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Table of Contents

IDENTICAL TWINS WITH SIBLINGS: AN EXPLORATORY STUDY OF THE POTENTIAL EFFECTS OF THE TWINSHIP ON TWINS' RELATIONSHIPS WITH OTHER SIBLINGS	4
ABSTRACT.....	4
BACKGROUND.....	5
<i>Theoretical Frameworks for Understanding Identical Twins in the Context of the Family</i>	<i>5</i>
<i>The Current Study</i>	<i>7</i>
METHODS.....	8
<i>Participants.....</i>	<i>8</i>
<i>Data Collection.....</i>	<i>9</i>
<i>Coding and Data Analysis</i>	<i>10</i>
RESULTS	10
<i>Twinship Affected Sibling Relationships</i>	<i>11</i>
<i>Age Difference More Important Factor</i>	<i>14</i>
<i>Sibling Relationships Not Affected.....</i>	<i>16</i>
<i>Unsure of Effect</i>	<i>17</i>
<i>Evolution of Sibling Relationships.....</i>	<i>18</i>
DISCUSSION.....	19
<i>Limitations of the Current Study.....</i>	<i>20</i>
CONCLUSIONS AND DIRECTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH	21
REFERENCES	21
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	23
BIOGRAPHY	23
UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF HYDRAULIC FRACTURING.....	25
ABSTRACT.....	25
STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM.....	25
LITERATURE REVIEW	26
METHODS.....	30
RESULTS	31
DISCUSSION.....	33
REFERENCES	34
BIOGRAPHY	36
EXPLORING PERCEIVED COLLABORATION BETWEEN CHILDREN'S ADVOCACY CENTERS AND RAPE CRISIS CENTERS IN PENNSYLVANIA.....	37
ABSTRACT.....	37
SHARED MISSION AND LACK OF EMPIRICAL RESEARCH.....	38
SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY	39
METHOD.....	40
<i>Participants.....</i>	<i>40</i>
<i>Procedure.....</i>	<i>40</i>
<i>The Wilder Collaboration Factors Inventory.....</i>	<i>40</i>
RESULTS	42
<i>Quantitative Results</i>	<i>42</i>

<i>Participants</i>	42
<i>Measures</i>	42
<i>Interpreting Wilder Collaboration Factors Inventory CAC/RCC Mean Scores</i>	44
<i>Wilder Collaboration Factors Inventory Independent samples t-test</i>	46
QUALITATIVE RESULTS	47
<i>Participants and Design</i>	47
<i>Theme 1: Competing for Funding and other Valuable Community Resources (Converges with Factor 3–Favorable political and social climate)</i>	48
<i>Theme 2: Overlap of Responsibilities/Duplication of Services (Converges with Factor 18–Unique focus)</i>	48
<i>Theme 3: Open Communication and the Issue of Confidentiality (Converges with Factor 15–Establish informal relationships/communication links)</i>	49
<i>Theme 4: The State Level (Converges with Factor 3–Favorable political and social climate)</i>	50
<i>Theme 5: Successful Collaboration and Positive Outcomes for the Community</i>	51
DISCUSSION.....	52
<i>Limitations</i>	53
CONCLUSIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS, AND DIRECTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH	53
REFERENCES	54
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	56
BIOGRAPHIES	56
THE DOUBLE VIOLENCE OF INEQUALITY: PRECARIY, INDIVIDUALISM, AND WHITE WORKING-CLASS AMERICANS	58
AMERICAN STRATIFICATION BELIEFS.....	60
WHITE WORKING-CLASS BELIEFS.....	62
METHODS.....	62
RESULTS	65
<i>Agency and Opportunity</i>	65
<i>Hard Work and Smart Choices</i>	67
<i>Laziness, Immorality, and Welfare</i>	68
<i>Blaming Themselves</i>	72
<i>A Step Above</i>	75
<i>Seeds of Resistance</i>	76
DISCUSSION.....	77
CONCLUSION.....	81
REFERENCES	83

IDENTICAL TWINS WITH SIBLINGS: AN EXPLORATORY STUDY OF THE POTENTIAL EFFECTS OF THE TWINSHIP ON TWINS' RELATIONSHIPS WITH OTHER SIBLINGS

Joleen Loucks Greenwood

ABSTRACT

In this exploratory study of the experience of being an identical twin, the association between the identical twin relationship and sibling relationships was investigated through semi-structured interviews with 94 identical twins ages 18 to 69 years of age. Results indicated that the twinship can put a strain on sibling relationships. Approximately one-half of the participants noted that the emotional closeness of their sibling relationships was negatively affected by their status as an identical twin. According to the participants, issues of jealousy and feeling excluded from the twinship were main factors. One-half of the participants believed that their sibling relationships were unaffected by their status as an identical twin. Age difference was believed to be more responsible for the distant sibling relationships. The evolution of sibling relationships is also discussed. These findings speak to the need to understand how an identical twin relationship can potentially affect sibling relationships.

KEYWORDS: Adult Sibling Relationships; Identical Twins; Qualitative Methodology; Siblings; Sibling Relationship Quality; Twinship

While identical twins are viewed as a phenomenon and often used to tease out the nature and nurture question, there is a scarcity of research on the effect of the identical twin relationship on other personal relationships including romantic relationships, other sibling relationships, and friendships. The current study investigated the association between the identical twin relationship and other sibling relationships, focusing on whether or not the emotional closeness and sibling relationship quality were affected by the twin's status as an identical twin. While there has been previous research that has focused on the special bond shared by identical twins, there is a lack of studies that investigate the ways in which other sibling relationships can be affected, positively and negatively, by the experience of having identical twins in a family.

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BACKGROUND

Theoretical Frameworks for Understanding Identical Twins in the Context of the Family

Most research that has focused on the twinship utilizes attachment theory (Bowlby 1969) to understand the relationship shared by twins, including both fraternal and identical twins. Less common is the application of sociological theories or frameworks to understand not only the twin relationship but the ways in which other personal, familial, and romantic relationships may be affected by the dynamics of a twinship. A review of recent research that has employed both sociological and psychological theories in order to understand identical twin relationships is provided below.

Symbolic interactionism. Symbolic interactionism offers a potential starting point for studying the effects of the twinship on other familial relationships, including those between identical twins and their non-twin siblings. There are few studies (Bacon 2010; Ncube 2018; Sadri and Sadri 1994; Stewart 2000) that have employed such an approach; however, they are an important foundation for the current study. According to the symbolic interaction framework, actors play crucial roles in the construction and interpretation of social situations (Stewart 2000). Meaning is thus constructed through the interaction of the individuals in groups (Stewart 2000). Given the rarity of identical twins in our society, some researchers have argued that identical twins are a marginalized group—individuals whose unique status constantly needs to be achieved (Sadri and Sadri 1994). Similarly, Stewart (2000) refers to twins as a “distinctive minority,” individuals who are often singled out because of their unique status. In studies of twins and their relationships, the twins and siblings can be viewed as competent social actors who have a role to play in the family. As such, meanings attached to the statuses of “identical twin” and “sibling” are built up through the course of everyday social life (Bacon 2010). Stewart (2000) explains that these interactions with others stresses and reinforces the idea and meaning associated with “twinship.”

Goffman’s (1959) work on dramaturgy is a particular derivation of the symbolic interaction framework that can provide the tools to aid in our understanding of the “twinship” as not only a status or position, but how it can affect interactions with others such as siblings. Specifically, in the case of identical twins, the twins are actors who perform face-to-face interactions, create impressions, and manipulate perceptions and seek to control their audience (Stewart 2000). As such, identical twins, who are well aware of their unique status as an identical twin, surrounded by non-twins, will often present or attempt to present an idealized image of the twinship. Ncube (2018) made a similar argument to Stewart (2000), explaining that the actions of identical twins are not necessarily expressive of their unique individual personalities, but are rather expressive of their expected social roles as identical twins—one part of the unit. Considering all of the aforementioned studies and their applications of symbolic interaction theory to understand twins’ experiences of the twinship, I argue that symbolic interaction theory can aid the understanding of how and in what ways the experience of being an identical twin can affect identical twins’ relationships with their non-twin siblings. Specifically, if identical twins are constantly performing as identical twins—according to societal expectations that they be alike, have similar interests, have a strong bond with each other, and spend a majority of their time together “paired-up” as twins—then one could argue that a result of such performances on a daily basis might lead to relationships with non-twin siblings that are not as close as their twinship. The close relationships of identical twins who spend a majority of their time interacting with their identical twin—performing as an identical twin—may be at the expense of other relationships such as those with their non-twin siblings. An evaluation of the

applicability of this framework to the current study's results is provided in the Discussion section. I now turn to a discussion of attachment theory.

Psychological framework: Attachment theory. Most research that focuses on the identical twin relationship utilizes attachment theory, as opposed to sociological theories. Given the unique characteristics of the identical twin relationship, such as sharing age and sex as well as DNA, along with experiencing a similar home environment, attachment theory (Bowlby 1969) serves as a potentially strong framework for this current study. Although Bowlby was focused primarily on understanding the nature of the infant-caregiver relationship, he believed that the attachment characterized the human experience from birth to death. According to Bowlby (1969), an attachment relationship is one in which a person uses the other as a target of proximity maintenance, experiences distress during separation from the other, uses the other as a safe haven during times of distress, and uses that person as a secure base from which to explore the world. A contrasting theoretical explanation, put forth by Neyer and Lang (2003), proposes that identical twins have a special regard for one another because they share more of their genetic makeup than do fraternal or non-twin siblings. Based on a review of previous research that has utilized attachment theory to understand familial and personal relationships, I argue that attachment theory is a useful theoretical framework to understand the identical twin relationship.

Starting in the 1980s, researchers began to discuss the possibility that other kinds of adult relationships, including friendships (Fralely and Davis 1997), romantic relationships (Hazan and Shaver 1987), and relationships with other family members (Ainsworth 1989) could serve as attachment relationships. Pertinent to the current study, there has been qualitative and quantitative research suggesting that twins may serve as attachment figures for one another across the lifespan.

Segal (1999) found that identical twins showed greater physical closeness than fraternal twins (in support of the proximity seeking feature). Specifically, Segal (1999) found that identical and fraternal twins state a preference for being in each other's company, whereas non-twin siblings report being happier when their siblings are not around. Other research on adult twins (Tambs, Sundet, and Berg 1985) found that identical twins were psychologically closer to each other and lived together longer than fraternal twins. Fralely and Tancredy (2012) found that both identical and fraternal twins were more likely to be attached to one another than non-twin siblings, with identical twins more likely to be attached to one another than both fraternal twins and non-twin siblings. Furthermore, Fralely and Tancredy (2012) suggested that twin children (both fraternal and identical twins collectively) rely more heavily on their co-twin for safety and security than do non-twin siblings.

Similarly, Neyer (2002) found that identical twins contacted each other more frequently and lived in closer geographical proximity than fraternal twins generally. Moreover, identical twins reported providing more support to their twins and feeling emotionally closer to their twins than the fraternal twins in the study. Previous research, especially qualitative studies such as the work of Ainslie (1997), has shown that twins can easily be distressed when separated from one another and this is even more obvious and intense when one twin dies (Woodward 1998). Tancredy and Fralely (2006) investigated the usefulness of attachment theory and found that twins (both fraternal and identical) are more likely than non-twins to use their sibling as an attachment figure. Twins also look to their co-twin as a safe haven, placing a high priority on offering support, protection, and comfort to their co-twin in times of need (Tancredy and Fralely 2006). Moreover, although there is some research that has shown that twins use their co-twins as a

secure base from which to explore the world, it is limited in that these studies focus on early childhood and not across the lifespan (Tancredy and Fraley 2006).

While many of the aforementioned studies focus on the positive effects related to the strong attachment between identical twins, others have taken a different approach. In her book *Twins in Session: Case Histories in Treating Twinship Issues* (2018), Joan Friedman, twin expert and psychologist, explains how the attachment between twins affects and is affected by the attachment between the parent and child (twin). Friedman (2018:16) explains, "A twin's attachment to a parent is inevitably complicated by the presence of a second same-age child, and it should be assumed that a twin not only has a unique connection to his twin brother or sister but has not had the normal parent-child relationship." In addition to the research on attachment theory as it pertains to identical twins, studies that have investigated the sibling relationship quality of identical twins also inform the current study.

Sibling relationship quality. There has also been research that has investigated the association between behavioral genetics and sibling relationship quality. Mark et al. (2017) relied on parental reports of sibling relationship quality for their children, utilizing a quantitative approach. Contrary to expectations, no mean level differences emerged when identical twin pairs, fraternal twin pairs, and non-twin pairs were compared on their sibling relationship quality. Fortuna, Goldner, and Knafo (2010) also relied on parental reports of sibling relationship quality and found that compared to same-sex fraternal twins, identical twins were perceived to be closer and more co-twin dependent. Case (1991) specifically found that identical twin sisters tended to form the closest emotional bonds compared to fraternal twins and identical twin brothers. Other researchers, such as Bank and Kahn (1997) investigated not only gender, but age as a factor, and found that the closer the siblings are in age and gender, the more intense their relationship.

Other research has relied on twins' self-reports of relationship quality. In the research of Pietila, Bjorklund, and Bulow (2012), based on 35 life stories of identical and fraternal twins aged 70 years and older, they explored the evolution and emotional closeness of twins over the course of their lives. The majority of participants (24/35) were categorized as having a "nurturing twin relationship." Their results indicated that twins seem to be emotionally closer to each other than non-twin siblings. In addition, they concluded that these twin relationships showed that relationship patterns (nurturing, draining, or superficial) remained much the same throughout life, emphasizing the importance of relationships in the early years of life. Last, their results showed that the twin relationship is important in later life, emotionally, socially, and in practical matters of daily living (Pietila et al. 2012). The aforementioned research studies provide evidence that the relationship shared by identical twins is an example of the most intense and emotionally close relationship, compared to other sibling relationships.

The Current Study

The current study builds upon the aforementioned existing research on identical twins and their co-twin relationship. Previous research (Tancredy and Fraley 2006) has investigated the bond shared by identical twins and the applicability of attachment theory to understand the nature of the twin relationship, especially compared to fraternal twins. All of the aforementioned studies come to the same conclusion that identical twins tend to be closer than fraternal twins and non-twin siblings. However, previous research is limited in that there are no studies that investigate the potential effect of the twin relationship on their non-twin sibling relationships; thus, the current study fills that gap.

In addition, while there are studies that have investigated the usefulness of attachment theory and symbolic interaction theory (separately) in understanding the identical twin relationship, this study assesses the potential of both of these theories. The current exploratory study is based off of in-depth qualitative interviews of a *large* sample of identical twins, providing the “voice” and perspectives of identical twins themselves—an opportunity for identical twins to reveal to “outsiders” what it is like to be an identical twin having to maintain other sibling relationships. Since I was most interested in understanding *if* and *how* the relationship between identical twins affects the emotional closeness and quality of their other non-twin sibling relationships, qualitative interviewing was the best methodology. The findings are a compilation of common themes that were revealed during the interviews.

METHODS

The primary goal of this exploratory study was to understand *how* and *in what ways* a twinship can affect an identical twin’s other non-twin sibling relationships. Specifically, I was interested in gaining the perspectives of identical twins regarding their relationship with their twin and their other siblings over time. Thus, conducting semi-structured in-depth interviews with identical twins was necessary to gain the best understanding of their personal experience. This type of information was gained by asking the twins to share their stories with me by discussing the evolution of their twin relationship and discussing their relationships with all of their siblings over their lifecourse. An interview guide was used to establish consistency across all interviews and to make certain key questions were asked of the participants. The following research questions thus guided my research: Does the experience of being an identical twin affect other sibling relationships? If so, how and in what ways? Do identical twins develop a codependence on one another in terms of personal relationships?

Participants

The current study is part of a larger study that included a total of 113 identical twins who were at least 18 years of age at the time of the interview. The target number of participants for the larger study was 120; however, after approximately 100 interviews, the point of saturation was met. Only 94 of the 113 reported having siblings other than their twin, so only data from these 94 are included in this study. The first interviews were with 39 participants recruited and interviewed between November 2013 and March 2014. These participants were recruited through the posting of advertisements on Craigslist and Facebook (Identical Twins Groups), along with State Twins Associations’ websites. Snowball sampling was used as well; once I established contact and completed the interviews with participants, I asked participants if they had contact information for other identical twins who might be interested in participating in the study. The last 55 participants were recruited at the 41st Annual Twins Days Festival held in Twinsburg, Ohio in August 2016—the largest gathering of identical twins in the United States. The first 39 participants received \$10 as a token of appreciation for their participation. The additional 55 participants received a \$10 gift card.

Participants self-identified as identical twins; thus, since DNA analysis nor a standard physical resemblance questionnaire was not used, it is possible that some of the participants might not have

actually been identical twins, as they had thought. Nonetheless, since the twins had grown up believing they were identical twins and self-identified as such, they were included in the study.

The average age of participants was 41 years of age, with a range of 18 to 69 years of age. A majority of the participants were female ($n = 73$); males ($n = 21$) comprised the remainder of the sample. In terms of race and ethnicity, the overwhelming majority of participants self-identified as White ($n = 69$), other races/ethnicities represented included the following: African American or Black ($n = 11$); Hispanic ($n = 7$); African ($n = 1$); multi-racial ($n = 2$); other ($n = 4$). It was not necessary for both twins to participate in the study, although the majority of participants' twins participated as well. Seventy-six of the participants were matched-pair twins, in that both twins participated. Eighteen of the participants were "solo" identical twins, who participated but whose twin did not participate. The average number of siblings, excluding their twin was 1.9; only five of the 94 participants had more than six siblings other than their twin. Pseudonyms are used to mask the true identity of the participants.

Data Collection

Semi-structured interviews were conducted by myself and my research assistant and took one of two forms: in-person or over the phone. In addition to receiving individual instruction regarding interviewing best practice for qualitative interviewing, my research assistant completed an online research ethics and compliance training course prior to the start of the interviewing stage. Interviews lasted between 20-80 minutes, with the majority of interviews lasting around 30 minutes. Interviews were audio recorded, if permission was granted by the participants. The first 39 interviews were done over the phone. The next 55 were done in-person, on-site at the Twins Days Festival or conducted over the phone, drawing from the list of participants who signed up at the festival to be contacted at a later date. I remained fully receptive to new themes emerging from the interviews and interviews were conducted until the point of saturation when no new themes were emerging, consistent with a grounded theory approach (Glaser and Strauss 1967).

An interview guide with demographic questions and key questions was used as a tool to assist the interviewers, including my research assistant and myself. Since this study is part of a much larger exploratory study on identical twins and their overall personal experience, the interview guide contained general questions about the identical twins' personal, familial, and romantic relationships. Specifically, the twins were asked to discuss their relationship with their identical twin throughout their lifetime; they were also asked to talk about their relationship with their twin in childhood, adolescence, young adulthood, and at the present time.

Demographic questions were included at the beginning of the interview. Participants were asked their current age, race/ethnicity (self-identified), occupation, whether or not they have other siblings (and ages), and marital status. In the first part of the interview, the participants were asked to talk about their relationship with their twin. This was an open-ended question, although, additional questions included the following: How would you characterize your relationship with your twin? Tell me about your relationship with your twin during childhood; Tell me about your relationship with your twin during adolescence; Tell me about your relationship with your twin during adulthood. Have you ever been separated (physically/geographically) from your twin? If so, did this affect the closeness of your relationship?

Participants were asked to discuss their relationships with siblings (as they were growing up and currently). Participants were asked to discuss all sibling relationships. Questions pertaining to this topic included the following: Describe your relationships with your other siblings. Do you believe that having a twin had an effect on the closeness of your relationship with your siblings? How would you characterize your relationship with your sibling(s) at the present time? Are your siblings equally close with your twin? If not, why?

Coding and Data Analysis

The interviews were transcribed by the Principal Investigator. Transcriptions were read by the Principal Investigator and analyzed via MAXQDA software. Coding of the data was done by the Principal Investigator and aided with the use of MAXQDA software. MAXQDA software is an efficient data-handling tool for textual data such as transcribed interviews. The software allows the researcher to explore documents such as transcriptions and memos, create categories and coding texts, manage, and organize the data in a way that can save the researcher a lot of time. The software was used to generate themes that illustrated patterns throughout the interview data. Specifically, the frequency of keywords and phrases was determined by a thorough search of all transcriptions. For example, the Principal Investigator came up with a list of key phrases related to the research questions, such as “sibling” and “jealousy.” All transcriptions that included the key words/phrases were highlighted. The key words/phrases that had the highest frequencies were then added to a list. The themes were then analyzed by the Principal Investigator and all of the content associated with a certain theme was reviewed. The list of themes was then narrowed down to the ones discussed in the next section.

RESULTS

One of my guiding research questions was the following: “Does the experience of being an identical twin affect other sibling relationships? If so, how and in what ways?” Thus, I set out to discover whether or not identical twins felt that their relationships with other siblings were affected (positively or negatively) by the fact that they were an identical twin. Nearly all of the twins in this study reported that they were much closer emotionally to their twin than their non-twin siblings. About one-half noted that they did believe that their other sibling relationships were affected in some way, especially negatively, by their status as an identical twin. Specifically, many twins talked about how it was “different” from other sibling relationships; many also described their non-twin sibling relationships as “close, but not nearly as close as with my twin.”

Results from my study are also consistent with the findings of Case (1991), who found that identical twin sisters tended to form the closest emotional bonds as compared to fraternal twins and identical twin brothers. Similarly, Bank and Kahn (1997) found that the closer the siblings are in age and gender, the more intense their relationship will be. For example, in response to the question, “How would/do you explain what it is like to be an identical twin to a non-twin?” Nicole (age 43, three siblings) noted, “I don’t know how to explain it to you. But when I think about my relationships with my other (siblings)...it’s definitely different...with your twin, it’s like you have a sibling, but you also have a best friend.”

Other themes that emerged from the twins' experiences included the perception that siblings felt left out or excluded or that they experienced jealousy of the twin relationship—the classic “third wheel effect.” It is important to note that not all twins felt that being an identical twin negatively affected relationships with other siblings. The other half of the participants in this study felt that their non-twin sibling relationships were not affected by their status as an identical twin, although they attributed the “not as close of a relationship as with their twin” to other factors such as age differences or different interests and hobbies. Nonetheless, it is important to note that we are only getting one perspective—that of the identical twin—only one part of the dyad in terms of the sibling relationship. Thus, the twin is expressing how they think the other sibling felt, rather than relying on a direct report from the sibling. In this section, I provide examples from the twins' interviews to support the theme of sibling relationships being negatively affected as well as examples of how twins did not feel that their relationships were affected negatively. It is important to note that when I indicate the number of siblings a twin had, I am referring to their non-twin siblings, since I was specifically asking them to discuss those relationships.

Twinship Affected Sibling Relationships

When asked whether they thought having an identical twin had an effect on the closeness of their relationships with their other siblings, about one-half of the 94 twins with siblings other than their twin stated that it did. For example, Caitlin (age 35, four siblings) responded, “Yes, absolutely! Our older brother and sister understood our relationship. We were never as close with our other siblings.” This response was typical of others who also argued that being an identical twin affected their other sibling relationships.

Paul (age 69) had three siblings other than his twin brother. He had an older sister and brother and one younger brother. He described his older sister as a “protector” and his older brother as an “antagonizer.” As for his younger brother, who is now deceased, Paul stated that he did not have a “real close relationship with him.” Although Paul seems to imply that his relationship with his younger brother was affected more by the age gap, his response to my question asking whether he believed that having a twin had an effect on the closeness of his other sibling relationships, revealed other factors. He responded, “(Older brother) thought we were an irritation. (Younger brother) felt threatened by us, I believe...two against one.”

