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The Roots Of Perspective In The American Context: News Media Discourse And Stakeholder Perspectives About The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program

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THE ROOTS OF PERSPECTIVE IN THE AMERICAN CONTEXT:
NEWS MEDIA DISCOURSE AND STAKEHOLDER PERSPECTIVES ABOUT THE
SUPPLEMENTAL NUTRITION ASSISTANCE PROGRAM

by

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DEDICATION

To my wife, Ashley. For taking that particular section of Anthropology 102 fifteen years ago, for being my constant support and safe harbor, for being my friend, and for putting up with me in a single room, garage apartment for four years while I pursued this course.

To my parents, Michael and Bonnie. For supporting me, unwaveringly, for my 30 plus years of life, and for letting us live in your garage apartment for four years.

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I would first like to thank my advisor, Dr. Christine Blake. You have shown me how high the bar can be set in being an advisor, teacher, and colleague. Thank you for spending countless hours patiently guiding and listening to me ramble and rant. Dr. Sonya Jones, thank you for taking me under your wing, showing me that doing research does not mean subverting your convictions, and for truly caring about every person you meet. I am also thankful for Dr. Ann Kingsolver. Many of the opportunities that I have had in academics have come as the result of your influence and I am honored to call you a friend. Dr. Sei-hill Kim, I have the utmost respect for your work and am thankful for your willingness to share your time and expertise with me. Carrie Draper, thank you for allowing me to tag along on your many successes. Jason Craig and Andrea Warren, thank you for allowing me to wax pretentious at the expense of your time. I can't wait to say, "I know them" at state dinners. Jeremy Vanderknyff, for being such a loyal and admirable friend. Kevin Fogle, for sharing your passion for food and photography and being a good friend. Leland Ferguson, I am honored to call you my friend. You have shown me so much and I am immeasurably thankful. I would further like to thank my parents, Michael and Bonnie, my brother Christian (Bill), and my wife Ashley. Each of you means more to me than you could know. And finally I would like to thank my lifelong friends- Josnel, Paul, David, Shaun, Charlie, and Drew.

ABSTRACT

The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program serves 46 million people but is controversial. The media is positioned to influence political and public opinions about SNAP policy. This study identifies the SNAP media discourse and investigates perspectives of SNAP participants and frontline workers about the program.

I employed a mixed-methods design with two aims. Aim 1 gathered 295 articles across six news outlets, semi-inductively coding the articles for characters, assignment of responsibility, and framing of the article. I then ran chi-square tests for difference between employed frame and responsibility and employed frame and political ideology.

Aim 2 collected a sample of 20 frontline workers and SNAP participants across South Carolina. I conducted semi-structured interviews about perspectives of the SNAP program through reactions to vignettes reflecting the media frames from aim 1. Data drew from emergent methodology and elements of discourse and schema analysis.

Aim 1 found that the most common characters were politicians (n=187) and SNAP participants (n=180). The most mentioned entity type of responsibility was governmental (24%). The employed frames were cost of the program (53%), individualism (16%), health (12%), and fraud (11%). Articles with a cost frame

were more likely to present the government as responsible for addressing hunger ($p < .01$). Articles from liberal outlets were more likely to employ a health frame and articles from conservative outlets were more likely to employ a fraud frame ($p < .01$).

Aim 2 found conflicting logics of respondents stemmed from a Bootstrap Ideology, built on values of meritocracy, individualism and work ethic. Respondents discussed the cost frame in terms of levels of scale. The fraud frame by describing ethical performance of agency. The individualism frame through decision-making and negotiating success and the health frame through personal freedom related to regulation of allowable foods under SNAP policy.

Media focus on cost, individualism, and fraud rather than health points to the need for public health researchers and practitioners to act as advocates for nutrition assistance programs and policies. Understanding how people rationalize their opinions could help researchers and policy-makers develop and evolve policies that are flexible and adaptive to how different people might interpret specific policies.

