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## **Universal Basic Income Favorability: An Examination of Discursive Frames of and Support for UBI Proposals**

John Stacy Elliott  
jellio32@vols.utk.edu

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To the Graduate Council:

I am submitting herewith a dissertation written by John Stacy Elliott entitled "Universal Basic Income Favorability: An Examination of Discursive Frames of and Support for UBI Proposals." I have examined the final electronic copy of this dissertation for form and content and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, with a major in Social Work.

William R. Nugent, Major Professor

We have read this dissertation and recommend its acceptance:

William R. Nugent, Gretchen Ely, Stephen McGarity, Leah Hamilton

Accepted for the Council:

Dixie L. Thompson

Vice Provost and Dean of the Graduate School

(Original signatures are on file with official student records.)

**Universal Basic Income Favorability: An Examination of Discursive  
Frames of and Support for UBI Proposals**

**A Dissertation Presented for the  
Doctor of Philosophy  
Degree  
The University of Tennessee, Knoxville**

**John Stacy Elliott  
May 2022**

## **DEDICATION**

This dissertation work is dedicated to the memory of my late mother, Judith Stacy Elliott. It is my sincere hope that, following her beautiful example of a life well lived, we might all find delight in breaking rules that need to be broken.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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## **ABSTRACT**

This dissertation work examines the relationship between Universal Basic Income (UBI) favorability and discursive framing. Chapter 1, the systematic review of literature, reviews the role that discursive framing has played in presenting UBI proposals related to the effects that notions of deservedness may have on levels of support for UBI proposals. Chapter 2, an article on a ordinal logistic regression analysis, explores the possible associations between gender inequity and support for UBI proposals. Chapter 3, an article on an ordinal logistic regression analysis, explores the relationship between attitudes toward privilege and systemic racism as they relate to support for UBI proposals.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>INTRODUCTION.....</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Purpose of the Study .....</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Theoretical &amp; Conceptual Framework.....</b>	<b>1</b>
Discourse and Discourse Analysis.....	1
A Materialist Feminist Approach.....	4
<b>Objectives.....</b>	<b>6</b>
Unconditional and Universal: Discursive Framing to Combat Negative Notions of Deservedness.....	7
Gaps in Literature and Methodological Limitations of Extant Discourse Analyses ..	8
Women’s Work: A Lack of Frames Concerning Sex or Gender .....	9
Implications for Data Analysis Plan .....	10
Racial Justice .....	11
<b>Research Questions Drawn from Literature Review findings.....</b>	<b>12</b>
Dataset for Secondary Analyses .....	12
Pew Research Center Methods for the American Trends Panel (ATP) Survey .....	13
<b>Data Analysis Plans for Dissertation Paper#2 (Study 1) and Paper #3 (Study 2). ..</b>	<b>14</b>
Methods.....	14
Controlling for Other Correlates and Determinants of UBI Support.....	14
Variables of Interest for Paper 2 (Study 1) .....	15
Variables of Interest for Paper 3 (Study 2) .....	16
<b>REFERENCES.....</b>	<b>17</b>
<b>CHAPTER I DISCURSIVE FRAMES OF UNIVERSAL BASIC INCOME PROPOSALS AND NOTIONS OF DESERVEDNESS: A SYSTEMATIC REVIEW .....</b>	<b>20</b>
<b>Abstract.....</b>	<b>21</b>
<b>Introduction.....</b>	<b>22</b>
Purpose.....	22
Objectives .....	22
<b>Background .....</b>	<b>23</b>
Deservedness and Financial Assistance.....	23
The Historic Shift of Deservedness and Cash Assistance Discourse in the US: Welfare Reform in the 1990s.....	27
Basic Income and Guaranteed Income .....	29
UBI and Racial Justice.....	30
<b>Methodology .....</b>	<b>31</b>
Search Strategy .....	31
Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria.....	33
<b>Results .....</b>	<b>34</b>
Theoretical Frameworks of the Studies Reviewed .....	35
Prevalent Discursive Frames.....	37

Discursive Actors.....	47
Gaps in Literature and Methodological Limitations of Extant Discourse Analyses	49
Limitations of Systematic Lit Review .....	50
Conclusions & Implications for future research .....	51
<b>REFERENCES.....</b>	<b>55</b>
<b>CHAPTER II GENDER INEQUALITY AND UNVIERSAL BASIC INCOME</b>	
<b>FAVORABILITY: AN ORDINAL LOGISTIC REGRESSION ANALYSIS .....</b>	<b>60</b>
<b>Abstract.....</b>	<b>61</b>
<b>Introduction.....</b>	<b>62</b>
<b>Methods.....</b>	<b>63</b>
Data .....	63
Variables for Analysis.....	66
Data Analysis .....	68
<b>Results .....</b>	<b>69</b>
Limitations .....	70
<b>Discussion.....</b>	<b>72</b>
<b>REFERENCES.....</b>	<b>74</b>
<b>CHAPTER III SYSTEMIC RACISM, WHITE PRIVILEGE, AND UNVIERSAL</b>	
<b>BASIC INCOME FAVORABILITY: AN ORDINAL LOGISTIC REGRESSION</b>	
<b>ANALYSIS .....</b>	<b>76</b>
<b>Abstract.....</b>	<b>77</b>
<b>Introduction.....</b>	<b>78</b>
<b>Methods.....</b>	<b>80</b>
Data .....	80
Data Analysis .....	84
Missing Data .....	85
<b>Results .....</b>	<b>85</b>
Limitations .....	87
<b>Discussion.....</b>	<b>88</b>
<b>REFERENCES.....</b>	<b>92</b>
<b>CONCLUSION .....</b>	<b>94</b>
<b>VITA.....</b>	<b>98</b>



# **INTRODUCTION**

## **Purpose of the Study**

This work aims to better understand the relationship between discursive frames of Universal Basic Income (UBI) proposals and favorability of UBI proposals. This work also aims to better understand potential predictors of support for or favorability of UBI proposals, particularly as potential factors may overcome or relate to notions of deservedness.

## **Theoretical & Conceptual Framework**

### **Discourse and Discourse Analysis**

The term “discourse” can be understood as an “institutionalized way of talking that regulates and reinforces action and thereby exerts power (Link, 1983, p.60, as translated into English by Jager & Maier, 2016).” Understanding the institutionalized communication and power relations involved with discourses requires some form or forms of discourse analysis. The field of discourse analysis aims to identify the knowledge contained in discourses, and how these different types of knowledge connect to power relations (Jager & Maier, 2016).

The analytical approach and theoretical framework for this review of discourse literature draws on the models of discourse analysis developed by Siegfried Jager and Florentine Maier (2016), as their methods are anchored in the theoretical work of two of the preeminent theoreticians to inform discourse analysis, Michel Foucault and Jurgen Link (Foucault, 1970; 2002; 2017; Link, 1982; 1983). Foucault’s theoretical work and conceptualizations of discourse include critical analyses of language, subjectivity,

different types of knowledges, the relations of power and knowledge, and the ways in which knowledges construct reality and the real world in which we live (Bouchard & Simon, 1977; Jen, 2019; Parker, 1992). The pathways between people and discourse are not linear one-way streets: discourse shapes people as people accept or reject certain knowledges from discourses, and people shape discourse by using power and agency through language and actions (Crapanzano, 1996; Jager & Maier, 2016; Jen 2019).

While there is no consensus on the definition of discourse, this systematic literature review paper relies on the model developed by Jager and Maier (2016), informed by the previous scholarship in theoretical frameworks of discourse study, especially the conceptual work and contributions of Foucault, Link, and Teun A. van Dijk. Van Dijk, like Foucault before him, notes that analyzing the role of power is an essential aspect of studying discourse. Discourse, particularly in van Dijk's conceptualization of Critical Discourse Studies, may serve a role of (re)producing or resisting "social domination", where social domination is defined as the acts of an ingroup, that celebrates itself, using power to abuse an outgroup, which is derogated by the powerful ingroup (Angermuller, Maingueneau, & Wodak, 2014; van Dijk, 2008). T.A. van Dijk's conceptualization of Critical Discourse Studies is an approach that he refers to as "not a method, but rather a critical perspective, position or attitude within the discipline of multidisciplinary Discourse Studies (van Dijk, 2008)."

This approach also includes a respect for and critical analysis of the "incompleteness" inherent to any definition of discourse (Angermuller, Maingueneau, & Wodak, 2014). In their discussion of van Dijk's approach and recommendations for

critical discourse studies, Angermuller, Maingueneau, and Wodak offer that the persistent incompleteness of the meaning of discourse can be likened to seeing a discourse as “the tip of an iceberg: only some of the propositions needed to understand a discourse are actually expressed; most other propositions remain implicit, and must be inferred from the explicit propositions (p395, 2014).” According to those recommendations, the aim of a critical discourse study or analysis is not to passively catalogue the various incidents of social domination and other uses and abuses of power exerted by discourse actors, but to actively expose and help combat discursive injustices, which, among other responsibilities to combat injustice, requires discourse researchers trusting and following the expertise and resistance of groups who are targeted by discursive injustices (Angermuller, Maingueneau, & Wodak, 2014). With this in mind, it should come as no surprise that discourses about basic income proposals often include explicit issue framing or implicit propositions about justice.

Furthermore, it seems that one of the main purposes of a discourse analysis rooted in a Foucauldian theoretical approach is to seek to understand how linguistics and power relations perpetuate and reinforce the dominant or hegemonic status quo that best serves the capitalist class of a modern society (Jager & Maier, 2016; Link, 1982). Adopting the Foucault-inspired model of critical discourse analysis developed by Jager & Maier seems especially appropriate for social work research, given the positionality of social workers--often agents of the welfare state-- in our current socio-political moment (Leotti, 2020). Though perhaps underutilized by social work researchers, discourse analysis methods, and specifically Critical Discourse Analysis methods, are ideal

research methods for adhering to the theoretical frameworks and values that underpin the profession of social work (Willey-Sthapit, Jen, Storer, & Benson; 2020).

### **A Materialist Feminist Approach**

Given the historical role of capital's reliance on women to provide the social production and reproduction --unpaid carework and other forms of unwaged labor typically carried out by women in the home across sociopolitical and geographical contexts (Abramovitz, 2017; Bakker, 2003; Bakker & Gill, 2003; Winders & Smith, 2019)-- that sustains welfare states and other capitalist systems, this study draws from the rich tradition of Materialist Feminist scholarship. Rosemary Hennessy and Chrys Ingraham describe the feminist struggle for transformative social change as fundamentally a class war over resources, knowledge, and power, and, therefore, best analyzed through the theoretical lens of Materialist Feminism (1997). Specifically, Hennessy and Ingraham note the importance of understanding wealth inequality and systems of oppression under capitalism through a Materialist Feminist approach that encapsulates Marxist Feminism and full historical materialism: this is seen as a logical and appropriate approach for conducting a systematic analysis that links the history and culture of meaning-making to capitalism's class system (1997). Materialist Feminism is particularly relevant to this comprehensive review of universal basic income discourse analysis as UBI interventions are being proposed as a type of remedy for wealth inequality and other economic issues currently faced under capitalist systems.

Contrary to some strands of Western Second-Wave cultural feminism and narrower conceptualizations of Marxist Feminism, Hennessy & Ingraham define

Materialist Feminism as more than a one-dimensional critique of culture, rather a “conjuncture of several discourses -- historical materialism, Marxist and radical feminism, as well as postmodern and psychoanalytic theories of meaning and subjectivity (p.7, 1997).” This theoretical conceptualization of Materialist Feminism: 1) understands the intersectional mutuality of issues tying race, gender, sexuality, nationality and class to labor; 2) recognizes that culture is the domain of knowledge production, both a stake and a site of class struggle; and 3) calls for social transformation informed by the emancipatory critical knowledge needed to challenge patriarchy and other forms of oppression related to capital’s relentless drive to accumulate (Hennessy & Ingraham, 1997).

Furthermore, there is a precedent in social science scholarship for applying a Materialist Feminist approach to the study of discourse analyses. Rooted in Foucauldian principles of critical discourse analysis, Nancy Naples advocates for a Materialist Feminist approach to discourse analysis that, similar to van Dijk’s recommendations for Critical Discourse Studies, seeks to understand how discourse shapes and interacts with the relations of power by either perpetuating or resisting social dominance (2002). Naples also points to a Materialist Feminist approach as an appropriate methodological choice for understanding how discursive frames function as part of a discourse, by examining how frames are created, adopted by, or refuted by discursive actors that may range from community activists and social movements to the ruling class. As this approach seeks to draw from the conceptual work of Entman (1993) on frames in discourse, and specifically frames of deservedness in discourses of who should or should not receive an economic

intervention like a universal basic income or a guaranteed income, a Materialist Feminist approach to discourse analysis is especially appropriate for this systematic literature review and future study of basic income discourses.

### **Objectives**

A comprehensive literature review on deservedness and discursive framing of UBI proposals found that the most prevalent discursive frames for UBI policy discussion tend to focus on subjective societal values such as justice, egalitarianism, freedom, civic mindedness, and activity (Bidadanure 2014, 2019; Mays, 2016; Perkio, 2020). Across the various sociopolitical contexts of basic income discourse studied in this review, implicit notions of deservedness and moral judgement shape the debate. The review found that an important factor in framing and affecting discourses is the extent to which proposed basic or guaranteed income interventions are unconditional --received with no strings attached rather than by means-testing criteria-- and universal--received by everyone without any or with very few exclusions (Mays, 2016; Perkio, 2020; Van Parijs & Vanderborght, 2017). Interestingly, the systematic review finds that basic income proposals and interventions have been framed in competing narratives: both as an alternative to, and furtherance of, previously existing welfare states undergirded by neoliberal agendas of austerity. This study evaluates the prevailing frames of the basic income discourse analysis, as well as some potential discursive frames that are conspicuously absent from basic income discourse.

