The Poverty Attributions of Professional Social Workers

THESIS

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By

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Abstract

The poverty attributions of 249 licensed, professional social workers from a Midwestern metropolitan center were assessed using the Poverty Attribution Survey. The three attributions used in this research were structural, individual, and cultural. The primary hypothesis of this research was that, as a whole, the social workers in this sample would agree with the structural attribution and disagree with the individual and cultural attributions for poverty. This hypothesis was supported, with the social workers in this sample “somewhat agree[ing]” that poverty is attributable to structure, “disagree[ing]” that poverty is attributable to the individual, and “somewhat disagree[ing]” that poverty is attributable to culture. The second hypothesis of the research was that social workers who provide direct service would agree more with the individual and/or cultural attribution for poverty when compared to indirect service social workers. This hypothesis also was supported for both the individual and cultural attribution.

There were other groups of social workers who agreed significantly more with one or the other attribution. In terms of the structural attribution, those social workers who identified as non-religious, liberal, and/or recent field instructors agreed with the attribution significantly more. Social workers who identified as politically conservative
were associated with endorsement of the individual attribution. Social workers who agreed significantly more with the cultural attribution for poverty identified as politically conservative, white/Caucasian/European descent, and/or having a non-social work Bachelor’s degree.

The implications of this research relate to the possible consequences for clients living in poverty who are assigned to social workers who endorse the individual attribution for poverty. Based on the ethical responsibilities placed on social workers by the National Association of Social Workers (NASW) to address and ameliorate the negative consequences of poverty, two initial actions are proposed.
Dedication

This document is dedicated to my partner, my family, and my friends.
Acknowledgments

I have been incredibly fortunate over the course of this project to be supported by numerous colleagues and loved ones. One could not ask for a better team of advisers than is found in Dr. Lisa Raiz and Dr. Tamara Davis. Their brilliance is only exceeded by their compassion. My future wife, Casey Bolitho, was exceeding patient with my process and provided critical thought and conversation throughout. My friends, honestly or otherwise, maintained a consistent level of interest, which, at times, I myself found difficult to sustain. My mother, Christy, and grandparents, Rodney and JoAnn, are certainly the leaders of my family, and I am indebted to them for my success. My brothers, Kasey and Nick, are my continued inspiration and are both very dear to me. I, also, want to thank the Bolitho family—Tim, Tracy, and Ely—who have invited me into their home and offered continued support and encouragement. This process would not have been the same without my canine companion, Copper, who barked out the window next to my desk and reminded me that life is more than a confluence of deadlines and tasks. A sincere “thank you” to all who have been instrumental in the completion of this study.
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Fields of Study

Major Field: Social Work
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In 2008, the U. S. Census Bureau reported that over 39.8 million individuals were living in the condition of poverty, representing 13.2% of the U. S. population (DeNavas-Walt, Proctor, & Smith, 2009). Poverty does not discriminate based on race, sex, age, disability status, or sexual orientation. However, there are groups who experience poverty in larger numbers than others. African Americans were 12.6% of the U. S. population in 2008 but 23.5% of individuals living in poverty (DeNavas-Walt, Proctor, & Smith, 2009)—meaning that nearly 1 in 4 individuals living in poverty were African American. Similarly, children and adolescents under the age of 18 constituted 24.6% of the U. S. population in 2008 but 35.3% of individuals living in poverty (DeNavas-Walt, Proctor, & Smith, 2009). Therefore, over one-third of Americans living in poverty are children under the age of 18. African Americans and children are not the only groups who experience poverty to a disproportionate degree; women and single-parent households also subsist in poverty in greater numbers than their respective counterparts (DeNavas-Walt, Proctor, & Smith, 2009).
The negative effects of living in the condition of poverty are experienced across the lifespan. Thomas-Presswood and Presswood (2008) analyzed the compounding effects of living in poverty. For instance, maternal malnutrition during pregnancy can lead to low birth weight which has profound effects on the physical and neurological development of children (Thomas-Presswood & Presswood, 2008). Nutrition’s contribution to physical and cognitive development continues throughout infancy, childhood, adolescence, and adulthood (Thomas-Presswood & Presswood, 2008).

Additionally, adults and children living in the condition of poverty have low social support and are exposed to disproportionally higher levels of environmental dangers, such as lead paint, substance-use, and crime (Thomas-Presswood & Presswood, 2008). The profession of social work has a long history of intervening on the behalf of individuals and families living in poverty to address the negative physical and social effects of poverty.

Before exploring a segment of the history mentioned above, it is central that the overarching research question and hypotheses of this research be presented. The research question which prompted this study was, *What are the poverty attributions of licensed social workers in one Midwestern metropolitan area?* It is hypothesized that social workers will agree with the structural attribution for poverty and disagree with the individual and cultural attributions for poverty. The second hypothesis is that social workers who provide direct service to clients will agree significantly more with the individual and/or cultural attribution for poverty.
Mary Richmond, Jane Addams, and the NASW

Social work was founded in the late 1890s (Specht & Courtney, 1994) and achieved professional status in the 1930s (Stuart, 2008). Mary Richmond and Jane Addams are two of the earliest figures in the history of social work. They are, also, credited with providing two divergent methodologies for meeting the needs of people living in poverty (Specht & Courtney, 1994). Richmond began her social service career in the Charity Organization Society (COS) of Baltimore (Specht & Courtney, 1994). The first COS was established by Reverend Humphries Gurteen in 1877, and although the organization invokes the word charity, the COS did not provide direct aid (Specht & Courtney, 1994). The purpose of the COS was to standardize the distribution of charity and prevent recipients from receiving more than their share (Specht & Courtney, 1994). This mission was accomplished through the use of “friendly visitors”: middle- and upper-class, white women who volunteered their time and energy to investigate the claims of destitution reported by families (Specht & Courtney, 1994).

Richmond, who pioneered social casework, appreciated the individual focus offered by the COS (Murdach, 2010). In 1917, she published the Social Diagnosis which outlined the initial interview with a potential recipient (Specht & Courtney, 1994). The text was extremely popular in the fledging field of social work and was used for two decades in both instruction and practice (Specht & Courtney, 1994). In the Social Diagnosis, Richmond outlined her method for intervention which involved collecting an extensive social and intrapsychic history and using that information to develop individualized treatment plans (Specht & Courtney, 1994). Unfortunately, these
exhaustive histories resulted in mounds of paperwork eliciting few successful outcomes (Specht & Courtney, 1994).

The second mother of social work was Jane Addams. A highly accomplished woman in her own right, Addams imported the social service model referred to as settlement house (Specht & Courtney, 1994). The first settlement house was established in England by Samuel and Henrietta Barnett and operated by graduates of Oxford University (Specht & Courtney, 1994). These newly minted intellectuals were middle- and upper-class men and women who settled in a working class neighborhood in order to increase the “cultural, moral, and intellectual level” of the area (Specht & Courtney, 1994, p. 81).

In 1889, Addams founded one of the first settlement houses in the United States—Hull-House of Chicago (Specht & Courtney, 1994). Hull House provided medical and child care as well as classes aimed at improving the quality of life of local residents (Specht & Courtney, 1994). Addams believed in cultural preservation and respect; she offered a strengths-based approach to understanding individuals and groups living in the condition of poverty (Brieland, 1990; Specht & Courtney, 1994). The settlement house movement was significantly different from its COS predecessors in that the houses intervened at an environmental or structural level, whereas COS social workers attempted to assist individuals and families in poverty on a case-by-case basis—an individualistic approach (Brieland, 1990; Specht & Courtney, 1994).

It is obvious that Richmond and Addams practiced and advanced different theories of social change. This may be rooted in their divergent political affiliations.
Addams was a well-known supporter and advocate of the Progressive Party (Murdach, 2010). Established in 1912, the Progressive Party grounded itself in the ideal of social justice (Murdach, 2010). Progressives believed, and continue to believe, that the government must be an active partner in social and economic equalization (Murdach, 2010). However, Richmond and social workers trained in case management did not agree with the principles of the Progressive Party (Murdach, 2010). Instead, Richmond believed that charity should remain individualized and private (Murdach, 2010). The theoretical, practical, and political differences between case managers and community organizers, epitomized by Richmond and Addams, represent a schism in the field of social work which may remain today.

The leadership of the professional field of social work is now consolidated in the National Association of Social Workers (NASW). The NASW identifies the mission of social work as a profession “to enhance human wellbeing and help meet the basic needs of all people, with particular attention to the needs and empowerment of people who are vulnerable, oppressed, and living in poverty” [emphasis added] (NASW, 2009, p. 1). The NASW addresses poverty again within the six core values of its Code of Ethics (NASW, 2009). Social Justice—the second core value enumerated—charges social workers with the responsibility of enacting social change in the areas of “…poverty, unemployment, discrimination, and other forms of social injustice” (NASW, 2009, p. 5). The ethical responsibilities to serve oppressed populations notwithstanding, social workers tend to distance themselves from individuals and families living in the condition of poverty, preferring instead to practice privately with clients living in the middle- and upper-class
Falck, 1984; Gibelman & Schervish, 1997; Rubin & Johnson, 1984; Specht & Courtney, 1994; Walz & Groze, 1991; Whitaker, Weismiller, & Clark, 2006). Specht and Courtney (1994) attribute the movement of social workers into private practice as an attempt to increase professional legitimacy. However, attribution theory provides another lens by which this migration can be understood.

The Attributions for Poverty

Empirical research on the attributions for poverty of individuals living in the United States reaches back as far as the 1960s. Predominately, researchers have gathered data on the individual, structural, and cultural determinants of poverty. A handful of researchers have investigated a fatalistic determinant of poverty (Bullock, 2004; Cozzarelli, Wilkinson, & Tagler, 2001; Feagin, 1972; Hunt, 2002; Smith & Stone, 1989) but found little statistical support for it.

An Attributional Schema for the Determinants of Poverty

The current research utilizes a 2x2 classification schema for the determinants of poverty. Each determinant varies in terms of locus and control. Locus identifies the location—either internal or external—of, in this instance, control (Weiner, 1986). The resulting combinations are internal-controllable, external-controllable, internal-uncontrollable, and external-uncontrollable. Each attribution for poverty is classified within one combination of locus and control, and each is considered distinct. The placement of the attributions is based on empirical data gathered by researchers over the last 50 years. Table 1.1 provides a visual representation of this classification system.
The individual determinant of poverty is considered *internal* and *controllable*. This means that persons living the condition of poverty are personally responsible for their socioeconomic status because they choose to manifest personal characteristics, such as a lack of effort and laziness (Bullock, Williams, & Limbert, 2003; Cozzarelli, Wilkinson, & Tagler, 2001; Free & Contril, 1967), alcohol and drug abuse (Bullock, Williams, & Limbert, 2003; Cozzarelli, Wilkinson, & Tagler, 2001), an inability to manage money or a lack of thrift (Bullock, Williams, & Limbert, 2003; Cozzarelli, Wilkinson, & Tagler, 2001), and sexual promiscuity (Bullock, Williams, & Limbert, 2003).

The cultural determinant of poverty represents an *internal* and *uncontrollable* explanation for poverty. The concept of a “culture of poverty” was first articulated by Lewis (1969) as “an effort to cope with feelings of hopelessness and despair that develop from the realization of the improbability of achieving success” (p. 188). Lewis’s theory assumes that parents transmit personal characteristics and a specific worldview to their children, who are without control over their developmental environment, and they, then, mature into adults who subsist in the condition of poverty. Lewis observed this culture while studying families living in the slums of San Juan and concluded that it produces “feelings of marginality, helplessness, dependence, and inferiority, which allegedly breed

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<th>Controllable</th>
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Table 1 The Determinants of Poverty Organized within a 2 x 2 Attributional Schema
weak ego structures, lack of impulse control, a present-time orientation [with] little ability to defer gratification, and a sense of resignation and fatalism” (Hughes, Kroehler, & Vander Zanden, 1999, p. 193).

The structural determinant of poverty is considered external and controllable. It is external to the individual because it represents forces, such as the government, economy, and social institutions which relegate segments of society into, and perpetuate, poverty (Bullock, Williams, & Limbert, 2003; Cozzarelli, Wilkinson, & Tagler, 2001; Feagin, 1972; Free & Contril, 1967; Huber & Form, 1973; Hunt, 1996, 2002; Nilson, 1981; Robinson, 2009; Rytina, Form, & Pease, 1970; Smith, 1985; Smith & Stone, 1989). It is also controllable in that citizens, including poor people, control who occupies some positions of societal power, and these powerful individuals, both those in the government and the private sector, have control over how individuals and groups living in the condition of poverty will be treated. Previous researchers have identified the structural attribution for poverty as “circumstances” (Free & Contril, 1967; Huber & Form, 1973; Rytina, Form, & Pease, 1970); social and economic factors (Feagin, 1972; Hunt, 1996); the poor being taken advantage of by the rich (Cozzarelli, Wilkinson, & Tagler, 2001); discrimination and prejudice in hiring, wage, and promotions (Bullock, Williams, & Limbert, 2003; Cozzarelli, Wilkinson, & Tagler, 2001; Hunt, 2002); inadequate schools for children living in poverty (Bullock, Williams, & Limbert, 2003; Cozzarelli, Wilkinson, & Tagler, 2001); a lack of jobs (Hunt, 2002); and low wages (Bullock, Williams, & Limbert, 2003).
The fatalistic determinant of poverty is *external* and *uncontrollable*. This attribution represents such intangibles as luck and destiny (Bullock, 2004; Cozzarelli, Wilkinson, & Tagler, 2001; Feagin, 1972; Hunt, 2002; Smith & Stone, 1989). As mentioned above, studies which have investigated the fatalistic determinant of poverty have observed little support for it. Consequently, the fatalistic attribution is not included in this research.

**Research Purpose**

The goal of this research is to better understand the poverty attributions of licensed social workers. The attributions of focus for this research are the individual, structural, and cultural. Again, fatalism was excluded due to its historically low endorsement rate. The specific research question is, *What are the poverty attributions of licensed social workers in one Midwestern metropolitan area?* Based on previous research (Bullock, 2004; Bullock, Williams, & Limbert, 2003; Hendrickson & Axelson, 1985; Reeser & Epstein, 1987; Weiss, 2006), the hypothesized result is that the social workers in this sample will agree with the structural and disagree with the individual and cultural attributions for poverty. A second hypothesis of this research is that, when considering social workers in terms of the services they provide, social workers who provide direct service will agree more with either the individual or cultural attributions when compared to social workers who provide indirect services. The hypothesized difference between social workers as a group and social workers providing direct service is based on the qualitative experiences of the author. On numerous occasions, the author has encountered professional social workers who demonstrated individual and cultural
attributions as well as negative affect toward individuals and groups living in the condition of poverty.