PREFACE

TWO STORIES AND THE RESEARCHER'S LENS

The Ransom effect

When I was eleven years old my parents went out with some friends for dinner and movie. They saw the film *Ransom*, starring Mel Gibson, Gary Sinise, and Rene Russo. You may have seen it. These days it's usually broadcast on cable on random Sunday afternoons. It's a typical Hollywood thriller and, owing to its namesake, involves a ransom for the return of Mel and Rene's son. To my eleven-year-old ears the plot seemed like an exciting adventure (to my 32 year old ears it sounds like a great way to spend a Sunday afternoon). After my parents returned from the theater I asked my dad how it was. He said that he didn't like it, it hit too close to home. I didn't know what he meant and he replied, "When you have kids you'll understand". I said, okay, not understanding what he meant, presumably because I had no children. That experience has stuck with me over the years because it perfectly illustrates the role of context, experience, and the logics that we employ in service of our perspectives. The take away perspective from my dad was that *Ransom* was not a good movie. However, underlying and contextualizing that perspective was the logic that child abduction is a real thing and it could happen to anyone and as a parent it could happen to him. That contextualization offers a deeper

understanding of the “why” for his negative assessment of the film. Incidentally, he’s still a father and doesn’t like Ransom; and I’m still not a father and still do like the movie.

The farmer and the lobster

Several years ago a colleague was conducting fieldwork, interviewing farmers in the rural Upstate of South Carolina about their participation in and opinions about the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program. One hot and humid summer day she asked a farmer why he did not register his farm with the SNAP program so that he could receive customers using EBT (SNAP dollars) for the produce he sold weekly at a local farmer’s market. His reply centered on his perception that SNAP participants wouldn’t buy his produce anyway as they were mostly interested in purchasing high-priced foods like lobster, and he didn’t want to support that. Of all the foods that could have passed through this farmer’s mind while he stood in that hot South Carolina field, why on earth did he choose a crustacean that lives in cold Northeastern waters and in restaurant aquarium tanks? Lobster has long been associated with luxury, but so have any number of other sea foods, meats, and even “exotic” produce like truffles. Perhaps his selection of lobster reflected his lived experience or culinary preferences. Perhaps, however, it was evidence of his uptake of media stories that highlighted purchases of SNAP participants and aligned with an ideology that reflected his values.

The researcher's position

These two anecdotes have contributed, among many other experiences, to my position as a researcher and a meaning-making human and serve to illustrate in some limited way, how I understand the world. Ontologically, I identify as a constructivist, seeing reality as constructed within the person (Bernard, 2011). Epistemologically, I believe that such reality construction occurs as interpreted through individual experience, worldview, and culturally-bounded and understood phenomena (Bernard, 2011). It is through these lenses and biases that I undertake my research agenda and well as engage with others; ultimately coming to understand that people are people and most of us are just trying to do the best we can.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP, formerly known as The Food Stamp Program) is the largest food assistance program in the nation and, according to many, is positioned to play a crucial role in the reduction of poverty (McGovern, 2001; Tiehen, Jolliffe, & Gunderson, 2012; Yaktine, Caswell, & others, 2013) and food insecurity (Mykerezi & Mills, 2010; Ratcliffe, McKernan, & Zhang, 2011). The program, however, is historically and currently controversial, drawing support or opposition from political and societal actors across the nation.

Public opinion and political debate about the SNAP program are represented in the media, but not in a simple “the pros say, while the cons say” narrative. The media is a particularly influential institution in terms of political debate, issue identification, responsibility assignation, and public perspectives of issues and programs (Dancey & Goren, 2010; Gilens, 2009a; Kim, Carvalho, & Davis, 2010; M. McCombs, 2013) and acts as a powerful voice in the SNAP discourse, potentially influencing as well as reflecting political and public opinion. The analysis of discourse can reveal “hidden ideological constructions” (Fairclough, 2001) that can link to the worldview of individuals and therefore factor into their perspective of a given concept. As “artifacts” of American culture

(Gilens, 2009a), news articles can contribute to perspectives and opinions around a given issue (M. McCombs, 2013). Coupled with the influence of the media discourse, cognitive mappings, called schema (d'Andrade, 1995) are built on a set of constructed logics that can be deployed in different contexts to inform an individual's perspective. Schema are often imbued with underlying values that contribute to particular ideologies, which "allow people to organize social beliefs about what is the case, good or bad, right or wrong...and to act accordingly" (Van Dijk 1998: 6).

