Strengths-based Approaches to Conducting Research with Low Income and Other Marginalized Populations

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Abstract

As researchers, providers, and policymakers strive to make their work more inclusive, it is important to move beyond simply paying more attention to “understudied” groups. Along with calls for more research, there should be equally vigorous calls to move beyond stigmatizing, deficits-based approaches and instead develop respectful, strengths-based lenses. One challenge is the lack of published guidance about how to interact professionally with marginalized populations. Guided by standpoint theory, I share my experiences and recommendations for working with marginalized populations, focusing especially on working with people from low-income and working-class communities. Everyone has a standpoint that is shaped by multiple characteristics, and for many people these will include some privileged and some disadvantaged characteristics. However, even for well-intentioned people, it can be challenging to look beyond one’s socialization and to recognize that these characteristics, in and of themselves, do not confer goodness on a person, only privilege. The following recommendations are explored in more detail in the chapter: recognize one’s perspective (reflexivity), avoid setting up studies that inadvertently reflect academic culture, offer incentives that convey respect for people’s time and expertise in their own lives, ensure measures are written in straightforward (not academic) language, include or create measures that explore the strengths of marginalized groups, and disseminate your work to communities, not just fellow researchers. Researchers, editors, reviewers, and policymakers should be aware of best practices in this area.

Strengths-based Approaches to Conducting Research with Low Income and Other Marginalized Populations

A few years ago, two of my interns were at a gas station, where they were trying to install a large banner near the curb. It was a windy day, they had never done this before, and they were having trouble. A middle-aged man in a pickup truck pulled over near them, got out of his truck, and offered to help. With his help, they managed to get the banner up in just a few minutes. They thanked him, and he said, “No, thank *you.* You people from Life Paths have made a real difference around here.” It turned out that the reason he stopped is because he had read the banner, as it billowed in the wind while they wrestled with it. He stopped because the banner said Life Paths, the name of my research center. I do not know for sure what that man was thinking of when he made that statement, but we have several principles for approaching data collection to promote respectful, positive relationships with community members (see also Allen, Rivkin, & Trimble, this volume). These include aspects of sampling and recruitment, incentives, methodological choices, and adopting a strengths-based, versus deficit-based lens, even—especially—for research on victimization and other trauma. Our approach also includes efforts to disseminate our findings to communities—not just fellow researchers—after data collection. In this chapter, I discuss each of these aspects, with a focus on respectful and strengths-based approaches to working with low-income and working-class communities. I hope that this material can guide future researchers as well as provide important context for editors, funders, and policymakers.

Standpoint Theory & The Challenges of Working in Marginalized Communities

There are many challenges to working with people from marginalized communities, but perhaps the hardest challenges are the internal ones. If you are a member of the dominant white, middle-class U.S. culture—like the majority of academics, even today—then you must reckon with the elements of that culture that teach people to pretend that "white middle-class culture" *per se* does not really exist and that the ways of the dominant U.S. culture are just neutral, "natural," default ways of doing things, while all other cultures, classes, and worldviews represent variations on the dominant theme (McIntosh, 2007; Steyn & Conway, 2010). The same can be said for people with other characteristics that are dominant in the U.S., such as those who identify as male, heterosexual, cisgender, Christian, and able-bodied. All aspects of our social identities contribute to our "standpoint" as we approach any scientific question (Harding, 2004, 2009). Everyone has a standpoint that is shaped by multiple characteristics, and for many people, these will include some privileged and some disadvantaged characteristics (for example, in the U.S., being white and female or male and Latino). Few, if any, people have a deep understanding of all groups to which they do not belong. Although there are unique—and still underappreciated—challenges associated with possessing characteristics that are dominant in a given culture, all identities, including marginalized ones, contribute to any person's lens (see Rogers, Moffitt, & Jones, this volume).

Nonetheless, it can be most difficult to recognize the influence of one's privilege and that has been the focus of most work in this area. Even for the most well-intentioned people of privilege, it is challenging to look beyond one's socialization and to recognize that these characteristics, in and of themselves, do not confer goodness on a person, only privilege (see Wilson, Breen & DuPré, this volume). Even trained professionals, such as psychologists, social workers, and other social scientists and health care providers, can struggle to separate goodness from privilege. Standpoint theory asserts that members of subordinate groups typically possess more information about dominant groups than the reverse, because the subordinate group must learn to navigate the dominant social structures (Hartsock, 1998). The Blackfoot advocate Theda New Breast uses the phrase “bicultural warriors” to describe people who have learned to navigate both their home tribe and white culture (Hamby, 2000). Harding and other standpoint theorists argue that the path to better scientific knowledge lies not in (futilely) trying to strip away these influences, but in acknowledging them (Harding, 2004, 2009; Hirsh, Olson, & Harding, 1995). There are many benefits from recognizing and acknowledging one’s position and incorporating multiple standpoints into scientific knowledge. Perhaps most importantly, it can be a path toward recognizing unconscious biases that we are unintentionally introducing into our work.

Hidden & Underappreciated Aspects of Socioeconomic Class

Although these are important issues for all identity characteristics, in this chapter I focus on the challenges associated with working with people who have lower incomes, working class jobs, or limited educational attainment. Although recent empirical data are hard to obtain, existing evidence indicates that most academics come from socioeconomically privileged backgrounds (Muzzatti & Samarco, 2006; Stricker, 2011). Consistent with this, men and people who identify as white remain over-represented among university professors, compared to the general U.S. or undergraduate populations (U.S. Department of Education, 2019). The lack of data on the class backgrounds of professors is evidence itself of cultural efforts to make class invisible and/or irrelevant (Muzzatti & Samarco, 2006; Stricker, 2011). This lack of information about the professoriate stands in contrast to the large literature on first-generation college students. The influential sociologist Pierre Bourdieu and his followers have written about the ways that education is a force for the social reproduction of class hierarchies, and that much of what happens in the academy is about claiming and reinforcing social position (Bourdieu &

Passeron, 1990; Gopaul, 2011; Thomson, 2017). To some extent, it may be difficult for us to fully escape the strictures of the system that we are in, but more intentionality and awareness around these issues is an essential first step.

There is a powerful narrative in U.S. and other Western cultures that argues that people deserve their socioeconomic status and that poor people are poor because they are lazy, dumb, or addicted to substances (Patrick, 2016; Pemberton, Fahmy, Sutton, & Bell, 2016). We speak of welfare “queens” who receive minimal and highly surveilled assistance (Dee, 2013; Maki, 2011), while corporations and the wealthy people who run them benefit from millions of dollars in tax cuts and subsidies. Many social pressures work against understanding privilege and the ways that poverty can become a multigenerational phenomenon from which it is very hard to escape. One economist recently estimated that it would take 20 years of good fortune, without any significant health, personal, or financial crises, to successfully escape poverty and achieve middle-class status (Temin, 2018). Many pathways to the middle class that became, briefly, widespread after World War II have been slowly deteriorating. For example, college tuition has dramatically outpaced inflation, probably in a vicious cycle where tuition is affected by inequality while also contributing to it (Hill, 2016). Meanwhile, the minimum wage has stagnated (Desilver, 2018). The “War on Poverty” was replaced with a War on Drugs that, intentionally or not, has primarily targeted low-income people and people of color, making it even harder for them to succeed (Martin, 2015). Although the rapidly increasing inequality in the United States—and to some extent other wealthy democracies—is widely recognized, the social forces contributing to these inequalities are not as widely appreciated.

It is in this rather stark context that I offer some basic information on understanding social class in the United States and other wealthy democracies. I offer thoughts on engaging in self-reflexivity to recognize these forces and how they affect the work of social scientists. Recognizing the powerful social forces that stigmatize and "other" people with low incomes or limited educational attainment is the first step toward crafting methodologies that do not reinforce these stigmas. In the final section of the chapter, I offer some concrete examples of research methods that better convey respect and appreciation for those with limited socioeconomic resources, based on my more than 20 years' experience working in lower income communities.