Crystal (age 55, two siblings) also explained that her relationships with her siblings were not as close as her relationship with her twin. She explained, “I love them because we are siblings. [But] I have a different bond with my siblings...I can tell my twin secrets.” When I asked her if she believed that having a twin had an effect on the closeness of her relationship with her siblings, she responded, “Well, my twin and I were always together.” Thus, Crystal was implying that it did have an effect; however, she noted that the relationship is getting closer as they get older.

Marina (age 37, three siblings) spoke at length about her relationships with two of her siblings. She explained how her status as an identical twin with other siblings played out in family life. According to Marina:

I was closer to my brother who is deceased now because he did stuff with us. But, we just never were close with...our older sister. (She) kind of just stayed in her room and kept to herself. We were always outside. (Twin) and I had each other, so we didn't have to have a relationship with her. We would gang up on her.

Thus, according to Marina, she and her twin actively antagonized their sister, resulting in a more distant and strained relationship. And, in her own words, Marina (and presumably her twin sister, as well) were well aware of the advantage they had over their siblings, in that they “had each other” and did not need to seek other non-twin relationships.

An interesting pattern emerged in that of the identical twins in this study who reported that their relationships with their siblings were negatively affected by the experience of being an identical twin, it was most likely to be sister-sister non-twin sibling relationships that were affected. Furthermore, in the same family dynamic, the sister-brother relationships were fine or unaffected by the twinship. Hillary (age 30, four siblings) reported that she and her twin experienced a strained relationship over time with their younger sister while her relationships with her brothers were not negatively affected. When I asked Hillary if she believed that having a twin had an effect on the closeness of her relationship with her siblings, she responded, “Yes, with our younger sister, for sure. It did not seem to affect our relationship with the boys.”

Similarly, Lauren (age 32, one sibling) explained that her relationship with her older sister has been strained. She notes that the closeness of the relationship changes over time, which is typical for many siblings. However, what was interesting is that she believes that being an identical twin has definitely affected her relationship with her older sister. She explained:

We have an older sister who is three years older. It goes from extreme strain to really good friends. As adults, we get along better. We still go through phases where one will be talking to her and the other is handling it...I believe it definitely had an impact on the closeness because it's been (sister) and the twins.

In Lauren's description about her relationship with her older sister, she hints at the negative effects of a triad—the two against one effect. By saying “(sister) and the twins,” the implication is that the twins are the assumed unit against the older sister. This is further evidenced when she referred to times when both twins were not on speaking terms with the older sister and the other twin was “handling it.” However, Lauren does note that the relationship is better as adults which is typical of adult sibling relationships.

Jake (age 62, one sibling) talked about his relationship with his older brother. While he attributes not having a super close relationship to factors such as age differences and different interests, he noted that perhaps being an identical twin had an effect. He explained, “We have an older brother. We are probably closer now than growing up. There are the age differences and different interests...we may have been closer if my twin was not there.”

Helen (age 30) has four siblings and stated that she is not close with any of them—two older brothers and a younger sister and brother. When I asked if she thought being a twin had anything to do with the lack of closeness, she responded, “I think so. We were so close with each other...we were not needing and wanting to be close with other siblings...My twin feels the same way...we've talked about it.” Like Helen, many of the twins in this study were well aware of the role that the twinship played in affecting other sibling relationships and used the word “distant” to describe their non-twin sibling relationships especially when they were comparing their sibling relationships to their twinships.

Jealousy/suspected jealousy on the part of the siblings. Whereas some twins focused on the overall negative effect that being an identical twin had on other sibling relationships, specifically not being as emotionally close with them as with their twin, others were quite vocal about what they believed to be the source of their “not so close relationship” with their non-twin siblings—jealousy. Steven (age 34, one sibling) explained that he has never had a good relationship with his older brother and chalked it up to jealousy. According to Steven, “The guy was kind of jealous...most of our family was jealous of my relationship with my twin brother. We never really had a good relationship...[at present time], I really don’t have a relationship with him.”

Russell (age 69, two siblings) noted that while age certainly was a factor that led to his sibling relationship that was not very close, he did suggest that his close relationship with his twin may have contributed to the more distant relationship compared to the one he shared with his twin. He explained, “(brother) is five years older. Five years is a big difference...[however],(brother) was probably jealous because (twin) and I always had each other.”

Timothy (age 69, two siblings) also had an older brother who was very jealous of the twinship and the closeness associated with it. He explained, “It was not a very good relationship. He was very jealous of us. It made the relationship with our older brother very strained...We healed some of that strain over time. I think we were threatening to him...because he lost his kingship.” At least for Timothy and his twin, the strained relationship with their older brother while continuing throughout adulthood, did heal a bit over time, providing support that some strained sibling relationships mend over time.

The women in this study were more likely to report having a strained relationship with siblings, especially older ones, than male twins in this study. Julia (age 41, two siblings) talked specifically about her relationship with her sister who is older by 11 years. She explained that they currently are not speaking. I asked her if she thought it was associated with her having an identical twin. She answered, “Yeah, I think there might have been some jealousy.” While it is quite plausible that there are other factors that led to the more distant relationships when compared to their twinships, one cannot rule out the role of the twinship and its potential to negatively affect other sibling relationships, especially since there was jealousy involved, as reported by the twins. I turn now to discuss the theme of siblings feeling excluded from the twinship, as perceived by the identical twins.

Siblings felt left out. While some twins attributed strained or “not so close” relationships with non-twin siblings to jealousy on the part of the siblings, others had been told or believed that their non-twin siblings felt excluded and left out from the identical twin bond. An interesting theme emerged in relation to the number of siblings and whether or not the non-twin sibling felt left out, as perceived by the twin(s). Specifically, twins who only had one other non-twin sibling, resulting in a triad of siblings, were more likely to report that their non-twin siblings felt left out. Given that the majority of twins in this study stated that their relationship with their twin was closer than with their non-twin siblings, it is no surprise that these third non-twin members of the triad often felt left out, as perceived by the twins in this study. In the following paragraphs, I provide examples of twins’ descriptions of their relationships with their non-twin siblings that have been affected by the inevitable effect of growing up with identical twins for siblings—feeling excluded.

Peter (age 51, one sibling) believed that his older sister felt excluded by his twin and himself. He talked about his current relationship with his sister who is four years older than him. According to Peter, “we’re not overly close, but it’s a good relationship.” When I asked if he believed that having a twin had an effect on the closeness of his relationship with her, he responded, “Probably. It was always about ‘the twins’...she probably felt left out.”

Vicki (age 20, one sibling) also has an older sister who feels excluded. She explained, “We have an older sister who is 4-5 years older than us. We have a good relationship, but we butt heads a lot. She feels out of the loop a lot.” Like Vicki, Parice (age 52, one sibling) also has a strained relationship with her younger sister that has been that way since childhood. Although Parice stated that she has a close relationship with her younger sister, they tend to be very different. She explained,

With our younger sister...all three of us are very close, but she and I are like oil and water. We can clash. My mother used to say, ‘A pair and a spare.’ ‘In childhood pictures...none of me.’ This was a quote from my younger sister...I still argue that when we were kids, it was always two against one—and it wasn’t always us against her. She has felt left out.

Despite qualifying her relationship with her younger sister as “very close,” Parice explained that it is different than the one she shares with her twin, citing factors such as frequency of contact and geographical distance between them. She elaborated, “We are not as close as with (twin) and I. We have a different relationship. I don’t talk to my non-twin every day. She lives 45 minutes away.”

Faith (age 34, one sibling) spoke at great length about her relationship with her older brother and shared both her and her brother’s perspective about their relationship. She explained:

We have a brother who is four and a half years older...I am not nearly as close with him as with my sister. I want to be, but it’s hard to be close to him, so I have this constant feeling of guilt. My twin and I were constantly leaving him out. He actually revealed this recently.

Thus, it was interesting that Faith not only acknowledged that she has had a more distant relationship with her older brother, but also shared that she and her brother have talked about their relationship over time and reasons why they were not as close as she is with her twin.

It is clear that in addition to jealousy, feeling left out or excluded by identical twin siblings, at least as reported by the twins in this study, was believed to be an effect of growing up in a family with identical twins. Although not all twins in this study reported their non-twin sibling relationships being characterized by jealousy or exclusion, many did, making it an important theme. Another important theme was the role of age differences between and among siblings which was believed to be, as reported by the participants in this study, a contributing factor to sibling relationships that they described as “not close” or “not as close as with my twin.”

Age Difference More Important Factor

Based on the aforementioned experiences of the twins, one might assume that if an identical twin’s non-twin sibling relationships were negatively affected by the experience of being an identical twin, it must have been due to jealousy of the twins or feeling excluded due to the triad effect. However, a number of the twins in this study mentioned that they were not very close—or not as close as with their

twins—with their older and younger siblings; when I asked for reasons why they were not very close, they noted the difference in age as a more important factor than having a twin with whom they shared a very close relationship.

Take Greta, for example, who grew up in a family of nine. Greta (age 42, seven siblings) explained, “Because of the age difference between us, our relationships are at different life stages and, therefore, we don’t have much in common.” Oriana (age 49, six siblings) also came from a large family and stated that age was the biggest factor for the more distant relationships with her non-twin siblings. She explained, “They were a lot older. Our closest brother is seven years older. We weren’t close in age. Our oldest brother got married when we were 4 years old...Age was the biggest factor.” Thus, especially for twins who have large families of origin, they reported that they are not as close with their non-twin siblings due to the large age difference and not necessarily due to the fact that they had a close relationship with their twin.

Although Ginny (age 28, three siblings) did not come from as large of a family as Greta and Oriana, she thought that the age gaps between her twin and her and their siblings was the reason for their distant relationships. She spoke for both her twin and herself, stating, “We’re not really close to them. (Brother) is twelve years older. (Sister) played Barbies with us. (Sister) was older, so she wanted to be with boyfriends, not us. Now all three are married with kids, so we don’t see them often. It was more of an age issue.” Even though she discussed the important role that age differences played, it is also possible that there were other factors involved as well. For example, she noted that all three siblings are now married, unlike herself, so it might be that she cannot relate to that stage of life or they may not live close to one another, which could affect the closeness of their relationships.

Sue (age 49, three siblings) also spoke about her relationships with her two older siblings and told me that they are very distant—one could even argue that they are strained—based on the descriptions she provided. For example, she described her relationships with two of the siblings in the following way:
Our older brother is...older. It’s a casual relationship. He’s an acquaintance. I see him at family reunions. I’m much more tolerant (of him) than (twin). Our older sister was (much) older. It was a mother-daughter kind of relationship. We have gone fifteen years without contact.

Considering that Sue refers to her own brother as an “acquaintance” and has gone 15 years without speaking to her sister, one can infer that age may be a factor for the more distant relationships, but there are also probably other factors that played a role.

Even though there is the possibility that the experience of being an identical twin could have potentially impacted the lack of closeness in the non-twin sibling relationships for some of the twins in this study, they felt strongly that the large age gaps were the main reason for the lack of closeness in their sibling relationships. It is important to remember that being a twin is all they have known for their entire lives and they may thus be unaware of the potential impact it can have on sibling relationships. I argue that both the gap in ages and the fact that they are an identical twin were main factors in the lack of closeness in their sibling relationships. Nonetheless, this study relied on the experiences and perspectives of identical twins and they had the opportunity to discuss their non-twin sibling relationships over their lifecourse, since I asked about these relationships from childhood through the present time. If they had

become closer over time, as they got older and age differences mattered less than they did when they were younger, this would have been revealed during the interviews. For some twins in this study, the age differences mattered less as they aged; for others, they mended once strained sibling relationships over time.

Sibling Relationships Not Affected

Although there were about one-half of the twins in this study who said that their sibling relationships were affected by their status as an identical twin and the resulting family dynamics, there were just as many who said that their relationships with their siblings were either not affected at all by their experience as an identical twin (i.e., they considered them to be “good” or “normal”) or they believed that other factors, such as a large age difference between their siblings and them was the main factor.

Judy (age 36, two siblings) talked about her relationship with her brother who is seven years older. Although she mentions a number of factors that potentially could affect the closeness of their relationship, such as an age gap, geographical distance between them, and dissimilar interests, she does not think being a twin affected her relationship with him at all. She reported, “It is distant and not very close. I have to force myself to be in contact with him. We don’t have anything in common.” According to Judy, her twin has a very similar relationship with him. She stated, “It’s pretty much exactly the same. He lives five hours away.”

Alexis (age 36, two siblings) also had a brother, although an older one. Alexis reported that she is not as close with her brother as she is with her twin, although she does not think that having a twin had an effect on the closeness of her relationship with him. Even though she only sees him once or twice a year, she referred to her current relationship with him as “great.” Kaylee (age 59, one sibling) did not report having a positive relationship with her brother, as did Alexis. Instead, Kaylee described their relationship as “not good—very distant.” However, when I asked her if she thought the lack of closeness was related to having such a close relationship with her twin, she said that it did not. Furthermore, she reported that her twin had a very similar relationship with their brother, in terms of closeness, describing it as “identical.”

While it is difficult to ascertain whether or not Kaylee’s and Alexis’ relationships with their brothers was actually affected by their status as an identical twin, I argue that perhaps if they were singletons, they may have been closer to their brothers; they may have sought the companionship and emotional closeness with their brothers that they had become accustomed to with their sisters. Nonetheless, from their perspective and the perspectives of other twins who said their other sibling relationships were not negatively affected by their status as an identical twin, they did not believe that being a twin was the main or even a contributing factor in determining the closeness of other sibling relationships.

James (age 58, two siblings) described his relationship with his older sister as “close, but not as close as with my twin.” He explained, “We are not as close as I am with my brother. I’m not too crazy about her husband, though. We talk, but not a lot.” When I asked if he believed having a twin had an effect on the closeness of their relationship, he responded that he did not think so.

Owen (age 51, one sibling) also spoke about his relationship with his older sister who was older by four or five years. Owen described her as “somewhat of a mother-figure” and described their relationship in the following way: “It’s somewhat distant...she works third shift and is quite a homebody.” He did not believe their relationship was affected by him being an identical twin. An interesting observation is that in the two aforementioned examples, the two male twins offered alternative explanations to justify the lack of closeness characterizing the sibling relationships. For James, he mentioned that he did not really care for his sister’s husband; for Owen, he seemed to imply that their work schedules and social lifestyles were different.

As evidenced by the aforementioned experiences, there were just as many twins in this study who believed that their non-twin sibling relationships were unaffected by the fact that they were an identical twin as those who felt that being a twin and the resulting family dynamics had an effect on their other sibling relationships. Furthermore, it should be noted that a pattern emerged in that participants who reported that their sibling relationships were “unaffected by their status as an identical twin” did so when discussing their opposite-gender sibling relationships; thus, gender may be an important factor that affects the sibling relationship. This point is elaborated on in the Discussion section. In the following section, I discuss the experiences of twins who were unsure about the role of their identical twin status on sibling relationships.

Unsure of Effect

There were some twins, such as those mentioned in the previous section, who were adamant that their non-twin sibling relationships were not affected by their status as an identical twin. However, there were also those who were not quite sure about the potential effect of being a twin. Other twins, when asked about the potential role of the twinship affecting other non-twin sibling relationships were not quite sure if that was the main reason for the more distant relationship, when compared to their twinship. Although they agreed that their relationship with their twin was much closer than their relationships with other siblings, they were not as convinced that it was due to being an identical twin. In the following paragraphs, I provide examples of these twins and their more ambivalent responses about the connection between being an identical twin and the closeness of sibling relationships.

When asked if she thought her twinship was responsible for her more distant sibling relationships, Polly (age 18, four siblings) hesitantly responded, “Yeah, it could because I’m way closer with my twin. They understand that...they view us as one person, when we’re really not.” Maya (age 46, four siblings) responded, “I guess there’s a possibility because (twin) and I always had each other...no true need to reach out to other siblings.” Rich (age 34, two siblings) reported that he was not very close with his older brother, but was vague in the reasons for the distant relationship. According to Rich, “It [our relationship] is not good. Our older brother is significantly older, but he’s the opposite of me.” As a follow-up, I asked him if he thought having an identical twin affected the closeness of his relationship with his non-twin brother and he responded, “Not really. There were definitely other things...He’s not such a nice person. There is a little jealousy on his part, but there are other reasons too.” Interestingly, he reported that his twin brother had the same relationship with their brother. He stated, “Both of us are not close at all.”

Carrie (age 36, two siblings) spoke about her relationship with her older brother, who is six years older. When I asked Carrie to talk about her relationship with him, she responded, “Our relationship is OK. We are not as close and he lives five hours away.” When I asked if she believed being a twin had an

effect on the closeness of the relationship, she answered, “It’s possible.” She also went on to say that her twin has the same relationship with their brother.

Gene (age 26, one sibling) spoke about his relationship with his older sister who is two and a half years older than him and his twin. He does not think that having a close relationship with his twin brother affected his relationship with her. He explained:

We have an older sister. We are pretty good friends. We get along well. We fought a lot when I was 10 or 12. We are not quite as close as I am/was with (twin)...I don’t think she ever felt excluded—not that I know of anyhow.

In addition to those who were not quite sure about the potential impact of their identical twin status on other sibling relationships, there were some who on the one hand, described a sibling relationship that was qualitatively different in terms of closeness than with her twin, but on the other hand, state that they did not believe being an identical twin affected the sibling relationship. For example, Ralph (age 26, one sibling) described his relationship with his sister in the following way:

Our sister is two and a half years older. It’s pretty close...she’s married now too. It’s different...a different category than with my twin. I don’t see her as part of myself. We don’t share as much as me and my twin do.

When I asked if he thought being a twin negatively affected his relationship with his sister, he responded, “I don’t think so—I don’t think she ever felt left out.”

There is the possibility that these twins had never really thought about the factors affecting their sibling relationships or perhaps they did not want to admit to their twinship having a negative effect on other areas of their lives. Nonetheless, there emerged a theme whereby when the twins were asked about the role of the twinship, they answered in an ambivalent way—unwilling to commit to a “yes” or “no”—or responded in a hypocritical way as evidenced by Ralph. Future research is warranted to better understand the role of the twinship in affecting the closeness of other sibling relationships. I turn now to discuss the evolution of sibling relationships as described by a number of twins.

Evolution of Sibling Relationships

Researchers assessing the adult sibling relationship have found that, in general, sibling relationships change over time. Specifically, compared to sibling relationships during childhood or adolescence, sibling relationships during adulthood are characterized by a decrease in conflict (Riggio 2001; Stewart et al. 2001). In addition, sibling relationships become a source of friendship and social support during adulthood (Riggio 2001, 2006). Since I specifically asked the participants to talk about their relationships with their siblings over time, in addition to a particular question asking them to describe the status of their current sibling relationships, I was able to gain an understanding of how their sibling relationships had evolved and changed over time for this group of identical twins. Most interesting was the finding that for those who had strained sibling relationships, especially those that had been negatively affected by the experience of being an identical twin, many of the relationships improved over time in terms of emotional closeness. Research has consistently shown that adult sibling relationships certainly evolve over time and the finding that strained relationships can and often do improve over time has been well documented in the literature (Cicirelli 1995). In the paragraphs below, I provide examples of identical

twins who shared stories of how and in what ways their relationships with their non-twin siblings changed and evolved over time.

Pat (age 69, three siblings) has four siblings, but spoke at length about his relationship with their older brother. He explained that he and his twin were never really close to their older brother who is five years older; however, he spoke about how their relationship has been evolving over time. According to Pat, "We were never close to older brother who is five years older. He was the athlete and he marched to his own drum. There was not much jealousy. But, in high school, we twins were compared to (him), the older brother." When I asked Pat if he thought having a twin had an effect on the closeness of the relationship with his older brother, he responded, "Yeah, especially the closeness. We [twin and I] got each other. Perhaps there was sibling jealousy. Our older brother has torn down barriers in past years as he is getting older and making amends."

Like Pat, Megan (age 26, one sibling) spoke about how her relationship with her older sibling, a sister, has evolved over time, resulting in a close relationship as young adults. She explained:

Our sister...is two years older. Growing up, we were close, but not as close as with my twin. Our older sister didn't have a companion like us. Our relationship grew...it got a lot stronger when she went to college. It is much stronger now because we don't have to see each other all the time.

Similarly, Jamie (age 55, two siblings), also attributed the "not so close" relationship with her older sister to her experience as an identical twin; however, Jamie pointed out that one of the main factors was the caretaking responsibility that was expected of the older sister. She explained, "there is a lot of resentment, especially because our older sister was our built-in babysitter....[now] my older sister lives 40 minutes away from me...we're getting back on track."

Based on the experiences of identical twins in this study, there is evidence that strained non-twin sibling relationships are resilient and even malleable, in the sense that a strained relationship in childhood, adolescence, or even adulthood does not necessarily translate into a doomed relationship that will remain strained forever. Of particular interest were the relationships that were said to have been strained due to the effects associated with growing up in a family where the identical twins shared such an emotionally close relationship with one another that they did not work on their relationships with the non-twin siblings.

DISCUSSION

Based on the results of this study, the experience of being an identical twin and the resulting close attachment between the twins, has the potential to negatively affect the closeness of non-twin sibling relationships. Specifically, about half of the 94 twins in this study believed that their status as an identical twin (especially with the very close relationship of their twinship) did affect the closeness of their non-twin sibling relationships. Some twins were unsure of the role of their twinship, while about one-half adamantly believed that being a twin had nothing or little to do with the lack of closeness characterizing their other sibling relationships. However, it is important to note that gender could be an important factor that affects the perceived closeness of the sibling relationship between identical twins and their non-twin

siblings. Research on sibling relationships has found that sibling contact and closeness is greater between sisters than in brother-brother or brother-sister dyads (Cicirelli 1991; Riggio 2000). Thus, it is no surprise that a majority of the identical twins in this study (with many more female than male participants) reported being closer to their twin than their non-twin siblings. Furthermore, gender may play an important role in whether or not non-twin siblings felt excluded or jealous, at least as perceived by the identical twins. Future research is warranted to investigate the influence of gender on sibling relationships with identical twins.

I argue that since nearly all of the twins in this study reported a very close relationship with their twins, attachment theory (Bowlby 1969) can help explain why twins may not characterize their non-twin sibling relationships as close as their relationship with their twin. Specifically, based on the results of this study, I argue that the identical twinship is an example of an attachment relationship. Applying the principles of Bowlby's theory (1969) to the identical twinship, I argue that identical twins use their twin as a target of proximity maintenance, experience distress during separation from the other, use the other as a safe haven during times of distress, and use that person as a secure base from which to explore the world. As such, if the identical twinship serves as the attachment relationship, then twins may not feel a need to seek out an attachment relationship in other siblings. Certainly, future research investigating the applicability of this theory is needed.

In addition to attachment theory, symbolic interaction theory can also aid our understanding of why identical twins' non-twin sibling relationships may be affected by the very close twin relationships. Specifically, a majority of the twins in the current study reported being very close with their identical twin. Given the societal expectation that identical twins be alike, look alike, have similar interests, etc., one could argue that identical twins have become so used to performing as an identical twin in their daily interactions—so much so that it is a factor that is responsible for the close relationship shared by the twins. Moreover, one-half of the twins in this study reported that their non-twin sibling relationships were negatively affected by the closeness of their relationship with their identical twin. The negative effect may be an unintended effect of their performance as an identical twin throughout their lives. Future research investigating the performance of identical twins in their interactions with their twins and others and especially the effect it has on their relationships with others is certainly warranted. Nonetheless, sibling relationships are the longest lasting familial relationships, so it is important for identical twins, family members of identical twins, and even professionals such as family counselors who may work with identical twins and their family members, to realize the potential effects of growing up in a family as an identical twin or as the sibling of an identical twin.

