavioral outcomes in childhood, young adulthood, and adulthood. Why does poverty create cognitive and emotional problems in children? Are there mechanisms, such as maternal depression, that explain the relationship between poverty and deleterious social and behavioral outcomes for children? Furthermore, how do these relationships predict social and behavioral problems in young adulthood?

The present study addresses these questions and contributes to the existing literature in two distinct ways. First, this study uses data from a nationally representative sample that follows mothers and their children throughout various stages in the life course. Therefore, this study is able to estimate how poverty and maternal depression affect an individual’s cognitive and behavioral well-being at two distinct periods in life: early childhood (birth to age 14) and young adulthood (age 15 to 22 years). Second, through the use of path analysis, a special case of Structural Equation Modeling (SEM), this paper examines the possible mechanisms that underlie the relationships between poverty, maternal depression, and childhood and young adult cognitive and behavioral problems in order to develop a more holistic understanding of the causal order of these factors across a child’s lifetime.

Background

Two theoretical models have been used to understand how economic instability can lead to negative behavioral outcomes in children: the family investment model and the family stress model. The family investment model evaluates how economic stability or instability can determine the ability of parents to invest resources, both tangible and intangible, in their children. According to the family investment model, higher levels of income lead to positive behavioral and social development in children through parents’ investment in their children in a number of ways. First, income gives parents the financial ability to purchase material goods such as food, school supplies,
housing, etc. Second, income also allows parents to purchase intangible services, such as dance or music lessons, sports lessons, or other services that aid in childhood social development skills. Thus, income inadvertently provides families with cultural capital, the intangible knowledge gained from education and other forms of socialization. Becker and Tomes (1979) argue that cultural capital begins at the family level; therefore, early accumulation of cultural capital is beneficial to the long-term development of children. Conversely, financial hardship leads to negative behavioral and social development in children. Parents who experience financial hardship are incapable of providing their children with the same material goods and services that wealthier families can access. Thus, children of low socioeconomic background possess less cultural capital and are more likely to develop behavioral and cognitive issues, compared to their wealthier peers (Becker, 1991; Becker & Tomes, 1986; Blau, 1999; Bradley et al., 2001; Kiernan & Huerta, 2008; Mayer, 1997).

The family investment model primarily functions as an economic theory depicting how investment in material goods and services can be beneficial to children. However, this theory fails to address the relationship between poverty and parental mental health, a connection that is imperative to understanding childhood welfare and development. The hardships and grievances triggered by economic instability can decay the mental health of parents, causing an increase in depressive symptoms and anxiety. Since parents play an integral role in the family unit, negative mental health outcomes for parents impact the behavior of children. The family investment model, however, fails to address how financial difficulties can impact parents’ emotional states and their corresponding nurturing and disciplinary behaviors. Although the theory provides a base level understanding of the relationships between income, parental behavior, and childhood behavior, the family stress model may provide a more holistic understanding of the mechanisms that undergird these relationships.

According to the family stress model, financial hardship can create life stressors and chronic strains. In turn, these chronic strains can increase parental depressive symptoms. Therefore, poverty influences child behavioral outcomes through its relationship with parental (in this study, maternal) depressive symptoms (Conger & Elder, 1994; Elder & Caspi, 1988). Children with
depressed mothers are not only genetically exposed to depression, but also emulate the depressive symptoms they observe from their mothers (Goodman & Gotlib, 1999). Children with depressed mothers may have a tendency to act more socially withdrawn, act out with hostility, or become physically or verbally abusive (McLoyd, 1990). Chronic strain and depression can also lead to a mother’s decreased ability to fulfill family role responsibilities. Children whose mothers exhibit depressive symptoms such as low mood and withdrawal tend to receive less parental nurturing and socialization, which can profoundly affect children’s positive development (Goodman & Gotlib, 1999).

Income also dictates the type of neighborhood in which a family can afford to live. There is evidence that high levels of perceived neighborhood disorder can lead to maternal psychological distress (Christie-Mizell et al., 2003). There is also evidence that children in higher income communities obtain positive peer influence compared to those living in lower income communities (McLanahan & Sandefur, 1994). Although neighborhood context is outside the scope of this particular study, it is important to note that neighborhood characteristics and their varying impact on family members’ adjustment might influence the relationship between poverty, maternal depression, and children’s outcomes (Cutrona et al., 2006).

Research has also shown that financial strain produces interparental discord, which subsequently leads to antisocial behaviors in children (Paat, 2011). Interparental discord refers to a number of indicators of parental issues, such as actual couple violence, parental commitment, and parenting discord. Financial strain can cause parents to lash out, either violently or verbally, creating increased tension in the household (Conger et al., 1993). Agreement over parenting procedures and childrearing is critical to the emotional security of children. Parents who argue may not agree on their children’s responsibilities within the family unit and may employ different disciplinary actions. Inconsistent patterns of parenting cause instability within the household, leading to uncertainty and confusion for children. Conversely, parents with less parental discord engage in productive parenting. Productive parents are more attentive to their children’s needs and produce stability within the household, thus positively impacting the behavioral outcomes of their children (Rogers & White, 1998). Furthermore, there may be a
positive relationship between parental depression and interparental discord. Although interparental discord is not operationalized in this study, it is important to note that its relationship to economic instability, maternal depressive symptoms, and childhood behavioral problems is well documented in the literature (Harold & Conger, 1997; Paat, 2011; Rogers & White, 1998).

Research points to a cyclical relationship between financial stressors and poor mental health. Parents with poor mental health face significant barriers on the job market because individuals with mental health problems are subject to stereotyping and harassment. Not only do chronic mental health problems impact performance on the job market, but also acute mental health problems are positively associated with unsteady work history and extended periods of unemployment (Dorio et al., 2008; Rimmerman et al., 1995). Depressed mood can interfere with a person’s ability to adequately perform job responsibilities. Therefore, poverty not only triggers poor mental health, but poor mental health can lead to increased financial stressors by impacting job performance.

Finally, family stress in early childhood has implications for health in young adulthood. Adverse experiences associated with childhood poverty and parental distress may lead to children becoming susceptible to depression in adolescence (Wickrama et al., 2008) and to negative peer influences such as vandalism, drinking, or smoking (McLanahan & Sandefur, 1994). Conger et al. (1991) found that financial stress was associated with more hostile and inconsistent parenting, and that such parenting behavior predicted adolescent alcohol use. Though understudied, further evidence suggests that adolescents whose mothers had depressive symptoms during the adolescent’s childhood years are more likely to engage in risky behavior such as substance use (Campbell et al., 2009; Weissman et al., 2006; Wickham et al., 2015). Moreover, young adult alcohol use is associated with detrimental outcomes, including poor school performance, lower educational attainment, suicide attempts, criminal convictions, and future substance dependence (Flory et al., 2004; Miller et al., 2007; Odgers et al., 2008). However, research using longitudinal data to assess the impact of early childhood poverty and family stress on young adult behavioral health outcomes is limited (Simons et al., 2016).
By including mental health as a possible mechanism for childhood behavioral outcomes, the family stress model provides a much more comprehensive understanding of how economic instability can impact the well-being of children. However, little research has extended the family stress model to outcomes later in life. Do financial instability and maternal depressive symptoms explain behavioral problems in young adulthood? The “poverty trap” hypothesizes that families can experience poverty for generations. However, the effects of early childhood poverty are pervasive, and cannot be completely corrected by financial security later in life. Research has shown that poverty in early childhood leads to negative health outcomes in adulthood, even when controlling for current income levels (Duncan et al., 2010). Using a nationally representative sample, Wickrama and Noh (2010) examined the longitudinal effects of community-, family-, and individual-level factors on young adult outcomes and found support for both the family investment and family stress models in explaining the long-term effects of childhood context. However, they did not include a measure of parental mental health, focusing only on the quality of parenting. Therefore, an extension of the family stress model that examines the role of parental mental health may show that a combination of instabilities in childhood (measured as economic instability, maternal depressive symptoms, and childhood behavioral problems) creates negative outcomes in adulthood.

Summary and Hypotheses

This research investigates the relationship between childhood poverty, maternal depressive symptoms, and childhood and young adult behavioral problems by utilizing theoretical elements of the family stress model (Conger & Elder, 1994; Elder & Caspi, 1988). A secondary aim of this research is to explore the possibility of mediational relationships between all key independent and dependent variables.

There are five main hypotheses for this study. Each hypothesis (and sub-hypothesis) is listed below. Furthermore, Figure 1 provides graphical representation of the hypothesized relationships of all study variables.
Hypothesis 1: Childhood poverty is positively related to (A) young adult depressive symptoms and (B) alcohol consumption.

Hypothesis 2: Maternal depressive symptoms are positively related to (A) young adult depressive symptoms and (B) alcohol consumption.

Hypothesis 3: Internalizing behavioral problems are positively related to (A) young adult depressive symptoms and (B) alcohol consumption.

Hypothesis 4: Externalizing behavioral problems are positively related to (A) young adult depressive symptoms and (B) alcohol consumption.

Hypothesis 5: Maternal depressive symptoms mediate the relationship between (A) poverty and young adult depressive symptoms and (B) poverty and alcohol consumption.

Figure 1: Hypothesized Pathways
Data

For this study, we use data from the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth (NLSY) and the National Longitudinal Study of Youth Child and Young Adult Sample (NLSY-CYA) to examine how childhood instability impacts behavioral issues in children and young adults. Funding for the NLSY and the NLSY-CYA mainly comes from the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS), but various government agencies have sponsored specific sets of questions at various time periods in the survey’s history. The NLSY is part of a larger project called the National Longitudinal Surveys (NLS) program. The survey gathers information on a number of topics, including labor market behavior, educational experiences, family background, family life, health issues, and income. Respondents in this survey were interviewed annually from 1979 to 1994 and biannually after 1994. The respondents in the cohort were born between 1957 and 1964, therefore their initial ages ranged from 14 to 22. The sample over represents minority groups including African Americans and Hispanics, as well as economically distressed whites. The sample is split evenly in terms of gender.

The NLSY-CYA began in 1986 and provides data on the children born to the women in the NLSY. There are two distinct segments to this sample: the child section and the young adult section. The child section of this data includes children from birth to age 14. The young adult section of this data includes young adults age 15 to 22. The child section includes factors like child-parent interaction, schooling behaviors, dating and friendship behaviors, etc. The young adult section is modeled after the NLSY survey. For the purposes of this project, data from the NLSY and NLSY-CYA were merged together through an identification code that connects the mother’s data with her children’s data.

Measures

Dependent variables: Young adult depressive symptoms and alcohol use. The variable young adult depressive symptoms is measured using the Center for the Epidemiologic Study of Depression (CES-D) seven-item scale. The seven-item scale is merely
designed to capture depressive symptoms, and therefore is not the same as a clinical diagnosis of depression. The scale includes the following measures: (1) I did not feel like eating/My appetite was poor; (2) I had trouble keeping my mind on what I was doing; (3) I felt depressed; (4) I felt that everything I did was an effort; (5) My sleep was restless; (6) I felt sad; and (7) I could not get “going.” Respondents rate the frequency of these symptoms (with the time frame being the past week) on scale ranging from 0 to 3: (0) rarely of none of the time (<1 day); (1) some or little of the time (1–2 days); (2) a moderate amount of the time (3–4 days); and (3) most or all of the time (5–7 days). This measure is represented as a latent construct in the final model. Young adult alcohol use is measured using a variable that captures the number of drinks the respondent had per occasion in the last 30 days. Both young adult depressive symptoms and alcohol use are taken from the 2008 wave of the NLSY-CYA.

*Internalizing behavioral problems and externalizing behavioral problems* are constructed using the Behavioral Problems Index (BPI). Internalizing behavioral problems and externalizing behavioral problems are used as both dependent and independent variables in this study. The BPI measures the regularity, range, and nature of childhood behavioral problems for children between the ages of 4 and 14. Mothers are asked about behaviors their children may have exhibited in the previous three months. There are three response categories: (1) often true; (2) sometimes; and (3) not true. The NLSY offers pre-constructed scale variables for both externalizing and internalizing behavioral problems. The externalizing scale includes behaviors such as cheating and lying, bullying, and sudden mood changes. The full externalizing score is based on 18 items for children 4–5, 20 items for children 6–11, and 19 items for children age 12–14. The internalizing scale includes behaviors such as feeling worthless, acting withdrawn, and feeling unloved. The full internalizing score is based on 10 items for children 4–11, and 6 items for children 12–14.

*Independent variables: Poverty status and maternal depressive symptoms.* Poverty status is constructed using two variables: income and family size taken from the 1992 wave. These variables are combined using the federal 1992 poverty status guidelines. For a family of one, an income of $7,360 or less indicates poverty status. A family of four with a combined annual income of
$14,800 is considered in poverty. The latent construct *maternal depressive symptoms* is measured using the same seven-item CES-D scale discussed above. This variable comes from the 1994 of wave of the NLSY. This variable was only measured in the 1992 wave and the 1994 wave, limiting the temporal element of the entire model. Poverty status is measured two years prior to maternal depressive symptoms to establish temporal ordering.

*Race/ethnicity, sex, and educational attainment* are all used as control variables. All control variables are taken from the 2008 wave of the NLSY-YCA and only placed on the key dependent variables. *Race and ethnicity* are identified in this model using dummy variables for African Americans, Hispanics, and Whites. Ethnic and racial minorities often face higher levels of economic instability due to discrimination and marginalization (Akee et al., 2019; Darity & Mason, 1998). *Sex* is also coded using dummy variables for women and men. Sex is an important variable because women, compared to men, are more likely to experience depressive symptoms as well as poverty in their lifetimes (Brady & Kall, 2008; Kuehner, 2017). Educational attainment is measured using the variable highest grade completed. Higher levels of education have been shown to lead to lower levels of depressive symptoms and lower alcohol consumption (Barr et al., 2016; Bauldry, 2015).

### Analytic Strategy

This study uses Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) using the Covariance Analysis of Structural Equations (CALIS) in SAS. SEM offers several advantages over traditional statistical approaches. First, SEM allows for the estimation of simultaneous equations in one model, whereas traditional regression only allows for estimations of separate models for each dependent variable. Therefore, we can simultaneously assess the effect of poverty and maternal depressive symptoms on two measures of childhood behavioral problems and the effect of these behaviors on depressive symptoms and alcohol use in young adulthood. Second, SEM is useful in measuring latent constructs. In this model, both maternal depressive symptoms and young adult depressive symptoms are represented as latent constructs. Third, SEM allows for pathways to be analyzed in terms of direct effects and indirect effects, which makes SEM
an ideal analytic approach for testing mediational relationships between variables.

There are two types of mediation that are shown in this model: simple mediation and multiple mediation. There are three steps to establishing simple mediational relationships. First, the causal variable must be correlated with the outcome variable. Second, the causal variable must also be correlated with the mediator variable. Third, the direct effect between the causal variable and the outcome variable must disappear when the mediator is added to the relationship (Christie-Mizell, 2003). However, mediation is easily discerned in pathway analysis. Evidence of mediation is depicted in SEM if the direct effect from the causal variable to the outcome variable is insignificant, but there are significant indirect effects tracing from the causal variable to the outcome variable. A graphical depiction of mediation is provided in the multivariate results section.

Table 1 depicts the descriptive statistics for this study, including the means/percentages, standard deviations, and correlations among all variables. The sample size for this study is 1913. Thirty-three percent of the sample was considered impoverished according to federal guidelines in 1992. Forty-nine percent of the young adults are females and 51% are males. Twenty-six percent of the sample is African American and 21% are Hispanic. As expected, many of the dependent and independent variables are highly correlated. Maternal depressive symptoms and poverty status are positively and significantly associated. Both internalizing and externalizing behavioral problems are positively and significantly associated with maternal depressive symptoms and poverty status. Alcohol consumption is positively correlated with both internalizing and externalizing childhood behavioral problems and young adult depressive symptoms. Alcohol consumption is negatively correlated with poverty status and maternal depressive symptoms. Young adult depressive symptoms is positively and significantly associated with maternal depressive symptoms, poverty status, and both internalizing and externalizing behavioral problems.
Table 1. Means/Percentages, Standard Deviations and Correlations for all Study Variables (N=1,913). Complete Cases

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<td>1. Poverty (1=Yes)</td>
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<td>2. Maternal Depressive Symptoms (Scaled)</td>
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<td>3. BPI: Internal Score</td>
<td>.12***</td>
<td>.22***</td>
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<td>4. BPI: External Score</td>
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<td>5. Young Adult Depressive Symptoms (Scaled)</td>
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<td>.09***</td>
<td>.09***</td>
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<td>6. Alcohol Consumption (Logged)</td>
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<td>0.01</td>
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<td>7. African American (1=Yes)</td>
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<td>.06**</td>
<td>-12***</td>
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<td>8. Hispanic (1=Yes)</td>
<td>.03</td>
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<td>0.03</td>
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<td>9. Female (1=Yes)</td>
<td>0.01</td>
<td>-0.02</td>
<td>0.01</td>
<td>-0.09***</td>
<td>0.11***</td>
<td>-24***</td>
<td>0.02</td>
<td>0.09*</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Highest Grade Completed</td>
<td>-16***</td>
<td>-13***</td>
<td>-0.09***</td>
<td>-12***</td>
<td>-16***</td>
<td>15***</td>
<td>-0.01</td>
<td>-0.06**</td>
<td>-0.09***</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean/Percentage</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>11.5</td>
<td>496.4</td>
<td>536.7</td>
<td>11.7</td>
<td>11.0</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>49%</td>
<td>12.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Standard Deviation</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>4.6</td>
<td>265.5</td>
<td>271.8</td>
<td>3.6</td>
<td>0.716</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1.94</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*p<.05; **p<.01; ***p<.001
Multivariate Results

Figure 2 shows the multivariate findings for this study. This graphical representation details the direct and indirect pathways specified in the model. The coefficients in this model are standardized regression coefficients. This analysis was carried out in two stages. First, we examined the direct effects between all dependent and independent variables. Second, we examined possible mediating effects between the following variables: poverty and young adult depressive symptoms, maternal depressive symptoms and young adult alcohol consumption, and finally, poverty and young adult alcohol consumption.

Note: Statistical Significance: * p < 0.05, ** p < 0.01, *** p < 0.001

Measures of fit: RMSEA (0.05), Bentler Comparative Fit Index (0.9), Bentler-Bonnet NFI (0.9), Chi-Square ***p<0.001

Figure 2: Estimated Pathways
The goodness of fit for this model was assessed using several statistical tests. The Root Mean Square Error of Appropriation (RMSEA) for this model is 0.05, which falls within the recommended guidelines that indicate an acceptable RMSEA of 0.05 or greater (Yuan & Bentler, 1998). Both the Bentler Comparative Fit Index and the Bentler-Bonnent NFI are at 0.9, which falls within the recommended guidelines that indicate an acceptable Bentler index of 0.90 or greater. The baseline model Chi-Square is significant (p < .001) and the ratio of Chi-Square over Degrees of Freedom is around 5.5:1. Since the sample size used in the model is large (N = 1913), the significant Chi-Square does not indicate a poor model fit. The Chi-Square/Degrees of Freedom ratio is slightly above the recommended cutoff of 5:1.

There are a number of significant relationships among the four variables measured in childhood. As expected, mothers living in poverty in 1992 have higher levels of depressive symptoms in 1994. This echoes the standard findings in the literature that financial instability leads to maternal depressive symptoms (Ertel et al., 2011; Goodman et al., 2011; Heflin & Iceland, 2009). Higher levels of maternal depressive symptoms in early childhood lead to both externalizing and internalizing behaviors in later childhood. Children living in poverty in 1992 demonstrate externalizing and internalizing childhood behavioral problems six years later.

Furthermore, this model demonstrates how poverty, maternal depressive symptoms, and childhood behavioral problems create negative consequences in young adulthood. *Maternal depressive symptoms* is positively related to young adult depressive symptoms. This relationship could provide support for Goodman and Gotlib’s (1999) theoretical model for the transmission of risk for depression from mothers to children that proposes how genetic, social, and environmental factors in childhood carry over into young adulthood. Regardless of the mechanisms driving this relationship, it is clear that depressive systems in mothers lead to deleterious effects for children, even in young adulthood.

However, there is no causal chain relationship between *maternal depression, internalizing behavioral problems* (which includes childhood depressive behavior), and *young adult depressive symptoms*. This could be the case because the manifestation of depressive symptoms in children differs from that of adults (Klein et al., 2005). Although the inadequacy of the measurement of
childhood depressive symptoms is outside the scope of this particular study, it is important to note that incorrect measurement of childhood depression could lead to the presence of type two error, meaning that there is a positive and significant relationship in the actual population, but researchers have failed to find an adequate way to correctly capture it. However, the model does indicate that externalizing childhood behavioral problems is positively associated with depressive symptoms in young adulthood. This finding is consistent with research showing that aggressive behavior in childhood is related to depressive symptoms in adolescence (Nilsen et al., 2013; Weeks et al., 2016).

Neither poverty status nor maternal depressive symptoms is directly associated with young adult alcohol use. However, there are significant indirect paths leading from both of these independent variables to young adult alcohol use, indicating a mediational relationship. Externalizing childhood behavioral problems is positively associated with alcohol consumption in young adulthood. Similarly, poverty status is not directly associated with young adult depressive symptoms. However, there are significant indirect paths leading from poverty status to young adult depressive symptoms, which also indicates that a mediational relationship is present. The following section of this paper will analyze the instances of mediation depicted in this model.