In this study I conduct a media content analysis to identify the SNAP media discourse, particularly focusing on the dominant frames that are employed in the discourse. I then use discourse and schema analysis to investigate the perspectives about the SNAP program and its participants held by SNAP participants and frontline workers. I further identify and explore the underlying logics respondents use to support those perspectives. I also situate their logics within a value-laden ideological system that serves as a common ground between seemingly opposed perspectives. Specifically, this project is informed by two specific aims with accompanying research questions:

(1) Locate and conceptualize the media discourse around the SNAP program and its participants.

- a) What characters are presented in media-constructed articles about the SNAP program and its participants?

- b) As presented in media articles about the SNAP program and its participants, whose responsibility is it to address issues of poverty and hunger?
- c) What frames are included in media-constructed articles about the SNAP program and its participants?
- d) What frames are most commonly used in articles that focus on a specific group's responsibility to address poverty or hunger in the United States?
- e) What frames are most commonly used in articles by conservative and liberal news outlets?

(2) Explore the perspectives about the SNAP program and its participants held by SNAP participants and frontline workers and reactions to media discourse.

- a) What perspectives do project respondents have about the SNAP program and SNAP participants?
- b) How do project respondents react to and interpret the SNAP media discourse?
 - i. What logics are used that might contribute to how respondents make sense of the SNAP program and its participants?

The SNAP program has received consistent attention from scholars and policy-makers. Many researchers have investigated the effects of the program for individuals and households on food insecurity, poverty, and links to health through economic (Gundersen, Kreider, & Pepper, 2011; McKernan, Ratcliffe, &

Rosenberg, 2003; Yaktine et al., 2013), health (Frongillo, Jyoti, & Jones, 2006), and social lenses. Investigations into the social conditions around SNAP participation are frequently focused on stigma of program participation and usage (Blumkin, Margalioth, & Sadka, 2008; Kaye, Lee, & Chen, 2013; Kreider, Pepper, Gundersen, & Jolliffe, 2012; Zekeri, 2003). The background factors that contribute to social concepts, such as stigma, however, have not been adequately investigated for the SNAP program and may play a large role in SNAP policy evolution and public opinion about the program and its participants.

Brief overview of chapter contents

In chapter 2, I situate the SNAP program historically and legislatively and discuss the role that news media plays in the construction of discourse and how individual perspectives are underlined by ideologically-imbued logics. I also discuss the phenomenon of poverty as tied to national assistance programs.

Chapter 3 presents the methodological process for each of the specific aims for the overall study. Each aim consists of research questions related to that aim and each aim was pursued sequentially. As such, the methods for each aim are presented in sequence, first aim one, then aim two followed by some overall concluding remarks.

Chapter 4 presents two complete manuscripts that make up the studies undertaken in pursuit of specific aims one and two. Taken together, these manuscripts present the SNAP media discourse, situated within the context of the passage of the 2014 Farm Bill, and then SNAP participant and frontline worker perspectives of the program through reactions to vignettes representing

the dominant frames of the SNAP media discourse. The second manuscript also explores the underlying logics employed by project respondents in service of their perspectives.

Chapter 5 situates the main findings from these two manuscripts in the wider research and policy environments with a focus on public health research and practice. Specifically, I argue that public health practitioners occupy a strategic position to influence the media discourse, and subsequently the political and public opinions and decisions around the SNAP program. As such, public health practitioners must realize the need for their voice as program and policy advocates for nutrition programs such as SNAP, which have a significant public health impact for millions of children, adults, and elderly across the nation (Patricia Elliott & Raziano, 2012).

CHAPTER 2

BACKGROUND

2.1: LEGISLATION, ORGANIZATION, REGULATIONS, AND STATE-LEVEL FUNCTIONING OF THE SUPPLEMENTAL NUTRITION ASSISTANCE PROGRAM