Limitations of the Current Study

Although the results of this study contribute to the literature on identical twin relationships, there are a few limitations of this study. However, these limitations point to potential areas for future research. As mentioned previously, only the twins were interviewed for this study; any "feelings" of the non-twin siblings was reported by the twins. In addition, there is no comparison group to which identical twins, as a unique group, are compared. Since this was an exploratory study of the identical twin experience, only identical twins were included. Data were not collected from fraternal twins, so comparisons could not be made between the two groups. Another limitation is that I relied on volunteer participants for this research project. As stated in the Methods section, participants were recruited through various venues, including Craigslist, Facebook, identical twins websites, and the Twins Days Festival in Twinsburg, Ohio. I

cannot be certain that those who volunteered to be interviewed are indeed representative of identical twins nationally or internationally.

In terms of sample demographics, there are limitations of this current study as well. Specifically, the majority of the sample self-identified as non-Hispanic white (69 out of 94). In addition, there were a greater number of females than males (73 females; 21 males). In terms of age, the sample could have been more diverse as well, with a majority of the participants in the young to middle adulthood range (age range 18-69, average age 41.1). Despite these aforementioned limitations, this research is a potentially fruitful starting point for future research on the identical twin relationship.

CONCLUSIONS AND DIRECTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Results of this study suggest that the status of being an identical twin and the close attachment between the pair can affect other non-twin sibling relationships. One-half of the identical twins in the current study believed their relationships with their non-twin siblings were negatively affected due to their closeness with their identical twin; however, for the other half, they did not believe their status as an identical twin affected their non-twin sibling relationships. Instead, their relationships seem to be influenced more by other factors such as age and gender. Still others were unsure of the effect of the family dynamics associated with being an identical twin.

Although the results of the current study contribute to the literature on the identical twin relationship in the context of family life, there are ways that future research could better address some issues. First, it would be interesting if future studies were able to interview both members of the dyad—the twins and the non-twin siblings. In addition, future research on the identical twin relationship could interview both identical twins and fraternal twins to see if there are similarities and differences between the two groups. Specifically, researchers could try to determine if there is indeed something unique about the *identical* twin relationship or if fraternal twin relationships share some of the same characteristics. In addition, future researchers could seek to determine if perhaps some other factor is at play, such as gender, in that maybe fraternal twin pairs (such as two girls) share similarities with identical twin sisters. While the answer to this question is unknown, it would be interesting to find out; more importantly, having a comparison group would allow more persuasive conclusions to be drawn while creating new interesting research questions about sibling relationships in general.

Another suggestion would be for future researchers to include additional specific questions about the sibling relationships over time, including ones about strain or conflict as well as resolution of any issues over the lifecourse. Last, future researchers should strive for more diversity in terms of age, sex, and race/ethnicity. This study, along with future studies on this topic will provide a better understanding for family researchers, family counselors, and others such as family members, spouses, partners, and friends whose own personal relationships are influenced by identical twins.

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UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF HYDRAULIC FRACTURING

Nicholas D. Pistory

ABSTRACT

Growing development of hydraulic fracturing across the United States has increased the number of studies that are being conducted that look at individual's perceptions of hydraulic fracturing. Previous studies have looked at how sex, political views, education, geographical location, and age affect an individual's perceptions of hydraulic fracturing with mixed consensus. With this increase in research on perceptions of hydraulic fracturing there has been very limited work on how college students perceive hydraulic fracturing. Looking at the perceptions of young adults is important because they will be significantly affected by the development of this energy resource. This study looked at undergraduate students' perceptions of hydraulic fracturing at Edinboro University of Pennsylvania. This study looked at how class standing, major, political affiliation, knowledge of someone working in the hydraulic fracturing industry, state the student grew up in, type of developed area the student grew up in, and the student's source of information on hydraulic fracturing affect knowledge and favorability toward hydraulic fracturing. Results of tests showed that class standing, political affiliation, and knowledge of someone in the hydraulic fracturing industry affected favorability towards hydraulic fracturing. The study also found that the state a student grew up in affected knowledge of hydraulic fracturing.

KEYWORDS: Hydraulic Fracturing; Undergraduate Students; Natural Gas; Oil; Perceptions of Fracking

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The last several years have seen the United States become more focused on developing energy independence from foreign countries. This increased desire for energy independence has led to increased use of processes such as hydraulic fracturing to access oil and natural gas reserves that were not previously tapped. According to a report from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, fifty percent of oil production and seventy percent of gas production in the United States came from hydraulic fracturing in 2015 (U.S. EPA 2016:4). Hydraulic fracturing is a drilling technique that includes encasing a steel pipe in cement, perforating the cement and casing, and using packers to seal sections of the well in order to pump hydraulic fracturing fluid into the well creating fractures in the geologic layer of interest (Carroll

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2015:197; U.S. EPA 2016:3–4). The hydraulic fracturing process is used in order to increase the permeability and production of the desired rock formation, which is typically a shale formation, that has a low permeability, meaning gas does not readily flow towards the well (Rivard, Lavoie, Lefebvre, Séjourné, Lamontagne, and Duchesne 2014:64; U.S. EPA 2016:3). This drilling technique is commonly combined with a horizontal drilling technique because the use of horizontal drilling allows for a single well to be in greater contact with a desired geologic layer in the hopes of having a greater yield of either natural gas or oil (Carroll 2015:196; U.S. EPA 2016:4). The hydraulic fracturing mix used in the hydraulic fracturing process is a mix of water, chemicals, and proppants (Carroll 2015:198). The proppants are usually small rounded sand particles that hold the newly created fractures open and allow for the oil or natural gas to flow through the well (Carroll 2015:198). Hydraulic fracturing typically occurs in shale formations that are up to one kilometer below ground (Rivard et al. 2014:64). However, hydraulic fracturing can also be done near the surface, near water supplies, depending on the vertical location of the desired formation (U.S. EPA 2016:6). There are two common ways hydraulic fracturing processes are believed to potentially contaminate freshwater. The first is improper treatment or disposal of flow-back water from the subsurface (Carroll 2015:206). The other is direct contamination of freshwater caused by the hydraulic fracturing process (Carroll 2015:207).

These concerns about drilling and hydraulic fracturing have led researchers to look at perceptions of hydraulic fracturing (Boudet, Clarke, Bugden, Maibach, Roser-Renouf, and Leiserowitz 2014; Burger, Nakata, Liang, Pittfield, and Jeitner 2015; Olawoyin, McGlothlin, Conserve, and Ogutu 2016; Sarge, VanDyke, King, and White 2015; Theodori 2009). For the most part, this previous research has focused on nationally representative participant sampling (Boudet et al. 2015; Olawoyin et al. 2016; Sarge et al. 2015). However, there has been research done that looked at how community members' perceptions of hydraulic fracturing differ from neighboring counties (Theodori 2009). There has been very little previous research that has focused on how undergraduate students perceive the process of hydraulic fracturing (Burger et al. 2015). This current research is attempting to fill this void left by a lack of previous research that looks at perceptions undergraduate student have of hydraulic fracturing. The need to look at how young adults and undergraduate students perceive hydraulic fracturing is important because they make up a large portion of the population that will be affected by the further development of this energy resource. Additionally, the futures of young adults and undergraduate students will be directly affected by a choice to further develop fossil fuel energy, such as hydraulic fracturing, or to develop other forms of energy, such as renewable sources of energy. This present research will also attempt to look at if and how personal ties to the hydraulic fracturing industry affect an individual's view of hydraulic fracturing, as suggested by Boudet et al. (2014). Also, of interest is if college major affects views of the process of hydraulic fracturing.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Much of the previous research on how individuals perceive the process of hydraulic fracturing has focused on looking at basic socio-demographic information, such as age, sex, and political views (Boudet et al. 2014; Choma, Hanoch, and Currie 2016; Olawoyin et al. 2016; Sarge et al. 2015). Some of the previous research has also looked at factors such as geographical location (Olawoyin et al. 2016; Theodori 2009) and education to help explain individuals' perceptions of hydraulic fracturing (Boudet et al. 2014;

Burger et al. 2015; Sarge et al. 2015). The degree of agreement between previous research differs depending on which of these variables is being considered as will be discussed now.

A common variable looked at during previous research was age (Boudet et al. 2014; Olawoyin et al. 2016). There is no clear consensus as to whether age alone has a correlation to the support of hydraulic fracturing. For example, Boudet et al. (2014) found in their research that age was positively correlated to support of hydraulic fracturing. Contradicting this finding by Boudet et al. (2014), another study found that age had no correlation to concern about hydraulic fracturing (Olawoyin et al. 2016). This research done by Olawoyin et al. (2016) did, however, find that a combination of age and gender was a predictor of concern regarding diseases that could be potentially caused by hydraulic fracturing. Specifically, in this research young women were more concerned than young men (Olawoyin et al. 2016). In fact, all of the previous research that looked at gender found gender to have an effect on views toward hydraulic fracturing (Boudet et al. 2014; Olawoyin et al. 2016; Sarge et al. 2015). All of the previous research found that women were less supportive of the process of hydraulic fracturing than men (Boudet et al. 2014; Olawoyin et al. 2016; Sarge et al. 2015).

Another commonality across the research that was examined was how political views affected views of hydraulic fracturing. Specifically, in the previous research those that looked at political views as a potential variable that affected individual's perceptions of hydraulic fracturing found that those with conservative political views were the most likely to support hydraulic fracturing (Boudet et al. 2014; Choma et al. 2016; Olawoyin et al. 2016; Sarge et al. 2015). Research done by Choma et al. (2016) found that participants who were politically conservative were more willing to use coal, hydraulic fracturing, and natural gas sources of energy over other sources of energy, such as wind, solar, and hydroelectric.

Some research has looked at how a participant's knowledge of the hydraulic fracturing process affects their perceptions of the process (Burger et al. 2015; Choma et al. 2016). Previous research has found that as knowledge of hydraulic fracturing increased so did the risks perceived in hydraulic fracturing (Choma et al. 2016). As previously stated Choma et al. (2016) found that as knowledge of hydraulic fracturing increased risks perceived increased as well. However, when knowledge was combined with political viewpoint it was found that those with a conservative political view and more knowledge of hydraulic fracturing had less perceived risk of hydraulic fracturing than those with less knowledge of hydraulic fracturing. Research that looked at students found that after students were given a lecture on hydraulic fracturing overall support for hydraulic fracturing fell (Burger et al. 2015). In an effort to learn more about how shale development would affect their area some community leaders visited areas that had already experienced development and this had an effect on their perceptions of hydraulic fracturing (Crowe, Ceresola, and Silva 2015). After visits to other communities, community leaders were more likely to support moratoriums on the development of shale deposits at the city, county, and state levels or ban hydraulic fracturing at the city or county levels compared to those leaders who had not visited areas with existing development (Crowe et al. 2015).

Education was also looked at as a potential predictor of support of hydraulic fracturing in previous research (Boudet et al. 2014; Burger et al. 2015; Crowe et al. 2015; Sarge et al. 2015). The previous research on how education affects perceptions of hydraulic fracturing is mixed thus far. One study found that education was positively correlated to support of hydraulic fracturing, which went against their original hypothesis (Boudet et al. 2014). Differing from this finding Sarge et al. (2015) found no correlation

between education and support of hydraulic fracturing. Supporting Burger et al. (2015), individuals who had a bachelor's degree or more were more likely to support a statewide ban on hydraulic fracturing, rather than a citywide or countywide ban, compared to those who had less than a bachelor's degree (Crowe et al. 2015).

There have also been conflicting findings regarding the effects of geographical location on perceptions of hydraulic fracturing. Olawoyin et al. (2016) found that those who lived in the Middle Atlantic, West South Central, Mountain, and Pacific regions of the United States had the least amount of support for hydraulic fracturing. Contradictorily, Boudet et al. (2014) did not find any correlation between geographic location and support of hydraulic fracturing. Theodori (2009) was another study that focused on geographic location. In this research, it was found that individuals from different counties had different levels of concern for issues based on which county the individuals lived in. Theodori (2009) found that those who lived in the county (Wise) that had had hydraulic fracturing longer saw water pollution as getting worse. Whereas in that same study the county (Johnson) that was newer to hydraulic fracturing development saw road conditions and population growth as getting worse (Theodori 2009). Individuals in Wise County were found to see poverty, medical care, school quality, fire services, and availability of good jobs as improving more than those participants from Johnson County (Theodori 2009). The common concerns across geographic location were increased truck traffic and the amount of freshwater used by the hydraulic fracturing industry (Theodori 2009). Theodori (2009) found that the individuals in both Wise and Johnson Counties did not approve of the social and environmental issues that hydraulic fracturing could cause, but they did approve of the potential economic and service industry boosts. Research done by Jacquet (2012) furthered research on how geographic location affected views of hydraulic fracturing by looking at how proximity to hydraulic fracturing wells affected attitudes towards natural gas well development. This research found no correlation between proximity to a natural gas well and attitudes toward natural gas well development (Jacquet 2012).

Several studies found that the context in which hydraulic fracturing is discussed affects individual's perceptions of the process (Boudet et al. 2014; Clarke, Hart, Schuldt, Evensen, Boudet, Jacquet, and Stedman 2015; Sarge et al. 2015). Sarge et al. (2015) saw that supporters of hydraulic fracturing were likely to see hydraulic fracturing as an economic issue and those who opposed hydraulic fracturing saw it as an environmental issue. These findings by Sarge et al. (2015) support the findings of Boudet et al. (2014) that found that what is mentioned when discussing hydraulic fracturing affects views of hydraulic fracturing. Specifically, when discussed with environmental impacts hydraulic fracturing was more likely to be met with opposition and when discussed with economic independence hydraulic fracturing was more likely to be met with support (Boudet et al. 2014). Similar findings were reported when terms were varied for hydraulic fracturing (Clarke et al. 2015). The authors found that the term "fracking" was met with a negative association; while the term "shale oil or gas development" was met with a more positive association (Clarke et al. 2015). Use of the term "fracking" was also associated with concerns for the environment and using "shale oil or gas development" was associated with concerns for the economy (Clarke et al. 2015).

The type of media used to gather information on hydraulic fracturing was found in some previous research to affect views of hydraulic fracturing (Boudet et al. 2014; Burger et al. 2015). After students were given a lecture on hydraulic fracturing they trusted the government and the Internet the most as sources of information on hydraulic fracturing (Burger et al. 2015). Then in another study done by Boudet

et al. (2014) TV usage was found to be a "strong positive predictor of support" (p. 63) and newspaper usage was found to be a "strong negative predictor" (p. 63). Some research has suggested that how an individual initially feels about hydraulic fracturing will affect where they feel they can get unbiased information on the subject (Ceresola and Crowe 2015). Specifically, when individuals who were in favor of hydraulic fracturing talked about obtaining information on hydraulic fracturing they spoke of how they perceived information that was against hydraulic fracturing was biased and could not be trusted (Ceresola and Crowe 2015). It was also found that those who were against hydraulic fracturing trusted information from environmental and government groups over information from the hydraulic fracturing industry (Ceresola and Crowe 2015). Of interest is that although individuals who support hydraulic fracturing report having difficulties finding unbiased information, these same individuals say they wish to learn more on hydraulic fracturing from educational sources, such as universities and independent researchers (Ceresola and Crowe 2015).

Very little research has been done previously that looked at how an individual's previous experience with the natural gas industry affects views of natural gas and oil drilling and the hydraulic fracturing process. Jacquet (2012) found that individuals who had a natural gas well lease on their property had more positive views of natural gas development compared to those without a lease on their property. This study also found that those who had worked in the natural gas industry had a more positive view of natural gas development and that those who knew a family member or friend who worked in the natural gas industry also had a more positive view of the industry than those who did not know someone who worked in the industry (Jacquet 2012). In a study that looked at community leaders in areas around the New Albany Shale, Ceresola and Crowe (2015) found that leaders who supported hydraulic fracturing pointed to their community's previous experiences with other extractive industries as a reason not to be concerned with having problems with hydraulic fracturing in the future.

The varying attitudes individuals have towards hydraulic fracturing can be looked at through a fear of crime theoretical framework. Through this framework hydraulic fracturing would be seen as the crime that an individual worries about. Fear of crime is a complex and subjective framework of looking at how individuals interpret the world around them (Jackson 2005:309). Fear of crime is made up of worry events, an individual's subjective perceptions of risk, and an individual's interpretations of their social and physical environments all help to shape an individual's meaning of risk and how likely that risk is to affect them (Jackson 2005:300). In the fear of crime theory individuals worry because they feel as if they are unable to control if they will become a victim to crime and because becoming a victim would lead to severe consequences (Jackson 2005:309). Other research has also suggested that fear of crime could be an expression of an individual's dissatisfaction with the environment around them, including the social and constructed environment (Lorenc, Clayton, Neary, Whitehead, Petticrew, Thomson, Cummins, Sowden, and Renton 2012:763). An individual's fear of crime is said to be constantly changing (Lupton and Tulloch 1999:521). This change is due to changes in an individual's personal experiences, learning of other's personal experiences, their sources of information, and their narrative of society as a whole (Lupton and Tulloch 1999:521). Looking at hydraulic fracturing through this framework one would expect feelings of hydraulic fracturing to vary depending on how much risk an individual believes is involved with hydraulic fracturing, their personal experiences with hydraulic fracturing, other's experiences with hydraulic fracturing, and how an individual feels about society as a whole.

METHODS

The data used in this study was collected during the spring 2017 semester at Edinboro University of Pennsylvania (EUP) from February 23, 2017, to March 7, 2017. The participants in this study were specifically undergraduate students from EUP. These students were recruited through classes taught in the Department of Sociology. The students were asked to take a survey on Survey Monkey. The professors of several classes allowed the researcher to use a portion of their designated class time to explain the research to the students and to answer any questions the students had regarding the research. The professors provided the Survey Monkey link to students so that the students would be able to complete the questionnaire during the time allotted in the class. Some professors, not all, elected to give extra credit to students who were in class on the date the survey was completed in class. This extra credit was given to every student in attendance regardless of whether or not they completed the survey as a way to ensure as many students as possible were in class on that day. The survey consisted of 31 questions. These questions included requests for basic socio-demographic information, such as class standing, sex, age, major, and race, as well as where the student grew up, sources where the student gathered most of their information on hydraulic fracturing, political affiliation, and if the student knew anyone who worked in the hydraulic fracturing industry (as suggested in previous research done by Boudet et al. [2014] and looked at by Jacquet [2012]), among other things.

The students were then asked how much they agreed or disagreed with statements regarding hydraulic fracturing on a Likert Scale, ranging from "Strongly disagree" to "Strongly agree." Eight of these Likert Scale statements were used to create a favorability scale to look at how participants viewed hydraulic fracturing. The questions that made up the scale were "Hydraulic fracturing is a practical way to acquire natural resources," "Fewer resources should be devoted to the maintenance of new hydraulic fracturing sites," "Fewer resources should be devoted to the development of new hydraulic fracturing sites," "Fewer resources should be devoted to the maintenance of existing hydraulic fracturing sites," "Fewer resources should be devoted to the further development of existing hydraulic fracturing sites," "The development of other forms of energy should be considered before the development of hydraulic fracturing sites," "Hydraulic fracturing will always lead to contaminated groundwater," and "Hydraulic fracturing causes earthquakes around the fracturing site." At the end of the questionnaire, students were asked seven true-false knowledge-based questions on hydraulic fracturing, which were adapted from previous research conducted by Burger et al. (2015). The knowledge-based questions were "Hydraulic fracturing is a way of extracting coal from the subsurface," "Hydraulic fracturing is a way of extracting gas from the subsurface," "Hydraulic fracturing is only when a well is drilled vertically in the subsurface," "Hydraulic fracturing involves drilling vertically and horizontally into the subsurface," "Hydraulic fracturing of shale for gas has been occurring in the United States for less than 30 years," "Hydraulic fracturing wells can be drilled to depths of a thousand feet or more," and "Hydraulic fracturing uses water, sand, chemicals, and oxygen to obtain gas from the subsurface." The number of correct answers to these knowledge questions was used to test student knowledge of the process of hydraulic fracturing.

Overall, 266 students completed the questionnaire on Survey Monkey by the date the questionnaire was closed. The students were made up of 144 males and 148 females. The majority of students were freshmen, 142. The remaining breakdown of the students contained 59 sophomores, 36 juniors, and 26 seniors. As would be expected with a majority of freshmen completing the questionnaire, 66.4 percent of the students were between the ages of 18 and 20.

The present research has several hypotheses that it will look to test. The first is that the class standing of a student will affect favorability toward hydraulic fracturing. This hypothesis is attempting to see if the amount of education a student receives affects views of hydraulic fracturing, as previous research suggests it will (Burger et al. 2015; Crowe et al. 2015). The second hypothesis is that a student's major will affect favorability toward hydraulic fracturing. This hypothesis is attempting to see if the type of education, as opposed to just level of education, affects views of hydraulic fracturing. The third hypothesis is that political affiliation will affect favorability toward hydraulic fracturing. This hypothesis is commonly looked at in previous research (Boudet et al. 2014; Choma et al. 2016; Olawoyin et al. 2016; Sarge et al. 2015) and is looked at here in an attempt to see if the effects of political affiliation are different among students on a college campus. The fourth hypothesis is that a student's knowledge of a friend or family member working in the hydraulic fracturing industry will affect feelings toward hydraulic fracturing. This hypothesis is being looked at to further research that looked at an individual's experience with the hydraulic fracturing industry and how that affected views of hydraulic fracturing (Jacquet 2012). The fifth hypothesis is that the state a student grew up in will affect favorability toward hydraulic fracturing. The sixth hypothesis is that the type of developed area a student grew up in will affect favorability toward hydraulic fracturing. The fifth and sixth hypotheses look to see if geographic location affect views of hydraulic fracturing, which previous research has found to have conflicting results (Boudet et al. 2014; Olawoyin et al. 2016; Theodori 2009). The seventh hypothesis is that a student's source of information on hydraulic fracturing will affect favorability toward the process. This hypothesis looks to further the research that looked at how and where an individual obtained their knowledge of hydraulic fracturing affected views of hydraulic fracturing (Boudet et al. 2014; Burger et al. 2015). This research will also look at whether or not any of the above independent variables affect basic knowledge of the hydraulic fracturing process. The final hypothesis for the present research is that knowledge of the hydraulic fracturing process will affect a student's favorability score toward hydraulic fracturing. This hypothesis is being looked at in the present research because previous research has suggested that knowledge of the hydraulic fracturing process affects views of hydraulic fracturing (Burger et al.; Choma et al. 2016).

RESULTS

The results from the basic knowledge questions on hydraulic fracturing were coded as either correct or incorrect and the number of correct responses was added to gauge a participant's knowledge of the process. This ranged from zero (0), no correct responses, to seven (7), all correct responses. Then using SPSS, the number of correct responses became the dependent variable in the ANOVA tests that followed. The only variable that was shown to significantly affect the number of correct responses to the knowledge questions was the state the participant grew up in ($p < .01$). This showed that participants who grew up in Pennsylvania knew more about hydraulic fracturing than those who grew up in other states or countries. A potential reason for this will be discussed later.

In order to obtain results from the questionnaire, participants' responses to the questions that were on a Likert Scale were combined to make a favorability scale. The favorability scale ranged from zero (0), being totally against hydraulic fracturing, to sixteen (16), being totally in support of hydraulic fracturing. Some of the responses from the questionnaire had to be reverse coded in order to fit this scale. Using SPSS this favorability scale was then used as the dependent variable in ANOVA tests to look

for differences between groups within the independent variables. The last hypothesis was tested using a linear regression where the favorability scale was the dependent variable and basic knowledge of hydraulic fracturing was the independent variable.

