BARRIERS TO SOCIAL CHANGE: NEOLIBERALISM AND

THE JUSTIFICATION OF THE STATUS-QUO AMONG

LOW-INCOME AFRICAN AMERICANS

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ABSTRACT

Neoliberalism has been the dominant political-economic model in the United States since Ronald Reagan's election in 1980 (Harvey, 2005). Few studies have shown how the political-economic model of neoliberalism influences behavior at the individual level (Brown, 2003; Esposito and Finley, 2014; Gershon, 2011; Klein, 2012; Leve, 2011; Martin, 2000). This study uses qualitative methods in order to understand how individuals internalize, rationalize, and explain a hierarchical social order and inequities in society. Further, it seeks to understand the connections between system justification theory and the influence of neoliberalism on individual-level behavior. In-depth interviews of 8 low-income African Americans living in the Kansas City metro area were analyzed in this study. Interview questions assessed how individuals perceive social inequities in society as being systemic or as problems of the individual. The results indicate that individualistic explanations for social problems are often paired with myths, stereotypes, and system justifying ideologies, but these are more likely to be absent in more systemic level responses. Further, respondents tended to mainly blame the individual or themselves for their economic circumstances, expressed individualistic solutions for systemic-level problems, and a form of neoliberal agency was displayed by the respondents.

APPROVAL PAGE

The faculty listed below, appointed by the Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences, have examined a thesis titled "Barriers to Social Change: Neoliberalism and the Justification of the Status-Quo among Low-income African Americans," presented by Kevin R. Douglas, candidate for the Master of Arts degree, and certify that in their opinion it is worthy of acceptance.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The hegemonic discourse of neoliberalism has significantly changed the political,

economic, and cultural landscape of the United States since its introduction in 1980 as the

new dominant political-economic model. This new political-economic model replaced the

previous model of Keynesian economics and embedded liberalism that was used from the

end of World War II up until the 1970s. This new model has focused on budget cuts,

austerity measures, significant tax cuts for the wealthy, the reduction of social expenditures,

and attacks on any forms of collective action that threaten the status quo and capital

accumulation (Harvey, 2005). The result has been increasing rates of income and wealth

inequality, environmental degradation on an astounding level throughout the world,

stagnating wages and salaries for the middle and working class, exorbitant CEO pay,

outsourcing of jobs to foreign countries, the militarization of our police force, and the

concentration of wealth and power into the hands of a small group of elites (Giroux, 2005;

Harvey, 2005). The economic collapse of 2008 should have made the public outraged and

demand a new form of government that works for the public good rather than for private

interests. Why then did so many of us acquiesce rather than take direct action to create a

more just and equitable social order?

The conceptual apparatus of neoliberalism may provide an answer to this question.

Harvey (2005) states, "For any way of thought to become dominant, a conceptual apparatus

has to be advanced that appeals to our institutions and instincts, to our values, and our

desires, as well as to the possibilities inherent in the social world we inhabit. If successful,

this conceptual apparatus becomes so embedded in common sense as to be taken for granted

and not open to question" (p. 5). Neoliberalism can appeal to so many people because of its focus on "dignity" and "freedom, which derives from the philosophy of liberalism (Harvey, 2005). Powerful elites have used this conceptual apparatus to reduce the power of middle and working-class individuals in society and to get them to work against their best interests.

Neoliberalism at the individual level can operate in a manner that compliments or mimics the political-economic model. Neoliberalism focuses on a staunch sense of individualism, self-reliance, viewing social problems as problems of the individual, having a strong desire for competition amongst others, and an entrepreneurial type of agency (Esposito & Finley, 2014; Gershon, 2011). An individual can see himself or herself as if they were a small business that must continually invest in and maintain their current skill set they possess in order to increase their economic capital and achieve upward mobility in society (Gershon, 2011). The acceptance of the worldview of the neoliberal elites creates a "survival of the fittest" mentality amongst individuals, reduces social solidarity in society, and normalizes a highly individualistic culture (Esposito & Finley, 2014). The social order can then present itself to society as if it were a written book, incapable of change, individuals are to be held responsible for the economic misfortunes and the blame shifts inward rather than outward.

On a psychological level, system justification theory (Jost & Banaji, 1994) states that individuals are psychologically motivated to view the social order in a highly favorable light and will tend to bolster, defend, and rationalize the status quo, even though it may be against their best interests. An assumption of system justification theory is that individuals will utilize cognitive and ideological mechanisms in order to justify and rationalize the pre-existing social order. In addition, social inequities and a stratified society may be deemed as

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fair and even necessary in order to ensure the proper functioning of the social system. Most surprisingly, individuals that benefit the least from the status quo, can at times, be the strongest defenders of the current social order (Jost, Pelham, Sheldon, & Sullivan, 2003).

The purpose of this study is to explore the connections between system justification theory and how neoliberalism influences behavior at the individual-level. More specifically, the research will assess how some members of disadvantaged groups internalize, rationalize, and defend a hierarchical social order. In addition, we will look at how individuals use systemic or individualistic-level analyses when asked to convey their thoughts, beliefs, and attitudes about current social problems. Last, we will compare how some disadvantaged individuals can adopt the worldview of neoliberal elites and operate in business-oriented model. The use of in-depth qualitative interviews with eight low-income African Americans living in the Kansas City area will help to answer these questions and the implications from the findings will be discussed. In-depth interviews can best serve the research questions in the study since they can display the worldviews of some of the most economically and socially disadvantaged individuals in society. Further, interviews can illuminate how some disadvantaged individuals use certain belief systems in order to satisfy certain epistemic, existential, and relational needs.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Since neoliberalism is the dominant political-economic model in the United States

and in the world it is crucial for social scientists to critically examine the consequences

associated with neoliberalism. This study will first provide a historical and critical analysis of

systemic-level discrimination towards African American in the United States. I will then

provide an overview of the research on system justification theory and neoliberalism in order

to illuminate previous findings on the two theories. An overview of the pre-existing literature

can provide a better understanding of why some disadvantaged individuals acquiesce, rather

than doing everything in their power to change the status quo.

Background

In the United States, 13.5% of Americans between the age of 18 and 64 live in

poverty (U.S. Census Bureau, 2015). African Americans are twice as likely to be living in

poverty as white Americans with one in four African Americans (26.2%) living in poverty,

compared to one in ten non-Hispanic whites (10.1%) (U.S. Census Bureau, 2015). Low-

income African Americans are more likely to experience a poor education due to

overcrowded schools, dilapidated infrastructure, out-of-date learning materials and

technology, and reduced opportunities for advancement due to their environment (Kozol,

1991; Sernau, 2011). These reduced opportunities along with persistent discrimination in the

workplace, isolation in their communities, reduced family ties and financial support, and an

increased likelihood of working full or part time jobs while in school can lead to lower

graduation rates in universities among low-income African Americans (Sernau, 2011). Many

of these inequities can be traced to historical legacies of institutionalized discrimination against African Americans.

Historically, African Americans have been victims of institutionalized racism, classism, and discrimination (Sernau, 2011). For example, the use of redlining or denying financial services to individuals based off their race or ethnicity by banks and mortgage companies or through the government imposing harsher drug sentences on crack cocaine, typically used more by those in the inner city, than powdered cocaine, which is characteristically used by wealthier individuals. In the contemporary U.S., we also see large differences in the distribution of wealth among racial groups and significantly large gaps in housing equity among African Americans when compared to white Americans (Krivo & Kaufman, 2004). For example, Black men make seventy-five cents to the dollar of a white man, and black women make a paltry 64 cents to the dollar of a white man (U.S. Department of Labor, 2013). Low-income African Americans are also more likely to live in stressful home environments and have a strong distrust in institutions such as the health care system, which can lead to poor health outcomes (Kennedy, Mathis, & Woods 2007; Kennedy, 2009). African Americans also have less access to adequate healthcare and are more likely to be uninsured compared to their white American counterparts (Smedley, Stith, & Nelson, 2002). Low-income African Americans are also more likely to experience an array of negative physical illnesses such as a stroke, diabetes, and cardiovascular disease than non-black populations (Kennedy, 2013).

Incarceration rates in the U.S. have increased drastically in the last 30 years (Enns, 2014). As a result, the U.S. incarcerates a quarter of inmates worldwide (Blumstein, 2007); the majority of those incarcerated are black and poor (Hlavka, Wheelock, & Cossyleon,

2015; Wheelock & Uggen, 2008). One in three African American men possess a felony record (Shannon, Uggen, Thompson, Shnittker, & Massoglia, 2011) and female incarceration rates are increasing at higher rates than men in the last few years, especially among black women (Heimer, Johnson, Long, Rengifo, & Stemen, 2012; Heimer & Kruttschnitt, 2005). This can make it harder for low-income African Americans to find work with a criminal record than their white peers (Pager, 2003). In light of this harrowing situation, I seek to understand what prevents these individuals from taking action to create a more just and equitable social order?

In this study, I ask what motivates people to legitimize aspects of social, political, and economic institutions when they can be disadvantageous for these same people to adopt such views. Further, I seek to explore the consequences of them holding such views. We can clarify this range of issues by synthesizing neoliberalism and system justification theory in order to understand how individuals attribute problems in society to either individual or systemic-level factors.

Neoliberalism

Neoliberalism is in the first instance a theory of political economic practices that proposes that human well-being can best be advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an institutional framework characterized by strong private property rights, free markets, and free trade. (Harvey, 2005: p. 2).

Under a neoliberal framework, the purpose of the state is to create an institutional framework capable of protecting free trade and markets. In doing so, the state must ensure the "quality and integrity of money" while providing key institutions such as the military, legal, police, and defense to safeguard private property rights and to assure that markets will

function in an orderly manner. In areas where markets do not exist, such as in education, water, land, social security, or healthcare, markets must be created. For example, when General Pinochet staged a Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) backed coup against the democratic government of Salvador Allende, he worked with a group of economists named "The Chicago Boys" to restructure the economy. One initiative was to move the timber and fishing industries, which were previously in the public sector, to the unregulated private sector. Under neoliberal theory, the state can intervene in this process if it is deemed necessary or if force is required to complete this objective. The actions of the state are then limited to these actions. The idea is that the state should not interfere with markets since it is does not have the knowledge and expertise to intervene in markets. Interventions from the state could also be tainted or corrupted by "powerful interest groups" that seek to profit from their relationship with the state (Harvey, 2005: p. 2).

Neoliberalism has become the dominant political-economic system in the World since the late 1970s. The political-economic practices of deregulation, privatization, budget cuts, austerity measures, the reduction of state interference in markets, and the dissolution of social services (social welfare initiatives) have become commonplace in both developed and developing countries. In neoliberal theory, free markets and free trade guarantee the freedom of the individual. The theory suggests that the implementation of these practices will result in economic growth and a level playing field whereby any individual can achieve success through hard work and initiative (Harvey, 2005).

This staunch sense of individualism is a hallmark of neoliberalism and is fundamental to the American Dream. As such, many Americans are socialized into this ideology. The conceptual apparatus of neoliberalism focuses on "freedom" and "human dignity" to appeal

to the broadest range of society and to gain legitimacy (Harvey, 2005: p. 20). This conceptual apparatus was developed and strengthened over many years following the Great Depression. Powerful and influential neoliberal thinkers such as the economist Milton Friedman, the philosopher Karl Popper, Ludvig von Mises, and the political philosopher Friedrich von Hayek formed the Mont Pelerin Society in 1947 to promote the ideals of human dignity, freedom, private property, and a competitive market system (Harvey, 2005).

These individuals identified themselves as "liberals" due to the belief in individual freedom and choice. Part of what made "neoliberalism" new was the combining of liberal ideals with the neoclassical economic principle of free markets while retaining Adam Smith's "invisible hand" metaphor from classical economic theory. This metaphor implied that "the hidden hand of the market was the best device for mobilizing even the basest of human instincts such as gluttony, greed, and the desire for wealth and power for the benefit of all" (p. 20). The ideals of "individual freedom", "dignity", and individual rights (such as strong property rights) from enlightenment era thinkers such as John Locke, John Stewart Mill, and the founding fathers in the United States were used to give neoliberalism a sense of legitimacy that would appeal to the public.

The doctrine of neoliberalism was formed in response to Keynesian theory and the system of embedded liberalism after World War II. Keynesian theory and embedded liberalism sought to address the problems associated with the economic collapse in the Great Depression by focusing on the rebuilding of economies, reducing competition and conflict between nations, and finding a good balance between public and private interests. Policy-makers were attracted to Keynesian theory and a system of embedded liberalism after World

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War II and this soon became the dominant political-economic model employed until the 1970s (Harvey, 2005).

The influence of the hegemonic discourse of neoliberalism began to appear in key institutions such as in education, the media, business and finance, centralized banks and treasury departments, and think tanks such as the Institute of Economic Affairs and the Heritage Foundation. International institutions that control global finance and trade such as the World Bank, the World Trade Organization (WTO), and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) also fell under the influence of neoliberalism during this time. In the academic world, Hayek was awarded the Nobel Economic prize in 1974, followed by Friedman in 1976, due to their work on neoliberal theory. The Nobel Economic prize was administered by Swedish banking elites inclined toward a neoliberal-minded reform.

Ronald Reagan, soon after his 1980 presidential election win, reappointed Paul Volcker back to the position of Chair of the Federal Reserve and gave political support to Volcker's monetarist policies. The Reagan administration then began making neoliberal reforms through practices such as deregulation, austerity measures, budget cuts, tax cuts (including reducing the top personal tax rate from 78% to 28%), and attacks on unions. Reagan sent a clear message about his opposition to organized labor through his confrontation with the air traffic controllers union PATCO. Harvey (2005) states that PATCO was "more than an ordinary union: it was a white-collar union which had the characteristic of a skilled professional association" (p. 25). The attack on this white-collar union sent shockwaves to unions across the country, and what resulted over time was a decline in wages, including a 30% drop in the Federal minimum wage by 1990. Henceforth,

wage stagnation held constant while productivity level rates have continued to rise (Harvey, 2005).