Mediational Relationships

Table 2 provides measurements of the direct and indirect paths for the model predicting young adult depressive symptoms and alcohol consumption. As stated previously, mediation is identified though the indirect pathways in path analysis. Thus, an analysis of the indirect pathways in the models will provide a better understanding of causal mechanisms. In order to find the total effect of all statistically significant pathways, indirect pathways are multiplied and added together.
Table 2: Direct and Indirect Effects Path Model Predicting Young Adult Depressive Symptoms and Alcohol Consumption

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Young Adult Depressive Symptoms</th>
<th>Young Adult Alcohol Consumption</th>
<th>Std. Est.</th>
<th>Std. Est.</th>
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</thead>
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<tr>
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<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>.01</td>
<td>***</td>
<td>.01</td>
<td>***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indirect</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Via Maternal Depressive Symptoms</td>
<td>.06</td>
<td>***</td>
<td>.30</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Via Externalizing Behavioral Problems</td>
<td>.10</td>
<td>**</td>
<td>.08</td>
<td>***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Via Internalizing Behavioral Problems</td>
<td>.01</td>
<td></td>
<td>-.03</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Maternal Depressive Symptoms</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Indirect</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Via Externalizing Behavioral Problems</td>
<td>.20</td>
<td>***</td>
<td>.02</td>
<td>**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Via Internalizing Behavioral Problems</td>
<td>.21</td>
<td>***</td>
<td>.01</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Internalizing Behavioral Problems</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Total Direct</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>.01</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Externalizing Behavioral Problems</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>.10</td>
<td>**</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Statistical Significance: * p < 0.05, ** p < 0.01, *** p < 0.001
Only statistically significant relationships included in total effects
Figure 3 provides a cross-section of the larger model in order to examine mediational relationships between childhood poverty and young adult depressive symptoms. In this figure, there are two types of mediation. First, maternal depressive symptoms mediate the relationship between poverty and young adult symptoms. Second, there is evidence that the combined effect of maternal depressive symptoms and externalizing childhood behavioral problems mediate the effect of poverty on young adult depressive symptoms.

Figure 3: Maternal Depression and Externalizing Behavioral Problems Mediating Poverty and Young Adult Depressive Symptoms

Note: Statistical Significance: * p < 0.05, ** p < 0.01, *** p < 0.001
Figure 4 provides a cross-section of the larger model in order to examine the relationships between childhood poverty and young adult alcohol consumption. There are also two types of mediation occurring in this figure. First, externalizing childhood behavioral problems mediates the relationship between maternal depressive symptoms and young adult alcohol consumption. Second, there is evidence that the combined effect of maternal depressive symptoms and externalizing childhood behavior problems mediate the effect of poverty on young adult alcohol consumption.

Figure 4: Maternal Depression and Externalizing Behavioral Problems Mediating Poverty Status and Alcohol Consumption

Note: Statistical Significance: * p < 0.05, ** p < 0.01, *** p < 0.001
Discussion and Conclusions

The primary goal of this research was to assess whether the effects of economic instability, maternal depressive symptoms, and childhood behavioral problems have negative consequences for young adults. A second goal was to assess whether maternal depressive symptoms and childhood behavioral problems mediate the relationship between poverty and young adult depressive symptoms and the relationship between poverty and young adult alcohol use. Our first hypothesis, that individuals who experienced childhood poverty are more likely to experience (A) young adult depressive symptoms, and (B) young adult alcohol consumption is supported by the model, when mediating variables are included in the model.

Part (A) of our second hypothesis, that maternal depressive symptoms are positively related to young adult depressive symptoms, holds true. Part (B) of our second hypothesis, that maternal depressive symptoms are positively related to young adult alcohol consumption, is not supported by the results. However, the model indicates that the relationship between maternal depressive symptoms and alcohol consumption in young adulthood is mediated by childhood externalizing behavioral problems. Theoretically, increased alcohol use in young adulthood may indicate a continuation of externalizing behavioral problems in adulthood.

Part (A) of our third hypothesis, that internalizing behavioral problems in childhood are positively related to young adult depressive symptoms, is not supported by the model. Since internalizing behavioral problems can manifest as depressive symptoms, the lack of statistical significance between these two variables is surprising. However, as stated previously, this null finding may indicate incorrect measurement of childhood depressive symptoms. Furthermore, the model does not support part (B) of our third hypothesis, that internalizing behavioral problems in childhood are positively related to alcohol consumption in young adulthood.

The model supports part (A) of our fourth hypothesis; externalizing behavioral problems in childhood are positively related to young adult depressive symptoms. This finding suggests that children who externalize their behavioral problems, whether by bullying, cheating, or demonstrating sudden mood
swings, tend to have higher levels of young adult depressive symptoms. Furthermore, the model supports part (B) of our fourth hypothesis. Externalizing behavioral problems in childhood are positively related to young adult alcohol consumption.

The model also supports part (A) of our fifth hypothesis; maternal depressive symptoms mediates the relationship between poverty and young adult depressive symptoms. This mediational relationship provides further support of the causal link between poverty status, maternal depression, and negative young adult behaviors. Maternal depressive symptoms functions as a mechanism underlying the relationship between childhood poverty and young adult depressive symptoms. The model did not support part (B) of our fifth hypothesis. There is no evidence that maternal depressive symptoms mediate the relationship between poverty and young adult alcohol consumption. Consequently, the final model demonstrated a pattern of multiple mediation, in which the relationships between poverty and young adult alcohol consumption is mediated through maternal depressive symptoms and through externalizing childhood behavioral problems.

This study finds that poverty, at just one instance in childhood, can have vast implications for mothers and their children over the course of a lifetime. Past research demonstrates a positive association between economic instability and childhood behavior problems (Atkinson et al., 1983; Duncan & Brooks-Gunn, 1997; Kiernan & Huerta, 2008). The findings in this study indicate that the deleterious effects of economic instability continue from childhood into young adulthood. Furthermore, the relationships in this study indicate that life stressors, such as economic instability, can lead to maternal depressive symptoms, which in turn interfere with childhood and young adult well-being. The findings presented in this model provide further support for the family stress model. A holistic understanding of the implications of economic instability on the life course cannot exclude mental health. It is clear that familial mental health matters in understanding the behavioral welfare of children.

By using path analysis and longitudinal data, this study leads to an enhanced understanding of the causal order between poverty, maternal depressive symptoms, and the behavioral health of children and young adults. It is clear that maternal mental health plays a key role in the relationship between childhood
poverty and cognitive and behavioral health of young adults. Consequently, this model also highlights the shortcomings of the family investment model. The family investment model posits that poor parents are constrained in their resources and time and therefore must focus on their children’s immediate needs, forgoing materials and activities that support children’s positive development. However, it does not account for the ways in which parents who experience economic stress are more likely to experience psychological distress, that such stress, in turn, influences their parenting, and that this decreased parenting quality increases children’s risk of a various negative outcomes in young adulthood. The social and behavioral difficulties exhibited by children and mothers in poverty are imperative mechanisms for understanding why poverty continues to cause such harmful effects over the course of a lifetime.

The results of this study can inform interventions to mitigate the consequences of poverty and maternal depression on children’s outcomes through young adulthood. Our findings suggest that interventions aimed at improving children’s behavioral health trajectories should include a focus on maternal well-being. In fact, research on parenting support interventions has found that improvements in maternal depression partially mediate improvements in behavior among high risk children (Hutchings et al., 2012; Shaw et al., 2009). In addition to targeted interventions for children who are identified as being at risk, findings from this study support the need for expanded access to mental health services for all low-income families. Because past studies have found that racial discrimination amplifies the association between maternal distress and parent-child relationships (Murry et al., 2001), specific strengths-based strategies for families of color that acknowledge structural racism are also imperative (Murry et al., 2018). Finally, interventions that target the societal conditions that lead to poverty and maternal depression should not be ignored. Research suggests that specific forms of material hardship (e.g., problems paying bills, lack of medical care, and unstable housing) help mediate the relationship between poverty and depression among low-income women (Heflin & Iceland, 2009). Combined with our findings, such evidence suggests that policies and programs that help families cope with and exit poverty may have cascading benefits on the health of children through young adulthood.
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References


Due to multiple factors, the community practice field struggles with incongruent community practice language and activities. In this article, authors unpack various challenges associated with community practice and explore implications for analysis, development, and application of effective interventions. Grounded in applied social science paradigms, authors offer a framework incorporating multi-paradigmatic approaches to inform intervention development and application. Principally centered in praxis—that is, reflection and action—this article builds on the work of foundational scholars to cultivate contextual interventions in planned change work. The authors aim to further develop the community practice knowledge base, expand what constitutes relevant evidence, and aid practitioners in making sense of complexity and contradiction in practice.

Keywords: Community organizing, community development, community planning, models, approaches
Introduction

Community practice involves people in addressing community needs, challenges, and issues through community-level organizing, development, planning, and advocacy. It encapsulates the activities of community organizing, community development, community planning, and community action (Popple, 1996; Weil et al., 2013). It originated in the early days of the industrial revolution, when community and social movements such as the settlement house, worker’s rights, racial justice, and child labor movements emphasized empowerment, advocacy, and the role of community in mutual aid and social reform (Addams, 1910; Garvin & Cox, 2001; Reisch, 2008). Community practice has long been considered a method, concentration, and/or a competency within social work practice, community development, and other human service disciplines (Brager et al., 1987; Garvin & Cox, 2001).

Although community practice is often discussed in various interprofessional histories, shifting paradigms within human services, driven by professionalization, neoliberalism, and market forces, have distanced community practice from social work and its fellow human service counterparts (Brady, Schoneman, & Sawyer, 2014; Fisher & Shragge, 2000; Fursova, 2018). One of the challenges that has long plagued community practice is clarity around practice terms, the development of a systematic knowledge base, ideological inconsistency, and questions about what constitutes evidence-informed practice (Brady, 2014). While authors do not seek to hegemonically convert the knowledge base of community practice to mirror that of direct practice social work, human services, public administration, urban planning or similar disciplines, they do desire to generate greater ideological, conceptual, and epistemological congruence in community practice terminology, as a modest contribution to the knowledge base. The authors also hope to continue conversations regarding what constitutes relevant evidence within community practice.

This article argues for conceptual clarity in the use of terms, such as practice theory, model, and approach, throughout community practice literature. We offer a guiding framework that integrates conceptual clarity with multi-paradigmatic analysis of community practice intervention, while concurrently informing the development of new ones. This multi-paradigmatic
framework allows congruent alignment of values, ideology, and underlying assumptions of various practice methods with their goals, activities, and outcomes. The focus of this work primarily deals with praxis, that which happens at the complex intersection of theory and practice (Casey, 2016). The aims build upon the work of scholars such as MacNair (1996), Reed (2005), Gutiérrez, Santiago, and Soska (2015), Boehm and Cnaan (2012), Gamble and Weil (2010), Rothman (2008), Thomas, O’Connor, and Netting (2011), Kenny (2019), and other foundational scholars in the field in order to improve the accessibility of effective practice interventions for community-level practitioners, educators, scholars, and students across contexts. We also explore the framework’s implications for the practice context, such as orienting practitioners, developing new knowledge, redefining and contesting what demonstrates relevant evidence within the field, and building interdisciplinary and inter-professional cohesion, and thus solidarity.

**Conceptual Clarity, Praxis, and the Community Practice Knowledge Base**

The knowledge base of community practice regularly makes use of terms such as perspectives, practice theories, practice approaches, and practice models (Quimbo et al., 2018). Few frameworks, if any, attempt to provide clarity in the uneven use of terminology, epistemology, and values utilized throughout community practice (Kenny, 2019; Materria-Castante et al., 2017; Rosato, 2015). As a result, authors draw from the works of Popple (1996) and Weil, Reisch, and Ohmer (2013) to define community practice as encapsulating the activities of community organizing, community development, community planning, and community action. Likewise, authors argue that using the term *community practice*, at least in the context of this piece, provides added clarity in communicating across various disciplines, such as social work, urban planning, community psychology, human services, and community development.

Due to the distance between scholars and practitioners, utilization of various epistemologies, and inherent interdisciplinary practice context, one of the main challenges influencing the knowledge base of community practice is the struggle to
utilize consistent vocabulary, coherent definitions, and accurate conceptual clarity throughout the literature (Kenny, 2019; Materria-Castante & Brennan, 2012; Materria-Castante et. al, 2017). A paucity of definitions exists within the community practice literature for terms such as practice model, which is often used synonymously with strategy, mode, or approach (Boehm & Cnaan, 2012; MacNair, 1996; Rothman, 2008; Weil et al., 2013). According to Netting and colleagues (2008), the difference between practice approaches and models lies in the level of prescription for how to do practice. Subsequently, approaches operate at higher levels of abstraction than models and use certain interrelated theoretical assumptions combined with skills, practice knowledge, and values to guide practitioners in the field (Netting et al., 2008). Models essentially make up the practical architecture of organized activities (Bobo et al., 2010; Burghardt, 2014). While practice approaches are somewhat flexible in the guidance provided to practitioners, practice models are more rigid and specific (O’Connor & Netting, 2009).

Ambiguity also exists in the use of the term practice theory across the literature. Netting, Kettner, McMurtry, and Thomas (2017) define theory as “sets of interrelated concepts and constructs that provide a framework for understanding how and why something does or does not work” (p. 11). Payne (2014) explicates theory into two distinct meta-categories: formal and informal. Formal theory has typically been tested and retested through methodologically driven systematic inquiry, peer review, and replication in the field, whereas informal theories arise from practice wisdom, case studies, community conversations, personal observations, and experience (Brady et al., 2014; Payne, 2014). Walsh (2013) defines practice theory within the context of direct practice in social work as, “a coherent set of ideas about human nature, including concepts of health, illness, normalcy, and deviance which provide verifiable or established explanations for behavior and rationales for intervention” (p. 3). In contrast, it is seldom defined in community practice literature (Brady & O’Connor, 2014; Bhattacharyya, 2004; Reed, 2005).

Many scholars actively discuss paradigms. Paradigms are at the foundation of theories and models in applied social science disciplines (Kuhn, 2012). According to Guba (1990), paradigms in science are commonly held worldviews comprised of underlying assumptions made about ontology (relationships between
concepts), epistemology (how do we build a knowledge base), and the nature of social change. Scholars utilize multi-paradigmatic frameworks to discuss differing and often-contested values that underlie the knowledge base of multiple human service disciplines (Schoneman & Sawyer, 2016). Within paradigms of social work, human services, and community practice lie ideologies that are rooted in the past history of the profession or discipline, and which inform how practitioners think about practice, research, the role of theory, methods, and social change (Hyde, 1996).

Applying a Multi-paradigmatic Orientation to Community Practice

Prominent scholars note the need to more accurately frame community practice interventions (Kenny, 2019; Thomas et al., 2011). Multi-paradigmatic frameworks’ conceptual tools usefully aid in bridging theory and practice. As heuristic devices, they highlight underlying competing values between different worldviews related to reality, knowledge, human nature, and social change (Brady et al., 2019; Burrell & Morgan, 1979; Guba, 1990; Kuhn, 2012). Burrell and Morgan (1979) offer an intellectual map for work within organizations that incorporates knowledge and value-based assumptions across various worldviews. Guba (1990) proposes a framework in the field of education, and Cameron and Quinn (2011) utilize a paradigmatic scheme for work in organizations within business. Built from many of the same key principles, which are briefly summarized below, they clarify how knowledge, values, and ideology guide practice.

Three paradigms influencing these schemes are the positivist paradigm, the interpretive paradigm, and the critical paradigm. Each of these orientations derives from philosophical traditions throughout the history of applied social sciences. Positivism posits that reality is knowable through objective observation and measurement (Humphrey, 2013). In this paradigm, reality exists outside the mind of the observer and is characterized through order, linearity, laws and verification, generalizability, and rigorous peer review. The interpretive paradigm diverges from positivism in distinct ways. For example, according to interpretivists, subjective experience guides
knowledge (Charmaz, 2014). Learning happens through dialogue and social construction. Reality is multifaceted, multidimensional, and co-constructed through various viewpoints (Lincoln & Guba, 2013). Critical theorists, unlike their positivist and interpretivist counterparts, view social change as transformative and radical as opposed to incremental. This paradigm highlights hegemonic social power structures, oppression, and dominance embedded within all knowledge systems. Linking personal and social problems, learning in this paradigm connects to historical systems of social control (Smucker, 2017). The critical paradigm emphasizes both radical structural and personal change. At the structural level, the critical paradigm, rooted in classical and neo-Marxism, seeks to eliminate institutional discrimination and oppressive violence, while centering analysis of power embedded within all knowledge (Marx & Engels, 1848/1967; Mullaly & Dupre, 2018). At the individual transformative level, the critical paradigm derives from Nietzsche (1997), Gramsci (1971/1971), Habermas (1981/1985), and Freire (1970) concerning the importance of consciousness raising and individual liberation to build collective power. The structural branch conveys a vision for systemic transformation emphasizing replacement of the status quo with a utopian vision for society led by those experiencing marginalization. Alternatively, the individual-focused branch dismisses utopian societal transformation as hegemonic and equally problematic to existing oppressive status quo traditions (Mullaly & Dupre, 2018).

Community Practice Paradigms: Rational, Collaborative, and Critical

In community practice, Thomas, O’Connor, and Netting (2011) provide the most recent multi-paradigmatic contribution based on the work of Burrell and Morgan (1979) and Guba (1990). These corral existing assumptions of knowledge, values, the nature of reality, and social change as tools to teach community practice. They argue that these paradigmatic schemes offer a way to link knowledge and values to the goals, activities, and outcomes of practice through three major worldviews: traditional; collaborative; and radical. More than simply an intellectual exercise, these schemes allow practitioners to link values and
knowledge to practice activities. Thomas, O’Connor, and Netting (2011) assert that each paradigm has different goals, visions, and activities for community practice. Adapting them, we categorize various community practice models and approaches throughout the literature to align their knowledge, value-based assumptions, and social change assumptions with their goals, activities, and outcomes. Table 1 highlights underlying common traits associated with the knowledge base of community practice, the major practices, and the social change focus within each.

This section details traits, utility, and limitations among intervention methods within the tradition of community practice (Gamble & Weil, 2010; Hardina, 2002; Ohmer & DeMasi, 2009; Pyles, 2013). Concerning the dearth of scholarship conducted in this area, authors by no means seek to review or cover all within the field, and do not hope to repeat the extensively rigorous work of other scholars (Fisher & Shragge, 2000; Gamble & Weil, 2010; Rothman, 2008). Rather, we seek to synthesize their work in the interest of clarity, and frame it based on underlying knowledge-based, value-based, and social change assumptions using their work as examples of how this framework can be applied. Additionally, we hope to enable practitioners to develop and apply other prevalent community practice interventions within the framework to build added analytical, practical, and developmental utility. Tables 2–4 briefly synthesize these dominant rational, collaborative, and critical community practice interventions in the more detailed sections that follow.

*Rational Community Practice*

Rational community practice aligns with instrumental rationality, which refers to the roots of scientific or technical knowledge (Weber, 1978). Seemingly neutral, and based in positivism and post-positivism, knowledge within rational community practice emphasizes objectivity, linearity, professional expertise, and measurable outcomes. Mobilizing strength through existing community structures, it addresses social problems through carefully ordered, generalizable interventions arranged around a set of “best practices” that operate within existing social structures (Thomas et al., 2011).

Various theories, models, and approaches dominate rational community practice. Community and economic development
Table 1. Characteristics of Community Practice Paradigms

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Paradigm</th>
<th>Knowledge Assumptions</th>
<th>Common Practices</th>
<th>Social Change Focus</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
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<td>Expert Driven</td>
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<td>Community Based Research</td>
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<td>Photo-Voice</td>
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<td>Broad Participation</td>
<td>Asset Mapping/Inventories</td>
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A Framework for Community Practice Interventions
### Table 3. Collaborative Community Practice Interventions

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### Table 4. Critical Community Practice Interventions

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currently permeate the community practice field, particularly within cities, neighborhoods and regional entities (Chapple, 2015). Informed by general systems theory, ecological systems theory, neoliberalism, and rational bureaucracy, this approach centers the use of economic principles to bring wealth and resources to drive community change. It combines hierarchy, accountability, political neutrality, and bureaucratic management practices (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Gamble & Weil, 2010; Udy, 1959; Weber, 2015; Weil & Gamble, 1995). It emphasizes market principles to drive accumulation of community wealth. This approach galvanizes broad support among policy makers, community leaders, private developers, planning professionals, and non-profit community workers (Chapple, 2015). However, taken to the extreme, this approach creates power struggles among well-meaning practitioners and residents and can fundamentally alter the culture, dynamic, and demographics of a community, at its worst resulting in gentrification, displacement, disintegration, and poverty re-concentration (Moskowitz, 2017). Communities solely depending on this approach can create social problems that reinforce oppressive structures. The Model Cities program is a primary example of this reality, which had mixed results (Ward, 2013; Weber & Wallace, 2012).

Dominant program and policy planning approaches are primarily based in rationality (Netting et al., 2017; Netting et al., 2008). Pyles (2009) describes social planning/policy as, “technical processes for addressing social welfare issues through public policies and programs” (p. 59). Netting, O’Connor, and Fauri (2008) define rational program planning as, “planning based on linear problem solving in which a step by step process moves toward a predetermined goal” (p. 266). Policy planning is typically defined by scholars as developing predetermined, data-based analytic strategies to achieve specific policy goals (Gamble & Weil, 2010; O’Connor, & Netting, 2011; Jansson, 2019; Rothman, 2008).

Social planning has been developed, studied, and expanded by practitioners and scholars in the field (Gamble & Weil, 2010; Rothman, 2008). With comparable theoretical underpinnings as community development, rational bureaucracy and various rational choice theories undergird social planning, program planning, program development, rational program planning, and policy planning (O’Connor & Netting, 2011; Ostrom, 2007;
In these planning approaches, decisions are made based on a set of informed, detailed, data-driven alternatives aimed toward predetermined outcomes (Gamble & Weil, 2010; Netting et al., 2008; Rothman, 2008).