The use of an attributional research model is empirically supported. Zucker and Weiner (1993) suggested that “attribution theory provides one useful framework for understanding the linkage between [the] causal responsibility for poverty, affect toward the poor, and support or nonsupport of government policies aimed at eradicating the problem” (p. 940). In that same study, Zucker and Weiner (1993) found that attributing poverty to individualistic causes led to negative affect toward people in poverty. The current research, then, is highly important because it explores the attributions of professionals who are ethically compelled to work with and improve the lives of individuals and groups living in the condition of poverty. Unfortunately, social workers are, and have been, migrating into the field of psychiatric evaluation and intervention and away from providing advocacy, linkage, and empowerment to individuals and groups living in the condition of poverty (Falck, 1984; Gibelman & Schervish, 1997; Rubin & Johnson, 1984; Specht & Courtney, 1994; Walz & Groze, 1991; Whitaker, Weismiller, & Clark, 2006). The great exodus of social workers from working with individuals living in poverty may have been spurred by a pursuit for higher professional status (Specht & Courtney, 1994) or a passive response to drastic changes in government funding (Stuart, 2008). A third possible explanation is that social workers have developed individualistic attributions for poverty, which, Weiss (2006) observed, decreases the motivation to work with individuals and groups living in the condition of poverty.
This study represents a vital attempt to engage in professional reflection. What follows is a further exploration of the history of social work, an outline of attribution theory, and an extensive review of previous empirical investigations into the poverty attributions of the general public and social workers. Then, the procedures and methods of the current study will be detailed. This is followed by a presentation of statistical findings. Finally, a discussion of the meaning and implications of said findings will be presented.
Chapter Two: Literature Review

This chapter presents three foundational literatures. First, a general review of the history of social work reaching from the late 1800s to the present. Second, attribution theory is explored in more detail. Third, a review of all identified studies conducted in the last 50 years which have analyzed the attributions Americans hold about poverty. Generally, researchers have utilized a model with three attributions—individual, structural, and cultural. There are, however, novel attributions, such as fatalism and institutional discrimination. Researchers have correlated attributions for poverty to various personal characteristics, including, sex, race/ethnicity, education, and socioeconomic status. Studies which sample social workers—either exclusively or partially—are much fewer in number. However, these studies have provided a valuable foundation for the current research.

A History of Social Work

Social work is a helping profession. Founded in the late 1890s (Specht & Courtney, 1994), social work was officially recognized as a profession in the 1930s (Stuart, 2008). Specht and Courtney (1994) attribute the evolution of social work to three
philosophical ideals. First, social workers intervene in a *pious* manner expecting little or nothing in return. Second, social work interventions are dependent on *philanthropy*, or the act of donating resources to individuals in need. Third, social workers act within a system of *patronage* wherein the passage of an individual from a lower into a higher class is mitigated by a third party (e.g., social workers). In contrast, Stuart (2008) attributes the development of social work to the attempts of individuals living in the late 19th century to answer the “social question.” The social question refers to the paradox between the seemingly limitless wealth of the United States and the existence of poverty (Stuart, 2008). The question, arguably, remains unanswered.

Specht and Courtney (1994) identify the legal foundation of social work as arising from the Elizabethan Poor Laws of 1601. These laws represented a significant shift in the provision of aid to poor individuals and families. Instead of sentencing poor people to labor, local communities were charged with the responsibility of providing aid to the poor. Early American colonists imported the Poor Laws and vestiges of these laws still exist today (Specht & Courtney, 2008). One aspect of the Poor Laws which can be observed to operate today is the dichotomous labels used to categorize individuals living in poverty. These categories—“worthy” and “unworthy”—are based in the attributions ascribed to the person living in poverty (Segal, Gerdes, & Steiner, 2007, p. 40). Individuals deemed worthy, included “widows, orphans, the elderly, and people with disabilities,” whereas individuals considered unworthy, included “able-bodied single adults and unmarried women with children born out of wedlock” (Sega, Gerdes, & Steiner, 2007, p. 40).
In addition to philosophical principles and legal precedents, social work developed within service institutions. The earliest purveyors of material resources for the needy in the United States were members of the Boards of Charity (Stuart, 2008). These boards were operated by volunteers who investigated state institutions and “made recommendations for more efficient management” (Stuart, 2008, p. 157). Responding to the child saving movements of the mid-19th century, private individuals established the New York Children’s Aid Society (CAS) in 1853 (Stuart, 2008). The CAS was primarily concerned with the needs of orphaned children (Stuart, 2008). However, the majority of children who interacted with the CAS were not actually orphaned. Commonly, mothers living in poverty would surrender their parental rights with the hope that this would improve the current and future lives of their children (Gish, 1999). Mothers would also foster their children during periods of crisis, and adolescent boys would join the CAS in order to find work in the countryside (Gish, 1999). Most notably, the CAS was responsible for the implementation of “orphan trains” which relocated orphaned and poor children from New York City to rural homes (Stuart, 2008, p. 157).

Although the aforementioned organizations were foundational, the Charity Organization Societies (COS) and Settlement Houses are recognized as the institutional birthplaces of social work (Specht & Courtney, 1994; Stuart, 2008). The first COS was established by Reverend Humphries Gurteen in 1877 (Specht & Courtney, 1994). The purpose of the COS was to standardize the distribution of charity and prevent beneficiaries from receiving more than their share (Specht & Courtney, 1994). This mission was accomplished through the use of “friendly visitors”: middle- and upper-
class, white women who volunteered their time and energy to investigate the claims of destitution reported by families (Specht & Courtney, 1994). Stuart (2008) portrays the friendly visitors as “provid[ing] good advice and an example of caring” (p. 158). However, other historians view the friendly visitors as intrusive—“the visitor’s main role was not as a helper but rather as a welfare gatekeeper to determine who deserved assistance and who did not” (Brieland, 1990). Further, friendly visitors were heavily moralistic (Brieland, 1990; Specht & Courtney, 1994) and emphasized industriousness and responsibility through the development, and stanch implementation of, family budgets (Zelizer, 1995).

Mary Richmond, who pioneered social casework, appreciated the individualistic focus offered by the COS (Murdach, 2010). In 1917, she published the *Social Diagnosis* which outlined the initial interview with a potential recipient (Specht & Courtney, 1994). The text was extremely popular in the fledging field of social work and was used for two decades in both instruction and practice (Specht & Courtney, 1994). In the *Social Diagnosis*, Richmond outlined her method for intervention which involved collecting an extensive social and intrapsychic history and using that information to develop individualized treatment plans (Specht & Courtney, 1994). Unfortunately, these exhaustive histories resulted in mounds of paperwork and elicited few successful outcomes (Specht & Courtney, 1994).

The Settlement House Movement offered a significantly different model for assisting individuals and groups living in the condition of poverty. The first settlement house, Toynbee Hall, was established by Samuel and Henrietta Barnett in England and
staffed by graduates of Oxford University (Specht & Courtney, 1994). These newly minted intellectuals were middle- and upper-class men and women who settled in a working class neighborhood in order to increase the “cultural, moral, and intellectual level” of the area (Specht & Courtney, 1994, p. 81). The first settlement house in the United States was founded in 1886 and located in New York (Glicken, 2007). It was named the Neighborhood Guild (Glicken, 2007). Being highly influenced by the English settlement houses, in 1889, Jane Addams founded Hull-House of Chicago (Brieland, 1990; Specht & Courtney, 1994; Stuart, 2008). Hull-House provided medical and child care as well as classes aimed at improving the quality of life of local residents (Brieland, 1990; Specht & Courtney, 1994). Addams believed in cultural preservation and respect; she offered a strengths-based approach to understanding individuals and groups living in the condition of poverty (Breiland, 2008; Specht & Courtney, 1994).

The Hull-House of Chicago established the settlement house tradition in the United States and the elements by which a service provider may be considered a settlement house. Addams believed that the settlement house and the providers of services must be located within the same community as service consumers; this is referred to as settling (Brieland, 1990). Service providers who settled in the community hoped to develop personal acquaintances with the individuals and families they assisted (Brieland, 1990). In this way, practitioners are trained helpers as well as neighbors and friends. Possibly the most crucial difference between the settlement house movement and the COS is the lack of moral means testing (Brieland, 1990). As mentioned above, one focus of the friendly visitors who represented the COS was to both prevent
“immoral” individuals from receiving aid and increase the moral grounding of charity recipients (Brieland, 1990; Specht & Courtney, 1994). By contrast, Addams “emphasize[d] neighbor-to-neighbor helping” and “respect for the heritage that each person brought to the new world” (Brieland, 1990, p. 135).

Addams expressed an appreciation for the effects of the environment on behavior and psychological wellbeing; this is what now distinguishes social work from other fields of study (Brieland, 1990). Addams advocated for clean, affordable, and safe housing for individuals and families living in the community surrounding Hull-House (Brieland, 1990). Further, within Hull-House, prominence was given to the esthetic appeal of the interior (Brieland, 1990). The final tradition of the settlement house movement was the provision of multiple, integrated services by Addams and others as well as linkage to social services and resources in the larger community (Brieland, 1990).

Today, the settlement house model is considered by some to be “outdated” (Brieland, 1990, p. 138). Whereas, the foundation set by Richmond, that is case management, is the primary mode of social work practice. More social workers than ever are leaving poverty for a life in the middle-class providing psychotherapeutic services (Falck, 1984; Gibelman & Schervish, 1997; Rubin & Johnson, 1984; Specht & Courtney, 1994; Walz & Groze, 1991; Whitaker, Weismiller, & Clark, 2006). The ethical dilemma between the mission of social work and its practice and the social question of prosperity built upon suffering, however, still remains unresolved and unanswered.
Attribution Theory

The current research is heavily based in the theoretical and empirical works of Fritz Heider and Bernard Weiner. Heider is credited as the originator of attribution theory (Weiner, 1992). He articulated the theory as the pursuit by both “common-sense” and “scientific” psychologists to understand the roots of behaviors and conditions (Heider, 1958, p.82). Each individual is said to behave as a meaning seeker attempting to create a causal framework of the world (Weiner, 1992). For example, a man is witnessed walking into a welfare office. The observer of this situation can draw numerous and varied conclusions about why the gentleman is entering the building. He is seeking services; he works for the organization; he is repairing the wiring, plumbing, or administrative machinery. Each of these conclusions, then, expands into a causal chain which explains the witnessed behavior. For instance, if the man is thought to be seeking services, one could attribute need to an individual (e.g., laziness), structural (e.g., poor economy), cultural (e.g., growing up in a “welfare family”), and/or fatalistic reason (e.g., bad luck).

As alluded to previously, Heider (1958) proposed that in determining attributions the observer considers personal (internal) and environmental (external) factors. The process, however, of determining the causal weight of internal and external factors is likely biased. Jones and Nisbett (1972) demonstrated that an actor (the individual performing a behavior) and an observer (the individual watching behavior occur) differ in the amount of influence they place on personal and environmental factors. Actors usually attribute a behavior to external—that is environmental—factors, whereas observers
attribute behavior to internal—that is personal—factors (Jones & Nisbett, 1972). Applied to the example above, if the observer identifies the man as a service consumer, then the attributions as to why the man is seeking services will likely relate to internal, or personal, factors (e.g., laziness, drug-use, etc.).

The terminology used throughout the above explanation and example—specifically “internal” and “external”—was articulated by Rotter in 1966 and led to the expansion of causal attributions by Weiner (Weiner 1986, 1992). Weiner (1986, 1992) developed a scaffold which culminated in a “classification scheme” with three continua anchored with six poles. The first continuum is “locus,” and it refers to the control of action and can be either internal or external (Weiner, 1986, 1992). The second continuum is “stability” (Weiner, 1986, pp. 46-47). Stability refers to the effectiveness of actions, with stable meaning that the same action will yield the same result across situations and unstable meaning that the same action yields different results across situations (Weiner, 1986). The third continuum is “control,” and it identifies outcomes as controllable or uncontrollable (Weiner, 1986, pp. 48-50).

This research will utilize one model of causality proposed by Weiner. Specifically, the determinants of poverty will be assumed to be distinct yet classifiable within a 2 x 2 schema of locus v. control. The examination of each determinant and its place within the aforementioned schema was detailed in the first chapter. It is important to understand the implications of organizing the attributions for poverty in such a way. Weiner (1985, 1992) empirically demonstrated that the motivation to assist another person is strongly based on the perceived determinants of that individual’s situation. For
example, if the challenges of an individual or group are deemed internal and controllable by an outside observer, then that observer is unlikely to assist (Weiner, 1985, 1992). In addition to decreased altruistic motivation, the observer is also expected to respond with negative affect (Zucker & Weiner, 1993). Possibly less threatening when applied broadly, this phenomenon has been observed within the field of social work. Wiess (2006) found that social work students who perceived poverty as individually determined—internal and controllable—were less likely to demonstrate an interest in working with individuals and families living in the condition of poverty.

Previous Research

Studies of the General American Population

Research on the poverty attributions of the American public began in the 1960s. Free and Contril (1967) conducted one of the first empirical investigations of the topic using a representative, cross-sectional sample of American adults. Respondents were able to choose between three attributions: circumstances, lack of effort, or both (Free & Contril, 1967). Twenty-five percent of respondents endorsed “circumstances,” 34% endorsed “lack of effort,” 38% endorsed “both,” and 3% had no response (Free & Contril, 1967, p. 28). A cross-tab of the income and poverty attributions of the sample found that among individuals earning less than $5,000 per year a plurality (43%) endorsed the “both” attribution, whereas individuals who made $10,000 or more in yearly income attributed poverty to a “lack of effort” at an endorsement rate of 44% (Free & Contril, 1967).
Though respondents were somewhat split about the roots of poverty, when asked whether “individual initiative” or “government welfare programs” should be utilized to alleviate poverty, an overwhelming majority (79%) agreed with individual initiative (this includes seven out of ten individuals living in poverty) (Free & Contril, 1967, p. 30). This finding prompted Free and Contril to conclude that “Americans at the ideological level continue to pay lip service to stereotypes and shibboleths. The abstract ideas they tend to hold about the nature and functioning of our socioeconomic system still seem to stem more from the underlying assumptions of a laissez-faire philosophy” (p. 30).

Rytina, Form, and Pease (1970) and later, using the same data, Huber and Form (1973), studied the poverty attributions of residents in one Michigan town (N = 540). Limiting the response choices to structural or individual causes, the “rich” respondents identified more with the individual attribution, whereas the “poor” respondents identified more with the structural attribution (Rytina, Form, & Pease, 1970; Huber & Form, 1973).

Feagin (1972) added fatalism to the previous attributions (individual and structural) for poverty. The definitions used by Feagin for the individual and structural determinants are similar to those outlined previously. However, fatalism has not yet been defined; fatalism referred to “illness, bad luck, and such” which are outside personal control (p. 103). Data were gathered from a representative, cross-section of 1,017 American adults in 1969 (Feagin, 1972). Participants primarily attributed poverty to individual causes, with fatalism receiving little, and mixed, support (Feagin, 1972). Although the determinant of fatalism was later used by other researchers (c.f., Bullock,
Williams, and Limbert, 2003; Hunt, 1996, 2002; Smith & Stone, 1989), the support for this attribution remained mixed and low (Cozzarelli, Wilkinson, & Tagler, 2001).

Continuing to expand the possible attributions for poverty, Nilson (1981) added institutional discrimination to the individual-structural dyad. Nilson used data gathered from adults during the 1972 American National Election Study (N = 1,072). Institutional discrimination was operationalized as a hybrid between individual and structural causes (Nilson, 1981). Nilson (1981) cited “low-quality schools which create cultural disadvantage, inadequate job training facilities which result in economic disadvantage, and prejudiced employers who won't risk giving the poor a chance” as examples of institutional discrimination as it relates to the creation of poverty (p. 532). Respondents viewed both the individual and institutional discrimination attribution as important to the explanation for poverty (Nilson, 1981). However, Nilson interpreted this dual attribution as a compromise between the political Left and Right. This compromise moves the responsibility for poverty from the overarching economic system (capitalism) to the government and its lack of regulatory legislation (Nilson, 1981).