Margaret Thatcher began to make neoliberal reforms to Britain's economy after being elected in 1979. Thatcher sought to end social democracy through attacks on key institutions. Similar to Reagan, Thatcher confronted trade unions, worked to disband various forms of collective action that challenged the free market system, promoted entrepreneurial behavior, privatized public services, cut taxes, and fought to reduce the size of the welfare state. Her famous political statement, there is "no such thing as society, only individual men and women" and their families, sent the message that social solidarity was to be replaced with staunch "individualism, private property, personal responsibility, and family values" (Harvey, 2005: p. 23). It was clear that the Thatcher administration wanted individuals to adopt these various ideologies associated with neoliberalism, the same ideologies that were being promulgated to individuals in the United States under Ronald Reagan through political discourse, right wing social movements, and through socialization processes in various institutions (Harvey, 2005; Staggenborg, 2012).

Neoliberalism at the individual level operates under a series of ideologies that parallel or compliment the political-economic model of neoliberalism. The neoliberal individual has a staunch sense of individualism, values competition between others, views problems in society as problems of the individual, and adopts an entrepreneurial type of agency. Gershon (2011) states the neoliberals view themselves "as though they were a business" rather than as property in an economic liberalism perspective (p. 539). There is a sense of ownership over their skills and traits and they must continually invest in themselves while maintaining and developing the assets that they already possess (Gershon, 2011; Leve, 2011; Martin, 2000).

The neoliberal assumes that other individuals adopt a market rationality in order to interpret and strategically act upon the social world. From this perspective, an individual views all relationships as possible business alliances or partnerships that can help the neoliberal individual improve upon themselves and become more marketable. Therefore, the neoliberal individual seeks relationships that are "mutually satisfying" based on a shared sense of goals, responsibilities, traits, and interests with other agents while minimizing any risks. The individual works with these alliances to "distributes responsibility and risk so that each can maintain their own autonomy as market actors" (Gershon, 2011: p. 540).

Neoliberals continually seek to improve their skill sets in order to increase their efficiency, marketability, and success. Therefore, autonomous individuals with the higher status level of an "expert" are utilized as a form of technology that neoliberals can use in order to learn how to manage themselves more effectively (Gershon, 2011). In consequence, if the individual fails, they can blame themselves for their failures, based on the belief of poor self-management and a deficiency in their skill set or assets. In turn, they would turn to the advice of the expert in order to remedy this problem (Gershon, 2011; Rose, 1996). The neoliberal individual then becomes very self-reliant, highly competitive, and gains a rugged sense of individualism. Ideologies that support this neoliberal worldview and the institutions that disperse these ideologies, through socialization processes, appear to "erode social bonds, encourage hyper-individualism, and normalize a 'survival of the fittest' ethic" (Esposito & Finley, 2014: p. 77; Klein, 2012).

From the neoliberal perspective, government should not interfere in the markets since the individual is seen as an autonomous agent who can successfully balance relationships, risks, and transactions. This creates a perceived sense of freedom, which the neoliberal

individual wishes to spread by encouraging others to adopt this business model mentality (Gershon, 2011). Again, individuals are seen as fully responsible for their own personal failures under this neoliberal model of agency (Brown, 2003; Gershon, 2011). In this study, we will explore how these measures of neoliberal agency manifest in a group of low-income African Americans living in the Kansas City metro area. Specifically, we will be analyzing how these individuals view themselves and behave in a manner that is consistent a small business mentality. Through this analysis, we will shed light on how the neoliberal worldview of elites can be adopted by some individuals and manifest in individualistic behaviors, explanations, and solutions to social problems.

System Justification Theory

It appears irrational that people justify systems that structurally disadvantage them. However, system justification theory (Jost & Banaji, 1994) states that individuals are psychologically motivated to uphold the status quo and to perceive the current social, economic, and political institutions as fair and legitimate, even when they are structured to oppose their interests. Ideological and cognitive-motivational mechanisms steer individuals to do more than just accept the status quo; they sometimes encourage such individuals to actively support, rationalize, and defend societal conditions unfavorable to their own economic interests. The consequences of adopting system-justifying ideologies can differ based on whether an individual is part of an advantaged or disadvantaged group, with the former group experiencing a host of benefits such as increased subjective well-being, in-group favoritism, and higher self-esteem, while the latter group experiences a direct reversal of these consequences. Since these system-justifying ideologies serve a "palliative function" (reducing negative affect and increasing positive affect) we tend to see individuals justifying

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inequalities and displaying unwillingness to take action in order to bring about systemic-level change (Jost & Hunyady, 2005; Rankin, Jost, & Wakslak, 2009).

System justification theory reflects Marx's concept of false consciousness, the idea that powerful elites in society have substantial control over the culture and key institutions in society, and disadvantaged individuals will accept the ideologies of those in power, even though these ideologies serve the interest of the elites and work against the best interests of the working class (Gramsci, 1971; Lukacs, 1971; Marx & Engels, 1846). According to Marx, the "ideas of the ruling class are in every epoch the ruling ideas" (Marx & Engels, 1846; Tucker, 1998: p. 172-173). Ideologies, for the purpose of this work, will be conceptualized as a set of belief systems that individuals use to make sense of and navigate through the social world, by simplifying complex political ideas in order to make things easier to understand, thereby, giving the individual the ability to act upon the social world (Love, 2011). Through this work, we will seek to understand how these system-justifying ideologies are able to persist over time and give people mechanisms that allow them to bolster and defend the social order.

In system justification theory, ideological and cognitive mechanisms may facilitate an individual to make sense of the social world, provide structure and order, and allow the individual to find meaning in their lives. These ideologies seen in Table 1 (see page 21) can allow individuals to navigate through the struggles in their everyday lives, while providing a sense of control and stability. Further, these ideologies can help to reduce the complexity of the social world and work as a "palliative function for its adherents" (p. 312). Of course, the consequences differ based on whether an individual is part of an advantaged or disadvantaged group. (Rankin et. al., 2009).

Recent research has found that system justifying ideologies help to satisfy certain epistemic, existential, and relational motives (Jost & Van de Toorn, 2012). There is a positive correlation between system justification and the following cognitive-motivational antecedents: (1) the need for a stable, orderly, and unambiguous environment for decision-making; (2) the perception that the world is a dangerous place full of crime, threats, and violence; heightened sense of insecurity in regards to threats in environment; (3) a salient anxiety about death/mortality; (4) threats or instability arising from actual events that pose a threat to the social order or from alleged threats to the status quo. There is also an inverse relationship between system justification and openness to new experiences, that is, an orientation that is more flexible and open-minded in regards to changes in the status quo (Jost & Hunyady, 2005). For example, those who "believe the world is just and fair" (BJW) are more likely to legitimate the social system and view it as a fair social system. Individuals adopting a belief in a just world ideology (Lerner, 1977) will seek consistency with this belief that the world is a just and fair place where the externalized moral conduct of an individual is rewarded appropriately. Accordingly, individuals holding such beliefs are more likely to stereotype the competence of individuals (high vs. low competence) to justify social inequality in society in order to maintain the belief that the world is fair and legitimate (Oldmeadow & Fiske, 2007).

In two studies, Oldmeadow and Fiske (2007) found that individuals with higher levels of BJW and Social Dominance Orientation (Sidanius & Pratto, 1999) compared to individuals with relatively low levels of BJW and Social Dominance Orientation (SDO) were more likely to view individuals with a higher status as being more competent than low-status individuals. This shows how these two ideologies can perpetuate and legitimate social

inequality through discriminatory actions such as status-based stereotypes (Oldmeadow & Fiske, 2007).

Cognitive dissonance theory (Festinger, 1957) states that when an individual experiences two conflicting beliefs, attitudes, opinions, or thoughts, this conflict will result in an uncomfortable psychological tension called dissonance. A person will be psychologically motivated to reduce this dissonance in order to alleviate any distress and to seek cognitive consistency (Beauvouis & Joule, 1996; Harmon-Jones & Mills, 1999; Festinger, 1957; Jost et al, 2003). If an individual cannot externally justify a belief they will seek to internally justify it by changing their attitude or behavior (Aronson, 2008). This can be problematic from the standpoint of informed participation in a democracy if an individual believes that the system is fair and just because what can result is the adoption of certain beliefs systems that attribute problems in society to that of the individual and prohibit a critical evaluation of established social institutions (Godfrey & Wolf, 2015).

Research has shown that disadvantaged groups are more likely than privileged groups to attribute social problems to systemic level factors than to individual level factors (Bullock, 1999; Bullock & Limbert, 2003; Bullock & Waugh, 2005; Cozzarelli, Wilkinson, & Taylor, 2001; Feagin, 1975; Godfrey & Wolf, 2015; Hunt, 1996; Kleugel & Smith, 1986; Smith, 1985). Since disadvantaged populations tend to view problems in society as more systemic in nature, compared to their more privileged counterparts, it would seem that disadvantaged groups would be the least likely to hold a system-justifying ideology. This would make sense, since they are not viewing the social order in such a positive light. However, research has found that, namely, the adoption of certain system-justifying ideologies, among sub-groups within larger disadvantaged groups, can be the strongest advocates and defenders of

the status quo (Frank, 2004; Godfrey & Wolfe, 2015; Hochschild, 1981; Jost, 2011; Jost et al., 2003; Jost, Banaji, & Nosek, 2004; Jost & Burgess, 2000; Jost, Pelham, & Carvallo, 2002; Jost & Thompson, 2000; Kluegel & Smith, 1986; Lerner, 1980; McCoy & Major, 2007).

How does an individual reconcile the desire to view a social order in a favorable light with competing evidence that the system is unjust? Godfrey and Wolf (2015) argue that individuals often attribute problems in society to both individual and systemic level factors. They state that the ability to critically evaluate the social order while holding system-justifying beliefs creates psychological discomfort due to "competing psychological processes" (p. 9). Disadvantaged individuals may be more likely to experience this problem since they find themselves conflicted between their self-interests and groups interests (Jost & Van der Toorn, 2012). Further, subgroups within larger disadvantaged groups hold a desire to see themselves and their in-group in a favorable light while also trying to view the social order as just and fair. This would create an immense amount of psychological discomfort (dissonance), which the individual would be motivated to reduce, according to cognitive dissonance theory. System justifying ideologies could then allow a disadvantaged individual to rationalize and justify these inequalities in society (Jost, 2011; Jost et al., 2003).

Why then do some disadvantaged groups tend to bolster and defend the status quo if the existing social system creates barriers for social mobility and limits the available resources needed for economic success? Research on system justification theory has shown that at times those who benefit the least from social arrangements are more likely to resist social change and defend the status quo. Further, it is thought that a significant number of those who suffer the most psychologically from a given set of circumstances will attempt to

reduce dissonance through rationalization processes in order to make sense of their social reality (Jost et al., 2003).

In some situations, ideological and cognitive mechanisms may allow some individuals to rationalize their external environment, and this can have a "palliative function" of reducing such cognitive dissonance (Jost & Hunyady, 2005; Jost, Pelham, et al. 2003;Kluegel & Smith, 1986). Therefore, it can be psychologically advantageous, at least in the short term, to adopt system justifying ideologies since they can provide dissonance reduction and the mitigation of this uncomfortable psychological tension, which has been found to increase positive affect while reducing negative affect for both advantaged and disadvantaged groups (Jost & Hunyady, 2005; Jost & Pelham, et al., 2003; Kluegel & Smith, 1986; Rankin et al., 2009). Unfortunately, the adoption of system justifying ideologies can result in resistance to social change and the belief in the legitimation of authority figures and institutions in society for both advantaged and disadvantaged groups (Jost & Hunyady, 2005).

In addition to the positive benefits of increased positive and decreased negative affect, advantaged groups also experience a greater sense of self-esteem and general subjective well-being, while maintaining the ability to see those in their in-group in a positive manner (Jost, Banaji, & Nosek, 2004; Jost & Hunyady, 2005; Rankin, Jost, Wakslak, & Cheryl, 2009). It appears that more privileged groups have the ability to use certain ideologies and cognitive mechanisms to help make sense of their social reality and justify their position in a stratified system, while alleviating feelings of discontentedness. On the other hand, disadvantaged groups seem to struggle more with the desire to view the social order as just while also trying to maintain a positive image of themselves and those in their

in-group (Jost & Hunyady, 2005; Rankin et al., 2009). This struggle for disadvantaged groups can lead to problems such as lower self-esteem and a decreased sense of subjective well being, decreased levels of in-group favoritism, and increased levels of out-group favoritism (Jost & Hunyady, 2005).

How do ideologies help us to navigate through our social worlds, form connections with others, and create a sense of belonging, structure, and stability? Jost, Ledgerwood, and Hardin (2008) argue that ideologies "may function as 'prepackaged' units of interpretation that are useful for regulating interpersonal relationships and navigating social and political life" (p. 175). Cheung, Noel, and Hardin (2011) found that individuals who feel excluded may adopt system-justifying attitudes in order to have a shared sense of reality with others. They found that this allows individuals to establish meaningful connections with others, which helps to satisfy relational needs.

 In addition, Cheung, Noel, and Hardin (2011) argued that individuals may engage in system justification in a "context of interpersonal relationships, especially ongoing, everyday connections people make within and across group boundaries" (p. 267). In a series of three experiments, they found that people engage in system justification in order to feel a sense of shared reality, even if those interpersonal relationships are superficial, mundane, exclusionary, and involve prejudicial attitudes (Cheung, Noel, & Hardin, 2011). Two studies by Hess and Ledgerwood (2014) found that when individuals feel that they are excluded from a group, they are more likely to adopt a meritocratic ideology in order to increase predictability and manage threats in their environment.

Individuals can also engage in system justification when they are uniformed or unable to comprehend key socio-political issues. For instance, Shepherd and Kay (2012) found that

individuals are more likely to engage in system justification when they are unknowledgeable on socio-political issues (p. 274-275). Specifically, people trust those perceived to have specialized knowledge and expertise on such issues when they do not have knowledge to guide decisions, a strategy that results is ignorance, due to the individual's avoidance of key issues. Individuals lacking knowledge of complex issues such as the environment, the economy, or energy are thus "steered" toward dependence on, and increased trust in, the government, and avoidance of those issues that undermine system justification (Shepherd & Kay, 2012). This research confirms previous studies (Jost, Glaser, et al., 2003; Jost & Hunyady, 2005) that have demonstrated how people rely on ideological fallacies to make sense of their reality, and use such fallacies as a coping mechanism, even when the adoption of such ideological positions may have directly negative consequences for themselves in the long run.