Class standing was found to have a significant impact on a student's favorability toward hydraulic fracturing between freshmen and seniors ($p < .05$). The results showed that freshmen scored about 2.5 points higher on the favorability scale than seniors did (Table 1).

Table 1. The Differences Between Class Standing on The Favorability Scale

Class Standing	Class standing being compared	Mean Difference	Std. Error
Freshman	Sophomore	0.75520	0.59475
	Junior	0.81706	0.72845
	Senior	2.50089**	0.84189
<i>Note: Significance Levels, *** $p < .01$, ** $p < .05$, * $p < .10$</i>			

The results from this research show that political affiliation does affect favorability towards hydraulic fracturing. The results suggest that Democrats score significantly lower on the favorability scale than Republicans ($p < .01$). In addition, these results suggest that Republicans also favor hydraulic fracturing more than those who identify as Independent politically ($p < .05$) (Table 2).

Table 2. The Differences Between Political Affiliation on The Favorability Scale

Political Affiliation	Political Affiliation being compared	Mean Difference	Std. Error
Republicans	Democrat	2.86762***	0.57066
	Independent	1.59646**	0.61397
	Other	2.30405	0.99251
<i>Note: Significance Levels, *** $p < .01$, ** $p < .05$, * $p < .10$</i>			

Knowledge of someone who works or has worked in the hydraulic fracturing industry was found to significantly affect a participant's view of hydraulic fracturing. The current results show that those who do know someone who works or worked in the hydraulic fracturing industry have a more favorable view of hydraulic fracturing than those who do not know anyone in the hydraulic fracturing industry ($p < .01$).

The independent variables of major, the state where a participant grew up, type of developed area the participant grew up in, and source of information on hydraulic fracturing were all found to not have any significance on favorability towards hydraulic fracturing in the present study (Table 3). The final hypothesis was also found to not have any significance in this research. The results showed that knowledge of the hydraulic fracturing process was not related to a participant's view of hydraulic fracturing.

Table 3. The Results of The Linear Regression Model

Linear Regression Models of Student's Favorable Perception of Hydraulic Fracturing		
	B	Beta
Sex	0.836	0.107
Age group	0.027	0.011
Class standing	-0.691	-0.178**
Major	0	0.001
School of Major	-0.018	-0.019
Race	-0.365	-0.035
PA vs. other states	-0.055	0.006
Setting of where participant grew up	-0.094	-0.018
Source of news	-0.104	-0.065
Republican vs. other political affiliations	0.921	0.108
Democrat vs. other political affiliations	-1.252	-0.154**
Knowledge of someone in the hydraulic fracturing industry	2.414	0.216***
F	4.198	
R Squared	0.185	
N	235	

*Note: Significance Levels, *** $p < .01$, ** $p < .05$, * $p < .10$*

DISCUSSION

The results of this research support some of the previous research done on perceptions of hydraulic fracturing. Particularly, this present study supports research that found political affiliation affected views of hydraulic fracturing (Boudet et al. 2014; Choma et al. 2016; Olawoyin et al. 2016; Sarge et al. 2015). This study supports the idea that political conservatism makes one view hydraulic fracturing more favorably. These results also show that knowledge of someone who works in the hydraulic fracturing industry increases favorability towards hydraulic fracturing. This is in support of Jacquet's (2012) research that showed individuals with previous experience with hydraulic fracturing had a more positive perception of hydraulic fracturing. The increased favorability could be because those who know of someone who works in the hydraulic fracturing industry have seen the economic benefits of this process. However, future research is needed to test this hypothesis. The results showing the change in favorability toward hydraulic fracturing between freshmen and seniors seem to support research showing that as education increases support of hydraulic fracturing decreases (Burger et al. 2015; Crowe et al. 2015). This is interesting because it suggests that even over a relatively small time period views of hydraulic fracturing could change. However, more research is needed to see what specifically changed views between freshmen and seniors. Although this research seems to suggest higher education is related to a less favorable view of hydraulic fracturing it does seem, at least presently, that the type of degree being achieved does not affect views of hydraulic fracturing.

Surprisingly, the results of this research found no significance between a participant's source of information on hydraulic fracturing and favorability towards hydraulic fracturing, which would have been expected according to previous research (Boudet et al. 2014; Burger et al. 2015). Another surprising result was the lack of significance between a participant's knowledge of hydraulic fracturing and decreased favorability towards hydraulic fracturing. A relationship would have been expected between these two variables according to previous research (Burger et al. 2015; Choma et al. 2016). Results from this study support previous research that did not find any significant correlation between geographic location and views of hydraulic fracturing (Boudet et al. 2014; Jacquet 2012).

Although the state a participant grew up in did not affect favorability towards hydraulic fracturing it did affect their basic knowledge of hydraulic fracturing. This could be from a number of reasons. In particular, this result could have occurred because of the increased use of hydraulic fracturing techniques in areas of Pennsylvania where the Marcellus Shale is located and being actively drilled. However, further research will be needed to confirm this hypothesis or prove another hypothesis.

Although this research can be viewed through the fear of crime framework, it lacks an in-depth look at certain specific potential variables that could affect the perception of fear of crime regarding hydraulic fracturing. The present research looks at how knowing someone who works in the hydraulic fracturing industry increased favorability of hydraulic fracturing, which is a variable when looking at the fear of crime (Lupton and Tulloch 1999:521). However, this present research lacks several things that would benefit future research that frames hydraulic fracturing through the fear of crime framework. Specifically, future research would benefit by looking closely at how positive and negative personal experiences and knowledge of others' positive or negative experiences with the hydraulic fracturing industry affect how individuals perceive hydraulic fracturing. Future research would also conceivably benefit by looking at how likely an individual feels that they could be affected by hydraulic fracturing and how severe the consequences would be if they were affected. Then how those variables affect their perceptions of hydraulic fracturing in the fear of crime framework. Future research would benefit by taking a more in-depth theoretical look at how hydraulic fracturing relates to fear of crime.

This study demonstrates a modest start in looking at factors that affect how undergraduate students view hydraulic fracturing, but there are some limitations to this study. First, the present study is not a random sample of students from the school where the study was conducted. Future research should look to obtain a more random sampling of participants. Second, because of the lack of random sampling, this study may not contain a representative sample of students at the parent institution and future research should work to obtain a representative sample of students. Obtaining a representative sample in the future could potentially make future research more relatable to other institutions. Third, previous research has suggested that wording of the terms used in a questionnaire play a role in views of hydraulic fracturing (Boudet et al. 2014; Clarke et al. 2015; Sarge et al. 2015), and this study only used the term "hydraulic fracturing" in the questionnaire because it was believed to be the most neutral (as opposed to using the term "fracking"). Future studies would benefit from looking at how changing terms within a questionnaire affect undergraduate students' views of hydraulic fracturing.

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BIOGRAPHY

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EXPLORING PERCEIVED COLLABORATION BETWEEN CHILDREN’S ADVOCACY CENTERS AND RAPE CRISIS CENTERS IN PENNSYLVANIA

Kathryn Bonach and Dana Hysock Witham

ABSTRACT

Because of the shared mission to assist child victims of sexual abuse and their families, collaboration between Children’s Advocacy Centers (CACs) and Rape Crisis Centers (RCCs) is important to ensure that child-focused investigations occur, and that treatment is provided as part of a multi-system response to child maltreatment. The purpose of this mixed-methods study was to explore the perceived factors that contribute to and/or hinder successful collaboration between Pennsylvania CACs and RCCs. The quantitative portion used an adapted version of The Wilder Collaboration Factors Inventory (WCFI) to measure 20 factors associated with influencing collaborative success. The qualitative portion used semi-structured phone interviews to identify the specific challenges to and proposed recommendations for successful collaboration between Pennsylvania CACs and RCCs. The results indicate significant differences in how the CACs and RCCs perceive collaboration in 3 of the 20 factors measured by the WCFI and the follow-up phone interviews yielded 5 specific themes which supported the quantitative results. The results of this study can enhance the collaborative response between and improve the overall services provided by CACs and RCCs to child sexual abuse victims and their families.

KEYWORDS: Collaboration; Children’s Advocacy Centers; Rape Crisis Centers; Child Abuse; Child Sexual Abuse; Multidisciplinary Team Approach; Wilder Collaboration Factors Inventory

Children’s Advocacy Centers (CACs) were developed as a collaborative community response that recognized the need to integrate all aspects of various systems to provide services to child victims of child maltreatment. CACs were designed for victims of child sexual abuse and their non-offending family members to provide a comprehensive, culturally competent, multi-disciplinary response in a dedicated, child-friendly setting (National Children’s Alliance [NCA] 2017). There are over 900 CACs in over 25 countries in the world (National Children’s Advocacy Center [NCAC] 2015). Since the year 2000, NCA’s membership has grown by 193 percent; 15 states have 100 percent service coverage; and two-thirds of

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all counties in the United State have access to a CAC (NCA 2014). Children's Advocacy Centers are an integral venue for the child victim and family to begin healing and find hope to obtain justice.

In 2016, nationwide, CACs served 324,602 children; 215,594 were sexual abuse allegations and 221,584 received an onsite forensic interview while 7,000 received an offsite forensic interview (NCA 2016). These statistics demonstrate the significance in the number of children and families served and the importance of a collaborative response to child maltreatment, particularly for sexual assault child victims. In terms of the number of children receiving coordinated services in 2016: 79,894 received a medical exam/treatment; 81,632 received counseling therapy; 115,081 were referred to counseling therapy while 1,169,863 children received case management and coordination of services by a CAC (NCA 2016).

The fourth of ten national standards for accreditation by the National Children's Alliance is Victim Support and Advocacy (NCA 2017). CAC standards allow for victim advocacy services to be provided either at the CAC or through coordination with other providers such as a state's coalition against rape contractor (Rape Crisis Centers) during the investigation and any subsequent legal proceedings.

Rape Crisis Centers (RCCs) developed in the 1970s as part of a grassroots feminist movement to meet the needs of women who had been sexually assaulted (Srdanovic 2012). Early RCCs did not collaborate with other institutions such as the criminal justice or legal systems because of pragmatic concerns about rape victims being revictimized by these systems; however, as RCCs shifted from grassroots organizations and began to accept money from state, government, and law enforcement agencies, they increased the amount of collaboration they had with these entities because doing so was required by funders (Maier 2004). Currently, there are 1,265 RCCs in the United States, and the majority of RCCs are affiliated with other organizations such as domestic violence shelters or hospitals (Srdanovic 2012). RCCs provide valuable assistance to survivors of sexual assault and rape including individual and group counseling, hospital accompaniment, legal advocacy, and community education.

SHARED MISSION AND LACK OF EMPIRICAL RESEARCH ON COLLABORATION

Because of the shared mission to assist child victims of sexual abuse and their families, collaboration between Children's Advocacy Centers (CACs) and Rape Crisis Centers (RCCs) is important. Successful collaboration helps ensure that child-focused investigations occur, and that evaluation and treatment are provided as part of a multi-system response to child maltreatment. Improving our awareness of the factors that contribute to or hinder successful collaboration between these two service providers will inform centers about enhancing interagency relationships. Currently, there is a lack of empirical research pertaining to successful collaboration between CACs and RCCs despite there being over 900 CACs that coordinate with RCCs to provide services. This research project is grounded in the belief that collaboration between CACs and RCCs is critical to child victims of sexual assault as well as to their families and communities. Equally important is that every victim of every age deserves a coordinated, multi-system response following a sexual assault to minimize emotional trauma and to reduce the likelihood of multiple accounts of the assault being asked and recorded by multiple professionals.

While there may be multiple systems intervening, it is important to note that not all of the systems will obtain or even need the same information because they each have a specific purpose. For example, victim needs and prosecution needs are not always one and the same. Many children who are sexually abused do not present with enough evidence for a case to move on to the court system and many children and families continue to need support long after a case has been prosecuted. Therefore, victims must be able to rely on the collaboration of the parties involved in the multi-system response not only at the outset of the investigation, but also for referral to expertise that will continue to meet their needs into the future. Successful collaboration depends on many factors; however, we know that to sustain successful partnerships, the collaborators must not necessarily share the same goals, but complementary goals or missions (Gazley 2017).

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

To better serve child sexual assault victims and their families, the purpose of this study was to explore the factors that contribute to and/or hinder successful collaboration as perceived between CACs and RCCs in Pennsylvania. The research project is based on a collaborative model and multidisciplinary approach in responding to child sexual abuse. The study was conducted in Pennsylvania where in one fiscal year, approximately 9,525 children (8,085 sexual abuse allegations) were served by CACs (NCA 2013). Around the same time, RCCs in Pennsylvania provided services to 8,213 new child victims and ongoing support and advocacy to 19,736 children (Pennsylvania Coalition Against Rape [PCAR] 2012). The numbers speak to the need for continued support and advocacy for children and families from a sexual assault specific provider.

Collaboration in this study is defined as “a mutually beneficial and well-defined relationship entered into by two or more organizations to achieve a common goal” (Mattessich, Murray-Close, and Monsey 2001:4). Mattessich et al. (2001) provide the most rigorous and thorough attempt at bringing together the empirical literature on collaboration and developing the Wilder Collaboration Factors Inventory (WCFI) (Perrault, McClelland, Austin, and Sieppert 2011). The WCFI is used with permission in this study to measure the 20 factors associated with influencing collaborative success that are grouped into 6 categories (Mattessich et al. 2001). The WCFI has been used in a variety of studies on collaboration with various organizations including human service, community organizations, corporations, and government agencies (for example, Collins-Carmargo, Sullivan, Murphy, and Atkins 2015; DeRose, Beatty, and Jackson 2004; Perrault et al. 2011; Ziff, Willard, Harper, Bangi, Johnson, and Ellen 2010); however, this study is the first time the WCFI has been used between CACs and RCCs intervening in child sexual abuse cases. One of the advantages of the WCFI is that it can be used at any point in the collaborative process.

To explore the factors that contribute to and/or hinder successful collaboration between CACs and RCCs in Pennsylvania, this study used a mixed methods approach. Both quantitative and qualitative data were collected through an email survey and follow-up phone interview with the agency designated point person (typically the Executive Director or Program Manager) for study eligible CACs and RCCs. There were two researchers for the study, one focused solely on the quantitative aspect of the study and the other focused solely on the qualitative part of the study. The results of this study can enhance the collaborative response by CACs and RCCs to better serve child abuse victims and their families as well as

to facilitate research, education, and training to improve overall services to child sexual abuse victims and their families.

METHOD

Participants

Selected subjects included all accredited and associate CACs in Pennsylvania and all their affiliated RCCs when the study was conducted. A total of 51 organizations were included, consisting of 14 accredited CACs, 9 associate CACs, and 28 RCCs. Some CACs collaborated with more than one RCC.

One email address contact was used for each organization selected to participate in this study. The identified point person was typically the Executive Director or Program Manager for the National Children's Alliance Accredited or Associate member CACs and state contracted RCCs in Pennsylvania that provide victim support and advocacy services to one (or more) CAC.

Procedure

The survey invitation letters were sent via email with embedded links to the web administered survey and secured internet data collection mechanism, "*Qualtrics*" which was available at an applied research lab at a university. The initial email contained information about how they were selected, the purpose of the research, voluntary participation, confidentiality, informed consent information, and that results would be confidential and aggregated data with no identifying information as to the identity of the participant or specific agency. The email blasts were sent to the CACs and RCCs via the research project liaisons (one for the CACs and one for the RCCs) to each service entity. The identified professional point person of each center was invited to participate and complete the survey contained in the email via a website link.

A second email with a reminder about the survey completion was sent later to the entire original list of sample criteria eligible liaisons. Since the research project liaisons had an affiliation with CACs and RCCs, they did not have access to any raw data nor did they know who participated and did or did not complete the survey.

At the end of the survey, participants were asked if they were willing to participate in a follow-up phone interview with one researcher from the study that would last about 20 to 30 minutes. There was space for the respondent to list his/her name, email, and telephone number. Only participants who completed that section of the survey were contacted for a follow-up phone interview by the qualitative researcher for the study. There were no other attempts to prompt a follow-up phone interview. It is important to note that the quantitative researcher only had access to the survey data during collection and analysis, while the qualitative researcher only had access to the interview data during collection and analysis.

The Wilder Collaboration Factors Inventory

Mattessich and Monsey (1992), using meta-analysis, developed the theoretical foundation for the development of the Wilder Collaboration Factors Inventory (WCFI) using 133 collaboration studies to

determine 19 factors associated with successful collaboration among organizations. In 2000, the Wilder Foundation independently initiated a meta-analysis of collaboration and research on collaboration studies after the Mattessich and Monsey project which resulted in Mattessich et al. (2001) adding an additional factor to the original 19 (Townsend and Shelley 2008).

Townsend and Shelley found that a factor analysis (principal components analysis with varimax rotation on the 40 items) supported the constructs in the Wilder instrument as “key elements of successful collaboration” (2008:101) and revealed a statistically significant theoretical structure validating the instrument for assessing collaboration. The two criteria used to determine the number of factors to rotate were the a priori hypothesis that the WCFI was a unidimensional measure and interpretation of the factor analysis solution.

Reliability measures for 17 of the 20 factors were established by DeRose et al. (2004) and added further support of the structure of the instrument as a suitable measure of collaborative efforts. Greater Cronbach alphas among the specific items in each factor indicate internal consistency and that the items are measuring the same construct and ultimately, demonstrate reliability (Tabachnick and Fidell 2013). With the WCFI, greater reliability or Cronbach alphas among the items in each factor indicate that the items in the factor are measuring the same construct and for this study, ultimately, collaboration. DeRose et al. (2004) specifically established reliability measures for 17 of the 20 factors ranging from .50 to .93 while the remaining 3 factors had a single item which prohibits a reliability analysis.

Further research by Townsend and Shelley (2008), to specifically validate the WCFI as an instrument for assessing collaboration, revealed Cronbach alphas that closely aligned with those in the DeRose et al. (2004) study. Townsend and Shelley’s study provided Cronbach alphas for 14 of the 20 Wilder factors with more than a single item that were between .66 and .86 indicating questionably acceptable to good internal consistency. While 3 of the 14 Wilder factors with more than a single item had lower reliability measures (cross-section of members, unique purpose, and sufficient resources), in the Townsend and Shelley study, they report that deeper examination of the data showed key relationships between the items defining these factors. The remaining 3 Wilder factors each only included a single item and could not be assessed.

Cronbach’s alpha reliability coefficient normally ranges between 0.00 and 1.00. The closer the alpha coefficient is to 1.00, the greater the internal consistency of the items in the scale. George and Mallery (2003) provide the following rules for interpreting the alpha coefficient: $\alpha \geq 0.9$ Excellent; $\alpha \geq 0.8$ Good; $\alpha \geq 0.7$ Acceptable; $\alpha \geq 0.6$ Questionable; $\alpha \geq 0.5$ Poor; and $\alpha < 0.5$ Unacceptable (231). Increasing the value of alpha depends in part, on the number of items in the scale and an alpha of 0.8 is a sensible goal (George and Mallery 2003).

Reliability for the 40-item WCFI, has been relatively consistent in multiple studies (for examples see DeRose et al. 2004; Townsend and Shelley 2008; and Ziff et al. 2010). As such, it is one reason that the WCFI is a respected and widely-used measure of the elements that influence effective collaboration. The WCFI has been employed in studying a variety of workforce and/or community partnerships (for examples see Collins-Carmargo et al. 2015; Czajkowski 2006; Mason 2006; Perrault et al. 2011; Schmaltz 2010; and Ziff et al. 2010). The WCFI contains 40 Likert scale close-ended questions (Mattessich et al. 2001) regarding the professionals’ experiences with and perspectives about the collaboration. Each item

in the inventory is a statement with a five-point Likert scale consisting of strongly disagree (1), disagree (2), neutral (3), agree (4), strongly agree (5). To interpret the WCFI, a t-test can be used to look at significant differences between groups and/or mean scores between groups can be examined using a range between 4.0 and higher or 2.9 and lower. Mean scores of 4.0 or higher indicate strength and likely do not need special attention; mean scores between 3.0 and 3.9 are considered borderline and may need attention; and mean scores of 2.9 or lower indicate concern and require attention.

RESULTS

Quantitative Results

Thirty-nine (76 percent) of the 51 centers responded to the questionnaire. Of the 39 completed questionnaires, 22 were from CACs and 17 were from RCCs. Centers that had a participant responded to be non-profit (64 percent), urban located (44 percent), currently collaborating centers (85 percent) that had an operational agreement between the two centers when the CAC began, and that practiced a multidisciplinary team approach (85 percent).

Participants

The participant from the center completing the survey was typically the administrator of the agency (86 percent, N = 30), middle-aged (M = 47.2, SD = 12.36), female (94 percent, N = 34) and at the agency for about 8.5 years (M = 8.6, SD = 8.14).

Measures

The WCFI was selected for this study to assess perceptions of collaboration between the CACs and RCCs because its development is clearly rooted in determining elements of successful collaboration in the research literature; it is relatively simple to use; and it is designed as an exploratory problem-solving tool that can be used at any point in the collaborative process. The researchers for this project adapted the WCFI by adding, with intentional common-sense logic, one additional Likert question to five specific factors (Factors 2, 4, 9, 13, and 18) and two questions to Factor 19.

The intent of the added item(s) was to capture more specific nuances of perceptions of effective collaboration between CACs and RCCs. One question was added to Factor 2—Collaborative group seen as legitimate leader in the community: “Others (in the community) who are not part of our collaboration have been supportive of our mission.” One question was added to Factor 4—Mutual respect, understanding, and trust: “People involved in our collaboration understand each other’s roles in this collaboration.” One question was added to Factor 9—Multiple layers of participation: “Each of the people in our collaborative group seeks input from their agency members as appropriate.” One question was added to Factor 13—Appropriate pace of development: “Our collaborative group has been able to keep up with the ongoing progress of the collaborative project.” One question was added to Factor 18—Unique purpose: “What we are trying to accomplish with this collaboration seems to be the same as the ideas of others.” And two questions were added to Factor 19—Sufficient funds, staff, materials, and time: “Our collaborative group has adequate ‘material resources’ to do what it wants to accomplish,” and “Our collaborative group has adequate ‘time’ to do what it wants to accomplish.” These additional questions

all had the same 5-point Likert scale response as the original 40 WCFI items from “strongly disagree” to “strongly agree.”

Cronbach alphas for each of the 20 Wilder factors (adapted to 47-items) were used to establish reliability for the instrument. Excluding the three one-item factors (Factor 6–Members see collaboration as in their self-interest; Factor 7–Ability to compromise; and Factor 20–Skilled leadership) the remaining factors had Cronbach alphas ranging from acceptable to excellent reliability, except for Factor 9–Multiple layers of participation and Factor 15–Established informal relationships and communication links which were questionable (see Table 1).