**Collaborative Community Practice**

Collaborative community practice emphasizes partnerships between stakeholders, locally-derived knowledge, practice wisdom, participatory practice processes, community building, and incremental change. Focusing on the incremental, participatory development of communities, it affirms context-driven theories, such as symbolic interactionism, social learning theory, social constructivism, empowerment theory, narrative theory, and feminist perspectives that embrace subjectivity, tacit knowledge, and the process of intentional reformative change (Thomas et al., 2011). Theoretical perspectives, such as social constructivism, the strengths perspective, intersectionality, feminist theory, social learning, and symbolic interactionism, inform many of these collaborative community practice interventions (Bandura, 1977; Collins, 2015; Crenshaw, 1989; Saleebey, 2013; Vygotsky, 1978). The most prevalent interventions in collaborative community practice include asset-based community development (ABCD), feminist organizing, coalition building, neighborhood organizing, emergent strategy, and emergent planning (Boal, 1974/1979; Boehm & Cnaan, 2012; Brown, 2017; Hardina, 2002; Kretzman & McKnight, 1993; Sawyer, 2014; Shemer & Agmon-Snir, 2019).

Formalized in the 1990s, ABCD shifts traditional community development’s underlying tenets from a problem-centered focus to an asset-based perspective that mobilizes the inherent gifts, talents, and associations within the community towards mobilization, and, as a collaborative community practice approach, is greatly utilized throughout international practice contexts (Yeneabat & Butterfield, 2020). Asset Inventories drive activities in partnership with practitioners and community associations to collectively address community concerns (Kretzmann & McKnight, 1993; McKnight & Block, 2012; Saleebey, 2013). Philosophically aligned with both the strengths perspective and empowerment, this approach has various benefits and challenges (Gutiérrez, 1990; Saleebey, 2013). Practitioners need
to be able to deal with healthy conflict to actualize ABCD’s potential, as they provide community members with more power. Success often depends on community readiness, time, and attention to cooptation (Block, 2008; Emejulu, 2015). Given its central focus on building power from within the community through contesting services, non-profit professionals, and social entrepreneurs in fields such as human services, social work, and urban planning, ABCD is often avoided as a practice approach among professionals (Johnson-Butterfield, Yeneabat, & Moxley, 2016; McKnight, & Block, 2012). It has also been criticized for its co-optation by neoliberal actors and service providers, business leaders, and human service professionals (Fursova, 2018; McCleod & Emejulu, 2014).

Similarly, both coalition building and collective impact involve organizations and institutions formalizing organizational structures to galvanize resources around a set of goals, and its success depends on organizations working together (Christens & Tran Inzeo, 2015; Walzer et al., 2016). Informed by organizational culture theory, social constructivism, social exchange, and social learning theory, coalitions center dialogue and mutual learning, and they assume that various agendas coalesce for social change (Gamble & Weil, 2010; Weil & Gamble, 1995). In a practice context, this approach utilizes collective impact to solve human service problems and struggles with similar limitations as ABCD in balancing competing agendas, conflicts, and mutually reinforcing activities (Kania & Kramer, 2013; Raderstrong & Boyega-Robinson, 2016; Schmitz, 2012).

Locality development and neighborhood organizing approaches also fall within collaborative community practice (Ohmer & DeMasi, 2009). Fisher (1994) conceptualizes neighborhood maintenance as analogous to neighborhood organizing, and each encompasses weighing multiple complexities into a comprehensive set of practice activities within a neighborhood (Gamble & Weil, 2010; Weil & Gamble, 1995). Rothman (2008) contextualizes locality development within a geographic region often larger than a neighborhood. Both have the same need to negotiate agendas, acknowledge and analyze power dynamics, and develop a comprehensive set of practices. Their theoretical base lies within ecological systems theory, local knowledge, and both formal and informal theory (Fisher, 1994; Gamble & Weil, 2010; Rothman, 2008). Locality development and local-level
development has been greatly honed and expanded over the years in the international contexts of community practice and development (Pawar, 2014; Pawar & Cox, 2010).

Collaborative community practice also applies versions of program, policy, and community planning. For example, emergent planning assumes that planning constantly changes based on new information from multiple data sources, contextual complexities, and swift responses to new realities, changing dynamics, and contingencies (Brown, 2017; Netting et al., 2008; Shemer & Agmon-Snir, 2019). Supported by feminist theory, social constructivism, and social learning, it assumes actors take part in a process of contextual learning situated within their social environment (Bandura, 1977; Block, 2018; Vygotsky, 1978). In planning for capacity development or participatory planning, Rothman (2008) makes analogous claims including community members as active partners. In both of these approaches, plans change and adapt as new situations arise. These assumptions bring limitations, such as ambiguity, time intensive practice, tensions from perpetual change, and conflict with formalized “best practices” and evidence-based practices.

Feminist organizing makes major contributions to collaborative community practice. In one study, six major characteristics were found that included: (1) focus on human needs; (2) connectedness of issues; (3) holistic approach to development; (4) process orientation; (5) emphasis on community participation; and (6) networking (Gittell et al., 2000). Depending upon goals and scope, feminist organizing can also be oriented to many different types of community practice, but only so long as the principles of feminist organizing are promoted in the process, goals, and tools utilized (Hyde, 1996; Pyles, 2013). Gutiérrez and Lewis (1994) contend:

The goal of feminist organizing is the elimination of permanent power hierarchies between all people that can prevent them from realizing their human potential…the elimination of sexism, racism, and other forms of oppression through the process of empowerment. (pp. 99–100)

Various forms of feminist practice exist. For example, more critical and radical feminisms, such as black feminism, intersectionality, and socialist feminism, focus more on analyzing power,
transformation, and liberation. What sets these radical feminist organizing approaches apart from collaborative feminist organizing is the focus on systems-level changes, empowerment, and dismantling of oppressive practices and power; this is why feminisms often fall within more than one paradigm within the broader framework.

Critical Community Practice

Critical community practice stands for elimination of oppression, and the transformative change of societal structures and systems (Evans et al., 2014). It “seeks to transform unjust systems that arise from inequalities perpetuated by dominant groups” (Brady et al., 2014, p. 37). Centering on the structural changing of communities, it emphasizes critical theories and perspectives to guide social change, such as Marxism, critical race theory, radical feminisms, structural social work, and others (Kaufman, 2016; Mullaly & Dupre, 2018; Reisch, 2005; Thomas et al., 2011). It encompasses direct action, social action/advocacy, social movement building, Freire’s Transformative Model, empowerment, and the Alinsky/IAF Model (Alinsky, 1971; Chambers, 2018; Freire, 1970; Gamble & Weil, 2010; Graeber, 2009; Lee, 2001; Solomon, 1976). Theoretical perspectives that undergird these models and approaches stem from critical theory, critical pedagogy, neo-Marxism, conflict theory, and various other anti-oppressive perspectives (Danso, 2015; Freire, 1970; Mullaly & Dupre, 2018; Pyles, 2013). Critical community practice envisions new possibilities, systems, and social arrangements that emphasize equity, equality, and liberation from oppressive structures (Reisch, 2005; Thomas et al., 2011). The hallmarks of these new social arrangements involve entirely new ways of conceiving, realizing, and actualizing more essential democratic practice in communities and societies (Bronkema & Butler Flora, 2015; Scully & Diebel, 2015).

Direct action organizing disrupts systems of power through revealing oppressive power-based problems and involves pushing boundaries by intentionally creating tension through violent and/or non-violent means (Graeber, 2009; Kauffman, 2017). First mentioned as a part of the workers’ movement in the United States, this approach poses multiple risks to participants comprised of physical, emotional, psychological, and legal challenges.
to individuals (Thompson & Murfin, 1976). It is also limited by its confrontational nature, negative connotations, and often inherent contradictions. Organizers also have difficulty gauging how the targets of such approaches may react, but in multiple cases have been effective in achieving goals as in the Suffrage Movement, Organized Labor, Civil Rights, Black Power, and the Indian Independence Movement (Gamson, 1990; Tilly & Wood, 2016).

Social action shares certain characteristics of direct action, but it also integrates advocacy (Gamble & Weil, 2010; Rothman, 2008). This is particularly true of the Alinsky/IAF Model. Alinsky’s (1971) pluralist, power-based, non-ideological model that organized communities based on mutual self-interest for systems-level change left a major mark on critical and radical community practice (Chambers, 2018). His main tools for consolidating power were building powerful people-based organizations and using creative, confrontational, direct action-oriented tactics (Alinsky, 1971). His model was oriented toward achieving end results and prescribed that the community organizer develops community leaders. He also drew a serious distinction between the organizer that worked for, rather than with, the community (Alinsky, 1971; Bradshaw et al., 1993). Even though he emphasized developing leaders, he justified the role of the organizer as expert for building and maintaining organizations. In this way, he worked for radical change of oppressive structures while often reinforcing them (Bradshaw et al., 1993).

Freire (1970), an educator who worked with people living in poverty in Brazil, developed another critical model based in education, literacy, and consciousness-raising. His work went through further development within Latin America and throughout the world, being continuously refined and utilized as a form of radical community practice (Bengle & Sorensen, 2017). Central to Freire’s model were: the banking model of education; dialogue; the culture of silence; praxis; and critical consciousness (Freire, 1970; Kaufman, 2016; Pyles, 2013). In the banking model, the teacher, acting as an expert, deposits information into the student. As a result, the banking model “attempts to control thinking and action, leads men and women to adjust to the world, and limits their creative power” (Freire, 1970, p. 77). Freire viewed dialogue as the antidote to this oppressive dynamic. Described as a practice of freedom, it is a central component in the development of an individual and
collective critical consciousness, and is essential in building trust. This further requires an intense faith in people and the presence of hope (Freire, 1970).

Various empowerment approaches closely align with Freire (1970). Empowerment is a transformative phenomenon constructed through a process of dialogue and action (Bengle & Sorensen, 2017; Lee, 2001; Kaufman, 2016; Saleebey, 2013). According to Hardina (2002), “the purpose of community organization practice is to empower members of oppressed groups” (p. 4). Solomon (1976) defines empowerment as:

> a process...to reduce the powerlessness that has been created by negative valuations based on membership in a stigmatized group. It involves identification of power blocks ... and implementation of specific strategies aimed at the reduction of the effects from indirect power blocks. (p. 19)

Gutiérrez and Lewis (1994) outline the elements of empowerment and place them under the overarching goal of social justice. They highlight the elements of power, psychological transformation, and connections or social supports. Recognizing the importance of critical consciousness, having knowledge of structures of power and oppression, and linking the personal issues to political conditions are necessary within this approach (Lee, 2001).

Social movement building typically integrates multiple radical approaches, including direct action, social action, and empowerment, due to their scope and the need for public displays of unity, power, and mass mobilization (Staggenborg, 2016). Social movements focus primarily on conscious oriented citizens working to create broad social change to institutions and social structures that perpetuate oppression (Tilly & Wood, 2016). Their essential characteristics involve changes in consciousness, shifts in collective behavior, and transformation in institutional values (Castells, 1984). Social movements raise consciousness through mass mobilization with the goal of fundamentally changing institutional structures, and their appeal is largely one grounded in values and human rights (Jasper, 2014). Examples include the Lesbian Gay Bisexual and Transgender Rights (LGBT) movements, Feminist Movements, Workers’ Movements, Poor People’s Movements, Black Lives Matter, Civil

Framework Implications: Complexity, Solidarity, and Expanding Knowledge

Early community practice often looked to local knowledge, practice wisdom, and case study approaches and moved to building and analyzing community-based interventions created to help marginalized populations (Brady et al., 2014). At the same time, various social pressures...including the professionalization movement, the push towards linear, positivist science-based forms of evaluation, and broad emphasis on the individual as a source of social problems—influenced the adoption of evidence-based practice (EBP), and the valuing of specific types of professional knowledge and values over others. This manifested itself as a guiding hegemonic worldview for structured activities within organizations and institutions across disciplines such as social work, public administration, urban planning, human services, community development, and non-profit management (Brady et al., 2019).

As a result of the influence of EBP and post-positivism, various responses and approaches to building the knowledge base of community practice have taken root, due to political, economic, and institutional pressure. Rational theories, models, and approaches dominate the field, often not due to their overall efficacy, but due to the influences of power, hegemony, and professionalization (Sawyer & Coles, 2020). While these approaches provide specific ways for understanding the creation and utilization of practice tools, utilizing a singular, dominant epistemological frame creates severe limitations for practitioners and opens the door to oppressive practice (Fursova, 2018; Materria-Castante & Brennan, 2012; Thomas et al., 2011). This framework expands capacities by offering alternative ways to envision effective practice in communities.

This piece does not capture all of the multiple intervention theories, models, and approaches to community practice. Though a rigorous systematic review of community practice interventions lies beyond the scope of this article, the core intent
remains to bring to light embedded assumptions, biases, and complexities within the numerous interdisciplinary community practice interventions within the field. The interventions above mix foundational interventions which are fundamental to community practice and contemporary exemplars. This framework brings to light diverse assumptions, agendas, contradictions, power sources, and biases that become evident when gathering inter-professional practitioners to build community practice initiatives, develop effective interventions, expand the community practice knowledge base, and forge solidarity across disciplines.

When practitioners use theories, models, and approaches which are not paradigmatically aligned, paradox, contradiction, and needless complexities arise. Aligning community interventions based on knowledge, values, and social change-based assumptions significantly reduces complexities. Paradigmatic analysis and application may not wholly eliminate complexity, but they can facilitate greater synergy than using mixtures of multiple less aligned eclectic approaches that do not take into account worldview, knowledge, values, and social change assumptions.

It is critical for practitioners and scholars to know the consequences, trade-offs, and benefits of using one intervention approach or model over another, along with having knowledge of those models that might be complementary or incongruous with chosen interventions in the field. For example, ABCD may not be as aligned with rational approaches to economic and community development. Due to the dynamic nature of communities and diverse goals of practice, prodigious benefits come from understanding what practice interventions paradigmatically align. Rational, collaborative, and critical community practice intervention approaches and models all have significant strengths and limitations. Choosing, utilizing, and effectively harnessing them regularly involves a series of trade-offs often made by practitioners at an unconscious level based on practice wisdom, personal values, practice contradictions, or misalignment among goals and paradigmatic orientation. This framework is useful in clarifying and identifying practitioner goals, strategies, and values, while also enabling practitioners to explicitly recognize the dominant knowledge-based, value-based, and social change-based assumptions which may be embedded within a given practice context. Often, as practitioners, students, and scholars, we may not choose the context in which
we practice, but identifying a specific community practice paradigm based on context can bring power to choose among various theories, models, and approaches appropriate for unique practice settings. It also holds potential for further developing new paradigmatically aligned interventions, and, more broadly, the community practice knowledge base as a whole.

Thorough analysis of applied social science paradigms exposes dominant ideas, knowledge, and practices. Formalized economic power, knowledge, and practices dictate how community-based organizations, community development corporations, and professional activities structure their organizations and services (Dominelli, 2010; Sawyer & Coles, 2020). Presently, academic systems, training programs, resource allocation, and knowledge development are centered in a rational paradigm (Brady et al., 2019; Fook, 2002). These rational approaches taken to the extreme perpetuate multiple social problems, particularly in communities in which more informal knowledge and subjective, context-bound approaches are pertinent, relevant, and appropriate.

Scholars and practitioners need to work diligently to develop the knowledge base to incorporate informal theories, approaches, and models through embracing interventions and research within collaborative and critical paradigms. These offer advantages that rational community practice does not include, such as democratization of knowledge and activities, incorporation of diverse perspectives, and analysis of and application of power (Brady et al., 2014; Fisher & Shragge, 2000). The knowledge driving collaborative and critical approaches continues to fall outside the mainstream of prototypical planning, and is often considered “novel” and less rigorous by more rationally-driven practitioners and scholars (Netting et al., 2008; Rothman, 2008; Shemer & Agmon-Snir, 2019). Expanding relevant evidence means incorporating more community-based participatory research methods, acknowledging local intelligence as valuable, and equalizing power among all stakeholders (Sawyer & Coles, 2020).

Diverse ways of approaching community work and knowledge development benefit professional practice and social science; however, it is imperative that community practice scholars, practitioners, and educators begin working collaboratively towards developing consistent terminology and definitions for practice tools. In this way, professionals across disciplines better understand which models and approaches will best serve
the needs presented in their practice context. Perhaps to bridge the interdisciplinary gap, consistent language can be cultivated through developing shared discourse and study of applied social science paradigms. This praxis framework helps build consistency, understanding of key concepts and terms, and interdisciplinary solidarity without exerting hegemony in favor of one overarching worldview regarding the best way to practice, or build intervention tools.

References


Kretzmann, J., & McKnight, J. (1993). *Building communities from the inside out: A path toward finding and mobilizing a community’s assets*. ACTA Publications.


Does Internet Access Create or Destroy Social Capital?  
The Case of West Java Province

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Bonding social capital is within a group or community, whereas bridging social capital is between social groups, social class, race, religion, or other important sociodemographic or socioeconomic characteristics. This paper aims to investigate the determinants of household involvement and the effect of internet access on bridging and bonding social capital in West Java, Indonesia. The data used in this study were sourced from the results of a survey conducted by the Central Bureau of Statistics (BPS) of West Java Province in 2014, The National Socio-Economic Survey (Survei Sosial Ekonomi Nasional) on Socio-Cultural and Educational Module (Modul Sosial Budaya dan Pendidikan) or The Social Security Module (Hansos Module) which was analyzed through instrumental variables estimation (IV). The results showed that social capital in West Java Province is determined by multiple factors related to schooling, health status, gender, and marriage status, among others. Additionally, we found that internet access has a positive and significant effect on social capital, especially bridging social capital. Furthermore, older individuals (aged 65 and above) are less likely to experience the effects of bridging social capital, due to their lower use of the internet compared to younger aged persons.

Keywords: bridging social capital, bonding social capital, instrumental variables, internet access, Indonesia
Nowadays, the internet has infiltrated our lives, both in the social, cultural, economic, health, political, and educational fields. Internet is crucial in exchanging information and communicating quickly without geographical limitations; where there is internet, there is easy and time-efficient work. In addition, the internet can also be used to expand knowledge and broaden human relationships. The start of the industrial revolution 4.0 has seen rapid changes in economic development, information technology, the climate of human organizations in business, and human interaction. Along with these changes, social interaction in society has also changed. As information technology becomes better in quality, the transfer of long-distance information becomes more accessible and faster, thus increasing the intensity of long-distance social interaction. However, the quality increase in information technology also results in lower face-to-face social interaction. This decrease happens as users tend to be more active in taking advantage of information technology.

The internet is part of the modern world today and is an essential tool for children’s education; it can be accessed in schools, homes, or even shopping centers. Also, internet proficiency is an important skill when entering the labor market. An internet user can become anyone they desire, whether they are in an online chat room, or playing online games. Thus, for many people, real-world relationships may be overlooked in lieu of virtual relationships. In this case, the existence of the internet as a mode of rapid connection can lead to freedom from family ties and associations with new cultures and communities.

Indonesia’s current population has reached 262 million people, of which more than 50 percent, or around 143 million people, have been connected to the internet throughout 2017 (Asosiasi Penyelenggaran Jaringan Internet Indonesia [APJII], 2014). The majority of internet users, as much as 72.41 percent, are still from the urban community. Its use has gone beyond communication to buying goods, ordering transportation, and performing business and work functions. Based on its geographical area, the people of Java have the most access to the internet at 57.70 percent, especially in the province of West Java, which has the most internet users in Indonesia, with as many as 16.4 million. The other islands follow suit, including Sumatra 19.09 percent, Kalimantan 7.97 percent, Sulawesi 6.73 percent, Bali-Nusa 5.63 percent, and Maluku-Papua 2.49 percent (APJII, 2014). This information
indicated that the highest internet usage lies in Indonesia is West Java.

One of the issues in development economics that concerns economists and policymakers is the role of social capital in the development of an area or country. Social capital is an interesting topic in the study of development economics, positing that differences in social variables between regions and countries can explain the differences in income and productivity. In this case, non-economic variables that can capture various aspects of social structure are called social capital. Experts have realized the importance of social capital in the formation of civil society (Abramson et al., 2001). The existence of social capital is also essential, not only to support the effectiveness of government, but also to aid with revenue growth and other economic indicators (Knack & Keefer, 1997). Social capital plays a role in many ways, such as access to credit and loan repayments, financial development, innovation, mitigating agency problems in organizations, and political accountability.

Putnam (2000) made a distinction between bonding (exclusive) and bridging (inclusive) social capital. Bonding social capital occurs among homogeneous populations. It is often parochial and only benefits those with internal access. While it can act as an effective resource for particular groups, such as ethnic minority groups who create niche economies, its benefits are limited. The very factors that promote its development, such as tight bonds of trust and solidarity, may ultimately prevent its entrepreneurial members from reaching their full potential. They may be held back by family and community demands and may only become successful if they are able to forge ties with others in the wider society. In other words, by developing bridging social capital. Furthermore, bridging social capital can pave the way for acquiring other forms of capital, such as financial or human capital.

Woolcock (1998) stated that bonding social capital refers to relationships between individuals who are in groups or neighborhoods that are close to each other with strong internal cohesion and are built on trust and good leadership. This bond is useful in times of crisis and as a social support formed through the similarity of income and demographic levels with the composition of a relatively homogeneous society (de Souza Briggs, 1998; Zhang et al., 2011). Furthermore, the exchange
of information in this bond tends to be limited. Meanwhile, bridging social capital is a relationship that exists between the characteristics of different individuals, including people from different communities, cultures, religions, or socioeconomic backgrounds (Woolcock, 1998). Bridging social capital connects bonding groups (Brisson & Usher, 2005). Communities who experience bridging social capital tend to be heterogeneous with weak ties (Coffé & Geys, 2007; Zhang et al., 2011). However, this bond allows a wider exchange of information and resources that are useful for helping individuals or communities achieve advancement.