## **Unconditional and Universal: Discursive Framing to Combat Negative Notions of Deservedness**

Framing basic income intervention proposals and policy ideas around basic income's aspects of being universally and unconditionally received may be the greatest protective force against basic income discourse devolving into highly subjective and morally judgmental notions of deservedness. When a basic income is received by all citizens, it is universal (Van Parijs & Vanderborght, 2017). When a basic income is received with no preconditions or strings attached, it is unconditional (Van Parijs & Vanderborght, 2017). When a basic income program approaches a universal and unconditional nature, it may be effectively framed as a right and freedom to be enjoyed by all citizens, out of a sense of fairness, justice, equality, or other broadly shared societal value (Mays, 2016; Perkio, 2020). Mays's analysis of basic income discourse (2016) finds that "a basic income grounded in citizenship rights would preclude the need for targeting and pejorative associations with entitlements" based on "who is deserving and who is not", and Vandeleene et al. (2016)'s study found that, after conducting quantitative analysis of their survey of basic income frames, "when respondents learn about the unconditional character of the basic income, they are less keen to stand against the implementation of a (basic income) system." Perkio (2020) also finds that in political discourse of basic income policy proposals in Finland's parliamentary proceedings during the 1980s, Finnish political actors relied on the persuasiveness of frames that highlight the unconditional nature of payments distributed to all. Additionally, Perkio found that the Finnish political discourse of basic income often promoted basic income through the use of concepts such as a "citizen's wage," "citizen's money," a "citizen's income", and other terminology that frames basic

income as a universal right, with strong implications that the basic income is deserved or even earned.

Looking at the main features of policy framing processes around the basic income debate in the US, Steensland (2008) notes that the fizzling out of basic income discourse in US politics coincided with a discursive shift toward frames that focused more on the “work behavior of the poor,” a clear departure from the sorts of framing that previously built political momentum for basic income proposals. In all of the discourse analyses included in this review, across all of their respective geographical and political contexts, basic income proposals seem less appealing and less viable when discursively framed (following Entman’s definition of framing; 1993) in the neoliberal welfare state notions of moral judgements of work ethic and deservedness, and more appealing and more viable when framed as a unconditional and universal right for citizens.

### **Gaps in Literature and Methodological Limitations of Extant Discourse Analyses**

This review found that only one peer-reviewed study has been published on modern US basic income discourse (Steensland, 2008), and the analysis of the study focused primarily on the debate among political actors over guaranteed income and basic income during the era-specific scope of a timeframe that spans the Nixon presidency through the Carter presidency. Of the most recent discourse analyses of basic/guaranteed income, the geographical context is either Denmark or Finland. There is a notable absence of basic income discourse analysis in the US since the Great Recession and housing crisis of 2008, and the era from that time to now is bookended on the present by another recession exacerbated by the ongoing COVID19 pandemic. With talk and



proposals of basic income interventions gaining momentum again, the time is ideal for an updated analysis of basic/guaranteed income discourse in the US.

### **Women's Work: A Lack of Frames Concerning Sex or Gender**

Absent from the existing literature of basic/guaranteed income discourse analysis is any level or category of analysis that investigates the role of sex or gender in UBI discourses. While there is a substantial body of literature articulating how women may benefit in unique and potentially emancipatory ways from a UBI (Axelsen & Bidadanure, 2018; Bidadanure, 2019; Miller et al., 2019; Pateman, 2005; Zelleke, 2011), this review did not find any discourse analysis or discourse study that specifically focused on outcomes for women or discursive frames centering on gender or how women might benefit from basic income interventions. This seems to be an especially critical gap in UBI discourse analysis in the US as decades of economic assumptions and neoliberal welfare state interventions have relied on the unpaid household labor and social reproduction labor of women to underpin and subsidize the broader economy (Abramovitz, 2011). Given that women, especially women of color, were overrepresented in the pool of those who received subprime mortgages in the lead up to the housing crisis (Fishbein & Woodall, 2006), and given that women's primary mode of asset accumulation in the US is homeownership (Baker, West, & Famakinwa, 2018), there is cause for researching basic/guaranteed income discourse in the previously unexamined era of the housing crisis of 2008 to the present. Women might stand to gain the most from basic or income guaranteed income, not just in terms of financial gains for a group that does unpaid social reproductive labor and other forms of unpaid labor to prop up the

broader economy, but perhaps also in terms of emancipatory empowerment and other types of mental or emotional gains.

### **Implications for Data Analysis Plan**

Critical discourse analysis has played a key role in synthesizing policy debate and popular narratives around the implementation or even possibility of implementing basic income or guaranteed income interventions. While there is a history of basic income discourse in the US rooted in the policy debate eras preceding and proceeding the Civil Rights and Women's Rights movements, analyses of policy discourse concerning such interventions is comparatively more common in European nations, and basic income discourse in the context of the US post-recession appears to be a completely unaddressed gap in the literature at the time that this systematic review was conducted. Additionally, this review noted how discourse analyses study various discursive frames, there has not been a study that specifically considers the role that notions of deservedness play, although the review did find that discourse researchers identify and analyze frames that address some of the moral and ethical judgements concerning opinions and arguments over who should or should not receive basic/guaranteed income. In the same vein, research of basic income discourses aims to identify the discursive frames that avoid or overcome assumptions of deservedness in order to garner greater support and favorability for basic income proposals. To accomplish this aim of gaining support and favorability for UBI proposals while avoiding counterproductive discursive battles over assumptions of deservedness, this review finds that the literature recommends discursive frames and themes emphasizing the universality, collective rights of citizenship, shared freedoms

inherent to UBI interventions. To take this area of analysis a step further toward greater understanding, future research of basic income discourse in the US must further explore and quantitatively investigate how emphasizing core UBI concepts of universality, collective rights of citizenship, and universally shared freedoms does or does not increase favorability of support for UBI proposals.

Beyond gaps related to temporal and national contexts, this review also identified a gap in the literature in terms of approach and lens for discursive analysis: there has never been an analysis of basic/guaranteed income discourse in the US that included sex or gender as a level or variable of analysis. It behooves future research to consider the differing roles related to sex and gender in the broader economic context when studying basic income discourse because UBI interventions are both economic and social interventions.

### **Racial Justice**

Similarly, the results of this review indicate that there is a critical gap in the research concerning both race and discursive notions of attitudes concerning racial justice. Bidadanure noted that in the realm of political theory, that, excepting important contributions from Shelby (2012, 2017), there is a lack of UBI literature written from an intersectional or racial justice perspective (2019). This review finds a similar gap in the literature on UBI discourse analysis and issue framing. Given the extent and importance of addressing racial injustices related to wealth and income, future research on UBI discourse should examine factors related to race and racial justice.

## Research Questions Drawn from Literature Review findings

### Research Question driving Paper #2 re: UBI favorability and attitudes on Gender Inequality:

*“Are attitudes about gender inequality predictive of support for a proposed Universal Basic Income (UBI) intervention discursively framed by values of universality and collective rights of citizenship”?*

### Research Questions driving Paper #3 re: UBI favorability and attitudes on Racial Inequality:

*“Are attitudes about White Privilege predictive of favorability of a proposed Universal Basic Income (UBI) intervention discursively framed by values of universality and collective rights of citizenship”?*

*“Are attitudes about Systemic Racism against Black Americans predictive of favorability of a proposed Universal Basic Income (UBI) intervention discursively framed by values of universality and collective rights of citizenship”?*

### Dataset for Secondary Analyses

The Pew Center’s most recently available wave (Wave 71, data collected July - August 2020) of responses to the American Trends Panel (ATP) survey provides a nationally representative sample for secondary analysis. Wave 71 includes a survey item asking Americans about a potential Universal Basic Income (UBI) that is worded in a specific way that meets what the systematic literature review identified to be prevailing discursive frames for garnering support for UBI proposals, framing a potential UBI intervention in a way that stresses the universality of a shared freedom enjoyed by all citizens without preconditions of work requirements (Christensen, 2008; Mays 2016; Perkio, 2020). In addition to this ordinal survey item about UBI support/favorability, the ATP survey also included survey items related to critical gaps in the UBI discourse literature: attitudes on gender and race.

With the comprehensive review of literature serving as Dissertation Paper #1, Dissertation Paper #2 will consist of an analysis using ordinal logistic regression to test the association between the variable of favorability/support for UBI and a variable representing views on sexism/gender discrimination. Dissertation Paper #3 will consist of an analysis using ordinal logistic regression to test the association between the variable of favorability/support for UBI and variables representing attitudes about White privilege and systemic racism against Black people in the United States. Responses to these survey items can be analyzed as ordinal variables, and a statistical regression analysis can test how variables measuring attitudes about White privilege and systemic racism may be associated with the variable measuring favorability of universal basic income. Attitudes on white privilege and systemic racism will be measured by the survey items the Pew Center entitled “WhiteAdvantage” and “DifficultyBlack”, respectively.

### **Pew Research Center Methods for the American Trends Panel (ATP) Survey**

The Pew Research Center recruited its Wave 71 survey sample from three large, nationally representative samples of panelists who had responded to previous surveys by the Pew Research Center, and also recruited from a pool of respondents of two nationally representative address-based surveys that Pew had recently conducted (Pew Research Center, 2020). Of the 14,407 survey respondents recruited to the Wave 71 survey, 11,001 respondents (N=11,001) completed the survey. In its Wave 71 methodology report (2020), Pew reports using best practices for weighting protocols and subpopulation parameter estimates. The unique context of the timeframe for data collection is important to note: the sample completed the survey between July 27, 2020 and August 2, 2020, with

several survey items focused on how the government was responding and could respond to the COVID19 pandemic.

### **Data Analysis Plans for Dissertation Paper#2 (Study 1) and Paper #3 (Study 2)**

#### **Methods**

Given that the majority of variables chosen for the analyses of Study 1 and Study 2 are ordinal variables drawn from ordinal survey items in the Pew Research Center's American Trends Panel survey, the analyses plan to use ordinal logistic regression to test the studies' respective research questions. Scholarship on medical research and social science has established a precedent for using ordinal logistic regression to analyze data collected from surveys that use ordinal items in order to increase statistical power and conduct analysis with better-fitting models (Warner, 2008). As both of the studies aim to test the associations between explanatory independent variables and an ordinal outcome variable (indicating levels of support for a Universal Basic Income) across the range of possible response values, an ordinal logistic regression is the most appropriate analytic method as it is the best possible choice for providing succinct representation and statistically powerful testing of those associations (Norusis, 2005; Warner, 2008). SPSS will be used to run descriptive statistics, and for ordinal logistic regression analysis in both Study 1 and Study 2. Pew Research Center has made its complete American Trends Panel Survey Wave 71 dataset publicly available in SPSS format.

#### **Controlling for Other Correlates and Determinants of UBI Support**

The particular timing of Pew Research Center's collection of survey data occurred during a heightened period of mandated lockdowns and other health and safety measures

publicly administered in response to COVID-19, as well as uncommon economic conditions in summer 2020 including historically unique instances of layoffs, furloughs, unemployment benefit enrollments, and even federally administered “stimulus” relief payments. Many factors of employment and income unique to this time period may hold important implications for consideration of possible correlates related to favorability of UBI proposals. With this in mind, and given the findings from recent research literature indicating a correlation between Americans’ experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic and increased support for Universal Basic Income (Nettle et al., 2021), both of the proposed analyses of support for UBI will include survey items pertaining to experiences of COVID-19 as control variables.

Both of the proposed studies will also control for variables that are commonly viewed and used as correlates for or determinants of UBI support, including indicators of individual characteristics of socioeconomic status, income, age, gender, and political orientation (Choi, 2021; Nettle et al., 2021).

### **Variables of Interest for Paper 2 (Study 1)**

For Dissertation Paper #2, the first study after the systematic review chapter, the independent variable of interest will be an indicator of attitudes about gender inequality and sexism. A survey item from the Wave 71 American Trends Panel questionnaire asked respondents if there are “still significant obstacles that make it harder for women to get ahead than for men”, or if such obstacles “are now largely gone.” This item will be used as a dichotomous independent variable to test if this indicator of attitudes on sexism and gender inequality is predictive of the outcome/dependent variable, support for a universal

basic income proposal, specifically a UBI proposal that is discursively framed as a universal and unconditional right of citizenship rather than a condition of deservedness.

### **Variables of Interest for Paper 3 (Study 2)**

For Dissertation Paper #3, the second study completed after the systematic review of literature, the independent variables of interest will be indicators of attitudes about white privilege, and systemic racism experienced by Black people in the United States. The analysis will draw from the ordinal survey item that Pew Research Center entitled “WhiteAdvantage”, which asked respondents how much White people benefit from advantages in society that Black people do not have, as an indicator of views on white privilege. Pew’s ordinal survey item entitled “Difficulty Black”, provides a variable of attitudes about systemic racism as it asks respondents if, and how much more, difficult it is to be a Black person in the US than it is to be a White person in the US. By using these independent variables, the proposed analysis for Paper 3/Study 2 will test if attitudes about white privilege and systemic racism are predictive of support for UBI. As with Paper 2/Study 1, the outcome variable of support for UBI will be drawn from the ordinal survey item that discursively frames a UBI proposal as a universal and unconditional right of citizenship rather than a condition of deservedness.



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**CHAPTER I**

**DISCURSIVE FRAMES OF UNIVERSAL BASIC INCOME**

**PROPOSALS AND NOTIONS OF DESERVEDNESS: A**

**SYSTEMATIC REVIEW**

## **Abstract**

This systematic review of literature (Paper 1 and Chapter 1 of this dissertation) investigated the role that discursive framing has played in presenting universal basic income (UBI) proposals related to the effects that notions of deservedness may have on levels of support for UBI proposals. The review primarily examined four discourse analysis studies conducted in US (Steensland, 2008) and international contexts (Mays, 2016; Perkiö, 2020; Vandeleene et al., 2016). The review found that framing UBI intervention proposals and policy ideas around aspects of being universally and unconditionally received by all citizens of a given jurisdiction may be the greatest protective force against basic income discourse devolving into highly subjective and morally judgmental notions of deservedness. The findings from this review also indicated a need for more research on discursive framing of UBI proposals related to gender inequities and racial inequities.