Smith (1985) and Smith and Stone (1989) used small, randomly selected samples of adults from Texas. Smith (1985) investigated the individual and structural attributions for poverty, and Smith and Stone (1989) expanded the attributions to include culture and fatalism. Both studies found that the individual attribution was viewed as primary (Smith, 1985; Smith & Stone, 1989), with little support for the fatalistic attribution (Smith & Stone, 1989). Hunt (1996, 2002) continued to study the individual and structural attributions with the addition of fatalism. Using a sample of 2,854 adults living...
in Southern California in 1993, interestingly, Hunt found that the structural attribution was viewed as the primary explanation for poverty. Similar to the findings of Nilson (1981), respondents exhibited a dual attribution between the structural and individual determinants (Hunt, 1996, 2002). The fatalistic determinant was weakly supported among all groups except black and Latino Catholics (Hunt, 2002).

Cozzarelli, Wilkinson, and Tagler (2001) sampled 209 undergraduates at a Midwestern university about their attributions for poverty. The researchers utilized the individual, structural, and fatalistic attributions (Cozzarelli, Wilkinson, & Tagler, 2001). Again, the individual attribution was viewed as the most important explanation for poverty (Cozzarelli, Wilkinson, & Tagler, 2001). However, the researchers found that during data analysis, the respondents’ endorsement of fatalistic items resembled a belief in a cultural attribution for poverty (Cozzarelli, Wilkinson, & Tagler, 2001). Further, respondents who endorsed individual attributions for poverty were much more likely to hold a negative view of the poor and attribute negative stereotypes to individuals living in the condition of poverty (Cozzarelli, Wilkinson, & Tagler, 2001).

Robinson (2009) reinterpreted the classic individual and structural attributions into a political continuum anchored by Unbridled Individualism representing Conservatism and Structure representing Liberalism. This continuum was empirically validated across a single national study and two local studies, in which respondents cited both the structural and individual attributions as important (Robinson, 2009). Few respondents cited only the structural attribution (less than 5% nationally; less than 14% locally) or only the individual attribution (less than 9% nationally; less than 4% locally).
as fully explaining poverty (Robinson, 2009). Robinson (2009) understood these findings as representing a “conflicting and often oddly-balanced conceptual mix about why people become and remain poor in this country” (p. 514).

To summarize, research indicates that the American perspective on poverty, excluding the work of Hunt (1996, 2002), has become more structural over the last two decades. However, it is still predominately individualistic, placing the “blame” on individuals living in the condition of poverty. The findings of Hunt (1996, 2002) were largely, by his own admission, due to a regional effect and are not representative of previous or current research.

*Poverty Attribution Studies of Social Workers*

Studies with social workers as either a portion of or the whole sample are few in number. Hendrickson and Axelson (1985) used a convenience sample of members belonging to the professional organizations representing computer scientists, public defenders, and social workers to study poverty attributions. The final sample consisted of 61 computer scientists, 50 public defenders, and 91 social workers (Hendrickson & Axelson, 1985). A majority of the sample (55.9%) identified the structural attribution as the most important explanation for poverty, with 15.9% of respondents endorsing the individual attribution (Hendrickson & Axelson, 1985). Unfortunately, the arithmetic means of each profession were not reported, and as such, there is no way to determine which explanation was most endorsed by social workers.

Reeser and Epstein (1987) compared data collected in 1968 and 1984 on the poverty attributions of social workers. Social workers were attending an annual NASW
conference in New York City, and both samples were characteristically similar to the
membership of the NASW at their respective times (Reeser & Epstein, 1987). The 1968
sample consisted of 1,020 social workers, and the 1984 sample consisted of 682 social
workers. The two samples were significantly different from each other in terms of
agency position, field of service, agency auspices, race, and religion (Reeser & Epstein,
1987). For example, Reeser and Epstein (1987) reported that a higher proportion of
respondents in 1984 sample were employed as mental health service providers and case
managers than in the 1968 sample. Further, the number of community organizers had
significantly decreased from 1968 to 1984.

Reeser and Epstein (1987) identified the attributions for poverty as individual,
structural, technical (lack of effective interventions for poverty), and co-optation (social
action). Only 10% of the 1984 sample, as compared to 26% of their 1968 peers, agreed
with the individual attribution for poverty (Reeser & Epstein, 1987). Fifty-three percent
of the 1984 sample agreed with the structural attribution for poverty, which was a
significant increase from 1968 (Reeser & Epstein, 1987). Thirty-seven percent of the
1984 sample agreed with the need for social workers to support societal change to the
benefit of individuals living in poverty, and 23% agreed that all the attention and
resources of the social work profession need to be devoted to the issue of poverty (Reeser
& Epstein, 1987). This is a significant difference from the social workers of 40 years
prior who agreed to both items with a majority (Reeser & Epstein, 1987). Lastly, the
social workers of 1984 desired working with individuals living in the condition of
poverty the least of all other economic classes, preferring instead to work with all classes (Reeser & Epstein, 1987).

Nearly 20 years later, Heather Bullock (2004) compared the poverty attributions of social workers and clients interacting through a State Department of Health and Human Services within the Temporary Aid for Needy Families Program. The sample consisted of 39 social workers and 41 welfare recipients (Bullock, 2004). Bullock (2004) identified three attributions for poverty: individual, structural, and family factors/fatalism. The structural attribution for poverty was further divided into the American economic system and prejudice/discrimination (Bullock, 2004).

Bullock (2004) found several significant differences between the social workers and their clients. Welfare recipients perceived prejudice as an important contributor to poverty to a significantly great degree than did the social workers (Bullock, 2004). Further, welfare recipients considered the welfare system as more legitimate than did the social workers employed in the program, and recipients cited the need for increased funding for the welfare system to a significantly greater degree than did the social workers (Bullock, 2004). The social workers did endorse the American economic system, a structural attribution, significantly more than the other attributions. However, the second most popular attribution among social workers was cultural, meaning that poverty is the result of behaviors transmitted from parents to children which predispose them to the condition of poverty (Bullock, 2004). This seems to imply that the social workers held a dual attribution for poverty—structural systems oppressing segments of

The final study for review is a cross-national research project. Weiss (2006) performed a secondary analysis of data collected by “social work scholars” in ten countries: Brazil, Germany, Hungary, Israel, the United States, Australia, Britain, Canada, Germany, Hong Kong, and Zimbabwe (p. 387). However, only five countries—Brazil, Germany, Hungary, Israel, and the United States—met the 50 respondent benchmark for inclusion in the study (Weiss, 2006). Only students graduating with a Bachelor’s of Social Work degree were surveyed (Weiss, 2006). The attributions for poverty were identified as social (structural), psychological, and a lack of motivation/responsibility (individual) (Weiss, 2006).

The primary concern of Weiss in this research was to measure the motivation of social work students to engage with individuals living in the condition of poverty. Therefore, attributions for poverty were not reported for each country individually. Instead, only the motivation of the samples was discussed, with Brazilian social work students reporting the most desire to work with the poor (Weiss, 2006). Social work students in the remaining countries expressed only a moderate desire to work with individuals in poverty (Weiss, 2006). Statistically, Weiss reported that social work students who identified most with the structural attribution for poverty expressed the greatest motivation to work with individuals in poverty. Consequently, Brazilian social work students attributed poverty to structural causes to a greater degree than did social work students in any other surveyed country.
Overall, social workers appear to attribute poverty to structural causes. However, the degree to which this attribution was supported, and the subsequent motivation to assist those in poverty, is low (Reeser & Epstein, 1987; Weiss, 2006). For example, Rehner, Ishee, and Velasques (1997) conducted research with social workers living and practicing in Mississippi. The researchers used the Attitudes Toward Poverty (ATP) scale developed by Atherton and Gemmel in 1993. The scale utilizes a five-point response schema ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree (Rehner, Ishee, and Velasques, 1997). Scores on the ATP range from a maximum of 185 to a minimum of 37, with higher scores indicating positive attitudes toward individuals living in the condition of poverty (Atherton & Gemmel, 1993). The social workers in the Rehner and colleagues sample (N = 186) had a mean score of 130 (Rehner, Ishee, & Valesques, 1997). Being that a median score on the ATP is 111, the social workers in this sample did espouse slightly positive attitudes about individuals in poverty.

The attributions one makes toward the plight of another are intimately related to the affect which is felt toward that individual and the likelihood that the individual will be assisted by others (Weiner, 1985, 1992). Weiner (1992) conducted research which demonstrated that helping behavior is directly affected by the attributions made about how the individual in need came to be in such a situation. Specifically, if the roots of an individual’s need are attributed to internal and controllable factors (such as a lack of effort), then it is unlikely that the individual will receive assistance and the affect felt toward the individual will be negative (Weiner, 1992; Zucker & Weiner, 1993). It is, therefore, of crucial importance that the poverty attributions of social workers be
understood. The work of Weiner (1992); Cozzarelli, Wilkinson, and Tagler (2001); and Weiss (2009) highlight the consequences attributions can have on motivation. It is necessary, then, to investigate the poverty attributions of social workers, as this may affect their motivation to assist, and feelings toward, individuals living in the condition of poverty.
Chapter Three: Methodology

Research Question

The intent of this research is to better understand the poverty attributions of professional, licensed social workers. The attributions of focus for this research are the individual, structural, and cultural. Again, although fatalism has been used in previous research, it was excluded due to its historically low endorsement rate. The specific research question is, *What are the poverty attributions of licensed social workers in one Midwestern metropolitan area?* Based on previous research (Bullock, 2004; Bullock, Williams, & Limbert, 2003; Hendrickson & Axelson, 1985; Reeser & Epstein, 1987; Weiss, 2006), the hypothesized result is that, as an aggregate, the social workers will agree with the structural attribution for poverty. However, when considering social workers in terms of the services they provide, direct service workers are hypothesized to attribute poverty to individual and/or cultural causes. This is a highly important distinction based on findings of Zucker and Weiner (1993); Weiner (1992); Cozzarelli, Wilkinson, and Tagler (2001); and Weiss (2006) who observed that helping behavior, affect, and motivation are linked to attributions.
Research Design

This study employs a descriptive, cross-sectional, survey methodology. As with any methodology, survey research has inherent strengths and limitations. Beginning with the strengths, surveys are very well suited for describing the characteristics of a population (Rubin & Babbie, 2008). Demographic data collected from the social workers who participated in this study include age, sex, gender, sexual orientation, ethnicity, highest level of education, type of practice, total years of practice, direct service status, provision of field instruction, recency of field instruction, political orientation, and religious and spiritual beliefs. Surveys also allow for the study of multiple variables (Rubin & Babbie, 2008). Therefore, the set of three attributions for poverty—individual, structural, and cultural—can be studied simultaneously. Lastly, surveys utilize standardized questions (Rubin & Babbie, 2008). All participants were asked the exact same questions in the exact same order. All participants had the capacity to answer all of the questions presented, though they could decline to answer any question.

Surveys do have important limitations. While considered a strength above, the standardization of surveys can also lead to a mismatch between participants’ experiences and opinions and the questions asked (Rubin & Babbie, 2008). Applied to the current research, participants were asked about a defined set of attributions for poverty. However, the set of attributions was selected using an exhaustive review of previous research findings. That notwithstanding, this survey does not afford participants the flexibility to share less common attributions for poverty. Additionally, surveys cannot account for the context in which responses are given (Rubin & Babbie, 2008). Although
still a limitation, it is addressed by the current research through demographic questions which attempt to place the participants’ attributions in the context of type of practice, years of practice, and political and religious/spiritual beliefs.

Surveys are also limited by their potential artificiality, meaning that either the variable of interest is not amendable to study by surveys and/or participants have not formed an opinion, attitude, or attribution until the moment they are asked the survey question (Rubin & Babbie, 2008). The attributional structure of the survey used in this research has proven valid for the last 50 years. Zucker and Weiner (1993) suggested that “attribution theory provides one useful framework for understanding the linkage between [the] causal responsibility for poverty, affect toward the poor, and support or nonsupport of government policies aimed at eradicating the problem” (p. 940). Further, the Council on Social Work Education (2010) requires that social work educational programs develop a curriculum which implicitly and explicitly addresses the NASW Code of Ethics, within which social work’s relationship to poverty is clearly stated. Therefore, the social workers surveyed for this study have not only considered the roots of poverty, but also their personal role in its maintenance and elimination.

Selection of Sample

Participants for this study were selected from a database of social work field instructors who are contracted by a large Midwestern university. A field instructor is a professional social worker who mentors and supervises undergraduate and/or graduate social work students. The college’s database of field instructors contained 802 unduplicated electronic mail addresses. After three rounds of recruitment, 290 field
instructors had responded. However, 41 participants were excluded from the final sample based on two eligibility rules, which decreased the final sample to 249 (a 31% response rate). The first eligibility requirement was that the participants were required to have a social work license in good standing with the state Counselor, Social Worker, and Marriage and Family Therapist board. The second was that participants had to respond to at least 75% of the attributional statements. This benchmark was applied following data collection in order to control the amount of data being imputed using mean substitution (Meyers, Gamst, Guarino, 2006). The imputation process will be detailed in the next chapter. The focused technique of sampling used in this study represents availability sampling—a nonprobability sampling method (Rubin & Babbie, 2008). Consequently, the findings of this study are representative of only those who participated (Rubin & Babbie, 2008). Nevertheless, this study is an important contribution to the empirical literature on the poverty attributions of social workers.

**Instrumentation**

Data for this study were collected using an instrument constructed specifically for this study and developed by the author titled the Poverty Attributions Survey (PAS). The PAS is an adaptation of items from Bullock’s (2004) Attribution for Poverty Survey; Bullock, Williams, and Limbert’s (2003) Attribution for Poverty Questionnaire; and Weiss and Gal’s (2007) Questionnaire on the Perceived Causes of Poverty. Bullock’s (2004) Attribution of Poverty Survey consisted of 24 items, some of which were adopted from Furnham (1982) and some were original (Bullock, 2004). It identified four attributions of poverty: individual, structural, family factors/fatalistic, and culture. The
individual attribution “emphasize[d] personal deficiencies which place the burden of responsibility for poverty on the poor” (p. 572). Specifically, personal characteristics, such as irresponsible spending, indiscriminate sexual activity, drug-use, and substandard work ethic, were included within this attribution (Bullock, 2004). The structural attribution identified “macrolevel economic and social conditions” as creating poverty (Bullock, 2004, p. 572). Examples of the structural attribution include inadequate wage, low quality educational institutions, prejudice and discrimination, and ineffective labor unions (Bullock, 2004). The family factors/fatalistic attribution focused on divorce, access to childcare, misfortune, and personal health (Bullock, 2004). The cultural attribution related to such conditions as being raised in a “welfare family,” having an “antiwork mentality,” and “family dissolution” (p. 577).

The Attributions for Poverty Questionnaire was developed by Bullock, Williams, and Limbert (2003) and is the second source of items for the PAS. The 45-item questionnaire addresses four attributions for poverty: individual, structural, fatalistic, and cultural (Bullock, Williams, & Limbert, 2003). The four attributions assessed by this questionnaire are conceptually similar to those of Bullock (2004), with items adapted from Bullock, 1999; Cozzarelli, Wilkinson, and Tagler, 2001; and Furnham, 1982 (Bullock, Williams, & Limbert, 2003). Original items, however, were created for the cultural and structural attribution as a means of “expand[ing]” them (Bullock, Williams, & Limbert, 2003, p. 41).