Regional economic development in West Java Province contributes to social capital in national development to achieve development goals that are adjusted to the potential and problems in the region. The Social Capital Index in West Java is still below the national figure with further details, as shown in Table 1 below.

Table 1. Comparison of Indonesian and West Java Province Social Capital Index Components, 2014

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Components</th>
<th>Indonesia</th>
<th>West Java</th>
<th>Difference</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Social Capital Index</td>
<td>49,45</td>
<td>48,10</td>
<td>-1.35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trust</td>
<td>60,87</td>
<td>61,64</td>
<td>0.77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religious Tolerance</td>
<td>41,55</td>
<td>36,51</td>
<td>-5.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethnic Tolerance</td>
<td>58,22</td>
<td>58,16</td>
<td>-0.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participation in groups</td>
<td>49,08</td>
<td>48,19</td>
<td>-0.89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Networking</td>
<td>13,46</td>
<td>10,41</td>
<td>-3.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joint Action</td>
<td>52,62</td>
<td>51,25</td>
<td>-1.37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reciprocity</td>
<td>53,15</td>
<td>52,71</td>
<td>-0.44</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Central Bureau of Statistics, 2014a, 2014b

Table 1 above shows that of the seven components of social capital, West Java’s attitude of trust is above the national average, while the other six components of social capital are still below the national average.

The influence of the use of the internet on social capital has become an important concern for scientists, society, and
government. The social influence of the internet has been widely debated in the last decade, but there is a conflict between the public and various academic literature that claim negative influences, such as social isolation. This group claims that if the internet is mostly used for passive entertainment, then similarly to television, it can also hinder social participation. Furthermore, conducting transactions such as shopping and banking on the internet can also deter people from face-to-face interaction (Franzen, 2003). Additionally, several studies have shown the positive influence of internet use on social interactions, such as finding work or getting better jobs, social status, welfare, social integration, better management of shared resources, poverty alleviation (Grootaert et al., 2002), civic engagement, and social cohesion (Lin & Erickson, 2012; Putnam, 2001). Thus, individuals who have higher social capital tend to have more opportunities compared to those who have lower social capital.

Putnam, (2001) showed that the decline in social capital—such as participation in formal organizations, informal social connectivity, and trust between individuals—started in the United States due to several reasons, namely: (a) the reduction in the time available for social interaction associated with increased labor flexibility and extended travel time; (b) increased mobility of workers and students; and (c) advances in information and communication technology (ICT). Moreover, television and other forms of domestic entertainment, such as video games and video players, replaced individual relational activities in leisure time. This argument is consistent with empirical evidence about the negative role of television exposure in social relations (Bruni & Stanca, 2008) and civic engagement (Olken, 2009). While television, a unidirectional mass media, is found to be significant in aspects of social capital, the internet, which provides on-demand content and enables interactive communication, can cause an even stronger substitution effect. Furthermore, television also caused fewer voters to go to the polls. This effect was particularly strong in exactly those elections where the drop in information was shown to be the largest. The evidence linking television to a drop in voting is robust to partitioning counties into groups by demographic characteristics, controlling explicitly for demographics, and allowing nonlinear functions of time interacted with demographics (Gentzkow, 2006).
Studies analyzing the importance of social capital as a determinant of the economic development of a society have been conducted in various developing countries, resulting in diverse results. Sum et al. (2008) showed that the relationship between internet use, social capital, and welfare is a complex construction, and the internet has different effects on social capital and welfare resulting from different uses of this technology. The use of the internet can assist mature adults and senior citizens if they can utilize it. Sabatini & Sarracino (2017) found evidence that all forms of trust declined significantly, affecting participation in online networks. Although the same study states that social networking has a positive impact on well-being as it increases the probability of face-to-face interactions, the net effect remains negative and decreases social trust among communities. Social networking sites may be detrimental to an individual’s well-being, as it impacts the aspects of social capital related to well-being, thus the deterioration of trust may be a result of online activity and internet use.

On the other hand, Bauernschuster et al. (2014) found no evidence that the internet reduces social capital. The internet is qualitatively different from the television in that its main function is not passive entertainment. At least in some areas of social engagement, the main function of the internet seems rather one of active information seeking and communication—which the internet provides in an individualized form at any time—that is conducive to social interaction. Such an interpretation is in line with suggestive evidence that most people use the internet for information searches and communication, whereas far fewer people use it for mere entertainment purposes.

Studies analyzing the importance of social capital as a determinant of the economic development of a society have been conducted in various developing countries with diverse results. Sum et al. (2008) showed that the relationship between internet use, social capital, and welfare is a complex construction, and the internet has different effects on social capital and welfare, resulting from different uses of this technology. The use of the internet can assist mature adults and senior citizens if they can utilize it. Sabatini & Sarracino (2017) i.e. subjective well-being (SWB found evidence that all forms of trust declined, significantly affecting participation in online networks. Bauernschuster et al. (2014) identified that the internet could reduce the level
of social capital, and Rosenblat & Mobius (2004) showed that the existence of the internet could increase the frequency of group separation and community fragmentation. The use of the internet has a positive role in social interactions, such as the expansion of connectivity or social networks (Wang & Wellman, 2010). Nie et al. (2008) used cross-sectional data in the United States to show that internet users spend less time with family and friends than non-users. Pénard & Poussing (2010) showed that investment through internet activity is positively correlated with social capital.

Empirical studies show contradictory findings regarding the effect of internet use on social capital; on the one hand, it has a negative effect, but in some cases, it is positive. Therefore, this study aims to investigate what determines household involvement in bridging and bonding social capital and the effect of internet access on bridging and bonding social capital in West Java, Indonesia. This research contributes important empirical results regarding the effect of internet use on social capital in Indonesia, especially in West Java Province.

Methods

This research used The National Socio-Economic Survey (Survei Sosial Ekonomi Nasional) on Socio-Cultural and Educational Module (Modul Sosial Budaya dan Pendidikan) or The Social Security Module (Hansos Module). The data were collected in March 2014, covering 26 (twenty-six) districts/cities in West Java Province. Data were taken at the level of household unit (with a total sample of 5,990 households) and individual household members (23,181 people). For this analysis, only the data and information of the head of the household will be used to represent the household. The data includes demographic characteristics, socioeconomic characteristics, household consumption, and information on social capital.

In this study, social capital is approached with 2 (two) points of analysis, namely bonding and bridging social capital. Bonding social capital can be measured by the willingness to help and the ease of obtaining assistance (Zhang et al., 2011). The indicators used are: (a) willingness to help others who are
helpless; (b) participation in community activities to help residents who are experiencing disasters; (c) ease in receiving assistance from neighbors (other than relatives); and (d) the number of relatives, friends, and neighbors who are ready to help when experiencing problems.

The calculation of the bridging and bonding social capital index uses the exploratory factor analysis method. In the data preparation stage, all data scales are uniformed using a scale of 10 (Central Bureau of Statistics, 2014). Furthermore, the formed factor is extracted by the principal component analysis (PCA). Meanwhile, the measures for bridging social capital refer to previous research (Beugelsdijk & Smulders, 2003; Zhang et al., 2011) namely: (a) the number of organizations or groups (with active members) that are followed; (b) participation in community activities in the public interest (such as volunteering in community service); (c) participation in religious social activities (such as religious studies, religious celebrations); and (d) participation in social activities (such as social gatherings, sports, arts) with a measurement scale of 0–4, with 0 indicating no community activities.

The estimation model used a previously applied framework (Bauernschuster et al., 2014; Sabatini & Sarracino, 2017) with some modifications. The basic model used in this study is as follows:

\[ S_i = \beta_0 + \beta_1 I_i + \beta_2 X_i + \beta_3 Z_i + u_i \]  

where \( S_i \) is social capital measured by two indicators of bonding and bridging social capital. \( I_i \) is internet access that is measured by the household, \( X_i \) is a vector of household characteristics and \( Z_i \) is the dwelling characteristic, whether it is a village or a city, and \( u_i \) is an error term.

Equation 1 shows a two-way causal relationship between internet access and social capital, which raises the problem of endogeneity and selection bias. Given the endogeneity problem, the ordinary least squared method is not appropriate, because endogenous variables correlate with error. Applying the OLS model without correcting endogeneity will cause an estimator of bias and inconsistency, leading to incorrect conclusions. For example, selection bias occurs because individuals have the basic nature of being shy, lonely, and are loners who resort to accessing the internet because they have less social contact in the real world and wants to compensate with interactions in
the virtual world. Another example is reverse causality, which may arise if politically interested individuals are more likely to buy internet access because they want to use the internet to obtain better information about politics. Another concern is the problem of omitted variables, which are another source of endogeneity; for example, individuals who are outgoing and open-minded tend to socialize more, but at the same time are more vulnerable to the development of new technologies such as the internet. Thus, to overcome this problem, the instrumental variable (IV) method is carried out so that the bias problem can be overcome. Therefore, equation (1) becomes as follows:

\[ S_i = \alpha + \gamma_1 W_i + \gamma_2 X_i + \gamma_3 Z_i + u_i \]  

(2)

\( W_i \) is the \( i \) household instrumental variable, \( \gamma_1 \) is a presumption of parameters, and \( u_i \) is a disturbance or error term.

The instrumental variables used are expected to correlate with internet usage and are not related to error term. The instrumental variable candidate in this study is the home as the location/media to access the internet (Bauernschuster et al., 2014). This candidate for the instrumental variable will be analyzed for strength and validity as instruments for forming internet access by meeting the assumptions correlated with internet access but not correlated with errors.

If all the independent variables inputted into the model are exogenous (i.e., it does not correlate with error), there will be no difference in the estimation results of the OLS and IV models. Therefore, it is essential to know whether the independent variables inputted into the model have an endogeneity problem or not. Endogeneity testing is done to measure whether there is a correlation between the independent variables that cause bias. This test is carried out using the Hausman (2001) test by looking at the p-value that is displayed when conducting a regression using instrumental variable model (Wooldridge, 2015).

Furthermore, a validity test is conducted to determine whether a model is valid or not by proving that the instrumental variables used in the model affect endogenous variables, but do not affect the dependent variable. In this study, a test was conducted to see whether the distance variable with the telephone office affected other independent variables, while not affecting social capital. This test was carried out by comparing the
regression result in the sub-sample instrument of the dependent and independent variables. Finally, an F-test was performed to test whether the instrument used has a strong correlation with endogenous variables. This test was carried out by comparing the F statistic in the first stage with the Stock-Yogo critical value displayed at the time of regression using instrumental variable model (Wooldridge, 2015).

Results and Discussion

Descriptive statistics in Table 2 show that social capital in West Java Province generally has higher bonding than bridging social capital by 5.31. This shows that people in West Java have strong ties in relationships between individuals who are in groups or neighborhoods in close proximity with strong internal cohesion and are built on trust and good leadership.

Table 2. Descriptive Statistics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>Obs</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std. Dev.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bonding social capital</td>
<td>18954</td>
<td>5.310</td>
<td>0.307</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bridging social capital</td>
<td>18954</td>
<td>1.600</td>
<td>0.197</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean years of schooling</td>
<td>18954</td>
<td>5.805</td>
<td>3.401</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Head of household who had health complaints</td>
<td>18954</td>
<td>0.143</td>
<td>0.350</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender of the head of the household males</td>
<td>18954</td>
<td>0.896</td>
<td>0.305</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age under 18 years</td>
<td>18954</td>
<td>0.328</td>
<td>0.470</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age 18 to 34 years</td>
<td>18954</td>
<td>0.231</td>
<td>0.421</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age 35 to 54 years</td>
<td>18954</td>
<td>0.161</td>
<td>0.367</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age 45 to 64 years</td>
<td>18954</td>
<td>0.219</td>
<td>0.413</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age above 65 years</td>
<td>18954</td>
<td>0.062</td>
<td>0.241</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marriage status of household head</td>
<td>18954</td>
<td>0.878</td>
<td>0.327</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Household size</td>
<td>18954</td>
<td>4.103</td>
<td>1.510</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Head of household works</td>
<td>18954</td>
<td>0.860</td>
<td>0.347</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Homeownership owned by households</td>
<td>18954</td>
<td>0.812</td>
<td>0.390</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The main job of the household as a farmer</td>
<td>18954</td>
<td>0.096</td>
<td>0.294</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Distance to sanitation facility</td>
<td>18954</td>
<td>0.273</td>
<td>0.445</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Electricity supply</td>
<td>18954</td>
<td>0.999</td>
<td>0.026</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Floor area in m²</td>
<td>18954</td>
<td>68.831</td>
<td>51.832</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Access to water facilities</td>
<td>18954</td>
<td>0.895</td>
<td>0.306</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Access to People’s Business Credit (KUR)</td>
<td>18954</td>
<td>0.021</td>
<td>0.145</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rural areas</td>
<td>18954</td>
<td>0.331</td>
<td>0.471</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Central Bureau of Statistics (2014a, 2014b)
* References Category
In general, the mean years of schooling of household heads in West Java reached six years (or they are primary school graduates), with an average of 4 members in the household. Meanwhile, the average head of household who had health complaints in West Java was quite low at 14.3 percent, while the rest did not have health complaints with the number reaching 85.7 percent. It is noted that the gender of the head of the household is dominated by males by 89.6 percent, and the average marriage status had 87.8 percent being married. Meanwhile, the average age of household members in West Java Province was dominated by individuals under 18 years of age, which reached 32.8 percent. Furthermore, generally married household heads reached 87.8 percent, and an average of 86 percent was employed, where the main job of the household head as a farmer was very low at 9 percent. The average status of homeownership own is quite high, reaching 81.2 percent, while those who do not yet have a home are at 18.8 percent.

The average distance to a place or sanitation facility of more than 10 meters reached 27.3 percent. This shows that the community’s accessibility to sanitation facilities is quite high. Most of the people in West Java Province had an electricity supply, with an average of 99 percent. Furthermore, people in West Java Province generally have an average floor area of 69 m². Healthy house category is a house that has a floor area of at least 10 m² per capita. Thus, in West Java Province it can be said that generally, the houses are in a healthy category. Furthermore, access to water facilities in West Java Province on average is already high, reaching 89.5 percent.

Access to People’s Business Credit (KUR) in West Java Province, in general, is still very low at an average of 2.1 percent. KUR is a credit or financing scheme for working capital and or investment specifically intended for Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises and Cooperatives (UMKMK) in productive and feasible businesses; this model has limitations in meeting the requirements set by the Banking industry. Finally, the majority of people in West Java Province live in urban areas, which reached 66.9 percent.
Determinants of social capital

Table 3 shows that the mean years of schooling has a positive effect on social capital (both bonding and bridging), and is statistically significant at levels 1 and 5 percent. Thus, it can be concluded that the level of education plays a vital role in various social capital activities. This is in line with previous research, which stated that schools are better than families in contributing to the spread of social capital (Aghion et al., 2010). In addition, although individuals with education have higher investment costs in social capital, they also receive a higher level of profit than social capital. Therefore, highly educated individuals will invest more in social capital because the net benefits will be higher.

The health status of household heads has a positive effect on both bonding and bridging social capital and is statistically significant at the 1 percent level. This indicates that social capital can play a vital role in improving the health status of various individuals. In this case, social capital is essential to maintain the general health status of the community. In other words, the health status of individuals through outreach efforts that encourage the development and maintenance of integration and social ties can increase various bonds, both bonding and bridging social capital. This is in line with previous research, which showed that social capital is essential for maintaining public health status (Yamaguchi, 2013).

Male household heads have a positive effect on bonding social capital which was statistically significant at the 5 percent level. This showed that male heads of households play an active role in relationships between individuals who are in neighboring groups or neighborhoods with strong internal cohesion and are built on trust and good leadership (Woolcock, 1998). Thus, male household heads tend to have significantly higher levels of participation in formal networks. This finding is in line with previous research that women have more family-based social capital and are more active in relationships related to social and health services, while men tend to be more active in sports and recreation associations (Lowndes, 2004).
Table 3. Determinants of Social Capital

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Independent Variables</th>
<th>Bonding Social Capital</th>
<th>Bridging Social Capital</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mean years of schooling</td>
<td>0.004***</td>
<td>0.007***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>[0.001]</td>
<td>[0.001]</td>
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<tr>
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Robust standard errors in brackets
* p<0.1, ** p<0.05, *** p<0.01
The possibility of having a higher level of social capital decreases with increasing age. Household members of the productive age group (18–64 years) are more involved in social capital activities because, at this age, being more productive provides opportunities and potential to increase income. High income allows families to meet their needs and set aside part of their income for social capital activities. Meanwhile, individuals over 65 years of age are already very experienced and know a lot about former situations, but sometimes are constrained due to the physical limitations they have to participate in social capital activities, which severely limits their involvement in social capital activities. These findings are in line with previous studies which showed that productive age enables productive work so that it is positively related to various indicators of social capital from community involvement (Brisson & Usher, 2005; Neves et al., 2018; van Ingen & van Eijck, 2009).

The size of the household has a positive effect on both bonding and bridging social capital and is statistically significant at the 1 percent level. These findings are in line with previous research, which showed that the higher the size of the household, the higher the participation in social capital, which is crucial in activities that provide mutual aid (Anderson & Baland, 2002).

Married household heads have a positive effect on both bonding and bridging social capital and are statistically significant at the 1 percent level. This indicates that if individuals are married, especially women, they are more likely to participate in social capital activities. A married woman has more of her own resources to maintain a household, thus she is likely to join in social activities. In addition, these resources then contribute to social capital activities by supplementing household income. In addition, the heads of married households tend to be more involved in social interactions because they have a significant role in increasing the household’s social status. These findings are in line with studies in Kenya that show that heads of married households tend to participate actively in social capital activities (Anderson & Baland, 2002).

Employed head of household has a positive effect on social capital, especially bonding social capital and is statistically significant at the 5 percent level. This indicates that employed heads of households play a role in increasing bonding social capital activities. Meanwhile, individuals who are unemployed
generally spend their time on other activities rather than participating or socializing in the community, such as spending more time at home. In addition, if the head of the household is not employed, his income will be low, limiting his ability to save if he were to participate in social capital activities. These findings are in line with previous studies which state that unemployment tends to reduce the level of interaction and social participation (Kunze & Suppa, 2017).

The main occupation of the head of the household in the agricultural sector has a positive effect on bonding social capital and is statistically significant at the 1 percent level. In addition, the Indonesian case showed that working in agriculture is a community effort which further creates social interactions. This is in line with previous research, which showed a positive correlation between these control variables and social capital (Bauernschuster et al., 2014). The existence of bonding social capital facilitates cooperation and connections between members of the farming community. Therefore, they prefer informal relationships and share experience and knowledge, as well as sharing an agricultural workforce and agricultural machinery (de Souza Briggs, 1998).

Distance to sanitation facilities has a positive effect on both bridging and bonding social capital and is statistically significant at the 1 percent level. These results are in line with previous studies, which showed that if a household built its own toilet, it would be easier to obtain access to sanitation that will benefit the community. If a community with a higher level of social capital can internalize these social benefits, then the community tends to be more interested and willing to work together to improve sanitation because it can improve the level of public health, especially in rural communities (L. Cameron et al., 2013).

Access to water facilities has a positive effect on social capital, both bonding, and bridging, and is statistically significant at the 1 percent level. These findings are in line with previous research which showed that the presence and active participation in community groups leads to greater participation in system management, particularly in service design, and also increases the effectiveness among water users, and operational rules to regulate the use of water systems, specifically the rules regarding construction monitoring (Isham & Kahkonen, 2005). Lighting was also found to have a positive effect on social capital,
both bonding, and bridging and is statistically significant at the 1 percent level. These findings indicate that the higher the use of lighting, the more prominent the social bonding and bridging ties.

The floor area occupied by households has a positive effect on social capital, especially bridging. This indicates that the wider the household floor, the greater involvement in bridging social capital activities. The wider floor space of a house indirectly reflects a higher level of household welfare, possibly making connections between the characteristics of different individuals, including people from different communities, cultures, religions, or socioeconomic backgrounds (Stepanikova et al., 2010).

Access to People’s Business Credit (KUR) has a positive effect on both bonding and bridging social capital and is statistically significant at the 1 percent level. This shows that access to the People’s Business Credit (KUR) can increase social capital. Previous research found that access to credit is related to general trust in society, so that it is expected to be positively related to the development of social capital (Postelnicu & Hermes, 2018; Stepanikova et al., 2010). Furthermore, rural areas have a positive effect on social capital bonding, statistically significant at the 1 percent level, similar to previous research which found that bonding social capital is higher in rural areas, while bridging social capital is higher in urban areas (Sørensen, 2016).

Internet Access and Social Capital

Instrumental variable regression (IV) is used to solve the endogeneity problem of one or more independent variables. Instrumental Variables can be used to obtain consistent estimators of neglected variables. The instrumental variable method can also be used to solve the problem of errors in variables with certain assumptions. Therefore, a new variable is needed as an instrument with the terms or conditions that the variable (z) does not correlate with error (u) or cov (z, u) = 0, and the variable (z) correlates with the dependent variable (x) or cov (z, x) ≠ 0 (Cameron & Trivedi, 2005).

The instrumental variable in this study is home as the location or media to access the internet (Bauernschuster et al., 2014).
The instrumental variables used are expected to correlate with internet usage and are not related to error term. If all the independent variables entered into the model are exogenous, in the sense that they do not correlate with errors, there will be no difference in the estimation results in the OLS and IV models. Therefore, it is imperative to identify whether the independent variables are endogenous or not. Based on the endogeneity test results with the Wu-Hausman Test, it showed that the p-value is 0.000, indicating that the hypothesis that all independent variables are exogenous is rejected, meaning that the primary independent variable (which is internet access in this study) is endogenous.