## **Introduction**

### **Purpose**

The purpose of this systematic review is to synthesize the body of research literature on discourse analyses of universal basic income, with a particular interest in how notions of deservedness are analyzed in universal basic income and guaranteed income discourses. This review identifies and examines the research precedents and prevalence of the different methodologies used in the scholarly analysis of basic income discourses, and how research studies have identified and analyzed the influence that deservedness has on basic income discourses.

### **Objectives**

This comprehensive review systematically examines research literature of studies and analyses of basic income discourses. This review also synthesizes and critiques the methodological conventions, approaches, and strategies used to analyze and draw conclusions from data used in the study of basic income discourse. This review seeks to identify and examine what the literature has determined to be the prevailing methods for effectively framing basic income discourses to increase support and favorability of universal basic income proposals. Furthermore, this review also provides justification and instruction for future research by identifying critical gaps in the existing research of basic income discourses.

## Background

### Deservedness and Financial Assistance

The social practice of moralizing about people in financial need and then categorizing them as either deserving or undeserving of forms of financial assistance is not a new one, and not unique to a single country, culture, or welfare system (Trattner, 2007). The United States can trace its history of moral determinations about financial assistance to several sources, long before the emergence of any universal basic income (UBI) discourses, and perhaps most directly back to the Elizabethan Poor Law structures and their underlying assumptions about sorting out the worthy poor from the unworthy poor (Trattner, 2007). Principles and underpinning assumptions from British Poor Law regulations still resonate through the underlying assumptions of current legislation in the US regarding aid for the poor. Stipulations codified in 19<sup>th</sup> Century Poor Laws, for example the British Poor Reform Act of 1834 requiring that the conditions of assistance to the poor must always be worse than the lowest paying job, have a lasting legacy informing how policy makers craft and shape modern public assistance programs (Blau, 2006).

In *Regulating the Lives of Women* (1988, 1996, 2017), a seminal work that directly built on Frances Fox Piven's *Regulating the Poor* (1971) and had been cited in nearly two-thousand unique scholarly works at the time of this review, Mimi Abramovitz illuminates how assumptions of the deserving and undeserving have been reinforced and codified by the US welfare state across several generations and policy eras.

Demonstrating how assumptions about the supposedly deserving and undeserving have

shaped life and governance in the US, Abramovitz exposes how unfounded stereotypes and assumptions about gender, race, class and familial status have been weaponized by a welfare state that has crafted punitive policies across several decades based on little more than ideas and subjective moral judgments about deservedness (2017).

Indeed, across the nearly two and half centuries of US social policy history, it is often the case that even prior to arriving at decisions about who does or does not deserve financial assistance, these decisions are predicated on unproven assumptions about the poor and faulty premises that fail to identify which groups and classes of people, historically, have been the main beneficiaries of public assistance through the US welfare state (Abramovitz, 2001). In the mid-twentieth century, British social policy analyst Richard M. Titmuss conceptualized the modern social welfare state (like those found in the US and the UK) as a three-tiered structure, in which financial aid to the poor, or Social Welfare, is only a thin, yet highly scrutinized, top layer of a much broader system that includes Fiscal Welfare and Occupational Welfare (Titmuss, 1965). Applying the framework developed by Titmuss, Abramovitz demonstrated that contrary to beliefs and political narratives that disproportionately focus on the deservingness of poor Americans who receive a strictly limited and ever-shrinking amount of social welfare through programs like TANF, Social Security Insurance, SNAP/Food Stamps, and Unemployment Insurance, a review of all welfare state spending reveals that all classes of people and, through vast amounts of tax breaks and corporate subsidies, corporations are effectively on welfare too (Abramovitz, 2001).



With the conclusions of the aforementioned scholarship in mind, it seems that the prevailing discourses about welfare in the post-WWII US presume a limit on the bounds of the term “welfare” to only refer to cash assistance and other aid programs for the poor, and not any of the other parts of the welfare state apparatus that benefit other groups of people and corporations. More specifically, it seems that the dominant discourses about welfare in the US have tended to narrowly view “welfare” as only pertaining to state programs like public cash assistance programs and other forms of aid that are designated for a class of poor Americans (Brophy-Baerman and Bloeser, 2006). Moreover, by nature of determining welfare program eligibility through the common practice of means-testing poor Americans, these practices, at least implicitly, sort those in need of assistance into a category of belonging to either the deserving or the undeserving poor.

As understood through the theoretical framework of Titmuss and more recent applications by Abramovitz, despite the fact that programs designated for helping the poor represent only one small portion of the broader welfare state apparatus, these financial assistance programs receive an outsized amount of criticism and scrutiny in the public discourse about welfare programming. With this disproportionate public focus on welfare programs designated for the poor, many leading US political actors of the second half of the 20th century and early 21<sup>st</sup> century have tended toward propagating narratives about welfare that rely on classist and racialized caricatures of the supposedly undeserving poor, such as the oft-repeated though never-evincing myth of “welfare queens” (Boris, 2007; Gilliam Jr., 1999; Gilman, 2013; Hancock, 2003; Kohler-Hausmann, 2015; Roper, 2012). For many decades, prominent political actors have taken

to stigmatizing poor Americans as part of a broader neoliberal movement in the US and beyond by which political actors have diminished, deregulated, and privatized the public safety net with consistently negative outcomes for the poor (Abramovitz, 2001; Antonio & Brulle, 2011; Baranski, 2020; Carroll, 1987; Clements, 2011; Schrecker & Bamba, 2015).

Abramovitz's analysis during the 1980s, an era that saw neoliberalism in politics rise and further reinforced by Thatcher-Reagan austerity politics in the UK and US, and revisited analyses during subsequent decades and eras of US welfare reform policy, found that it is actually affluent people and corporations –without serious debate or speculation about their perceived deservedness-- who benefit considerably more than poor people from the US welfare system:

“by the year 2000, the federal government spent \$235.9 billion for means-tested public assistance programs that serve the poor but a much larger \$793.9 billion on non-means-tested programs that do not use poverty or need as a criterion for receiving aid...(the differential in funding allotted to these different forms of welfare spending) reflects the larger number of people who are not poor in the overall population, the less restrictive eligibility rules in programs open to the middle-and upper-income classes, and the provision of higher benefits to this group of recipients viewed as more worthy of assistance (Abramovitz, p.299, 2001).”

Findings from this sort of critical analysis of actual spending practices on public assistance and various forms of welfare, contrasted with the narratives that tend to

dominate the discourses around financial assistance programs, underscore how assumptions of deservedness, a worthy and unworthy poor, and financial assistance in general all shape the discourses and political realities of financial assistance programs of any form. In light of this history, any analysis of themes of deservedness in the discourses of basic or guaranteed income must acknowledge the long precedent of the role of themes of deservedness, including the categorizations of a worthy and unworthy poor, across the related discourses of financial assistance.

### **The Historic Shift of Deservedness and Cash Assistance Discourse in the US:**

#### **Welfare Reform in the 1990s**

The major bipartisan US “reforms” of the mid-1990s Bill Clinton and Newt Gingrich policy era, known as a Devolution Revolution for drastically altering or eliminating federal assistance programs by deferring prior federal administrative power to state-level prerogatives, marked historic reductions in the federal safety net aid to poor Americans (Brophy-Baermann & Bloeser, 2006). While these reforms ushered in a major shift in cash assistance policies and policy discourse and a huge departure from previous policies and practices that tended toward Keynesian ideology, both the US policies of this era and the US welfare state eras preceding it shared a common trait: their policies on assistance for the poor were based almost entirely on spurious myths, stereotypes, and assumptions rooted in racism, sexism, classism, ableism, and unfounded notions about deservingness (Brophy-Baermann & Bloeser, 2006; Handler & Hollingsworth, 1972; Handler & Hasenfeld, 1997; Handler & Hasenfeld, 2006).

The major changes to the US welfare state during the Clinton-Gingrich era of slashing public programs or cash assistance for the needy were accompanied by, if not directly buoyed by, a notable shift in cash assistance and welfare policy discourse. Using qualitative coding methods and Entman's (1993) definition of media frames to analyze US welfare reform discourse, Brophy-Baermann and Bloeser found that 85 percent of congressional testimony portrayed pro-privatization of welfare positively, and 74 percent of major network news reports presented the same Clinton-Gingrich era proposals for privatization of welfare as favorable to policies that proposed maintaining or increasing public cash assistance programs (2006). The prevailing discourse of welfare assistance during the Clinton-Gingrich era was often framed, by political actors and media actors alike, to promote privatization and devolution of federal assistance programming as a method of supposedly empowering state governments, implying that the proposed methods of assistance for the poor, even with a decreased amount of spending, would become more effective by activating people to work harder while being less hindered by bureaucratic difficulties.

The popular discursive frames of the new welfare policy proposals were rooted in arguments that after taking administrative responsibility and funding away from a presumably inept and wasteful federal government, and handing the reins over to state governments and private non-governmental agencies, these state-level administrators and private non-government entities would, hypothetically, be better positioned to more effectively help the deserving poor at a community and local level. However, despite the near hegemony and seeming popularity of proposals in favor of privatization, devolution,

or elimination of federal assistance programs as portrayed in political discourses at the time, the resulting welfare reforms of the Clinton-Gingrich ultimately made devastating reductions in assistance to the poor, far beyond what was represented to the American public by the political and media actors who dominated the discourse. Through their discourse analysis of the Clinton-Gingrich welfare reforms, Brophey-Baermann and Bloeser demonstrate how politicians and news media can have powerful influence in framing a financial assistance discourse in order to promote a political agenda that was ultimately ruinous to and, eventually, deeply unpopular among many Americans (2006). The findings of Brophey-Baerman and Bloeser regarding the discourse of financial assistance related to welfare reform hold important implications for the universal basic income discourses: popular notions of an undeserving poor can powerfully affect the discourse and feasibility of policy implementation.

### **Basic Income and Guaranteed Income**

The term “UBI” was historically more commonly used as an acronym for variants of “unconditional basic income” proposals, emphasizing the hotly debated and politically controversial aspect of administering a guaranteed minimum income to recipients without targeted means-testing or work requirements (Van Parijs, 1991). This aspect of proposals for UBI sparked sociopolitical debate because the unconditional nature of these proposals was such a stark departure from the traditional role that means-testing and targeting played in separating the deserving from the undeserving for receiving cash assistance under most 20<sup>th</sup> Century welfare states (Abramovitz, 2001; Van Parijs, 1991). As political arguments and contexts for UBI discourses have evolved over the past several decades,

“UBI” is more commonly understood as shorthand for “universal basic income” with the term capturing both the unconditional aspect and the universal—cash support received with no strings attached by everyone in a population including those who might typically be deemed so rich as to not need cash support—aspect of most UBI proposals (Bidadanure, 2019). This review finds that most definitions of modern UBI proposals suggest a guaranteed minimum income that aims to be inclusive of all members of a given population without trying to make or justify any exclusions.

### ***Guaranteed and Recurring***

Another aspect of modern UBI proposals that differentiates these sorts of cash assistance interventions from other forms of cash assistance or credits is that rather than one-time lump sums or infrequent disbursement, a UBI is administered in a consistent set amount for recurring disbursements, typically monthly, over a guaranteed amount of time (Bidadanure, 2019). Unlike existing US cash transfer policies like the Earned Income Tax Credit or the Alaska Permanent Fund Dividend that are administered as a sort of annual lump-sum, most UBI proposals promote a cash income that recurs monthly in order to better serve as a continual safety net and source of economic security across a lifespan (Bidadanure, 2014; Bidadanure, 2019; Birnbaum, 2012).

### **UBI and Racial Justice**

In the US, there is a fairly rich, if publicly underappreciated, tradition of UBI proposals aimed at addressing racial inequities and systemic racism. During the Civil Rights era of the late 1960s, Martin Luther King, Jr., the Black Panther Party, and James Boggs all appraised and discussed the potential of UBI or guaranteed income

interventions (Bidadanure, 2019). Racial justice scholars consider Universal Basic Income to be one of the few policy ideas that could be disruptive and transformative enough to be part of a suite of interventions that could potentially work toward addressing the massive racial wealth inequality in the United States (Oliver et al., 2019; Warren, 2016). Among other policy recommendations including student loan debt reduction, federal job guarantees, and baby bonds, Oliver and Shapiro suggest that current universal basic income proposals, while already promising, could do more to address racial injustices by framing UBI interventions in a context of reparative justice that aims to ameliorate disparities of wealth accumulation, wealth inequality, power relations, and the racial wealth gap (2019).

## **Methodology**

### **Search Strategy**

A preliminary attempt at a systematic review of the literature on universal basic income discourse that explicitly mentioned themes of deservedness proved to be too narrow in specificity, yielding zero results. However, themes of deservedness are implicitly affixed to virtually any discourse about proposing and/or implementing some form of basic or guaranteed income intervention. Therefore, a separate round of literature review was completed with a focus on research that analyzes how implications of deservedness connect to theoretical conceptualizations of and discourses about universal basic income or guaranteed income.

### *Second Round of the Systematic Review*

As studies, academic papers, and other scholarly articles concerning discourse analyses are a less-studied topic area in the traditional scope of social work research, this systematic review underwent a second round using the following search tools: Scopus, a vast multidisciplinary database; Communication and Mass Media Complete, a database of many media, communication, and cultural studies; and Google Scholar, available through University of Tennessee institutional access. The archives of the journal *Discourse & Society* were reviewed after finding one result that linked back to this journal focused on discursive studies; further searching its archives did not yield more eligible results for this review. Using the combination of these databases, a comprehensive search was conducted that spanned social science and communication media for peer-reviewed journal articles relating to discourse analysis of universal basic income and guaranteed income interventions.