"It's the hands you shake, not the grades you make": Understanding Social Class

There are a few basic facts about social class that everyone should know. I am focusing on U.S. data, which has starker patterns of inequality than many wealthy democracies, but most of these patterns are occurring in some form in many other countries. First, low-income households are a large and vulnerable segment of the population. Unlike college students, which are drawn disproportionately from high-income families, most of the population is grouped together near the bottom of the income range. Figure 1, with data from the U.S. Census, shows that more than 1 in 5 U.S. households are living on less than $24,000 per year. To put this in some context, the yearly tuition, board, and fees for an in-state student at the University of Tennessee at Knoxville was $32,010 for 2019-2020 (https://onestop.utk.edu/cost-of-attending-ut/undergrad/).

As many economists are now advocating, if wealth is considered instead of annual income, the findings are even more disparate (Piketty, 2014). Many households either have a negative value—more debt than assets—or very limited assets, while a select few have tremendous assets even into the billions of dollars. Three men (Bezos, Buffett, Gates) now have as much wealth as the poorest 160 million U.S. citizens (Collins & Hoxie, 2017). Walmart is the world’s largest employer (Statista, 2019). Retail salespeople and cashiers are the most common professions in the United States, both with average annual salaries under $25,000 (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2016). The smallest occupational groups include life, physical, and social science occupations, each making up less than 1 percent of total employment.

The unpleasant truth that we very seldom acknowledge is that, in our current economy, we have a high need for people working in retail, other service industries, factories, and fossil fuel industries. Many of these jobs are low paying and have little room for advancement. Many of them do not offer particularly gratifying or meaningful work, yet we need—literally—tens of millions of citizens to accept this kind of work. How does society make this happen? Seen in this light, some of our most intractable social problems look quite different. Of course, people in the working and lower classes have a wide array of experiences and characteristics. Nonetheless, they are more likely to experience several important forms of systemic and institutional oppression. Youth who grow up in lower-income homes have higher burdens of victimization and other trauma (Turner, Finkelhor, & Ormrod, 2006) and are more likely to be re-victimized as adults (Klest, 2012). In contrast, high socioeconomic status can act as a buffer, protecting wealthier trauma victims from poor mental health outcomes (Mock & Arai, 2011). In the U.S., many people from low-income families are the products of poor schools, due to a system that is tightly controlled along wealth lines, with funding based on local land values. As a result, the children of wealthy kids systematically receive better educations than poorer children. This is what Bourdieu and his followers mean when they say that education is a key element in reproducing class hierarchies (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990). Notably, Bourdieu was writing about French schools, who despite their attempts to be more egalitarian, at least compared to U.S. schools, can still reinforce class.

Our society is also set up so that social capital and networking help control access to the best jobs and other social benefits. At the private university where I work, I have heard students and alumni say, “It’s the hands you shake, not the grades you make.” The advantages of social capital are hard to under-estimate. For example, it only took white slaveowners 20 years after Emancipation to recoup their wealth when they lost access to unpaid labor and could not count other humans as assets. They accomplished this largely through advantageous marriages and moving into white-collar occupations (Ager, Boustan, & Eriksson, 2019).

People from higher socioeconomic backgrounds are taught the various “hidden” rules of class that guide interactions in universities and many other white collar settings (Stephens, Fryberg, Markus, Johnson, & Covarrubias, 2012). Meanwhile, our society often disrespects the equally complex knowledge needed to survive with a low income and views people with lower SES through a largely deficit lens. There are many forms of prejudice, including those aimed at people who use dialects or accents that are stigmatized. When I go to speak about issues related to Appalachia and identify as someone with multigenerational roots in this region, I have encountered experiences such as requests to speak in a stereotypically “hillbilly” accent and surprise that I own good quality modern technology, despite being a university professor. I never have these experiences when I speak on topics not specifically related to Appalachia. Finally, despite all of these obstacles, the U.S. and many other wealthy democracies continue to promote ideas of meritocracy, pretend there is a level playing field, and stigmatize any association with the lower tiers of the socioeconomic pyramid (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990; Gopaul, 2011; Thomson, 2017).

Strengths-based Approaches to Working with Low-Income Populations

These are formidable issues that will not be solved by individual researchers or individual research projects. Still, there are steps that any scholar can take to minimize these issues and shift the field to a better place, by working to avoid unintentionally reproducing hidden class norms. Anyone who wants to do just and fair work with low-income people needs, first and foremost, to avoid looking down on people who have fewer financial resources than they do. Research and scholarship should not be driven by pity. As soon as pity enters the picture, the ability to help others disappears. It is important to recognize that many people not only work hard but work harder than many people in professional jobs. Work hours for people in the middle and working classes have increased while wages have been largely stagnant, unlike people at the top end of the income spectrum, who have seen large wage gains (Mischel, 2013). Their days are often long and physically grueling, and they get few holidays and vacations. I once interviewed a man who had been fired for going to the bathroom too many times in one day (despite having a chronic condition, violating the Americans with Disabilities Act). In contrast, my job offers considerable flexibility. I have a great deal of control over how I spend my day, and if I am feeling unwell, it is not a problem if I go to the bathroom more than usual.

Trauma history is associated with financial strain (Turner et al., 2006), but one under-appreciated aspect of this is that many people who are working full-time in low-wage jobs, caring for children, and participating in their churches or other community organizations, have overcome substantial trauma to do so and are coping despite many interpersonal and institutional abuses (see also Delker, this volume for a discussion of the stigma of trauma). It is likely that they are functioning despite significantly more trauma than people with more financial privilege because financial privilege offers some insulation against some types of violence and adversity exposure.

Different sociocultural positions—based on income and other characteristics—require different kinds of knowledge. In my experience, some academics resist the idea that lower-income people have knowledge and skill sets that the middle and upper middle classes lack. It can be surprising the extent to which "middle class" and "knowledgeable" are unconsciously equated. However, lower income people often know all kinds of survival strategies, such as navigating social service agencies and courts (skills even many people with full-time jobs need). They might know more about prices, price fluctuations, and other economic data for a large range of essential items. They may have more expertise in plumbing, electricity, and auto engineering than many people of privilege.

Many academics do not recognize the extent to which many features of class are a performance. While visiting a campus that was situated in an Appalachian county that was quite poor except for the campus bubble, I had a conversation with a professor over dinner at a very expensive restaurant. In fact, he had earlier made it clear that this was one of the nicest and most expensive restaurants in town, I think hoping to communicate that I was being well treated as a guest of the university. He spoke of the surrounding towns and said no one in them had any money. He mentioned the Piggly Wiggly, a grocery store chain that is common in many rural towns. I suggested that the owners of the Piggly Wiggly might be millionaires and told him that the owners of the Piggly Wiggly in my town not only owned the grocery store—which probably includes hundreds of thousands of dollars in inventory alone—but also owned a lot of other land and commercial property in town and were one of the wealthiest families on the mountain. It was hard for him to consider that someone who owned a small country grocery store—that he emphasized was not where he shopped—could have more assets than he did. That is what people mean by the performance of class.

Even graduate students, assistant professors, and adjunct faculty, all of whom typically have incomes below the top 20% or sometimes even below the top 50%, perform class through dress, habits, and other signifiers. This has been most thoroughly investigated in research with first generation college students. These unspoken rules are some of the features of academia that can make it hard for first-generation college students and students from other marginalized groups to succeed, because success in the university environment is not just about doing homework and passing tests. For example, one study found that universities tend to emphasize independence, while first-generation college students are more likely to value interdependence and communitarian values (Stephens et al., 2012). Research on classism has found that it is a common experience among university students (Beagan, 2005; Langhout, Rosselli, & Feinstein, 2007; L. Smith, Mao, & Deshpande, 2016). However, it remains an underappreciated factor, especially among students from higher socioeconomic backgrounds (Beagan, 2005). Unfortunately, although there has been some discussion of the power dynamics of the research experience (Wilkinson, 1998), there have been few studies on the experiences of classism by research participants.