The Present Study

In the following study, I seek to understand the relationship between system justification theory and the influence of neoliberalism upon a sample of African American living below the median household income level. In a series of eight interviews, African Americans living in the Kansas City discussed their thoughts, opinions, and attitudes on critical issues in today's society such as the welfare system, the legal system, the government, education, social inequality, collective action and social movements, and immigration. There is limited qualitative research exploring the connections between system justification theory and individualistic explanations for systemic level problems in society (Cozzarelli et al., 2001; Flanagan & Tucker, 1999; Godfrey & Wolfe, 2015; Neville, Coleman, Falconer, & Holmes, 2005; Stephenson, 2000). Further, there are no studies that

explicitly trace the connections between neoliberalism, system justification theory, and individualistic explanations for complex social problems. This study is important because it can help to show how system-justifying ideologies, myths, and the beliefs that are promulgated by the universal experts manifest in individualistic behaviors that can limit the power of the middle and working class. In addition, it can also inform readers on how individuals can break free from the restraints of individualistic explanations and develop a more critical understanding of issues going on in society, which can help lead to collective action to make positive social change.

TABLE 1

SYSTEM JUSTIFYING IDEOLOGIES AND THEIR DESCRIPTIVE CONTENTS

Ideology	Description
Meritocratic Ideology (Jost, Pelham, et al. 2003)	The belief that success can be achieved through hard work and hard work alone in society; individual assumes there is a level-playing field in regards to opportunities.
Economic System Justification (Jost & Thompson, 2000)	Economic inequality is natural and inevitable in society; consequences of economic inequality are fair and deserved.
Belief in a Just World (Lerner, 1980)	The world is considered a just and fair place where outcomes are a product of deservingness.
Social Dominance Orientation (Jost & Thompson, 2000; Sidanius & Pratto, 1999; Fiske, 2010)	The degree to which an individual accepts the domination of some groups over others in a competitive hierarchy.
Opposition to Equality (Jost & Thompson, 2000; Kluegel & Smith, 1986)	An egalitarian society where social and economic resources are distributed evenly is undesirable and unrealistic; an egalitarian system would have devastating consequences.
Right Wing Authoritarianism (Altemeyer, 1981, 1998; Jost, Glaser, et al., 2003)	Individuals should obey conventional traditions and authority figures and individuals should not rebel against the system.
Political Conservatism (Jost, Glaser, et al., 2003)	Social, political, and economic institutions should be upheld in society; social inequality is a natural result of the social order and is necessary for economic growth.

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CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

Subjects and Procedure

The data in this study was collected through eight in-depth interviews with

economically disadvantaged African Americans living in the Kansas City Metro Area. A

single researcher collected data between August 2015 and April 2016. To be eligible for

participation in the study, the individuals had to be eighteen or older, identify as

Black/African American, have a household income less than $45,000/year, have less

education than a college degree[1], and live in the Kansas City Metro area. The median

household income for individuals living in the Kansas City area is $45,150 (U.S. Census

Bureau, 2015) and participants making less than this amount were considered to be

economically disadvantaged in this study. One participant was permitted to have a bachelor's

degree to make the sample representative of the population. One in ten low-income

individuals have a bachelor's degree by age twenty-five (Bailey & Dynarski, 2011) and

17.7% of African Americans over the age of twenty-five possess a bachelor's degree or

higher (Census, 2012). African Americans were chosen for this study based off the

participant's social network, the participant's responses during the first few interviews, and

to help understand why some members of disadvantaged groups bolster and defend the status

quo (Jost, 2011; Jost, Banaji, & Nosek, 2004; Jost & Hunyady, 2002; Jost et al., 2003). (See

table 2, page 26, for sample characteristics).

Participants were invited to participate in an in-depth interview to voice their

thoughts, opinions, and proposed solutions to some of the most critical social, political, and

economic issues going on in the country. Businesses, churches, and community partners were

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[1] One participant with a Bachelor's degree was used to make a representative sample.

used to help find eligible participants for the study. Snowball recruitment was then used to gather participants. After an interview, the researcher asked the participant if they knew any other individuals who met the study criteria and who might be interested in participating in the study. Most of the time, the participants would then provide a list of contacts to the researcher. Many of the participants found the interview to be an enjoyable experience since it allowed them to express their views on pressing social issues in today's society. The researcher also gained two of the participants in the study by handing out flyers and by talking to individuals that were walking around a local bus stop.

The researcher conducted six out of the eight interviews in the homes of the participants. One interview was conducted at the University of Missouri-Kansas City campus in the researcher's office and one interview was conducted by a nearby shopping center, while sitting on the bed of the researcher's truck. No financial compensation was afforded to the participants in the study. The researcher was only able to offer the incentive of driving to the participant's location for their convenience. The participant that came to the campus was issued a temporary parking pass to the staff parking lot, and the interview was conducted privately in the researcher's office.

The average time of the interviews was approximately 53 minutes in length. Interviews were recorded with a digital recorder, transcribed, and reviewed shortly after the visits. Memos were also used after the interviews to reflect on the visit, assess themes and relationships between categories, and to update the interview guide. The researcher dressed in business casual clothes to make the interview seem informal, relaxed, and to make the interviewee feel comfortable discussing various topics with the researcher. Hennink, Hutter, and Bailey (2011) argue that a researcher must "dress appropriately for the socio-cultural

situation of the research", so that the participant does not feel threatened or offended by the researcher.

To further make the participant feel comfortable talking about sensitive issues such as racism, poverty, and immigration, the researcher first focused on establishing rapport with the interviewee. This involved small talk before the interview, discussing family life and history, and then leisure time activities. This has been shown to create a safe and comfortable environment for the participant, in order to create trust between the researcher and interviewee (Hennink et al., 2011: p. 112-115). Questions were asked in a friendly and colloquial manner to create the feeling of having a natural conversation about social issues. When discussing controversial issues, the researcher would show empathy, understanding, and encourage the participant to further discuss their thoughts and opinions on the subject matter, to make the interviewee feel comfortable talking about contentious issues[2] (Hennink et al., 2011).

After establishing rapport with the interviewee, the researcher asked about the respondent's views on government, political issues, the legal system, the police, taxes, social inequality, opportunities for upward social mobility, social issues, and religion. The social issues discussed in the interview consisted of questions regarding to the welfare system, the minimum wage, and immigration in the United States. The interview guide was constructed by the researcher to measure system-justifying beliefs and to assess how neoliberalism influences their thoughts and behaviors in everyday life. The interview guide questions consisted of a series of open-ended questions with a few questions that were more direct in

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[2] When discussing white privilege, which came up often in the study, the researcher would motivate the individual to express their feelings and to tell their story. After the initial discussion about white privilege, the participants seemed to feel very comfortable in expressing their attitudes, beliefs, and opinions.

nature, such as questions that directly measured system justification[3]. The researcher then probed further on the interviewee's response to these direct questions. The open questions allowed the interviewee to express their true feelings and to tell their story. The researcher then used topical and motivational probes on specific questions to insure that the data was rich and reliable (Hennink, 2011). Small revisions were made to the interview guide after the in-depth interviews to enhance the efficiency of the interview and to build on emerging themes, relationships, and insights seen in the data. After the interviews were transcribed, the researcher searched for themes, categories, and typologies in the data. Deductive and inductive codes found in the data were used to establish a codebook. The codebook is included in Appendix A. After coding was completed, the researcher used memos (Appendix B), coded data, and the literature to describe patterns, themes, and relationships that emerged from within and across the participants in the study. The themes found in the study will be presented below, using quotations from the participants to illustrate the findings in the study. Pseudonyms are used in place of real names.

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[3] See "Interview guide" in Appendix C.

TABLE 2

PARTICIPANT CHARACTERISTICS

Sample Characteristics (n = 8)		
Characteristics	Percentage	n
Race/Ethnicity		
Black/African American	100%	8
Highest level of education		
<High school/GED	12%	1
High school/GED	75%	6
Bachelor's degree	12%	1
Currently employed	87%	7
(Full-time or part-time work)		
Marital Status		
Single	75%	6
Married	12%	1
Widowed	12%	1
Parents/Caregiver's Education*		
<High school/GED	37%	6
High School	31%	5
College degree	6%	1
Unsure/refused to share	25%	4

*All participants discussed the educational attainments of both parents and/or caregivers

Table 2. --Continued

	Mean	SD
Interview time	53.62 minutes	18.03
Household income	$23,400	$12,465.72
Individuals living in home	3	1.09
Age	38	16.25

CHAPTER 4

RESULTS

The Political System

All respondents[4] (eight out of eight) stated that the structural model of the government is fair and acceptable. Half of the respondents (four out of eight) stated that the society is just and fair. Such responses indicating that the social order is legitimate and fair, reflects system-justifying beliefs. All respondents in the sample stated that minor adaptations are needed to make the government more efficient. However, five out of eight respondents stated, verbally or implicitly, that they are highly dissatisfied with the government, especially with government officials, such as the president, congressmen, and representatives. Many of the respondents' statements were concerned with taxation, problems with the educational system, homelessness, deficiencies with the health care system, the welfare system, immigration policies, and the criminal justice system.

Seven of the eight respondents in the study also stated that the government is only looking out for its own best interests and the interests of the rich and powerful. The most common responses by the respondents were that the government does not take low-income African Americans into consideration, the government does not provide enough assistance in terms of welfare, the government is anti-democratic, and the government caters to people with power, especially white individuals with a high socioeconomic status. Ziggy, a 59-year-old widow who works as a mailroom clerk at the local post office argued that the government sought to protect or cater to the interest of some social groups over others. When asked whom they cater to, she responds,

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[4] See Table 3, page 52, for participant pseudonyms and demographics.

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"The main group they cater to is young, white men. And then older, white men. And then…rearing down from there you have white women and Hispanics and Asians and I feel at the bottom are Blacks".

Ziggy's response takes into consideration age, sex, and race/ethnicity in this type of hierarchy but she does not take into account the socioeconomic status of individuals and the socio-historical context of discrimination. Throughout the history of the United States we have seen systemic-level discrimination towards minorities in regards to pay, health care, education, housing, and the judicial system (Kendall, 2013: p. 63-64).

A majority of the respondents (seven out of eight) expressed some form of distrust in the government, stating that their political voices are often not heard by politicians or are ignored, and six out of eight felt as though their vote does not make a difference, though, one of the eight respondents stated that the collective power of political voices matter, but not her individual voice. She says "It depends…I believe that if enough of people stand up [and speak out] then a change will come". Another common theme was that respondents also stated that those with power are the ones that are heard in society. Cherry, a 29-year-old female who works part-time at a convenience store, displays her thoughts when asked about government responsiveness at the state-level,

Researcher- Do you feel like your local representatives will listen to you?

Cherry- Depend on what position I'm in. Like me…no…but [named local politician]…yes. If you get what I'm saying.

Researcher- So they're more likely to listen to him due to his position of power?

Cherry- Right, opposed to me. They don't care what I'm talking about.

Only three out of the eight respondents regularly engaged in discussion with others about social, political, and economic issues outside of this interview. Five out of eight respondents stated that they rarely talk to anybody about social issues, except on occasion, and mostly keep to themselves. For example, Cherry and Daisy describe their views:

Researcher: With whom do you talk to about important things in life? Like different social, political, or economic issues going on in society?

Daisy: God.

Researcher: What about any family members or church members?

Daisy: Not really, I may talk to, every now and then, my best friend but not really.

This may be significant because if Daisy is not engaged in regular discussion with others about current events then she isolates herself and limits her knowledge of socio-political issues to only those in her in-group. This isolation may have contributed to her use of myths, stereotypes, and system justifying ideologies in her later responses. Cherry is similar, when asked with whom she discusses socio-political and economic issues, she responded,

"Well, I guess I could really say nobody unless we is actually sitting in front of the T.V. and we just decide to have a conversation about what's going on or what people are saying. But for the everyday topic or everyday thought it's not."

All respondents also stated that they are not involved in any social groups that meet regularly to discuss or raise awareness to social issues going on in the country, though, two of the respondents said they are active members of their church. These low numbers are surprising, historically, churches have been a source of political and social cohesion in Black communities. For instance, Black churches in the Southern Christian Leadership Conference

(SCLC) were a key voluntary association that provided necessary resources during the Civil Rights movement (McAdams, 1982). This sense of increased isolationism may be indicative of the influence of neoliberalism on American culture.

Seven out of the eight respondents stated that they are registered to vote and have voted in at least one election in the past. Yet, only three out of eight stated that they plan to vote in the 2016 Presidential election. When Daisy, a 45 year old female working part-time as nursing assistant, was asked why she would not vote in the next election she stated that women should not be in positions of power. She explains:

Daisy: I don't think God designed a woman to rule the word or have that type of power. I just don't…I always felt that but you know? Then if you read in the Old Testament you will see where a woman filled the seat of a King for a little bit until another King was chosen. So, that's the only reason why I'm like…well maybe she could fill the seat but with the way the world is but other than that…really I don't know. I just don't know. I don't think a woman should be in a man's position.

Daisy' response displays a variety of system justifying ideologies. She displays political conservatism, social dominance orientation, and right wing authoritarianism. She uses these ideologies to assert that individuals should obey traditions and authority figures (RWA) such as a divine figure or a male with power. She justifies a hierarchical social order (SDO) by stating that a woman should not "be in a man's position", a statement that works directly against her best interests as a woman. Lastly, she implies that traditional institutions and culture should be upheld by stating that men should be in positions of power. In this sense, she views social inequality as a natural result of the social order, which is representative of political conservatism (PC).

Six out of the eight respondents stated that they are not active in the political process other than voting. Two of the respondents stated that they tried to voice their concerns to a representative but felt ignored and this discouraged them from participating in other political activities. This is important since these two individuals were trying to be politically active in their communities but they felt as though there actions were not making a difference, which can reduce the likelihood of future political participation. Sabrina, a 27-year-old married woman with three children, describes an instance in which she tried to assert her political voice:

Researcher: How active are you in regards to political participation other than voting? Do you bring your issues to representatives? Do you attend city council or town hall meetings?