To adequately capture discursive studies of universal basic income interventions and related interventions, the review was expanded to include results beyond those that only explicitly mention deservedness. The review was broadened by using a combination of the following search terms with Boolean operators: discourse analysis OR discursive analysis OR media analysis OR media study OR news media analysis AND basic income (as this is the root term that captures any mention of both “universal basic income” and “unconditional basic income”) OR guaranteed income OR negative income tax.



## **Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria**

In order to be included in the review, a source had to meet the following three criteria: 1) the source must be a study published in a peer-reviewed journal, 2) the source must be a discourse analysis or other form of discourse study and 3) the study must include analysis of discourse concerning an intervention, treatment, or proposal for economic remedy that is characterized as a “basic income”, or as a similar non-means-tested, recurring cash assistance intervention, such as a “guaranteed income” or “negative income tax.” Search results of scholarly sources were excluded if they did not meet the inclusion criteria, if they were completed as part of a student thesis or dissertation paper (as they have not yet but may later be part of a work for peer-review publication), or if the article is not published or available in English.

The search, using the aforementioned terms and Boolean phrases, yielded 10 articles in total. After reviewing these articles and following up on relevant references used in them, it was determined that the search criteria would also allow for the inclusion of additional search terms that described interventions similar in nature and scope to basic income. Based on the 10 articles discovered in the initial literature search, these additional search terms were used in a slightly expanded search: “guaranteed minimum income,” “citizen’s wage,” and “citizen’s income,” as the latter two terms are both English translations of terms commonly used to refer to basic income and guaranteed income programs in Scandinavian discourses (Christensen, 2008; Mays, 2016). Although the new search terms used in the expanded search did not yield any new results, running the initial search terms again at a later date yielded two new search results: one new article that had just

been published in the short time span since the initial search, and, consequently, a second article that had evaded the initial search but was cited and discussed at great length in this newly published article. That development increased the search results to 12 total sources.

Of those 12 sources, further review revealed that: five concerned discursive analyses of some sort of economic or financial conditions, but did not analyze discourse related to basic income interventions or any similar interventions and were therefore excluded; one was not published or available in English and was therefore excluded; one was a book (Christensen, 2008) comprised of separate academic papers on ideological and theoretical arguments and proposals on basic income discourses, but did not have any experiment, study, or test of discursive variables related to discourse analysis; and one was a graduate student's master degree thesis paper that is not (though perhaps could later be) a peer-reviewed published article. After the aforementioned exclusions, there was a total of four articles that met all search criteria for further review (Mays, 2016; Perkiö, 2020; Steensland, 2008; Vandeleene et al., 2016).

## **Results**

All four of the discourse analysis studies included in the systematic review of literature examined basic income discourse by creating exclusive categories to sort discursive data into distinct discursive frames, coming from distinct groups of discursive actors (people or sources who create and or contribute to discourse), or both. For three of the four articles that met all eligibility criteria, the respective authors used a similar methodological process to both qualitatively and quantitatively analyze discursive data.

The one exception (Vandeleene, et al., 2016), was a study that surveyed university students in Belgium to test their preferences for different types of discursive frames for basic income and ran an ANOVA statistical test as part of a quantitative analysis, and did not use any qualitative methods of study. In all of the other studies, researchers used a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods to study the forms, changes, and impacts of basic income discourse. The quantitative aspect of analysis in these three discourse studies consisted of tallying up the total number of times certain discursive frames appeared in the discursive data over a selected time frame. This simple method allows researchers to track the frequency with which certain frames appear in UBI discourse compared to other discursive frames or themes.

Qualitative methods were used to assign, or thematically code, discursive data into separate categories of frames and discursive actors, while quantitative methods were used to tally up the amount of data in each category in order to track the prevalence and nature of selected discursive frames and classes of discursive actors. While each study made unique methodological decisions, and varied in several factors across the contexts of discourse in different countries around different basic income interventions or policies, all of the studies share the commonality of approaching discourse analysis through methods that seek to enumerate and understand a discourse topic by breaking it down into distinct categories of discursive frames or discursive themes.

### **Theoretical Frameworks of the Studies Reviewed**

As all of the reviewed studies made some methodological effort to identify and sort basic income discourse into distinct categories, this was often determined by what

discursive frames were used to present basic income ideas and strategies. In order to justify, introduce, or otherwise explain their chosen method for tracking and sorting discursive frames, the authors of the reviewed studies cited theoretical frameworks for the concepts and methods of discursive framing and issue framing. Before assigning by and assessing the characteristics and related factors of discursive framing, the aforementioned studies needed to first define what discursive framing is while citing credible sources for their respective definitions. The results of this systematic review indicate that the seminal theoretical work of Robert M. Entman on framing (1993), informed the discursive research methods of two authors, Perkiö (2020) and Steensland (2008).

While the other two studies (Mays, 2016; Vandeleene, et al., 2016) included in this review cite research to justify their methods for categorizing and tracking types of basic income discourse by either the prevalent political arguments and metaphors that accompany basic income proposals (Vandeleene, et al., 2016), or the persuasiveness of the principles and arguments used to frame basic income discourse (Mays, 2016), they do not explicitly state a rationale for underpinning theoretical frameworks of discursive framing. However, all four of the studies included in this review acknowledge precedents of similar methods used in previous research to analyze the types of language and discourse used to frame political ideas and policies as a basis for analysis of universal basic income (UBI) discourse.

## **Prevalent Discursive Frames**

As might be expected from discourse that is often politicized, many of the prevalent discursive frames for basic income policy proposal discussion focus on subjective societal values such as justice, egalitarianism, freedom, civic mindedness, and activity (Bidadanure 2014, 2019; Mays, 2016; Perkiö, 2020). Across the various sociopolitical contexts of basic income discourse studied in this review, implicit notions of deservedness and moral judgement shape the debate. This review finds that an important factor in framing and affecting discourses is the extent to which proposed basic or guaranteed income interventions are unconditional --received with no strings attached rather than by means-testing criteria-- and universal--received by everyone without any or with very few exclusions (Mays, 2016; Perkiö, 2020; Van Parijs & Vanderborght, 2017). Interestingly, this review finds that basic income proposals and interventions have been framed in competing narratives: both as an alternative to, and furtherance of, previously existing welfare states undergirded by neoliberal agendas of austerity. This review evaluates the prevailing frames of the basic income discourse analysis, as well as some potential discursive frames that are conspicuously absent from basic income discourse.

### ***Role of Deservedness in Reinforcing Neoliberal Programs and Austerity***

The term “austerity” applied to governance can be understood as political policies and programs that lead to cutting taxes (especially for the extremely wealthy and corporations), wage concessions, and social welfare spending (Abramovitz, 1986); the term “privatization” refers to governments’ practices of placing public tasks in private

hands (Abramovitz, 1986); the term neoliberalism refers to the encompassing political agenda of austerity governance that, in a sharp contrast and departure from viewing government as necessary to protecting and promoting the well-being of all, focuses on deregulation and privatization (Abramovitz & Zelnick, 2018; Brown, 2015; Lerner, 2000; Leotti, 2020). As all of the studies included in this review noted neoliberal political ideology as having some sort of effect or influence on basic income discourses, this review uses a conceptualization of neoliberal ideology articulated by Sandra Leotti (2020), that is both consistent with themes of the discourse analyses included in this review and rooted in precedence of discursive research. Leotti explains that neoliberal ideology rests on central tenets of individualism, choice and responsibility, market-driven economics, and minimal government while driving shifts in policy agenda away from Keynesian welfare states in favor of austerity agendas of deregulation and privatization.

Further, citing Wacquant (2014) and Brown (2015), Leotti notes neoliberal ideology “erodes government commitment to social welfare in favor of policies that focus on individual responsibility and market-based rationalities,...a hyperfocus on the individual as both the cause of and solution to social problems”(p.446, 2020).

As the aforementioned notions of austerity and neoliberalism suggest, framing basic income discourses through the lens of ideologies that center on individualism sets the stage for signaling implications about which individuals may or may not be deserving of a basic or guaranteed income, hinging on a latent premise that it is by individual actions and individual responsibilities that members of a populace are deemed deserving or undeserving. While based in geographically varying contexts from the U.S.

(Steensland, 2008) to Australia (Mays, 2016) to Finland (Perkiö, 2020) to Denmark (Christensen, 2008), all of the basic income materials included in the initial review and basic income discourse studies included in the final review indicate that an emergence of a neoliberal hyperfocus on individualism shifted political discourses away from universal basic income and guaranteed income proposals.

In many instances, this sort of shift in discourse toward neoliberal notions of individualism is quite drastic as some of the most prevalent discursive frames --and perhaps most internationally persuasive aspects-- of basic income discourse focus on the universality and collective impact of basic income interventions. The results of this review indicate that often a robust basic income discourse is originally rooted in some principle of collective citizenship and universality of shared freedom, and then after an economic recession or disaster, discourse actors with a neoliberal agenda seize on the moment of disaster and transition the prevailing discourse toward hegemonic capitalist narratives that recommend neoliberal/austerity governance. The studies reviewed generally find that when this neoliberal transition occurs, it co-occurs with a noticeable shift in discourse toward individualistic victim-blaming themes that, at least implicitly, center on ideas about deservedness.

This trend of regressive and neoliberal political opportunism --the documented tradition of powerful political actors using severe recessions or other large scale economic disasters as a rationalization for moving policy discourse toward austerity measures of privatizing services that were typically and/or formerly public services performed by the state shifting to private capitalist firms who contract with the state-- is

consistent with Naomi Klein’s scholarship on the phenomenology of “Disaster Capitalism” and what Klein termed the Shock Doctrine (2007). Klein’s ongoing research highlights how democratic norms and usual government regulations and policies are often suspended during crises such as war or natural disaster, and that powerful political actors seize on these crises as opportunities to ram through a wish-list of austerity agendas. Klein finds that these austerity agendas consistently target public resources and recovery projects for public-private contract arrangements that enrich private capitalist firms, often without any mechanism for ensuring that the private capitalist firms ever actually deliver on the goods or services the private firms purport to perform better than public sector entities (2017).

In 2017, Klein noted that several of the most notable profiteers from war and disaster in recent US history are also champions of privatization and overarching austerity agendas. For example, former Exxon-Mobil executive Rex Tillerson, who oversaw increased profits after fighting for deregulation of the oil industry while the US went to war in Iraq in 2003, and Mike Pence, who lead a “free-market” think tank agenda that pushed for privatization of recovery efforts and deregulation of federal rules in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina in 2005, further solidified the dominance of neoliberal ideology in U.S. governance by leveraging those roles to gain key positions (Tillerson, US Secretary of State; Pence as Vice President) in a Trump administration that prioritized austerity and deregulation. During this same era, the Trump administration’s 2017 regressive tax scheme chiefly benefited the ultra-wealthy of US society to the tune of trillions of dollars (Drucker & Lipton, 2017; Saez & Zuckman, 2019), further



perpetuating and reinforcing an implicit notion of austerity politics: that the very wealthiest upper crust of the capitalist class must somehow be inherently more deserving of tax breaks and other forms of financial relief than the entire rest of society.

This review finds that a neoliberal shift of political discourses toward austerity politics and privatization and away from the possibilities of universal basic income/guaranteed income is hardly unique to US discourses. Perkiö's analysis of basic income discourse in Finland (2020) noted this sort of discursive framing shift as austerity measures were hastily passed through parliament following a late 80s/early 90s economic boom and early/mid 90s economic bust. As the early 1990s recession in Finland ushered in a political trend toward neoliberal hegemony and austerity politics, the discursive frames and political discussions around basic income in Finland shifted toward more notions of "deservedness."

While previous eras of Finnish basic income discourse were defined by the prominence of discursive frames such as Justice, Equality, Rights, Dignity, and Autonomy Distribution, the political moment of the early 90s Finnish recession saw basic income proposals discursively framed through moral evaluations that insisted on requirements for recipients of any sort of potential aid or welfare or basic income to do some sort of "activity" as precondition for "earning" basic income interventions (Perkiö, 2020). In other words, the changes in discursive framing of the Finnish debate on basic income shifted toward the promotion of proposals that sought to enforce an ever-broadening concept of work that must be completed in order for citizens to reach a subjective level of deservedness as a prerequisite for receiving a basic income. During

that paradigm shift, we see less of the frames that argue for the universality of a basic income, less of frames that start with a premise of human rights or dignity of universal income.

Perkiö's analysis of basic income discourse in Finland (2020) found themes of austerity politics' paradigm shift that are similar to what Steensland had assessed from analyzing several decades of basic income discourse in the US context (2008), and what Mays had found from similar discursive study in an Australian context (2016). Following the rise of the Civil Rights, Great Society, and Women's Liberation movements in the US during the 1960s and early 70s, basic income proposals had gained so much interest and political momentum that President Richard Nixon supported basic income legislation that was nearly implemented in 1969 as part of the "War on Poverty" before ultimately deciding otherwise (Steensland, 2008; Bregman, 2016).

Despite the extensive study and consideration of implementing a basic income policy in the United States during the 1960s and early 70s, the rise of the New Right and austerity politics, especially during and following the economically devastating Stagflation crisis of the 1970s, the 1980s neoliberal reign of Thatcher and Reagan ushered in a decline in basic income discourse that tapered out into a virtual disappearance of all basic income discourse by the time the Reagan administration took office in 1981. With prevalent narratives and neoliberal dogma dominating political discourse, the notions of deservedness and work ethic drowned out almost any mention of basic income intervention in a popular US discourse then dominated by the mythology and fundamentalist belief systems of rugged individualism and supply-side economics.