Decentering Your Own Sociocultural Lens

Reflexivity is probably the most important qualification for anyone who wants to work with marginalized populations—especially those who are not from those populations, or those who, like myself, have some connections to marginalized populations but also, as a university professor, are now a member of the professional class. No one is deeply knowledgeable about every culture or identity. Even if your own identity includes some marginalized characteristics, there will likely be others that you are less familiar with. When it comes to working with low-income populations, virtually every professional will in some sense be the “other,” because the very process of becoming a researcher, academic, or licensed provider is a process of joining the professional classes. I personally spent a lot of my undergraduate and graduate school career learning the cultural signals of class that I had not been taught as a youth, having been raised in a "first generation middle class" family, thanks to my father attending college on the GI bill. I still perform class on an almost daily basis (although not always in the privacy of my home, where my country ways are an endless source of amusement to my upper middle-class children). Professionally, it can be important to perform class in many settings. In some settings, people do not take me seriously if I do not perform the cultural markers of my professional status, and so I perform them. With my considerable professional privilege, I try to create spaces where I can communicate other cultural behaviors, but it is challenging.

Reflexivity Statements

One powerful way to become better aware of your own cultural lens is to prepare a reflexivity statement (Steyn & Conway, 2010; Wilkinson, 1988; see also Delucio & Villicana, this volume). One important element of working with marginalized populations is to know yourself, in terms of your own personal characteristics and your own history of privilege and advantage. In addition, it is important to understand the lens that your training and discipline offers and the ways that your framing of research questions affects the outcome. The classic way to acknowledge these factors is to craft a reflexivity (aka positionality) statement (Steyn & Conway, 2010; Wilkinson, 1988). A reflexivity statement, also sometimes called a positionality statement, is a narrative describing your own personal situation as you approach the work. This includes a description of the characteristics already mentioned, but also other features of your personal history, your training, and your discipline that affect your work.

Reflexivity statements have long been a prominent feature of much qualitative research and ethnography, perhaps especially in anthropology and sociology, but also in other social sciences (Steyn & Conway, 2010; Wilkinson, 1988). We now know that true objectivity is impossible. Even in the physical sciences, the act of measuring a phenomenon changes it (Baclawski, 2018). In social sciences, this is even more true, because we cannot fully distance ourselves from our measures and our research questions are inevitably influenced by our social position. Thus, the best way to approach science is to know (as much as we are able) our subjectivity and how that affects our work. Reflexivity statements are becoming common in social science research. I was recently required to do one for a publication in a communications journal (Hamby, Taylor, Smith, Mitchell, & Jones, 2018), and also required to do one for a grant from a private foundation. They are becoming important research skills. See Box 1 for my reflexivity statement. Note that I sometimes prepare new ones, depending on the nature of the project and the issues that will be addressed. There is no right or wrong length, and I have written ones that are as brief as a paragraph to ones that are several pages long, depending on the needs of a particular project.

Methods That Make Space for Strengths

The woman approached me cautiously. “My husband would like to do the survey.” “Great!” I said, but I could sense there was something more she wanted to say. “The thing is, he played football in high school.” I understood immediately what she meant. “That’s no problem, we have an option available to listen to the survey over a headset. If he needs other help, my interns can assist.” She looked relieved, thanked me, and went to tell her husband who was waiting across the street.

The key to strengths-based approaches to marginalized communities is ***inclusivity.*** Inclusivity means many things. This man was a survivor who had found a way to have a career and provide for his family despite being failed by his school system. He was one of several adults we encountered who needed help reading the survey, even though we had worked hard to ensure that the survey had a 6th grade reading level. Everyone deserves to have their voices represented in the body of psychological knowledge. In this section of the chapter, I discuss a range of approaches for including under-represented voices and for using methods that create space to ask about strengths and coping strategies, and move beyond deficit-based studies that only see people in terms of their adversities, risk factors, and symptoms. The discussion includes quantitative and qualitative approaches, including approaches to sampling, recruitment, survey design, and interview design.

There are a thousand details to attend to when one is conducting research. Unfortunately, due to space limitations in journals and other reasons, it is hard to find information for guidance in many of these decisions. For example, the methodological report for the National Survey of Children's Exposure to Violence (https://www.bjs.gov/content/pub/pdf/natscev2_mr.pdf), a project I worked on for many years, is 41 single-spaced pages, more than twice the length of most journal manuscripts, and it only describes the method. Even that document does not include every methodological decision that had to be made. That level of detail is beyond the scope of this chapter, too. However, I would like to mention some methodological details that are important for working with marginalized populations and under-discussed in the literature. These comments are based on more than 20 years' experience living and working in low-income communities, predominantly rural areas and small towns, across the United States (especially Tennessee, North Carolina, Arizona, and Maine).

Sampling and Recruitment

It has been said many times, but it bears repeating: we fail our communities, just as that man was failed by his school system, when we base so much psychological knowledge on college students (W. L. Jones & Sonner, 2001; Stolp, 2017; see also Syed & Kathawalla, this volume). Even when we extend beyond college students, too often it is only to younger students or people seeking help at clinics, hospitals, and other readily accessible groups. Or online surveys, despite the many known problems with the quality of the resulting data (S. Smith, Roster, Golden, & Albaum, 2016). These should be recognized as highly specialized populations, especially college students, who are so often accepted as standing for a neutral person. College students are richer, whiter, and younger than the general population. Few university students are married or have children—especially those at the universities where most research is conducted. They do not support themselves financially and have little, if any, work experience. That man who took our survey orally—a father with a full-time job and no college degree—has much more in common with the "typical" U.S. adult than college students do. Yet, when we submit papers using data from community members in this southern Appalachian region, we are frequently challenged on whether this sample could possibly generalize outside of this community—comments that we seldom get about papers based on any other type of sample. There is so much untapped wisdom in many understudied and marginalized communities, including Appalachia, where people seldom have the chance to tell their stories, especially if those stories do not conform to the negative stereotypes of their communities.

Embodying the role through sampling, recruitment, and participant support. We approach participation inclusively (see also Katsiaficas, this volume). Psychologists do not give sufficient consideration to the experience of being excluded from a study, especially if an incentive of some type is being offered. It is our goal to include as many voices from the community as possible and we endeavor to be as inclusive as possible and make our surveys as accessible as possible. Although we are sometimes limited by the prescriptions of our funders, we have worked across the age spectrum, from ages 10 and up.

However, there are many other factors that also impact our relationships with people in the community. We frequently collect data at community events—local festivals, etc. Sometimes people just appreciated a place to sit down in the shade and have a bottle of water without getting pressured to buy anything (as at other booths). We kept coloring books and crayons for kids and a few of my crew got pretty good at making balloon animals! Although it turned out that the greatest demand was for crowns and swords, and even I could make those. Sometimes a dozen or more kids would be playing around our booths.

In these more public settings, participants have told me many times that I am the first psychologist they have ever met. They are sometimes even more surprised to learn that there are people out there in the world who are trying to reduce the burden of trauma in communities like this one. Thus, it is important to be conscious that you are a role model for many people. This makes many of my students initially uncomfortable, because it is often the first time that they have been in such a position, but they typically rise to the occasion of being the "psychologist" that they would want to meet. A key element of this is our strengths-based approach. Many participants enjoy our surveys because they give them a chance to think about all the good things in their lives. Perhaps surprisingly, just as many appreciate a safe place to disclose their adversities, even anonymously. Once, we were collecting data at a clinic serving maltreated children. They had incorporated our survey (and consent process), which was completed on computer tablets, into their intake procedure. One week, I needed the tablets back for a few days because we had a large data collection planned at a school and I needed all the devices I could get. The therapists were disappointed to hear that the tablets would not be available, because they had found that an initial opportunity to share strengths was helpful for establishing the therapeutic alliance.

We try to make ourselves useful in other ways. As part of our debriefing, we worked hard to provide a good list of local resources and made sure all my research assistants were familiar with them. We started with information on therapists, domestic violence shelters, free hotlines, and that sort of thing. But then we found we got many questions about homeless shelters, English-as-a-second-language courses, and AA meetings, so we researched all of those and helped many people get connected with services. We also made this information available online as well as on a paper handout. Off the record, we were "honest witnesses" about services that we had heard many complaints about and tried to steer people to the strongest alternatives in the area.