Next, to test whether the instrument has the power to explain endogenous variables, an under-identification test is used. The results of this test indicate that the p-value of 0.000, which is smaller than α is 5%. Therefore, the parameters have been correctly identified, and home as the internet access variable is a good instrument. Finally, an F-test is performed to test whether the instrument has a strong correlation with endogenous variables. This test is done by comparing the F statistics on Cragg-Donald F-statistics with critical values. If the F-statistic is not higher than the critical value, it does not reject the hypothesis that the instrument is weak (Wooldridge, 2015). Cragg-Donald F Statistics Test has a value higher than each measure of critical value. This shows that the instrument used has a strong correlation with endogenous variables.

The comparison in Table 4 shows that the coefficient on the instrumental variable (IV) model is higher than that of OLS. This is in line with previous studies, which showed that the results of the instrumental variable (IV) estimation show a more significant coefficient than OLS regression (Bauernschuster et al., 2014). This can indicate there is no relationship between internet access and social capital; if there is a reverse causality relationship, the coefficient on the instrumental variable model must be smaller compared to OLS. (In addition, it supports the results of this study, which stated that internet access is an exogenous determinant of social capital).

Estimation results with instrumental variables regression (IV), both with control variables and without, showed a positive
Table 4. Internet Access and Social Capital

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<td>0.022***</td>
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Robust standard errors in brackets, * p<0.1, ** p<0.05, *** p<0.01
influence between the use of internet access and social capital, especially bridging social capital, and is statistically significant at the level of 1 percent. This indicates that if someone uses the internet it will increase bridging social capital by 0.096 points. This is because the more a person accesses the internet, it will indirectly increase the communication network they have and will have an impact on their social capital. These findings are in line with previous research which showed that the internet is qualitatively different from television; the latter has a passive entertainment function, where the former provides active information and communication facilities that have an impact on social capital (Bauernschuster et al., 2014). In addition, the internet is a medium that helps in communication and information sharing. This finding contradicts previous research which showed decreased interaction with family members in the household, reduced social circle, and increased loneliness and depression (Kraut et al., 2002).

Humans now meet, maintain various forms of social relations, and even create new forms of community through the internet. More than that, humans not only make new relationships via the internet but also move existing relationships to the online area (Kraut et al., 2002). Pénard & Poussing (2010) showed that the internet could increase the role of social capital, where mediated communication with computers (in this case, the internet) can eliminate distance and facilitate interaction between groups of people.

Online investment is a complement to the strengthening of existing relationships and community participation in associations. Based on the estimation results, there is a stronger influence between internet access and bridging social capital compared to bonding social capital. This finding is in line with the media multiplexity hypothesis (Haythornthwaite, 2005), which stated that a stronger partner is bound to make more use of available media. People use a variety of ways to connect with close ties, with the internet seeming to be the most widely used, inexpensive, and convenient medium to connect with weak ties. The relationship of bridging ties with the use of the internet refutes the cyber balkanization hypothesis which claims that the internet will lead to outgroup antagonism.
The estimation results in Table 5 shows that older individuals (aged 65 and over) are less likely to adopt the internet when compared to other younger age groups in terms of their effect on bridging social capital. In addition, the possibility of having a higher level of social capital will increase with the use of the internet but will decrease with age. These findings are consistent with previous research which found a strong interaction between the internet and age on social capital, providing support for the theory of cumulative advantage, or Matthew effects.

Table 5. Internet Access and Social Capital with Age Interaction

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<td>Internet Access</td>
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<td>Internet Access * Age 35 to 54 years</td>
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<td>Internet Access * Age 45 to 64 years</td>
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<td>Internet Access * Age above 65 years</td>
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<td>Age 45 to 64 years</td>
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<tr>
<td>Age above 65 years</td>
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Wu-Hausman test - 0.000 - 0.000
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Robust standard errors in brackets
Additional controls: mean years of schooling, head of household who had health complaints, gender of the head of the household males, gender of the head of the household males, household size, marriage status of household head, head of household works, the main job of the household as a farmer, distance to sanitation facility, electricity supply, floor area in m², access to water facilities, access to people's business credit (KUR), rural areas
* p<0.1, ** p<0.05, *** p<0.01
where younger internet users are more proficient than older internet users, but daily users, who also happen to be older individuals, are more proficient than internet users who rarely or never use the internet (Neves et al., 2018).

While the social capabilities of the internet help explain its positive relationship with social capital, changes in the life cycle in social networks can explain the negative relationship between social capital and age. Research showed that the number of strong ties and friendship levels decreases with increasing age due to, among others, retirement, physical and functional decline, loss of mobility, and other life cycle conditions (Ajrouch et al., 2005). Thus, young internet users are more likely to have higher levels of social capital than more frequent, but older internet users.

Conclusion

Several conclusions can be made from this study. First, determinants of social capital in West Java Province (among others), are determined by many factors: the mean of years of schooling of the head of households; health status of the head of the household; gender of head of households; increasing age; size of the household; marriage status of head of household; employment of head of household; farming as the primary employment of the head of household; distance to sanitation facilities; access to water facilities; lighting; floor area of houses inhabited by households; access to business credit (KUR); and living in rural areas. Second, internet access to social capital, especially bridging social capital, has a positive and statistically significant effect at the 1 percent level. This indicates that if someone uses the internet, it will increase bridging social capital. Indirectly, the more frequently a person accesses the internet, the larger communication network they have, and this will have an impact on their social capital. Furthermore, older individuals (aged 65 and above) are less likely to adopt the internet when compared to other younger age groups, which impacts their levels of in terms of bridging social capital. In addition, the possibility of having a higher level of social capital will increase with the use of the internet but will decrease with age. These findings are consistent with previous research which found a strong interaction between the internet and age on social capital, supporting
the theory of cumulative advantage or Matthew effects, where younger internet users are more proficient than older internet users, but daily users who happen to be old are more proficient than internet users who rarely or never use the internet.

Although we have moved forward our understanding of internet access and social capital, this work is not without limitations. First, these findings are limited by the use of a cross-sectional data set. Second, internet infrastructure in Indonesia is still uneven and is only centered on Java island, so the results of this study may not be applicable to several provinces in Indonesia, especially outside Java. Third, the results of this study are limited by the possibility of complex socio-cultural features on the Java island. Future research should examine types of Internet usage and social capital in a longitudinal data perspective to control for the possibility of unobserved heterogeneity that can affect outcomes. Exploring psychosocial abilities and personality traits would also expand our understanding of the relationship and outcomes of internet use and social capital in old age.

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References


Childhood SNAP Receipt as a Protective Factor Against Adult Obesity: Examining the Interaction of SNAP Participation and Neighborhood Disadvantage

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Using the Panel Study of Income Dynamics (PSID) with family fixed-effects (FE) models, we explore how neighborhood conditions and time receiving SNAP benefits during childhood interact to relate to time spent obese in adulthood. Results suggest that, for those growing up in less advantaged neighborhoods, SNAP receipt between the ages of 9–13 and 14–18 was associated with subsequently shorter periods of time obese in adulthood. Conversely, for those growing up in more advantaged neighborhoods, SNAP receipt during these same late childhood/adolescent time periods was associated with relatively high proportions of time in adulthood spent obese. SNAP participation during early and middle childhood (ages 0–4 and 5–8) was not associated with time spent obese in adulthood, regardless of childhood neighborhood conditions. These results suggest that for those growing up in disad- vantaged neighborhoods, where study data indicate the vast majority of SNAP-recipient families reside, SNAP participation during adolescents may serve as a protective factor against adulthood obesity. Expanding research in this area of health and public policy is essential to advancing cost-effective, socially responsible food assistance program policies that can help ameliorate health disparities within communities across the country.

Keywords: Obesity, SNAP, Neighborhood Effects, Poverty, BMI
Introduction

The primary U.S. food and nutrition program, known currently as SNAP (Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program), is designed “...to supplement the food budget of needy families so they can purchase healthy food and move towards self-sufficiency” (U.S. Department of Agriculture Food and Nutrition Service [USDA-FNS], 2019a, para. 1). Both the near-term goal for families (“purchase healthy food”), as well as the more aspirational goal (“move towards self-sufficiency”), have provided grounds for debate about program details, including what foods can be purchased using SNAP and which families, under what conditions, are eligible for receipt (for a list of enacted state-level measures, see National Conference of State Legislatures [NCSL], 2018). Between December 2019 and April 2020, we saw—at the federal level alone—the adoption of rules limiting states’ options for covering “able-bodied adults without dependents” (USDA-FNS, 2019b), and the enactment of the Families First Coronavirus Response Act which expanded access to SNAP in the wake of a global health pandemic (for a list of state-level waivers and extensions, see USDA-FNS, 2020a).

Under both its current and its original name (the Food Stamp Program [FSP]), SNAP has been part of a long history of debate about who deserves aid and who does not, intertwined with concerns that even those deserving of aid may use public benefits in unintended or health-compromising ways (Shimizu, 2020). Such concerns have led to a variety of state and federal policies and policy proposals designed, most directly, to prevent the use of SNAP for purchasing “low-nutrient, energy-dense” (LNED) foods (for a list of enacted state-level measures, see NCSL, 2019). Less directly, these policies and policy proposals have been linked to concerns for the health of recipients based, in part, on a rise in obesity rates among both children and adults (Flegal et al., 2016; Skinner et al., 2018).

Policies and policy proposals that aim to limit SNAP-eligible foods or decrease eligibility or benefit levels more broadly often fail to address mixed or favorable evidence of dietary, weight, and health effects of SNAP participation (Jones & Frongillo, 2006; Vartanian & Houser, 2012). Studies that have attempted to draw causal connections between SNAP use and body weight or obesity have been susceptible to selection bias, or the
possibility that those who receive SNAP may be different in unobservable ways from those who are eligible, but not receiving SNAP, and that these differences may in turn be mistaken for SNAP effects (Yen et al., 2008). By using family fixed effects (FE) models with longitudinal panel data, we hope to disentangle SNAP effects from the effects of other factors, including family and neighborhoods factors. Focusing on four distinct childhood and adolescent age ranges (0-4, 5-8, 9-13, 14-18), we examined whether time spent receiving SNAP within particular types of neighborhoods in childhood/adolescence was associated with time spent obese as an adult.

Background

SNAP Participation and SNAP Effectiveness

The years covered by this study—1968 through 2013—saw numerous changes in the United States’ largest food assistance program, including changes in name (from the FSP to SNAP), eligibility rules, participation rules, data collection and tracking methods, and, of course, the economic and cultural conditions within which participation occurred. Although longitudinal data on uptake and expenditures should be viewed with caution, they illustrate the reach of the program over a 45-year period. In fiscal year (FY) 1969, nearly 2.9 million people received $228.8 million in food stamp benefits. By FY1976, the number of participants had risen to 18.5 million, with annual participation numbers then alternately increasing and decreasing for the next 15 years, between 16 million and 22.5 million participants. While the first half of the 1990s saw increases in uptake (from 20 million people in FY1990 to 27.5 million in FY1994), the latter half saw even more precipitous declines (to 17.2 million in FY2000). The next 13 years, however, would yield steady participation increases, peaking, in 2013, at 47.6 million people and $79.9 billion in benefits in FY2013, the final year of data covered by this study. It is noteworthy, however, that following the 2013 period and until recently, we saw declines in participation, with 40.4 million participants at a cost of $65.3 billion in FY2018 (USDA-FNS, 2019c).

SNAP participation has been linked to a number of positive outcomes for recipients. Conducted over a period from 2011–
2013, a study by the USDA-FNS (2016) showed that providing SNAP over the summer to the families of children receiving free and reduced-price school meals during the previous school year reduced “very low” food security by one-third. In a separate study, relative to the time before they started receiving SNAP, families were over 16% less likely to be food insecure, and over 17% less likely to be “very low” food secure, after receiving SNAP for six months (USDA-FNS, 2013). For families with low incomes, using SNAP has been associated with lower health care spending due, in part, to lower levels of food insecurity (Berkowitz et al., 2017). Using the supplemental poverty measure and data from the Current Population Survey in 2016, the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities (2019) showed that SNAP kept 7.3 million people out of poverty, including 3.3 million children.

In addition to research on proximal measures of impact and effectiveness, such as food security and poverty, researchers have addressed more distal indicators, including health and obesity. Such studies have become especially important in recent years because of the ways in which rising obesity rates in the United States (Flegal et al., 2016; Skinner et al., 2018) have been rhetorically tied to poverty and poverty programs. While some have questioned both the framing of obesity indicators as an “epidemic,” as well as the consistency of evidence for both causes and consequences (Moffat, 2010; Sanabria, 2016; Wachs & Chase, 2013), the fact remains that isolating and addressing causes of overweight and obesity is a significant focus of research and policy. According to Ward et al. (2019), nearly half of the U.S. adult population will be obese by 2030. High body weight has been linked to a number of health consequences, including high blood pressure and cancer among adults (Freedman et al., 2007; Lauby-Secretan et al., 2016) and psychosocial problems among children (Rankin et al., 2016).

**SNAP and Obesity: Relationship Mechanisms**

Researchers have used a variety of theories to explain relationships between food assistance program participation and obesity. One view posits that because SNAP funds are inflexible income that must be used to purchase food, SNAP recipients will purchase more food than people with similar income
levels but without SNAP (Fox et al., 2004; Leung & Villamor, 2011). This is known as the *income effect*. Based on the results of four “cashout” demonstrations in three U.S. states (in which FSP benefits were issued to some families via checks rather than food vouchers), Fraker et al. (1995) found that those who received vouchers spent 18% to 28% more on food than those who received benefits in the form of cash. Based on a study of county-level FSP rollout from 1963 to 1975, Hoynes and Schanzenbach (2009) concluded that program implementation was linked to decreased cash (non-FSP) spending on food but to increased total food expenditures. More recently, however, Kim and Shaefer (2015) found no increase in food expenditures for SNAP recipients in the month they began to receive SNAP, relative to the month prior to SNAP receipt.

A second theoretical explanation for a SNAP/food stamp and obesity connection is the “food stamp cycle;” because SNAP funds are distributed at the beginning of the month, they may run out before the end of the month (Council of Economic Advisors, 2015; Ver Ploeg & Ralston, 2008). A 2011 report issued by the Office of Research and Analysis of the USDA’s Food and Nutrition Service (USDA-FNS, 2011) showed that, in recipient households, nearly 80% of SNAP funds were used within the first 14 days of the month, leaving relatively little for the final half of the month. The resulting “feast and famine” cycle has been positively associated with BMI among adults (Smith et al., 2017; Yanovski, 2003), and food insecurity itself has been linked to obesity in women (Dinour et al., 2007) and, albeit less consistently, in children (Casey et al., 2006; Dinour et al., 2007). In a 2016 review paper, Dhurandhar (2016) theorized that a resource scarcity hypothesis (i.e., higher calorie consumption in response to food supply threats) may explain relationships sometimes observed between food insecurity and obesity.

Another possible mechanism underlying an association between SNAP participation and obesity is a sort of “protective income effect;” specifically, that increased food income in the form of SNAP benefits may enable recipients to buy healthier foods, such as fresh fruits and vegetables, thus decreasing caloric intake overall (Anderson & Butcher, 2016). Several studies have suggested that additional cash funds help low-income families living in areas with limited access to food stores, to afford regular travel to larger grocery stores, and, subsequently,
to access healthier and more affordable, nutritious and/or fresh foods (Ford & Dzewaltowski, 2011; Jennings et al., 2011).

The relationships modeled in our current study extend from childhood circumstances (primarily household SNAP receipt and residential neighborhood conditions) to adult obesity. According to Simmonds et al. (2016), overweight and obesity in childhood increase risks for overweight and obesity in adulthood. Therefore, while the outcome modeled is the proportion of adulthood spent obese, any observed relationships between extent and timing of SNAP participation, neighborhood conditions, and adult obesity may capture both time-specific and cumulative (from childhood into adulthood) factors.

Literature Review

Using two research databases (Academic Search Premier, SocIndex), we reviewed articles published over the roughly 15-year period from January 1, 2004, through March 31, 2020. For the first review, we searched article abstracts for [(obesity OR overweight OR BMI) AND (SNAP OR food stamps)]. For the second review, we searched article abstracts for [(obesity OR overweight OR BMI) AND (neighborhood) AND (food OR nutrition OR diet) AND (United States)]. For both sets of results, we retained only those studies that: (1) examined relationships between SNAP participation (first review) or neighborhoods (second review) and some measure of overweight as their primary focus; (2) reported on either original analyses or systematic reviews of original analyses; and (3) contained clearly defined samples and methods. While we included studies focusing on subsets of the U.S. population related to gender, age, and geographic location, we excluded studies focusing on other subpopulations such as immigrants. We then reviewed the references for each included article, applying to each the inclusion criteria labeled (1) through (3) above and retaining those referenced articles meeting the criteria.

Studies varied by participant age (children, adolescents, adults), data type (cross-sectional, longitudinal), data source (primary, secondary; regional, national), and method (e.g., ordinary least squares and logistic regression, propensity score matching). Below, we summarize findings and gaps from the 28 articles retained for the first review, 89 articles retained for the
second review, and four articles selected in both reviews (due to space constraints, we cite only a subset of articles; full article lists are available upon request).

**SNAP and Obesity**

The majority of studies we reviewed examined SNAP participation and body weight outcomes measured at either the same or similar periods of time (e.g., during adulthood or during adolescence/childhood). We therefore grouped the studies reviewed by these broad age categories. Research reviews by Ver Ploeg and Ralston (2008), Debono et al. (2012), and Gunderson (2015) each found consistent evidence for a positive relationship between SNAP participation and body weight indicators for adult women but not for adult men. However, two more recent studies reported evidence of non-significant or negative associations between adult SNAP participation and weight (Almada & Tchernis, 2018; Nguyen et al., 2015). Using cross-sectional data from the 2003-2010 National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey (NHANES), Nguyen et al. (2015) found that, in households with marginal food security, adult SNAP participation was associated with lower adult BMI, lower probability of obesity, and better diets; in households with low or very low food security, adult SNAP participation was not associated with weight measures but was associated with better diets. More recently, Almada and Tchernis (2018) used a quasi-experimental approach with data from 1985 to 2008 to determine that increases in SNAP benefit amounts were not related to adult obesity levels; indeed, in households with one or more young children, the probability of obesity for adults decreased by about 10%.

In addition to studying relationships between SNAP participation and body weight for adults, researchers have looked for evidence of SNAP participation effects in children and adolescents (Hudak & Racine, 2019; Kreider et al., 2012; Leung et al., 2013; Schmeiser, 2012; Simmons et al., 2012). Studies of food assistance and BMI/obesity in adolescents generally find small or no associations between SNAP participation and weight measures (Schmeiser, 2012). Similarly, both national and regional studies conducted over the past 15 years, including those by Kreider et al. (2012; ages 2–17), Leung et al. (2013; ages 4–19), Schmeiser (2012; ages 5–11), and Simmons et al. (2012; ages 3–5)
observed null or negative relationships between SNAP participation and BMI/obesity. However, in a recent review of 23 studies of household SNAP participation and child body weight, Hudak and Racine (2019) concluded that, while the majority of studies found null or inverse relationships between SNAP use and children’s weight, several of those that addressed selection bias observed positive associations between SNAP use and overweight for some groups of children.

A smaller number of studies have modeled the impact of program participation during child and adolescent years on outcomes observed in adulthood. For example, using family fixed effects models with nationally representative longitudinal data from the Panel Study of Income Dynamics, Hoynes et al. (2016) linked childhood access to food stamps to a lower likelihood of metabolic syndrome (i.e., “a cluster of conditions including obesity, high blood pressure, heart disease, and diabetes”) in adulthood (p. 905).

**Neighborhoods and Obesity**

The selection, purchase, and consumption of food take place within local contexts. Any observed connections between SNAP program participation and obesity could be related to the places in which SNAP funds are used (e.g., food store type and proximity) (Jilcott Pitts et al., 2012; Sanjeevi et al., 2018). In the current study, we explicitly examined the socioeconomic environment, which includes the individual and socioeconomic characteristics of neighborhood residents. However, our review of studies associating neighborhood conditions with BMI, overweight, or obesity, revealed three intersecting dimensions of neighborhood environments: what Carroll-Scott et al. (2013) summarized as socioeconomic, built, and social environments.

**Socioeconomic Environment**

Researchers have linked neighborhood socioeconomic conditions to obesity risk (Greves Grow et al., 2010), risk of overweight (Kowaleski-Jones & Wen, 2013), and BMI scores (Burdette & Needham, 2012). In models of relationships between neighborhood environments and weight-related outcomes (i.e., soda consumption, BMI, and obesity risk), Wong et al. (2018)
noted that residents’ educational attainment was significantly and inversely associated with one or more outcomes for participants of all racial and ethnic groups, but particularly for non-Hispanic Whites. Consistent with Wong et al.’s conclusion that neighborhood environments may impact residents differently by their individual sociodemographic characteristics, several recent authors have found that neighborhood segregation is associated with higher odds of obesity for Black women (Bower et al., 2015; Kershaw et al., 2013) and Hispanic adults (Corral et al., 2014), and with lower odds of obesity for Mexican-American women (Kershaw et al., 2013).

In a longitudinal examination of neighborhood effects, Lippert (2016) found that, while residing in poor neighborhoods during adolescence increased the likelihood of obesity in adulthood, moving out of a high-poverty neighborhood to a low-poverty one during the transition to adulthood reduced this likelihood.