Weiss and Gal (2007) are the originators of the Questionnaire on Perceived Causes of Poverty, which is the third and final source of items for the PAS. This
questionnaire is similar to those detailed above in its conceptualization of the structural and individual attributions, which account for six and five items respectively (Weiss & Gal, 2007). Although not utilized by the PAS, a novel attribution—psychological—is included in the Weiss and Gal questionnaire (Weiss & Gal, 2007). Consisting of seven questions, the psychological attribution for poverty focuses on the link between mental health and economic status (Weiss & Gal, 2007).

Although the above measures are all well-constructed and valid, the PAS was developed for several important reasons. First, this research does not assess the fatalistic attribution of poverty. The decision to exclude this attribution is related to the historically low endorsement rates by participants (Cozzarelli, Wilkinson, & Tagler, 2001). Second, the PAS represents an opportunity to improve upon earlier research. Researchers commonly use a statistical procedure referred as a factor analysis, which identifies items that correlate strongly with each other in comparison to other items in the scale (Rubin & Babbie, 2008). In order to be included in the PAS, an item had to receive a score of .50 or above on the factor analysis conducted by its original researcher. Third, in some instances, the author disagreed with the placement of items within its original attributional framework. For example, Bullock (2004) included a “lack of childcare” within the family factors/fatalistic attribution (p. 579), whereas this author perceives this item as representing a structural attribution for poverty.

The final version of the PAS, which can be found in Appendix A, consists of 50 questions: 33 attributional statements and 17 demographic questions. The attributional statements are further divided into thirteen individual, eleven structural, and nine cultural.
The attributional statements complete the root phrase, “Poverty is the result of….” For example, an individual attributional statement is read, “Poverty is the result of a lack of drive and perseverance.” Respondents were asked to provide their level of agreement with each statement using a six point Likert-type scale (1 = strongly agree, 2 = agree, 3 = moderately agree, 4 = moderately disagree, 5 = disagree, 6 = strongly disagree). As detailed in the previous chapter, the attributions for poverty are understood within a 2 x 2 scheme of locus and control. The individual attribution is classified as internal and controllable, the structural attribution is considered external and controllable, and the cultural attribution is conceptualized as internal and uncontrollable.

The PAS demonstrated a high level of internal consistency reliability. Internal consistency refers to the degree to which items correlate with each other, the expectation being that items meant to measure a concept will correlate highly (Rubin & Babbie, 2008). A coefficient alpha was calculated to determine the reliability of the three attribution scales. The individual attribution scale had “excellent” internal consistency (α = .943), the structural scale had “good” internal consistency (α = .886), and the cultural scale also had “good” internal consistency (α = .850) (Rubin & Babbie, 2008, p. 184).

Demographic Data Collected

The demographic section of the PAS contains questions related to basic characteristics (e.g., gender, age, ethnicity) and characteristics specific to social work (e.g., area of practice, years of practice). Importantly, participants were not required to answer any questions—demographic or attributional—in order to complete the survey. The demographic variables will be presented from the lowest level (nominal) to the
highest level (ratio) of measurement. Nominal variables are those which are categorical with no hierarchal relationship (Rubin & Babbie, 2008). The nominal variables include gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation, licensure, current area of practice, provision of direct service, field instructor status, recency of field instruction, personal identification as religious, and personal identification as spiritual. Participants were provided response choices for all the nominal variables listed above except ethnicity and sexual orientation. Responses to these questions were open-ended allowing participants the freedom to self-identify. The researchers then categorized and coded the variables following data collection.

Ordinal variables are also categorical but have a hierarchal relationship (Rubin & Babbie, 2008). The PAS has only one ordinal level question, which is participant’s highest degree completed. Interval level questions represent numerical data with equal space between responses but without a meaningful zero (Rubin & Babbie, 2008). The question of political orientation is considered ordinal, instead of nominal, because it is measured on a continuum with Very Liberal and Very Conservative acting as anchors. Additionally, the rating of how strongly the participant identifies with his or her political party, and later his or her self-identified religion, is an interval level variable ranging from (1) Not Strongly to (10) Very Strongly. Finally, ratio level variables are basically interval level variables but with a meaningful zero point (Rubin & Babbie, 2008). There is a single ratio level variable—age—which was collected using an open-ended response box.
**Demographic Data**

This section will present the demographic data collected by the PAS. In order to establish comparability to the national workforce, the data collected by a NASW national study of licensed social workers will be displayed alongside the PAS data (Whitaker, Weismiller, & Clark, 2006). The NASW study randomly sampled 10,000 licensed social workers using lists provided by State licensure boards (Whitaker, Weismiller, & Clark 2006). The study had a 49.4% response rate, with 81.1% of the sample identifying as an “active” social worker (Whitaker, Weismiller, & Clark, 2006, p. 5).

The PAS sample was 22.1% male and 77.9% female with no participants identifying as transgender or other. Based on tables provided by the NASW study (Whitaker, Weismiller, & Clark 2006), the author of the current study estimates that approximately 17% and 83% of members were male or female respectively. PAS participants ranged in age from 21 to 71. The “under 25” and “65 and older” groups made up the smallest proportion of the sample. However, the distribution of the PAS sample was still highly similar to that of the NASW sample. The full age distribution for PAS participants and NASW participants can be found in Table 2.

38
Table 2 Percent Distribution of Ages for PAS Participants and NASW Participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age</th>
<th>PAS n (%)</th>
<th>NASW %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Under 25</td>
<td>3 (1.2)</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25-34</td>
<td>54 (21.7)</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35-44</td>
<td>64 (25.7)</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>45-54</td>
<td>62 (24.9)</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>55-64</td>
<td>58 (23.3)</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>65 and older</td>
<td>3 (1.2)</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No Response</td>
<td>5 (2.0)</td>
<td>NR</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* NR = not reported

Participants in the PAS were provided the opportunity to write-in their ethnic identity. Responses were then coded and categorized by the researchers. Interestingly, although participants were asked to supply their “ethnicity,” the vast majority provided a racial identity. By far the largest group was social workers who identified as white/Caucasian/European descent. The NASW study reported a similarly high proportion of “white” respondents, which was substantially larger than the general U.S. population for the same year (Whitaker, Weismiller, & Clark, 2006, p. 12). Table 3 presents the full distribution of ethnic identities reported by PAS participants as well as the distribution of racial identities reported by NASW participants.
Table 3 Ethnic Distribution of PAS Participants and Racial Distribution of NASW Participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ethnicity</th>
<th>PAS n (%)</th>
<th>NASW %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>White/Caucasian/European Descent</td>
<td>205 (82.3)</td>
<td>86.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black/African American</td>
<td>17 (6.8)</td>
<td>7.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic/Latino</td>
<td>3 (1.2)</td>
<td>4.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>1 (0.4)</td>
<td>1.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jewish</td>
<td>2 (0.8)</td>
<td>NA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Biracial</td>
<td>4 (1.6)</td>
<td>NA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>2 (0.8)</td>
<td>1.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No Response</td>
<td>15 (6.0)</td>
<td>NR</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note. NR = not reported*

A demographic difference between the current study and the NASW study is that PAS participants were asked about their sexual orientation. PAS participants were provided the opportunity to write-in their sexual orientation and 77.1% identified as straight/heterosexual, 5.6% as gay/lesbian, 1.6% as bisexual, 0.4% as Queer, and 15.3% chose not to respond to this question. PAS participants’ education was measured by their highest degree completed. The largest category of educational achievement reported by PAS participants and NASW participants was a Master’s of Social Work (MSW). There were slightly fewer PAS respondents reporting a Bachelor’s of social work (BSW) as their highest degree completed in comparison to NASW respondents. The PAS demographic data delineated between the types of degrees participants held when reporting a non-social work education. The full distribution can be found in Table 4.
Table 4 Educational Achievement of PAS and NASW Samples

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Highest Degree Completed</th>
<th>PAS n (%)</th>
<th>NASW %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>High School</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>NR</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Associate’s Degree</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>NR</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bachelor’s Degree</td>
<td>6 (2.4)</td>
<td>NR</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BSW</td>
<td>20 (8.0)</td>
<td>12.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Master's Degree</td>
<td>23 (9.2)</td>
<td>NR</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MSW</td>
<td>195 (78.3)</td>
<td>79.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PhD (non-social work)</td>
<td>2 (0.8)</td>
<td>NR</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PhD (social work)/DSW</td>
<td>2 (0.8)</td>
<td>2.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>8.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No Response</td>
<td>1 (0.4)</td>
<td>NR</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note. NR = not reported*

Because social workers provide a wide range of services, respondents were asked their area of practice. The categories used by the PAS were directly fashioned from those of the NASW study (Whitaker, Weismiller, & Clark, 2006). Additionally, PAS participants were given the opportunity to write-in their area of practice. As a result, the PAS includes categories which differ from the NASW study. Whereas both studies found that social workers were largely employed as mental health professionals, the PAS also drew more social workers employed in health/hospital settings. All areas of practice and their respective proportions are presented in Table 5.
Table 5 Area of Practice Reported by PAS and NASW Samples

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Area of Practice</th>
<th>PAS n (%)</th>
<th>NASW %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mental Health</td>
<td>70 (28.1)</td>
<td>37.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health/Hospital</td>
<td>57 (22.9)</td>
<td>13.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child Welfare</td>
<td>23 (9.2)</td>
<td>13.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aging/Geriatrics</td>
<td>23 (9.2)</td>
<td>9.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School Social Work</td>
<td>12 (4.8)</td>
<td>8.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adolescents</td>
<td>7 (2.8)</td>
<td>6.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family</td>
<td>7 (2.8)</td>
<td>NA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Addiction</td>
<td>7 (2.8)</td>
<td>3.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Developmental Disabilities</td>
<td>5 (2.0)</td>
<td>3.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Higher Education</td>
<td>1 (0.4)</td>
<td>2.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Occupational Social Work</td>
<td>1 (0.4)</td>
<td>1.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Homeless/Displaced Persons</td>
<td>10 (4.0)</td>
<td>1.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Criminal Justice</td>
<td>5 (2.0)</td>
<td>1.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community Development</td>
<td>2 (0.8)</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>11 (4.4)</td>
<td>4.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crisis</td>
<td>2 (0.8)</td>
<td>NA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Administration</td>
<td>1 (0.4)</td>
<td>NA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No Response</td>
<td>5 (2.0)</td>
<td>NR</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note. NR = not reported*

The demographic parallels between the current study and the NASW study conclude with education. However, the PAS investigated several other important demographic variables. PAS participants were asked whether they had ever been in the role of field instructor, with 90% affirming yes and 8.4% answering no. Of the 90% who answered affirmatively, 71% had been a field instructor in the last two years. The PAS investigated the respondents’ political orientations by providing a continuum ranging from *Very Liberal* to *Very Conservative*. A large majority of the social workers endorsed Liberal or Moderate views. The full distribution of respondents is presented in Table 6.
Table 6 Political Orientation of PAS Respondents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Political Orientation</th>
<th>PAS n (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Very Liberal</td>
<td>29 (11.6)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liberal</td>
<td>99 (39.8)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Slightly Liberal</td>
<td>39 (15.7)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moderate</td>
<td>38 (15.3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Slightly Conservative</td>
<td>18 (7.2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conservative</td>
<td>12 (4.8)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very Conservative</td>
<td>1 (0.4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No Response</td>
<td>12 (5.2)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The PAS concluded with a set of questions related to the religious and spiritual beliefs of participants. In terms of religion, 62.2% of participants reported being “religious.” This question was followed by an inquiry into the respondent’s faith. As might be expected, the responses were highly diverse, with 22 unique responses. A list of these responses can be found in Appendix C. Participants were asked a separate question addressing whether they experience themselves as “spiritual.” Not considered mutually exclusive with religiosity, 88.4% of respondents identified themselves as spiritual, with 8.4% of respondents not identifying themselves as spiritual.

The consideration as to whether a demographic question should be included in the PAS was based on how well the question would strengthen the instrument’s convergent validity. Convergent validity is the degree to which the results of one measure correlate with the results of another when investigating the same variable (Rubin & Babbie, 2008). Briefly, demographic characteristics, as identified in the literature, related to endorsing the individual attributions for poverty are being politically conservative (Cozzarelli,
Wilkinson, & Tagler, 2001; Robinson, 2009; Smith & Stone, 1989; Zucker & Weiner, 1993), older in age (Cozzarelli, Wilkinson, & Tagler, 2001; Hunt, 1996; Rehner, Ishee, & Velasques, 1997), male (Cozzarelli, Wilkinson, & Tagler, 2001), and white Protestant (Hunt, 2002; Rehner, Ishee, & Velasques, 1997; Robinson, 2009). The demographics correlated with endorsing structural attributions for poverty are being politically liberal (Rehner, Ishee, Velasques, 1997; Robinson, 2009), a member of a disadvantaged group (Hunt, 1996; Robinson, 2009), a Black or Latino Protestant (Hunt, 2002; Robinson, 2009), and an individual with a high level of education (Rehner, Ishee, & Velasques, 1997; Robinson, 2009). Finally, the only characteristic identified in the literature as being associated with endorsing cultural attributions for poverty is being an older adult (Robinson, 2009).

Data Collection

Participants were given access to a self-administered internet based survey. This service was provided by the non-profit organization Lime Survey. Potential respondents were sent a recruitment letter via electronic mail. The letter outlined the purpose and importance of the study as well as the eligibility rule that respondents must be social workers with a license in good standing with the State CSWMFT board. A link to the survey was included within the body of the email. Potential participants were instructed to “click” the link which would redirect them to the survey website. Participants would then encounter a screen detailing instructions for the proper completion of the survey and a reiteration of the eligibility requirements. To begin the survey participants were required to select a “proceed” button which represented informed consent. In order to
ensure the anonymity of participants, responses were not saved during the administration of the survey. This means participants had to reach the end of the survey to submit their data. Three rounds of recruitment, roughly two weeks apart, were completed with all participants receiving a revised letter (See Appendix B). The revised letter provided gratitude to the social workers who had completed the survey at an earlier time and encouragement to submit responses to those who had not yet participated. All responses were anonymous and no incentive for participation was offered by the researcher. Therefore, there was no attempt to follow-up with any of the participants.

Data Analysis Plan

The data analysis plan outlines the statistical procedures utilized to examine the research question and other investigations of interest. The results of these statistical procedures can be found in Chapter four. Prior to outlining the specific statistical tests utilized by this research, it is important to discuss the reasoning and method for data imputation employed in this project. Because respondents were able to skip questions, there were missing data in several of the respondents’ datasets. Specifically, 40 participants were missing at least one response on the structural scale, 23 participants on the individual scale, and 24 participants on the cultural scale. There was no discernable pattern to the missing responses. In fact, no single question was missing ten or more responses. The decision to impute data was reached in response to the need to translate raw scores into means. As described in the instrumentation section, participants’ raw scale scores were divided by the total number of items included in said scale. However,
participants with missing responses would have unique denominators based on the number of questions answered.