Occasionally we provide additional support for participants. One woman who completed one of our surveys stayed afterward to disclose to us that she was a victim of domestic violence and that she was worried because her partner was going to be released from jail soon. Somehow, he had gotten hold of a cell phone while in jail and called her to tell her he would be looking for her when he got out. She wanted to get a restraining order, but when she called the court, they told her that would be $200, a huge sum to her. I knew that because of the Violence Against Women Act, they were not allowed to charge for those. So, we called the clerk of court on her behalf, but this time one of my interns said they were calling on behalf of "Dr. Hamby from the University of the South." The court staff suddenly got very helpful and explained that our participant needed to ask for a "domestic violence order of protection." Those were free. It was “restraining orders” that cost $200 (that is, for anyone with a different relationship to the offender, such as an employer). Now, they could have explained that to this woman who was in danger and so worried, but they did not. We arranged for her to go back to the clerk of court and arranged for the local domestic violence agency to help her complete the forms. There were other times when there had been, shall we say, miscommunications that we were able to help clarify.

Incentives. One important issue is incentives. I am strongly of the opinion that it is important to approach participants like peers and show respect for their input, whether their participation is in the form of a focus group, interview, or something else. Everyone is expert in their own lives and we literally could not do this work without them. Thus, some tangible sign of respect is warranted, and it is appropriate to include financial incentives in your budget. As I often tell people, all the members of the research team and all the project officers at the funding agencies are getting paid for their roles on this project. Indeed, few, if any of them, would continue to participate without getting paid. It is condescending and exploitive to expect other people to participate without pay. Further, incentives should offer enough money to actually buy something more than a pack of gum in today’s economy. Most often, we offer $20.

In rural communities, Walmart gift cards are a good option. I am specifically mentioning Walmart because other “department” or “big box” stores are not equivalent. If you have never lived in a remote area, you may not appreciate the importance of Walmart, despite its flaws. There is no Walmart on the mountain where my campus is located. People must go off the mountain for much of their shopping, but Walmart is the closest place—by far—to purchase hundreds if not thousands of items. Sooner or later, virtually everyone who lives in a rural area ends up at Walmart. Many of my colleagues have conveyed disdain at the choice of Walmart or asserted that they do not shop there for various political reasons, but those choices are all expressions of class and privilege. Walmart is one of the largest employers in many rural communities and is the largest employer in the world (Statista, 2019). Many potential participants either will work at Walmart or similar retail outlets or have family and friends who work there. Further, Walmart gift cards are easy to use and do not lose value over time, unlike some brands' cards. Amazon is not a good substitute, because it is hard to use the full value of an Amazon gift card without a credit card (you either have to find something that is exactly $20 including tax, have a credit card to cover the difference, or forego the balance). In contrast, you can easily pay in cash at Walmart for whatever amount you go over, or if you have a small amount like $1.43 left after a purchase, you can keep the card and take the $1.43 off your next purchase, so everyone can easily use the full $20 value.

Gift cards are also more accessible to unbanked and underbanked people. Further, gift cards are important because many low-income people do not have credit cards and checks are not as anonymous as gift cards (although we ask folks to sign a receipt). Approximately 1 in 13 people in Tennessee (7.5%) do not have a bank account, and this figure ranges from 8.7% to 15.8% in other nearby Appalachian and southern states where we have collected data (Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation, 2018b). More than 1 in 5 in this region are considered "underbanked," meaning that although they have a checking or savings account, they also use products including money orders, check cashing, payday loans, refund anticipation loans, rent-to-own services, pawn shop loans, or auto title loans (Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation, 2018a). Thus, many people do not have easy or cost-free ways to cash a check and may find it difficult to wait to receive payments in the mail. Once, we even worked with a community organization that did not have a checking account. Further, in our experience, letting people to take the incentive with them at the time they complete the survey is key to promoting broad participation.

Recently, Life Paths was part of a larger project where the funders were reluctant to offer incentives. Their first suggestion was that we offer youth a pencil. All I can say is that they must not know any teenagers, because teenagers are not motivated by pencils! The lead researcher was finally able to negotiate an arrangement that included offering a gift card to a bookstore. We picked Barnes & Noble, because the university bookstore is a Barnes & Noble and the closest shopping area (more than 50 miles away) also had one. Nonetheless, it was a struggle. We got asked over and over "What's a Barnes & Noble?" Books are a luxury item. Yes, I can hear the howls of those who might like to say that books are a necessity. I appreciate the sentiment, as both a writer and a reader, but that is not what "necessity" means. Food, electricity, diapers, tampons—these are necessities. Books are not required for survival and, outside the campus, this is not a book-oriented community (although of course there is a range of interest). I do not think that kind of controlling behavior is respectful of the choices and needs of participants. In the end, we got a lot of questions about what else you could buy at a Barnes and Noble and became fairly expert in their inventory.

Survey Construction & Measurement

Looking beyond your own experience for strengths. Many times, researchers are not aware that they are replicating their own experiences in their research. One of the main goals of the Life Paths research program is to identify under-appreciated strengths that have received little attention in mainstream research (see also Fish & Counts, this volume; Katsiaficas, this volume). Thus, as also described in more detail below, we often include a qualitative element, where we are actively listening for ideas that are not captured in existing literature (see also

Rogers et al., this volume). For our most recent project, we created several strengths and measures of functioning that had received little, if any, prior study, including concepts such as family well-being, relational motivation, and recovering positive affect (Hamby, Taylor, Mitchell, Jones, & Newlin, 2020; Hamby et al., 2019). As you can see in Figure 3, most of the pre-existing constructs showed higher scores among European American/white youth than African American/black youth. In contrast, 6 of the 8 measures of new constructs showed no significant differences between African American/black youth and European American/white youth, with some (psychological endurance, recovering positive affect, and non-theistic spiritual well-being) showing slightly higher scores among African American/black youth. These kinds of data suggest that researchers may be unintentionally tapping into their own standpoints and researching the kinds of strengths that are common in their identity groups (which historically has largely been white and middle class). Instead of concluding that African American youth have fewer strengths than European American youth, as has often been done, it would be better to consider the possibility that we are not doing a good job of assessing strengths in these communities.

Sensitively dealing with social and political identities. Another important aspect of survey design is considering how to ask potentially stigmatizing questions. Considerations include promoting disclosures, avoiding stigma, and serving as a role model for inclusivity while avoiding upsetting some participants. In general, a strengths-based approach, focused on conveying respect for all persons, is useful for these goals as well. A surprising range of people, including some that may seem quite privileged or politically dominant in a region, will express concerns about not being heard. For example, a few years ago we did a survey on gun violence and a few strongly pro-2nd amendment people expressed doubt about whether we wanted to hear their opinions or would give them space to share their beliefs. We had gone over the survey many times to make sure that the phrasing of the questions and answers allowed for a full range of attitudes and experiences, and a few of these folks even complimented us on that after completing the survey. We strive to make it clear that we want to hear the full range of opinions.

I get asked all the time about whether people will really disclose their traumatic experiences to me and my team. That is not a problem. On the contrary, many people appreciate finally having a safe, confidential space to tell their story. By empirical standards, victimization is not the most sensitive topic. Income is. We get far more missing data in response to questions about income—often ranging from 10% to 15%--than any other question. This is true not only in my research in Appalachia or other low-income communities, but also in nationally representative studies. Even questions on rape or child abuse seldom have missing data—if appropriately asked—from more than 2% or 3% of participants, often less. To collect income data, we start by asking very broad categories, such as $0 to $50,000, $50,001 to $100K, etc. Then, we ask a follow-up to narrow the categories. That way, we have at least some information on a higher percentage of participants. We also ask about financial strain—a set of questions about whether they could access $500 in an emergency, for example. These responses are more highly correlated with many other factors, in part because even many people with "middle class" incomes also report a lot of financial strain. People are more likely to respond to financial strain questions than a direct question about income.