**Built Environment**

The built environment refers to the ways space is designed and used (Carroll-Scott et al., 2013). Overall, evidence for a relationship between body weight and characteristics of the built environment (e.g., food store type and quality, presence of green space, perceived neighborhood attractiveness, neighborhood safety, and outlets for physical activity) has been mixed, with some variation by whether settings are urban, suburban, or rural and by region of the country (Adachi-Mejia et al., 2017). Numerous researchers have observed, however, that low-resource or high-poverty neighborhoods tend to have fewer large grocery stores and more convenience or fast food stores than other neighborhoods (Larson et al., 2009; Powell et al., 2007). In addition, researchers have found relationships between access to food stores abundant in nutrient-rich foods and BMI (Carroll-Scott et al., 2013; Jennings et al., 2011), obesity risk (Black et al., 2010; Bodor et al., 2010; Larson et al., 2009; Zick et al., 2009), the purchase of fresh and nutrient-rich foods (Jilcott Pitts et al., 2015), and healthier diets (Larson et al., 2009). Food prices in general, including prices for fruits and vegetables, have also been positively associated with BMI (Sturm & Datar, 2005). It is, however, noteworthy that, in a national study of low-income
women with young children, Ford and Dzewaltowski (2011) found that supermarket availability was not directly related to women’s BMI in urban or rural areas.

Cooksey-Stowers et al. (2017) examined the effects of so-called “food deserts”—areas lacking in large-scale grocery stores—and “food swamps”—areas with a high proportion of fast food and other sources of LNED foods, and found that those living in a food swamp were more likely to be obese than those living in a food desert.

Social Environment

The social environment refers to relationships between groups and individuals within particular neighborhoods (Carroll-Scott et al., 2013). There are a number of mechanisms within the neighborhood social environment that may be associated with physical activity, food purchase, and consumption, which may then be related to body weight. These mechanisms include social modeling, social ties, social capital, and collective action (Carroll-Scott et al., 2013). Studies that have examined relationships between social modeling and food choice and consumption have shown mixed results. In their review of these studies, Cruwys et al. (2014) found evidence that individuals are influenced in their food choices by others seen as similar to themselves. In a Philadelphia-based study of shopping behaviors, Cannuscio et al. (2014) observed that individuals actively selected food stores for safety, ease of access (e.g., parking), convenience of location, friendliness, and extent to which other store patrons shared their perceived race, ethnicity, education, and/or income.

SNAP Participation, Neighborhoods, and Obesity by Age

A child’s age may influence relationships between SNAP participation, neighborhood environment, and body weight in a number of ways, including the extent to which they eat at home, purchase their own foods, and are influenced by caregivers or peers. As such, many researchers have opted to examine relationships between SNAP participation and obesity in samples of children divided by age. For example, Gibson (2004) observed relationships between long-term SNAP participation and obesity for children ages 5–11 (in a positive direction for girls and
a negative direction for boys), but not for children ages 12–18. Studies of neighborhoods and child obesity have also acknowledged important age-related distinctions. For example, Singh et al. (2010) found that factors in the built environment are related to obesity likelihoods differently at different ages, with the greatest impacts on the youngest children.

The Current Study

Our study aimed to examine the relationship between SNAP participation during various childhood ages and adult obesity risk, while accounting for childhood poverty and attending to the context of socioeconomic neighborhood environment.

Hypotheses

We examined whether the interaction between receiving SNAP benefits and living in disadvantaged areas during particular periods of childhood had positive relationships with the amount of time spent obese as an adult. These relationships may be due to the food stamp cycle or to the income effect and, in turn, may be accentuated in distressed neighborhoods where low-cost, nutrient-rich foods are less available. Alternatively, as a “protective income effect,” SNAP income may provide families the additional funds necessary to buy more expensive, healthful foods in disadvantaged areas or may supplement their income enough to enable travel to areas where food costs are lower.

To determine how children in various age ranges are impacted by SNAP participation and neighborhood environment, we examined ages that correspond roughly to birth to preschool (ages 0–4 years); primary school age (ages 5–8 years); early adolescence (ages 9–13 years); and late adolescence (ages 14–18 years). Past studies have used these or similar age ranges and found relationships between childhood conditions and adult outcomes, including completed schooling and adult income (Duncan et al., 1998; Levy & Duncan, 2000; Vartanian & Buck, 2005).
Data and Methods

Study Samples

The data for our study are from the Panel Study of Income Dynamics (PSID) from the University of Michigan. Funding for the PSID comes from the National Science Foundation, the National Institute on Aging, and the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development. When weighted, the PSID is a representative longitudinal sample of the non-institutionalized U.S. population with an initial sample of 5,000 families and 18,000 individuals within those families in 1968. With each wave of data collection, information is collected about all sample members, including children. Over time, the children and the subsequent generations of children of the original PSID members have also been included in the sample. Currently, there are over 9,000 families and over 26,000 individuals within those families that are followed in the PSID, with as many as six generations within sample families. The PSID surveyed respondents annually from 1968 through 1997, then biennially from 1999 through 2013. We examined 0 to 18-year-olds for neighborhood, household income, and SNAP participation data from the 1968 to 2013 PSID. We then examined those who are age 20 or above and who became heads of households or spouses (who are asked weight/height questions) in years 1999 to 2013 (the sample years where weight and height information is available) and determined their proportion of time spent obese.

We merged the PSID data sets with Census tract data in order to obtain neighborhood information. For data years 1968 to 1975, we used 1970 Census information; for years 1976 to 1985, we used 1980 Census information; for years 1986 to 1995, we used 1990 Census information; for years 1996 to 2005, we used 2000 Census information; and for years 2007 to 2013, we used information from the 2006 to 2010 American Community Survey, which gives average census tract data over this five-year period. We have previously tried alternatives to this type of linking of Census and PSID data but found that these alternative approaches made little difference to our results.
Dependent Variable

We used the proportion of adult time spent obese (adult BMI at or above 30) as the dependent variable. We believe that this is a better measure of obesity than whether an individual becomes obese at some point in adulthood or whether an adult’s BMI falls, on average, in the “obese” range, because, as a measure of cumulative risk, duration of time spent obese has been positively associated with multiple adult health outcomes, including hospital stays (Schafer & Ferraro, 2007), self-rated health (Zajacova & Burgard, 2010), and cancer risk in women (Arnold et al., 2016).

Independent Variables

Program Participation and Household Income. The primary independent variables were measured as the proportion of time receiving certain public benefits, living in particular economic conditions, and a combination of these two elements. In order to isolate the effects of using SNAP benefits, we focused on the proportion of time during childhood receiving only SNAP and refer to this variable as proportion of time on SNAP. Because the majority of households with dependent children that receive SNAP are also eligible for cash assistance (TANF), we included the variable proportion of time on SNAP/TANF to capture time spent enrolled in both programs. We also included the variable proportion of time on TANF, for those who spent time receiving TANF without receiving SNAP. The primary comparison is between individuals’ proportion of time receiving SNAP during childhood and the proportion of their time in poverty without SNAP or TANF receipt during childhood.

Measures of household economic conditions included the proportion of childhood time growing up in households with income less than 150% of the federal poverty level (FPL) and not receiving any SNAP or TANF income; this variable, called proportion of time with low income, served as the reference group in our regression analyses. We included the variables proportion of time with income at 150%-200% of the FPL and proportion of time with higher income, both without SNAP or TANF receipt, to designate proportions of time in childhood with household incomes between 150–200% and above 200% of the FPL, respectively.
In order to determine program participation and income during each year of childhood, we first examined whether there was any childhood participation in SNAP, TANF, or both programs, and if there was not, we then examined whether the family’s income was above or below 150% of the FPL, or within the other income categories. We then examined the proportion of childhood time in each of these different categories.

Each of our models included the proportion of time within particular conditions for particular age categories. For example, when we examined children ages 0 to 4, we were examining only the proportion of time spent in particular conditions during childhood ages 0 to 4.

*Childhood Neighborhood Conditions.* Because most neighborhood variables are highly correlated, we created separate indices of neighborhood conditions during childhood and adulthood. These indices were constructed by using principal components (PC) analysis with a variety of neighborhood conditions that are similar to those used by previous researchers (Burdette & Needham, 2012; Vartanian & Houser, 2012). These measures included, by census tract, the percentage of female-headed households, the percentage receiving public assistance income, the unemployment rate, the poverty rate, the percentage of people with incomes greater than $60,000 (2011 dollars), and the percentage of White and Black residents. We found that most neighborhood variables were highly correlated with the PC variable for both child and adult periods, with absolute values of .76 or above for all child neighborhood scores and .68 or above for all adult neighborhood scores. The child neighborhood PC variable explained 74.52% of the variation in the original child neighborhood variables, while the adult PC variable explained 66.73% of the variance for the original adult neighborhood variables (results not shown). The PC variables were positively correlated with the percentage of incomes greater than $60,000 (.76 in childhood and .79 in adulthood) and the percentage White (.89 in childhood and .87 in adulthood), and negatively associated with all other neighborhood variables (in childhood and adulthood, respectively, percentages for poverty rate [-.90 and -.91], public assistance receipt [-.90 and -.69], female-headed households [-.90 and -.68], unemployment [-.78 and -.87], and Black [-.88 and -.85]). The direction of the income indicators suggest that higher PC values
correspond to more advantaged neighborhoods and lower values indicate less advantaged neighborhoods.

We examined the child neighborhood advantage index (created as described above) in conjunction with the SNAP program participation and income variables to determine whether SNAP use during childhood influences adult time spent obese differently in varied neighborhood contexts. To do this, we interacted the neighborhood advantage variable with the variable proportion of time on SNAP.

In order to examine the independent effects of each of the seven neighborhood conditions (e.g., neighborhood poverty rate and neighborhood unemployment rate), we also ran separate models for each neighborhood condition along with all control variables. Each separate neighborhood variable was also interacted with time participating in SNAP.

Control Variables

Our statistical models controlled for a number of childhood factors, averaged over the individual’s examined childhood age period (0–4; 5–8; 9–13; 14–18). These included family and head of household variables: age; marital status and changes in marital status; average family income-to-needs and the variance of family income-to-needs; whether the residence was owned; value of the residence if owned; whether the residence was in a rural area; whether the residence was in the south; number of household moves; number of children in the household; hours worked; and work limits. We also controlled for gender and birth order of the child, whether the child dropped out of high school, and the beginning year for the child entering the survey.

Each model also controlled for variables observed in individuals’ adult years, including all income and public assistance measures (e.g., proportion of adult time on SNAP; proportion of adult time with low-income) and the adult neighborhood advantage index.

Statistical Methods

We examined the relationships between SNAP program participation, neighborhood conditions, and obesity in adulthood using a number of modeling strategies: Ordinary Least Squares
(OLS) regression with the full sample, OLS regression with the siblings-only sample, and family fixed effects (FE) regressions. We applied these modeling strategies first using the neighborhood conditions index. Then, to examine which neighborhood indicator(s) might be driving an overall index effect, we examined family FE models for each neighborhood indicator separately. We used Stata (version 15) to analyze the data.

Self-selection may confound estimates of the effects of both government assistance programs and neighborhood conditions. For example, people who live in less advantaged neighborhoods may be more prone to obesity relative to those who “choose” to live in more advantaged neighborhoods for reasons that are unobserved or are not captured by the current set of control variables. To control for these types of unobservable shared attributes that do not vary among siblings, we used family FE models (Vartanian & Houser, 2012).

To estimate the FE models, we examined individuals from multi-child families, and used a family dummy variable for all families except the reference family. Variation among siblings is needed for neighborhood conditions, time using SNAP, and all other variables to estimate the effects in FE models. Variation between siblings in their neighborhood advantage index values can come from household moves, from developments and changes in the neighborhood over time, or from movements of individual siblings into and out of households. We found that almost all siblings within families in our sample showed variation in their neighborhood index values.

There are several limitations to FE models. Such models exclude those children without siblings or without siblings in the sample. Hence, sample sizes are smaller than in those studies using all children within the sample. FE models lose many degrees of freedom because a separate dummy variable is used for each family except for one (the reference family). FE models are only able to additionally control (above standard regression models) for unobservable factors that do not vary among the siblings, such as unvarying characteristics of their parents or shared genetic makeup. We examined whether the sibling sample and the all-child sample differed from each other by examining mean values for the key variables and by running OLS regression analyses on both samples and looking for differences in effects. If the effects are similar for these two OLS models, we
can have greater confidence that FE models are not being driven by the sibling restriction.

Results

Descriptives

Table 1 shows the types of neighborhoods where the sample of children, both with and without siblings, grew up, including the mean, standard deviation, and the 25th and 75th percentiles of the neighborhood advantage index (which is standardized to a mean of 0 and a standard deviation of 1). We examined those who spent more than 25% or 50% of their childhood time on SNAP, those with low income (less than 150% of the FPL without SNAP or TANF assistance), and those with income above 200% of the FPL (also without SNAP or TANF assistance). We found that those who received SNAP for a considerable amount of their childhood tended to live in less advantaged neighborhoods. Table 1 shows that the mean neighborhood advantage value for those who received SNAP income for more than 25% and 50% of their childhoods is .73 and .94 standard deviations (SDs) below the overall neighborhood mean (or in less advantaged neighborhoods), respectively. Those who received SNAP income for more than half of their childhoods and lived in neighborhoods at the 25th percentile of neighborhood advantage for this group were 1.44 SDs below the overall mean neighborhood condition; this places their levels of neighborhood advantage well below those of other children. Table 1 also shows that children who spent longer proportions of their childhoods using SNAP spent longer proportions of their adulthoods obese relative to other groups.

To examine whether the all-child sample and the siblings-only sample were noticeably different from each other, we examined mean values for all variables used in our analyses (results not shown), finding that there were generally small or no differences in mean values between the all-child and siblings-only samples. For example, the mean proportion of time obese as an adult was .22 for both the full, all-child sample (i.e., the sample which includes people who did not have a sibling in the sample) and the siblings-only sample. We found similar results for the proportion of time using SNAP, family income-to-needs,
Table 1. Childhood Neighborhood Index Values, by Childhood Time on Public Assistance and Income, and Proportion of Adult Time Spent Obese

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Mean Neighborhood Index Value</th>
<th>25th, 75th Percentile for Neighborhood</th>
<th>Prop. of adult time spent obese</th>
<th>N</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>% of time on SNAP&gt;25%</td>
<td>-.73 (.95)</td>
<td>-1.29-.18</td>
<td>.32 (48)</td>
<td>755</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of time on SNAP&gt;50%</td>
<td>-.94 (.90)</td>
<td>-1.44-.39</td>
<td>.30 (48)</td>
<td>258</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of time w/low income&gt;25%</td>
<td>-.08 (.98)</td>
<td>-6.09</td>
<td>.25 (45)</td>
<td>2,318</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of time w/low income&gt;50%</td>
<td>.05 (.89)</td>
<td>-.46.77</td>
<td>.24 (45)</td>
<td>1,770</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of time w/income&gt;200% of the FPL&gt;25%</td>
<td>.40 (.71)</td>
<td>.19.87</td>
<td>.18 (.39)</td>
<td>2,741</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of time w/income&gt;200% of the FPL&gt;50%</td>
<td>.48 (.64)</td>
<td>.27.90</td>
<td>.16 (.38)</td>
<td>2,206</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Neighborhood index values are standardized, with a mean of 0 and a standard deviation of 1 for the entire sample.
Note: FPL=Federal Poverty Line. SNAP=Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program. Low Income=household income less than 150% of the federal poverty line without using Food Stamps/Supplemental Nutritional Assistance Program or Aid to Families with Dependent Children/Temporary Assistance for Needy Families.
the neighborhood poverty rate, and other important variables in the study.

Table 2 shows the weighted mean values and standard deviations for some of the key independent variables for the siblings-only sample. (The full set of results is available upon request.) Overall, and within the four age categories for children, we found similar amounts of time spent obese, with all groups spending 20% to 21% of their adult period obese. Those in the younger age groups tended to spend a little more time using SNAP relative to those in the older age groups. We also found that the neighborhood poverty rates for all age groups of children were close to 13%.

Regression Results

Table 3 shows the estimated effects for adult time spent obese by regression method, for the siblings-only sample. (The full set of coefficient estimates for these models is available upon request.) In results not shown, we did not find differences in our statistical analyses between the OLS models using all children (including those without siblings) and the OLS models using siblings only. We also ran our models without adult neighborhood, SNAP and poverty measures, and found similar results to what we present here.

While the interaction coefficients for childhood time receiving SNAP and neighborhood advantage during ages 9–13 and 14–18 were positively but not significantly related to adult obesity in the OLS models, the coefficients increased in size and were statistically significant at the .05 and .01 levels, respectively, in the FE models. These interactions indicate that the longer someone receives SNAP in more advantaged neighborhoods during these childhood age periods, the more time they will spend obese as an adult relative to those who grow up with low incomes without SNAP participation. Conversely, the more time children receive SNAP while living in a less advantaged neighborhood, the less time they will spend obese as an adult relative to those who grow up with low income without SNAP receipt. This suggests that SNAP participation helps those who grow up in disadvantaged neighborhoods—settings wherein most who receive SNAP for extended periods of time tend to live. In fact, in results not shown, we found that, of the group of people
Table 2. Mean Values for Proportion of Adult Time Obese, Childhood Time in Public Assistance and Income Categories, and Neighborhood Poverty Rate, for All and by Age

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>All</th>
<th>Ages 0-4</th>
<th>Ages 5-8</th>
<th>Ages 9-13</th>
<th>Ages 14-18</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Prop. adult time obese weight</td>
<td>.21 (.43)</td>
<td>.20 (.42)</td>
<td>.21 (.42)</td>
<td>.21 (.43)</td>
<td>.21 (.43)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prop. of time of time on SNAP</td>
<td>.07 (.19)</td>
<td>.08 (.24)</td>
<td>.08 (.25)</td>
<td>.07 (.25)</td>
<td>.06 (.24)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prop. of time on both SNAP/TANF</td>
<td>.05 (.20)</td>
<td>.06 (.24)</td>
<td>.06 (.25)</td>
<td>.05 (.24)</td>
<td>.04 (.22)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prop. of time w/income&gt;200% of the FPL</td>
<td>.59 (.40)</td>
<td>.59 (.44)</td>
<td>.59 (.45)</td>
<td>.58 (.45)</td>
<td>.60 (.45)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prop. of time 150%&lt;w/income&lt;=200% of the FPL</td>
<td>.12 (.16)</td>
<td>.12 (.22)</td>
<td>.12 (.23)</td>
<td>.13 (.23)</td>
<td>.12 (.22)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prop. of time w/income&lt;=150% of the FPL</td>
<td>.15 (.24)</td>
<td>.13 (.27)</td>
<td>.14 (.22)</td>
<td>.16 (.24)</td>
<td>.16 (.31)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>4,577</td>
<td>2,646</td>
<td>3,239</td>
<td>4,053</td>
<td>4,423</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: FPL=Federal Poverty Line; SNAP=Supplemental Nutritional Assistance Program; TANF=Temporary Assistance for Needy Families.

Note: Those in the categories of income above 200% of the FPL, between 150% and 200% of the FPL, and income greater than 200% of the FPL, do not have any SNAP or TANF income.
Table 3. OLS and FE Models for the Proportion of Time Obese for Adults, from Childhood and Adulthood Characteristics, by Age (Siblings Only)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Childhood Characteristics</th>
<th>Ages 0-4</th>
<th>Ages 5-8</th>
<th>Ages 9-13</th>
<th>Ages 14-18</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>OLS Model</td>
<td>FE Model</td>
<td>OLS Model</td>
<td>FE Model</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>-.03 (.04)</td>
<td>-.08 (.09)</td>
<td>-.03 (.04)</td>
<td>-.05 (.05)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>-.04 (.04)</td>
<td>.12 (.05)*</td>
<td>.03 (.03)</td>
<td>.13 (.05)**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advantage*SNAP</td>
<td>.02 (.02)</td>
<td>-.00 (.03)</td>
<td>.02 (.02)</td>
<td>-.00 (.03)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>.01 (.02)</td>
<td>-.01 (.05)</td>
<td>.01 (.01)</td>
<td>-.01 (.02)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of time on SNAP only</td>
<td>.06 (.16)</td>
<td>.08 (.12)</td>
<td>.06 (.06)</td>
<td>-.06 (.06)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>.03 (.05)</td>
<td>.05 (.07)</td>
<td>.01 (.04)</td>
<td>.08 (.07)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adjusted R2/within R2</td>
<td>.09</td>
<td>.06</td>
<td>.07</td>
<td>.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td># of families</td>
<td>1,111</td>
<td>1,111</td>
<td>1,324</td>
<td>1,324</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>2,646</td>
<td>2,646</td>
<td>3,239</td>
<td>3,239</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: models include all child and adult control variables. Models are for those with siblings. +p<.10; *p<.05; **p<.01; ***p<.001
Note: OLS=ordinary least squares regression. FE=fixed effects.
Note: SNAP=Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program.
spending at least 25% of their childhoods receiving SNAP, 36% lived in neighborhoods that are at least 1 SD below the overall neighborhood mean, and 10% in neighborhoods that are at least 2 SDs below the overall neighborhood mean (i.e., in less advantaged areas). Less than 1% of this group lived in neighborhoods that are 1 SD above the overall neighborhood mean (i.e., in more advantaged areas).

In the models for SNAP participation at child ages 0-4 and 5-8, we found no statistically significant relationships between any of the primary coefficients and adult time spent obese. Regardless of neighborhood advantage index score, SNAP participation during childhood years 0-4 and 5-8 had no relationship with the proportion of time individuals spent obese in adulthood.

As noted above, all models controlled for adult SNAP use and adult neighborhood advantage. Neither the proportion of adult time spent with SNAP, nor the adult neighborhood advantage index score, nor the interaction between the two were significantly associated with proportion of adult time spent obese in any of our models.