The above standardization challenge was solved using mean substitution (Meyers, Gamst, & Guarino, 2006). Mean substitution is a statistical process whereby missing data is replaced by the mean for the scale (Meyers, Gamst, & Guarino, 2006). The researcher chose to institute an imputation standard to offset the negative consequences of imputation (see Meyers, Gamst, & Guarino, 2006). Therefore, in order for a participant’s data to be imputed, he or she needed to supply a response to at least 75% of the statements representing an attribution. For example, the individual attribution consisted of 12 questions; a respondent would need to respond to a minimum of nine of those attributional statements for his or her data to be imputed for that scale. Those participants who did not provide a sufficient proportion of responses for imputation were excluded from analysis.

The most basic procedure conducted on the attributional scores of participants was to derive the descriptive statistics, including, mean, median, mode, maximum and minimum, and standard deviation. These results provide the answer to the research question posed above—What are the poverty attributions of licensed social workers in one Midwestern metropolitan area? The subsequent hypothesis that social workers providing direct service will attribute poverty to individual and/or cultural causes was assessed through an independent-samples t-test. A t-test is used to compare the means of two groups and determine if they are significantly different (Wright, 2002). The type of t-test—one-sample, independent-samples, or paired-sample—depends on the research
method and the data it produces. The independent-samples $t$-test is necessary when the
two groups consist of different members who supply data once (Wright, 2002). The
independent-samples $t$-test was also employed to investigate differences in attributions
between genders (male v. female), types of education (social work v. non-social work),
etnicities (white v. ethnic minorities), sexual orientations (heterosexual v. gay), field
instructor status (current v. past), recency of field instruction (within the last two years v.
over two years ago), and identification as religious (yes v. no) and/or spiritual (yes v. no).

The next statistical test used was an Analysis of Variance (ANOVA). An
ANOVA is indicated when a researcher is attempting to determine if the means of three
or more groups are significantly different (Wright, 2002). An ANOVA was called for in
the analysis of the differences between participants’ levels of education both overall and
when collapsed into three categories (Bachelor’s, Master’s, PhD), participants’ self-
identified ethnic identity, and participants’ type of practice.

The final statistical procedure employed by this research is a correlation analysis.
Correlations are denoted when a researcher is attempting to understand the relationship
between two numerical variables (Wright, 2002). Correlations are said to be positive
when the two variables increase or decrease together and negative when an increase in
one leads to a decrease in the other and vice-versa (Wright, 2002). Importantly,
correlations do not prove causality but instead suggest the presence of an interdependent
relationship which can at times be observed (Wright, 2002). Correlations were calculated
to investigate the relationship between age and poverty attributions, political orientation
and poverty attributions, and years of practical social work experience and poverty attributions.

Human Subjects Research

This research was approved for data collection by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) of The Ohio State University. The IRB granted this research a Category Two exemption based on the professional status of the sample and data method utilized by the researcher. The survey software was a licensed version of Lime Survey: a user-developed software tool by which to build internet surveys. The tool enables survey administrators to encrypt all survey traffic sent through the World Wide Web using a Secure Sockets Layer (SSL). Surveys created for this study using Lime Survey were enabled with SSL for both administrative tasks and participant responses using a root url that begins with “https.” All respondent data was stored on a firewall protected server housed in the College of Social Work, Stillman Hall. Only the principal investigator and co-investigators were able to access these data. The Social Work IT Systems Engineer had access to the server where the data are stored, but does not have direct access to view the data in the researchers’ Lime Survey account.
Presented in this chapter are the statistical findings from the PAS. As mentioned above in the discussion about convergent validity, many of the findings below were hypothesized utilizing previous research. In addition, the depth of the demographic information collected with the PAS surpasses any research project to date and provides the opportunity to engage in an exploratory analysis of numerous variables. The exploratory variables include sexual orientation, current provision of field instruction, recency of said field instruction, religiosity and spirituality, and area of practice.

Poverty Attributions

It is first important to examine the calculation and distribution of poverty attributions in this sample. As mentioned above, participants responded to each attributional statement using a Likert-type scale. The scale score for each attribution (i.e., individual, structural, and cultural) was calculated by adding the response codes of a participant and dividing it by the total number of questions within that scale. This yields a mean score. The mean score was then translated back into the original Likert-type scale, with lower scores indicating greater agreement and higher scores indicating greater
disagreement. For example, if a participant’s cumulative score on the individual scale was 24, then it would be divided by 12 (which is the total number of items in that scale), yielding a mean score of two. A score of two corresponds with “agree” in the Likert-type scale developed for this research. A complete distribution of responses for each item can be found in Appendix D.

By taking the mean of all the scale means, it can be said that the majority of social workers in this sample “somewhat agree” that poverty is attributable to structural causes. None of the social workers’ means indicated that they “strongly disagree[d]” with the structural attribution for poverty. When considering the minimum mean score, there were social workers who “strongly agree[d]” with the structural attribution for poverty. Again by calculating the mean of all the scale means, the individual attribution received a “disagree” and cultural attribution received a “somewhat disagree” from this sample of social workers. The inverse to the structural scale occurred when considering the individual and cultural attributional statements, with none of the participants’ means indicating that they “strongly agree[d]” with either attribution for poverty. There were social workers who “strongly disagree[d]” with the individual and cultural attributions for poverty. Table 7 details the exact values for the attributional scales.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Minimum</th>
<th>Maximum</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Structural</td>
<td>249</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>5.270</td>
<td>3.054</td>
<td>0.797</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Individual</td>
<td>249</td>
<td>2.310</td>
<td>6.000</td>
<td>4.625</td>
<td>0.807</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cultural</td>
<td>249</td>
<td>2.110</td>
<td>6.000</td>
<td>4.141</td>
<td>0.781</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Further detailing the attributional findings, the social workers in this sample had diverse endorsement of the three poverty attributions. Each participant’s endorsements were calculated by translating the mean score for each attribution back into the Likert-type scale developed for the PAS. The majority of the participants (73.9%) agreed with the structural attribution for poverty, with a minority (26.1%) disagreeing. The endorsement rates for the individual and cultural attributions followed the opposite pattern from that observed with the structural attribution. A total of 9.6% of the social workers in this sample agreed with the individual attribution for poverty. The majority of the sample (90.4%) disagreed with the individual attribution. In terms of the cultural attribution, one-fifth (20.5%) of the sample agreed with the attribution, with 79.5% disagreeing. A detailed presentation of each level of attribution endorsement (e.g., strongly agree, agree, somewhat agree, etc.) is provided in Table 8.

### Table 8 Participants’ Endorsement of Poverty Attributions by Level

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Attributions</th>
<th>Strongly Agree n (%)</th>
<th>Agree n (%)</th>
<th>Somewhat Agree n (%)</th>
<th>Somewhat Disagree n (%)</th>
<th>Disagree n (%)</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree n (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Structural</td>
<td>6 (2.4)</td>
<td>48 (19.3)</td>
<td>130 (52.2)</td>
<td>54 (21.7)</td>
<td>11 (4.4)</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Individual</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3 (1.2)</td>
<td>21 (8.4)</td>
<td>77 (30.9)</td>
<td>109 (43.8)</td>
<td>39 (15.7)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cultural</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4 (1.6)</td>
<td>47 (18.9)</td>
<td>119 (47.8)</td>
<td>70 (28.1)</td>
<td>9 (3.6)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Attributional Differences Between Direct Service and Indirect Service Social Workers**

Social workers who responded to the PAS were asked if their “primary role [is] direct service.” Of the 249 social workers who responded to the PAS, 144 identified as
direct service providers and 100 indicated that their primary role was not direct practice. The differences and similarities between these two groups on their attributions for poverty were determined using an Independent-samples t-test. The direct service (M = 3.104, SD = 0.861) and indirect service (M = 2.984, SD = 0.704) social workers were not significantly different in terms of their agreement with the structural attribution for poverty, \( t(242) = 1.144, p = 0.254 \). Significant differences did arise in the cultural and individual attributions for poverty. Direct service social workers (M = 4.496, SD = 0.803) agreed significantly more with the individual attribution for poverty than indirect service social workers (M = 4.814, SD = 0.772), \( t(242) = -3.094, p = 0.002 \). Direct service social workers (M = 4.008, SD = 0.756) also agreed significantly more with the cultural attribution for poverty when compared to indirect service social workers (M = 4.347, SD = 0.777), \( t(242) = -3.400, p = 0.001 \).

Other Variables of Interest

The PAS includes an expansive demographics section which allows for the analysis of variables suggested by previous research as well as novel variables. All of the variables and the proper statistical procedures for understanding the relationships between them and poverty attributions are outlined in the previous chapter. Briefly, they include gender, type of education, ethnicity, sexual orientation, field instructor status, recency of field instruction, religious and spiritual identity, age, political orientation, years of social work practice, highest level of educational attainment, and type of practice. The data for these statistical tests are presented below in their identified sections.
**Gender**

Participants were provided four options for identifying their gender, which included an opportunity to write-in gender identities which were not offered by the researcher. The major categories were “male,” “female,” and “transgender.” As detailed above in the demographics section, none of the participants identified themselves as transgender or other. Based on previous research (Cozzarelli, Wilkinson, & Tagler, 2001; Hunt, 1996), this researcher expected that males would endorse the individual and/or cultural attribution to a significantly greater degree than females. Male social workers (M = 4.479, SD = 0.881) did agree slightly more with the individual attribution for poverty when compared to the female social workers (M = 4.666, SD = 0.783) but not to a significant degree, t(247) = -1.517, p = 0.130. Therefore, male and female social workers did not vary significantly on their attributions for poverty. The poverty attributions for males and females are presented in Table 8.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Attributions</th>
<th>Male (n = 55)</th>
<th>Female (n = 194)</th>
<th>t(247)</th>
<th>p</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Structural</td>
<td>3.0965 (0.798)</td>
<td>3.0418 (0.789)</td>
<td>0.436</td>
<td>0.663</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Individual</td>
<td>4.479 (0.881)</td>
<td>4.666 (0.783)</td>
<td>-1.517</td>
<td>0.130</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cultural</td>
<td>4.112 (0.819)</td>
<td>4.149 (0.772)</td>
<td>-0.321</td>
<td>0.748</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Type of education**

The educational data provided by participants were delineated into eight levels ranging from high school diploma to PhD. This data were also differentiated by whether or not the degree was received within a social work education program. Following data collection, the researcher collapsed the participants’ levels of education into two groups: those with a social work degree (n = 217) and those with a degree from a different discipline (n = 31). Previous research (Rehner, Ishee, & Velasques, 1997) indicated that participants with a social work education would endorse the structural attribution for poverty to a significantly greater degree than participants with an educational background in a different area of study. Using an Independent-samples *t*-test, no significant difference was observed between these two groups. Importantly, the low (n) for participants with other degrees likely prevented this analysis from reaching significance. The poverty attributions for participants with a social work or other degree are presented in Table 9.

| Attribution | Social Work (n = 217) M (SD) | Other Degree (n = 31) M (SD) | *t*(246) | *p*
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Structural</td>
<td>3.023 (0.798)</td>
<td>3.242 (0.773)</td>
<td>-1.436</td>
<td>0.152</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Individual</td>
<td>4.661 (0.802)</td>
<td>4.379 (0.826)</td>
<td>1.828</td>
<td>0.069</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cultural</td>
<td>4.176 (0.769)</td>
<td>3.899 (0.847)</td>
<td>1.846</td>
<td>0.066</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Ethnicity, participants identifying as white/Caucasian/European descent v. ethnic minorities

Participants in the PAS were asked to write-in their “ethnic identity.” Overall, participants choose to provide their racial identity. The free responses of participants were coded by the researcher following data collection and further collapsed into two groups for the purposes of this analysis. The two groups were participants who identified themselves as “white/Caucasian/European descent” and participants of an “ethnic minority” (i.e., black/African American, Asian, Hispanic/Latino, Biracial, Jewish, or other). Most PAS participants identified as white/Caucasian/European descent (n = 197), with the remaining participants identifying as an ethnic minority (n = 32) or providing no response (n = 20). Robinson (2009) found that members of disadvantaged groups (e.g., women, people of color) attributed poverty to structural causes significantly more than their white/Caucasian/European descent counterparts. Although no significant difference was observed between these groups in reference to the structural attribution, white/Caucasian/European descent participants (M = 4.075, SD = 0.793) did endorse the cultural attribution to a significantly greater degree when compared to participants who identified as ethnic minorities (M = 4.412, SD = 0.713), t(227) = -2.259, p = 0.025. The structural and individual attributions can be found in Table 10.
Table 11 Attributional Differences Between Participants Identifying as White/Caucasian/European Descent and Ethnic Minority

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Attribution</th>
<th>White/Caucasian/European Descent (n = 197)</th>
<th>Ethnic Minority (n = 32)</th>
<th>t(227)</th>
<th>P</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cultural</td>
<td>M (SD)</td>
<td>M (SD)</td>
<td>t(227)</td>
<td>P</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4.075 (0.793)</td>
<td>4.412 (0.713)</td>
<td>-2.259</td>
<td>0.025</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Structural</td>
<td>3.076 (0.787)</td>
<td>3.052 (0.841)</td>
<td>0.156</td>
<td>0.876</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Individual</td>
<td>4.565 (0.817)</td>
<td>4.804 (0.804)</td>
<td>-1.538</td>
<td>0.125</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Sexual orientation**

The PAS is the first measure of its type to take into account participants’ sexual orientation. The structure of the PAS allowed participants the opportunity to self-identify their sexual orientation. Participants’ responses were coded by the researcher following data collection. For the purpose of this analysis, the researcher combined the responses of participants who identified as “Gay,” “Lesbian,” “Bisexual,” or “Queer” and created a single identification—gay/bisexual (combined n = 19). A minority of participants (15.3%) chose not to respond to this question. The majority of respondents identified as straight/heterosexual (n = 192). Based on Robinson’s (2009) findings pertaining to member of disadvantaged groups, the current researcher hypothesized that participants identifying as gay/bisexual would endorse the structural attribution to a greater extent when compared to heterosexuals. This hypothesis was not confirmed. However, possibly due to the small gay/bisexual sample size, the differences between gay/bisexual participants (M = 2.679, SD = 0.689) and straight/heterosexual participants (M = 3.084,
SD = 0.808) on the structural attribution did approached significance, \( t(204) = 1.823, p = 0.070 \). The full attributional data are presented in Table 11.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Attributions</th>
<th>Straight/Heterosexual ( (n = 192) )</th>
<th>Gay/Bisexual ( (n = 14) )</th>
<th>( t(204) )</th>
<th>( p )</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Structural</td>
<td>3.084 (0.808)</td>
<td>2.679 (0.689)</td>
<td>1.823</td>
<td>0.070</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Individual</td>
<td>4.595 (0.828)</td>
<td>4.712 (0.700)</td>
<td>-0.512</td>
<td>0.609</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cultural</td>
<td>4.110 (0.817)</td>
<td>4.289 (0.550)</td>
<td>-0.806</td>
<td>0.421</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Field instruction status and recency