Other sociodemographic characteristics can present challenges too. We are interested in the role of religion and spirituality in coping with trauma, a neglected area of research but a potential resource for many people in my community. However, we long ago decided to never ask religious affiliation. We did not want to be in a position to describe differences between Catholics and Protestants, or Methodists and Baptists.

Our approach to gender identity has changed over time. My earliest studies only included the options to report male or female gender identities. The first time I collected community data in Appalachia, in 2013, we discussed adding a third alternative, but being somewhat anxious about recruitment, I was concerned that might be unacceptable to many community members. However, I now think that was too conservative on my part. Currently, we include a third option that reads, “I prefer another term” and gives people a chance to specify that term. We intentionally avoid the use of “other” as a category here, because nobody identifies as “other.” If we are asking questions about an intimate partner, then we ask the same gender questions for the partner.

Qualitative Methods

Crafting the script. Most of the above strategies can be applied to either quantitative or qualitative research. Even beyond focusing on easy-to-read, strengths-based approaches in surveys, there are considerations that are perhaps best exemplified in qualitative research.

Once, as we were preparing for community interviews, we sought input from a well-known psychologist to help us draft a more strengths-based interview. Although I and some of the other members of the research team had experience with focus groups and interviews, most of those had been focused on victimization or violence prevention. This was the first time I had tried to construct an interview that would get a more open-ended, holistic perspective on coping and resilience that was not focused on known victims of violence. The consultant recommended a technique that is apparently common in their field, which is asking people to turn their lives into a book and describe each chapter. The consultant was very excited about this approach and the opportunity to use it in my rural Appalachian community.

I was not in favor of this approach. More precisely, I thought they had no idea how much their own sociocultural perch as a full-time tenured academic had influenced their view of the world. In the United States, 88% of the population has a high school diploma—meaning about 1 in 8 people do not (and that 88% includes people like our participant who graduated due to sports participation or getting passed along, despite not being able to read). One in three people have a college degree, while about 3 in 5 have been to at least some college (Ryan & Bauman, 2016). Many people have limited exposure to college. It is important to recognize that a university education is not the norm in the United States. However, I want to be clear that I don't think this is simply a matter of more or less education. Reaching for the concept of "book" as a metaphor for life reflects academic culture. It is a fine metaphor, but no more inherently worthy than other common metaphors, such as life as a journey, adventure, or movie.

Appalachian communities, like all communities, are more diverse than the stereotypes about them suggest (Gray, 2009; Terman, 2016). Our mountain community includes authors, pundits, and educators who are not affiliated with the university. Nonetheless, communities do have cultures that must be reckoned with, even if the degree of identifying with those dominant values varies (McLean & Syed, 2015). We should not be imposing academic culture on other communities. A book is not a common metaphor among many people in this rural Appalachian community, and "book smarts" are not as valued as common sense and lived experience. In this low-income community, like others I have lived in, it is not uncommon for there to be few, if any, books in a house, other than a Bible. Of course it would be the height of vanity to compare one's own life, in any way, to that text, and humility is a key value in this community (Hamby, Taylor, Smith, Jones, & Mitchell, 2018).

In Tennessee, Dolly Parton is the source of many books. She has a foundation, Dolly Parton's Imagination Library, that gives a book a month to every child in the state of Tennessee from birth to age 5 (the foundation also operates in other places, but has been statewide in Tennessee since 2004, https://imaginationlibrary.com/usa). So, you do see books in houses with children, but typically those are books for young children and do not have chapters. There are public libraries in many towns on the mountain, too. These are important resources; in addition to providing books they also provide people with internet access, programs for children, meeting rooms for other organizations, and other important services. Still, books are not a central feature of community life. The only bookstore on the mountain is the university bookstore, which does stock books for the general public but that means coming on campus. In our work, we met dozens, if not hundreds, of people who had never been on the university campus despite living in the surrounding communities their whole lives. These towns are small—Sewanee has only about 2000 year-round residents, and other towns on the mountain are even smaller. Nonetheless, town-gown relationships are distant, at best, in part because most of the university faculty are not from this area or even from Tennessee.

Life Paths has attended many community events, both for data collection (we often set up booths at community events to recruit participants, our most successful recruitment strategy) and to support community initiatives. Of course, in a community of this size, we would often frequently run into people from youth organizations and nonprofits in the area. Several times, one of the counselors from a statewide therapy organization approached me and said something like, "I know you probably think that most people around here hate everyone from the university, and I know there's a lot that speak ill of the college, but I just want you to know that I'm not one of them. I don't hate you just because you're from the university." After the 3rd or 4th time he offered this "support," I started to wonder about his own feelings. The reasons for the town-gown tensions are complex, but, as in many university towns, some reasons are the perception that university faculty and students are elitist, uppity, and hold themselves apart from the rest of the community. There is some truth in those perceptions. Worse, in Appalachia, as in many rural communities, "elitist" is considered an insult by many people (Hamby, Taylor, Smith, Jones, et al., 2018; L. Jones & Brunner, 1994; L. Jones & Wheeler, 1995). A big insult. Plus, the communities are small enough that word gets around fast when something is a pleasant or unpleasant experience. So, it is not a book-oriented community to begin with and drawing attention to our university affiliation and emphasizing our university-based way of looking at the world would be doing us no favors in terms of the project.

Even if we did find people to participate in such an interview, they would probably not represent the full community. Honestly, I could hardly imagine a worse approach than asking folks to turn their lives into a book on the spot. Further, this seems like a pretty hard task, even under the best of circumstances. I am a book-oriented person and read several books a year in addition to dozens of journal articles. I am also a huge fan of narrative exercises as a therapeutic tool. Still, I would not find it easy to turn my own life into a book with just a few moments to ponder that at the beginning of an interview. In one discussion, I turned to my colleagues and asked them, on the spot, to turn their lives into a book. They just smiled and laughed and demurred. And there was not even a voice recorder running to add to the pressure. One important aspect of reflexivity is working to appreciate what it feels like to be on the other side of the "desk", so to speak, and to be asked to do the things that we, as researchers and providers, so often recommend to others. In addition to this overarching issue, there were other problems with their interview script too, perhaps most notably that it was long. Probably one of the most common complaints I hear from people about therapy sessions is that their therapist talks more than they do. During my clinical training, I was taught that any time you are talking more than your client, then something is wrong, and I try to bring that principle to interviews and focus groups.

Working with the rest of the research team, we eventually settled on a compromise that was less academic-centric. Instead of trying to capture someone's entire life in a single interview, we opted to focus on some key moments. We decided to focus on "key scenes" in their life stories (an approach that has also been used by others). The advantages to this approach are that it requires a less exhaustive inventory and relies more on visual images—as in TV or movies—than written ones. We asked people to describe a high point, a low point, and a turning point. We also asked them to tell us about a time they did something good and a time they did something bad. Because we were interested in understanding the role of religion and spirituality in this community, we asked them to describe a religious experience. We also had a question asking them to describe a life challenge. Then we moved on to a section on context, or the background of the story. Then we had a question we called "the next chapter" where we asked them to think about where they might be in 10 or 15 years. It took many drafts and much effort to simplify the interview and shorten the script, compared to the original version. My research assistants, especially those with more ties to the local community, provided valuable feedback.

During the interview or focus group. To fully appreciate and understand strengths, it is important to understand trauma. A lot of people's strengths—their assets and resources—emerge in the context of dealing with challenges, from everyday hassles to overwhelming trauma. If you want to get more than a few nice-sounding platitudes, you must be willing to go where they need to go to tell their stories. That involves, among other things, being ok with tears. All the usual interviewing guidelines apply—ask open-ended questions, avoid questions or comments that could sound blaming (such as “Why were you drinking?”) versus more general prompts to elicit what happened. Communicate attention and interest with body language. There are many sources of good guidance on general interviewing skills (e.g., Charmaz & Belgrave, 2012; Weiss, 1995; see also Rogers et al., this volume).