Although Mays's analysis of basic income discourse (2016) focused more specifically on basic income's potential to replace harmful and ineffective neoliberal welfare programs for persons with disabilities, her analysis bears out findings that are similar to those of other studies in this review, especially observations regarding the tendency of neoliberalism and austerity politics to shape prevalent framing of economic/financial policy discourse. Like Perkiö, Mays also challenges discursive notions of "active citizenship" that have been used to frame Neoliberal welfare programs, as this sort of framing always seems to imply that receiving assistance is both temporary, and preconditioned on obligatory reciprocation of some form, i.e. being "active" in searching for work in order to exit welfare, etc. The neoliberal tendency to discursively frame economic policies and proposals with explicit or implicit prerequisites of work or job seeking activity further perpetuates notions of deservedness that are debasing or, as Mays points out, abelist and discriminatory against persons with disabilities (2016). When economic discourses are rife with presumptions about work requirements and other activities or actions demanded of people in order for them to be able to afford the most basic needs of human survival, these presumptions at least implicitly suggest that people who have disabilities or are otherwise unable to fulfill state mandated work requirements are somehow less deserving of the most basic needs for human survival.

After synthesizing the critiques of multiple authors weighing in on discursive framing of public assistance in many forms from neoliberal welfare programs to universal basic income proposals, this review finds that requirements of eligibility targeting and means testing, common features of neoliberal welfare programs, are among the greatest

contributing factors to discursive notions of deservedness. By relying on eligibility requirements that categorize citizens into mutually exclusive groups of who qualifies to receive assistance versus who does not, neoliberal assistance programs set the stage for performative policy framing that consistently seeks binary sorting of the undeserving vs the deserving, the worthy poor vs the unworthy poor, the truly needy vs those who are not, etc. Further, if assistance programs with exclusive eligibility preconditions insist on discursive framing that gets caught up in the weeds of determining who is truly worthy of aid based on notions of deservedness, it follows that politically viable discursive frames for basic income interventions may be those that emphasize characteristics of universality instead of means testing, targeting, or other preconditions for eligibility.

***Unconditional and Universal: Discursive Framing to Combat Negative Notions of Deservedness***

Framing basic income intervention proposals and policy ideas around basic income's aspects of being universally and unconditionally received may be the greatest protective force against basic income discourse devolving into highly subjective and morally judgmental notions of deservedness. When a basic income is received by all citizens, it is universal (Van Parijs & Vanderborght, 2017). When a basic income is received with no preconditions or strings attached, it is unconditional (Van Parijs & Vanderborght, 2017). When a basic income program approaches a universal and unconditional nature, it may be effectively framed as a right and freedom to be enjoyed by all citizens, out of a sense of fairness, justice, equality, or other broadly shared societal value (Mays, 2016; Perkiö, 2020). Mays's analysis of basic income discourse (2016)

finds that “a basic income grounded in citizenship rights would preclude the need for targeting and pejorative associations with entitlements” based on “who is deserving and who is not”, and Vandeleene et al. (2016)’s study found that, after conducting quantitative analysis of their survey of basic income frames, “when respondents learn about the unconditional character of the basic income, they are less keen to stand against the implementation of a (basic income) system.” Perkiö (2020) also finds that in political discourse of basic income policy proposals in Finland’s parliamentary proceedings during the 1980s, Finnish political actors relied on the persuasiveness of frames that highlight the unconditional nature of payments distributed to all. Additionally, Perkiö found that the Finnish political discourse of basic income often promoted basic income through the use of concepts such as a “citizen’s wage,” “citizen’s money,” a “citizen’s income”, and other terminology that frames basic income as a universal right, with strong implications that the basic income is deserved or even earned.

Looking at the main features of policy framing processes around the basic income debate in the US, Steensland (2008) notes that the fizzling out of basic income discourse in US politics coincided with a discursive shift toward frames that focused more on the “work behavior of the poor,” a clear departure from the sorts of framing that previously built political momentum for basic income proposals. In all of the discourse analyses included in this review, across all of their respective geographical and political contexts, basic income proposals seem less appealing and less viable when discursively framed (following Entman’s definition of framing; 1993) in the neoliberal welfare state notions

of moral judgements of work ethic and deservedness, and more appealing and more viable when framed as an unconditional and universal right for citizens.

### ***Support for Discursive Frames of Freedom in a US Context***

The majority of studies included in this review, conducted across several international contexts, indicate higher levels of support and favorability of UBI proposals when these proposal are rooted in discursive frames emphasizing the universal and unconditional aspects of UBI. In the study conducted by Vandeleene and colleagues (2016), the researchers found that their survey participants strongly favored UBI proposals rooted in discursive frames emphasizing the universal and unconditional nature of UBI over proposals rooted in discursive frames emphasizing freedom. However, it seems understandable that findings from a study of Belgian university students (Vandeleene et al., 2016) and studies from other international contexts included in this review may not be entirely generalizable to a US context.

Thomas and colleagues (2021) found that while there is a precedent for UBI proposals emphasizing features of universality and unconditionality to combat stigma related to assumptions about welfare and financial assistance, frames stressing the universal and unconditional nature of UBI proposals were not as persuasive for a large sample ( $N=1,895$ ) of politically conservative and politically liberal US residents. While discursive frames emphasizing universal and unconditional nature of UBI seemed to garner support and favorability for UBI from self-identifying politically liberal respondents, the researchers found that these frames were ineffective at garnering support from self-identifying politically conservative respondents (Thomas et al., 2021). Further,

the study found that frames emphasizing universality and unconditionality of UBI were not enough for conservatives to overcome the sort of stigma and negative stereotyping about financial assistance and welfare that is so prominent in the US. However, this recent study found that when, and only when, a UBI proposal was couched in a discursive frame emphasizing a bipartisan value of “freedom” did a majority of both politically conservative and liberal respondents demonstrate high levels of support and favorability for UBI (Thomas et al., 2021).

### **Discursive Actors**

In the majority of studies reviewed, a common methodological decision for analyzing basic income discourse is to include a variable or level of variable analysis that both tracks what contributions to the discourse came from which discursive actors, and what similarities or differences might exist within and among various groups of categorized discursive actors.

#### ***Who are discursive actors?***

Discourse actors can be understood as the social actors who participate in discourse: those who produce, reproduce, distribute, and receive discourse (Fairclough, 2001; van Dijk, 1995, 2008). The categorization of different types of discourse actors is important to any discourse analysis, including all of the discourse studies in this review, because as Veronika Koller sums it up: “social actors as a discourse analytical category are seen as the textual instantiations of models of the self and others, both individual and collective (p.1, 2009).” Drawing on the foundational discourse theory work of Foucault (1971, 2002) and Ernesto Laclau (1980) regarding discourse actors and meaning making,

Jager and Maier deduce that “reality is meaningful, that reality exists in the way it does, only insofar as it is assigned meaning by actors, who are themselves entangled into and constituted by discourses (p. 9, 2016).”

Some groups of discourse actors have much more power in and over discourse practices, particularly those elites among political and media actors (Jager & Maier, 2016; van Dijk, 1995). Discursive analyses of basic income/guaranteed income interventions typically categorize different types of political actors, as types of testimony before legislative bodies and other forms of formal political debate comprise most of the data collected on basic income/guaranteed income discourse. Of the discourse studies included in this review, political actors are identified as members of Congress, members of Parliament, and other legislators who discussed and debated basic income/guaranteed income in some legislative or political forum that was preserved as part of a public record. Within the broader category of political actors, these discursive actors were sub-grouped by political party affiliation and other commonalities.

While one study in the reviewed literature (Steensland, 2008) relied on the New York Times by citing its reputation as “the paper of record” and using its extensive archives to draw a large corpus of discursive data, the review did not find evidence of any existing discourse study that has ever analyzed basic income/guaranteed income with a comparison of different types of media actors. This appears to be an important gap to explore, as media actors, from a wide range of current news media across digital and analog formats, surely contribute to and influence discourse on basic/guaranteed income in ways that have yet to be analyzed.



## **Gaps in Literature and Methodological Limitations of Extant Discourse Analyses**

This review found that only one peer-reviewed study has been published on modern US basic income discourse (Steensland, 2008), and the analysis of the study focused primarily on the debate among political actors over guaranteed income and basic income during the era-specific scope of a timeframe that spans the Nixon presidency through the Carter presidency. Of the most recent discourse analyses of basic/guaranteed income, the geographical context is either Denmark or Finland. There is a notable absence of basic income discourse analysis in the US since the Great Recession and housing crisis of 2008, and the era from that time to now is bookended on the present by another recession exacerbated by the ongoing COVID19 pandemic. With talk and proposals of basic income interventions gaining momentum again, the time is ideal for an updated analysis of basic/guaranteed income discourse in the US.

### ***Women's Work: A Lack of Frames Concerning Sex or Gender***

Absent from the existing literature of basic/guaranteed income discourse analysis is any level or category of analysis that investigates the role of sex or gender in UBI discourses. While there is a substantial body of literature articulating how women may benefit in unique and potentially emancipatory ways from a UBI (Axelsen & Bidadanure, 2018; Bidadanure, 2019; Miller et al., 2019; Pateman, 2005; Zelleke, 2011), this review did not find any discourse analysis or discourse study that specifically focused on outcomes for women or discursive frames centering on gender or how women might benefit from basic income interventions. This seems to be an especially critical gap in UBI discourse analysis in the US as decades of economic assumptions and neoliberal

welfare state interventions have relied on the unpaid household labor and social reproduction labor of women to underpin and subsidize the broader economy (Abramovitz, 2011). Given that women, especially women of color, were overrepresented in the pool of those who received subprime mortgages in the lead up to the housing crisis (Fishbein & Woodall, 2006), and given that women's primary mode of asset accumulation in the US is homeownership (Baker, 2018; Baker et al., 2019), there is cause for researching basic/guaranteed income discourse in the previously unexamined era of the housing crisis of 2008 to the present. Women might stand to gain the most from basic or income guaranteed income, not just in terms of financial gains for a group that does unpaid social reproductive labor and other forms of unpaid labor to prop up the broader economy, but perhaps also in terms of emancipatory empowerment and other types of mental or emotional gains.

### **Limitations of Systematic Lit Review**

This review found that basic income/guaranteed income discourse analysis in the US is an understudied area of scholarship. With only four studies meeting the criteria for inclusion in this review, this review is limited by a lack of literature on the topic. While this review was limited in its ability to examine discursive notions of deservedness, as it did not find any study of basic/guaranteed income in the US that explicitly analyzed discursive notions or frames concerned with deservedness, this review did find that previous literature that addresses moralistic and ethical discursive frames that imply assumptions of deservedness, and it seems likely that further study may find implicit notions of deservedness worth analyzing in order to begin to address this gap in the

literature. Another limitation is the lack of focus dedicated to basic/guaranteed income: many of the articles included in this review examined basic/guaranteed income as part of broader discourse of a wide array of various types of welfare reforms without the level of detailed analysis that might be devoted to the topic in a study that focused exclusively or primarily on basic/guaranteed income interventions and proposals.

### **Conclusions & Implications for future research**

Critical discourse analysis has played a key role in synthesizing policy debate and popular narratives around the implementation or even possibility of implementing basic income or guaranteed income interventions. While there is a history of basic income discourse in the US rooted in the policy debate eras preceding and proceeding the Civil Rights and Women's Rights movements, analyses of policy discourse concerning such interventions is comparatively more common in European nations, and basic income discourse in the context of the US post-recession appears to be a completely unaddressed gap in the literature at the time that this systematic review was conducted. Additionally, this review noted how discourse analyses study various discursive frames, there has not been a study that specifically considers the role that notions of deservedness play, although the review did find that discourse researchers identify and analyze frames that address some of the moral and ethical judgements concerning opinions and arguments over who should or should not receive basic/guaranteed income.

In the same vein, research of basic income discourses aims to identify the discursive frames that avoid or overcome assumptions of deservedness in order to garner greater support and favorability for basic income proposals. To accomplish this aim of

gaining support and favorability for UBI proposals while avoiding counterproductive discursive battles over assumptions of deservedness, this review finds that the literature recommends discursive frames and themes emphasizing the universality, collective rights of citizenship, shared freedoms inherent to UBI interventions. To take this area of analysis a step further toward greater understanding, future research of basic income discourse in the US must further explore and quantitatively investigate how emphasizing core UBI concepts of universality, collective rights of citizenship, and universally shared freedoms does or does not increase favorability of support for UBI proposals.

Beyond gaps related to temporal and national contexts, this review also identified a gap in the literature in terms of approach and lens for discursive analysis: there has never been an analysis of basic/guaranteed income discourse in the US that included sex or gender as a level or variable of analysis. It behooves future research to consider the differing roles related to sex and gender in the broader economic context when studying basic income discourse because UBI interventions are both economic and social interventions.

Similarly, the results of this review indicate that there is a critical gap in the research concerning both race and discursive notions of attitudes concerning racial justice. Bidanure noted about literature concerning political theory, that, excepting important contributions from Shelby (2012, 2017), there is a lack of UBI literature written from an intersectional or racial justice perspective (2019). This review finds a similar gap in the literature on UBI discourse analysis and issue framing. Given the

extent and importance of addressing racial injustices related to wealth and income, future research on UBI discourse should examine factors related to race and racial justice.

Furthermore, as this review found a common theme of discourse researchers identifying, categorizing, and analyzing basic income discourse according to various types of discursive actors, it is recommended that future research explore how media outlets and media actors function as discursive actors in the context of basic income discourse in the US. Michel Foucault's notions of social power and knowledge created from discourse provide much of the theoretical basis for modern critical discourse analysis (Jager & Maier, 2016; Leotti 2020). Drawing from Foucauldian theory, and the theoretical and methodological work of other scholars of discourse analysis such as Jurgen Link and Ernesto Laclau, Jager and Maier state that "reality is meaningful, that reality exists in the way it does, only insofar as it is assigned meaning by actors, who are themselves entangled into and constituted by discourses (p. 9, 2016)." With this understanding of the critical importance of studying discursive actors, and the role that media plays in creating and shaping prevalent narratives and discursive frames, it is essential that future research on basic income discourse analyze the role various types and formats of news media play as discursive actors. This might include categorizing different types of news media as similar and dissimilar discursive actors in how they approach and perpetuate basic income discourse in the US.