Another area of exploration for the PAS was the inclusion of questions assessing the participants’ history of providing field instruction and the recency (within the last two years) of said field instruction. A large majority of PAS respondents reported having been a field instructor at one time \( (n = 224) \), and 79% of those field instructors had fulfilled that role in the last two years. No significant differences were observed between participants who had provided field instruction and who had not provided field instruction. However, one evident difference arose in terms of recency of field instruction. Recent field instructors \( (M = 3.026, SD = 0.763) \) endorsed the structural attribution for poverty to a significantly greater degree when compared to social workers who had not provided recent field instruction \( (M = 3.277, SD = 0.825) \), \( t(224) = -1.989, p = 0.048 \). The full attributional data for field instructors are presented in Table 12.
Table 13 Differences in Poverty Attributions Among Field Instructors and Non-Field Instructors and Recent Field Instructors and Past Field Instructors

| Attribution | Field Instruction | | | Recent Field Instruction | | |
|-------------|------------------|----------|----------|------------------------|----------|
|             | Yes (n = 224)    | No (n = 21) | t(243)  | p          | Yes (n = 178) | No (n = 48) | t(224) | p          |
| Structural  | 3.084 (0.789)    | 2.841 (0.856) | 1.340 | 0.181 | 3.026 (0.763) | 3.277 (0.825) | -1.989 | 0.048 |
| Individual  | 4.592 (4.769)    | 4.769 (0.555) | -0.970 | 0.333 | 4.623 (0.829) | 4.473 (0.738) | 1.138 | 0.256 |
| Cultural    | 4.121 (0.789)    | 4.183 (0.494) | -0.353 | 0.724 | 4.104 (0.808) | 4.104 (0.728) | 0.207 | 0.836 |

Religiosity and spirituality

The religiosity and spirituality of PAS participants was assessed using three questions. First, respondents were simply asked if they are religious. Second, those participants who identified as religious were given the opportunity to write-in the faith with which they most identify. Third, participants were queried as to whether they consider themselves spiritual. Of the analyses employed using this data, only one proved significant. There were 84 participants who identified as “not religious,” and those respondents (M = 2.840, SD = 0.776) attributed poverty to structural causes to a significantly greater extent than respondents who identified as “religious” (M = 3.173, SD = 0.782), t(237) = 3.151, p = 0.002. The data for religious and/or spiritual respondents are presented in Table 13.
Table 14 Differences in Poverty Attributions by Religious and Spiritual Identification

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Attributions</th>
<th>Religious</th>
<th></th>
<th>Spiritual</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Yes (n = 155)</td>
<td>No (n = 84)</td>
<td>Yes (n = 220)</td>
<td>No (n = 21)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Structural</td>
<td>M (SD)</td>
<td>M (SD)</td>
<td>t(237)</td>
<td>p</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3.173 (0.782)</td>
<td>2.840 (0.776)</td>
<td>3.151</td>
<td>0.002</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Individual</td>
<td>M (SD)</td>
<td>M (SD)</td>
<td>t(237)</td>
<td>p</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>0.799 (0.821)</td>
<td>0.821 (0.775)</td>
<td>-1.058</td>
<td>0.288</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cultural</td>
<td>M (SD)</td>
<td>M (SD)</td>
<td>t(237)</td>
<td>p</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>0.785 (0.775)</td>
<td>0.775 (0.775)</td>
<td>-0.715</td>
<td>0.416</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Age and years of practice

The data for participants’ age and years of practice were collected using a write-in format. A Pearson’s $r$ was computed to assess the relationship between age and poverty attributions as well as years of practice and poverty attributions. There was no significant correlation between age and poverty attributions or years of practice and poverty attributions.

Education

Participants were asked to supply their highest level of education delineated by whether or not the degree was received within a social work education program. This formulation yielded eight possible choices ranging from high school diploma to PhD/Doctorate of Social Work. Participants selected only six of the eight categories, with Bachelor’s degree being the lowest. A 6 x 3 (Education [Bachelor’s degree, Bachelor’s of Social Work, Master’s degree, Master’s of Social Work, non-social work PhD, social work PhD/DSW] x Attributions for poverty [structural, individual, cultural]) ANOVA was employed to determine if there were any significant differences between
groups. No significant differences were observed between the educational levels on the structural or individual attributions for poverty. A significant difference was observed between educational levels and the cultural attribution for poverty, $F(5, 242) = 2.270$, $p = 0.048$. The post-hoc Tukey’s HSD indentified the significant differences as between social workers with Bachelor’s degrees ($M = 3.167$, $SD = 0.874$) and social workers with Bachelor’s of Social Work (BSW) ($M = 4.211$, $SD = 0.592$) or Master’s of Social Work (MSW) degrees ($M = 4.167$, $SD = 0.723$), at $p = 0.046$ and $p = 0.024$ respectively. The above arithmetic means indicate that social workers with a Bachelor’s degree in another discipline agreed significantly more with the cultural attribution of poverty than social workers with either a BSW or MSW. Table 14 displays the results of the Tukey’s HSD statistical test for the cultural attribution for poverty.
### Table 15 Post Hoc (Tukey’s HSD) Analysis of Endorsement of the Cultural Attribution for Poverty by Type of Education

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Education (I)</th>
<th>Education (J)</th>
<th>Mean Difference (I-J)</th>
<th>p</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bachelor's degree</td>
<td>BSW</td>
<td>1.044*</td>
<td>0.046</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(n = 6)</td>
<td>Master's degree</td>
<td>-0.935</td>
<td>0.092</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>MSW</td>
<td>-1.001*</td>
<td>0.024</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Non-social work PhD</td>
<td>-0.611</td>
<td>0.927</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Social work PhD/DSW</td>
<td>-1.500</td>
<td>0.168</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BSW</td>
<td>Bachelor's degree</td>
<td>1.044*</td>
<td>0.046</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(n = 20)</td>
<td>Master's degree</td>
<td>0.109</td>
<td>0.997</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>MSW</td>
<td>0.044</td>
<td>1.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Non-social work PhD</td>
<td>0.433</td>
<td>0.974</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Social work PhD/DSW</td>
<td>-0.456</td>
<td>0.968</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Master's degree</td>
<td>Bachelor's degree</td>
<td>0.935</td>
<td>0.092</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(n = 23)</td>
<td>BSW</td>
<td>-0.109</td>
<td>0.997</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>MSW</td>
<td>-0.066</td>
<td>0.999</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Non-social work PhD</td>
<td>0.324</td>
<td>0.993</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Social work PhD/DSW</td>
<td>-0.565</td>
<td>0.920</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MSW</td>
<td>Bachelor's degree</td>
<td>1.001*</td>
<td>0.024</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(n = 195)</td>
<td>BSW</td>
<td>-0.044</td>
<td>1.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Master's degree</td>
<td>0.066</td>
<td>0.999</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Non-social work PhD</td>
<td>0.389</td>
<td>0.981</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Social work PhD/DSW</td>
<td>-0.499</td>
<td>0.944</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-social work PhD</td>
<td>Bachelor's degree</td>
<td>0.611</td>
<td>0.927</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(n = 2)</td>
<td>BSW</td>
<td>-0.433</td>
<td>0.974</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Master's degree</td>
<td>-0.324</td>
<td>0.993</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>MSW</td>
<td>-0.389</td>
<td>0.981</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Social work PhD/DSW</td>
<td>-0.889</td>
<td>0.860</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social work PhD/DSW</td>
<td>Bachelor's degree</td>
<td>1.500</td>
<td>0.168</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(n = 2)</td>
<td>BSW</td>
<td>0.456</td>
<td>0.968</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Master's degree</td>
<td>0.565</td>
<td>0.920</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>MSW</td>
<td>0.499</td>
<td>0.944</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Non-social work PhD</td>
<td>0.889</td>
<td>0.860</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*p < 0.05
Political view

The political view of participants was conceptualized as existing on a continuum constructed by the researcher. This continuum consisted of seven points with Very Liberal and Very Conservative as anchors and “Moderate” as the center. Again, a Pearson’s $r$ was computed to determine if a relationship existed between participants’ political views and poverty attributions. There was a positive correlation between political view and the structural attribution for poverty ($r = 0.388$, $n = 249$, $p < 0.001$). There was, also, a negative correlation between political view and the individual attribution for poverty ($r = -0.271$, $n = 249$, $p < 0.001$) and political view and the cultural attribution for poverty ($r = -0.222$, $n = 249$, $p < 0.001$). Based on the codification schema of this research, the above statistics translate as increased liberalism being correlated to increased endorsement of the structural attribution and increased conservatism being correlated to increased endorsement of the cultural and individual attributions.

Conclusion

Overall, the social workers who participated in the PAS endorsed the structural attributions for poverty to a greater extent than the individual or cultural attributions. This trend was mediated when the social workers were grouped as direct service providers and indirect service providers. Direct practice social workers agreed to the individual and cultural attributions for poverty to a significantly greater degree than did indirect practice social workers. The gender of the participants was not found to significantly influence their poverty attributions. However, male social workers did endorse the individual attribution to a greater, but not significant, degree. Having a social
work education was, though not significantly, related to poverty attributions. Participants without a social work educational background agreed more with the individual and cultural attributions, but again, not to a significant degree. Sexual orientation moved in the direction of significance, with participants who identified as gay/bisexual agreeing more with the structural attribution for poverty.

There was no significant correlation between a participant’s age or years of practice and his or her poverty attributions. A significant correlation was found between a participant’s political view and his or her poverty attributions. The observed relationship manifested in liberalism being positively correlated with endorsement of the structural attributions for poverty and conservatism being positively correlated with endorsement of the individual and cultural attributions for poverty.

There are several other significant findings. First, a difference was observed between ethnic/racial identity and poverty attributions. Participants who identified as white/Caucasian/European descent agreed more with the cultural attribution for poverty than their ethnic minority counterparts. Second, the recency of a social worker’s delivery of field instruction was associated with their poverty attributions. Participants who were recent field instructors agreed significantly more with the structural attribution for poverty. Third, a participant’s religiosity was significantly associated with his or her poverty attributions. Social workers who did not identify as religious agreed with the structural attribution for poverty to a significantly greater extent than social workers who identified as religious. Fourth, the social workers with Bachelor’s (non-social work)
degrees agreed significantly more with the cultural attribution than did their peers with BSWs or MSWs.

The next and final chapter presents a discussion of these findings related to the attributional framework developed earlier. Chapter five also explores the limitations and future research implications of this research as well as the implications of this research to social work as a profession and practice.
Chapter Five: Discussion

The goal of this research was to better understand the poverty attributions of licensed social workers. The sampling frame of this research consisted of roughly 800 social workers functioning as field instructors for a college of social work in the Midwest. The final sample was comprised of 249 licensed social workers operating in myriad professional roles. The participants responded to the Poverty Attributions Survey (PAS), which was designed specifically for this study to assess the degree to which each participant attributed poverty to structural, individual, or cultural causes.

The primary hypothesis of this research was that social workers would agree with the structural attribution for poverty to a greater extent than the individual or cultural attribution. This hypothesis was supported. In aggregate (i.e., the average level of agreement across the sample), social workers “somewhat agree[d]” that poverty is attributable to structural causes. In turn, the social workers in this sample “disagree[d]” with the individual attribution and “somewhat disagree[d]” with the cultural attribution for poverty. These results are also consistent with previous research (Bullock, 2004; Hendrickson & Axelson, 1985; Reeser & Epstein, 1987; Weiss, 2006). The second
hypothesis of this research was that social workers who identified themselves as direct service providers would endorse the individual and cultural attributions for poverty to a significantly greater degree than would their indirect service providing peers. This hypothesis was also supported.

Social workers who provide direct services were not the only identifiable group that attributed poverty more to individual and/or cultural causes. Social workers who identified as white/Caucasian/European descent attributed poverty to cultural causes significantly more than their ethnic minority peers. Also, social workers who identified as religious disagreed significantly more with the structural attribution for poverty when compared to non-religious social workers. Finally, greater political conservatism was significantly correlated with greater agreement with the individual and cultural attributions for poverty.

The Effects of the Individual Attribution for Poverty on the Therapeutic Relationship

Although the above demographic findings are important, the attributions of direct service social workers are a crucial finding for the field of social work. Social workers who provide direct services, by definition, interact with clients in one capacity or another. This could mean that the social worker is, for example, a case manager, clinician, or school social worker. The consequences of this direct contact can be understood within the context of attributional theory. Individual attributions for poverty have been linked to negative affect, or feelings, toward individuals and groups living in poverty (Cozzarelli, Wilkinson, & Tagler, 2001; Zucker & Weiner, 1993). The expectation, then, is that those social workers who endorse individual attributions for poverty will also experience
negative affect toward individuals and groups living in the condition of poverty.

Empirically, Weiss (2006) was able to demonstrate a link between individual attributions for poverty and decreased motivation to work with clients living in poverty among BSW students.

Based on the findings of this study, the individual poverty attribution is likely not the only perspective which can produce negative affect. First, the individual and cultural attributions for poverty were both linked to similar demographic characteristics: political conservatism and direct service provision. Second, both the individual and cultural attributions for poverty are focused on the actions and qualities of the person. The cultural attribution does acknowledge a factor external to the individual, that is, culture. For example, one cultural attributional statement in the PAS is, “poverty is the result of a culture which perpetuates poor work habits, welfare dependence, and laziness.” The implication is that the individual living in poverty was socialized by his or her family, neighbors, and cultural group to hold certain values and manifest certain behaviors. These values and behaviors, then, predispose the individual to a life of poverty. Even with a focus on a secondary factor (i.e., culture), the cultural attribution for poverty identifies the individual as responsible for his or her poverty through behaviors and values learned in the environment. Therefore, the cultural attribution could be considered a less provocative form of classism or racism than a realistic explanation for poverty.

Given the observations that the individual and cultural attributions are endorsed by social workers with overlapping demographic characteristics and that the attributions share an individual focus (either directly or indirectly), the individual and cultural attributions for
poverty would be expected to elicit similar, if not identical, reactions in social workers who endorse it—negative affect.

Negative affect experienced toward clients living in poverty could have a significant impact on the ability to form effective helping relationships. Lambert and Barley (2001) reviewed 100 empirical studies in order to better understand the factors which contribute to successful outcomes in the therapeutic, or helping, relationship. They found that roughly 30% of successful outcomes were attributable to “common factors” (Lambert & Barley, 2001, p. 358). These common factors refer to the underlying attitudes of the practitioner—empathy, warmth, and congruence (Lambert & Barley, 2001). All the major therapeutic orientations—including Attachment Theory, Self Psychology, Cognitive-Behavioral Therapy, Task-Centered Therapy, Client-Centered Therapy, Feminist Therapy, Narrative Therapy, and Solution-Focused Therapy—make reference to and emphasize empathy, warmth, congruence, and respect (Buckman, Kinney, & Reese, 2008; Cobb, 2008; Corcoran, 2008; Marin, 2008; Ramos & Tolson, 2008; Rothery & Tutty, 2008; Saulnier, 2008; Stalker & Hazelton, 2008). Negative affect and the fundamental therapeutic conditions listed above cannot easily co-exist.

This is not to imply that social workers who experience negative affect toward their clients are seeking to harm them. However, it is important to acknowledge that lower-quality helping relationships are likely to reduce the effectiveness of interventions and thereby contribute to less positive outcomes for clients. Clients who present with more vulnerable situations, such as poverty, are disadvantaged even prior to the compounding effects of a practitioner who is less empathetic to their experiences, needs,
and challenges. As Biestek (1957) writes, “A good relationship is necessary not only for the perfection, but also for the essence, of the casework service in every setting” (p. 19). Given the evidence in their research that the quality of the helping relationship is crucial to successful intervention, Lambert and Barley (2001) explicitly advise that “clinicians watch for a reduction in their ability to empathize and relate to client[s]” (p. 359). They also recommend “a constant emphasis on the therapeutic relationship in continuing education for licensed professionals” (Lambert & Barley, 2001, p. 359).