However, these general principles are not sufficient when you are talking to people with less privilege than you. Perhaps they are not sufficient for anyone, but especially when working with marginalized and oppressed populations, it is important to be aware of your discrepancies in privilege. One of the most important values for talking to people with less privilege is this: Never promise more than you can give. Be an *honest witness*. Do not say “Everything’s going to be ok” when you do not know what is going to happen to them. The first time you utter anything like that, people who struggle daily with low resources, discrimination, or the failure of the social services and health care systems will know that you do not understand. Do not offer false comfort.

It is equally important to keep from second guessing someone’s judgment. Do not say something like “The safest thing to do would be to call the police” or, even worse, “Why didn’t you call the police?” Again, these stances reflect privilege. In many communities, it is not safe for many people to call the police. This is just one example—this issue is not limited to contact with law enforcement or other agencies. It is equally important for other decisions too, such as the decision as to whether it is better or even safer to leave a violent relationship. Assuming that would lead to an improvement in someone’s life circumstances is also a sign of privilege that ignores the financial challenges and risk of separation violence, among other issues (Hamby, 2014). Along similar lines, be careful about asking anything that suggests access to resources. For example, perhaps you live somewhere that has public transportation. Some universities even offer free public transportation. Many rural communities and small towns lack public transportation. Even some larger towns and cities have limited public transportation that may be limited to older people or people with disabilities or have such limited service that it is not feasible for regular use. I have also lived in many places where it is a very long drive to the nearest domestic violence agency or rape crisis center. Medical care, especially specialty medical care such as psychiatrists, are also often hard to access. On the mountain where my work is based now, accessing such services generally means driving off the mountain.

Closing the Circle: After Data Collection

I have participated in numerous studies where the debriefing included a promise to receive information about the results of the project. Most of the time, this never happened. There needs to be more attention to circling back to communities after conducting research there (see also Katsiaficas, this volume). Too many researchers "helicopter" in to their target communities, get the information they need, and depart (Hamby, 2000). This is especially problematic in low-resource communities.

Over the years, we have handled this kind of giving back in several ways. One effective way to give back is to offer workshops on the results. For some of our recent Life Paths projects, we have done this in a few different ways, including preparing a brief 15-minute presentation (with handouts) that was incorporated into the monthly meetings of three area health councils, giving a free 90-minute talk on resilience to a new resiliency network in the largest city where we collected data, and offering a free full-day training on resilience and resilience interventions in the small town closest to campus. In the latter case, Life Paths covered the costs of renting a space in town that is popular with local (non-university) organizations and covering the costs of coffee and breakfast. Another time, we were able to offer a conference that included local providers and representatives from area nonprofits as well as academic researchers. Some of the local professionals were able to participate in a special section of papers for a journal.

As stated earlier, not everyone is comfortable coming to campus and campus is less centrally located to many nonprofit, state, and county organizations than the hotel meeting room we chose. We also maintain a page of local resources and project-specific reports on our website. A brief summary of our latest project is on our website and one of our partner's websites. We have also prepared other handouts that we have made available to community members at local health fairs and other venues.

These community-specific activities are in addition to our other efforts to disseminate our work to the general public, which include a *Psychology Today* blog and interviews with the media, including newspaper, radio, and podcasts (and TV, when the opportunity presents itself). I also present trainings to provider and general audiences in other communities, in addition to research conferences. Research conferences and scientific journals are important and, as a former editor of an American Psychological Association journal, I am a strong believer in the value of peer review and scientific writing. However, it is equally important that scientific findings not stay in the ivory tower but get disseminated as quickly as possible so that they can help reduce the burden of trauma and other problems.

Perhaps the most important point to make about these kinds of dissemination is that they are, like all aspects of research, also a two-way street. My team and I learn a lot from communicating with the public and with frontline providers, including perspectives that not only improve our future dissemination efforts but also often inspire future research questions. Two of my academic colleagues and I partnered with a national nonprofit, the National Children's Advocacy Center, a few years ago to work on developing workshops and materials to train providers, and it was an eye-opening experience for me to see how far the gap was between the implications section of your typical journal article and the kind of information that providers can actually use. Now we endeavor to be much more explicit about how people can translate our work into practice.

Beyond Social Class: Intersectionality

In this chapter, I have focused on social class, which remains perhaps the least discussed characteristic in social science research, yet one that is responsible for many health disparities and other risks and adverse outcomes. However, as discussed at the beginning of the chapter, none of us is a single identity. Social class intersects with other attributes, such as race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, immigrant status, age, and disability status (Crenshaw, 1991; see also Delucio & Villicana, this volume). Respectful, strengths-based approaches are helpful for working with people, groups, and communities of all identities. Depending on the setting, some identities may be foregrounded relative to others. As a researcher, you will probably have some identities in common with the group you are working with, and some that vary. As you broaden your lens to a more intersectional framework, reflexivity remains the key first step. Take time to consider the similarities and differences between you and the group you are working with. If you dis-identify with that group or any of its characteristics, it might be worth asking why you are working with this group. "Savior syndrome" is still a common problem in many academic, non-profit, and health care settings. You might be most familiar with the "white savior" concept, but savior syndrome occurs any time that rescue fantasies by a privileged outsider—with the outsider in the hero role—drive the work, the way it gets executed, and who gets credit for it. Often, once the credit is obtained, the savior leaves the community, with few, if any, mechanisms in place for the work to continue. This is a big issue and a full discussion is beyond the scope of this chapter.

However, there are steps that you can consider if you are working with a community that is different from you, especially in characteristics that will be the focus of the project. Think about the construction of your team. Are you all similar to each other (for example, white, upper middle class, cisgender, professional, secular, currently able-bodied) and unlike the community you wish to study, especially in variables that are important to your study? Then your team needs re-thinking. Teaching research skills to students or members of that community can help diversify the pipeline of people going into science. Another good option, regardless of the diversity of your team, is to form an advisory board of community stakeholders, who can help you craft your project and interpret your data (see Katsiaficas, this volume).

Most importantly, take time and listen. If you do not have years of personal experience to draw on to understand a community, then you need to invest adequate time to become familiar with a community, to become a person trusted by that community, and to recognize some of the main ways that community differs from those you know well (Hamby, 2000). If you are not willing to make that kind of investment, then there is a possibility that there is an exploitive element to your involvement in that community. I once read a book manuscript where, in the opening, the author described her process for obtaining interviewees. She said that she got material for her dissertation, and the interviewees got “a good cup of coffee.” That has stayed with me for many years. This was supposed to be her statement of reflexivity and she was claiming that this was an equitable exchange. I hope it goes without saying that a graduate degree and a good cup of coffee are not comparable benefits. Frankly, it may not be possible to create a fully equitable exchange, especially at the individual participant level. That is why dissemination and training to the general public and to providers are so important, so that there are ways that the whole community benefits. It is very important to give some serious consideration to this balance of benefits and striving for this balance becomes even more important as the social distance between you and your participants increases.

Conclusion

Psychology and other social sciences should represent everyone. More community-based research is urgently needed, especially research that helps to identify the untapped wisdom of marginalized groups, including low-income communities. Lower income and working-class people make up a large percentage of the population but are under-represented in research, and not always respectfully treated when they are included. Researchers, editors, reviewers, funders, and policy makers can enhance their impact by taking care to engage in and support strengths-based approaches.

There are several concrete steps that researchers, students, and others can take to conduct stronger and more respectful research with people from low income and other marginalized communities. Reflexivity is an essential first step, because full objectivity is impossible, especially with marginalized groups, or any group that is different in important ways from your own identity. A long tradition supports preparing reflexivity statements that acknowledge the influence of your personal history as well as your current sociocultural situation and the training in your discipline. In addition to self-awareness, the other key element to strengths-based approaches is to be as inclusive as possible. Inclusivity can be expressed in many ways. For working with people with lower incomes or limited educational attainment, inclusivity can mean avoiding setting up studies that reflect the culture of university campuses and research institutes. Incentives should be offered that convey respect for people's time and expertise in their own lives and the lives of their communities. Be mindful that there are few people who conduct research on a *pro bono* basis, and it is not appropriate to ask people who have fewer resources than the researchers to make *pro bono* contributions to research. Their time is just as valuable as so-called experts.