Sabrina: I tried to talk to [local politician] but he just always right and everybody else is wrong. So I cut it short.

Researcher: So, he doesn't listen?

Sabrina: Mmhm (no). No…not at all.

While the participants may not know of the empirical evidence of governmental unresponsiveness shown by Gilens and Page (2014) they certainly pick up on the fact that if you have power than you can be heard in the realm of politics. In this sense, six out of the eight respondents seemed to display a fatalistic ideology, a belief that they are powerless and hold no significant influence in regards to their actions, when describing their own political importance. McAdam (1982) argues that feelings of fatalism, pessimism, and frustration seemed to hinder collective action during the Civil Rights movement towards the end of the 1960s, due to a lack of personal efficacy felt by the participants in the movement (p. 204-

205). A continuation of these feelings may point to why many of the respondents feel powerless in the sphere of politics and do not participate in acts to bring about social change.

The Criminal Justice System

Among the respondents, six out of eight viewed the criminal justice system as deficient. Further, half of the respondents, four out of eight, stated that they had a strong distrust of the police and the legal system. Some of these respondents initially described the police and legal system as "the worst enemy", "a mess", "predatory", "corrupt", "prejudiced", and "racist", especially towards African Americans. Five out of eight respondents often stated that the police and legal system focus more on punishment, or making the state money through fines, rather than focusing on rehabilitation and providing a safe atmosphere in the community. When asked her views on the legal system and of the police, Daisy said,

"It's a mess. Half of them don't need to be policemen and some of them need re-training. Half of them got a complex issue before they even become policemen and they're using their little so called power to get their rockerts off and that's not cool."

Daisy's response shows a high degree of distrust towards the police. She states that half of police officers are unworthy of providing services for the community and abuse their power. Further, she recommends that al least some need to be re-trained, which can indicate that she views some as incompetent. While Daisy's response may be using stereotypes or overgeneralizations, she perceived these problems to be systemic in society. Similarly, when Storm, a 24-year-old single mother living in the inner city was asked if she believed our society was fair and just, she replied,

"No. I believe it to be fair and just until you got to deal with the police and then that's when it gets unfair. They will slap charges on you that you ain't ever did. That you never heard of…they beat you up, throw you in jail. Kill us in jail.

She believed that much of the injustice in the system was racially motivated rather than class-based and went on to say "It's not just the racism thing. It's also people like the police officers who think they got a badge so they can do whatever they want to do the people. [Same with] the judges, you go in there for a traffic ticket and they condemn you on the fact that you ain't got your kids or something". Similar to Daisy's response, Storm believed that individuals in the legal system seem to abuse their power regularly and she perceived these institutions as untrustworthy and deficient. Most discussion of the criminal justice system focused upon corruption or poor intentions. In the excerpt below, we see Ziggy's perspective on the issue:

Researcher: Would you say that the criminal justice system just focuses on… (Interrupts)

Ziggy: Punishment.

Researcher: Punishment rather than rehabilitation?

Ziggy: In a lot of cases…yes. You kill my family member, I'm a Christian. I'm going to forgive you. No, you don't need the death penalty. You need rehabilitation. You go to the court the judge says, "No, he's going to jail for life". Where is the rehabilitation in that? That's a person that might have been a productive part of society but now you locked him up and you're taking my tax dollars to pay for his three hots and a cot.

It appeared that many of the respondents tended to view the police and legal systems as unfair and unjust, especially for African Americans. Further, it seemed that their responses viewed problems such as racial injustice, police brutality, and corruption as systemic-level

problems. Only three of the respondents stated that the police or legal system could be a "positive" force in the community by providing "structure". These participants appeared to hold conflicting views in regards to the legal system. Most of the respondents generally tend to have less confidence in the police and legal system and view the criminal justice system as untrustworthy and discriminatory.

The Welfare System

Half of the respondents, four out of the eight, felt that most people on welfare assistance are abusing the system. These respondents often used stereotypes such as these individuals are "milking the system", "lazy", and "moochers". Five out of the eight respondents also believed the myth that the welfare system makes people dependent on those services. Further, six out of the eight respondents felt that welfare assistance should only be provided to individuals that deserve help and are putting in hard work and initiative, both of which indicate belief in a just world and a meritocratic ideology. When Daisy was asked to share her views on the welfare system she stated,

"Well, it's an iffy thing. Cause when you got the one with five kids over here still milking the system. I really have a problem with [this] cause as much as I hate taxes…my taxes paying for her butt to just lay up there and now she pregnant with a sixth kid. No. Then you got these younger girls that are on their fifth pregnancy at twenty-three that just want welfare and food stamps. I'm not sayin…(stops). They should be given more stronger repercussions. You know? Cause you can't just sit at home…ten years straight and not do nothing, not try to do nothing but lay on your back and have five babies. So, I'm just saying for people that are really going to work…you know and they're trying to make it happen…such as myself (should be rewarded)."

Daisy shows a very individualistic response and utilized the myth of the "Welfare Queen". She seemed to stereotype welfare recipients as "lazy" and engaging in fraudulent behavior in order to receive public assistance. Further, she recommends that there needs to be "stronger repercussions" for those engaging in fraudulent behaviors. Cherry shares a similar perception of welfare recipients in her response,

"Welfare, welfare…they need to stop that! Point blank, period! They need to stop giving these girls welfare. That's the best thing that ever happened to these ladies. That's the best thing that ever happened."

Cherry also believed that many young women are manipulating the welfare system and engaging in fraudulent behaviors. Through the use of stereotypes and myths, respondents tended to view a majority of welfare recipients as lazy, wasting taxpayers' money, and are unproductive citizens. In reality, when looking at the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), we find that the majority of SNAP recipients are working Americans. Over half of SNAP recipients work and over 80% of SNAP recipients were employed either the year before or the year after receiving assistance, with even higher rates for families that had children (Rosenbaum, 2013a). Further, fraud and abuse of SNAP has been reduced by about 75% in the last fifteen years and is among "one of the most rigorous quality control systems of any public health program" (Rosenbaum, 2013b).

These respondents seemed to have a neoliberal interpretation of the welfare system. The respondents viewed the welfare system as deficient and utilized myths and stereotypes in their responses. Further, half of these respondents did not take into account how this new political-economic model of neoliberalism seeks to end the remnants of a welfare state or a social-democratic system. By blaming individuals for their poor economic circumstance and

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viewing the welfare system as deficient, the respondents are making themselves prone to neoliberal manipulation.

The respondents tended to use individualistic explanations to describe the welfare system and seem to derogate those in their in-group with their responses. Daisy also endorses the ideology of a belief in a just world and a meritocratic ideology in her response by stating that individuals deserve to be rewarded for their hard work and initiative. Such beliefs combined with the utilization of system-justifying ideologies inclined respondents to emphasize hard work, initiative, and personal deservingness.

Immigration

Three out of eight of the respondents stated that immigration is a serious problem in society. Further, two of these three individuals stated that both legal and illegal immigration are both a serious problem in the United States. Specifically, the respondents felt as though the immigrants were in competition with them for scarce resources. For example, Daisy argues,

"You got these foreigners coming over here and they virtually get a pass. You know? And, that's not cool. Why can't we have the same pass? Because if we go over to their country…were not getting pass through. In fact, we got it harder…and that's another thing if you want to get me started. I can't stand the fact…I just started…took a job down there at Henley Worths and they have it easy. You go through agencies to get on unless somehow you get on. They call their cousin Lulu and all them and all them is back there and they are more apt to stay than me and some Caucasians. Yeah, I just don't get it. And, they can't even speak English!"

In her response, Daisy believed that immigrants pose a threat to the American myth of meritocracy, due to an unfair allocation of resources to those individuals from the government. Daisy's sentiment was shared by Storm, who believed that immigrants were getting unjust assistance from the government and in doing so threatened American values of individual meritocratic achievement:

"But the legal ones that come here. That's the worst part. They come here and get checks. They get a business loan and green card and American Dream for real. Scholarships for school. They didn't even have to apply for."

Daisy and Storm's individualistic level responses, in regards to legal immigrants, shows a lack of knowledge about the various problems faced by immigrants and refugees in the United States. Immigrants and refugees are often not well equipped to succeed in U.S. schools and have trouble learning the English language. Parents and caregivers often find it very difficult to help their children with homework, which can hinder their children's future academic success. Many immigrants and refugees also feel their lack of proficiency in English works as a barrier to economic success in the U.S., despite their attempts to learn English in English as a Second Language (ESL) programs. As a result, many immigrants and refugees are actually more likely to work long hours in lower paying jobs that offer limited upward mobility (Lake, Snell, Perry & Mermin, 2006).

Four out of eight respondents felt that immigrants pose a threat to American workers. The respondents often used myths and stereotypes of immigrants such as (1) "they took most of our jobs"; (2) they express an unwillingness to learn English; and (3) immigrants are depleting public resources such as Section 8 housing (interviews with Daisy, Storm, Vern,

and Lily). Storm displays a nationalistic response when asked what the United States can do to solve the immigration problem,

"Shut the border down and send them back! I mean they should. It's an American World. It's Americans here. White America. Black America. Native Americans."

Storm believed that the United States should be composed of whites, African Americans, and Native Americans. In addition to her nationalistic response, she also shows a sense of xenophobia. Under neoliberalism, a staunch sense of individualism, high competitiveness with others, and the belief in the American dream can further isolate individuals and due to a sense of fear of the unknown, a form of xenophobia can manifest under these circumstances. Vern, a 63-year-old single stay-at-home grandmother, shared a similar response to Storm,

"Quit bringin' em over here. Lettin' em come over here. I mean…it's alright people wanna travel. I bet you we can't go to their city. I bet you we can't go there."

Vern believed that the United States government should not accept any more immigrants into the country. Instead, she stated that people could just travel to the United States. Vern shows a very neoliberal response since it is very individualistic and void of empathy. Similarly, Daisy shares Vern's sentiments and also does not take into account historical, economic, or political processes that may drive individuals to immigrate to another country; instead she utilizes a simplistic explanation for a complex social problem,

"Stop letting them come over here. Make them get legal. Make them go the proper steps to get legalized. "

Many of the myths and stereotypes towards immigrants that were expressed by the respondents are not grounded in reality. *Myth #1:* Immigrants are taking away all of our good

jobs. *Reality:* Latinos immigrants, especially undocumented immigrants, have significantly benefitted local economies for white Americans, since they tend to work longer hours for lower pay, which increases profits and can prevent job losses for smaller industries (Gonzales, 2011; Portes & Rumbaut, 2006). *Myth #2*: Immigrants are unwilling to learn English. *Reality:* Most Latino immigrants believe it is imperative to learn English in order to achieve success in the U.S. This willingness to learn English manifests in 75% of Hispanics learning how to speak English on a daily basis within fifteen years of coming to the country. Further, for 70% of those immigrants, English becomes their dominant language and they tend to speak only in English (Crawford, 1993: p. 21; Gonzalez, 2011: p. 246). *Myth #3*: Immigrants are depleting public resources in the U.S. *Reality*: Many studies have shown that immigrants actually make large contributions to the U.S. economy through social security and taxes. The main problem is that there are uneven levels of distribution of those contributions between the local and federal governments (Gonzalez, p. 217).

RWA, a tendency to obey traditions and authority figures, was shown by two of the three respondents through derogatory use of the word "foreigners" and their forceful assertions that immigrants need to adhere to the customs and traditions of the United States, which includes learning the English language. Four out of the eight respondents showed a form of xenophobia, making themselves prone to neoliberal manipulation, by seeing immigrants as a potential threat, taking away potential jobs from Americans and draining public services. Thus, the use of stereotypes, legitimizing myths, and system justifying ideologies displayed by the respondents, show individualistic ways of viewing issues in society. Further, the four respondents did not discuss or consider why people immigrate or why undocumented immigrants are risking their lives to cross the southern border and live

illegally in the United States. These four respondents did not take into account factors that influence the immigration of Latinos such as high levels of poverty, income and wealth inequality, the negative consequences of NAFTA, environmental degradation, repressive work environments, and violence from narcotics traffickers in their country (Dear, 2014; Gonzalez, 2011;Kan, 2011).

Collective Action and Social Change

All of the respondents (eight out of eight) offered individual-level suggestions when asked how people can make positive changes in their communities when faced with social issues such as budget cuts in transportation or decreased funding for schools. The respondents stated that individuals could increase their education, talk to people at the transportation department, vote, donate money to a charity, volunteer, focus on "being a productive citizen", or by "paying it forward". Some of these responses seemed to contradict their other responses. Some of the respondents stated that individuals need to talk to their representative or vote, though they previously stated that their vote does not matter and those in power are not hearing their political voices. A possible indication of competing psychological processes, the individual is trying to justify the social order, while also trying to see themselves and those in their in-group in a favorable light. Below, Storm describes her views on how an individual can make a difference in their community:

Storm- A person can make a difference by they own self. By paying it forward. Treating everybody like they want to be treated. Showing respect and caring in themselves with morals and everything would be ok.

Researcher- What do you mean by paying it forward?

Storm- Like when this old lady was at the gas station yesterday and she only had $3 to put in her tank. So, I gave her seven more dollars to make a whole ten-dollar bill. You know what I'm saying? And yeah…just pay it forward. Somebody help you. You help somebody…you know?

Storm displays the system justifying ideology of belief in a just world in her response. She offers an example that constructs her positively as taking this personal initiative to "pay it forward". This rationale reflects and individual-level solution to social problems such as poverty.

Marcus, a 42-year-old single father, and Cherry also offer individual-level explanations for social problems when asked on how a person can make a difference in their community. Cherry displays a staunch sense of individualism and utilizes stereotypes in response when she is asked what people in the community can do if all public transportation was cut in the city,

"Walk. What was you doing before the transportation? That'll get these young kids and these lazy kids out here doing something. Walk. Walk it out. What if they never made a car? We still would've been walking or riding on horses…so walk."