On a frigid February afternoon in East Lansing, Michigan President Barack Obama picked up the first of eleven pens and began to sign his name to the Agricultural Act of 2014 (colloquially called the Farm Bill). Minutes before, standing in front of an enormous American flag, an array of farm equipment, and strategically-placed bales of hay, the President described the bill as a “bi-partisan effort”. No Republican politician, however, accepted the President’s invitation to attend the signing. The term “bi-partisan” hung in the air; juxtaposed starkly against the absent other side of the aisle. The term “effort” was perhaps more deservedly earned. In fact, the Bill’s passage was overdue by almost two years and in the tradition of political compromise neither side was happy with the outcome. A New York Times article declared, “Senate Passes Long-Stalled Farm Bill, With Clear Winners and Losers” and a Washington Post article from the same day provided the weary headline, “Farm Bill passes after three years of talks”. One major sticking point delaying the Bill’s passage was the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP, formerly known as the Food Stamp Program). In this section we will examine the role of the Farm Bill and the

roots of the SNAP program, moving from federal legislation to the functioning of the program in South Carolina.

Legislation: The “Farm Bill” and the roots of the SNAP program

The Agricultural Act of 2014 marks the 11th passage of the omnibus bill that drives most US Farm policy and food assistance programs (Jackson, Minjares, Naumoff, Shrimali, & Martin, 2009). The history of the bill can be traced to Depression-era America and a need to respond to collapsing agriculture prices due to overproduction and declining farmer income resulting in higher rates of unemployment (Patricia Elliott & Raziano, 2012). A series of laws and programs were created to address these two issues and from these seeds the first Farm Bill, the Food and Agriculture Act of 1964, was passed. The Farm Bill has expanded its juridical reach since the 1964 act and the current Farm Bill is composed of twelve sections, called titles, that address commodity crops and insurance, forestry, foreign aid, energy, rural development, and nutrition, among others. Two large groups, for which the Bill serves as safety net, are United States farmers and participants in nutrition assistance programs (Zulauf & Orden, 2014). Over time, the Bill’s non-nutrition foci have shifted to reflect: (1) a greater alignment with market outcomes through an increased reliance on crop insurance tagged to demonstrated revenue loss rather than yield loss and reduction and eventual elimination of fixed support targets set by Congress to flexible support based on market fluctuation, and (2) an increase in conservation programs, such as improvement of working lands and preservation of wetlands (Zulauf & Orden, 2014).

Like its predecessors, the Agricultural Act of 2014 authorizes and funds programs contained within the twelve titles of the legislation, with the Nutrition title making up almost 80% of the total Bill's budget (Figure 2.1). The passage of the Bill was achieved only after unprecedented partisan debate. With the national recession of 2008-2009 still fresh on the minds of citizens and politicians, "deficit reduction, entitlement programs, taxes, and policies to stimulate employment and growth dominated the domestic political dialogue" (Zulauf & Orden, 2014, p. 24). As such, "voracious objections" were raised by conservatives around farm support and nutrition assistance, with one version of the bill removing the nutrition title from the bill altogether (Gritter, 2015; Zulauf & Orden, 2014). The Farm Bill was to be enacted by the end of the 112th Congress, in fall of 2012. This goal was not met. Instead, the 112th Congress passed a stopgap measure to extend the provisions of the 2008 Farm Bill by one year, ending September 30, 2013. With three months remaining in the extension period, the Senate approved a version of the Bill that House Republicans rejected. In reply, the House presented a Farm Bill that retained farm safety net programs but completely removed the Nutrition Title from the bill, which had been home to nutrition assistance programs, such as SNAP, for more than forty years (Gritter, 2015). This new House-supported stand-alone resolution, called the Nutrition Reform and Work Opportunity Act (H.R. 3102), included cuts to the SNAP program that would have reduced SNAP spending almost \$40 billion by limiting the number of Able-Bodied Working Adults Without Dependents (ABAWDs). It would have also removed categorical eligibility of applicants, a feature of the program through

which SNAP eligibility is automatic if the applicant is a participant in certain other means-tested assistance programs, such as Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF, colloquially known as welfare) (Congressional Budget Office, 2013). The House bill also proposed allowing states to subject SNAP applicants and participants to drug testing (Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, 2014). Eventually, the two House bills were merged, returning the SNAP program back to the Farm Bill. In the end, the Farm Bill signed by President Obama on that frigid February morning contained authorization and funding for the SNAP program that did not include the House-proposed cuts and drug testing components. Rather than cutting the program by almost \$40 billion over ten years the final budget contained around \$8 billion dollars of cuts over ten years through removal of a mechanism that previously had included a benefit increase to cover utility expenses for states that participated in this practice (Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, 2014).