Using the FE model coefficient estimates for the 9–13 and 14–18 year-old models (where the interaction between SNAP use and neighborhood advantage was significantly related to adult obesity), we predicted time spent obese as an adult at different levels of childhood SNAP use (25%, 50%, and 0%), different levels of childhood time spent with low income without SNAP or TANF use (75%, 50%, and 100%), and for different types of neighborhood conditions (1 SD above and below the mean neighborhood). These results are shown in Figure 1. For those who, from ages 9–13, received SNAP for 25% of the period and lived in a relatively disadvantaged neighborhood (1 SD below the mean), our models predicted that they would spend around 4% of their adulthood obese. For those who, from ages 14–18, received SNAP for 25% of the period and lived in a relatively disadvantaged neighborhood, our models predicted that they would spend around 5% of their adulthood obese. These predicted adult times spent obese go up by a small amount—to 5% and 7%, respectively—when we increase the childhood time spent on SNAP to 50%, keeping all other conditions the same. These predictions are notably lower than those for individuals who, at ages 9–13 and 14–18, had low income with neither SNAP nor TANF benefits and lived in a relatively disadvantaged
neighborhood (with predictions of adult time spent obese at 15% and 17%, respectively). When we estimate results for those who received SNAP for 25% or 50% of their childhood time and lived in areas one SD above the mean for neighborhood advantage during childhood, predicted adult time spent obese rises to 27% and 31% for those aged 9–13 and 14–18, respectively. For those who spent all of the 9–13 and 14–18 period with low income and neither SNAP nor TANF benefits, and who lived in areas one SD above the mean for their childhood neighborhood, we predict that they will spend 14% and 15% of their adult time obese, respectively.

When we ran the individual neighborhood conditions, both in childhood and adulthood, in separate models (an approach taken to account for the high collinearity among the neighborhood variables), and interacted them with the time on SNAP variable, we found similar results to those shown in Table 3.
(results not shown). Most of the interactions of the childhood neighborhood variables and the time on SNAP variable were statistically significant for the 9–13 and 14–18 year old models, while none of these interactions were statistically significant in the models for the younger children. These significant interactions included neighborhood poverty rate, unemployment, and income over $60,000 for both older age groups, public assistance receipt for the 9–13 year old age group, and female-headed families and percent Black for the 14–18 year old age group.

Discussion and Conclusion

Several state governments and the federal government are considering ways to reduce eligibility for SNAP or limit SNAP-eligible foods (Dewey, 2017), with references to limiting obesity as one justification for such changes. However, the evidence that SNAP is positively associated with obesity is mixed. This study poses the question of whether SNAP participation and neighborhood conditions during childhood are associated with weight during adulthood. In our descriptive statistics, we found those who used SNAP for relatively long periods of childhood time spent a longer time obese in adulthood relative to those who had low income but did not receive SNAP or TANF assistance (see Table 1). However, in the FE models, where we were able to control for both observable and unobservable factors, we found no relationships between SNAP participation during ages 0–4 and 5–8 and adult obesity. Moreover, we found positive and statistically significant relationships for the interaction of time receiving SNAP benefits during ages 9–13 and 14–18 and neighborhood advantage, and time spent obese in adulthood. These results indicate that the longer adolescents living in disadvantaged neighborhoods participated in SNAP, the less time they spent obese as an adult, relative to adolescents living in similarly disadvantaged neighborhoods who are income eligible but do not receive SNAP benefits, as well as relative to similar SNAP participants living in more advantaged neighborhoods. As we have highlighted, the great majority of those receiving SNAP benefits for extended periods of time live in disadvantaged neighborhoods. These results showing the inverse relationship between SNAP and BMI/obesity align with those from Almada and Tchernis (2018) and Nguyen et al. (2015).
As previous research has noted, there may be a few factors that account for these findings. Food deserts and food swamps are prevalent within disadvantaged, low-income communities and have been linked to the development of increased BMI scores amongst those who reside in these areas (Jennings et al., 2011; Liu et al., 2012). SNAP may moderate or prevent this outcome for people residing in disadvantaged areas in three ways. First, additional SNAP income may be used by families to purchase the more expensive, healthier food items that may be found in smaller neighborhood grocery and convenience stores more prevalent within disadvantaged communities. Second, SNAP income may free up other cash income to be used to travel to larger grocery stores where fresh whole foods are more abundant. Third, if, as Dhurandhar (2016) suggested, food insecurity can lead to overconsumption in the face of threatened scarcity, SNAP may reduce BMI and obesity risk via reductions in food insecurity (Casey et al., 2006; Dinour et al., 2007). Each of these mechanisms may explain how SNAP influences family patterns of food purchasing and consumption to establish health-promoting purchasing and eating habits—which contribute to weight maintenance—to carry through into adulthood. SNAP benefit receipt may allow families to engage in healthful food purchasing habits that are then maintained by children as they transition into adulthood and begin to purchase and prepare their own food (Anderson & Butcher, 2016; D’Angelo et al., 2011; Laska et al., 2010).

Shannon (2014) found that in suburban, more economically robust areas, SNAP benefits tend to be spent at grocery stores with an abundance of fresh foods at higher rates relative to less economically robust areas. As previously discussed, researchers have observed that, in economically disadvantaged areas meeting food desert criteria where healthful food choices are few, inflexible SNAP income is subsequently spent on the available low-nutrient and energy-dense foods. These findings point to the importance of funding low-income families sufficiently to enable them to buy healthier foods, and ultimately to avoid adverse long-run health outcomes.

Our results indicate that increasing SNAP funding for low-income families with children is likely to improve the long-run health outcomes of those children. One way to limit the nearly 50% of adults predicted to be obese by 2030 (Ward et al., 2019) is
by providing more funding for low-income families to buy the types of nutrient-rich food for children that will make them less likely to be obese as adults (Carlson, 2019). Given that roughly half of all SNAP households are still food insecure (Carlson, 2019), and that 80% of SNAP funds are spent within 14 days of receiving these funds (Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, 2019), increasing SNAP funding would increase the ability of families to afford nutrient-rich foods on a consistent basis. SNAP funds would need to be raised substantially—by roughly 70%—so that SNAP funds can last through an entire month. Such a change has the potential to help not only low-income, SNAP-eligible families but also those living in neighborhoods with high proportions of low-income residents, as household income no longer needed for food purchasing can be reallocated towards quality housing, necessary health care (including medication adherence), and other necessities (Carlson & Keith-Jennings, 2018; Pooler & Srinivasan, 2018). The potential multiplier effects of increased SNAP funding—estimated to be $2 for every additional dollar of SNAP funding—would help communities expand their economic base, which may improve employment possibilities within poor areas (Canning & Stacy, 2019).

Expanding SNAP funding during the summer, when children no longer have access to free or reduced-price school breakfast and lunch programs, can help families to avoid food insecurity during these months. While the USDA has summer food programs for school-aged children, these sites are less often used than on-site school programs, with roughly 22 million children getting free or reduced-price meals during the school year versus 3.76 million during the summer (Feeding America, n.d.). SNAP and child nutrition program expansions, such as those enacted in response to the global novel coronavirus health pandemic (USDA-FNS, 2020b), have the potential to close the gap between school year and summer food access for families with children.

In 2019, the USDA initiated a pilot program in New York City that allowed SNAP recipients to buy food online (Cohen, 2019). This program expands SNAP recipients’ access to food sources, hopefully reducing the prices they pay for healthful, nutrient-rich foods. Expansion of this program would be especially helpful for those living in the most disadvantaged neighborhoods, where large grocery stores, which often have
the lowest food prices, tend to be less prevalent (Larson et al., 2009; Powell et al., 2007). For SNAP recipients who do not have access to a private vehicle, and therefore have difficulty traveling to large grocery stores, this type of program can provide the type of assistance necessary to purchase healthful foods. Even if some without private vehicles can get to large grocery stores by using public transportation, hauling back the food when buying in bulk (which can be the least expensive way to buy food) can be difficult and time consuming. Programs like the pilot adopted in New York City, along with policies that subsidize the purchasing of healthful foods for SNAP families could dramatically improve the consumption of nutrient-rich foods for those who can currently least afford and access them.

While researchers have generally examined low-income households, often SNAP households, where the income limit for receiving SNAP is 130% of the federal poverty line, little research has examined households with slightly higher incomes and their ability to buy healthful, nutrient-rich foods. Future research should examine whether those that have incomes well beyond the current income limit lines are able to afford such foods and whether raising the SNAP income maximum will improve the quality of food purchases for those in these slightly higher income groups.

Overall, our study indicates that, for the vast majority of children in households receiving SNAP, those in disadvantaged neighborhoods, childhood SNAP use has no negative association with obesity in adulthood and may, in fact, serve as protection against obesity.
References


This book explores aspects of U.S. policy not typically discussed among the general population. The authors discuss the evolution of homelessness in the United States and the impact scholars, psychiatrists, and politicians have had in labeling homelessness, which in turn gave birth to its normalization. The discussion focuses on life experiences of poor and homeless individuals dating back to biblical times, the efforts of homeless advocates, and how U.S. policy developed so as to create an industry out of efforts to address homelessness. Homelessness is often ignored, and when it is discussed it is often from the perspective suggesting that homelessness is a choice. Previous authors have engaged specific elements of homelessness in the United States. However, Beck and Twiss provide a comprehensive discussion of homelessness and its roots, the efforts of homelessness advocates, U.S. neoliberal policy, and key areas of change within a human rights framework, making such information easily accessible within one book.

The authors come from a background of working with women who are experiencing homelessness, social work, and academia. They approach homelessness and neoliberal policies in an open manner. The writing style is clear and easy to understand. Each chapter begins with a statement or two setting the foundation for the entire chapter. Individualized experiences are shared to provide a real life understanding of what was going on during the discussed timeline of homelessness in America. Summaries allow the reader to put the entire chapter into a timeline of events, thus setting the stage for the following chapter. Additionally, the authors provide chapter end notes highlighting historical events which had an impact on the homelessness industry.
The book starts out by helping the reader understand the historical evolution of homelessness in the United States and introduces the reader to the terms “homelessness industry” and “neoliberal policies” as well as the McKinney Act of 1987, which was the first major federal legislation developed in order to address the needs of homeless individuals. This is followed by discussion of the historical roots of homelessness and its development prior to the McKinney Act going into effect. The authors draw attention to how society views poor people and the impact of modern thinking as to which poor people are considered worthy of being helped, as well as the criminalization of homelessness. Considerable attention is given to issues of neoliberalism and social justice, and how during the 1980s, a social issue such as homelessness was labeled a psychiatric problem rather than an economic problem, and was thus handed over to mental health workers to solve. Beginning with the Reagan administration, this resulted in conflicts between homeless advocates themselves. This is followed by attention to the first major federal legislation on homelessness, the McKinney Act, and the competition for resources between homelessness programs and programs for social justice which would eliminate homelessness. The book ends with examination of strategies used after the implementation of the McKinney Act and key areas of change built upon a human rights framework.

This book has many strengths for readers with open minds and willingness to embrace the concept that homelessness is less an individual choice than a systemic issue. The historical approach Beck and Twiss apply to the development of homelessness puts into perspective how homelessness developed in this country, while the use of personal experiences gained through work with women experiencing homelessness brings substance to the many ways individuals fall through the cracks in a land with many resources. Discussing the impact that various presidential administrations had on the development of the homelessness industry lends credibility to the critique of U.S. social policy. Such discussion can be sensitive for those who have experienced homelessness or know someone who has. Readers already
convinced that homelessness is a personal choice will find here a strong challenge to their views.

*María Aguilar-Amaya*
*Arizona State University*


In this book on sexual violence and the myths that surround this prevalent social issue in the United States, Schulze, Koon-Magnin, and Bryan deconstruct the gendered societal biases concerning sexual assault (e.g., rape myths) and portray a comprehensive understanding of how LGBTQA+ community members both experience and describe sexual assault. The book places the experiences of sexual and gender minorities, jointly referred to in the book as the “queer community,” in the forefront and explores how gender identity and sexual orientation affect how these individuals are perceived and treated by the criminal justice system. The authors focus on the victim’s experience, particularly the disclosure process and how gender identity and sexual orientation are critical to understanding their experiences.

This book is distinguished by the interdisciplinary and queer theoretical approach to the qualitative research upon which it draws. The authors’ backgrounds include criminology, political science, mental health counseling, social work, and sociology. They challenge traditional academic inquiry on sexual assault and thus provide readers a new perspective for viewing the queer community’s experiences of sexual assault. Through the use of consensual qualitative research (CQR), researchers capture the complexity of 22 queer identity participants, who were presented with an array of rape myths; interviews with the participants explore their responses and viewpoints of these myths. These accounts are eye-opening, insightful, and compelling.
The book assists in presenting more meaningful discussions around sexual assault, including challenging the myths of sexual violence, the importance of identity, sexual assault and disclosure, rape myths, and rape culture. It is especially useful for highlighting the Identity Inclusive Sexual Assault Myth Scale (IISAMS), as well as unique concerns and resources for this community. To my knowledge, IISAMS is the first research tool that measures rape myths, including queer identities. This book relates well to recent research indicating that non-heterosexual individuals experience higher rates of victimization compared to their heterosexual counterparts. Unfortunately, this book did not discuss how race or ethnicity impacts sexual assault, as most of the participants were White. Nonetheless, as this topic is an emerging field of research, this book fills an important gap in the literature concerning both method and theory.

Overall, this provides the needed portrayal of the unique identities and understandings of LGBTQA+ individuals and how they perceive sexual assault. It is a significant contribution to the literature in a variety of areas, including LGBTQA+, gender, and sexual violence studies. This book is an asset to qualitative researchers interested in extending inferences about sexual assault myths within the queer community and could be included in upper-level college courses to provide an inclusive perspective on sexual assault.

*Kimberly A. Hogan*  
*Arizona State University*


This book brings together leading researchers and academics in social work to address some of the most prominent social problems in the U.S. related to gerontological issues. Each chapter discusses a separate social problem or “Grand Challenge” that we must overcome to advance the well-being of our society. The grand challenges discussed are healthy development for all youth,
the health gap, stopping family violence, advancing long and productive lives, ending homelessness, responding to a changing environment, harnessing technology, smart decarceration, reducing economic inequality, financial capability, and achieving equal opportunity and justice. This book is well written and focuses on one challenge at a time, so that the reader can follow along easily. It was written specifically through a gerontological lens with a focus on the importance of social workers in tackling the grand challenges. While the book discusses the impact of social workers on the overall well-being of older adults, all professionals interested in policies and practice that affect older adults will find this to be useful. Given the current epidemic with COVID-19, it is most pertinent for this review to discuss the social policies mentioned in the following chapters: closing the health gap, eradicating social isolation, and harnessing technology.

Although an international problem, the U.S. is now especially impacted by the spread of this virus. In a response to try to limit the spread, some states have taken precautions to promote the well-being of their residents. Shelter-in-place directives have been issued by many states in hopes of limiting the spread of disease. Even with these precautions, we are not yet sure how long it will be until the virus either slows or a vaccine become available. It is clear the coronavirus will have a long-term impact on the U.S. For seniors, the impact will be exacerbated. As professionals, we must seek to understand the impact this will have on older adults and work to reduce the negative outcomes.

A related issue already impacting older adults is access to adequate healthcare. Many facilities have limited supplies and space for those who need care. Older adults who are infected with the coronavirus have an increased chance of death, and that risk only increases without proper healthcare. Those who are unable to access adequate care due to social, economic, or environmental factors are even more likely to face high mortality rates as they contract this virus. Collaboration among professionals working in research, policy, and practice is essential to create the interventions required to address this problem. These authors focus especially on the need for collaboration in research on social care interventions in the healthcare delivery system, which can then be used to advocate for reimbursement of care management services by social workers.
Social isolation is another social issue that has a huge impact on seniors. Isolation has been found to relate to multiple health issues, increasing the need for healthcare and the chance of death. With the COVID-19 pandemic, many older adults must distance themselves from their networks of social supports. An example I see in my own work is the policy of limiting of guests and visitors in nursing homes in order to reduce exposure to the virus. While this is a necessary precaution, there will be an impact on residents’ social health. Efforts need to be made to address this increase in social isolation. An example of local efforts being made by some businesses is that of having times of the day when shopping is limited to those categorized as higher risk and vulnerability to infection. This is but one way older adults may limit their contact with others while still being able to socialize and engage in their communities. The authors suggest that social workers are key players in working with older adults as advocates for addressing problems of social isolation.

Another key resource for addressing social isolation is the ability to harness technology, which could have huge implications for addressing a number of social issues. Social workers are making significant efforts to incorporate technology into their professional practice to expand access to services. This expansion of services could have huge impacts on older adult’s well-being during this pandemic. Examples such as telehealth options or traveling health services both increase access to healthcare services and reduce exposure to COVID-19. Increased access to video call platforms, such as Skype or Zoom, create opportunities for older adults to remain connected to loved ones while following institutional precautions to reduce contracting the virus. Technology offers such promising tools for expanding social services for seniors. At the same time, the significant cost of such technology still limits accessibility for services. A continuing focus for social work, therefore, is to advocate for broad social policies that address factors of accessibility.

Katelyn Hill
Illinois State University

In this time of global connection, it is essential to consider widely the challenges of indigence and destitution associated with poverty, inequality, and social injustice that stem from wage labor in the context of industrialization, globalization, and neoliberalism. The COVID-19 pandemic illustrates how interconnected our world is with respect to political, economic, and social ties among nation-states and global regions. While there are rich literary resources that explore neoliberalism, globalization, labor markets, poverty, and migration independently, there is space for the integration of these topics into a comprehensive book that emphasizes commonalities while also honoring regional, national, and traditional trends. This book fills that space, providing the academic community with a complex overview and an in-depth examination of the social question over the past two centuries with an eye toward labor, policy, politics, and social welfare.

To contextualize this historical overview of the social question, authors delve into the development of wage labor through the Global South, the Global North, and the eastern communist-socialist block in the 20th century. Significant trends that have accompanied the social question throughout time and place center on the profit decline in former capitalist countries, the transformation of socialist countries, the rise in neoliberalism, and the surge in ultraconservative and nationalistic politics. These authors weave together a fascinating sweep of historical events, emigration, national policy, and the interplay of economics to illustrate the power and consequences of global hegemony.

The book represents the work of a diverse and expansive academic community with regional expertise in such disciplines as sociology, anthropology, human geography, and African and Asian studies. Through this comparative exploration of globalization in the Global North and the Global South, readers are challenged to examine existing knowledge through multiple
lenses that expand beyond the local region to understand global dynamics. Breaking free of the Global North orientation prevalent in much of the literature, this book integrates perspectives from the Global South, and there is intriguing evidence for the divergent development of the social question for the Global North and the Global South. In the process of uncovering the powerful influence of Global North hegemony, this book questions why the global standard for comparison of the social question is based on Europe and the West.

In addition to exploring the worldwide importance of informal labor in neoliberalism, the reader is exposed to the causes, implications, and effects of informal work scenarios in various countries and communities, in context of the complexities of politics, migration, and economics. Readers are introduced to unique regional situations and global trends, while resisting generalizations, as the social question differs even within each nation-state. The editors succeed in emphasizing commonalities shared, while also identifying the differences. There is an innovative expansion of the labor discussion to include women’s contributions to the informal and formal markets. The book does not shy from identifying the connection of the social question with democracy, religious and tribal communities, and racial inequality ties with colonization histories.

This book is a gem among academic resources for the understanding of how the social question stands at the intersection of poverty, neoliberalism, globalization, politics, economics, labor, and migration. The writing is descriptive, reflecting a systemic approach with astonishing insight into the social question. Some chapters are easier to integrate critically than others; however, the chapters weave together a global interpretation of the development of the social question with compelling evidence to support the assertions.

This book outlines valuable implications for the social work profession, as well as the global and local communities served, since the social question is, after all, at the heart of social work. The strength of this book rests in the collection of historical overviews to provide insight as to the social question in the Global South and the Global North. The content spurs questions regarding what would be uncovered if there were a more intensified examination of specific cultural communities, such as Native populations, in this push toward globalization and neoliberalism. This is a
must-read for academically minded readers pursuing knowledge about our world in a time of increasing awareness of regional interdependence and influence.

_Melanie Reyes_  
_Arizona State University_


Kobes Du Mez grew up in a strong Evangelical church and is now a professor of history at Calvin College in Michigan. Clearly she knows her subject from the inside. Like many of us, she is simply astonished to see that the very group of people most vociferous about bringing religious values and Christian piety into politics and the public square have ended up becoming the most consistent supporters and at times leaning toward cult followers of the current President—a thrice-married man, an open adulterer, a man who gained a large portion of his wealth through gambling operations and shady real estate deals, a man who daily displays his narcissism and foul language for all to see. How could this be?

The quick and easy answer, of course, is that Evangelicals (and Republicans in general) have wittingly made a devil’s bargain, holding their collective noses and turning their collective eyes away from the excesses and shenanigans of this man in exchange for filling the pipeline with Federalist-Society-vetted conservative judicial appointments, who will rule against abortion, against organized labor, against “creeping secularism,” and in favor of traditional family issues and “religious freedom” in areas such as taxation and education. Without question there is this, a strong element of pure transactional rationalizing in Evangelical and Republican justifications for their support of this President, especially in the later days of the 2016 campaign, when leaders who had voiced support for other candidates scrambled post haste to get onboard the Trump-Train. But as Kobes Du Mez recognized, this did not at all account for the depth of Evangelical support for this man. It was not just
support based on political calculation or evaluation. This was deeply emotional admiration, rooted in a sense of awe, a strong sense that ‘this is Our Man’ that can only be understood as a connection on the spiritual level. For a historian like Kobes Du Mez, this required serious investigation.