Table 1. Wilder Collaboration Factor Inventory Reliability Measures

Wilder Categories	Wilder Factors (number of items)	Scale reliability alpha	Mean Factor score
Environment	History of collaboration/cooperation in community (2)	.83	4.31
	Collaborative group seen as a legitimate leader in community (3)	.80	3.81
	Favorable political and social climate (2)	.78	4.14
Membership Characteristics	Mutual respect, understanding, trust (3)	.86	3.94
	Appropriate cross-section of members (2)	.83	4.19
	Members see collaboration as in their self-interest (1)	N/A	4.50
	Ability to compromise (1)	N/A	3.64
Process and Structure	Members share a stake in both process and outcome (3)	.83	3.81
	Multiple layers of participation (3)	.61	3.69
	Flexibility (2)	.89	3.86
	Development of clear roles and policy guidelines (2)	.79	3.92
	Adaptability (2)	.75	3.64
Communication	Appropriate pace of development (3)	.87	3.89
	Open and frequent communication (3)	.92	3.94
Purpose	Established informal relationships and communication links (2)	.66	3.92
	Concrete, attainable objectives (3)	.89	4.33
	Shared vision (2)	.78	4.28
Resources	Unique purpose (3)	.78	4.50
	Sufficient funds, staff, materials, and time (4)	.87	2.31
	Skilled leadership (1)	N/A	4.08

Note: (Number of items) in **bold** denotes factors with item(s) added

Cronbach alpha $\alpha \geq .9$ Excellent; $\alpha \geq .8$ Good; $\alpha \geq .7$ Acceptable; $\alpha \geq .6$ Questionable; $\alpha \geq .5$ Poor; and $\alpha < .5$ Unacceptable (George and Mallery 2003:231)

Factor 14–Open and frequent communication had a reliability alpha of .92. Nine of the 17 factors (Factor 1–History of collaboration or cooperation in the community; Factor 2–Collaborative groups seen as a legitimate leader in the community; Factor 4–Mutual respect, understanding, and trust; Factor 5–Appropriate cross section of members; Factor 8–Members share a stake in both process and outcome; Factor 10–Flexibility; Factor 13–Appropriate pace of development; Factor 16–Concrete attainable goals and objectives; and Factor 19–Sufficient funds, staff, materials, and time) had reliability alphas between .80 and .89.

Three of the 17 factors (Factor 3–Favorable political and social climate; Factor 17–Shared vision; and Factor 18–Unique purpose) had reliability alphas of .78; Factor 11–Development of clear roles and policy guidelines had an alpha of .79, while Factor 12–Adaptability had an alpha of .75. The two lowest alphas were for Factor 9–Multiple layers of participation and Factor 15–Established informal relationships and communication links of .61 and .66.

One final Likert-scale question was used *following* the 47-item WCFI questionnaire solely as a crude validity check to see if the results of this one question validated the questionnaire items intended to measure collaboration. That one question was “Our CAC and RCC collaborate successfully.” Of the 36 respondents that answered the question, 75 percent (N = 27) indicated they “strongly agreed” (N = 13) or “agreed”(N = 14) that their CAC and RCC collaborated successfully, while 5.6 percent (N = 2) indicated “neutral,” and 16.7 percent either “disagreed” or “strongly disagreed” (N = 4; N = 2, respectively) demonstrating a fairly strong crude validity check that the WCFI (adapted) was capturing information about collaboration as perceived by the two entities.

Interpreting Wilder Collaboration Factors Inventory CAC/RCC Mean Scores

Analysis and interpretation of WCFI data is done by determining where the mean scores fall between ranges. According to the WCFI developers, Mattessich et al. (2001), mean scores of *4.0 or higher* show a strength and probably do not need special attention. Mean scores from *3.0 to 3.9* are borderline concerning and thus, should be discussed by the collaboration. Last, mean scores of *2.9 or lower* reveal a concern and should definitely be addressed by the collaboration. The mean scores for the CAC/RCCs on the WCFI are depicted in Table 2.

Table 2. CAC and RCC Mean Scores on WCFI (47-items)

Factor	CAC/RCC	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
1. History of collaboration	CAC	44	4.30	.553	.083
	RCC	34	4.09	.570	.098
2. Collab. group legit leader in community	CAC	66	4.02	.734	.090
	RCC	51	*3.78	.702	.098
3. Fav political & social climate	CAC	44	4.27	.624	.094
	RCC	34	*3.91	.712	.122
4. Mutual respect, understand, trust	CAC	66	4.06	.802	.099
	RCC	51	*3.94	1.085	.152
5. Appropriate cross section	CAC	44	4.14	.878	.132
	RCC	34	*3.65	1.252	.215
6. Members see collaboration in their self-interest	CAC	22	4.50	.512	.109
	RCC	17	4.41	.507	.123
7. Ability to compromise	CAC	22	*3.73	.827	.176
	RCC	17	*3.53	.943	.229
8. Members share process/outcome	CAC	66	4.06	.721	.089
	RCC	51	4.00	1.000	.140
9. Multi layers of participation	CAC	66	*3.79	.903	.111
	RCC	51	*3.55	.832	.117
10. Flexibility	CAC	44	*3.80	1.002	.151
	RCC	34	*3.74	1.024	.176
11. Dev of clear roles & policy guides	CAC	44	*3.93	.818	.123
	RCC	34	*3.65	1.041	.179
12. Adaptability	CAC	42	*3.90	.850	.131
	RCC	32	*3.56	.878	.155
13. Appropriate pace of development	CAC	63	*3.87	.833	.105
	RCC	48	*3.60	.939	.136
14. Open & freq communication	CAC	61	4.00	.931	.119
	RCC	48	*3.79	1.220	.176
15. Estab informal relationships & communication links	CAC	40	4.05	.959	.152
	RCC	32	*3.16	1.298	.229
16. Concrete attainable goals, objectives	CAC	60	4.17	.763	.098
	RCC	48	*3.81	1.179	.170
17. Shared vision	CAC	40	4.18	.712	.113
	RCC	32	*3.91	.995	.176
18. Unique purpose	CAC	60	4.63	.637	.082
	RCC	48	4.15	.799	.115
19. Sufficient funds, staff, materials, time	CAC	80	**2.54	1.211	.135
	RCC	64	**2.80	.946	.118
20. Skilled leadership	CAC	20	4.25	.967	.216
	RCC	16	*3.88	1.204	.301

Note: Statistically significant differences between CACs and RCCs at $p < .05$

Mean scores of 4.0 or higher show strength and likely do not need special attention; *Mean scores from 3.0 to 3.9 are borderline concerning and should be discussed by the collaboration; **Mean scores of 2.9 or lower reveal a concern

Both CACs and RCCs had 4.0 or higher on Factor 1—History of collaboration or cooperation in the community, Factor 6—Members see collaboration as in their self-interest, Factor 8—Members share a stake in both process and outcome, and Factor 18—Unique purpose.

For Factor 2—Collaborative group seen as a legitimate leader in the community, Factor 3—Favorable political and social climate, Factor 4—Mutual respect, understanding, and trust, Factor 5—Appropriate cross section of members, Factor 14—Open and frequent communication, Factor 15—Established informal relationships and communication links, Factor 16—Concrete attainable goals and objectives, Factor 17—Shared vision, and Factor 20—Skilled leadership, the CACs had a mean score of 4.0 or higher; however, RCCs had a mean score between 3.0 and 3.9 on those factors. CACs perceive these

factors of collaboration more positively while RCCs perceive these factors as borderline concerning and in need of discussion.

For Factor 7–Ability to compromise, Factor 9 Multiple layers of participation, Factor 10–Flexibility, Factor 11–Development of clear roles and policy guidelines, Factor 12–Adaptability, and Factor 13–Appropriate pace of development, both CACs and RCCs had a mean score *between 3.0 and 3.9* which are borderline concerning indicating that these particular factors should be discussed by the collaboration.

Mean scores of *2.9 or lower* reveal a concern and should definitely be addressed by the collaboration. Both CACs and RCCs are in agreement that Factor 19–Sufficient funds, staff, materials, and time is a considerable concern. Of note, Factor 19 was the only factor of all 20 factors where the CACs had a lower mean score than RCCs.

Wilder Collaboration Factors Inventory Independent samples t-test

The t-tests for the mean scores for the CACs and RCCs indicated statistically significant differences between the two entities for three of the twenty factors. To meet t-test criteria, N had to be greater than 20 with independent samples. Factors 6, 7, and 20 did not meet the criteria for the t-test because N was less than 20. Only Factors 3 (Favorable political and social climate), 15 (Established informal relationships and communication links), and 18 (Unique purpose) emerged as statistically significant at $p < .05$ two-tailed t-test; CI = .95.

For Factor 3, the CACs reported significantly higher levels of “Favorable political and social climate” ($M = 4.27$, $SD .62$) than the RCCs ($M = 3.91$, $SD .71$), $t(2.38) = 76$, $p = .02$. Specific statements within each significant factor provided insight into the areas within each factor that were important. Factor 3–Favorable political and social climate statement items included:

1. The political and social climate seems to be “right” for starting a collaborative project like this one.
2. The time is right for this collaborative project.

For Factor 15, the CACs reported significantly higher levels of “Established informal relationships and communication links” ($M = 4.05$, $SD .96$) than the RCCs ($M = 3.16$, $SD 1.30$), $t(3.35) = 70$, $p = .001$. Factor 15–Established informal relationships and communication links statement items included:

1. Communication among the people in this collaborative group happens both at the formal meetings and in informal ways.
2. I personally have informal conversations about individual child abuse cases with others who are involved in this collaborative group.

There was also a significant difference for Factor 18, with the CACs reporting higher levels of “Unique purpose” ($M = 4.63$, $SD .64$) than the RCCs ($M = 4.15$, $SD .80$), $t(3.53) = 106$, $p = .001$. The statement items included in Factor 18–Unique purpose were:

1. What we are trying to accomplish with our collaborative project would be difficult for any single organization to accomplish by itself.
2. No other organization in the community is trying to do exactly what we are trying to do.
3. Our collaboration shares a unique common mission.

To sum, the quantitative results indicate that overall, with the exception of Factor 19 (Sufficient funds, staff, materials, and time), CACs hold more positive perceptions of collaboration than RCCs. Of the 20 factors that are measured by the WCFI, 3 (Favorable political and social climate; Established informal relationships and communication links; and Unique purpose) emerged as having statistically significant differences between the CACs and RCCs. Because this study is the first of its kind to examine the factors that influence successful collaboration between CACs and RCCs, the researchers endeavored to collect as much data as possible. Semi-structured qualitative interviews were included in the research design to provide details and nuance to the quantitative findings.

QUALITATIVE RESULTS

Participants and Design

The research team was comprised of a quantitative and qualitative researcher. As a way to obtain different but complementary data on the same topic, a convergent parallel design was utilized for this research (Creswell and Plano Clark 2017). The quantitative data were collected first, and research participants were asked about their willingness to participate in follow-up phone interview at the conclusion of the survey. Twenty-one of the 39 survey participants (54 percent) participated in follow-up semi-structured phone interviews. Quantitative data collection began in October 2015, and participants who were interested in being interviewed were contacted in November. All of the qualitative interviews were conducted between December 2015 and April 2016 (13 interviews were done in December, 1 was done in January, 4 were done in February, and 3 were done in April). Interviews were conducted with 13 CAC professionals and 8 RCC professionals. All of the interviews were completed by the same researcher.

Interview length ranged between 12 and 42 minutes with an average length of 20.5 minutes. Given that this research was conducted statewide, interviews were conducted over the telephone. The interviewer reviewed the following information with the professional prior to the start of the interview: permission to audio tape or take notes, confidentiality, no foreseeable risks in participating, point persons for questions about the study or the participant's rights, and voluntary withdrawal from participation at any time without penalty.

All interviews were transcribed verbatim by an independent transcriptionist. Rather than focusing on line-by-line coding, transcripts were read numerous times and themes were identified. In keeping with the procedures for implementing a convergent parallel design, the qualitative researcher did not review any of the quantitative findings while completing her analyses. Once the preliminary qualitative analyses were complete, the research team discussed the findings from the surveys and interviews to see if and how they informed each other (Creswell and Plano Clark 2017).

The quantitative and qualitative results converge with each other and combine to create a better understanding of collaboration between CACs and RCCs. As discussed in the previous section, three factors (Factor 3—Favorable Political and Social Climate; Factor 15—Established Informal Relationships and Communication Links; and Factor 18—Unique Purpose) on the WCFI showed statistically significant differences between CACs and RCCs. Themes identified within the qualitative data illuminate some of the reasons why these differences emerged.

Theme 1: Competing for Funding and other Valuable Community Resources (Converges with Factor 3–Favorable political and social climate)

The first theme that emerged during the qualitative analysis centered around the two entities competing for funding and other valuable community resources. CACs and RCCs are seen as competing entities for specific sources of funding. Multiple interviewees from both CACs and RCCs discussed their concerns about Victims of Crime Act (VOCA)¹ funding in particular. As one RCC professional stated:

I am certain that [by the time we are able to apply for VOCA funding again] the CAC will be fully accredited and eligible to apply for VOCA funding from our county. Which would mean, unless there is a significant increase in that VOCA funding, then that is going to put our program against them in who gets VOCA funding and how much.

Additionally, CACs and RCCs compete for board members, volunteers, attention in the community, goodwill, etc. The qualitative findings show that, although the CACs perceive their ability to apply for VOCA funding as a positive, the RCCs are concerned that there is only so much funding available. Data from the qualitative interviews suggest that a “favorable political and social climate” exists for CACs because they are able to apply for funding that had previously been closed to them; however, RCCs are “borderline concerned” because their funding will most likely be decreased now that another entity can apply.

Some CACs and RCCs have responded to the challenge of competing for funding and other valuable community resources by co-writing grants together, sharing information about grant opportunities with the other agency, and doing joint advertising so the community sees the two agencies as collaborative partners. These CACs and RCCs tended to perceive themselves as being “successful collaborators.”

Theme 2: Overlap of Responsibilities/Duplication of Services (Converges with Factor 18–Unique focus)

The second theme that emerged from the qualitative data spoke directly to the statistically significant difference of “unique purpose” found in the quantitative results. RCCs have been providing accompaniment and advocacy services for 30+ years; they do not need it replaced by another agency/entity. Advocacy becomes a territorial issue for the RCCs and/or is perceived as the CACs not having a lot of respect for the RCCs and/or a solid understanding of the RCCs history and services.

We certainly have had that accompaniment, advocacy, and crisis intervention role for a long time. We don’t need it replaced by anybody else. We would like to work in collaboration and provide that piece and let the CAC do the pieces that they do. [I don’t think the CAC recognizes] what our role is... I’m not sure they understand our history and our services. (RCC professional)

¹ The Victims of Crime Act or VOCA was passed in 1984. VOCA (which is administered by the Office for Victims of Crime) provides financial assistance to victims of crime through state-based compensation programs, and indirectly through state grants that help finance state victim service organizations.

[I]f you're a CAC and you are completely duplicating [a service], I'm not talking about just filling a gap of what's missing in your county, but completely duplicating a service, well no wonder people are mad at you. (RCC professional)

Some interviewees see duplicating services as “wasting” money and resources; basically, do not do what is already being done by another agency—that money and those resources can be better spent elsewhere. Although “unique purpose” was seen as a strength by both the CACs and RCCs, the fact that the difference between the two entities reached statistical significance suggests that the RCCs perceive the CACs as encroaching on their “turf.”

Among the CACs and RCCs who perceived themselves as being successful collaborators, there was a clear delineation between the services that the CAC provides and the services that the RCC provides. One CAC professional stated, “We don't duplicate. We make sure we refer everyone [to the RCC].” Another CAC professional suggested that CACs should look around the community and see what is already there and build on it:

As a CAC person and watching CACs develop across the state, I really hope that they will sit down with their local RCC leader really early on in the process of their development [and ask] what services do you offer? This is what we are going to do at our CAC. Is there overlap? Can we partner?

Other “tips” that more successful collaborators offered on how to best interact with the “other” agency included having an orientation for staff from each agency that outlines what the goal of each agency is and what the roles of each agency are:

I think the directors need to be able to sit down and talk without being threatened by what each one does or is to do. I think the boards of each agency, or at least the board leadership, needs to be able to understand what the other agency does... I think it's also good if the staff people know each other. And it would really be good to have an orientation for CAC staff about what the RCC people do and for the RCC to see what the CAC people do. (CAC professional)

Theme 3: Open Communication and the Issue of Confidentiality (Converges with Factor 15—Establish informal relationships/communication links)

The third theme that emerged from the qualitative analysis centered around the issue of open communication. Some interviewees felt that open communication was the key to avoiding the duplication of services. As illustrated by the comments of the two CAC professionals quoted above in Theme 2, the directors and boards of each entity need to be able to communicate with one another without feeling “threatened” by what the other agency does, and CACs should initiate meetings with their local RCC early in the process of their development to find out what services they offer, and if there is overlap, find ways to partner instead.

Aside from being a strategy to avoid duplication of services, misperceptions and misunderstandings about client confidentiality was at the core of open communication. The standard of CACs is sharing information about cases. However, once a client (or the non-offending parent of the client) is referred to the RCC for counseling, the RCC does not share any information with the CAC beyond whether or not the client is receiving services (unless there is a release and/or they have the client's

permission). RCCs emphasized that sexual assault counselors have this confidentiality “privilege” in Pennsylvania. However, several interviewees felt that RCCs should not assume that in order to collaborate with the CAC and/or “sit at the table” with the Multi-disciplinary Investigative Team (MDIT) that they will have to disclose confidential client information. In reference to CACs and RCCs that have poor collaborative relationships, one RCC professional stated:

[RCCs are] assuming that if they’re part of this multidisciplinary team and collaborate with the CAC that they are going to have to disclose confidential client information, which is BS (bullsh*t). [Be]cause [RCCs] have never disclosed personal client information to sit around the table and discuss a case. So, I think it’s a challenge that RCCs are going to have to get over because it’s BS.

Both RCCs and CACs were aware that sexual assault counselors in Pennsylvania are mandated reporters and are required by law to breach confidentiality if a child disclosed any sort of abuse during a counseling session. CACs that spent time educating their staff about confidentiality and sexual assault counselor privilege did not experience confidentiality as an obstacle. They had trust in their partners with whom they contracted to provide services that they would be informed by the RCC if something was disclosed in the course of counseling that would mandate reporting:

[T]he standard of CACs is sharing information. And RCCs really were established and legally have a privilege in this state that’s unlike anything else... And so for our team members, we do a lot of education about why [RCCs] couldn’t share information that the client or the family member told them. (CAC professional)

The qualitative data suggest that establishing communication links went a long way in terms of fostering trust between CACs and RCCs.

Rather than seeing the issue of confidentiality as a challenge, some CACs saw it as beneficial for clients. CACs can inform clients who might have been resistant to the CAC/investigative process that they can talk with a counselor/advocate from the RCC and it is completely confidential. When CACs have their own counseling program (i.e., they provide advocacy services in-house), the client has no confidentiality. If an advocate is part of the MDIT, the perception/concern is that their loyalties are going to be divided between the team and the information that they may gather from the victim and the family. If the advocate does not respect the confidentiality of the family and identifies more as a team member, the perception is that they are not going to be effective as an advocate.

Theme 4: The State Level (Converges with Factor 3–Favorable political and social climate)

Another theme that emerged from the qualitative data provided some additional insight as to why CACs and RCCs had statistically significant different perceptions about a “favorable political and social climate.” Several respondents intimated that some of the issues with collaboration between CACs and RCCs are more “state level” issues that get reflected at the local level. It was clear from respondents that, in the past, not much had been done at the state level to model CACs and RCCs working together and that collaboration between CACs and RCCs seemed “forced.” One RCC professional suggested that “more conversations [and] more opportunities to figure out how to work together are required.” She also felt that some state-level policies might be beneficial to CACs and RCCs in figuring out how not to duplicate services in their communities. A CAC professional also wishes that the state coalition against rape would have been more strategic when the CAC concept was starting in Pennsylvania:

[T]he dialogue that is happening now; should have been happening back then [when CACs were starting in Pennsylvania]. I wish [the state coalition against rape] had a stronger voice and support for CACs, [and] the collaboration between RCCs and CACs.

Another CAC professional also stated that she never saw “[the state coalition against rape] reaching out to support the CAC movement.” She continues by adding that even though the state coalition against rape claims it is supportive of CACs:

[The state coalition against rape has not] really demonstrated [its support] by reaching out and being deliberate in speaking out for CACs or helping CACs to find funding. [The state coalition against rape has] been very focused on their own mission, yet if we want to do what’s best for children, CACs need to be supported.

Theme 5: Successful Collaboration and Positive Outcomes for the Community

The current study set out to examine the perceived factors that influence successful collaboration between CACs and RCCs. The major benefit of interviewing professionals was that the researchers were able to gather information beyond the perceived factors that influence successful collaboration. We asked interviewees what they viewed as the positive outcomes for the community when a successful collaboration exists. Knowing what the outcomes of a successful collaboration are may serve as incentives for the CACs and RCCs who do not perceive their collaboration as successful.

One positive outcome for the community when CACs and RCCs work together includes providing efficient and effective services for the victim in a way that the victim can easily access them. Additionally, CACs and RCCs believed that when the family felt supported, the child was going to fare much better. Successful collaborations also meant that offenders were held accountable and other victimizations were prevented. Overall, fewer clients fell through the cracks when CACs and RCCs worked together:

[Y]ou are going to have a more victim friendly and sensitive approach to child abuse. Because children are not going to be re-victimized by being interviewed many, many times. They’re going to have people who are properly trained to do both medical and forensic interviewing. So that’s going to benefit the family in a positive way. But then all of the support services, if they’re collaborative, [abused children and their families will] get all of those at the same time. (RCC professional)

I see a stronger community. I see a healthier community. I see a better educated community with more awareness and more buy in. When we’re collaborating and everybody has the same goal, it’s much easier to have people join your effort. (CAC professional)

Several interviewees described the “coordinated efforts” of multiple agencies (not just the CACs and RCCs) within the community coming together to form a larger task force on child abuse prevention—multiple agencies can do much more to educate the public than the CAC and RCC can do by themselves. As one RCC professional stated, “[Collaboration] benefits all of us.”

DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to explore the perceived factors that contribute to and/or hinder successful collaboration between CACs and RCCs to better serve child sexual assault victims and their families in a collaborative manner. The findings from this study suggest that overall, with the exception of Factor 19 (Sufficient funds, staff, materials, and time), the CACs had higher mean scores on the WCFI than the RCCs indicating that CACs perceived the factors of effective collaboration as stronger with the RCCs than the RCCs perceived them with the CACs. This finding is not surprising. From their inception, CACs have operated under a team model—multiple agencies (including law enforcement, child protection, victim advocacy, and others) come together to serve child victims of abuse/neglect/maltreatment and their families. However, with regard to Factor 18 (Unique purpose), although a mean score of 4.0 or higher indicated a “strength” and not an issue that needed to be addressed by the collaboration, the qualitative data suggests that “territorial” issues and competition for scarce community resources and funding hinder successful collaboration between CACs and RCCs. RCCs have a long history of providing advocacy and crisis intervention services and are clear in their mission. When CACs do not refer clients to the RCC, they are duplicating services that are already provided by RCCs. It becomes a territorial issue as RCCs perceive this as a lack of respect for or understanding of the RCC on the part of the CAC. CACs and RCCs that perceived their collaborations as successful believed that open communication between CAC and RCC leaders at the outset of the collaboration was the key to avoiding the duplication of services.

At the time that the study was being conducted, important changes were being implemented in terms of which services could be covered through/funded under Victims of Crime Act (VOCA) dollars. The NCA advocated for changes that would allow VOCA funding to pay for an expanded list of CAC services (e.g., forensic interviews, forensic medical exams, mental health counseling, case management, etc.) (NCA N.d.). Given these significant changes in funding, it is not surprising that a significant difference was found between CACs and RCCs on Factor 3 (Favorable political and social climate). CACs viewed this factor as a “strength” (mean score of 4.0 or higher), whereas the RCCs viewed this factor as “borderline concerning” (mean score of 3.0 to 3.9). Several of the RCC professionals expressed concern that, unless there was a significant increase in VOCA funding (which they thought was unlikely); their agency would be competing with the CAC for the same funding stream in the very near future. CACs and RCCs that perceived their collaboration as successful responded to these changes by co-writing grants together and sharing information about grant opportunities with one another.