Cherry's individual-level response could have devastating consequences for other forms of austerity measures, reduction of social expenditures, and budget cuts that could be enacted under a neoliberal social order. If public forms of transportation were supplanted with privatized forms of transportation under neoliberalism, individuals may just adapt to the changes and not engage in collective action to restore a more a just and equitable social order. Marcus also displays an overly simplistic and individual-level explanation when asked how a person can make a difference in their community,

"Doing what they suppose to do…just being a productive citizen."

Similar to some of the other respondents, Cherry and Marcus's responses are very individualistic, Cherry uses the stereotype of "lazy" to describe members of her in-group, and does not take into consideration political and economic processes. Budget cuts and austerity measures have been key tenets of neoliberalism (Harvey, 2005). Their responses seem to indicate that social problems should be handled in an individualistic manner rather than through collective action.

Initially, four out of the eight respondents held very negative opinions of rallies, protests, and/or the Black Liver Matter movement as effective forms of social change. However, two of these four individuals later retracted their response and said that peaceful protests were permissible. It appeared that these two individuals showed a heightened degree of anger in their initial responses when asked how they feel about rallies and protests. Although, after venting their frustration, they seemed to adopt a more positive view of peaceful rallies and protests. Therefore, two out of the eight respondents held mixed feelings about collective action, stating that only peaceful protests and rallies were acceptable. Below we see how Daisy and Cherry had mixed feeling towards collective action,

Researcher- Do you think rallies or protests are good ways to make social change?

Daisy- Yes and no. Because it always end up…well I can say with the Ferguson they are people that did protest in a peaceful way. But sometime its not always peaceful because people are so high strung in they emotions that it winds up being another way.

Researcher- So, when there is violence in there it can be very negative?

Daisy- Yes. Innocent people are being hurt. Sometimes.

Daisy's seemed to be hesitant about collective action in her response. She states how easily various forms of insurgency can lead to violence where "innocent people" can get hurt. This belief could steer individuals away from participating in a social movement such as Black Lives Matter. Below, Cherry displays a highly negative view of protest and rallies but changes her initial response after reflecting on the question,

Researcher- Do you think rallies and protests are good ways to make social change?

Cherry- No, that is the most horrible thing that you can do. This is so horrible and stupid, That's the most dumbest, stupidest thing I ever thought of in my life.

Researcher- Rallies and protests?

Cherry- That is so stupid. Well, let me take it back. It depends, that Ferguson…that was ridiculous. That was the most dumbest thing they could have ever done. Now if you just doing your little boycott or whatever or like peaceful…yes. Peaceful! Peaceful. Let's do something peaceful. Then that's fine. Nobody's touching nobody, nobody's going to jail, nobody's doing nothing. That Ferguson was the dumbest thing.

Cherry's initial response held a highly negative view of protests and rallies. She later alters her opinion on the matter and stated that peaceful forms of insurgency are more acceptable. This belief in peaceful forms of collective action was shared by many of the respondents in this study.

Alternatively, two out of eight respondents stated that under no circumstances should people engage in collective action, a response indicative of right wing authoritarianism. These two respondents stated that individuals should voice their concerns to politicians or let the state handle problems in society. Sabrina and Storm both believed rallies and protests

were ineffective. When asked if she thought rallies and protests are good ways to make social change, she responded,

"No. That just causes a bunch of confusion, violence, and all that." Storm was similar in arguing that, "Rallies and protests is just ways to get another group riled up with a different opinion, which starts commotion."

Storm and Sabrina's responses imply that people should just remain obedient and conform to traditional roles and status quo behaviors. Further, they assert that people should just take their issues to their representatives rather than engage in collective action processes. This later assertion, moreover, is contradictory, since both of these respondents previously stated that their voices cannot be heard in politics on the local, state, or federal level.

In contrast, three out of the eight respondents believed that rallies and protests are necessary for social change, disagreeing with the statement "should people just obey the law and stop making trouble" and stating that collective action is a necessary to reform unjust laws. In her statement below, Ziggy supports rallies and protests and describes why these forms of collective action are necessary for social change,

Researcher- What do you think makes those so efficacious or why do you believe those are good ways to make social change?

Ziggy- When they are organized…they get attention. When you get attention, you become the squeaky wheel that needs the oil.

Ziggy describes how tactics such as rallies and protests can shed light on problematic issues in society. Similar to the other two respondents, who displayed mixed feeling in regards to collective action, she states that protests should be peaceful. Ziggy states, "I'm not

in favor of the wild trashing, breaking windows, turning over cars". Therefore, amongst all the respondents, violent forms of insurgency were viewed in a highly negative light.

Wages

Initiatives such as the "Fight for $15 Movement" and the desire for a higher minimum wage have been "hot-button" topics in recent years. Questions were used to understand how some economically disadvantaged individuals view significant wage increases and why they hold such views. Among the respondents, seven out of eight believed that the minimum wage should be raised. At the same time, seven out of the eight respondents believed that a fifteen-dollar per hour minimum wage is too high and almost all of the respondents seemed to agree that a ten-dollar per hour minimum wage would be a fair minimum wage. The respondents seemed to agree that a low minimum wage works as an incentive and is necessary in order to motivate individuals to find a better job or to further their education. Daisy describes why she disagrees with the fifteen dollars per hour minimum wage:

Researcher- What is your position on raising the minimum wage?

Daisy- I think they should…well as far as McDonalds…it depends on what level you at…at McDonalds. I don't think that you just now getting out of school and you just started McDonalds…that they should start them at $15/hr. That's B.S. I think you work your way up for that…

Daisy, along with many of the other respondents, used the ideologies of a belief in a just world (the idea that outcomes are a result of deservingness) and a meritocratic ideology in their responses. Similarly, four of these respondents used the stereotype of a minimum wage earner as a young teenager who just graduated high school and is working at a fast food restaurant. In reality, about 89% of minimum wage earners are over the age of twenty and

56% of those earners are women (U.S. Department of Labor, 2016). A living wage for a household in Jackson County, Missouri with one working adult and one child would need to be $20.78, according to the living wage calculator at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT, 2016). For a single earner, the minimum wage would have to be at least $11 per hour in order to match the buying power of the minimum wage in the 1960s (U.S. Department of Labor, 2016).

Five of these respondents explicitly stated that a high minimum wage would have devastating consequences on society. These respondents seemed to believe that a hike in the minimum wage to $15/hour would result in joblessness, children quitting school and not pursuing higher education, and this would cause a lack of prestigious jobs in society. Storm and Marcus describe why a higher minimum wage of $15 per hour would have devastating consequences. When asked what her position is on raising the minimum wage to $15/hour, Storm replies,

"No, because they gave that $15 to a couple of places and everybody trying to get on the Taco Bell and stuff. Where's our doctors at? Where's our lawyers at? Where's our case workers at? Where's our firemen? Ya know? No. They gonna give $15 to Taco Bell and we ain't gonna have a god damn doctor in sight!"

Storm believed that a $15/hour minimum wage would lead to social instability and a lack of prestigious jobs. Similarly, Marcus believes that a $15/hour minimum wage would have devastating consequences and his response implies that low wages are necessary in order to motivate individuals to obtain a higher education,

"Then the schools will really be closing then. Cause you know kids will be making $15/hr and they gonna say the hell with school. You know…they gonna say the hell with school with the [the way the] minimum wage is now."

Marcus and Storm believe in the myth that a higher wage would results in joblessness and social instability. The other respondents who believed that a higher minimum wage would be a danger to society also accepted this belief. In fact, many studies from economists in the United States have shown that minimum wage increases have no significant, negative effect on newly hired or unskilled workers. In addition, higher wages can be seen as a good investment since they can significantly reduce turnover rates and cut costs on training employees (U.S. Department of Labor, 2016). Through the acceptance of these legitimizing beliefs, however, we see a strong opposition to a higher minimum wage. This reluctance to accept a higher minimum wage that a significant minority of Americans and scholars believe can help low-income minorities and women, while improving local economies, works directly against their own interests.

Social Mobility

All of the respondents believed that an individual's success or failure in life is mostly dependent on the individual. Five out of eight of the respondents stated that there are no barriers to economic success, thereby, attributing economic success or failure to deficiencies of the individual such as a lack of effort, laziness, or a poor work ethic. Below, Marcus describes why he believes the future is mostly dependent upon the individual:

Marcus- Ok. If he want the prison life…he'll go the other way. If he want to be out here and live in society and be happy then you get the job and (he) do what he has to do to stay free.

Researcher- So, if you want a life of crime than that's something you choose, but if you want

to be rich or successful, or at least content, than that's something that you can do through

your own initiative?

Marcus- Yes. Right.

By stating that a person's success or failure in life is dependent on the individual,

Marcus adopts a meritocratic ideology and blames the individual (Ryan, 1976) for her or his

poor economic or social circumstances. Further, through viewing economic inequality

through such lenses mitigates competing psychological tensions and can result in dissonance

reduction. Sabrina provides another example of how a respondent attributes economic

success or misfortunes in an individualistic manner:

Researcher- How do you think an individual can work his or her way up the social ladder in

America?

Sabrina- I mean you gotta start from the bottom and climb up to the top. I mean if you want

to do it then you gonna do it. You don't wanna do it…you not going to do it. Hard work pay

off for real.

Sabrina's response displays a meritocratic ideology and a belief in the "rags to riches"

myth. She attributes economic success to be solely dependent on the work ethic and

determination of the individual and does not take into account other systemic level factors

that can influence a person's economic success such as their socioeconomic status or their

exposure to poverty. Recent research has shown that the neighborhood where children grow

up is significantly likely to reflect the neighborhood that the adult will live in later in life,

especially for ethnic minorities (Van Ham, Hedman, Manley, Coulter, & Osth, 2014). Many

of the respondents used these mobility myths in their responses to blame individuals for their

own economic outcomes. The utilization of these legitimizing myths works to bolster and defend a hierarchical social order while perpetuating social inequities in society.

Alternatively, the other half of the respondents, four out of eight, cited various barriers to upward mobility such as race, connections or social networks, education, socioeconomic status, and civic engagement. The low levels of systemic level analyses among the participants as a whole was striking due to the fact that the sample consisted of low-income African Americans living in urban areas. In contrast, the ability to take into account systemic level factors such as race, education, and socioeconomic status shows the development of a deeper understanding of why social inequities persist in society. Storm discusses below why there are certain barriers to success in society:

Researcher- How do you think an individual can work his or her way up that social ladder?

Storm- Education is the key. School. That's how you work your way up the social ladder.

Education is the central component of the neoliberal American dream and Storm endorses the myth of meritocracy in her response through the belief that everyone has "equal opportunity" because of education. She also does not take into account the inequities in the education system in the United States. However, Storm states later in interview that money and a strong social network were necessary for economic success in society. Storm's response takes into account how upward mobility can be hindered by various social and economic circumstances, rather than be obtainable simply through hard work and initiative alone. However, it still seems that Storm is not taking into account other political, economic, cultural, and historical processes that can influence a person's success in society. Therefore, she does not appear to have a full understanding of why some of these social inequities still

persist in society. Ziggy's response below shows the most systemic level analysis of social inequities in society of all the respondents interviewed.

Researcher- What do you think gets in the way of people's ambitions or achieving their goals?

Ziggy- So many things…education, money, environment, moral support or lack of…

Researcher- Could you elaborate on the environment and moral support?

Ziggy- You come from a very…you come from the ghetto. You grew up in the projects. You get lost in the cycle. As a child you have a goal. When you get older you're in the cycle…it's not there. You get thrown in the system because of your parents or lack of parents. It's hard to break out of this system and at the age of 18 when they say "bye bye"…you may not have anything and you end up with nothing. Some people, God bless them, are able to overcome it…but I've seen a lot people who just fall.

Ziggy also discusses the importance of "family, teachers, coaches, preachers, pastors…the village that you have or don't have…" later in the interview. Ziggy's response takes into account various processes that allow individuals to succeed or fail in society. Similar to other respondents who sometimes departed from their dominant individualistic assumptions by occasionally shifting towards systemic level analyses in their responses, Ziggy, at this point, does not blame the individual for their failures due to individualistic level factors such as lack of motivation, values, or a poor work ethic.

All of the respondents seemed to value competition between others and deemed this as a force that can help individuals achieve upward mobility. Although, one respondent stated that competition is useless if there is no chance of upward mobility. Competition amongst others over resources, the belief in "equal opportunity" for all, and social mobility

myths are central to the American Dream and neoliberalism. This creates a highly competitive environment that can help individuals justify social inequities in society. Vern states why she believes competition between others is an important value:

Researcher- Do you think that competition make people work harder or that it's a good thing?

Vern- Well, competition is a good thing. That make you work harder now don't it? To the best you can…if you work hard and do what you suppose to then they ain't got no business going outside the job…getting somebody that gotta come in there and take a position that you working, studying, and trying to get to…

In this mindset, competition can improve productivity and increase the likelihood of advancing to a higher paying or more prestigious position. In addition, the individual's outcomes will be rewarded (BJW) through hard work and initiative (MI). By accepting a highly competitive work environment for the sake of upward mobility, the individual also accepts a structured hierarchical society, and views him or herself as though they were a competitive small business in the marketplace.

Overall, many respondents offered individual-level solutions to social problems, utilizing overly simplistic explanations, stereotypes, the use of myths, and/or system justifying ideologies. Those who used systemic level analyses were less likely to utilize such stereotypes, myths, and system justifying ideologies. Respondents with the ability to take into account various social, economic, historical, political, and cultural processes seemed more likely to understand, at least intermittently, that many of the social problems in society are systemic rather than just problems of the individual.

TABLE 3

PARTICIPANT PSEUDONYMS AND DEMOGRAPHICS

Participant #	Pseudonym	Gender	Age	Marital Status	Location
1	Cherry	Female	29	Single	Kansas City
2	Storm	Female	24	Single	Kansas City
3	Sabrina	Female	27	Married	Kansas City
4	Daisy	Female	45	Married	Kansas City
5	Vern	Female	63	Single	Kansas City
6	Ziggy	Female	59	Widow	Kansas City
7	Marcus	Male	42	Single	Kansas City
8	Lily	Female	20	Single	Kansas City

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to develop a better understanding of the relationship between system justification theory and the influence of neoliberalism at the individual level, specifically in regards to low-income racial/ethnic minorities' understandings of social problems in society. It is critical to understand how some of the most disadvantaged individuals in society can interpret, internalize, and rationalize a social order that systemically disadvantages certain groups. The findings in this study can help to inform public policy and develop a better understanding of why some disadvantaged individuals tend to acquiesce, rather than take action to create a more just and equitable social order.