Although the passage of the 2014 Farm Bill was particularly contentious and centered on the debates regarding the SNAP program, SNAP escaped relatively unchanged. It is the very fact that the SNAP program is contained within the large omnibus bill that serves as a shield from drastic changes, such as those that have occurred in some other assistance programs such as welfare's shift to block grants (Gritter, 2015). It was not until 1973 that the program that is now the SNAP program was moved into the Farm Bill. The history of the program begins well before that first Farm Bill was signed in the 1960's.

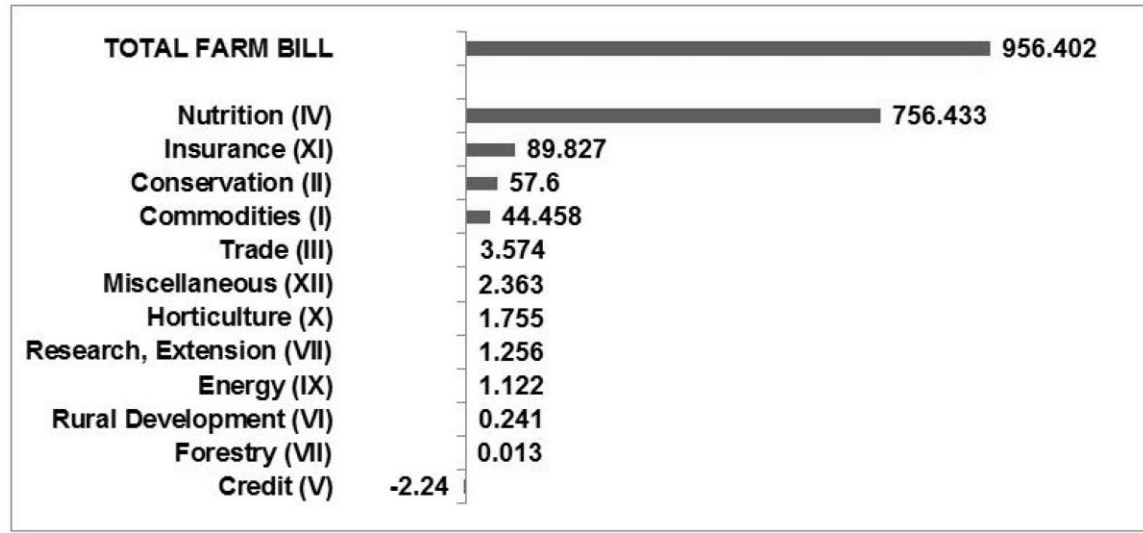


Figure 2.1 Expenditures per title for the Agricultural Act of 2014, sources: (Congressional Budget Office, 2014; Zulauf & Orden, 2014)

The roots of the SNAP program can be traced back to 1939 with the creation of the first food stamp program, which lasted until 1943. Emerging from the Great Depression many Americans were dealing with hunger and poverty (Poppendieck, 2014). Simultaneously, the Department of Agriculture was struggling to find a destination for a surplus of farm crops. Then Secretary of the Department of Agriculture, Henry Wallace, conceived this first food stamp program as a way to simultaneously reduce the crop surplus and eliminate hunger in American households (Poppendieck, 2014).

During this early iteration of the program, participants purchased orange stamps to be used for non-surplus foods. The purchase and use of these orange stamps gave participants access to free blue stamps that could be redeemed for surplus foods included on the surplus commodity foods list (Gritter, 2015). On the one hand, this iteration of the food stamp program could be seen as a way to

feed hungry Americans while reducing agricultural surplus. On the other hand, the intentions underlying this program could be also viewed as a project in consumerist citizen-making with three goals: “to move welfare-recipients into the marketplace, stimulate the economy, and decrease the stigma of relief while simultaneously restricting and monitoring consumer behavior” (Moran, 2011). With the advent of World War II, this early stamp program was ended in 1943 as the economy improved and it was not until a pilot Food Stamp Program was authorized by executive order under John F. Kennedy that the program that exists today began to take shape (Gritter, 2015).