Finally, as the ultimate goal of many UBI proposals is to test and implement UBI interventions, future research should investigate how people respond when directly asked about UBI favorability when framed in the ways discourse analysis indicates is most

effective: highlighting universality, and widely shared social values like democracy, freedom, and shared rights of citizenship. More research is needed to see if and to what extent framing UBI around the aforementioned values can overcome assumptions about deservedness. The findings from discourse analyses conducted in international contexts suggest frames promoting the universality and democracy of UBI can overcome deep seated concerns about potentially unworthy or undeserving others, however, this has not been analyzed in a modern US context. Future research should aim to further test this finding among a representative sample of US citizens.

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**CHAPTER II**

**GENDER INEQUALITY AND UNVIERSAL BASIC**

**INCOME FAVORABILITY: AN ORDINAL LOGISTIC**

**REGRESSION ANALYSIS**

## **Abstract**

This study (Paper 2 and Chapter 2 of the dissertation) analyzed data from Wave 71 of the Pew Research Center's American Trends Panel survey. Using Pew's dataset from a large ( $N=11,001$ ), nationally representative survey sample, this study analyzed relationships between views on gender inequity and favorability of a proposed universal basic income (UBI) intervention that discursively framed as universal and unconditional. A Weighted Least Squares Mean Variance adjusted (WLSMV) estimation of an ordinal logistic regression yielded results that indicated that acknowledgement of persisting gender inequity in the US had a statistically significant association with increased levels of support for a proposed UBI. This study takes an important step toward addressing a critical gap in the research literature on discursive framing of UBI and view of gender inequity. The findings of this study hold implications for future research on UBI interventions and gender inequity, and how discursively framing UBI proposals can garner more support in a US context.

## **Introduction**

Given the gendered income disparity in the US (England et al., 2020), and that women do the majority of unpaid socially reproductive labor that subsidizes and underpins the broader US economy (Abramovitz, 2011), it may come as no surprise that Universal Basic Income (UBI) proposals have been suggested as a potentially viable means toward ameliorating gender inequality in US and in several international contexts (Axelsen & Bidadanure, 2018; Bidadanure, 2019; Miller et al., 2019; Quiroga, 2020). Feminist scholarship has long put forth that UBI may unlock economic and social emancipatory potential for women to upend or challenge established family-wage and capitalist welfare state systems that predominantly rely on women to perform social reproduction (Christensen, 2003; Fraser, 1994; Schultz, 2020; Weeks & Cruz, 2016). Further, research literature in this area has made a compelling case that UBI holds transformative power to substantially increase the amount of financial freedom and empowerment experienced by women (Bidadanure, 2019; Standing, 2013; Zelleke, 2011), even beyond the realms of employment and unpaid care work (Ketterer, 2021). However, despite a rich body of research literature on the potential of UBI to address issues of gender inequality, there remains a lack of empirical research on the nature and extent of the observed relationship between gender inequality and UBI (Lombardozi, 2020).

Prior to this study, a systematic review of literature pertaining to discursive framing of UBI proposals did not yield results of any discourse analyses that specifically

examined the relationship between gender inequality and the perceived potential or viability of UBI proposals. By analyzing data from a large, nationally representative data set that included responses to survey items about several matters of public opinion including views on gender inequality and favorability of a proposed UBI, this study aimed to take a critical step toward addressing a gap in the extant research literature. Further, the aim of this study was to analyze the relationship between views on gender inequality and UBI favorability with consideration of other factors viewed as correlates for or determinants of UBI favorability, including individual indicators of socioeconomic status, income, age, gender, political orientation, and experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic (Choi, 2021; Nettle et al., 2021). Based on the review of literature on discursive frames of UBI, and literature on UBI and gender inequality from the perspectives of feminist scholarship, this researcher hypothesized that views or beliefs asserting the continued existence of gender inequality disadvantaging women in the US will be associated with higher levels of support for a UBI proposal framed as universal and unconditional.

## **Methods**

### **Data**

*Dataset: Using a Measure of UBI Favorability that may Bypass Notions of Deservedness*

The Pew Center's most recently available wave (Wave 71, data collected July - August 2020) of responses to the American Trends Panel (ATP) survey provides a nationally representative sample for secondary analysis. Wave 71 includes a survey item

asking Americans about a potential Universal Basic Income (UBI) that is worded in a specific way that meets what the systematic literature review identified to be prevailing discursive frames for garnering support for UBI proposals. This was done by framing a potential UBI intervention in a way that stressed the universality of a shared freedom enjoyed by all citizens without preconditions of work requirements (Christensen, 2008; Mays 2016; Perkio, 2020). This survey item on level of support of, or opposition to, UBI was worded by the Pew Center for Research as such: “Would you favor or oppose the federal government providing a guaranteed income, sometimes called a ‘universal basic income,’ for all adult citizens, whether or not they work?” The survey item had four ordinal response options ranging from “strongly favor” to “strongly oppose.” This survey item made for an important indicator of UBI support as it was asked in a manner that emphasized two of the most salient and effective frames according to discourse analysis literature, universality and unconditionality. By stipulating UBI would be disbursed at a federal government level to all adult citizens in the US, the survey item highlights an aspect of UBI consistent with the discursive frames emphasizing universality. By specifically stating that all US citizens would receive the income regardless of work status, the survey item notes an aspect of UBI consistent with frames that emphasize the unconditionality of UBI.

According to the systematic review of literature on discourse studies of UBI proposal framing completed prior to this study, public and individual consideration of UBI proposals often veers into a preoccupation with or debate over the perceived deservingness of those who might receive cash assistance from a UBI. The review of



discourse analyses found indications that framing UBI proposals in ways that emphasize the universality -that every member of given population receives the income—and the unconditionality – that people receive the income no-strings-attached regardless of personal income level, work status, disability status, etc.—aspects of UBI proposals can effectively bypass or overcome the potential pitfall derailing UBI proposal consideration with assumptions about the deservingness of UBI recipients. Considering the aforementioned findings from the systematic review of literature on framing proposals in UBI discourses, and the large nationally representative sample of Pew’s American Trends Panel (ATP) survey, the UBI support/opposition survey item on Wave 71 of the ATP survey makes for a compelling variable for analysis.

Pew Research Center Methods for Wave 71 of the American Trends Panel (ATP) Survey

The Pew Research Center recruited its Wave 71 survey sample from three large, nationally representative samples of panelists who had responded to previous surveys by the Pew Research Center; the research center also recruited from a pool of respondents of two nationally representative address-based surveys that Pew had recently conducted (Pew Research Center, 2020). Of the 14,407 survey respondents recruited to the Wave 71 survey, 11,001 respondents (N=11,001) completed the survey. In its Wave 71 methodology report (2020), Pew reports using best practices for weighting protocols and subpopulation parameter estimates. The unique context of the timeframe for data collection is important to note: the sample completed the survey between July 27, 2020 and August 2, 2020, with several survey items focused on how the government was responding and could respond to the COVID-19 pandemic.

## **Variables for Analysis**

The aforementioned ordinal survey item on Universal Basic Income (UBI) support/favorability was chosen as an outcome variable, with other variables selected for statistical analysis to test factors that might possibly be predictive of or associated with levels of support or opposition to a UBI proposal. Based on findings from the systematic review of literature indicating a lack of research on the possible associations between gender inequality and framing of UBI proposals, a survey item related to women’s experiences of gender inequality in the US was chosen as the primary independent variable of interest. The dichotomous survey item pertaining to gender inequality in Wave 71 of American Trends Panel (ATP) asked respondents to choose “which statement comes closer to your own views—even if neither is exactly right?” with options of either, “The obstacles that once made it harder for women than men to get ahead are now largely gone”, or, “There are still significant obstacles that make it harder for women to get ahead than men.”

### **Controlling for Other Correlates and Determinants of UBI Support**

The particular timing of Pew Research Center’s Wave 71 collection of survey data occurred during a heightened period of mandated lockdowns and other health and safety measures publicly administered in response to COVID-19, as well as uncommon economic conditions in summer 2020 including historically unique instances of layoffs, furloughs, unemployment benefit enrollments, and, notably, federally administered “stimulus” relief payments. Many factors of employment and income unique to this time period may hold important implications for consideration of possible correlates related to

favorability of UBI proposals. With this in mind, and given the findings from recent research literature indicating a correlation between Americans' experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic and increased support for Universal Basic Income (Nettle et al., 2021), this analysis of support for UBI included survey items pertaining to experiences and views of COVID-19 as a combined control variable. There were six survey items that asked respondents about potential reasons for why the pandemic became so severe in the US compared to other countries, and if or how state or federal government could have done more to prevent the spread and severity of COVID-19 in the US in early 2020. Five of the six COVID-19 categorical survey items were tested for correlation, while one of the six was excluded for using a prompt and response option that amounted to a confusing double-negative statement with questionable validity. A reliability analysis in IBM's SPSS 26 found that the five COVID-19 survey items correlate together with a Cronbach's Alpha of 0.8, a level typically described by researchers as "robust" and "fairly high" (Taber, 2018). The combined COVID-19 variable created from the five correlating COVID-19 items was included as a control variable in the analysis.

This analysis also controlled for variables that are commonly viewed and used as correlates for or determinants of UBI support, including indicators of individual characteristics of socioeconomic status, income, age, gender, and political orientation (Choi, 2021; Nettle et al., 2021). To test for correlation of multiple survey items related to political ideology and political "party lean", a reliability analysis was completed finding a correlation between Ideology and Party Lean plus Ideology with a Cronbach's Alpha of 0.912, a level typically described as "strong" (Taber, 2018).

## **Data Analysis**

Descriptive statistics and initial analysis were completed using SPSS 26. Mplus statistical modeling program Version 8.7 was used to run a Weighted Least Squares Mean Variance adjusted (WLSMV) estimation of an ordinal logistic regression. Given that the sample was quite large (N= 11,001) and statistical power high, it was important to accurately estimate parameters related to effect size, and research indicates that WLSMV produces accurate parameter estimates while generally reporting acceptable model-data fit (DiStefano & Morgan, 2014). As the majority of variables included in this study were created from ordinal survey items, WLSMV was chosen as the most appropriate method of analysis as WLSMV was specifically designed for estimating ordinal data, and makes consistently less biased and more accurate estimations in models using ordinal data than robust maximum likelihood (Cheng-Hsien, 2016).

### **Missing Data**

Full information maximum likelihood (FIML) was used for handling missing data based on a rich precedent for this method in statistical analysis (Enders, 2001; Enders, 2010; Lee, 2021). The analysis found that data were missing at random, meaning that there might be systematic differences between the missing and observed values, but these can be entirely explained by other observed variables (Bhaskaran & Smeeth, 2014). Notably, while most of the variables included in the analysis were drawn from survey items that had a missing data rate of two percent or lower, the UBI support/opposition survey item in Wave 71 (Summer 2020) of the American Trends Panel had a missing data rate of 50.4 percent, meaning that slightly over half of the respondents skipped or

refused to answer the question about a UBI proposal. In other words, only 5,459 of the 11,001 survey respondents answered the survey item asking about UBI.

## **Results**

Results for the overall model were statistically significant ( $p < .001$ ) with a chi-square of 312.9 with 28 degrees of freedom. Results also supported the hypothesis indicating a statistically significant relationship between asserting that women still experience disadvantages of gender inequality and higher levels of support for a proposed UBI framed as universal and unconditional ( $b = -.11$ ,  $z = 3.85$ ,  $p < .001$ ). As survey respondents answered that women in the US still experience “obstacles” related to gender inequality, they also reported higher levels of support for a proposed UBI as measured by ordinal data ( $OR = 0.85$ ).

Other variables with a statistically significant association with UBI support/opposition included age, Hispanic ethnicity, income, political ideology, and a combined variable of correlated views on US government responses to COVID-19. The analysis found that older age was associated with increased levels of opposition to (or decreased levels of support for) UBI ( $b = .053$ ,  $z = 4.12$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $OR = 1.01$ ). Regarding Hispanic ethnicity, respondents who identified as Hispanic reported higher levels of support for UBI, or, in other words, respondents who identified as non-Hispanic reported higher levels of opposition to UBI ( $b = .07$ ,  $z = 2.35$ ,  $p < .02$ ,  $OR = 1.24$ ). The observed relationship between income and UBI favorability indicated that higher levels of income were associated with higher levels of opposition to UBI ( $b = .026$ ,  $z = 5.2$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $OR = 1.04$ ). The combined sum variable for political ideology indicated that levels of more

liberal political ideology were associated with higher levels of support for UBI while reported levels of more conservative political ideology were associated with higher levels of opposition to UBI ( $b = -.044$ ,  $z = -6.72$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $OR = 0.96$ ). A combined variable of views on government response to COVID-19 was also associated with levels of support for or opposition to a proposed UBI ( $b = .038$ ,  $z = 8.80$ ,  $p < .001$ ). Variables in the analysis that did not have a statistically significant association with UBI favorability included education level of respondent, race of respondent, and religion of respondent.

### **Limitations**

One intriguing limitation of this analysis concerns the relatively large amount of missing data on the outcome variable of UBI favorability: despite relatively low skip rates on the overwhelming majority of survey items in Wave 71 of Pew's ATP survey, 50.4 % of all respondents skipped the only survey item about universal basic income. While this study used best practices for treating missing data with full information maximum likelihood (FIML) analysis, it is important to note that the largest instance of missing data concerned the lower response rate to the survey item from which the main outcome variable was drawn for this study. Future research could further investigate this observed aversion to responding to survey items about UBI by doing more in-depth exploration, such as mixed methods research with qualitative interviews, to understand why such an unusually high proportion of respondents in a large representative sample of Americans frequently surveyed about political trends and hot-topic issues decided to skip or otherwise refused to respond to a survey question about a proposed UBI.