In this study, I found that many respondents viewed institutions in society in a highly unfavorable light, which compliments other studies that show how low-income African Americans tend to have a strong distrust of institutions in society (Kennedy, 2009; Kennedy, Mathis, & Woods 2007). However, most of the explanations for economic success or failure in life were individualistic in nature, blaming individuals for bringing about their unfortunate circumstances, by inadequacies or shortcomings. These findings challenge previous research that posits that disadvantaged individuals are more likely to attribute social problems to systemic level factors rather than to individualistic level factors (Bullock, 1999; Bullock & Limbert, 2003; Bullock & Waugh, 2005; Cozzarelli, Wilkinson, & Taylor, 2001; Feagin, 1975; Hunt, 1996; Kleugel & Smith, 1986; Smith, 1985). All of the respondents in the study stated that an individual's success is largely dependent upon the individual. This is a striking finding since it would seem that low-income African Americans would recognize through their life experiences how economic success or failure is largely due to systemic level factors

(Kozol, 1991; Sernau, 2011). However, many of the respondents in the study utilized systemic level analyses when discussing political corruption, cuts to the welfare system, problems in the health care system, and racism in the legal system, but systemic-level analyses were often paired with individualistic explanations for social problems. Further, half of the respondents in the study explicitly stated that our current social system is just and fair, while others utilized legitimizing myths, stereotypes and ideologies that work to preserve the status quo. Indeed, through the utilization of system justifying ideologies, these respondents were supporting and defending the status quo on an unconscious level. Such dispositions can be seen through the adoption of ideological and cognitive mechanisms that justify economic inequality and view it as a natural part of the social order.

Therefore, we can see how some of the most disadvantaged members of society internalize and rationalize a highly stratified social order. However, I think it would be a mistake to just state that the ideas of the elites just permeate through the cracks of our institutions and culture in a strictly top-down fashion and insert themselves into the minds of individuals in society. Individuals may employ these system-justifying ideologies in their daily lives in order to satisfy epistemic, existential, and relational needs. At the same time they may be met with disapproval from others in society or find that they are not necessarily true through learned life experience or through acts of deviancy. Future research could explore how participants in an interview could continue to bolster and defend the social order and utilize these system justifying ideologies even after being shown empirical evidence that dispel certain stereotypes, myths, and ideologies.

A key finding in this study was how individualistic level responses were almost always paired with overly simplistic analyses, stereotypes, myths, and system justifying

ideologies. This can show how the adoption of these system-justifying ideologies can serve as a palliative function for individuals since they can simplify and rationalize a complex social world (Jost & Hunyady, 2005; Jost, Pelham, et al.,2003; Kleugel & Smith, 1986; Rankin, 2009). Dissonance reduction and cognitive consistency can then be attained, which can provide the individual with a sense of order and structure in their lives (Beauvouis & Joule, 1996; Festinger, 1957; Harmon-Jones & Mills, 1999; Jost et al. 2003). Alternatively, we saw that systemic level analyses, which were conceptualized as being able to take into account various social, political, cultural, economic, and historical processes, were far less likely to be accompanied by legitimizing myths, system justifying ideologies, and stereotypes. This can show how the ability to think critically about social problems can lead to a better understanding of the social world and may lead to individuals taking action to create a more just and equitable social order (Freire, 1970, 1973; Wolf & Godfrey; 2015).

However, I would argue it takes more than just an ability to think critically about the social world to inspire an individual to take action to redress social inequities in society. According to the political process model in social movement research (McAdams, 1982), there must be public support for systemic level changes, mobilizing structures to provide resources for the movement, and political allies that can aid in the movement. In addition, an individual must feel as though their actions will have a direct impact and are worth the sacrifice. This does not seem to be the case among the participants. Most of the respondents stated that they did not talk regularly about social, political, and economic issues with other people. Most of the respondents also were not a part of any social groups or organizations that could be used as a network to attempt to create social change. Many of the respondents also felt that the consequences of their political actions were useless and felt that their

political voices could not be heard in society. In addition, half of the participants held a highly negative view of collective action initiatives in their initial responses, while two respondents stated that people should never challenge the social order and should just remain obedient. A resistance to social change among disadvantaged and advantaged groups has been associated with system justification theory (Jost & Hunyady, 2005). Conversely, it is worth noting that most of the participants stated that "peaceful" protests and forms of collective action were permissible. The findings in this study, lend support to findings from previous studies in the literature, that show how sub-groups within larger disadvantaged groups, can be the strongest advocates and defenders of the status quo, through the adoption of these system justifying ideologies (Frank, 2004; Godfrey & Wolfe, 2015; Hochschild, 1981; Jost, 2011; Jost et al., 2003; Jost, Banaji, & Nosek, 2004; Jost & Burgess, 2000; Jost, Pelham, & Carvallo, 2002; Jost & Thompson, 2000; Kluegel & Smith, 1986; Lerner, 1980; McCoy & Major, 2007).

We find evidence to support the claim that individuals can operate under the same series of ideologies that are analogous to or compliment the political-economic model of neoliberalism. The respondents expressed a staunch sense of individualism, valued competition between others in their environment, viewed problems in society as mainly problems of the individual, and to a lesser extent, adopted an entrepreneurial type of agency (Gershon, 2011). We mainly see a staunch sense of individualism in the solutions to improve society proposed by the respondents, through their views on upward mobility and the internalization of mobility myths, as well as individualistic level responses to social inequities. All of the respondents also felt that a sense of competition between others is vital to upward mobility and economic success.

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Limited evidence was found to support an entrepreneurial type of agency among the respondents. A few respondents stated that individuals should work hard, form connections or alliances with others, and pursue higher education in order to achieve economic success. It appears that for disadvantaged groups, a lack of alliances or partnerships can increase feelings of exclusion or powerlessness, which can foster system justification (Cheung, Noel, & Hardin, 2011; Hess & Ledgerwood, 2014; Van der Toorn, Feinberg, Jost, Kay, Tyler, Willer, & Wilmuth, 2015). Additionally, it seems that there is a lack of expertise and technics for disadvantaged groups to utilize as form of technology in order to improve their self-management (Gershon, 2011). I would argue that if disadvantaged individuals do not have access to such expertise and technology, this could also lead individuals to engage in system justification.

Over half of the respondents argued that barriers to success do not exist, a position that conveys the neoliberal belief that individuals are responsible for their own successes and failures (Gershon, 2011; Brown, 2003). Therefore, it can be an attractive worldview since it does not have to worry about "social problems" because they do not exist in the mind of a neoliberal. Alternatively, awareness of social problems may exist in some variants of neoliberalism, but such awareness does not entail obligations to work for the public good. Indeed, neoliberalism tends to display a lack of empathy and disregard towards individuals that are not in their in-group (i.e. low income individuals or those with a low status) while favoring those in the out-group, that is, individuals regarded as "successful" and thus having a higher status, which can be seen in research on competence based (high vs. low) stereotypes (Oldmeadow & Fiske, 2007).

The findings in this study further our knowledge on how the conceptual apparatus of neoliberalism can influence behavior at the individual level. In particular, as system justifying ideologies work to preserve the status quo, they are a powerful worldview used by the elites to sustain neoliberalism as the dominant political economic model. Through the embedding of these beliefs systems into our culture and institutions, individuals can internalize ideas that can actually work against their best interests. Elites can then create and maintain a strong base of advocates and defenders of the current political economic model, who operate on a conscious or unconscious level to preserve the status quo.

While the findings in this study can contribute to pre-existing literature on system justification and neoliberal theory, limitations of the study must be taken into account. First, the small sample size (n=8) needs to be corroborated by further research. Second, the questions in the study were a mix of direct and open questions in concern to social issues in society that indirectly measured attitudes, beliefs, rationalizations, and explanations for social inequities in contemporary American society. It is hard to say if the respondents were stating their "actual" beliefs or if they were giving "socially desirable" or non-confrontational responses to the questions. The race of the researcher (white) may have caused some of the African American respondents to feel uncomfortable expressing their "true" feelings about certain issues such as "white privilege" in the United States. Nevertheless, it seemed that most of the respondents held steadfast and confident in their responses when probed further on their answers to most of the questions. Thirdly, most of the participants in the study were women and in the system justification literature, women tend to score lower than men on measures of system justification (Jost & Kay, 2005). Lastly, this was an exploratory study

that sought to better understand the connections between system justification and the influence of neoliberalism on behavior at the individual level.

Despite the limitations, the findings in this study can provide key insights into how belief systems promulgated by "experts" or elites can be internalized by individuals in society and be used to guide individuals in their daily lives. In addition, this study shows how people may rationalize and explain a hierarchical social order and the social inequities that accompany a stratified system. The findings in this study replicate many of the previous studies done on system justification and neoliberal theory at the individual level, while also making a contribution to the literature that shows how the two theories can be used to guide future research on the subject matter.

APPENDIX A

CODE BOOK

Code	Description
Meritocratic Ideology (MI)	The belief that success can be achieved through hard work and hard work alone in society; individual assumes there is a level-playing field in regards to opportunities.
Economic System Justification (ESJ)	Economic inequality is natural and inevitable in society; consequences of economic inequality are fair and deserved.
Belief in a Just World (BJW)	The world is considered a just and fair place where outcomes are a product of deservingness.
Social Dominance Orientation (SDO)	The degree to which an individual accepts the domination of some groups over others in a competitive hierarchy.
Opposition to Equality (OE)	An egalitarian society where social and economic resources are distributed evenly is undesirable and unrealistic; an egalitarian system would have devastating consequences.
Right Wing Authoritarianism (RWA)	Individuals should obey conventional traditions and authority figures and individuals should not rebel against the system.
Political Conservatism (PC)	Social, political, and economic institutions should be upheld in society; social inequality is a natural result of the social order and is necessary for economic growth.
In-group (IG)	Statement made about members of their in-group
Out-group (OG)	Statement made about members of their out-group
Fatalistic Ideology (FI)	A belief that the respondent feels powerless and holds no significant influence in regards to their actions, when describing their own political importance
Job Dissatisfaction	Respondent discusses how they are

(JD)	dissatisfied with their work environment, pay/salary, hours they receive at their job
Consumerism (C)	Respondent states that in order to have a good time or feel better about yourself you must consume some sort of commodity
Individualistic response (IR)	Individualistic-level response to a systemic problem; overly simplistic explanations, stereotypes, the use of myths, and/or system justifying ideologies
Systemic Response (SR)	Systemic-level response to a systemic problem; ability to take into consideration social, political, cultural, historical, and/or economic processes in response to an issue
Myths (M)	Use of myths by respondent (i.e. legitimizing myths, social mobility myths…etc.)
Xenophobia (X)	Respondent displays an attitude, behavior, or prejudices that exclude and denigrate members of out-group (i.e. outsiders, "foreigners"…etc.); nationalist response
Desire for Competition (DC)	Desire for competition with other individuals in their environment; belief that competition with others will increase motivation and lead to economic success
Forms of Capital (CC) or (SC)	Respondent states the importance of cultural capital and/or social capital in some form (cultural know-how or "who you know"

MEMOS

8/28/2015- Late note- I conducted my first and second interviews on 8/26 and then completed a third interview today on 8/28. The first interviewee was excited to participate in the interview and when the interview was over she told her friend to participate in the study (who walked in towards the end of the interview and sat quietly on the couch). She stated- not exact words- that YOU people need to know how we feel about these issues- these issues being social, economic, and political issues. I believe the first participant thought I was in the government or doing work for the government even when I told her I was just a student at UMKC (hence the YOU people comment). Nonetheless, the second participant qualified for the study and she seemed to enjoy talking about these issues in society. All three respondents showed dissatisfaction with the government and especially the legal system and even further the police. 2 of the 3 respondents (possibly all 3…have to double check) feel the police are predatory and the people in power…in the legal field (judges, correction officers) are on some sort of power trip. It would be highly beneficial to add questions about the legal system to my interview guide since my original guide did not ask questions about the legal system or their thoughts on policing in America. I believe at least two of the respondents talked about Ferguson and all three viewed protests and rallies as terrible things…they stated peaceful protests were "ok" but their body language stated that they weren't that approving of peaceful protests either that or their just not efficacious. The data will need to be reviewed but it sounds like RWA where they believe people should just be obedient and conform to authority. All three respondents' responses were filled with contradictions, statements that were simply not true, some prejudice/racist remarks and stereotypes, and most of all there was a lot of blaming individuals for problems in society. To them, problems in society are individual problems, which if people worked hard enough than they can succeed (belief in meritocratic myth) and they rarely stated problems are systemic in nature. The major finding thus far is that the respondents seem to view the system in a more negative light (the institutions) but they constantly are blaming individuals for their lack of success in society and they are bolstering and defending the status quo. Much of their responses seem to be regurgitation of the arguments of authority figures in the Republican Party and by Fox News. I believe all three stated that they watched Fox news for their news (along with social media as a big news source and talking with close family/friends).

10/6/15- Transcribing Interview #1. I need to just build rapport and then once established- get straight to the real questions. Taking too long on transcribing useless data. In the first interview, the interviewee is harping on the health care system in America. She believes it is not helping the "right" people and not doing enough for people that need necessary services. I believe you hear this in interview #2 as well. You also hear meritocratic ideology and I believe neoliberal ideology. P1 is back and forth in regards to viewing system as fair and just. When asked in general- she derogates the system. She draws on personal experiences to make judgments. She also bolsters and defends the system too- I believe more unconsciously.

Saying the status quo should be preserved and she also goes into blaming individuals for systemic problems. Dissatisfied with health care system and political system. Also, you see she wishes that the system would provide them with health. Belief that everyone should work. #1 besides voting- not active in political participation and not the least bit interested in learning how to be active in the political system. Calling people lazy and mooching off the system.