The qualitative data provided some nuance as to why a significant difference between CACs and RCCs was found for Factor 15 (Established informal relationships and communication links). CACs viewed this factor as a “strength” (mean score of 4.0 or higher), whereas the RCCs viewed this factor as “borderline concerning” (mean score of 3.0 to 3.9). This difference seems to rest on the issue of confidentiality. With few exceptions,² sexual assault counselors have a confidentiality “privilege” which seems at odds with the CAC standard of sharing information about clients. For CACs and RCCs, there seems to be some confusion about what and how much personal client information must be disclosed by the RCC in order for them to have a “seat at the table” as a member of the MDIT team. Collaborators who took the time to educate their staff about confidentiality did not experience confidentiality as an obstacle,

² Some exceptions to confidentiality include mandatory reporting, duty to warn/duty to protect, and court order/subpoena.

and embraced the notion that clients could receive confidential services at the RCC and saw it as a way to build trust with their clients.

Finally, professionals from both CACs and RCCs recognized the many positive outcomes that are beneficial to their communities when successful collaboration among their two agencies exists. They believed that their communities were healthier and more aware of the issues surrounding child victims of abuse/neglect/maltreatment and their families. Successful collaboration was also viewed as a mechanism for preventing additional victimizations because professionals believed that more offenders would be held accountable. Overall, successful collaboration between CACs and RCCs meant providing services to clients that were easily accessible, and in doing so, fewer clients would “fall through the cracks.”

Limitations

This study was conducted in Pennsylvania and may not be representative of the relationship between CACs and RCCs in other states across the nation. Furthermore, not all participants were willing to participate in the quantitative and/or qualitative study, so it is possible that because of self-selection to participate, some valuable information may not be represented or accurately represented.

CONCLUSIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS, AND DIRECTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

The overall goal of this study was to explore the perceived factors that contribute to and/or hinder successful collaboration between Pennsylvania CACs and RCCs. Knowing which factors are perceived as “strengths” or “concerns” by each entity can enhance the collaborative response between and improve the overall services provided by the CACs and RCCs to child sexual abuse victims and their families. The researchers have made the findings from this study accessible to the entities (CACs and RCCs) that would directly benefit from them in several ways. First, the researchers provided a summary of the study’s findings to regional leaders. Second, the findings from this study, along with several models of “successful” collaboration that exist within Pennsylvania, were presented at a national leadership conference in 2015 (the models of successful collaboration were discussed at the conference by the two project liaisons). Additionally, the researchers are available to serve as “collaboration consultants” to CACs and RCCs (as well as other MDIT members) that are interested in further exploring the collaborative process between and among the agencies with which they partner.

Based on the quantitative and qualitative findings from this research, several practical recommendations are offered which might help to foster more effective collaboration between CACs and RCCs. First, the researchers believe it is imperative that collaboration between CACs and RCCs becomes a priority at the state-/regional-level. State-level and regional directors need to come together to have an open and honest discussion about what successful collaboration looks like and what the benefits of community partnerships are. Because both CACs and RCCs viewed Factor 19 (Sufficient funds, staff, materials, and time) as real concerns, securing funding and other valuable resources within the community in such a way that benefits both entities may be a key topic of discussion between state-level and regional directors. Second, local CAC and RCC directors/board leadership should meet with each other to facilitate conversations so that the entities understand each others’ history and roles in the collaborative process. During these conversations, clear expectations about referrals, mandated reporting, and confidentiality should be discussed. Finally, staff who work at CACs and RCCs attend multiple conferences/trainings per year. The researchers believe that at least one of these

conferences/trainings should be a cross-agency conference/training where information that is pertinent to both CACs as well as RCCs is presented (this conference/training could be organized at the state-/regional-level and would partially fulfill the first recommendation discussed above). The researchers recommend that at least one of the opening plenary sessions (which all participants would attend) should be on the topic of collaboration and the perceived factors that contribute to and/or hinder successful collaboration. Plenary session organizers/panelists can utilize the factors identified on the WCFI as discussion points around which to facilitate dialogue among conference/training participants since the WCFI garners information that groups can use as a starting point for discussion anytime, before, during, or after collaboration initiatives.

In conclusion, the need for a shared mission for sexually abused children is concrete by virtue of looking at national statistics. No one agency can or should be the sole provider of services for victims of child sexual abuse. There are many necessary team members that comprise the intervention and treatment of the children and families. Collaboration among those entities cannot be disguised as a simple mandate in an operational agreement. Collaboration takes open communication, feedback, and a shared mission that includes respect for each entity's roles, responsibilities, and resources. Future emphasis on collaboration is necessary to address the concerns of CACs and RCCs.

Future research should explore collaboration between and among all entities that serve as members of Multi-disciplinary Investigative Teams (MDIT) (i.e., law enforcement, child protective services, prosecution, mental health, medical, etc.) and this research should be conducted at both the state and national levels (the researchers of this present study utilized similar methods employed here and replicated the research on collaboration between CACs and RCCs on a national level). Also, to better understand the collaborative process which is not static, a longitudinal study of collaboration between and among all entities that serve a Children's Advocacy Center to tease out how the perceptions of collaboration may change over time should be considered. Doing so may promote necessary discussion regarding collaboration and the implementation of successful mechanisms of the collaborative process that can serve to strengthen the unified mission in responding to child maltreatment.

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THE DOUBLE VIOLENCE OF INEQUALITY: PRECARITY, INDIVIDUALISM, AND WHITE WORKING-CLASS AMERICANS

Lawrence M. Eppard, Dan Schubert, and Henry A. Giroux

ABSTRACT

This study explores the popularity of individualism among White working-class Americans in light of the structural forces that have negatively impacted their lives in recent years. Findings are based on data from semi-structured interviews with 20 non-Hispanic White custodial workers from five Appalachian universities across three U.S. states: Pennsylvania, Virginia, and West Virginia. Participants were asked a variety of questions about the causes of poverty and economic inequality in the U.S. in general, as well as the causes of their own personal fortunes. Data were analyzed utilizing grounded theory methods. Participants were found to be highly individualistic both in explaining poverty and economic inequality in the U.S. in general, as well as in explaining their own lives. Our results suggest that individualism remains popular among White working-class Americans. We argue that growing inequality is experienced as “double violence” by working-class Whites, both as structural violence and symbolic violence. We discuss the challenges this poses for tackling persistent poverty and growing economic inequality in contemporary American society.

KEYWORDS: Individualism; Stratification Beliefs; White Working Class; Poverty; Inequality; Welfare; Symbolic Violence; Structural Violence

Increasing attention has been paid to the structural violence (Galtung 1969) experienced by the White¹ working class in the U.S. in recent years. This attention has centered on the ways in which structural transformations in the American economy over the past few decades have impacted their lives, as well as their reactions to these changes. Many live in regions that have been negatively impacted by the “trauma of a simultaneous economic, social, and political collapse” (Gest 2016:10). Today’s economy demands more educational attainment and different types of skills than were expected of workers in

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¹ Throughout the article we use “non-Hispanic White” and “White” interchangeably for ease of reading. Here as elsewhere we mean “non-Hispanic White.”

previous generations, a shift which has left many working-class Whites behind. White working-class incomes and benefits have declined in recent decades, and their economic insecurity has increased (Luhby 2016; Draught 2018). As Lamont notes, “their living standards are in long-term and uninterrupted decline,” and as a result “the ideal of social success may appear increasingly unreachable to them” (2000:2).

Related to the financial impacts, there has been significant social fallout from their growing economic insecurity. White working-class Americans now come of age at a time when traditional markers of transition into adulthood—leaving home, attending college, becoming financially independent, and marrying and starting a family—have been delayed, postponed, cancelled, and/or remade (Silva 2013). A number of indicators of success and well-being are under threat, including labor force participation, marriage and divorce rates, social mobility, health and longevity, community engagement, and political participation (Lamont 2000; Silva 2013; Cherlin 2014; Case and Deaton 2015 & 2017; Chen 2016; The Economist 2017; Graham 2017; Williams 2017).

A few examples help to underscore this group’s lost ground. Since the mid-1990s, the average income of working-class White men has dropped by 9 percent (Luhby 2016). The percentage of White men aged 35 to 45 with a high school degree/GED or less who were unemployed or outside of the labor force rose from 15 percent in 1990 to 24 percent in 2016. Over that same time period, the percentage of these men reporting working 48 or more weeks the previous year fell from 73 percent to 69 percent. In 1990, 74 percent of Whites aged 35 to 45 with a high school degree/GED or less were married, but only 53 percent in 2016. Over that same time period, the percentage from this group experiencing economic precarity (incomes below the 125 percent poverty threshold) rose from 13 percent to 21 percent (Ruggles et al. 2018).² In addition, a recent study by Case and Deaton found increasing midlife mortality from the late 1990s to today for working-class Whites, due in part to increases in “deaths of despair,” such as those caused by drugs, alcohol, or suicide. The authors found that the mortality rate of middle-aged working-class Whites, which was approximately 30 percent lower than that of all middle-aged African Americans in 1999, increased to approximately 30 percent higher by 2015 (Case and Deaton 2015 & 2017).

Our research focuses on the White working class not because they have been the group most disadvantaged by growing economic inequality. On the contrary, non-White working-class Americans have fared worse on a number of indicators (in some cases much worse), as have the poor. Our interest stems from the fact that this group, unlike the poor and African Americans, has historically resisted structural explanations of economic disadvantage, instead preferring individualistic ones (Kluegel and Smith 1986; Lamont 2000; Silva 2013; Hunt and Bullock 2016; Williams 2017). This naturally led to the research question: In the face of their own growing insecurity, have their stratification beliefs become more structuralist? Have they come to reject dominant individualistic beliefs, which place the blame for their growing economic insecurity squarely on working-class Whites themselves? Or have they experienced this growing insecurity as “double violence,” where the symbolic violence (Bourdieu and Passeron 1990) of dominant culture hinders their ability to recognize the structural violence (Galtung 1969) of forces like globalization, deindustrialization, automation, and neoliberalism? To help answer this question, we developed this exploratory study.

² Those defined as “White” in this analysis are non-Hispanic White.

AMERICAN STRATIFICATION BELIEFS

Scholars who study stratification beliefs examine “what people believe about who gets what and why” (Kluegel and Smith 1981:30). These beliefs consist of “information (veridical or non-veridical) about a phenomenon that an individual uses as a basis both for inferring other information and for action” (Kluegel and Smith 1981:30). Previous research reveals that Americans espouse a range of stratification beliefs to explain poverty and economic inequality in the U.S. Some beliefs are individualistic, holding individuals personally responsible for their social position (based on their work ethic and choices). Some beliefs are structuralist, blaming large-scale economic and/or political forces (such as the availability of living-wage jobs or the generosity of social policies). Americans also espouse cultural beliefs (which cite values acquired through socialization) as well as fatalistic beliefs (which cite non-structural factors outside of the control of individuals, such as luck) (Hunt and Bullock 2016). While Americans utilize a mixture of individualistic, structuralist, cultural, and fatalistic beliefs to explain poverty and economic inequality, the weight of the evidence—including hundreds of survey items and interview questions from numerous studies across a half century—confirms that individualistic beliefs tend to be the most popular (Feagin 1972; Huber and Form 1973; Kluegel and Smith 1986; Ladd 1994; Lipset 1996; Chafel 1997; Alesina and Glaeser 2004; Economic Mobility Project 2007; Hanson and Zogby 2010; Henrich et al. 2010; Pew Research Center 2012, 2014, & 2016; Hunt and Bullock 2016; ISSP 2018). Indeed, in her review of the major nationwide studies of American stratification beliefs conducted since the late 1960s, Chafel found that “an ideology of individualism prevailed in American society” (1997:445). This ideology (1) views the U.S. as the land of opportunity, (2) holds individuals responsible for their social position, (3) believes inequality is necessary to motivate achievement, and (4) views the American system as equitable and fair (Chafel 1997:445).

Two seminal statements on American stratification beliefs came from Feagin (1972) and Kluegel and Smith (1986). In Feagin’s 1969 nationwide survey, he found that 53 percent of Americans gave high importance to individualistic factors in explaining poverty, compared to only 22 percent for structural factors (1972:104). Most held either a skeptical or negative view of welfare recipients. An overwhelming majority (84 percent) agreed that too many people receive welfare who should be working. There was deep skepticism about the neediness of welfare recipients, as 71 percent agreed with the notion that many people getting welfare are not honest about their need. A majority (61 percent) questioned the fertility decisions of female welfare recipients, agreeing that many have “illegitimate” children in order to increase their welfare benefits (Feagin 1972:107). In addition to these findings, Feagin demonstrated that high scores on his antiwelfare index were strongly correlated with high scores on his individualistic-factors index (1972:108). Based on his data, Feagin argued that “an individualistic, blame-the-poor view of poverty is firmly entrenched in the American value system” (1972:103), as a majority of Americans held the poor responsible for their own poverty and were correspondingly reluctant to support new social welfare programs (1972:101).

Kluegel and Smith came to similar conclusions based on their subsequent 1980 nationwide survey, finding that adherence to the dominant ideology was widespread across all of the social groups they examined (1986:289). The authors found that most Americans believed that, in general, economic inequality was fair, because opportunities for economic advancement were widely available to all, and social positions largely reflected individual effort and talent. The most popular explanations (among 12

possible explanations) for American poverty were individualistic ones which personally blamed poor individuals themselves for their lack of thrift, lack of effort, and lack of ability³ (Kluegel and Smith 1986:79). A large majority agreed (92 percent) that they personally had an average (54 percent) or better than average (38 percent) chance to get ahead compared to the average American (Kluegel and Smith 1986:47). A strong majority (70 percent) agreed that most Americans had a fair opportunity to make the most of themselves in life without anything holding them back, and 72 percent agreed that they themselves had the same fair opportunity (Kluegel and Smith 1986:44, 47). Most also agreed (70 percent) that the U.S. was the land of opportunity where everybody who worked hard could get ahead (Kluegel and Smith 1986:44). A majority (66 percent) even said that poor children had an equal (47 percent) or better (19 percent) chance of getting ahead compared to the average American (Kluegel and Smith 1986:49). Like Feagin, the authors found significant skepticism about welfare and welfare recipients and important correlations between stratification beliefs and welfare attitudes. Eighty-one percent agreed the government was spending too much on welfare, 77 percent said that most welfare recipients were not honest about their need, and 69 percent disagreed that most welfare recipients tried to find jobs to support themselves (Kluegel and Smith 1986:153). The authors found a very strong negative correlation (-.77) between inegalitarian beliefs and welfare support, a moderately strong positive correlation (.47) between a structural view of poverty and welfare support, and a moderately strong negative correlation (-.39) between an individualistic view of poverty and welfare support (Kluegel and Smith 1986:160).

A variety of subsequent studies, using both similar and different research designs, have largely confirmed the prioritization of individualistic beliefs over non-individualistic ones in American culture (Ladd 1994; Lipset 1996; Chafel 1997; Alesina and Glaeser 2004; Economic Mobility Project 2007; Hanson and Zogby 2010; Henrich et al. 2010; Pew Research Center 2012, 2014, & 2016; Hunt and Bullock 2016; ISSP 2018). This does not mean other beliefs are absent. Most Americans will utilize a range of beliefs, including structuralist, cultural, and fatalistic ones, depending upon the circumstances. Americans just tend to be more comfortable with individualistic explanations for social stratification and utilize them more frequently. Individualism might be thought of as the default “rule” which explains the overall system of social stratification in the U.S., with other beliefs accounting for the “exceptions.”

While individualism’s popularity does reach across most social groups, the degree of adherence varies by race and ethnicity, income, gender, educational attainment, personal experience, religiosity and religious denomination, political orientation, and place. Whites, men, political conservatives, and economically-secure individuals, for instance, tend to be more individualistic than non-Whites, women, liberals, and the less-economically-secure (Feagin 1972; Kluegel and Smith 1986; Zucker and Weiner 1993; Robinson 2009; Bullock 2013; Hunt and Bullock 2016; Pew Research Center 2017). Most social groups prefer individualistic explanations to non-individualistic ones, even if the degree of popularity varies, with two notable exceptions: African Americans and the poor. Research suggests that both groups tend to firmly support both individualistic and structuralist beliefs. These studies reveal that the common experience of discrimination among African Americans, and the harsh experiences of everyday life faced by the poor, significantly increase these groups’ awareness of unequal structural barriers, which leads to the development of stronger structuralist views. The rest of the American population, including the White

³ Survey items throughout this article are sometimes shortened and/or paraphrased for ease of reading. Please refer to the original source for the precise wording for each survey item.

working class, tends to prefer individualistic explanations of poverty and economic inequality over other explanations (Feagin 1972; Kluegel and Smith 1986; Hunt and Bullock 2016).

WHITE WORKING-CLASS BELIEFS

A number of scholars have shed light on the beliefs of White working-class Americans. Three particularly illuminating accounts include Michèle Lamont's *The Dignity of Working Men* (2000), Jennifer Silva's *Coming Up Short* (2013), and Joan Williams' *White Working Class* (2017).

Summarizing the privileging of individualistic stratification beliefs by the working-class Whites in her interviews, Lamont explains, "White [working class] workers do not privilege structural explanations...none provided a full-fledged structural explanation of poverty or of the precariousness of the condition of workers...they particularly resent that others receive help from the state" (2000:134). Silva's interviews with working-class Americans similarly revealed that they are staunchly individualistic and do not trust government or dominant institutions. They tend to "embrace self-sufficiency over solidarity and blame those who are unsuccessful in the labor market...the cultural logic of neoliberalism resonates at the deepest level of self" (Silva 2013:18).

As a general tendency, working-class Whites tend to place a heavy emphasis on hard work, personal responsibility, and traditional morality as means of struggling against the precarious nature of their lives and the social decay in their communities. They see these as the only means of survival and possible upward mobility for people in their social position. They believe that failure in these areas carries greater consequences for them compared to higher-class Americans. They attribute their own success to hard work and living moral, "settled" lives, while believing those who fail have laziness, immorality, and "hard living" to blame. They believe they have a future orientation and impulse control, unlike groups below them. Working-class Whites believe that, despite being lazy and immoral, the poor and African Americans receive government assistance unavailable to the working class. Because of this perceived illegitimate assistance, working-class Whites believe the poor and many African Americans are allowed to live easier lives than the White working class. They feel betrayed by labor markets, by the government, and even those people closest to them—they are on their own, with little trust in people or institutions (Lamont 2000; Silva 2013; Williams 2017).

METHODS

This study was designed to explore whether White working-class stratification beliefs might be changing in a more structuralist direction in this age of growing inequality, given how this group has suffered due to structural forces beyond their control in recent decades. In order to accomplish this, we recruited non-Hispanic White custodial workers currently employed at universities throughout Appalachia. We chose the custodial profession because of the high concentration of working-class workers (workers without a college degree and in precarious economic circumstances), and Appalachia because the region continues to lag behind much of the country on a variety of measures of well-being (ARC 2015). We were particularly interested in university custodians, who work in an environment where different groups (students, faculty members, staff members, and administrators) have such a wide range

of educational and socioeconomic backgrounds. We first identified which colleges and universities qualified as “Appalachian”⁴ and then contacted as many of their custodians as available contact information allowed. In some cases participants helped us identify other potential participants through snowball sampling. This was an incredibly time-consuming process. In many cases, contact information was either difficult to obtain or unavailable. Even after obtaining this information, initiating contact with workers often still proved elusive. Through our initial recruitment and additional snowball sampling, we ultimately confirmed participation with 20 custodial workers from five Appalachian universities across three states: Pennsylvania, Virginia, and West Virginia. A variety of definitions of the working class exist (see Gest 2016). Our sample meets a majority of these definitions based upon their combination of educational attainment, incomes, and occupation. Because of the small and non-random nature of our sample, we consider this an exploratory study.

We conducted interviews as soon as was convenient for the participants as not to lose their interest. These interviews took place mostly during the summer and fall of 2017. The interviews were semi-structured, allowing for both the exploration of our core research questions as well as emergent areas of discussion. Some of the interviews were in-person, while others were conducted over the phone due to geographic distance. Only one of the co-authors conducted the interviews. While the interviewer was non-Hispanic White like the participants, there were a variety of differences (gender, social class, occupation, political orientation, etc.) whose impact the interviewer attempted to minimize. We received very positive feedback from our participants regarding our rapport and believe these differences were minimized to the extent possible, although an open discussion of racial inequality was clearly hindered by social desirability concerns on the part of the participants.⁵ Some interviews wrapped up in 45 minutes, while others lasted over 90 minutes. We asked participants a variety of questions about the causes of poverty and economic inequality in the U.S. in general, as well as the causes of their own personal fortunes. As both an incentive for participation and a thank you for sharing their time and stories with us, participants were offered gift cards ranging from \$15 to \$25. All interviews were audio recorded and transcribed word-for-word, removing all identifying information in the process. We analyzed the data utilizing grounded theory methods similar to those articulated by Charmaz (2006). The resulting analysis is organized around clear and consistent themes that emerged from across the interviews.

To qualify for this study participants needed to be non-Hispanic White, 18 or older, and currently employed as a custodian at an Appalachian university. Additionally, our Institutional Review Board (IRB) protocol specified that they could not be knowingly pregnant, incarcerated, or impaired (cognitively or otherwise) in such a manner as to prohibit proper consent. Demographic variation beyond these qualifying characteristics depended solely on the non-random responses we received (see Table 1). We interviewed 15 women and 5 men. Participants’ ages varied widely, with 3 in their 20s, 4 in their 30s, 6 in their 40s, 4 in their 50s, and 3 in their 60s. None of our participants reported total household incomes

⁴ We used the boundaries defined by the Appalachian Regional Commission: https://www.arc.gov/appalachian_region/CountiesinAppalachia.asp. Universities qualified if they are located in a county within or directly bordering Appalachia.

⁵ Although we cannot be certain, we believe our participants hid many of their more conservative explanations of racial inequality from the interviewer due to social desirability bias. Not only was the interviewer a stranger to our participants, but most of our participants have worked in university settings long enough to pick up on the ideological dividing lines.

that qualified them as poor, while only 20 percent reported incomes in the middle-class—the rest, 80 percent, were struggling somewhere in-between. Slightly more than half (55 percent) have needed public assistance at some point in adulthood. Only one of our participants has earned a four-year college degree, while the rest have either a high school diploma (80 percent) or GED (15 percent). Eighty-percent of our participants are Republican-leaning in their voting behavior, and 20 percent are Democrat-leaning. Later we will discuss other important sample characteristics in more detail.

Table 1. Sample Characteristics

Participant Characteristic	Percentage of Participants
Age	
20–29	15%
30–39	20%
40–49	30%
50–59	20%
60–69	15%
Race/Ethnicity	
Non-Hispanic White	100%
Gender	
Female	75%
Male	25%
Educational attainment	
High school degree only	80%
GED only	15%
4-year college degree	5%
Adult total household income	
Working class	80%
Middle class	20%
Childhood social class	
Poor	45%
Working class	50%
Lower middle class	5%
Welfare need	
In childhood	60%
In adulthood	55%
Single-parent family sometime in childhood	50%
Voting behavior as adult	
Republican-leaning	80%
Democrat-leaning	20%
Voting behavior of family of origin	
Republican-leaning	80%
Democrat-leaning	20%

RESULTS

Agency and Opportunity

A majority of our participants believe that Americans are autonomous individuals with a high degree of agency, that American society is largely a meritocracy, and that the U.S. offers virtually unlimited opportunities (see Tables 2 and 3). When asked what percentage of most Americans’ lives is within their control versus what percentage is outside of their control, 90 percent of our participants answered 70 percent or more is within Americans’ control, with 80 percent the most frequent answer. Tina’s⁶ sentiments were typical: “Everybody is in control of their own destiny...For the majority of people, I think they are in control. I’d say about 80 percent [of most Americans’ life outcomes are within their control].” A strong majority, 85 percent, agree that the U.S. is the land of opportunity where everybody who works hard can succeed. A majority, 70 percent, also agree that the U.S. is a meritocracy. Eighty percent believe that, even when some people face barriers to success that others do not, these barriers can be overcome if they really put their mind to it. The same percentage agree that most Americans can earn a college degree if they really want to. Half of our participants agree that a poor child’s opportunity to succeed is equal to the average American, with the other half believing it is worse.