Unlike most variables in the analysis, the independent variable of interest regarding gender inequality was dichotomous rather than ordinal. By using a binary survey item that required respondents to choose whether they do or do not believe women in the US still face more obstacles than men, restriction of range for those two answer responses may have limited the extent to which researchers might find a relationship between respondents' views on gender inequality and support for UBI.

Although the COVID-19 item was created as the sum of highly correlated survey items that pertain to views on the government response to the pandemic, and was collected at a particular point in time (Summer 2020) with potentially important implications about several factors of the US experience of the pandemic, this variable is not a precise measure of any specific aspect of the multitude of views US respondents might hold about the pandemic and response to the pandemic. While it can be inferred that the combined COVID-19 variable in this study has something to do with American views and experiences of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, it is not explicitly clear which specific aspects and factors of views on COVID 19 that this combined variable does and does not measure. The analysis found a statistically significant association between the COVID-19 variable and levels of support for a proposed UBI, but the extent of inferences that can be drawn from this association are limited.

#### Effect Size

Reporting odds ratios is the most widely used convention for reporting indices of effect size in statistical analyses like the one conducted for this study, and while it should be noted that there is no consensus threshold for determining an effect size to be small or

large (Chen et al., 2010), the effect sizes for the statistical model in this analysis could be interpreted as relatively small. The smaller effects sizes, to some extent, limits what inferences can be made about how meaningful the relationships are between those variables with observed associations.

### **Discussion**

By analyzing data from a nationally representative sample of over 11,000 survey respondents living in the United States, this study makes an important step toward addressing a gap in the research literature on the relationship between views on gender inequality and favorability of a proposed universal basic income (UBI). The results indicate an important association between views on gender inequality and favorability of UBI that is discursively framed as universal and unconditional, and further investigation and understanding of this association holds critical research and policy implications for addressing systemic injustices related to economic insecurity and gender inequity. With UBI proposals, studies, and pilot demonstrations currently reaching an unprecedented level of momentum and funding in the US amidst an ongoing pandemic and a second major economic recession since 2008, the findings of this study and studies like this hold implications affected by a sense of both urgency and opportunity.

Further research should investigate predictive and covarying factors of UBI favorability, as the literature on the potential of UBI portends promising effects that may potentially ameliorate many forms of economic insecurity including economic inequities exacerbated by sexism and gender inequities. Future research may build on this study by further investigating how views rooted in sexism and perceptions of gender inequities may



impact the favorability and viability of UBI, an economic intervention noted for its potential for economic and emancipatory effects that could be especially meaningful for directly remedying some of the harmful effects of gender inequities experienced by US women.

As human rights scholar Patricia Schulz notes, a UBI like the federal UBI proposed in the ATP wave 71 survey item would fortify the economic security, social protection, and freedoms of democracy of any person on the planet, while women of the world “have a particular stake in the introduction of a UBI to maintain systems that respect their human rights and freedoms as, generally, authoritarian governments have quite restrictive views of women’s rights and gender equality (2017).” Feminist scholarship and human rights research have demonstrated that women are paid less than men for work, are more likely to do the bulk of unpaid labor and care work that props up broader economies, and are also more vulnerable to financial precarity and economic insecurity while operating in societies where sexism and gender discrimination against women are primary determinants of wealth inequality (Goldblatt, 2020). Women in the US, and the world over, may have the most to gain from an economic intervention like a UBI that is unconditional and universal in nature, so it remains urgently important to connect issues of gender inequality to the potential of UBI. Future analysis of the relationship between attitudes on gender inequity and favorability of potential economic interventions like a guaranteed income or UBI should further investigate how discursive frames of both UBI proposals and issues of gender inequity could be leveraged to better illustrate the link between economic security and gender inequity in a US context.

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## **CHAPTER III**

# **SYSTEMIC RACISM, WHITE PRIVILEGE, AND UNVIERSAL BASIC INCOME FAVORABILITY: AN ORDINAL LOGISTIC REGRESSION ANALYSIS**

## Abstract

This study (Paper 3 and Chapter 3 of the dissertation) analyzed data from Wave 71 of the Pew Research Center's American Trends Panel survey. Using Pew's dataset from a large ( $N=11,001$ ), nationally representative survey sample, this study analyzed relationships between views on gender inequity and favorability of a proposed universal basic income (UBI) intervention that discursively framed as universal and unconditional. A Weighted Least Squares Mean Variance adjusted (WLSMV) estimation of an ordinal logistic regression yielded results which indicated that both independent variables of interest have a statistically significant association with the outcome variable of UBI support. Higher levels of agreement with the notion that White privilege persists in the US were correlated with higher levels of support for the proposed UBI ( $b=.032$ ,  $z= 1.98$ ,  $p<.05$ ,  $OR=1.03$ ), and higher levels of agreement with the notion that Black Americans experience systemic racism were correlated with higher levels of support for the proposed UBI ( $b=.062$ ,  $z= 2.90$ ,  $p<.005$ ,  $OR=1.06$ ). This study takes an important step toward addressing a critical gap in the research literature on discursive framing of UBI as it relates to how Americans view privilege and systemic racism.

## **Introduction**

As noted in the systematic review of literature, the tradition of universal basic income (UBI) proposals aimed at addressing racial inequities and systemic racism goes back to at least the 1960s era of Civil Rights and Black liberation movements (Bidadanure, 2019). Discourses appraising economic interventions like universal basic income and guaranteed income created a tide of political momentum in the US that carried UBI discourses all the way to the houses of Congress and the Oval Office during the Nixon administration (Bregman, 2016; Standing, 2017). However, much of the momentum around UBI discourses and financial relief during that era receded with the political rise of the “New Right” in the 70s and 80s, which promoted political discourses, often rooted in racially prejudiced and unfounded assumptions about Black Americans (Cammett, 2014). The prevailing discourses of that era shifted all US discourses on government assistance toward a push for austerity politics, prizing privatization over government intervention, which culminated with the bipartisan dismantlement of the welfare state during the Clinton-Gingrich “reforms” of the mid 1990s (Brophy-Baerman & Bloeser, 2006). By the start of the Great Recession, states in the US with higher proportions of Black residents tended to have harsher eligibility requirements and lower benefits than states with comparatively lower proportions of Black residents (Hamilton et al., 2021; Soss et al., 2008).

As Strand and Mirkay note, the current racial wealth gap in the US is immense, persistent, and profoundly rooted in and sustained by structural racism (2022). According

to 2019 figures reported by the Federal Reserve, the median annual wealth for white households was \$188, 200, median annual wealth for Latino households was \$36,000, while that of Black households was \$24,100 (Bhutta et al., 2020). Many barriers to addressing the wealth gap today are a continuance of centuries of legislation and unjust policies that have systematically disadvantaged Black Americans by limiting means for building, maintaining, and passing on wealth (Strand & Mirkay, 2022; Weller & Roberts, 2021). Scholars contend that a large-scale UBI intervention may be one of the few policy ideas that could be disruptive and transformative enough to address racial wealth inequality in the United States (Oliver et al., 2019). As the problems of the racial wealth gap are maintained by structural factors like policies and legislation that have been administered by the US government apparatus, viable solutions may require implementation at a structural point and scale of the federal government. In its investigation of the relationships between variables representing views on systemic disadvantages experienced by Black Americans, levels of acknowledgement of white privilege, and favorability of UBI, this study uses a measure of support for a UBI that would be proposed at a scale that could potentially ameliorate some of the issues related to the racial wealth gap: a universal and unconditional economic intervention administered to all US citizens by the federal government.

## Methods

### Data

#### *Dataset: Using a Measure of UBI Favorability that may Bypass Notions of Deservedness*

Using the same dataset and following similar ordinal logistic regression analysis methods as those used in Study 1 (chapter 2), this study built on the prior analysis by testing other possible predictors and correlates of UBI favorability. As with Study 1, this study (Study 2) used the most recently available wave, Wave 71, of the Pew Research Center's American Trends Panel (ATP) survey. Wave 71 data was collected from July to August in 2020 from a nationally representative sample ( $N=11,001$ ). Wave 71 data was chosen for this additional secondary data analysis as it is the only wave in which a survey item asks respondents about UBI, and it because it frames in a specific manner that aligns with what the systematic literature review (Chapter 1) identified as highly effective discursive framing for eliciting support for a proposed UBI. Specifically, the survey item pertaining to UBI favorability in Pew's ATP Wave 71 survey frames a proposed UBI using language that emphasizes the more favorable discursive frames of UBI: universality and unconditionality of an economic freedom enjoyed by all citizens without means-testing or preconditions of work requirements (Christensen, 2008; Mays, 2016; Perkiö, 2020). The survey UBI survey item asked: "Would you favor or oppose the federal government providing a guaranteed income, sometimes called a 'universal basic income,' for all adult citizens, whether or not they work?" The survey item had four ordinal response options ranging from "strongly favor" to "strongly oppose."



By clearly stipulating that the proposed UBI would be administered by the federal government to all adult citizens, the survey question poses a potential UBI in a fashion that is consistent with what discourse analysis literature finds to be consistent with frames focusing on the concept of universality. By stipulating that the UBI would be received by all citizens regardless of work status, the survey item provides a qualifier that implies consistency with discursive frames that highlight the unconditional nature of a UBI. As with Study 1 (Chapter 2), this dataset was chosen because the survey item about UBI favorability happens to emphasize two discursive frames, universality and unconditionality, that the literature review (Chapter 1) found to be effective at preventing or overcoming UBI discourses' tendency to get sidetracked by scrutiny over the assumed deservedness of cash assistance recipients. Building on Study 1, this secondary analysis again examines associations and potential predictors of the outcome variable of UBI favorability.

***Pew Research Center Methods for Wave 71 of the American Trends Panel (ATP)***

***Survey***

As mentioned in the prior data analysis (Chapter 2), this dataset was chosen because of the strengths and advantages of the Pew Research Center's methodology for conducting Wave 71 of the American Trend Panel (ATP) survey. The Pew Research Center recruited its Wave 71 survey sample from three large, nationally representative samples of panelists who had responded to previous surveys by the Pew Research Center; the research center also recruited from a pool of respondents of two nationally representative address-based surveys that Pew had recently conducted (Pew Research

Center, 2020). Of the 14,407 survey respondents recruited to the Wave 71 survey, 11,001 respondents (N=11,001) completed the survey. In its Wave 71 methodology report (2020), Pew reports using best practices for weighting protocols and subpopulation parameter estimates.

### ***Variables for Analysis***

Like Study 1, this study also featured the survey item regarding UBI favorability as an outcome variable. Based on findings from the systematic review of literature indicating the role of systematic racism in creating the racial wealth gap in the US and the potential of UBI for partially ameliorating the racial wealth gap, an aim of this study was to test the possible associations that views on systemic racism and white privilege might have with UBI favorability.

Variables were selected from ATP Wave 71 survey items for an ordinal logistic regression analysis to test the association between the variable of favorability/support for UBI and variables representing attitudes about White privilege and systemic racism against Black people in the United States. These independent variables of interest were drawn from ordinal survey items entitled “WhiteAdvantage” and “DifficultyBlack.” The survey item labeled by Pew Research Center as “WhiteAdvantage” asked respondents how much White people benefit from advantages in society that Black people do not have, which can be interpreted as an indicator of views on white privilege. Pew’s ordinal survey item entitled “DifficultyBlack”, provides a variable of attitudes about systemic racism as it asks respondents if, and how much more, difficult it is to be a Black person in the US than it is to be a White person in the US.

## *Context, Covariates, Correlates, and Controlling for Other Determinants of UBI*

### *Support*

Since the results of Study 1 (Chapter 2) indicated a statistically significant association between a variable of gender inequity and the outcome variable of UBI favorability, this study adhered to intersectional feminist views of the emancipatory and liberatory potential of UBI (see Chapter 1) by including the gender inequity variable as well as variables related to systemic racism in this ordinal logistic regression analysis. As with Study 1, this analysis also included a combined sum variable of correlated COVID-19 survey items. This study also included analysis of data that was collected during a heightened period of mandated lockdowns and other health and safety measures publicly administered in response to COVID-19, as well as uncommon economic conditions in summer 2020 including historically unique instances of layoffs, furloughs, unemployment benefit enrollments, and, notably, federally administered “stimulus” relief payments. This is both important context of when Pew Research Center conducted Wave 71 of the ATP survey and important in terms of how the pandemic has effected US views of UBI proposals. Recent research findings since the beginning of the pandemic have already found that many Americans have increased their level of support for potential UBI interventions as a result of experiences during the pandemic (Nettle et al., 2021).

It is also critically important to note that the context of survey responses in Summer 2020 coincided with events of the police murder of George Floyd and the resulting nationwide uprisings of mass protests against racism in policing, police brutality, and systemic racism in more broadly. As both of the main independent

variables of interest in this analysis, ATP survey items “WhiteAdvantage” and “DifficultyBlack,” concern views about systemic racism in the US, it's important to consider how this historic context of massive protests against racism in Summer 2020 might have impacted survey respondents.

As with Study 1, this analysis also controlled for variables that are commonly viewed and used as correlates for or determinants of UBI support, including indicators of individual characteristics of socioeconomic status, income, age, gender, and political orientation (Choi, 2021; Nettle et al., 2021). To test for correlation of multiple survey items related to political ideology and political “party lean”, a reliability analysis was completed finding a correlation between Ideology and Party Lean plus Ideology with a Cronbach’s Alpha of 0.912, a level typically described as “strong” (Taber, 2018).

### **Data Analysis**

This study used the same recommended data analysis methods as those used in Study 1 in order to examine the possible relationships between previously unexamined variables of interest and the outcome variable of UBI favorability. Mplus statistical modeling program Version 8.7 was used to run a Weighted Least Squares Mean Variance adjusted (WLSMV) estimation of an ordinal logistic regression. Given that the sample was quite large ( $N= 11,001$ ) and statistical power high, it was important to accurately estimate parameters related to effect size, and research indicates that WLSMV produces accurate parameter estimates while generally reporting acceptable model-data fit (DiStefano & Morgan, 2014). As the majority of variables included in this study were created from ordinal survey items, WLSMV was chosen as the most appropriate method

of analysis as WLSMV was specifically designed for estimating ordinal data, and makes consistently less biased and more accurate estimations in models using ordinal data than robust maximum likelihood (Cheng-Hsien, 2016).