10/14/15- Transcribing Interview#2. Participant states that she mostly talks to therapist about problems and doesn't communicate much with her family but then states she will talk about social/political issues with "anybody that'll listen". Views system as problematic. Thinks racism is still a big problem in society today. Police violence. Whites and blacks are fighting each other and whites blaming minorities for problems in society. Racism still very apparent in society accorder to P. Pessimism. Dissatisfaction with cuts to welfare and housing (section a)- unfair. People who need it most are not getting it. White privilege. Rich controlling the government and government catering to rich- not interested in minorities or poor people. Said that people are being factionalized without "even knowing it". Angry and frustrated at government and the condition of society. Individualistic actions stated when asked how to solve problems in society- need to have shared morals. "Pay it forward". Voice is not heard. No faith in the government. Unemployment a common problem/theme (in interviews). Stated laws should be changed- systemic level analysis. G & S are too high in price- too low of wages, job scarcity, taxes too high. Social security threatened (could be a common theme- in interview #1 I believe). People will result to crime if they don't have money. Good to know people (first 2 interviews)-social ladder. Not well aware of how widespread some problems are such as "schools shutting down". "Providing comfortable life for foreigners"- theme of anger towards "foreigners" or immigrants. Favors an interventionist form of government in markets. Mentions "they cut the TANF's down"- Temporary cash assistance for needy families. Legal Immigrants are a threat to resources that are already scarce. Foreigners are not real Americans. Religion important because the thought of an afterlife is important. Does not like to attend church- rather not go. When talking about "gay shit"- she was actually for gay rights but was very opposed to media coverage of rallies and protests and thought the protests and rallies were unnecessary. Also, said media and government shouldn't of been showing the protests/rallies on tv as much as they did. Sandra Bland- asked why people in other states got upset and rioted for something that happened in another state.
No direct target other than government and foreigners.

10/22/15 & 10/23/15- Transcribing Interview #3
Interviewee, like previous interviewees brought up issue of police as unjust- strong distrust. Feels government is not doing anything for her. Still in same position as she was "years ago". Job competition fierce and need credential/high education in order to get jobs. States the older generations are at a disadvantage- don't have high education and many don't even have high school diploma. Need to check out the influence of social media (facebook) on political participation or collective action and biases. Unrealistic optimism- believes she will be rich in the future and life will be better. PWE- Protestant work ethic but I think Jost's use of this is incorrect- probably not use this in study. #1 and #3 talked about how one presents self in society is important- Goffman. Talking about her grandmother not getting Medicaid- slashing

Medicaid? Huge medical bills and basically describes that medical care should be socialized (socialist model). Although she didn't use these terms. "I don't feel sorry for no adult"- relieves psychological tension- individual problem- they can take care of it…they choose to be victims attitude (basically see interview). Thought- disadvantaged individuals see and experience the consequences of social inequality first hand and continually- must be able to develop ideologies that reduce psychological tension in order to free one's self up and continue on with other activities in life. Blaming victim- shifting blame on economically disadvantaged individuals. No American Dream- in a "lose-lose situation" with no education and ability to succeed. Not willing to quit job (make sacrifice) for higher wages. View those that don't work as very problematic. SDO with minimum wage question- no $15/hr. You have to earn that wage by getting a degree. Does not attend church regularly. Does not talk with church people about social issues. States that church is not active in community. Religion provides hope and group of people to talk with-network.

11 /4/15- Transcribing Interview #4

I believe all P's have stated that the future (except one) will be better for them- unrealistic optimism? What if the future looks bleak- collective action? Theme- part time work vs full time work. Desire for meaningful job. MI (Meritocratic Ideology). PWE (Protestant Work Ethic). States there can be some barriers to an individual's success- sometimes it is out of their control. Feelings of racial discrimination at work- derogatory language aimed at them and unequal pay. Believes racism is structural or systemic problem in country. "disgusted" with racist police who kill black women or men or manifest their racism by use of force. Racism in police force "throughout the country". Tax the rich. Need to give the people the ability to succeed by raising taxes on the rich. Filled out over "200 applications" hard to get a job. Empathizes with disadvantaged people. Has a degree but finding a job is still very hard. Dissatisfied with system at one point but seems to believe the U.S. is democratic (although it's not said) and they are looking out for her best interests. Not qualifying for food stamps if you make certain amount and get unemployment- unemployment takes care of rent but she says what about getting hair done, food, and other things? (Quality of life disturbed). Make a difference question- advocate and find resources.

Feels that the media ignores African Americans thoughts/ideas on social issues. Will only let AA's talk about issues when there is a lot of controversy. Could point to another way that institutions make AA's feel powerless. Treated or portrayed as "animals" by media. Police need more training "mess". Pointing towards systemic level issue of racism in law enforcement.

What ways govt help- support of the welfare state by saying there should be more programs for disadvantaged

Memo Interview 5

P states that if people don't vote they shouldn't complain about things going on in society but then say's her voice can't be heard when it comes to political issues.

When ps talking about protests/rallies it seems that they are just completely turned off by the violence and young people being hurt and killed. It seems to make them disfavor rallies/protests altogether…often times because the media just shows the violence and chaos for entertainment purposes and doesn't show peaceful protests and the good things brought

about by these initiatives. Almost as if they demonize the protestors---just trouble makers. Blaming the victim (Ryan). "pitiful" "disgusting" in concern to their actions.

Paradox- distrust institutions in society and don't believe that those in power are working in their best interests but their advice to make things better is to just follow the rules and orders...don't stir the pot. Let organizations and politicians handle these problems...no need for protests/rallies—they're ineffective, dangerous, destructive, and people are getting killed. Stating all systems are corrupt...not just legal and police institutions. The higher ups just haven't been caught yet. These institutions and higher ups have been corrupt for a long time she says it just didn't happen that month or year...been going on for a while. Also says the rich avoid paying taxes- know how to work the system.

P.17 talking about culture capital.

Price of health care and medicine p 19 * touched on in other interviews

Price of goods (milk, eggs) going up constantly

P. 20-21 blaming individuals and self for not wanting to move up social ladder and do better for themselves. They have the opportunity and the ability she states...it's just if they want to do it or not. They just need to "do what they suppose to do"- again paradox- believe system to be unfair and unjust but you're suppose to follow the rules of the game even though the board is rigged in favor of the rich and powerful?

Theme- Minimum wage shouldn't be raised too high because low wages create an incentive for individuals to go out and further their education and find better paying or more prestigious jobs. They seem to fear that if the minimum wage was raised that people would just be satisfied working at McDonalds and people wouldn't want to go to school to be a doctor, lawyer, or nurse. Also, there seems to be the myth that these employees making minimum wage are just kids (not true show evidence).

"all depends on the individual" 24

Neoliberal Ideology

Competition at work and in everyday life, rationally minded individual belief- that they can achieve anything despite others in same situation that cannot, staunch individualism, individual/systemic level problems, government interference, police/military state- police/military guarantee the functioning of markets at all costs- increased militarization of police from neoliberals- political corruption- fatalistic ideology

*Make table similar to SJT Table of Neoliberal Ideologies that individuals use to navigate through their lives and help to find meaning in events and find stability/security- remember not just on right but on both sides. What are their values, attitudes, and positions on things? All interviewees have stated they favor competition in the workplace- neoliberal position. When they don't have the capital/credentials to move up than they tend to blame themselves for their misfortunes rendering them powerless by them focusing on themselves and the desire to build themselves up to be competitive in the marketplace- how many people do this on a resume? Pretty standard (seems natural like social inequality or a hierarchy in society)...seek more education but rising costs of education make this hard especially for low income AA's. Highlights a person's deficits and makes them focus on improving themselves—seeing themselves as a small business that is trying to compete in the market. Survival of the fittest mentality. Lack of empathy? Fatalistic ideology consumes individual if

they believe their actions are inefficacious? Oppose threats to the social order (political movements/organizations) since it provides at least some stability- neoliberal behavior? On the other hand, if low income AA's in urban areas portrays the opposing ideology (Keynesian/liberalism) could elites be viewing AA's as a threat to the neoliberal social order and could this be why we see the mass imprisonment of AA's along with reduced opportunities for success (education, jobs/careers, housing)?

Interview # 6 2/13/16

First interviewee to come to campus. All of the other interviews were done at person's home. Described importance of family (even though she has very little family). Husband died a few years ago and she struggled to make a living until this last year where she found work at the U.S. Post office. She described the post office as a very oppressive work environment. They keep the temperature at about 80 degrees, work on their feet for about 8-12 hours/ day. No real places to sit down in break room. Management quick to purchase new equipment for production to make packaging more efficient but puts employees concerns on backburner for months. Stressful job. No satisfaction or pleasure from job.

Interviewee stated she is open to new experiences. Does not talk to other individuals about social, political, or economic issues going on in society. Stated she would be interested in joining a group to discuss or raise awareness to these issues in the future. She stated she doesn't talk to other people about social/political issues or attend groups because she has a strong distrust towards other people.

Interviewee stated that the news on tv is very biased and unreliable. Prefers PBS, looking up news on the internet, and sometimes CNN. Stated that the news is slanted towards the left or right and she doesn't trust what she hears on the news. Uses multiple sources to obtain news. Content with life. Does not feel a sense of security at this point.

Thinks she will be more happy in the future but will have less money because she wants to retire in 7 years and live off social security.

Future mostly depends on individual. Mostly agrees with the idea of meritocracy. Believes there are barriers to success for some people, especially AA's. Also, those with health problems, older individuals, and those with low income and education. Also states that a lack of moral support can hinder a person's development/success.

Satisfied with some of government. Stated young white men are very privileged in society. Then it goes to young white women then Asians, then "Hispanics", then Blacks.

Believes we should have some adaptations to government system. Be more inclusive/democratic. More change should be made at the local level- not breaking up neighborhoods and communities. Stated government can be too powerful at times. More power should be given to local government. Wants to be able to see change.

A person can make a difference in their community by volunteering and giving money. Stated that voice can be heard but it doesn't always make a difference. Believes collective vote can make a difference. Stated that how you present yourself in public is key in order to get representatives or people to take you seriously.

Believes rallies and protests are good ways to make social change- as long as they are peaceful. They bring attention to issues. Doesn't like Black Lives Matter- states that she likes All Lives Matter but she understand the sig. of the movement. Call for an end to black on

black violence. Believes KCPD is respectable and there to protect and serve the community for most part.

Feels that people are overtaxed. Believes in a flat tax- 30% across the board.

States that the government mostly just listens to special interests groups.

Stated that she does not believe our society to be fair and just.

Believes in "working up the social ladder" – hierarchy in society. Individual can work up it with good education, good ideas, and a strong work ethic. Believes competition is advantageous.

Believes social inequality in society is very problematic. Believes that education, health, and welfare (nursing home care) should be more affordable- Q 18- believes that individual has to take some responsibility for their own future.

American Dream is a decent car and house. Also, family and church. Believes that not everybody can achieve the dream of wealth, security, and happiness- some have cards stacked against them.

Does not like the Welfare system in U.S.- demeaning, oppressive, nosey, and ineffective

Raise minimum wage but only to $10/hour- this will encourage individuals to further their education so that they can get a better wage/salary.

Attends religious activities 2-3 times per week. Church does not preach politics just how to be a "better Christian". Identifies as a Democrat. In the "middle of the road" in regards to conservatism/liberal. Feels that voting is simple process but also they try to suppress the black vote. Would participate in political activities more if she had more time.

2/24/2016

*These are notes that I wrote down quickly after doing an extensive review of the and is not part of my results/discussion section. Counts are only estimates not actual counts.

Since system justification theory is based off the idea of a false consciousness, I want to incorporate a form of Freire's critical consciousness into the results/discussion section. My argument would be that since neoliberalism views problems in society as problems of the individual then individuals (working & middle class) should attribute social problems to the individual rather than viewing problems in society as systemic. When coding the data I put (IR) for "individualistic response to a social problem" and (SR) for "systemic response to a social problem". What I'm measuring is the ability of the individual to take into account social, political, cultural, economical, and historical processes when looking at social problems. Questions were in regard to taxes, health care, politics, immigration, work, welfare, social movements/collective action, media, education, and the American Dream. (*I will only discuss some of the key findings here)

What I'm finding (I still have to go back and do counts but I'll give you a general update) is that most of the individuals (4/6) when looking at social problems view problems in an individualistic manner. One participant out of six blamed the individual for all problems in society and did not view any problems in society as being systemic in nature. The other five would use both individualistic and systemic level responses in their answers. Two of the six participants showed a higher level of critical consciousness development but their responses would often take into account only the political and cultural processes and would often exclude the historical and economic processes.

A very interesting finding was that next to each individualistic response was often a system justifying ideology, a stereotype, and/or a very simplistic analysis of a complex social problem. I believe this shows how individuals will employ a system justifying ideology in response to a complex social problem in order to reduce cognitive dissonance. This can provide them with a sense of stability, structure and order in their lives. The following system justifying ideologies were the most utilized ideologies among the participants: Social Dominance Orientation, Right Wing Authoritarianism, Belief in a Just World, Meritocratic ideology, and Political Conservatism.

What I found was that the participants put a strong emphasis on work and personal deservingness. It was often stated that if individuals in society are not working for any reason then they don't deserve welfare or any assistance. Most of the participants also believed that most of the people on welfare are taking advantage of it. They would often utilize stereotypes such as "moochers" and "lazy" in regards to the majority of people who are on welfare. Another interesting finding was that most participants completely isolated themselves. Only spending time with close friends or family. Most of the participants were not very politically active, involved in social organizations or groups, and rarely discussed political, economic, and social issues with other people.

What I found the most interesting was that most of the participants viewed the government, schools, the welfare system, the health care system, and the legal system as all corrupt and deficient. 5 out of 6 participants viewed rallies and protest in a highly unfavorable light. They would often employ a RWA ideology when discussing rallies, protests, or the Black Lives Matter movement. Stating that the individuals are "just making trouble" and "tearing up where they live". Many participants would say that they need to just let the state and organizations take care of these problems (although they view the police and the government as deficient- contradictory). The individuals who showed a negative view of protest/rallies and the Black Lives Matter movement usually cited what they heard on Facebook or TV and did not discuss any of the positive outcomes of the movement. I believe this shows a contempt for collective action, which would be in line with neoliberal thought.