As noted, Kobes Du Mez knows the Evangelical world intimately, from the inside, and her connections there were nurtured over decades of immersion in its bosom. Thus, while fully retaining the objective gaze of an academic historian, she has a perspective that very few others can claim. She points to three major undercurrents in Evangelical culture that explain the current situation. The first of these, perhaps the most pervasive, and with a history Kobes Du Mez traces throughout the 20th century, is an underlying anxiety about their social legitimacy. Although Evangelicals apparently yearn for the old days when Christian clergy were serious and powerful actors on the social stage, it should be remembered that these Christian leaders were not Evangelicals at all, but rather were mostly associated with the “liberal mainline” denominations in America. The Fundamentalists, as they were known then—contemporary Evangelicals are the heirs of this earlier Fundamentalism—were as often as not ridiculed as uneducated, know-nothing Bible thumpers, crude inhabitants of the backwoods and frontier areas, provincial hicks from the sticks, country bumpkins with ring around the collar. (Side Note: Popular Evangelical media preachers, dressed in fine clothes and sporting Oxford or Ivy League diplomas, will now often refer to themselves jestingly with these exact images, clearly as a way to communicate to their crowds both “Look how far we’ve come!” and “Remember, I am still one of you!”) Kobes Du Mez’s reading is that this deeply rooted basic ambiguity, of wanting to be “distinct” from the sinful world, while also desperately wanting social legitimacy, to be accepted and respected by the society at large, goes a long way to explain the many contradictions and skewed inconsistencies in the Evangelical world.

The second major undercurrent Kobes Du Mez finds in Evangelicalism is a robust and durable support for the patriarchal family structure, and particularly the figure of the brave, powerful, wise and stern male head of household (this is essentially the Evangelical image of God in relation to
the human family). The history here is a little more nuanced and difficult to trace simply because there was little need to emphasize this undercurrent theme in Evangelical preaching and literature until it came under fire starting in the 1960s. But under pressure from feminism and gender-alternative forces in American society, vocal support for the patriarchal family structure as the ideal, God-given model for all families quickly came to the fore. This is not to say that feminist and gender-alternative ideas made no inroads into the Evangelical world. Far from it. Even today a very high number of those on the fringes of Evangelicalism, for example, those who self-identify as Evangelical in their religious beliefs but are solidly in the 20% not enamored by the current Occupant, very likely point to their dissenting views on feminist, sexual and gender-alternative issues as that which distinguishes them from the Evangelical mainstream. Among those who self-designate as ex-Evangelical, the likelihood that such issues played a central role in their disillusionment is even higher still.

Evangelical patriarchy soon rose to fight back the tide of such influence. Probably most Americans have some idea of who the recently deceased Evangelical preacher Billy Graham was. (Side Note: although there is disagreement among researchers as to who is and is not an Evangelical, the pragmatic “I know one when I see one” position hinges largely around the question “do you identify religiously with Billy Graham?”) Here is one place that Kobes Du Mez’s insider status is put to good use. She knows the territory well and traces a parade of programs and figures, all deeply engaged in the patriarchal backlash that started in the early 1970s, who are absolute rock stars in the Evangelical world but of whom non-Evangelicals have almost no awareness at all. From Bill Gothard’s seminars and Marabel Morgan’s million-selling books, to the many talk show hosts of the Christian Broadcasting Network, Bill McCartney’s so-called Promise Keepers (who filled stadium after stadium with the message to Evangelical men to “take back your manhood and rightful place in the family”) and James Dobson’s books and radio shows on family and parenting advice, many of those given balanced and nuanced evaluation in this book are simply unknown outside of the Evangelical world. For this aspect of the investigation, you couldn’t hope for a better guide than Kobes Du Mez.
The third undercurrent highlighted in this book largely emerged as a further development of the patriarchal backlash, that is, the increasing adoration of the strong and powerful alpha male figure, who naturally takes his place in the world as leader and protector of others. This undercurrent has its deep roots in the "muscular Christianity" of earlier Fundamentalist preachers such as Billy Sunday, who mixed together a potent brew of manliness containing various portions of sports accomplishment, standing one’s ground (leaning into bullishness), military discipline, outdoorsmanship, self-confidence, and self-reliance. This kind of preaching presented the "real Jesus" as the embodiment of this Ideal Man (not, we must add, the meek and sissified, turn-the-other-cheek nancyboy of polite American Christianity!). When this earlier stream of "muscular Christianity" joined the stream of renewed focus on patriarchal family structure, the ground finally was prepared for the idealization of a series of strong male figures to emerge from the Evangelical imagination.

Billy Graham was undoubtedly the first such figure, and was perhaps best pictured among Evangelicals as the preacher, no tie, open collar, sleeves rolled up, glistening with fiery perspiration, with his wiry but fine young physique peeking through. But Billy Graham was a real person and made plenty of real mistakes—and was never hesitant to own up to his mistakes. Sustained idealized heroism requires a bit more distance than was found in Billy Graham. The Evangelical world finally looked elsewhere for their male ideal. Although Kobes Du Mez gives treatment to a string of lesser lights, such as Evangelical wrestlers, bodybuilders ("Feats of Christian Strength!"), motorcycle daredevils for Christ, and other such testosterone-soaked semi-entertainers, each of which had their own particular fanbase, she lands on four men in particular who have made the Evangelicals as a whole simply swoon.

Enter here, The Duke. John Wayne, the fast shooting, fast fisted figure of the silver screen was increasingly held up to American young men in general, but in exaggerated form to Evangelical young men in particular, as the Ideal Man, the model for true Christian manhood and leadership. Although it is reported that Wayne himself was initially uneasy about all the ongoing attention and admiration he received coming from these "religious folks," he eventually became used to the
idea that if he played his role well among them, they were not keen to look very closely into his private life. The idealization of John Wayne led directly into that of the second great Ideal Man among the Evangelicals, namely Ronald Reagan. With Reagan, Evangelicals were drawn very directly into the political arena, and the politicization of Evangelical religion came on with the full force of Cold War enthusiasm. Soon explicitly political groups among Evangelicals such as the Moral Majority and the Christian Coalition were being formed and led by ministers who only a few years before had cautioned Christians to stay clear of politics and concentrate their energies on getting people saved and ready for the afterlife.

On the heels of Reagan arose a third figure embodying the Evangelical Ideal of Manhood, the Marine Lt. Col. Oliver North. North solidified the image of the warrior into the Evangelical Ideal of Manhood, with all of the muscle and swagger the now-aging John Wayne once embodied, and associating true manhood with themes of super-patriotism and militarism. He also solidified the mental habit among Evangelicals of not looking too deeply into the foibles of their heroes. North’s felony convictions on three separate counts, if anything, enhanced his popularity in the Evangelical world, lending him both the aura of willingness to pursue Truth and Justice outside The Law if necessary, and the aura of sacred martyrdom when he was caught and punished for doing so (his felony convictions were later overturned). From there, North’s time has been split between his radio program (Evangelicals making up a high percentage of his audience), his work with the National Rifle Association (mixing themes of gun-toting patriotism and religious zeal), and celebrity speaking engagements (mostly in Evangelical venues.)

Throughout the ensuing decades, forces of liberalism and secularism proceeded unabated in America, despite the best efforts of Evangelicals to resist (they settled mainly for symbolic victories here and there). The Obama years were especially tough ones for Evangelicals, as they watched their once-powerful megachurches diminish in size and influence, with many of their own children leading the way out the doors. Furthermore, they had to acknowledge Obama’s own high level of popularity among Evangelical young people, not least of which was Obama’s
extremely popular embodiment of a type of Ideal Manhood far
different from the swaggering tough guy crafted over decades
in the Evangelical imagination. Kobes Du Mez suggests that the
Evangelicals were by then powerfully yearning for a new Strong
Man Leader to take control of the nation. George W. Bush fit that
need only in fleeting moments ("Mission Accomplished!") but
even then with obviously clay feet.

Donald J. Trump had in the meantime become not just a
billionaire leader in the business world (much of that, it turns
out, is bluff) but also had become a true media star, playing
exactly the role of the tough-but-fair alpha male ("You’re Fired!")
week after week, for some fifteen seasons, on what became one
of America’s most watched shows. By the time Kobes Du Mez
has carefully built her case and filled in the background step by
step, we are no longer so astonished at the fact of Evangelical
swoon, as DJT descended the golden staircase, amid cheering
fans (we later learned were paid to be there) to announce his "No
More Mr. Nice Guy," and "Make America Great Again!" run for
President. His numbers among self-identified Evangelicals soon
shot up to somewhere in the near 90s and has never dropped
below 80% since that time.

Kobes du Mez’s book is really a tour de force, an impressive
achievement, written with wit, understanding and a veritable
encyclopedic knowledge of the Evangelical world. There is
one thing that I would have liked her to explore more deeply
than she did, and that is the fact that all of the main figures
embodying the Evangelical Ideal of Manhood, the Heroes du
jour on the Pedestal, so to speak, are pretty much 100% media
images and not actual people. John Wayne may be The Duke,
but underneath that media image is Marion Michael Morrison
(thrice married) from small town rural Iowa. Evangelicals
(admittedly, along with many other Americans) persist in
associating wartime heroism with (twice married) Ronald
Reagan, when in fact this pertains only to roles he played on
the screen while sitting out the actual war in Hollywood. Oliver
North is a Marine Lt. Colonel with a history of battle action, but
his belligerently swaggering defense in front of congressional
inquiry committees for what was, after all, the job of paper
pushing, was so patently staged that any non-swooners
watching it couldn’t help but be embarrassed on his behalf.
Likewise, anyone who has watched his performances in facing down capitol hill reporters knows that DJT (thrice married) is clearly no genius businessman or even the boardroom alpha male—but he played one on TV! Perhaps it is too much to ask of Kobes Du Mez that she would look deeper into the sources and meaning of such obvious preference among Evangelicals for image over reality. Hopefully that is the subject of a future project. In any case, it is an extremely important topic to wrestle down and would doubtless have profound implications for our understanding of the type of religion Evangelicalism actually is, politically, sociologically and theologically.

Daniel Liechty
Illinois State University


This review will primarily focus on two subjects covered in this text, defining dementia-focused music therapy and the physiological impact that melody has on older adults. While the book contains fourteen chapters discussing topics ranging from the seven capacities of music to therapeutic intervention techniques for Life Enrichment specialists, I am focusing here on those topics most relevant to social workers. The research provided in this book offers implications for improving the quality of life for older adults across a variety of communities and living environments, including assisted living facilities, retirement communities, memory care support, or an individual’s home. As dementia remains the most significant and neurocognitively harmful condition impacting older adults, it is for social workers and other professionals to acquaint themselves with the importance of sound and music as a therapeutic tool for working with this vulnerable group of people.

As a starting point, the authors debunk a number of common misconceptions about music therapy. They stress the difference between recreational and therapeutic experiences. In order to
provide a therapeutic structure for older adults with dementia, the use of music must be active, rather than passive. Often, passive experiences are mistaken for therapeutic ones because of the pleasurable moments they provide. The text lists several examples of passive listening experiences that are often used in assisted living and memory support settings, including bedside musicians, listening to music with headphones, a piano player in the lobby, a student playing guitar for residents, or a visiting choir performance. The authors note that musical experiences exist on a continuum, and that while each of the previous activities are not harmful, they are not considered music therapy. Such passive musical experiences can be implemented for older adults with dementia, but the psychological and physiological effects of a truly therapeutic approach are unlikely to occur. Passive listening, of course, can be enjoyable for anyone, but it is generally not individualized for each person, nor is it often accompanied by a professional care plan with specific goals.

An important consideration for social workers working with the dementia population is the genre of music used for intervention. For people with dementia, it is important to utilize familiar songs and melodies when creating therapeutic interventions. Research underlines the power of past associations. For example, if a song is linked to a patient’s memory of a wedding day, a music therapist may have more success helping the patient stimulate their mind and connect with their emotions. Since determining musical preferences for a person with dementia can be challenging, it is recommended to consult with family members to find out what specific songs and genres the person enjoyed. However, the authors note that it cannot be assumed that familiar music is always the preferred music.

In addition to these considerations, the research presented here suggests the act of playing an instrument or singing along with a music therapist plays a tremendous role in improving quality of life and fostering personal expression. Activities mentioned in the text include utilizing percussion instruments, such as maracas, drums, or tambourines, and group sing-alongs in which individuals play music along with the recorded or live music provided by the music therapist, social worker, or life enrichment specialist. These activities have been proven to stimulate brain cells and to support a healthy brain state.
Music creates a physical stimulus in all of us. From anecdotal cases provided in the text, the authors conclude that during the progression of dementia, motor responses to music can endure longer than responses to other stimuli, such as exercise. Music has been proven to assist older adults with dementia in regaining access to emotions through autobiographical memories. As a result, many music therapists have designed interventions that are both physically and emotionally engaging. One study assessed cognitive outcomes in older adults after completing an intervention of exercise accompanied by music for one hour per week over the course of a year. The results indicated participants who exercised with music displayed improvements in visuospatial and cognitive function. Interestingly, the effectiveness can be caused by the association between music and physical movement, which increases the motivation to move. Likewise, particularly with older adults, physical responses to music are often more enjoyable than exercise alone. Therefore, the benefits of exercise are easily combined with the enhanced mood of listening to music.

Synchronizing with music enhances motor, cognitive, and behavioral patterns in older adults. The book highlights that when movement happens as a response to music it is proven to increase the motor functioning of dementia patients. The patterns found in therapeutic music can be used to connect with the patient and subsequently give a sense of regulation and security, a phenomenon known as neural entrainment. Similarly, when synchronous rhythms are used in music therapy, it leads to increased awareness, along with verbal and nonverbal communication abilities. One music therapist referenced in the text notes using a simple rhythmic pattern on a drum to produce a calming effect on older adults with dementia.

This multi-disciplinary text defines what music therapy for dementia patients looks like, as well as how music therapy can transform the lives of older adults experiencing neurocognitive decline in settings ranging from assisted living facilities to home environments. In summary, the authors argue that music-based intervention for older adults with dementia involves creating conditions in which the person, stimulus, and environment align to facilitate forms of engagement. As a result, clinical outcomes, such as mood improvement, heightened sense of self, and stimulus of short and long-term memory, make music
therapy an appropriate intervention for older adults across practice settings. While there is growing public awareness of the positive effects of music therapy, healthcare professionals and social workers alike often struggle to integrate this knowledge with standard best practice interventions.

Kinsey Stapleton
Illinois State University

Ezra Klein, Why We’re Polarized. Avid Reader/Simon and Shuster (2020), 312 pages, $28.00 (hardcover).


A couple years back as I was looking for some summer recreational reading, I spotted this book, Prius or Pickup?, thinking it would be a light-hearted and humorous romp through America’s culture wars. Although the prose is very accessible, what I got instead was a serious treatise by two academic political scientists examining recent research on a much different and more important divide: specifically, a divide in the cultural world views held by our fellow Americans, as well as of many other nations. The consumer preferences in the title turn out to be real, but much more reflective of world views, as well as other symptomatic indicators. Written soon after the 2016 election, the book is focused much more on trying to understand the results of that election than on motor vehicle preferences. Yet, the correlations are statistically significant. The key issue that demarcates the divide in world views these authors tease out and expand upon can be summarized as, how dangerous do you perceive the world to be? As the saying goes,
if there is one constant in our lives, it is change. But how do you perceive that change? Those these authors characterize as fixed in their world view tend toward perceiving change as perilous and threatening. They resist change and seek protection from what they see as the inevitably dangerous aspects of change. In contrast, those characterized as fluid in their world view see change primarily in terms of opportunities, of openings that foster movement in positive directions. To these people, change is to be embraced, not resisted. According to these authors’ reading of the research, people fall roughly equally on either side of this divide, although with varying strengths of conviction. One thinks here of Erik Erikson’s first stage of development, characterized by basic trust/mistrust of the world.

The book demonstrates a wide-ranging strength of the idea that our basic world view has a great impact on how we respond to decisions and choices throughout our lives. As far as social workers are concerned, perhaps the most important point is the differences between the ways that the fixed and the fluid raise their children. The fixed strive to instill characteristics of obedience, good manners and respect for authority; the fluid strive to instill independence of thought, a sense of curiosity and exploration. Nonetheless, while Hetherington and Weiler do provide some 20 pages of endnote references, one might well suspicion that their presentation is over-simplified, that the argument was too binary and neatly tied up; more specifically, that there had to be a lot more folks like me out here who have clear sympathies with characteristics of both the fixed and the fluid! So finally, I read the book, mused on it a bit, and more or less forgot about it.

I recently revisited the book, however, as two more recent volumes came across my desk, each of which, in its own way, support and extend with more evidence and reflection the basic viewpoint of Hetherington and Weiler. One of these is Irony and Outrage, written by Dannagal Goldthwaite Young, who heads up the Center for Political Communication at the University of Delaware. Young is very interested in styles of communication, and discerns from her own and others’ research a division corresponding very closely to Hetherington and Weiler’s categories of fixed and fluid. Her route into this was trying to determine as a media scholar why “outrage” media (radio,
television, internet) is so clearly the domain of conservative end of the spectrum, while irony and satire are equally dominated by the liberal end. To put it another way, why is there almost no successful conservative equivalent of Saturday Night Live or The Daily Show, and almost no successful liberal equivalent of Rush Limbaugh or FOX Network programming?

To answer this, Young looks at the communicative strategies of each medium form. She concludes that outrage communication assumes a very strong and clear set of values, norms and ethics that are in one way or another being violated, and the outrage is vented directly against those (usually liberals in politics, media or culture leadership) who are identified as the perpetrating violators. Liberals also see outrageous values, norms and ethics violations in the world. However, their analysis trends away from binary categories, and toward more nuanced recognition of factors such as mixed motivations and unintended consequences, that undermine a pure sense of righteous outrage. The longer conservative commentators, who like those of the fixed mentality treasure order and closure, stick with a topic, the more outraged they and their audiences become. In contrast, the longer liberal commentators, who like those of the fluid mentality treasure openness and ambiguity, stick with a topic, the more they bring out many sides of the issue and thus dilute rather than stoke the initial sense of outrage the topic may have elicited.

This same dynamic applies to comedic communication. While there are certainly comedians who are personally conservative, comedy as a genre is veritably rooted in a willingness to violate and ridicule the proprieties of good order. Bob Hope, as one case in point, was a Reagan Republican, yet even his routines on USO tours revolved largely around spoofing military discipline and other foibles of army life. Irony is one form of comedy suited to the liberal fondness for ambiguity and “saying it without saying it,” that is, demanding that the listener draw on information not actually part of the bit itself in order to connect the dots and arrive at the intended humor. I am reminded of a joke my pre-teen daughter (now in college and a voracious consumer of irony comedy) once thought hilarious: I look forward to the day when a chicken can simply cross a road without everyone feeling the need to examine
her motivations for doing so! If you think of all of the strands of cultural knowledge not stated directly but only alluded to here, and which the listener must provide to find it at all funny, you see that at which Young’s understanding of irony is driving.

The second recent book is Ezra Klein’s, *Why We’re So Polarized*. Klein is an upcoming public intellectual and one of the pioneers of both blogging and then podcasting as forms of publication and medium for exploring issues of politics and social policy. For the past decade his voice has been heavily present in the debate on healthcare policy (he supports a single-payer system), and more recently he has also become very invested in exploring the polarization that increasingly characterizes politics in America and beyond. This book is at least a first attempt at summarizing his findings. Although Klein does not employ Hetherington and Weiler’s categories of fixed and fluid, he does endorse the idea that psychology strongly impacts political leanings and that among the psychological elements, fear is perhaps the most basic. In other words, whether you see the world as a fundamentally dangerous place, or a fundamentally friendly place, does largely predict the pool of related social policies you are likely to support.

Klein sees this as a constant. So then, why do we see such a strong push toward polarization that we did not see in previous decades? Klein suggests that throughout most of American history, we have really had four parties and not just two, and that each of these factions had a geographical base. Until recently we had both liberals and conservatives in both of the two dominating political parties, and in the give and take of policy sausage making, coalitions of liberal Republicans and Democrats versus coalitions of conservative Republicans and Democrats, were even more common than Republicans versus Democrats. Thus, on any given issue, the need was to move toward a ‘center’ in order to hammer out the specifics of laws and social policies.

As Klein sees it, it is not that we are that much more polarized than we once were, but much more that we have become tribalized. That is, as southern-based conservative Democrats (reacting largely to civil rights issues) have left
the Democratic Party and joined the Republican Party, and as liberal Republicans (largely based in the northeast) were slowly squeezed out of positions of power in the Republican Party, and have remained dormant or joined the Democratic Party, party identification increasingly takes on a tenor of tribal identity and not simply that of political identification.

Klein expertly traces this dynamic of polarization and tribalization. Essentially, once the process of polarization has begun, there is subtle reinforcement for moves in the direction of further polarization and disconfirmation for that which encourages moves toward the center. This can occur at a quite rapid pace; just think of Nelson Rockefeller moving from Vice President to all but complete marginalization within the Republican Party in less than a decade, or the downward career slope of just about any Pro-Life Democrat you can name. But Klein is not all that worried about polarization per se; one could even argue that voting Democratic or Republican means more in our time than it did previously. The real danger to our democratic system comes as polarized political identification creeps over into tribalized social identity. It is one thing when knowing someone’s political party affiliation gives you more than betting odds on pinpointing that person’s stand on various hot button social issues. It is something else altogether when knowing someone’s political affiliation yields more than betting odds on a growing list of all kinds of consumer preferences, favored media outlets, preferences in spectator sports, clothing styles and hundreds of other items we could tick off (as said, a growing list, including most recently wearing or not wearing a covid19-protective mask). Just about anything and everything has become or can become a signal of such tribal identification.

Klein is particularly impressed by studies showing that large numbers of people will express initial support for a policy idea until they are informed that it is a policy supported by the opposite political party, after which become adamantly opposed to it. Whether or not the American experiment in representative democracy can survive this kind of extreme tribalization of the social landscape is an open question, and Klein is frankly not very optimistic. That such tribalization of identity is occurring is undeniable, and thus we circle right back from Klein and Young to Prius or Pickup?
While I chose to review these books as a group, each of them can be read and assigned to classes singly. Especially those who teach social policy classes at the undergraduate level should benefit from having these books on their mental horizons. Students will find them engaging to read and valuable for sorting out debates on topical issues.

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