Table 2. Beliefs Concerning Individual Agency in the U.S.

Percentage of life within individual Americans’ control	Number of participants who responded (%)
100%	1 (5%)
90%	1 (5%)
Between 80 and 90%	1 (5%)
85%	1 (5%)
80%	6 (30%)
75%	5 (25%)
70%	3 (15%)
60%	1 (5%)
50%	1 (5%)

Table 3. Beliefs Concerning Opportunity in the U.S.

Belief	Percentage of Participants Who Agreed
America is the land of opportunity where everybody who works hard can succeed	85%
Even when some people face barriers that others do not, those barriers can be overcome if people put their minds to it	80%
Most Americans can earn a college degree if they really want to	80%
The U.S. is a meritocracy	70%
A poor child’s opportunity to succeed is equal to the average American	50%

Previous studies such as Feagin (1972) and Kluegel and Smith (1986) asked respondents whether different poverty causes are “very important,” “somewhat important,” or “not important.” While this is an effective way to pose this question, we took a different approach, asking participants to instead rank poverty causes in order of importance. In doing this, we believe that participants were more explicit in indicating how they prioritize poverty causes in relation to each other.

Posing the question in this manner, it is clear that most of our participants agree that individual-level causes of poverty are more important than non-individualistic ones. When asked to rank the six

⁶ This is a pseudonym we have given this participant. All identifying information has been changed for all participants.

causes of poverty that we provided—bad family upbringing, bad luck, lack of effort/laziness, not enough good jobs, poor choices, and poor quality schools—poor choices and lack of effort/laziness were by far the most popular choices, with poor choices slightly edging out the top spot. Seventy-five percent of our participants chose either poor choices or lack of effort/laziness as their top poverty cause, with 70 percent choosing one of those two choices for their second most important cause. The next most popular choice was bad family upbringing, followed by not enough good jobs, poor quality schools, and bad luck.

The data presented here strongly suggest that individualistic explanations of economic disadvantage are privileged over non-individualistic ones among our sample. There was strong support for notions of individual autonomy, virtually unlimited opportunities, meritocracy, and individual-level blame for poverty in American society.

Many of our participants echoed meritocratic sentiments similar to those expressed by Anne, who said, “I would say most Americans probably get back what they deserve.” Karen made similar remarks while also incorporating reflections on her own work ethic, saying:

I’m a hard worker, and I think anybody can do anything they set their mind to doing if they just try. America is the land of opportunity, I feel like, because you get out of it what you put into it. If you put more into life, then you are going to get something out of it. If you just lay around and do nothing, then more than likely you’re not gonna get nothing.

Jill similarly argued that, “You’re only going to get out of life what you put into it...If you keep going towards that goal and you don’t let up, I think you’re going to find success. Whereas if you don’t put much into trying to make something of yourself you’re never going to make anything of yourself.”

These meritocratic beliefs were associated with a strong sense that there are virtually limitless opportunities in the U.S. Anne noted the connection between opportunity and meritocracy, saying, “If you live or come to America, you can become or do whatever you want to do, there’s opportunities there if you desire to take them.” Amy admitted that one’s background matters, but only in a limited sense: “I understand your background may have a little bit of play in what happens to you. But you can accomplish anything you want. If you put forth the effort you can succeed. And here in America there are so many opportunities.” April noted that, given the number of opportunities available, the only thing preventing success is laziness: “I think there’s enough in this country that if we all work, I just think there’s a lot of opportunity. We could all be self-sufficient. I think a lot of Americans have gotten lazy.”

There was a strong tendency for participants to conflate negative and positive freedom when discussing opportunities in American society. Many of our participants believe that, because the U.S. is a wealthy country, and because its government is less oppressive than many others, all Americans are free to live whichever lives they choose for themselves. Ryan’s comments are a typical and illustrative example. He suggested that the high degree of negative freedom in a democratic society like the U.S. equals a high degree of positive freedom:

Well, we’re a democracy, and I just think we all have a fair chance. I think we all have a pretty good chance to be who we want to be in our country. We live in the society where we’re able to make our own choices, go to school, go to work every day. I mean, a lot of societies you can’t do that. I just think that in the United States we can.

The democratic nature of American society, combined with the country's wealth, convinced many of our participants that life in the U.S. is what individuals make of it. To not succeed in a democratic land of plenty, it was reasoned, must ultimately be the fault of the individual.

There was a strong tendency to equate the availability of student loans and financial aid with unlimited access to higher education for all. Other barriers to educational attainment, such as the unequal social distribution of capability development, were either downplayed or ignored. Many of our participants suggested that this belief was reinforced by their experiences of working in a university setting where they are frequently exposed to information concerning the availability of student aid. Jill's comments were typical: "Whatever you decide to pursue, I think the opportunities are there for everyone, especially in this day and age because there's a lot of opportunity to pursue higher education... So yeah, I mean I really do think basically it's the individual. It comes down to the choices and the decisions you make." She went on, later remarking, "I know 100 percent that anybody can [get a college education in the U.S. today]. You just need to apply yourself, and like I said, there's so many programs out there. So much so that I think anyone can." Anne made similar remarks:

I just think that the United States offers all kinds of programs to help the poor, people of different races, you know Blacks or whatever... I just think the programs are out there that anybody in the United States, no matter what their color, their financial position, no matter what. I think if you really want to go to college and succeed the opportunity is here.

Randy incorporated the availability of public K through 12 education into his reasoning:

If you really study hard or pursue what you want, you can get the education through the public school, which doesn't cost you anything. It will eventually pay off when you go to, say, community college, or get an online degree, or something. And you can pursue maybe even some scholarships or something if you really work hard enough.

This widespread belief that higher education is available to all Americans who put forth the effort clearly reinforces their other stratification beliefs concerning opportunity and meritocracy.

Hard Work and Smart Choices

Most participants buttressed their assertions about the meritocratic nature of American society by focusing on the role of hard work and smart choices. Brenda's reflections were typical: "How much you put out is how much you get back. If you're willing to work for it eventually you'll get somewhere." Anne believes that too many Americans have become spoiled at the number of opportunities available in the U.S. and are not working as hard as they could be to grasp them: "I think the United States, the opportunity is here if you want to work for it. I mean there's people who grow up here and they think it should all be handed to them, they don't work hard. Then they wonder why they are in life where they are. I just think the opportunity's here if you work hard for it." Sherry stated that, "If you work hard, you can have anything you want in the United States. I mean you can go as far as you want. Get a good education and a good job." Randy cannot fathom that true commitment to the work ethic will not ultimately yield success in the U.S.: "I would say most people, if they really work at it, they give it 100 percent to achieve your best, you will succeed...I couldn't believe that you wouldn't be a success." Jill linked choices and individual fortunes, saying, "I think that we all have choices and decisions to make. I think based on what choices and decisions you make is going to be the outcome." Grace argued that rich

children can fail and poor children can succeed—it is not their background but their work ethic that matters: “If you put your mind to anything you can accomplish it. It doesn't matter if you grew up poor or if you grew up rich. I mean, a rich kid could grow up with all the money in the world and still not make much of anything.” Karen believes that growing up poor does not mean you have to stay poor. Instead, you need to make a decision to leave poverty and work hard in order to be upwardly mobile (a decision she believes she personally made herself):

There is always room to go forwards, there is always room to go backwards, you just gotta choose which way you wanna go. Say I didn't get adopted. Say I stayed with my mom and dad. I could have chosen to stay in that life, or I could choose to do better. I think being poor gives you even more motivation to strive to do better, to have more, because you didn't have nothing as a child. Just because you're poor doesn't mean you are going to stay poor. You either wanna go up, or you wanna stay at the bottom.

A strong majority of participants, 80 percent, believe that, even when some people face social barriers to success that others do not, these barriers can be overcome if they really put their mind to it. Jill's remarks reflect this widespread assumption:

Say you had a fire and you lost everything. Or you lost your job because of something that was totally unfair and had nothing to do with you. I still think you have the control in your life that you decide how you're going to respond to that, and what you're going to do to get out of it.

Many participants argued that because some people overcome long odds and achieve success, this is proof that all people can. Sherry, for instance, in explaining why poor children have the same chance to succeed as non-poor children, used a personal anecdote as proof of her assertion:

For one thing, I had a girlfriend I grew up with when I was a kid, she had nothing. Mom stayed home and didn't work, she didn't have nothing. I seen her as a kid try and go out and work at nine and ten years old. Babysitting, cleaning houses, anything that they can make a dollar at. People give them food, people give them clothes. I mean these kids had it really rough. And now they in big jobs.

Laziness, Immorality, and Welfare

Given their strongly individualistic stratification beliefs, it is not surprising that most participants have a negative opinion of the American social welfare system (see Table 4). The vast majority, 75 percent, view welfare as having a mostly negative impact on society. This is likely related to their general suspicion of the morality and deservingness of most welfare recipients. These suspicions persist despite the fact that 60 percent of our participants reported needing welfare as a child, 55 percent reported needing welfare in adulthood, and most note frequent welfare use in their families and/or communities.

Negative views of welfare tended to focus on the assumed association between welfare and laziness, dependency, out of control fertility, drug abuse, and/or fraud. There was also a popular assertion that welfare recipients owe it to taxpayers to prove that recipients are moral and hardworking in exchange for receiving “other people's money.” A majority of our participants support welfare work requirements (65 percent), and all support welfare drug testing. Seventy-five percent support family caps of some kind (welfare policies denying an increase in benefits to families for children born while the family is receiving

government assistance), with 60 percent reporting outright support and an additional 15 percent supporting caps above a certain number of children (typically after two total children).

Table 4. Beliefs Concerning Welfare in the U.S.

Belief	Percentage of Participants Who Agreed
Welfare recipients should have to pass a drug test in order to receive benefits	100%
Welfare has a mostly negative impact on society	75%
The government should either prohibit additional benefits for children born on welfare or set a limit to the number of children in a family who can receive welfare benefits	75%
Welfare recipients should be required to work in the paid workforce in order to receive benefits	65%

A major concern among our participants is that welfare incentivizes laziness and encourages dependency. Kimberly’s concerns are a typical example, as she lamented, “It just encourages them, I feel like, to stay home and continue to be lazy and keep getting your free money.” Sadie has similar concerns, remarking, “People think that they can live off of it instead of going out and getting a job. So, people who don’t really need it are getting it just because they don’t want to go and work.” Tina also believes that welfare incentivizes laziness, and is particularly indignant because she believes she has used the system correctly, unlike other supposedly less-deserving recipients:

It is way out of control. It was made to give people a hand up, to get them out of their situation, give them the tools they need. And I think it has gotten way beyond what it was meant for. I have been made to feel ashamed in my adult life because I have worked and I fell on hard times and I had to get assistance for a short period of time. But when I see people make a career out of it and they go in and they’re patted on the back, but I am made to feel ashamed because I can work. Well they can too, but they have never made the effort to work. I think whole families have been raised to depend on it, to make a career out of it. I know people that are living on public assistance that do better than I do, with me and my husband both working. And they brag about it. That’s what makes me angry, because they are able to work.

Randy focused on laziness while also chafing at hardworking Americans having to pay for the welfare system:

A hardworking American has to pay for people to sit around and do nothing, and the welfare system allows it. And sometimes these people on welfare drives around in a big Cadillac. They never have a mortgage really to pay, or rent. And they’re given food and food stamps, and everything is handed to them. They don’t do anything to get it other than go down and do paperwork, and get checks and benefits and everything else handed to them. So it doesn’t give a person a reason to work.

April shared sentiments similar to Randy’s “Cadillac” remarks:

I think [welfare’s impact on society is] pretty negative, with the people ‘using the system’ so to speak. People having a lot of kids, and just a lot of stuff. This is just me hearing people say that people were using food stamps and all this stuff, and they’re driving around in nice cars, and all this other stuff that other people can’t afford. Getting free handouts. It seems like people just ain’t trying to work anymore.

Sherry highlighted laziness while also incorporating notions of abuse by recipients who do not really need welfare: “For me, I think it is mostly bad. I see it now all over. You see people that draws welfare that really don’t need it. They are too lazy to go out and get a job. I mean they have a high school diploma, but they would rather live on welfare. They say, ‘I can get this and this and this, and I don’t have to get up early.’”

Amy has such a negative view of welfare, and believes so strongly that it incentivizes laziness, that she is willing to make life harder for herself and her family in order to avoid the indignity associated with welfare. She explained that she refuses to file for disability benefits that her son qualifies for due to her strong anti-welfare beliefs:

With my own son, he has a severe disability, reflux of the kidney. He has gone into kidney failure twice, at one point he was in grade five kidney failure and he was dying. It can happen at any moment, he could wake up today and be in kidney failure. He has no control over it. There is no medication for it, all they can do is monitor it. And I know this is going to sound cruel, but he qualifies for a disability check. If he received it, he would never have to work, if I got him this check. But I refuse to do it. If he wants it he is going to have to do it on his own, because I want him to go to college and see that there is better for him out there than getting a check every month, than getting welfare.

Another common theme that emerged from across the interviews was concern about the fertility of poor women and welfare recipients. There was widespread support for the notions that welfare recipients have out-of-control fertility, plan to have more children in order to increase their monthly welfare benefits, and are irresponsible if they become pregnant while poor. These widespread concerns helped explain the strong support for family caps. Some of our participants, like Katie, simply thought it was irresponsible to bring children into poverty, arguing, “You shouldn’t be pumping out kids if you can’t afford them.” Amy focused both on the irresponsibility of bringing children into poverty while also framing welfare recipient fertility as an example of abuse:

You shouldn’t get more benefits the more children you have. I mean I do think every American has the right to have a family and to have babies. But it is sad when people bring more and more children into a bad situation money-wise. I actually know a lady who had another child for more benefits. Whether she was telling the truth or not I don’t know, but that is what she stated to me. And that isn’t right. I don’t think benefits should raise every kid you have. You should just get one set amount.

Sadie believes having children while poor is immoral and thinks that the government plays a critical role in discouraging such behavior:

If they get government assistance for that, I feel like it's making it easier for them to make the choice to have a baby. 'Cause when you make the choice, you gotta think about paying for the hospital stay, paying for all the equipment that they have to use. And I feel like if people couldn't afford that, they would get on birth control. I don't know, they would make better choices about having babies.

Jill made a similar observation:

I knew people who were on the system, they’re pregnant with their third child, and I’m like, ‘Aren’t you worried about affording them? How are you going to afford them?’ And

they're like, 'No, we'll just go on WIC.' They just accept that that is there and it's available and they're going to use it. It doesn't matter. Whereas for me and my ex-husband, we agreed on a number of children, and a lot of what went into that decision was affordability. I come from six kids, so I would have loved to have had a larger family. When you look at the cost of things and what you can afford, we decided two. It's like they're being rewarded in a sense because they had another child.

Others focused on the issue of welfare recipients using childbirth as a way to gain more in benefits:

A lot of people get on welfare for that reason. I've seen it, I've heard it. I'll just have another child, I'll have ten kids so I can get another check. Because welfare throws so much more money to them for a child. (Karen)

Well, I think a lot of them just don't want to work and I think that if they think they can have more kids, we're gonna get more money a month, and I think there ought to be a stop to that. I don't know what it is today. How do I want to say this? I think after two kids, they shouldn't get any more money. (Betty)

I agree with [family caps] because I know people that have kids to get a bigger check. So there needs to be like a family cap. I knew people, they admit it, 'I'm gonna get pregnant 'cause you know I need, you know either this kid's graduated or out of the house so they need more income and let's have another kid.' (Anne)

Of all of the topics discussed in our interviews, welfare drug testing seemed to provoke the most anger. This was routinely the part of the interview where participants became most animated. Every participant supports policies which deny welfare to individuals and their families if the adult welfare recipient cannot pass a drug test. Common themes were the immorality of drug use, the negative impact of drug use on the children of recipients, the notion that buying drugs keeps people in poverty, and the need to address the opioid epidemic. Here are some examples from across the interviews:

Even a time when I was a young adult I was aware of families that did the drugs, they all sniffed, they all drank. It's just really weird how they always had the money for the pleasure things, so to speak. But I think if you can't pass a drug test then you should not receive any help. Because obviously you're getting drugs from somewhere, and either you're stealing or you're buying. Either way it's just not a good thing. If you're dealing and you're making money that way, you shouldn't have to live off the system, which I know is against the law, and I don't condone that. If you're using cash to buy drugs, that's money you should be using for food, for housing. I'm all for that. (Jill)

Well, if you have money for drugs you should have money for food. (Ryan)

Because I feel like if you can afford drugs, then you can afford whatever else, whatever government assistance you're getting, from Medicaid to food stamps. If you can afford drugs, then you can afford food. If you can afford drugs, you can afford insurance. (Sadie)

This country has really been on kind of a drug epidemic. Society today is very addicted to these drugs. And if you're on welfare and you're accepting money from the government, and you're using that to spend on drugs, it's defeating the purpose of welfare. (Randy)

I think if people on welfare could get drugs and pay whatever money for that then they obviously don't need to be using the welfare system. (April)

You go for any job, number one thing, they will ask you for a drug test. I think if people gets on welfare, and tries to make a living off the welfare department, I think they oughta have to take a drug test. I seen so many of them up there, 'Oh, I got a check, I'm going out to get my drugs this weekend.' So what happens? Little baby goes without food because that adult decided he wanted his drugs. (Sherry)

Of course I would agree with [welfare drug testing]. If you can afford to buy drugs and use drugs, then I think you could definitely afford to somewhat support your family. So you shouldn't be getting assistance. (Kimberly)

Previous research suggests that individualistic and anti-welfare beliefs are associated with other stratification beliefs regarding race and gender. Americans who conflate poverty/welfare and race, assume African Americans are lazy and/or immoral, and/or have a negative opinion of single mothers (particularly Black single mothers), for instance, have been found to have much more negative views of welfare compared to Americans with opposing beliefs (Gilens 1999). While our participants' negative views of the fertility of poor women came through clearly in the interviews and surely impact their opinions of welfare, their views on race were harder for us to access. Despite our efforts to ask participants directly about the causes of racial inequality, they were extremely reluctant to talk about race, with most simply refusing to answer direct interview questions about racial inequality and largely avoiding directly addressing race at other points in the interviews. While their silence could mean many things, the existing literature suggests that it was likely an attempt to avoid revealing problematic views concerning race that participants know are not "socially desirable."⁷ Despite not addressing race directly, however, we suspect that much of what our participants said about welfare was at least in part euphemistically referring to their beliefs about African Americans.

Blaming Themselves

While a strong majority of our participants are individualistic in their stratification beliefs concerning the U.S. in general, most are even more individualistic when explaining their own lives (see Table 5). When we asked our participants if they had a worse, equal, or better shot of making the most of themselves in life compared to the average American, for instance, all but one (95 percent) said they had at least an equal shot compared to the average American, with two (10 percent) saying that they had a better shot. When we asked if they had a fair shot at making the most of themselves in life without anything holding them back, all but two of our participants (90 percent) said yes. A majority, 65 percent,

⁷ Based on previous research, we find it likely that our participants hid many of their more conservative explanations of racial inequality from us due to social desirability bias. Not only had the participants and the interviewer never met before, but most of our participants are surely aware of the ideological dividing lines that exist in the university setting.

said they had either an equal (55 percent) or better (10 percent) shot at earning a college degree compared to the average American.

Table 5. Beliefs Concerning Participants’ Personal Opportunity

Belief	Percentage of Participants Who Agreed
Your opportunity to succeed in life was equal to or better than the average American	95%
You personally had a fair shot to succeed in life without anything holding you back	90%
Your opportunity to earn a college degree was equal to or better than the average American	65%

These results are quite striking, considering the decidedly unequal opportunities that their challenging backgrounds suggest they had available to them. The interviews were rife with stories of struggle. Most of the participants grew up in families that were economically insecure in some fashion. Of our 20 participants, half came from working-class backgrounds and 9 (45 percent) grew up in poverty. Only one reported growing up in a social class position higher than the working class (they reported a lower-middle-class childhood). Sixty percent of our participants reported needing welfare in childhood, and 55 percent in adulthood. Multiple participants reported significant periods of time where they would go hungry, as well as periods of time where their families would have their electricity or water shut off. There were a number of instances of abuse, including physical and sexual abuse, that the participants either witnessed or experienced themselves in childhood. Only one of our participants earned a four-year college degree (although a few others tried college for a short period of time without completing a degree). The rest of our participants either concluded their educational careers after finishing high school (80 percent) or with their GED (15 percent). About a third (35 percent) of our participants reported one or more of their parents dropping out of high school. Only one participant reported having a parent with a four-year college degree (representing just 2.5 percent of parents who held one)—his mother earned her bachelor’s degree and his dad dropped out of high school. Making it to college was difficult for our participants based both on preparation and affordability. Single-parent families were common, with half of our participants spending significant amounts of time in childhood being raised by a single parent. About a third of our participants (35 percent) reported absent fathers (five left the family voluntarily during the participants’ childhood, while the remaining two died during the participants’ childhood years). Three (15 percent) participants reported an absent mother (two left the family voluntarily during the participants’ childhood, while one participant’s mother died during their childhood years). In adulthood, 80 percent of the participants earn working-class total household incomes.

Despite these struggles, hardly any of the participants are willing to see their lives in anything other than individualistic terms. Instead, they blame their own choices for their fortunes. This portion of the interview data underscores the value of utilizing a qualitative approach, which allowed participants to reveal how they make sense of individualism in their own lives in ways that would be difficult on a survey.

Anne, in explaining how she is responsible for her own life, said, “I mean it’s hard to explain because I am just a custodian, but I got a job. I mean I can’t complain. I’d say I have an equal [opportunity], I would say equal.” Grace blames herself for not putting enough effort into school when she was younger, saying, “If I would have put the effort into it, I could have gotten to college. I just didn’t choose that kind of path.” Randy likewise cites his choices in explaining his life:

I believe that I could have done more in my life. I believe I could have been whatever I really wanted to if I would have tried a little bit harder. If I wouldn’t of had doubt. I guess the biggest thing that holds anybody back is fear. I think the biggest obstacle for most

people is themselves, you know, fear, doubt, the unknowns, things of that nature. I believe I had the greatest opportunity to make something out of myself.

April similarly blames herself and the decisions that she made:

When it comes down to it, it was my choice. Just like everybody else, you end up with some regrets. There are a few things you'd like to have changed or done differently, but I wish I would have stuck it out with my classes. I just went to work instead of staying at home and doing some college and trying to get a better job. I guess I feel like it was more my choice, a poor choice.

Kimberly, despite many childhood struggles, believes she had an equal shot, saying, "I feel like everybody has that opportunity no matter where your struggle was. There's opportunities out there. Where there's a will, there's a way."