All participants agreed that the minimum wage needed to be increased. They all disagreed with a $15/hr minimum wage and most stated that the minimum wage should be $10/hr. All the individuals stated that keeping wages low creates "initiative" and "motivation" to succeed. They all stated that if wages were too high then people would just "work at McDonalds" and there would be no doctors, lawyers, or judges.

What I'm seeing in the data could be very troubling. I'm seeing that most participants view problems in society as problems of the individual. The participants would also discuss how "deficient" the schools, the welfare system, the government, the health care system, and the legal system (especially the police) are in society. So what we're seeing is that these individuals derogate the system and view institutions in society as unfair and unjust. But on an unconscious level, through the utilization of these system-justifying ideologies, they are actually preserving and providing justification for the neoliberal political economic model. I would argue that they could actually provide a strong base of supporters for the move towards full privatization and the complete removal of the welfare state since these individuals view all the government and all public services as deficient. Through an attractive

conceptual apparatus, I believe the neoliberal elites could actually convince the most disadvantaged groups that full privatization is the best path forward and make them work against their best interests.

4/15/16

Interviews #7 and #8:

Before describing the interviews, I will note that I tried a new method for recruitment via the flyers and how I presented the study. Previously, I was asking churches, businesses, and people on the street to partake in a study that had a main emphasis on Black/African Americans. My flyer stated that you had to identify as African American/Black in order to be eligible for the study. I believe this could have thrown some people off and increased skepticism (i.e. A white researcher seeking to do research on African Americans).

I deleted these from the discourse (flyer and speech) and made it appear I was just looking to see what local Kansas Citians had to say about various social issues going on in the country. I also made cuts to the interview guide and decided to get straight to the point. Therefore, I stated that the study would take approximately 45 minutes instead of and hour or and hour and a half. This seemed to work especially when I said that I'm interested in what working class people have to say about different things going on in society. This seemed to have worked out well since I had 5 people show interest in the study fairly quickly. I walked downtown on main street (a little north of Emanual Cleaver II) towards the bus stops near all the fast food restaurants and talked with people near the bus stops. I also walked down on the plaza. This was by far the most successful recruitment trip I made. I found over the course of the study that if you don't have strong personal contacts in the community then you have to be fully immersed in the areas. I received a lot of interest in the study from highly educated and middle class African Americans but the opposite from low-income African Americans. Definitely need gatekeepers to gain access to this desired population.

I also approached individuals on the last trip in a more relaxed and somewhat playful manner. I introduced my self, my interests in Sociology, and tried to make the study sound fun and important. The participants were told the criteria for the study, low-income African Americans, after they qualified for the study. 2/5 that showed a high level of interest in the study actually returned my phone calls or picked up the phone so that we can schedule the interview.

Interview #7

This interview was completed at the plaza while sitting on the back of my truck. This was not an ideal location to do an interview and I would not encourage it. There were loud generators, his kid was constantly talking and screaming, he had a very low/soft voice, motorcycles and cars were driving by constantly, and his phone seemed to go off every 5 seconds. Home and office interviews were by far the best. Respondent #7 was very short and to the point. He was very much like Respondent #3 in that he just continued to say that problems in society are problems of the individual that should be solved by the individual. Don't blame others or the government for your deficiencies or lack of motivation/desire to succeed. Therefore, just like Interview #3, the interview was very short because I could tell he was a little irritated in repeating himself (i.e. no social problems, just problems of the individual). Same themes tended to emerge as the other interviews. System justifying beliefs

but he also was highly system justifying on a conscious level (as well as unconscious). Stating that current traditions and institutions should be upheld. Stating there is nothing really wrong with government. There are just lazy people who don't want to put in the work to succeed. He was the first respondent to denounce a rise in the minimum wage. Although, his answer as to why the minimum wage shouldn't be raised was the same as the other respondents (i.e. it inspires motivation and competition). He also had a very optimistic view of the future even though he stated he had a criminal record and has a household income of $15/000 year.

Interview #8

Very run down and sketchy looking neighborhood. Police were patrolling the neighborhood when I pulled up to the house. All the houses in the neighborhood looked like they were falling apart. The respondent was very quiet and soft spoken. She had the least amount of education among all the respondents (less than high school) but she is working on her GED. Very low income- $12,000/year. Many of the themes found in this interview as in past interviews. I think the respondent had a lot of trouble answering some of the questions. Anything that really required critical thinking was often problematic for her. When asked why some of the problems occur or why she believes certain things, she often would not have an answer and state that she doesn't know. Just like #7, there were mostly individualistic responses to the questions. MI and BJW but also I think there was an inability to really think about social issues in a complex manner (take into account various processes: historical, social, political, historical, etc…). Therefore, this interview was also shorter. It seemed like the respondents with the longer interviews were able to think more critically about various topics.

4/28/2016

Influence of neoliberalism on individual behavior- individuals in study have reduced civic/political activity, not a part of any real social groups, committees, regular involvement in churches or other structures where they can meet or use as a network to attempt to create social change. Neoliberal agency- staunch sense of individualism, individualist solutions to social problem (social problems not really social problems but problems of the individual), high value on competition between others in environment. P's tend to derogate those in their in-group but value those in their out-group ("successful people" competence based stereotypes). Increasing this sense of individualism and hyper-competitiveness to succeed amongst those in their in-group, which further isolates the individual from others. What if- Ps receiving this push back from "society"- not accepted, not "successful"- there is a desire for an extrinsic reward from those in their out-group (the people they deem successful and where they wish…and may believe they are going to end up- unrealistic optimism) which cannot be satisfied. Individual takes these system justifying ideologies and utilizes them to gain a sense of balance, structure, and to find meaning in events, though, these ideologies don't materialize into anything since they are just abstract concepts. Individual may seek to satisfy these desires for acceptance from those in their out-group by purchasing items (think Marcuse- One dimensional man) but this ultimately fails them (plus purchasing power is weak and seems to be getting weaker with stagnating wages and salaries) and this increases the desire to believe in these legitimizing myths, use stereotypes to derogate others so they

can continue to believe that they are not going down the same path- keeping people divided and further isolating individuals that do not have access to the necessary expertise and forms of technology to build themselves- remain stagnate- justify status quo and the dominant elites find these world views useful for maintaining current political-economic model.

APPENDIX C

INTERVIEW GUIDE

Interview Activity/Sample Interview Guide

Participant's ID#/Pseudonym: _____

Date/Time of Interview: _____ Interviewer's Name:

_____

Length of Interview: _____

Thank you for taking the time to meet with me today. Your input is greatly appreciated and I look forward to learning more about your views. I am conducting a research study that seeks to understand belief systems and how people use these belief systems in order to make sense of their social world. The research will help to understand the relationship between individuals and governing systems.

This interview is completely voluntary and you do not have answer any questions that may make you feel uncomfortable. It is important to answer the questions as honestly as possible. All information will be kept completely confidential. Only I and other members of the research team will have access to your responses.

However, if you do mention your intention to harm others or yourself, share information in regards to a crime that is currently under investigation, or discuss your involvement in sexual or physical abuse, then I'm mandated to report that information.

I will be recording this interview so that I can review our discussion and make sure not to miss anything you say during the interview. You can refuse to be audio taped at any time and still participate in the study. I will also be taking handwritten notes during our interview just

in case the recording device shuts off or experiences a technical problem. Again, I will be the only person reviewing the recording and notes.

Do you have any questions/concerns before we begin with the interview?

Family Life & Leisure Time:

1.   How important is family to you?

    a. Would you describe your family as close?

    b. Do you spend a lot of time together?

2.   How do you like to spend your free time? (Biking, spending time with family, videogames, fishing, music)

4.   With whom do you talk to about important things in your life?

    a. Probe: what about social, political, or economic issues?

    b. Are you apart of any social groups that meet to talk about social issues?

        Probe: Would you be interested in joining a social group to talk about political or social issues or raise awareness on certain issues?

        Probe: What holds you back from joining a social group?

5.   How do you typically stay up to date on current events? (Television, websites, social media)

        b. Probe: Which major news station do you tend to use most to stay up to date on current events?

Life Satisfaction & Sense of Mastery

6.   How would you describe your life at this moment? Are you content with life at the moment?

        Happy? Content? Sense of security?

7.   What do you believe the future will be like for you?

        Probe: Do you think you'll be more or less happy than you are now? More or less money/wealth?

8.   Probe: (if employed) how do you feel about your current job/position?

        (Probe) Do you feel a sense of pleasure or satisfaction from your work?

        (Probe) Do you find that hard work, in itself, is a desirable quality and its own reward?

9. Do you believe that your future mostly depends on you? Why/why not?

10. Why do you think some individuals are more successful than others?

Do you think that through hard work and initiative a person can achieve anything?
Why why/not?

Probe: do you believe that there are any barriers to success for an individual? Do you
feel there is anything that limits you from achieving your goals?

Probe: what do you think gets in the way of people's ambitions or achievements?

Role of Government

11. What are your views on the U.S. Government?

Are you satisfied with U.S. government? Why or why not?

Probe: Do you think officials work in the best interests of the people (middle/working
class)?

Probe: What are your views on the president? Congress? (Positive, negative?)

12. How do you feel about our current social, political, and economic institutions in
society? (Unfair or just?)

Should these institutions should upheld or do you think there needs to be some
significant changes to our current system?

(a) If so, describe what changes you think may be necessary

(Probe: Do you think the Federal government is too powerful?) Interferes too much in your life?

b) How about state and local government? Do you think more power should be given to the state?

c) How can a person make a difference in their community or in society? (In regards to education, transportation issues, or other large social issues)

d) Do you believe your voice can be heard when it comes to political issues?

  Do you feel as though your vote makes a difference?

  Do you believe that representatives will listen to your concerns?

  (Probe if they say government is unresponsive): Do you think the government or politicians cater to a specific group of people in society? Who?

e) Do you think rallies or protests are good ways to make social change? Do you think that people should just obey the law and stop making trouble?

(Probe: What is your take on Black Lives Matter?)

f) What are your views on the legal system?

g) Do you believe that the police in Kansas City are respectable and are there to protect and serve?

(Probe: Do you believe that the police can be predatory towards individuals or certain types of individuals? What are your thoughts on Ferguson and the incident with Michael Brown?)

14.   How do you feel about taxes in America? Should they be higher or lower?

c. Probe: Should the rich be taxed at a higher rate?

15.   Would you say that the government works for the benefit of all people? (Providing opportunities for success, providing jobs for people, or access to resources such as health care)

Equality

16.   Overall, do you believe our society to be fair and just? Why or why not?

17.   Do you believe in working up the social ladder to achieve success?

a. Probe: How do you think an individual can work her or his way up the social ladder in America?

b. Probe: Any barriers to success?

c. Do you believe that competition makes a person work harder to achieve success?

18. Do you believe that a certain amount of inequality is necessary in society? (Ex: Differences in the amount of funding or resources for schools or income/wealth inequality)

(Probes: do you think wealth should be distributed more evenly in society or that individuals should be responsible for determining their own future?

19. In your own words, what is the American Dream?

(a) Can anyone achieve the American dream of wealth, security, and happiness?

(b) Why or why not?

(c) Do you think you can achieve the American dream?

Social Issues

21. How do you feel about the welfare system in the United States?

22. What is your position on raising the minimum wage? ($15/hour minimum wage?_

20. Do you believe that legal or illegal immigration is a serious problem in this country?

(Probe: do you believe that undocumented immigrants pose a threat to American workers? What do you think the government can do to solve this problem?

Religious Preference:

21.   How religious and/or spiritual would you say you are?

22.   With which faith do you identify? Christian, Protestant, Roman Catholic, Jewish, Islam or another religion?

23.   How often do you attend religious services? (Probes: regularly, once a month, only on holidays…)

24.   What aspects do you enjoy about religious life (church, sense of unity, meeting new people, sense of pride or hope?)

Political Preferences:

26.   With which political party do you identify?

        a. Would you say you're more conservative or liberal?

27.   Are you registered to vote?

28.   How active are you in regards to political participation (i.e. voting, taking issues to representative, city council, town meetings)?

29.   Are you involved in any work related groups, organizations, and/or associations?

Closing Questions:

Are there any other issues or topics that you wish to elaborate on or feel we haven't discussed yet?

Demographics:

1. What is your age?

2. How do you identify in regards to gender?

3. What is your race/ethnicity?

4. What is your marital status?

5. What is your estimated household income?

6. What is your level of education?

7. What is the level of education for your parents?

*If unemployed, ask about past work experience and if unemployment has been a continual problem.

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VITA

Kevin Ryan Douglas was born on January 25, 1988, in Houston, Texas. He graduated from Springboro High School in Springboro, Ohio in 2006. He then moved to Gadsden, Alabama and enrolled in Gadsden State Community College. Mr. Douglas then moved to Wichita, KS and attended Butler County Community College where he received an Associate of Arts degree in May 2009.

Mr. Douglas then worked as a research assistant for two years in the Optimal Youth Development Lab, the Clinical Psychology Department, and the Community Psychology Department at Wichita State University. During this time, he also volunteered as a tutor/mentor for "at-risk" youth at various schools in the inner-city area in Wichita, Kansas. Mr. Douglas graduated Magna Cum Laude and was awarded the Bachelor of Arts degree in Psychology with a certificate in Community Psychology, December of 2011.

After graduation, Mr. Douglas worked for three years as a Life Enhancement and Social Services Director at a long-term health care center. After witnessing the poor living conditions and treatment of those living with mental and physical illnesses, and how systemic the greed and corruption was within the organization and health care system, he decided to further his education in the field of Sociology. In August of 2014, Mr. Douglas was accepted and began work as a student in the graduate program at the University of Missouri-Kansas City. Here he assumed the duties of a graduate teaching assistant and undergraduate advisor for the Sociology department. Upon completion of his degree requirements, Mr. Douglas plans to continue his studies in the field of Sociology while pursuing a career that has a social justice emphasis and places the well being of people over profits.