The above statements by Lambert and Barley signify not only that empathy and relatedness are preferable but also achievable. Systems theory, a definitively social work perspective, emphasizes the dynamic—that is, changeable—nature of human beings (Dale, Smith, Norlin, & Chess, 2009). Further, Oskamp and Schultz (2005) identify learning theory as a viable route to attitudinal change. Therefore, the potentiality of adjusting one’s perspective on poverty and the individuals and groups who subsist within its conditions is similar to a clinician being instructed in the techniques of CBT or an administrator coming to understand the value of organizational culture. In fact, the current research found that increases in education were significantly associated with poverty attributions which are not associated with negative affect.

The Structural Attribution for Poverty as Best Practice

Social work is a “person in environment” science. As pioneered by Addams, social work’s appreciation for the effects that the environment has on development, perception, and opportunity is still one of the most defining aspects of the profession. The structural attribution for poverty is a “person in environment” perspective. Its
parameters are systematic and macro-level. Various large systems are included within the structural attribution, such as economics, government, and the interplay between them. The structural attribution allows negative associations, for example, blame, to be focused on macro-level systems instead of the individual.

The idea of transplanting “blame” from an individual living in poverty raises possible concerns. However, these concerns are best addressed within the conceptualization offered by C. Wright Mills. Mills (1959) draws the distinction between troubles and issues. “Troubles,” he writes, “occur within the character of the individual and within the range of his immediate relations with others” (Mills, 1959, p. 8). These are contrasted with issues which “have to do with matters that transcend these local environments of the individual and the range of his inner life” (Mills, 1959, p. 8). As referenced above, 39.8 million Americans live in the condition of poverty (DeNavas-Walt, Proctor, & Smith, 2009); poverty is an issue. Poverty has existed, in one form or another, across huge swaths of time unbounded by civilizations, nation states, and social policies. Poverty, then, is not an individual problem, or trouble.

A possible rebuttal to the above conceptualization is that if individual responsibility is removed, then people, specifically individuals living in poverty, will not be motivated to expend the necessary effort to change their economic status. This line of thought is rooted in meritocracy, that is, the idea that reward is directly linked to effort. An example of this can be found in the qualitative research of Jay MacLeod. MacLeod (2004) engaged in a qualitative study of two groups of adolescents living in urban poverty. One group, referred to as the “Brothers,” held strong beliefs in the benefits and
rewards of meritocracy (MacLeod, 2004). Each adolescent perceived the educational system as an equalizing force and an opportunity to create a solid foundation for future success (MacLeod, 2004). This is best summarized by “Craig,” who states, “I know by working hard it’ll all pay off in the end. I’ll be getting a good job” (MacLeod, 2004, p. 98). The respective parents of each adolescent instilled in him a conviction that hard work is the primary mode of reaching success (MacLeod, 2004). This emphasis on hard work could be found in the Brothers’ dedication to academic pursuits, including graduating from a school with a high dropout rate; their involvement in extracurricular activities, both academic and athletic; and their adherence to and respect for the disciplinary code of the school (MacLeod, 2004). Overall, MacLeod (2004) describes the Brothers as “typical high school students” (p. 92). Unfortunately, the Brothers did not experience large returns on their efforts. Nearly a decade later, MacLeod (2004) followed up with the Brothers to find they were “stuck in low-wage, high turnover jobs” (p. 196), and many of them were still living with their parents.

The experiences of the “Brothers” are in stark contrast to the cultural hallmarks—hopelessness and despair—Lewis (1969) observed in the formulation of his culture of poverty theory. For these young men, their parents’ insistence on educational attainment and success, and their subsequent achievement-oriented behaviors, were not enough to diminish the structural obstacles—crime, insufficient resources, inadequate employment opportunities—which confounded attempts at changing their economic class (MacLeod, 2004). Therefore, as an idea, meritocracy can be said to work for individuals whose
experience of structural impediments are decreased by, for example, their race/ethnicity, economic class origin, and the quality of their educational institutions.

Given the theoretical and practical insufficiencies of the individual and cultural attributions for poverty and the idea of meritocracy, one alternative is a structural orientation. From a practical perspective, a structural orientation would first require an analysis of the societal standards placed on individuals living in poverty. The primary inquiry would be the degree to which the standard is appropriate in relation to the amount of resources individuals living in poverty possess. For example, in many American cities, securing effective and dependable transportation is a societal standard for which individuals are responsible. However, individuals living in poverty usually do not possess the resources necessary to purchase and maintain an automobile when that is the primary mode of transit in their town or city. The consequences of diminished mobility are sweeping and range from difficulties locating and sustaining adequate employment, to decreased availability of healthy food choices, to limited access to social services.

Continuing at the macro-level, it would, then, be crucial to identify the programs which state as their goal the mitigation of the targeted societal standard. Once identified, these macro-focused service organizations can become collaborative partners who provide the basis for collective action and creative problem solving. Only after system-level inequities—in areas, such as education, safety, and nutrition—are diminished, can social workers begin the micro-level efforts involved in building skills in the same areas the inequities stifled. Extending the previous transportation example, once effective transportation is established, social workers can begin to engage in psychoeducational
services geared toward increasing clients’ knowledge and skill in the selection and preparation of healthy, nutritious foods.

The brief description provided above represents a community change process with a structural orientation. This is an example of community practice in social work (Segal, Gerdes, & Steiner, 2007). It reaches back to a model older than the profession itself. Pioneered by Jane Addams, it represents a truly social work perspective which respects the contributions and consequences of the environment; empathizes with and empowers individuals, families, and communities; and advocates for systems-level change which positively affects and promotes the common good. However, community practitioners make up a very small proportion of social workers, as evidenced in this study and the NASW’s study on the professional composition of social work (Whitaker, Weismiller, & Clark, 2006). Furthermore, previous research has demonstrated that the current arc of social work as a profession is toward clinical practice with individuals and small groups (Falck, 1984; Gibelman & Schervish, 1997; Rubin & Johnson, 1984; Specht & Courtney, 1994; Walz & Groze, 1991; Whitaker, Weismiller, & Clark, 2006). As Specht and Courtney (1994) conceptualize this movement, social workers are seeking occupational prestige, which requires them to chase professionals who currently hold a monopoly on it—psychologists and psychiatrists.

A consequence of pursuing esteem from a group unlikely to surrender any is that social workers can become disempowered. There is the potential to lose sight of the unique and exceptional qualities which constitute the field of social work. One such quality is social work’s acknowledgement and commitment to social justice. Social
workers are, also, skilled professionals with the ability to engage with a wide range of individuals and groups. Social workers embody a perspective which acknowledges how the environment affects people and how people can affect their environment. These skills and perspective are unique to social work, and they afford social workers the opportunity to be the “expert.”

The Structural Poverty Attribution and Social Work Education

The field of social work, as with any profession, benefits from a healthy exchange of new ideas and a constant evaluation of existing practices. As demonstrated by this research, there are social workers who hold individual and/or cultural poverty attributions—roughly 10% and 20% respectively—which can elicit negative affect towards clients (Zucker & Weiner, 1993) and decrease social workers’ motivation to engage with individuals living in poverty (Weiss, 2006). The individual and cultural explanations for poverty are, therefore, possibly harmful to clients. In response to the presence of these attributions in the field of social work and the consequence they can have for clients, schools of social work need to assess student’s attributions for poverty and educate them in an orientation which seems best suited for the practice of social work—the structural attribution.

Social work education does appear to have some effect on students’ attributions for poverty. This research found that social workers with a BSW or MSW degree agreed less with the cultural attribution for poverty when compared to social workers with BA/BS degree. However, this research also found that social workers who identify as white/Caucasian/European descent endorsed the cultural attribution to a greater degree.
than did their ethnic minority peers. Considering that the majority of participants in this sample (as with social work in general) identified as white, social work education requires a further strengthening of its methods for educating students on the structural sources of social issues.

The first step in developing an understanding of social work students’ attributions for poverty is to assess them. Presented in this research is one instrument—the PAS—which could be utilized to this end. Numerous stakeholders would benefit from a better understanding, and subsequent adjustment of, students’ attributions for poverty. First, social work students would be better served by their educational institutions by allowing for a more tailored educational experience. Second, educational institutions would benefit by graduating social workers who have an improved understanding of the roots of social work and poverty. Additionally, these students would become more competent in their work with individuals and groups living in the condition of poverty. Third, clients living in poverty would benefit by having the opportunity to interact with a professional helper who offers a unique, and possibly more valuable, perspective on his or her situation when compared to other helping professionals.

As social work education programs increase their understanding of incoming and current students’ attributions for poverty, purposeful adjustments can be made to their curricula. One such adjustment could be an increased prominence of community and policy practice education. These two aspects of social work practice focus on macro systems and the methods by which to facilitate change, organization, and collective action. As frames of reference, these two practice models provide social workers with an
understanding of the reciprocal relationship between macro-level and micro-level systems.

Attention to poverty attributions need not only occur within the context of the classroom. Because of social work’s dedication to lifelong learning through continued education, licensed social workers are required to seek educational experiences which improve their skills and knowledge of practice. Agencies, especially those which serve individuals living in poverty, could increase clients’ positive outcomes by assessing the poverty attributions of direct and indirect service social workers and obligating them to receive training in the structural causes of poverty. Importantly, increasing a social worker’s awareness of structural forces is worthless, and possibly harmful, without also increasing skills.

For nearly the last century, social work has been split between macro-level practice, which represents the historic roots of social work, and micro-level practice, which finds its origins in psychoanalytic theory (Weil, 2005). As the profession of social work continues to mint micro-level practitioners (Falck, 1984; Gibelman & Schervish, 1997; Rubin & Johnson, 1984; Specht & Courtney, 1994; Walz & Groze, 1991; Whitaker, Weismiller, & Clark, 2006), and the demand for education in micro-level practice increases, it is crucial that the field of social work does not abandon its professional and academic roots. Rather, it must actively reinvest in the systems-level perspective which makes social work unique.
Limitations

This study was not without methodological and sampling limitations. First, although the PAS is an amalgamation of other validated scales and received high reliability scores, it is a new and previously untested instrument. During the course of this study, several areas of improvement for the demographic section became apparent. First, there was no inquiry into the socioeconomic status (SES) or economic class identity of participants. With the exception of early poverty attribution studies which surveyed the general public, researchers have not inquired about the SES of participants. Adding SES as an area of inquiry would allow for an analysis of its possible effects on poverty attributions. Second, the researcher did not provide examples to define “direct” or “indirect” service provision. Instead, the participants were able to self-identify their role, which prevents the researcher from knowing what conceptualizations they were utilizing when answering the question. Third, participants were asked for their “ethnic identity” but the majority responded with their racial identity. Future versions of the PAS will inquire about both ethnic and racial identities.

The second methodological issue is similar to the direct service confound described above. The researcher did not define “poverty” for the participants. Therefore, it is possible that each participant utilized a slightly different definition as they completed the survey. Again, in the future, it may prove useful to provide a definition for poverty to the participants prior to administering the survey.

The sampling limitation of this study is related to the relatively small and narrow set of social workers who were able to participate. As mentioned previously, the sample
was taken from a database consisting of current and previous field instructors for a large Midwestern university. Consequently, the findings of this study represent only those social workers who participated and cannot be generalized beyond those parameters. However, this study does represent the poverty attributions of 249 licensed social workers.

Implications

This research raises many interesting and difficult issues in the practice of social work with individuals and groups living in the condition of poverty. First, there are the implications of negative affect toward clients. As mentioned previously, the NASW (2009) charges social workers with the responsibility of addressing the needs of individuals living in poverty as well as challenging the societal structures which perpetuate poverty and discrimination. However, Weiss (2006) observed that graduating BSW students who endorsed individual attributions for poverty disclosed a lower motivation to work with individuals in poverty. Further, Zucker and Weiner (1993) demonstrated that negative affect is linked to the individual attribution for poverty. The cumulative effect, then, is that a group of social workers will not aspire to assist and advocate for individuals living in poverty. Numerous researchers have observed this abandonment of social work’s ethical principles and historical foundations (Falck, 1984; Gibelman & Schervish, 1997; Rubin & Johnson, 1984; Specht & Courtney, 1994; Stuart, 2008; Walz & Groze, 1991; Whitaker, Weismiller, & Clark, 2006).

As this trend continues, the pool of professionals available to competently serve individuals living in poverty will dwindle, as will the opportunities for clients to request
workers who respect and empathize with their condition. Each treatment modality presented above acknowledges the importance of respect, empathy, and congruence on the therapeutic, or helping, relationship. In fact, Lambert and Barley (2001) found that nearly 30% of successful client outcomes are directly related to the quality of the client-practitioner relationship, and it is difficult to forge a helping bond with an individual toward whom one experiences negative feelings.

With these negative consequences for economically disadvantaged clients in mind, it is suggested that NASW establish a position which details an evidence-based perspective toward individuals and groups living in the condition of poverty. Precedent for this type of mandate is evidenced in the NASW’s recent membership in a coalition of other professional organizations who declared a specific perspective on sexual orientation (Just the Facts Coalition, 2008). This is by no means an attempt to conflate the march of the gay community towards equality with the struggles of individuals living in poverty. However, the methods by which to disseminate population-specific information and ensure some level of quality care can be similar, if not identical. The NASW Code of Ethics (2009) explicitly states that “social workers should obtain education about and seek to understand the nature of social diversity and oppression with respect to race, ethnicity, national origin, color, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, age, marital status, political belief, religion, immigration status, and mental or physical disability” (p. 9). But there is no mention of class, socioeconomic status, or poverty. As detailed above, the roots of social work run parallel to the plight of individuals and
groups living in the condition of poverty. A respect for poverty is a respect for the
tradition and history of social work.

The second implication of this research is directly related to the first. Without
class or poverty being acknowledged by the NASW, there is little to no ethical
motivation for social workers to elaborate upon their understanding of poverty received
in BSW or MSW programs. If Weiss’s (2006) study is any indication of the overall
quality of said education, then social workers are not being exposed to curricula which
motivate them to set their professional courses toward addressing the challenges of
individuals living in the condition of poverty. Without the support of education, the
addition of class, poverty, or socioeconomic status to a list in the Code of Ethics will not
suffice as a solution to this difficulty. One active step would be to emphasize and
embolden the issues of poverty in the educational experience of students and the
continuing education of practicing social workers. In this way, the NASW and CSWE
could assemble a foundational perspective on poverty for all social workers.

The third implication of the current research is that it represents the first use of the
PAS. This instrument is a combination of three other validated measures, and it received
high reliability scores for each of its attributional scales. Various adjustments and
potential additions to the measure were previously described, but, at current, the
instrument offers a new tool by which to better understand the poverty attributions of
social workers.
Future Research

There are numerous opportunities to extend and calibrate this research. As mentioned above, the PAS has identifiable structural sore spots. Suring up these areas offers an opportunity to continue validating and improving its ability to assess social workers’ and others’ attributions for poverty. Additionally, it will be necessary to analyze the PAS using factor analysis. This procedure will allow for an increased understanding of the number of constructs the PAS measures.