Look at your materials—your questionnaires and interview prompts—and make sure that they avoid reifying university culture, such as the example discussed in the chapter of avoiding using books as metaphors for people's lives. People who have trouble reading should be accommodated, and care should be taken to keep reading levels as low as possible. Do not write questionnaire items to impress your peers, write them so that the broadest swath of people will understand what you are trying to get at. Due to a lack of reflexivity and other forces, such as the unintended consequences of rewarding the use of well-established (even old) measures, there is a lack of measures available that explore the strengths of marginalized groups. Consider creating new scales that help identify these strengths. Take care to develop diverse research teams and consider forming advisory boards of local stakeholders. These are just a few examples of steps that can lead to more accurate and respectful work with people who have lower socioeconomic status or other marginalized characteristics.

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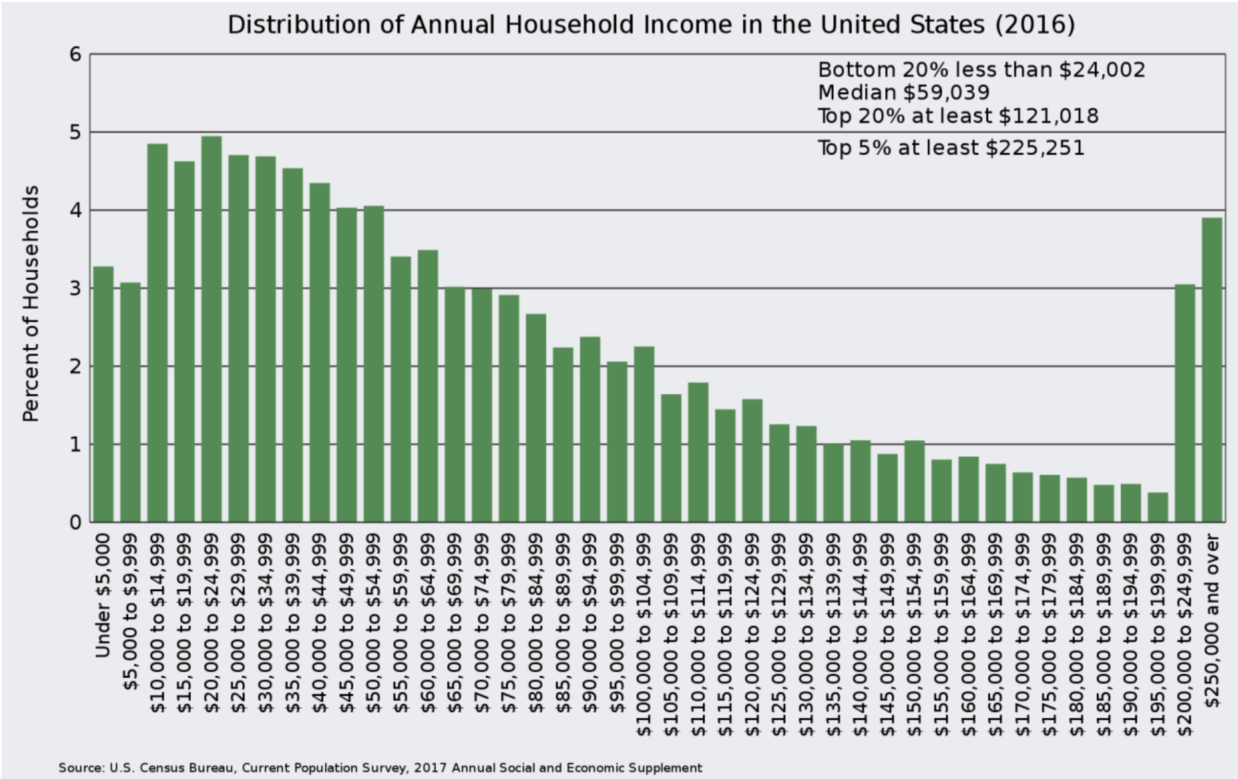
Figure 1


Distribution of Annual Household Income in the United States (2016)
Bottom 20% less than $24,002
Median $59,039
Top 20% at least $121,018
Top 5% at least $225,251
Percent of Households
0
1
2
3
4
5
6
Under $5,000
$5,000 to $9,999
$10,000 to $14,999
$15,000 to $19,999
$20,000 to $24,999
$25,000 to $29,999
$30,000 to $34,999
$35,000 to $39,999
$40,000 to $44,999
$45,000 to $49,999
$50,000 to $54,999
$55,000 to $59,999
$60,000 to $64,999
$65,000 to $69,999
$70,000 to $74,999
$75,000 to $79,999
$80,000 to $84,999
$85,000 to $89,999
$90,000 to $94,999
$95,000 to $99,999
$100,000 to $104,999
$105,000 to $109,999
$110,000 to $114,999
$115,000 to $119,999
$120,000 to $124,999
$125,000 to $129,999
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$150,000 to $154,999
$155,000 to $159,999
$160,000 to $164,999
$165,000 to $169,999
$170,000 to $174,999
$175,000 to $179,999
$180,000 to $184,999
$185,000 to $189,999
$190,000 to $194,999
$195,000 to $199,999
$200,000 to $249,999
$250,000 and over
Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey, 2017 Annual Social and Economic Supplement