In 1964, President Johnson authorized the first nationwide Food Stamp Program with justifications to help achieve a fuller and more efficient use of food abundance and raise the levels of nutrition among low-income households (King, 2000). Catalysts in these programmatic changes have often been supporters of different interests, such as urban supports of nutrition programs and rural supporters of agricultural programs (Gritter, 2015). In the 1960’s legislators estimated that the program would serve around 4 million and cost around \$360 million, however, by 1975 the program was serving around 17 million at a cost of almost \$4.5 billion (USDA, 2015). As the program expanded, it became closely aligned in public consciousness with what was then known as “welfare”. In the 1990’s President Clinton signed into law the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act” (PRWORA) and declared “the end of welfare as we know it” (Goode & Maskovsky, 2001). This act is commonly referred to as welfare reform and, among other changes, it started the Temporary Assistance to

Needy Families Program (TANF) and included stricter conditions for food stamp eligibility (Seccombe, James, & Walters, 1998) and the hope of increased “self-sufficiency” to combat the perceived problem of recipients’ apparently inherent dependence on the state (Morgen, 2001). The specific framing of the program by the government and certain public entities targeted a tenuous but fairly common ideologically-based discourse which envisioned program participants as hopelessly dependent on assistance (Bartle, 1998) and because TANF was connected to the Food Stamp Program, some perceptions of Food Stamp Program participants were likewise oriented towards dependency, resulting in stigmatization of participants (Gilens, 2009b). The use of stamps in retail food establishments was an identifiable sign of program participation and, as viewed through program opponents, a marker of stigma. In fact, as Hasenfeld (2000) has shown, frontline workers in welfare agencies may assess the social worth of program participants and be motivated to mobilize organizational resources dependent on their perceptions of the participant’s deservingness, which creates the opportunity for interpersonal stigma attached to program participation.

A counter framing to the dependency discourse relates to the consumerist underpinnings of the program. Since its beginnings in the 1930’s, the program and its participants have been positioned to support the market economy. Specifically, the capitalist system creates and needs unemployment and downward pressure on wages to protect the interests of corporations and their stockholders. This creates a group of people who cannot meet their needs through labor alone. The SNAP program remedies this market failure by

redistributing income to people who cannot be productive and self-sufficient in this system (Bartle, 1998). In this framing, the SNAP program serves to compensate for the failures of a capitalist market system.

In the context of the SNAP program, stigmatization of SNAP participants is a significant barrier to program participation as well as a barrier to measurement of program effects (Kreider et al., 2012). Social stigma associated with the SNAP program is also influential enough to serve as a motivator for policy change (Blumkin et al., 2008). For example, the creation of the Electronic Benefits Transfer (EBT) card in 1984 and, its national adoption as the sole SNAP transaction mechanism in 2004, served as a method of reducing stigma of usage by mimicking the transaction method of credit and debit cards (Blumkin et al., 2008). In a study focusing on the use of EBT in the Rural South, Zekeri (2003) found that SNAP participants reported less stigma and embarrassment when using EBT compared to paper “stamps”. Further, Schanzenbach (2009) found that SNAP information available to customers in a tax services office that focused on reducing stigma through the use of EBT were associated with much more favorable responses by clients than information that did not focus on the reduction of stigma through EBT. In the twelve years since the national adoption of EBT, however, social stigma has not been eliminated (Kaye et al., 2013; Kreider et al., 2012). This may be due to the complex underlying logics and ideologies that shape individuals’ perceptions of SNAP participants and the ease with which individuals can share their opinions, however extreme, with the world using social media and other technology.

The SNAP program remained relatively unchanged between the 2004 national adoption of EBT and 2008, when the program's name was officially changed from The Food Stamp Program to The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) under the Food and Nutrition Act of 2008, (*Food and Nutrition Act of 2008*, n.d.). According to official political statements, the program changed its name to reflect a focus on nutrition and healthy eating by participants (Manchester & Mumford, 2009; USDA, 2015a). However, others suggest that the name change was an attempt to reduce stigma and negative program perceptions.