Following enhancements to the PAS, it will be important to continue studying the poverty attributions of social workers. As found in this study, there are identifiable differences between the diverse groups which comprise social work as a profession. One such distinction is between direct and indirect service providing social workers. Future research should endeavor to increase the profession’s understanding of the extent to which this pattern is observable across educational levels, areas of practice, and regions.

Continued improvements to the PAS will, also, allow it to be competently employed in future research on the consequences associated with poverty attributions. As mentioned above, the findings of the Zucker and Weiner (1993) were foundational to the current research. However, their study analyzed only the individual attribution and its consequences on affect. It is, therefore, critical to both further substantiate the link between the individual attribution for poverty and negative affect (and, also, behaviors), and explore the effects of the cultural attribution on the same domains. It is likely that future research on the effects of the cultural attribution for poverty will overlap with the effects observed for the individual attribution. This hypothesis is based on the
attributional schema utilized in the current research which identifies the cultural attribution as internal to the person. Further, the statistical trends observed in this study demonstrated that the individual and cultural attributions for poverty are related to many of the same demographic variables. Research must also be directed toward better understanding the effects of the structural attribution for poverty on the affect and behaviors of social workers. Moving beyond studies of behaviors and affect, future research must also investigate the consequences poverty attributions have on client outcomes. These are important next steps in developing a deeper understanding of the practical implications poverty attributions have on social workers and their clients living in the condition of poverty.
References


Appendix A: Poverty Attribution Survey

Instructions: Please respond to the following questions to the best of your ability. Each question has six potential response categories to choose from. Please select the response which is *most* closely aligned with your personal beliefs and mark that box. Each question is based on the root question, “Poverty is the result of…”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>“Poverty is the result of…”</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Somewhat Agree</th>
<th>Somewhat Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1)…inequities which don’t give all people an equal chance.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2)…an anti-work mentality.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3)…a culture which perpetuates poor work habits, welfare dependence, and laziness.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4)…a capitalist society in which the wealth of some is contingent on the poverty of others.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
5) ...an unwillingness to work at the competitive level that is necessary to make it in the world.

6) ...discrimination against minorities and the poor.

7) ...a lack of motivation that results from being on public assistance.

8) ...loose morals.

9) ...living in a family with a parent(s) who has a poor work ethic.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>“Poverty is the result of...”</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Somewhat Agree</th>
<th>Somewhat Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>10) ...an economic system that fosters competition over cooperation.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11) ...a lack of drive and perseverance.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12) ...the poor being taken advantage of by the rich.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13) ...laziness and a lack of motivation.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
14)…corporate downsizing because of U.S. companies relocating to foreign countries that can pay lower wages.

15)…a lack of effort to improve oneself.

16)…not having positive role models to teach children about drive and ambition.

17)…a culture which does not frown upon mothers having children outside of marriage.

18)…living in a family with a parent(s) who is on welfare.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>“Poverty is the result of…”</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Somewhat Agree</th>
<th>Somewhat Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>19)…the low wages that some businesses pay.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20)…a culture which does not teach children to save, spend, or manage money wisely.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
21) the lack of readiness of the government to allocate sufficient resources to help people during economic difficulties.

22) parent(s) who glorify living on welfare.

23) people being “victims” of social processes or situations.

24) individuals on welfare spending their money on drinking and drugs.

25) not really wanting to work.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>“Poverty is the result of…”</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Somewhat Agree</th>
<th>Somewhat Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>26) belonging to social groups that have been disadvantaged over the years.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27) not making a sufficient effort to find work.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28) a lack of sufficient willpower.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29) growing up in welfare families.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30) a preference for living off society.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
31) …the inability of society to provide the basic needs of individuals.

32) …a low level of individual responsibility.

33) …not having middle-class values.

Demographics

34. Gender:  ___ Male  ___ Female  ___ Transsexual  ___ Other (Specify):

35. Age:  (write-in)

36. Ethnicity:  (write-in all which apply)

37. Sexual Orientation:  (write-in)

38. Highest Completed Degree:
   ___ High School  ___ Associates Degree
   ___ Bachelors  ___ BSW  ___ Master’s Degree
   ___ MSW  PhD (non-Social work)
   ___ PhD (Social work)/DSW

39. Do you currently hold a license in good standing with the CSWMFT board?  ___ Yes  ___ No

40. Years of Social Work Practice:  (write-in)

41. Type of Social Work Practice:
   ___ Mental Health  ___ Health  ___ Child Welfare
   ___ Aging  ___ School
   ___ Adolescents  ___ Addictions
   ___ Developmental Disabilities  ___ Higher Education
   ___ Occupational  ___ Homeless/Displaced Persons
   ___ Criminal Justice  ___ Income Assistance
   ___ Community Development  ___ Other
42. Is Your Primary Role Direct Practice?  ___ Yes  ___ No

43. Have you ever been a field instructor?  ___ Yes  ___ No

44. If yes, was this within the last two years?  ___ Yes  ___ No

45. Political View:  ___ Very Liberal  ___ Liberal  ___ Slightly Liberal  ___ Moderate  ___ Slightly Conservative  ___ Conservative  ___ Very Conservative

46. How strongly do you identify with this political orientation?  Not Strong  1  2  3  4  5  6  7  8  9  10  Very Strong

47. Do you consider yourself religious?  ___ Yes  ___ No

48. If yes, what is the faith you most identify with?  (write-in)

49. How strongly do you consider your beliefs?  Not Strong  1  2  3  4  5  6  7  8  9  10  Very Strong

50. If no, do you consider yourself spiritual?  ___ Yes  ___ No
Appendix B: Recruitment/Informed Consent Letters

First Recruitment/Informed Consent Letter

10/30/2009

My name is Robert Bennett, and I am a second year Master's of Social Work student at The Ohio State University. I am writing to ask for your help in a study of professional social workers’ attitudes about the determinants of poverty.

The target of this research is social workers with a valid license in good standing with the Counseling, Social Worker, and Marriage and Family Therapist (CSWMFT) Board. Therefore, if you have received this message but do not possess a license, please disregard this message. However, if you are a licensed social worker in good standing with the CSWMFT board, please continue.

This study is intended to better understand the perspective of social workers about individuals and groups living in the condition of poverty. Results from this survey will help to identify areas of consensus and debate, as well as plan future research.

Your answers will be kept completely confidential and will only be released as summaries from which NO individual answers can be identified.

This research is voluntary and will in no way affect your employment record. That aside, we would greatly appreciate you taking the time to fully and thoughtfully complete our online survey. To begin the survey, please click the link below:


If you have any questions or comments about this study, feel free to contact me via the personal information provided below.

Again, I am very thankful for your time and effort in participating in this valuable research.
Sincerely,

Robert M. Bennett, B.A.
Master's of Social Work Student
The Ohio State University
44 Clark Place
Columbus, OH. 43201
(740) 704-2657
bennett.455@buckeyemail.osu.edu

Second Recruitment/Informed Consent Letter

11/23/2009

Two weeks ago you hopefully received an email asking you to participate in a research project via an online survey. This letter is to thank you if you have already participated and persuade you to participate if you have not.

This study is intended to better understand the perspective of social workers about individuals and groups living in the condition of poverty. The results from this survey will help to identify areas of consensus and debate, as well as plan future research.

The target of this research is social workers with a valid license in good standing with the Counseling, Social Worker, and Marriage and Family Therapist (CSWMFT) Board. Therefore, if you have received this message but do not possess a license, please disregard this message. However, if you are a licensed social worker in good standing with the CSWMFT board, please continue.

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Masters of Social Work Student
The Ohio State University
44 Clark Place
Columbus, OH. 43201
(740) 704-2657
bennett.455@buckeyemail.osu.edu

Third Recruitment/Informed Consent Letter

12/04/2009

Two weeks ago you hopefully received an email which asked you to participate in research investigating the attitudes of social workers’ toward the determinants of poverty. If you at that time, or at a time previous to that, participated in this research, I would like to thank you for your contribution. However, if you have not yet taken the survey, this is your final opportunity. The survey will close TWO weeks from today.

The target of this research is social workers with a valid license in good standing with the Counseling, Social Worker, and Marriage and Family Therapist (CSWMFT) Board. Therefore, if you have received this message but do not possess a license, please disregard this message. However, if you are a licensed social worker in good standing with the CSWMFT board, please continue.

This study is intended to better understand the perspective of social workers about individuals and groups living in the condition of poverty. Results from this survey will help to identify areas of consensus and debate, as well as plan future research.

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bennett.455@buckeyemail.osu.edu
Appendix C: Alphabetical Listing of Participants’ Religious Identities

Alphabetized Listing of Faith/Denomination Identities of PAS Participants

- Agnostic
- American Baptist
- Anabaptist
- Assembly of God
- Baptist
- Buddhist
- Catholic
- Christian
- Episcopalian
- Lutheran
- Mennonite
- Methodist
- Mormon
- Nazarene
- Non-denominational
- Presbyterian
- Protestant
- Reformed Catholic
- Roman Catholic
- Seventh Day Adventist
- United Church of Christ
Appendix D: Item Distribution for the Poverty Attribution Survey

Item Endorsement by Number and Percentage of the Poverty Attribution Survey

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>“Poverty is the result of…”</th>
<th>Strongly Agree n (%)</th>
<th>Agree n (%)</th>
<th>Somewhat Agree n (%)</th>
<th>Somewhat Disagree n (%)</th>
<th>Disagree n (%)</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree n (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>...inequities which don’t give all people an equal chance.</td>
<td>56 (22.5)</td>
<td>83 (33.3)</td>
<td>81 (32.5)</td>
<td>20 (8.0)</td>
<td>7 (2.8)</td>
<td>2 (0.8)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>...a capitalist society in which the wealth of some is contingent on the poverty of others.</td>
<td>32 (12.9)</td>
<td>45 (18.1)</td>
<td>84 (33.7)</td>
<td>24 (9.6)</td>
<td>43 (17.3)</td>
<td>21 (8.4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>...discrimination against minorities and the poor.</td>
<td>24 (9.6)</td>
<td>47 (18.9)</td>
<td>105 (42.2)</td>
<td>25 (10.0)</td>
<td>39 (15.7)</td>
<td>9 (3.6)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>...an economic system that fosters competition over cooperation.</td>
<td>26 (10.4)</td>
<td>40 (16.1)</td>
<td>99 (39.8)</td>
<td>30 (12.0)</td>
<td>47 (18.9)</td>
<td>7 (2.8)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>...the poor being taken advantage of by the rich.</td>
<td>8 (3.2)</td>
<td>30 (12.0)</td>
<td>85 (34.1)</td>
<td>52 (20.9)</td>
<td>56 (22.5)</td>
<td>18 (7.2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>...corporate downsizing because of U.S. companies relocating to foreign countries that can pay lower wages.</td>
<td>14 (5.6)</td>
<td>39 (15.7)</td>
<td>122 (49.0)</td>
<td>29 (11.6)</td>
<td>41 (16.5)</td>
<td>4 (1.6)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>...the low wages which some businesses pay.</td>
<td>28 (11.2)</td>
<td>93 (37.3)</td>
<td>93 (37.3)</td>
<td>20 (8.0)</td>
<td>12 (4.8)</td>
<td>3 (1.2)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
…The lack of readiness of government to allocate resources to help people during economic difficulties.

…people being the victims of social processes or situations.

…belonging to social groups that have been disadvantaged over the years.

…the inability of society to provide the basic needs of individuals.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>“Poverty is the result of…”</th>
<th>Strongly Agree (%)</th>
<th>Agree (%)</th>
<th>Somewhat Agree (%)</th>
<th>Somewhat Disagree (%)</th>
<th>Disagree (%)</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>…an anti-work mentality.</td>
<td>0 (0.0)</td>
<td>3 (1.2)</td>
<td>42 (16.9)</td>
<td>35 (14.1)</td>
<td>111 (44.6)</td>
<td>58 (23.3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>…an unwillingness to work at the competitive level that is necessary to make it in the world.</td>
<td>0 (0.0)</td>
<td>3 (1.2)</td>
<td>26 (10.4)</td>
<td>41 (16.5)</td>
<td>109 (43.8)</td>
<td>70 (28.1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>…a lack of motivation that results from being on public assistance.</td>
<td>0 (0.0)</td>
<td>5 (2.0)</td>
<td>56 (22.5)</td>
<td>57 (22.9)</td>
<td>90 (36.1)</td>
<td>41 (16.5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>…loose morals.</td>
<td>0 (0.0)</td>
<td>2 (0.8)</td>
<td>10 (4.0)</td>
<td>17 (6.8)</td>
<td>83 (33.3)</td>
<td>137 (55.0)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>…a lack of drive and perseverance.</td>
<td>0 (0.0)</td>
<td>5 (2.0)</td>
<td>50 (20.1)</td>
<td>58 (23.3)</td>
<td>102 (41.0)</td>
<td>34 (13.7)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>…laziness and a lack of motivation.</td>
<td>0 (0.0)</td>
<td>5 (2.0)</td>
<td>36 (14.5)</td>
<td>51 (20.5)</td>
<td>97 (39.0)</td>
<td>60 (24.1)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
…a lack of effort to improve oneself.  
(1) (3) (45) (51) (114) (35)

…individuals on welfare spending their money on drinking and drugs.  
(5) (7) (38) (51) (95) (53)

…not really wanting to work.  
(3) (6) (40) (54) (87) (59)

…not making sufficient effort to find work.  
(1) (7) (51) (57) (100) (33)

…a lack of sufficient willpower.  
(0) (4) (35) (51) (104) (55)

…a preference for living off society.  
(4) (2) (12) (0) (12) (28)

…a low level of individual responsibility.  
(2) (6) (26) (26) (28) (10)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>“Poverty is the result of…”</th>
<th>Strongly Agree (%)</th>
<th>Agree (%)</th>
<th>Somewhat Agree (%)</th>
<th>Somewhat Disagree (%)</th>
<th>Disagree (%)</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>…a culture which perpetuates poor work habits, welfare dependence, and laziness.</td>
<td>1 (0.4)</td>
<td>11 (4.4)</td>
<td>55 (22.1)</td>
<td>37 (14.9)</td>
<td>93 (37.3)</td>
<td>52 (20.9)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>…living in a family with a parent(s) who has a poor work ethic.</td>
<td>1 (0.4)</td>
<td>9 (3.6)</td>
<td>71 (28.5)</td>
<td>47 (18.9)</td>
<td>89 (35.7)</td>
<td>32 (12.9)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>…not having positive role models to teach children about drive and ambition.</td>
<td>10 (4.0)</td>
<td>32 (12.9)</td>
<td>112 (45.0)</td>
<td>46 (18.5)</td>
<td>38 (15.3)</td>
<td>11 (4.4)</td>
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<tr>
<td>…a culture which does not frown upon mothers having children outside of marriage.</td>
<td>4 (1.6)</td>
<td>8 (3.2)</td>
<td>28 (11.2)</td>
<td>27 (10.8)</td>
<td>105 (42.2)</td>
<td>77 (30.9)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
…living in a family with a parent(s) who is on welfare.

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…a culture which does not teach children to save, spend, or manage money wisely.

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…parent(s) who glorify living on welfare.

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<td>1.6</td>
<td>8</td>
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<td>32</td>
<td>12.9</td>
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…growing up in welfare families.

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…not having middle-class values.

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