### **Missing Data**

Missing data were handled using Full information maximum likelihood (FIML) based on the strong precedent for this method (Enders, 2001; Enders, 2010; Lee, 2021). As with Study 1, this analysis found data were missing at random, meaning that there might be systematic differences between the missing and observed values, but these can be entirely explained by other observed variables (Bhaskaran & Smeeth, 2014). As with the analysis in Study 1, this study also relied on an outcome variable with an unusually high missing data rate: while most of the variables included in the analysis were drawn from survey items that had a missing data rate of two percent or lower, the UBI support/opposition survey item in Wave 71 (Summer 2020) of the American Trends Panel had a missing data rate of 50.4 percent, meaning that slightly over half of the respondents skipped or refused to answer the question about a UBI proposal.

### **Results**

Results for the overall model were statistically significant ( $p < .001$ ) with a chi-square of 522.8 with 30 degrees of freedom. The results indicated that both independent variables of interest have a statistically significant association with the outcome variable of UBI support. Higher levels of agreement with the notion that White privilege persists in the US were correlated with higher levels of support for the proposed UBI ( $b = .032$ ,  $z = 1.98$ ,  $p < .05$ ,  $OR = 1.03$ ), and higher levels of agreement with the notion that Black

Americans experience systemic racism were correlated with higher levels of support for the proposed UBI ( $b=.062, z= 2.90, p<.005, OR=1.06$ ).

Other variables in the model with a statistically significant association with UBI favorability included agreement with the notion of persisting gender inequity in the US, age, income level, Hispanic ethnicity, political ideology, and a combined variable of correlated views on US government responses to COVID-19. The analysis found that disagreement with the notion of persisting gender inequity of additional obstacles faced by women in the US was associated with lower levels of support for (or, in other words, higher levels of opposition to) the proposed UBI ( $b= -.07, z= -2.69, p<.01, OR= .93$ ). Regarding age of respondents, older age correlated with higher levels of opposition to, or lower levels of support for, the proposed UBI ( $b= .052, z= 4.38, p< .001, OR= 1.05$ ). Regarding Hispanic ethnicity, respondents who identified as Hispanic reported higher levels of support for UBI, or, in other words, respondents who identified as non-Hispanic reported higher levels of opposition to UBI ( $b= .075, z= 2.51, p<.02, OR= 1.08$ ). The combined sum variable for political ideology indicated that levels of more liberal political ideology were associated with higher levels of support for UBI while reported levels of more conservative political ideology were associated with higher levels of opposition to a the proposed UBI ( $b= -.037, z= -5.62, p< .001, OR= .96$ ). The combined sum variable of views on government response to COVID-19 was also associated with levels of support for or opposition to a proposed UBI ( $b= .029, z= -6.17, p< .001, OR=1.03$ ). Variables in the analysis that did not have a statistically significant association with UBI favorability included race of respondent, education level of respondent, and religion of respondent.

## **Limitations**

As with Study 1, a noteworthy limitation of this analysis concerns the unusually high rate of missing data on the outcome variable of UBI favorability despite relatively low skip rates on the overwhelming majority of survey items in Wave 71 of Pew's ATP survey, 50.4 % of all respondents skipped the only survey item about universal basic income. In other words, 5,542 of the 11,001 survey respondents, for whatever reason, chose to not answer the survey item that asked about a proposed UBI. This study recommended best practices of full information maximum likelihood (FIML) for handling missing data, similar to how missing data was treated in Study 1 (Chapter 2). As similarly noted in Study 1's discussion of limitations, future research could further investigate why a survey item about a proposed UBI would have such an uncharacteristically low response rate from a sample of respondents who regularly complete Pew Research Center surveys on a wide range of topics and experiences.

As with the statistical model in the analysis of Study 1, the model used in this analysis of Wave 71 of American Trend Panel survey data also found the combined sum variable of COVID-19 survey items to be a statistically significant predictor of UBI favorability. However, while the COVID-19 variable was created as a sum of highly correlated survey items that asked respondents about different views on government responses to the pandemic, and was collected at a particular point in time (Summer 2020) with potentially important implications about several factors of the US experience of the pandemic, this variable is not a precise measure of any specific aspect of the

multitude of views US respondents might hold about the pandemic and response to the pandemic. As was noted about the variable's inclusion in Study 1, it can be inferred that the combined COVID-19 variable in this study has something to do with American views and experiences of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, but it is unclear which specific aspects and factors of views on COVID 19 that this combined variable does and does not measure. Although the COVID-19 combined sum variable had a statistically significant association with UBI favorability in this analysis, the extent of inferences that can be drawn from this association are limited.

### ***Effect Size***

The effect sizes for the statistical model in this analysis were relatively small. This study reported odds ratios, as this is the most widely used convention for reporting indices of effect size in statistical analyses like the ordinal logistic regression analysis conducted in this study, and the effect sizes for the statistical model in this study can be interpreted as relatively small (Chen et al., 2010). The smaller effects sizes, to some extent, limits what inferences can be made about how meaningful the relationships are between those variables with observed associations.

### **Discussion**

The systematic review of literature (Chapter 1) found that, despite a rich history of racial justice proponents averring the potential of UBI to at least partly address issues of the US racial wealth gap and other issues systemic racism, there was a noted lack of research on possible associations between discursive frames of UBI proposals and systemic racism. This study took a step toward addressing that gap in the literature by



analyzing data from a large, nationally representative US survey sample that asked respondents about both systemic racism against Black Americans and about support for a proposed UBI discursively framed in a way that the literature indicates effectively overcomes (often racially prejudiced) assumptions of deservedness. This analysis found that there is a statistically significant association between ordinal variables related to those concepts, which may perhaps be indicative of a more broadly important relationship between being able to acknowledge systemic racism in the US and supporting a federally administered UBI unconditionally and universally received by all adult citizens. This finding, as well as its inverse that Americans who do not acknowledge systemic racism are more likely to oppose a proposed UBI, hold important implications for future researchers and policy advocates interested in UBI interventions in the United States.

Building on the work of Study 1 (Chapter 2), this study's findings may also hold important implications about the observed association between gender inequity and racial inequity, with results indicating that both are predictive of support for UBI. Theoretical scholarship and research literature have pointed toward the potential of UBI to address inequities related to intersectional systems of oppression that perpetuate gender inequity and racial inequity. Finding an observed statistically significant association between views on these issues seems to suggest additional justification for furtherance of policy recommendations highlighting UBI's potential for ameliorating these intersecting systemic inequities.

Further research should continue to investigate to what extent views on racial injustice might influence support or opposition to UBI proposals, as well as which discursive frames of UBI might win support even from Americans who do not acknowledge the persistence of systemic racism that maintains the racial wealth gap. Research that unlocks better understanding of what discursive frames and other factors can affect broader support for UBI could be key to closing the racial wealth gap in the US.

Another aspect of recommended further investigation would be future research that examines how proposals of a government-administered UBI could be framed in ways that are favorable or more palatable to a broad range of Americans, given the challenge created by the nature of how deeply intertwined many Americans' anti-government animus is with racist animosity (Lopez, 2019; Strand & Mirkay, 2022). While the literature indicates that a proposed federally administered UBI anchored in discursive frames of universality and unconditionality is highly supported in several international contexts, there are several challenges to gaining support for a government administered UBI in the United State due to the unique discursive and cultural weight of decades of discourses around financial assistance defined themes of hyper-individualism and anti-government sentiment hued by racial animosity, themes that have been entrenched in the US discourses since the rise of the New Right's neoliberal austerity politics. Recent research from Thomas et al. found that when it comes to discursively framing UBI in a way that might overcome the deeply entrenched negative stereotyping associated with financial assistance in the US, only discursive frames that emphasize a bipartisan value of

“freedom” can effectively garner UBI support from Americans who identify with more conservative political ideology (2021). With that in mind, it stands to reason that future research on UBI favorability would benefit from a nationally representative survey that asks about favorability of a proposed UBI when UBI is explicitly framed with a bipartisan value of freedom that may be more palatable to respondents across a wide political ideology spectrum.

While this study analyzed favorability of UBI proposal framed in way that would ideally overcome American assumptions about perceived deservedness of UBI recipients, it seems that despite UBI’s potential for economic improvement in the lives of all Americans, there are still other obstacles to overcome related to many Americans’ reluctance to acknowledge the material realities of systemic racism. Future research should continue to explore what other relevant factors and discursive framing trends can potentially predict or even sway UBI favorability in a US context while keeping connecting to the positive economic potential of UBI rather than UBI considerations becoming hindered or bogged down by assumptions related to racial animus.

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## CONCLUSION

Universal basic income holds emancipatory potential for women who currently do the majority of the unpaid care work, informal labor, and social reproduction work that props up capitalist economies. Universal basic income also has the transformative and disruptive ability to take strides toward closing the racial wealth gap in the US (Lu, 2020; Oliver & Shapiro, 2019). After decades of discursive dormancy during an era dominated by policies of privatization and austerity hyper-focused on rugged individualism, UBI proposals have emerged at the forefront of economic policy discussion about financially lifting the several millions of Americans currently suffering through what is the country's second deep capitalist recession in the past 13 years. UBI pilot programs and policy debates are emerging across the nation and drawing interest across the political ideology spectrum, and it is urgently important to figure out what discursive frames are most effective at promoting the favorability of UBI.

The first chapter of this dissertation consisted of a systematic review of literature on discourse analyses of UBI proposals. No discourse analysis of UBI discourses in the US has (at the time of this writing) been conducted since the onset of the Great Recession (Steensland, 2008). Reviewing analyses primarily conducted in European or Australian contexts, the review found some common themes and effective discursive frames for improving the favorability of UBI proposals. Among other favorable frames, such as those that emphasize a UBI as a collective right of citizenship, discursive frames that emphasized unconditional and universal aspects of a proposed UBI were notably more likely to increase favorability. The systematic review also found that, despite

established scholarship on the potential of UBI to address deep seated issues of gender inequity and racial inequity, there was a lack of discourse analysis of UBI proposals that emphasized the potential of a UBI to target these sorts of inequities.

Following up on the findings of the systematic review of literature in Chapter 1, two studies were conducted using ordinal logistic regression analyses. Both studies used survey data from a large, nationally representative sample. This sample was asked about levels of support or opposition to a proposed UBI, framed as universal, unconditional, and federally administered in the US. The first study, Chapter 2, found a statistically significant association between views on gender inequity and UBI favorability where acknowledgement of persistent gender inequity experienced by women correlated with higher levels of support for a proposed UBI. The second study, Chapter 3, found that higher levels of acknowledgement of the existence of white privilege and systemic racism in the US had a statistically significant relationship with higher levels of support for a proposed UBI.

Viewed in the context of previous scholarship that indicates UBI holds emancipatory potential for women and a potentially disruptive and transformative approach to partially addressing the racial wealth gap created and maintained by systemic racism, the findings of this research may hold important implications for social work practice and research. UBI proposals, pilot programs, and demonstrations are gaining unprecedented levels of interest and implementation in the US. The time is ripe for further examining what aspects and discursive frames of UBI lead to higher levels of support and opposition to UBI in a US context. Given the historic trend of discursive

notions of hyper-individualism dominating the past few decades of discourse around the welfare state and financial assistance in the US, there may be an impetus for social work practice and other community organizing work that focuses on frames and notions of UBI that can overcome or compete with the entrenched cultural identity and ideology of individual Americans supposedly being the cause of systemic problems and the solution to systemic problems. Further research is needed to uncover the extent and nuances of Americans' perceptions of hyper-individualism compared to views of potential strengths of a community or broader collective in US society. This could include further investigation of recent mutual aid efforts and community-based responses to the economic shocks experienced leading up to and since the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as other noted trends of communal and collective response to ongoing systemic economic struggle that challenge previous discursive notions about rugged individualism and austerity politics.

Future research would also do well to further investigate why some frames, such as a vague and bipartisan value of "freedom," resonate better with Americans than other frames, such as emphasizing a universal and unconditional right of citizenship, that tend to garner more favorability for UBI in international contexts. Future research could also build upon current understanding of these issues by pursuing mixed-methods analyses that might include qualitative components such as in-depth interviews with Americans on the specific reasons why they support or oppose a proposed UBI. With the vast majority of current and very recent UBI or guaranteed income pilot programs or demonstrations structured by various combinations of philanthropic and grant funding, there is also an



imperative for future research on UBI favorability in the US to disentangle what amount of opposition to a government-administered UBI proposal may be due to government distrust, anti-government sentiments, and other related factors not currently discernable from extant UBI data. Because UBI holds such critically important potential to address some of the most deep seated and systemic issues in the US, further research on discursive frames of UBI and UBI favorability among Americans is essential to addressing inequities that affect millions of Americans.

## VITA

Stacy Elliott received his Bachelor of Social Work degree from Lipscomb University in Nashville, Tennessee. As a Housing and Community Development Fellow with the City of Memphis, Tennessee, and the University of Memphis, he began working with and researching Housing First initiatives. While completing his Master of Social Work degree at the University of Memphis, he worked with veterans, families, and other individuals exiting homelessness by securing permanent supportive housing. As a social worker in Memphis, he worked as a case manager in North Memphis and other communities across the city, at Memphis Area Legal Services and Fair Housing Center, and with multiple Housing First programs. As a social worker in Washington, D.C., he worked for a non-profit organization focused on ending homelessness, and for the D.C. Housing Authority. After years of direct practice in social work, he began his PhD in Social Work at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville. Currently, he works as a graduate research assistant and teaches graduate-level social work courses at the University of Tennessee College of Social Work's Nashville campus. He graduates with his PhD in Social Work in May 2022.