Figure 2

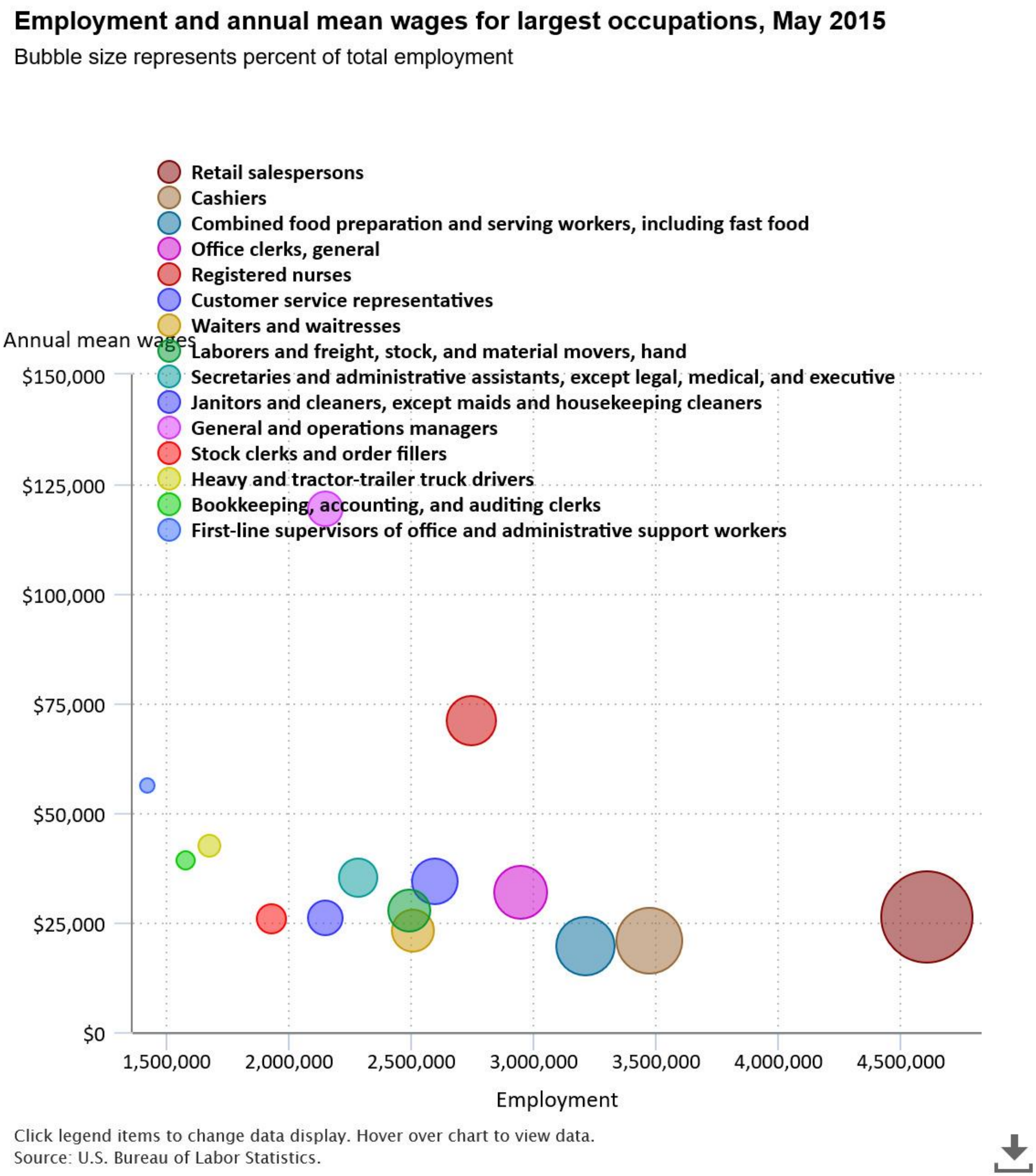
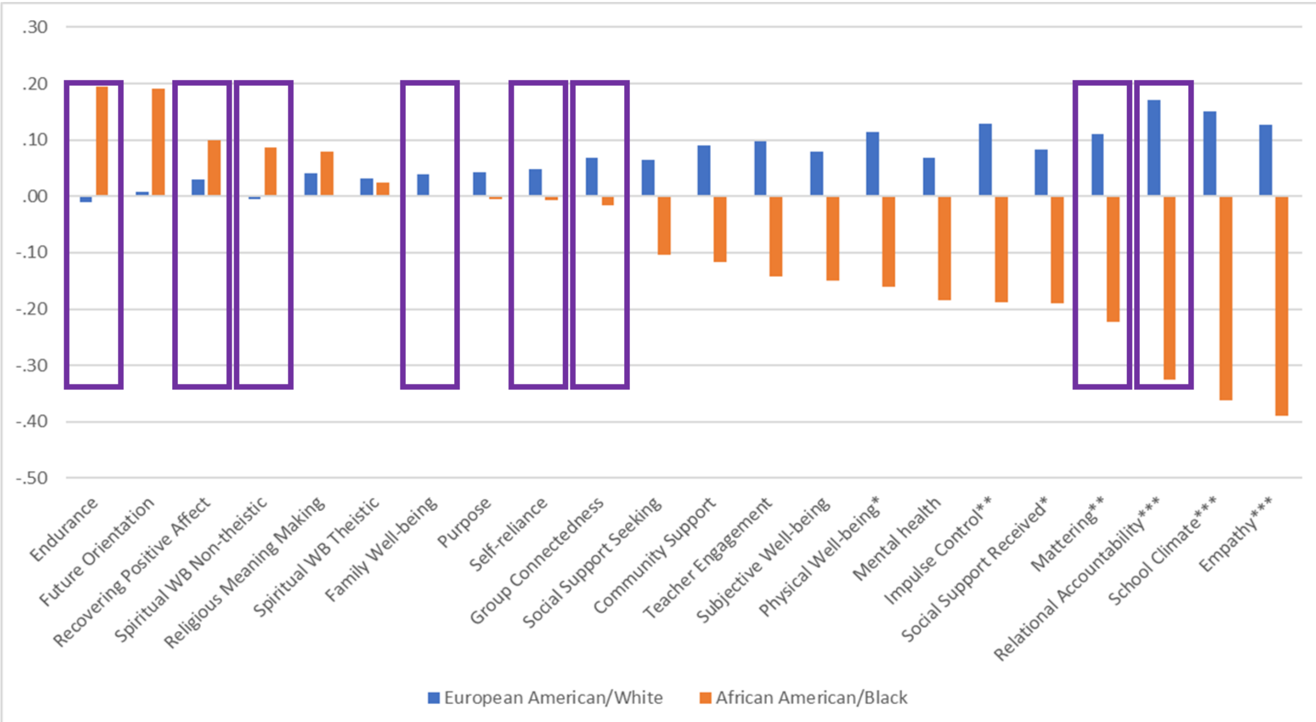

Employment and annual mean wages for largest occupations, May 2015
Bubble size represents percent of total employment
Retail salespersons
Cashiers
Combined food preparation and serving workers, including fast food
Office clerks, general
Registered nurses
Customer service representatives
Waiters and waitresses
Laborers and freight, stock, and material movers, hand
Secretaries and administrative assistants, except legal, medical, and executive
Janitors and cleaners, except maids and housekeeping cleaners
General and operations managers
Stock clerks and order fillers
Heavy and tractor-trailer truck drivers
Bookkeeping, accounting, and auditing clerks
First-line supervisors of office and administrative support workers
Annual mean wages
$150,000
$125,000
$100,000
$75,000
$50,000
$25,000
$0
1,500,000
2,000,000
2,500,000
3,000,000
3,500,000
4,000,000
4,500,000
Employment
Click legend items to change data display. Hover over chart to view data.
Source: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics.

Figure 3. *Mean differences in indicators of strengths and functioning for African American/black and European American/white youth*



Note: Means and standard deviations have been converted to z-scores (mean=0, standard deviation=1) to facilitate comparisons across scales. Scales in purple boxes are new ones that were added after qualitative work exploring strengths in this population. Scales with marked with an * showed significant mean differences between African American/black and European American/white youth.

Box 1. Sample reflexivity statement.

As described in more detail in the text, preparing a reflexivity statement is a powerful way to become more aware of your specific perspective and lens. It is an important first step to helping to reduce the inevitable subjectivities and biases that affect all research projects. Here is an example in the form of a reflexivity statement about me. This one focuses on social class, but depending on the nature of the project, it would be appropriate to prepare new ones with different foci.

To that end, here is my reflexivity statement.

My background deeply influences my approach to working with people from low-income and rural communities, in southern Appalachia and elsewhere. I have multigenerational roots in southern Appalachia and the rural southern U.S. more broadly. My paternal grandparents were tenant farmers and later orange pickers. My maternal grandfather was a coal miner until he got black lung disease, and then he and my grandmother became teachers. My father was the first person in his family to go to college, thanks to the GI bill. My mother did not go to college and worked in retail before her retirement. My father moved his family from the deep south to Washington DC to work for NASA. Thus, I grew up learning to navigate both the professional classes of the DC suburbs as well as the southern working-class norms of my extended family. I believe this code-switching ability is a tremendous advantage in my work. I was the first person in my extended family to get a graduate degree.

As a white, straight, cisgender woman, I benefit from many kinds of privilege, which I did not really understand until I moved to the San Carlos Apache Reservation in the 1990s, to work as a clinician and researcher. It was the first time I lived in a community that wasn't majority white and, more importantly, the first time I started to appreciate that whiteness was not some sort of neutral default, but that middle class American white culture was a very specific culture and way of being in the world. That experience has had a profound impact on my work until this day.

My graduate training is in clinical psychology. There are pros and cons to this lens. I think I have a lot of empathy and strong skills for interacting with people who are in distress, and this has helped me include a wider range of people in my research. However, clinical psychology is also very focused on individuals. Psychologists seldom ask whether there is a good reason that someone is depressed or abusing substances. Although some psychologists focus on families and parent-child relationships, psychology has only recently started to consider the health of communities and the broader social forces that affect everyone. I learned more about those when I spent my research post-doctorate working with sociologists at the University of New Hampshire. I have spent most of my adult life, more than 20 years, living in rural and low-income communities. In these communities, I began to understand not only that the solutions typically offered by psychologists were not very helpful, but also that community members had answers to their own problems that were hardly ever discussed in psychology. Now, I focus my research on documenting the untapped wisdom of marginalized communities and identifying the most helpful strategies for overcoming trauma.