Sadie's story provides a good example of our participants' firm commitment to individualism despite their challenging childhoods. Sadie reported frequently going without food and electricity in childhood. Here she describes her family's struggles: "We could barely get by. My parents had trouble paying all the bills. We almost lost our house because we couldn't pay the mortgage. We had to beg schools to let us go on field trips, because we couldn't pay for it. It was embarrassing, because we had to pretty much beg for money." In one particularly heartbreaking story she described having to fight with her siblings in order to secure a share of the scarce food supply in her household: "We were fighting over Shake 'n Bake, 'cause we didn't have any food...we were so hungry." She described her neighborhood as "pretty rough," saying, "We lived on a street everybody refers to as the ghetto. There was drugs, there was alcohol, there was people fighting." When she was five years old, she was molested by a neighborhood boy she described as "much older than me." In addition to all of these struggles, Sadie's mother and stepfather battled drug addiction and her stepfather regularly physically abused her mother. Police visited her home often in response, and her mother ended up in the hospital multiple times. To pay for drugs, Sadie's mother would sell the family's food stamps. The drug addiction that plagued her mother and stepfather eventually claimed her stepfather's life. Despite her extremely challenging childhood, Sadie believes she had an equal opportunity to succeed compared to the average American, saying, "I think everybody makes their own choices which affects what happens to you." She went on:

I am in control of my life. I'm the one who makes the choices. I can go out here and get a good job and go to school, pay for school, or I can go out here and I can get in trouble, and not be able to get that good job, and not be able to pay for school... It doesn't matter what you go through, you can always overcome that and come out on top. There's a way around all that stuff. You shouldn't let that stuff stop you from doing what you want to do.

After enduring a childhood that could only be described as unequal compared to most Americans, Sadie refuses to characterize her life in anything other than individualistic terms. In doing this, Sadie is like the vast majority of our participants. Almost all believe they had a fair shot at succeeding compared to the average American, and most frame their fortunes as resulting from their own poor choices.

Tina grew up poor in a family that relied on food stamps, WIC, and Medicaid. Her mother divorced twice while Tina was young, with an additional third engagement called off:

After my mom and stepdad got a divorce, my mom started dating a man for two or three years and then they got engaged. Well, he ran off one weekend and married a woman he was having an affair with, unbeknownst to my mom. She found out afterwards and then found out she was pregnant with my brother. And the man gave up all rights to my brother.

Despite her family's economic insecurity and a number of other challenges, Tina sees her life in individualistic terms:

When I was younger, if I would have used my head more and listened, then I would be exponentially better, and my children's lives would be better than they are now. I wouldn't be having to scrub toilets for a living, not that there's anything wrong with that. If I would have made better choices when I was younger, the outcome would have been drastically different. I was in control of that. I settled, and I know I settled.

Several times in the interview she described being in a "rut" that was her own doing. She hopes that her kids will use her example as motivation to strive to do better, saying:

My kids are my greatest accomplishments... I tell my kids all the time, 'Learn from my mistakes and do better for yourselves. Don't fall in the rut like I have in my life.' I feel like I didn't push myself hard enough, and I just settled, I let myself get in a rut. I got married very young, before I turned 18. I had my first child when I was 20, and my next one at 25. I was a stay-at-home mom up until my divorce from my first husband... Now I am 39 and I look back and my kids are basically all I have to show for it.

Karen is another illustrative example. She was born into a poor family along with her five siblings, and both of her parents struggled with alcoholism. Her father would frequently beat her mother "to a bloody pulp." The alcoholism and abuse were so bad that she was eventually taken away from her parents, at which point she cycled through 15 different foster homes before she even reached second grade. She would be adopted and raised by her older sister when she was six years old, facing somewhat improved but still insecure financial circumstances. In adolescence, Karen's uncle would subject her to four years of sexual abuse. Graduating from college was unheard of in Karen's family, and college did not work out for her, either. Despite all of this, she holds strongly individualistic stratification beliefs about the U.S. in general, as well as about her own fortunes. Karen believes that she had at least as good of an opportunity to succeed compared to the average American, saying, "I may of even had more of an opportunity than most kids."

Again and again it was the same story. Despite the odds clearly stacked against most of our participants in childhood, they refuse to believe they did not get a fair shot to succeed in life. As individualistic as they are concerning American poverty and economic inequality in general, they are even more individualistic when explaining their own fortunes.

A Step Above

One factor contributing to our participants' individualism is their pride in having avoided the significant problems they observe in their families and communities. At different points throughout their lives, our participants have witnessed drug abuse, physical and sexual abuse, welfare fraud, chronic unemployment, absent parents, and/or a number of other problems related to poverty. Exaggerated or

not, it is likely that they observed and/or experienced a number of painful consequences of poverty in ways that middle- and upper-class Americans are much less familiar. Rather than recognizing the structural causes of these problems and joining in solidarity with those who were not so lucky, our participants instead use their perceived success as a means of affirming their own dignity. Many view their stable employment and avoidance of drug abuse as a source of pride, as some measure of success and social mobility that sets them apart from the poor and from the less-successful members of their families and communities. They may not be rich, or even middle-class, but they are proud not to be poor, and proud of achieving a measure of stability that was not easy to obtain given their backgrounds. Having successfully navigated very difficult circumstances, they are now critical of others in their families and communities who failed to follow their example of hard work and smart choices. They are proud of not having “given in” to the problems that ensnared those around them, and if they did it, they believe anybody can, thus reinforcing their individualistic beliefs. Many admit they are still struggling in adulthood, but they frame their struggles as different from those of the families and communities from whence they came. While they may still struggle financially, they are employed and sober, unlike the “lazier” and more “immoral” others around them. Because their struggles are happening within the context of stable employment and moral living, they believe this allows them to occupy a higher social position—differentiated not by income alone but more importantly by morality and work ethic—than those who struggle financially while also dealing with additional problems like unemployment and drug abuse. Previous research suggests that, in fact, people who perceive themselves as upwardly mobile may be more likely to favor individualism compared to those who are not as subjectively mobile (Gugushvili 2016).

In addition to the pride at having achieved some measure of success, there was also a palpable sense of relief on their part at having escaped very difficult circumstances. Our participants shared some extremely traumatic experiences. They faced problems up-close and personal in ways that many Americans never do. One gets the sense in reading their accounts that they desperately wanted to escape the homes and/or communities where these problems occurred, regardless of who was to blame for the problems in the first place. The drug abuse, the hunger, the family conflict—for many of our participants, their childhoods were filled with periods of time that were intensely scary and unhappy. They abhor drug use, for instance, in a way that suggests they have seen the worst of what addiction can inflict on individuals, families, and communities. They outwardly project the image of a stably employed, sober success story as a means to manage stigma in their interactions with others—but they seem to *inwardly* project this image as well, a message intended for oneself as a means to manage their own fear that they will ever again have to face the difficult circumstances in which they once found themselves.

Seeds of Resistance

Individualistic explanations of poverty and economic inequality are clearly more popular than non-individualistic ones among our participants. Despite this, most of our participants utilized non-individualistic explanations for economic disadvantage when discussing specific anecdotal examples. This suggests that, while individualism may be their default explanation for abstract questions concerning poverty and economic inequality, it is not universally the case that they will depend on individualism. They are not oblivious to non-individualistic arguments, but seem to view such examples as the exception to what is otherwise the general rule of individualism.

Given the intimate ways in which our participants have experienced structural forces, it would have been surprising if structural concerns were completely absent from our discussions. It is clear in their responses that they are often very conscious of the ways that forces beyond individual control can impact people's lives. At various times our participants spoke about globalization, deindustrialization, job scarcity, systemic insecurity, the paradox of poverty amidst plenty, the decreasing value of a high school diploma, stagnating wages, and the inadequacy of the minimum wage, among other topics. The seeds of resistance to the dominant ideology are clearly present in their reflections on life in the working class. The challenge is translating these experiences into criticisms of dominant modes of thought. To accomplish this, our participants would need to view these examples as evidence of systemic problems, rather than exceptions to the overall rule of individualism and meritocracy. Without this reformulation, what is left is a population whose dominant tendency is to view abstract questions of autonomy and opportunity from an individualistic perspective, even if they feel the contradictory tensions created by their more structuralist concerns in other areas. Their individualistic perspectives persist despite contrary lived experiences and despite the ways in which this perspective denigrates them personally as well as the people that they care about in their families and communities.

DISCUSSION

The picture that emerges from across our interviews is one of strongly individualistic stratification beliefs in explaining poverty and economic inequality in the U.S. in general, as well as in explaining our participants' own fortunes. Individualism is clearly the "default" belief system preferred by a strong majority of participants. Non-individualistic explanations are not absent but utilized in specific, limited circumstances. While our sample is small and non-random and therefore these results cannot be generalized to the White working class overall, our findings align with previous research suggesting that this group is strongly supportive of individualistic stratification beliefs and resistant to non-individualistic beliefs.

A number of themes are common across the interviews. In terms of their overall stratification beliefs, our participants view the U.S. as offering nearly limitless opportunities for all who desire to grasp them. These opportunities are viewed as available to all who make smart choices and work hard, regardless of where one starts out in life. Participants tend to view individuals as autonomous agents with a high degree of control over their lives. The U.S. is seen as largely meritocratic, where people's social positions reflect their choices and work ethic. Because of the perceived high degree of individual control over one's fortunes, success or failure is viewed as inhering within the individual. There is a strong emphasis on the importance of self-reliance and personal responsibility. Relatedly, depending on others (such as the government) is viewed negatively by most participants. In addition to this negative view of the welfare system, there is also widespread and deep suspicion of the morality and deservingness of the poor and of welfare recipients, particularly as it relates to their presumed poor work ethic, rampant drug-use, and out-of-control fertility. When unlevel playing fields are acknowledged, most participants still maintain that people in these circumstances will eventually overcome those barriers if they really put their mind to it. Additionally, many of our participants conflate negative and positive freedom.

When moving beyond their general stratification beliefs to discuss their own fortunes, our participants tended to be even more individualistic. As much as they may blame individual Americans for

their lot in life, they are even more critical of themselves. Despite very challenging working- or lower-class backgrounds, the belief in a high degree of control over one's life extended to participants' own lives. They largely view their own chances to succeed as fair and blame themselves for their shortcomings in life. There is a strong tendency to reject any notion that they are victims of circumstance. Our participants tend to distance themselves from the poor and other economically-struggling Americans (previous research refers to this as "dissociation" or "boundary work"), even though it is clear many are struggling mightily themselves. This distancing often takes the form of framing their stable employment and avoidance of problems like drug abuse as proof of their own success relative to many of their neighbors and family members. These accomplishments, seen as proof of their own work ethic and morality, reinforce participants' perceptions that if they can "make it" despite their backgrounds, anybody can.

There are a variety of possible explanations for why individualism remains so popular among White working-class Americans like the ones in our study. Our participants are mostly Republican-leaning in their voting behavior (80 percent) from similarly Republican-leaning families (80 percent) who have spent their lives in Appalachia (100 percent)—political and geographic characteristics which likely contribute to many of their beliefs concerning poverty, economic inequality, and government. Beyond these characteristics, research suggests a prominent role for dominant American stratification beliefs, White racism, and the process of dissociation/boundary work.

Research suggests that White Americans across all socioeconomic groups, save for the poorest, have historically found individualistic explanations of poverty and economic inequality more appealing than non-individualistic ones (Kluegel and Smith 1986; Hunt and Bullock 2016). This reflects the dominant cultural lessons Whites are taught about economic disadvantage throughout their formative years in childhood, lessons which are then reinforced in adulthood. As mentioned previously, working-class Whites apply individualism to their particular social location by placing a heavy emphasis on hard work, personal responsibility, and traditional morality as means of struggling against the precarious nature of their lives and the social decay in their communities. They attribute their own success to hard work and living moral, "settled" lives, while believing those who fail have laziness, immorality, and "hard living" to blame (Lamont 2000; Silva 2013; Williams 2017). Previous research suggests that, for our non-Hispanic White sample, it is likely that the internalization of dominant American stratification beliefs significantly contributes to their individualism.

Beyond the influence of dominant culture, previous research suggests that race plays a critical role. This impact is felt in two important ways: through the experiences of living in a subordinate group in an unequal society, and through group-specific socialization. The experiences of discrimination and racial inequality, for instance, give African Americans a much deeper understanding of how structural forces impact people's lives and helps reinforce a more structural understanding of inequalities. In terms of socialization, African Americans are more likely to be taught to see themselves in racial terms, while Whites largely are not. Whites also receive many negative messages about African Americans throughout their formative years, including messages which conflate race with poverty, welfare, laziness, and immorality (Gilens 1999; Lamont 2000; Silva 2013; Hunt and Bullock 2016; DiAngelo 2018). Additionally, working-class Whites have increasingly scapegoated other social groups, including racial and ethnic minority groups, for Whites' perceived loss of status in recent decades (Silva 2013; Hochschild 2016; Green 2017; Khazan 2018; Mutz 2018). All of this has a significant impact on Whites' racialized and more individualistic views of poverty, economic inequality, and welfare.

Our participants were extremely reluctant to talk about race and largely avoided addressing it. When asked specifically about the primary cause of African Americans' subordination in American society, for instance, too few participants agreed to even answer the question to allow an analysis. We suspect this silence reflects a desire not to reveal socially-undesirable beliefs about race. Much of what our participants said about the problems with welfare, however, was likely euphemistically referring to their beliefs about African Americans.

In addition to the importance of dominant culture and White racism, a number of studies have noted a process of "dissociation" or "boundary work" common to struggling Americans (Briar 1966; Rank 1994; Lamont 2000; Seccombe 2011; Silva 2013). This is a process whereby struggling Americans, in order to maintain dignity and/or manage stigma, set themselves apart from other social groups as well as members of their own social group. This phenomenon is pronounced among the poor, and welfare recipients in particular, but can also be found among the working class.

In Goffman's seminal work on stigma, he noted that a stigmatized individual possesses "an attribute that makes him different from others in the category of persons available for him to be, and of a less desirable kind," and this attribute has a discrediting effect (1963:2-3). In response to the stigma of failing to live up to American expectations of self-reliance, and what this failure says about their own talents, effort, choices, and/or morality, many individuals will try to reduce this stigma by managing their own sense of self, as well as the impression that they project to others in their social interactions.

Seccombe (2011) and Rank (1994) observed this phenomenon in their respective studies. Seccombe found that most welfare recipients attempted "to distance themselves as far as possible from other recipients" (2011:61). They did this by arguing that they were on welfare due to circumstances beyond their control, while other recipients were often framed as responsible for their own plight. In Rank's earlier study he found a similar phenomenon: while 82 percent of his participants felt that they were on welfare due to circumstances beyond their control, approximately 90 percent felt that other recipients were either partially or fully to blame for their circumstances (1994:133, 142). When recipients in these studies dissociate themselves from other recipients, they are attempting to manage the stigma of welfare use by asserting the legitimacy and dignity of their own situation in opposition to the less-dignified and less-legitimate situations of others. They share the general public's negative view of welfare, and agree that most welfare-recipients are lazy, immoral, and/or undeserving, and they try hard to convince themselves and others that they are one of the few exceptions.

While the working class is not as economically disadvantaged or stigmatized as welfare recipients, they engage in a somewhat similar process of dissociation. They fail in some ways to live up to American standards of success, and therefore manage their own identities and the impressions they project to others in order to reduce the stigma of being economically-insecure. Lamont, for instance, observed what she called "boundary work" among this group. Lamont describes how the working class draws boundaries around other social groups, distancing themselves from those above and below as a means of maintaining a sense of dignity. The boundaries for the White working class, Lamont argues, are organized around issues of morality: "[Morality] helps workers to maintain a sense of self-worth, to affirm their dignity independently of their relatively low social status, and to locate themselves above others" (2000:19). Lamont describes this boundary work more fully:

Morality is generally at the center of these workers' worlds. They find their self-worth in their ability to discipline themselves and conduct responsible yet caring lives to ensure order for themselves and others. These moral standards function as an alternative to economic definitions of success and offer them a way to maintain dignity and to make sense of their lives in a land where the American dream is ever more out of reach. Workers use these standards to define who they are and, just as important, who they are not. Hence, they draw the line that delimits an imagined community of 'people like me' who share the same sacred values. (2000:3)

These working-class Americans believe they are better than those above them, for instance, because they believe they have more integrity, more sincerity, and better relationships. They believe they are above those below them—such as the poor and African Americans—because of their superior morality, discipline, work ethic, and personal responsibility.

In her later book, Williams (2017) catalogues a variety of working-class assumptions that contribute to the boundaries that they create between themselves and the poor. From the perspective of the working class, the poor receive government assistance not available to the working class, who work multiple jobs just to survive and would never suffer the perceived indignity of welfare use anyway. The poor succumb to despair, drugs, and alcohol, which the working class avoids through their commitment to traditional morality. Many in the working class grew up in the same conditions as the poor, yet walked the razor's edge and somehow climbed the socioeconomic ladder through hard work, smart choices, discipline, and sacrifice. Where the poor cannot control their impulses or plan for the future, the working class regularly forgoes immediate gratification for their long term goals. The working class must meet the impossible demands of full-time employment and childcare, while the poor do not work yet still have their childcare subsidized. The poor allow themselves to be seen as victims, something the working class would never endure. Yet, despite all of this, it is the poor who receive society's sympathy, not the harder-working and worse-off working class (Williams 2017:13–23). Whether or not any of these assumptions have merit, many in the working class nonetheless believe them. And in doing so, they draw boundaries around themselves and the poor in ways that make it more difficult to cite non-individualistic forces for both groups' plight and more difficult to develop the kind of solidarity that might emerge from that realization.

Our participants are engaged in a similar dissociation/boundary-drawing process. Unlike welfare recipients in some of the studies cited above, our participants maintained individualistic explanations of others' plight and of their own personal fortunes. To adopt a structural worldview for themselves would be seen as a claim to victimhood and/or an association with the poor, both of which conflict with their White working-class identities and worldviews. Our participants constructed themselves as a separate group from the poor and other struggling Americans despite the fact that many of our participants have struggled mightily throughout their lives. Like Lamont's participants, ours emphasized their work ethic (through their stable employment) and morality (through their lack of drug abuse). However much they struggle, they perceive their morality, commitment to hard work, and ability to maintain stable employment as at least some measure of success and dignity. Their perceived elevated status is differentiated less by income and more by their work ethic and morality. Because they are not poor and not on welfare, and because of their employment and sobriety, they feel they can make claims to fulfilling the American ethos.

In addition to this pride at having achieved some measure of success, there was also a palpable sense of relief on our participants' parts at having escaped childhoods filled with very scary and unhappy episodes. Focusing on their stable employment and sobriety not only projects an image outward to others that is less stigmatized, but projects a message inwards, intended for oneself, aimed at managing the fear that one will ever again have to face such difficult circumstances.

Such boundary work likely makes it more difficult for the working class in general, and our participants specifically, to identify with other social groups who are also struggling to varying degrees due to forces beyond their control. In this sense, the dominant American individualism displayed by our participants simultaneously provides them with a sense of dignity while also inhibiting the solidarity and structural orientation that together could be a politically-powerful force in addressing their plight and the plight of others. While their individualism may give them every day psychological relief from stigmatization, it also contributes to the perpetuation of their economic and social marginalization by reinforcing the economic and political structures responsible for their plight.

CONCLUSION

Why should we care what Americans believe about poverty and economic inequality? After all, isn't what we *think* about economic disadvantage not really of concern as long as we *do* something about it? As appealing as such a notion may be, the reality is that how we act to address a social problem is related to what we believe causes it. Much like a doctor would not choose a treatment plan without first identifying the disease, people support particular approaches to addressing social problems based on what they believe causes them. Multiple studies suggest that one's stratification beliefs are linked to their policy preferences (Feagin 1972; Kluegel and Smith 1986; Gilens 1999; Appelbaum 2001; Bullock et al. 2003; Alesina and Glaeser 2004; Hunt and Bullock 2016). This helps us to understand why Americans, given their preference for individualistic explanations for a wide range of social problems, tend to be somewhat skeptical of more robust and structurally-oriented social welfare policies like the ones favored in many European countries.

This does not mean that Americans hate the poor or do not want to help them. Studies consistently find that Americans are morally committed to helping the poor (Piston 2018). This moral commitment, however, coexists alongside many contradictory stratification beliefs that create a tension that Americans must resolve when considering particular social policies. Alongside their moral commitment to fighting poverty, Americans hold stratification beliefs that cause them to be deeply suspicious of the morality and deservingness of welfare recipients (particularly African American recipients), to be adamant that assistance go only to the deserving poor, to be somewhat skeptical of "big government" and the effectiveness of government programs, and to prefer individualistically-oriented social policies. So while they are committed to enacting social policies to address poverty, Americans' "skeptical altruism," as we call it, places limits on how much support they are willing to show for the kinds of robust and structurally-oriented social policies that work so well to combat poverty in many other wealthy countries.

More robust and structurally-oriented social policies are likely necessary if we wish to achieve a more socially-just society. Studies suggest it is not economic performance or demographic characteristics that explain the high levels of poverty and economic inequality in the U.S. compared to other wealthy countries, but the comparatively minimalist nature of American social policies (Smeeding 2005; Brady 2009). The level of generosity of social policies explains why only around 5 percent or 6 percent of the population lives in poverty in countries like Denmark and Finland, versus 17 percent in the U.S. (OECD 2018).

The causes of the limited American welfare state are complex, but many scholars agree that it results from a combination of political and cultural factors (Alesina et al. 2001; Smeeding 2005; Brady 2009; Gilens 2012; Royce 2015; Michener 2018). As Alesina and his colleagues explain, the U.S. redistributes less than Europeans for three primary reasons: a majority of Americans believe that redistribution favors racial minorities, a majority of Americans believe that the U.S. is an open and fair society and that the poor have themselves to blame for their plight, and the American political system is structured in a manner that prevents redistribution (Alesina et al. 2001:39).

In a way, our current age of growing inequality commits a form of “double violence” upon struggling Americans like the White working-class custodians in our study. There is structural violence, which refers to “the avoidable limitations society places on groups of people that constrain them from achieving the quality of life that would have otherwise been possible...structural violence occurs through economically, politically, or culturally driven processes working together to limit subjects from achieving full quality of life” (Lee 2016:110). Forces beyond the control of the working class—such as globalization, deindustrialization, automation, and neoliberalism—have made them more insecure in a variety of ways in recent years. Rather than being natural or inevitable, this growing insecurity could have been avoided, or at the very least mitigated, if not for the deliberate choices made by those in power in the U.S.

A second form of violence is symbolic violence. Bourdieu defines symbolic violence as “every power which manages to impose meanings and to impose them as legitimate by concealing the power relations which are the basis of its force” (Bourdieu and Passeron 1990:4). We follow Bourdieu in arguing that dominant culture, in largely justifying social inequalities, protects them from serious challenges. Stratification beliefs internalized during socialization lead many to attribute the consequences of structural violence to individual failings and thus misrecognize a class system as a meritocracy. These dominant beliefs—disproportionately influenced by individualism, racism, sexism, and skeptical altruism—frame economic uncertainty, massive economic inequality, the loss of decent jobs, the fraying of the social contract, and persistent racial and gender inequalities in disproportionately individualistic terms. As we have argued in more detail elsewhere (Giroux 2008; Schubert 2008; Eppard et al. 2017), in order for all Americans, and particularly struggling Americans like the ones in this study, to challenge inequalities, they need the cultural tools necessary to identify and understand them.

We should not underestimate this symbolic dimension of our struggles. Addressing the insecurity of large portions of the population will likely require more than changing economic structures of domination, as important as that is. Symbolic violence renders structural violence partially invisible, and we cannot address what we cannot fully see. As Giroux argues, “Politics often begins when it becomes possible to make power visible, to challenge the ideological circuitry of hegemonic knowledge” (2008:113). To have a more egalitarian future, Americans will need a deeper and more structural

understanding of social problems. This new understanding must allow Americans to fully recognize the non-individualistic causes of their plight, their solidarity with other social groups, and the ways we can combat structural violence. In the absence of this, Americans are in danger of blaming structural failings on the wrong people—such as themselves, racial and ethnic minority groups, immigrants, single mothers, public employees, the poor, etc.—instead of directing their energy at transforming our society into something more just.

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