During the years immediately following the program's name change the national economy plummeted in what has since been called "The Great Recession". As part of President Obama's American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA), funding for nutrition programs, including the SNAP program, was dramatically increased. As part of the Act, there were two policy changes made to the SNAP program: (1) a 13% increase in benefits for all recipients, and (2) expanded eligibility for jobless adults without dependents (Nord & Prell, 2011). The increase in SNAP funding and expanded eligibility also reflect increased need due to unemployment as millions of jobs were lost during this period and the instability of new but low-paying jobs created during the economic recovery. In figure 2.2 this increase is immediately visible in the vertical line representing increased allocation of funds beginning in 2009 through 2013. The USDA presents this increase as necessary to address population need and points to a reduction of food insecurity during this period as evidence of success (Nord &

Prell, 2011). During the “Great Recession” from 2009-2013, a peak of 47 million people were enrolled in the program with a maximum budget of \$80 billion in 2013 (USDA, 2015b). Once the economy rebounded after 2013, the maximum SNAP benefit levels were reduced to pre-ARRA rates, thereby reducing benefits for a household of three by an average of around \$30 per month (“After Friday, states will lose \$5 billion in food aid,” n.d.). Recent reports indicate that the SNAP program currently serves around 46 million people with a budget of around \$74 billion (USDA Food and Nutrition Service Annual Summary, 2015).

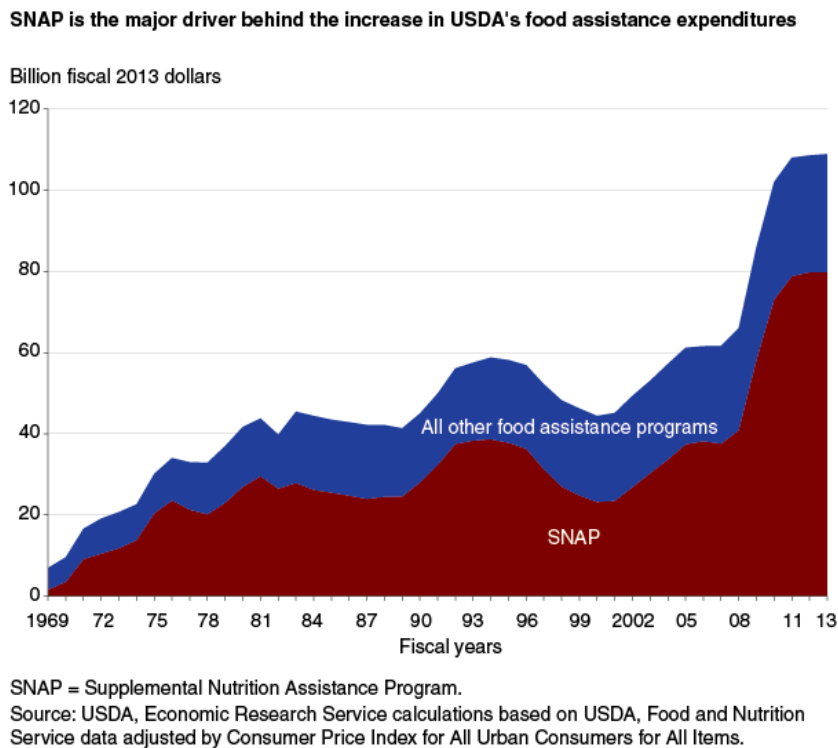


Figure 2.2 Increasing level of SNAP funding, 1969-2013

Organization: Federal structure of The SNAP program

The USDA houses seven agencies which oversee general categories such as natural resources and environment; rural development; farm and foreign agricultural services; and food, nutrition, and consumer services (see figure A.1). Within the Food, Nutrition, and Consumer Services Agency there are two offices: the Center for Nutrition Policy and Promotion and the Food and Nutrition Service. As presented above, it is the Food and Nutrition Service that directly administers the SNAP program. Within the Office of the Administrator of the Food and Nutrition Service there are five sub-offices: the office of Regional Operations and Support; Special Nutrition Programs; the Office of Management, Technology, and Finance; The Office of Policy Support; and the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP). Within the SNAP office there are four divisions: the Benefit Redemption Division, Program Accountability and Administration Division, Program Development Division, and the Retailer Policy and Management Division (see figure A.2). The organizational structure of the overall USDA has a relatively high degree of what Rainey would call formalization, that is, the structure has been established and codified through law, and as one moves into the descendent agencies of the Department, the power begins to shift to a more horizontal orientation, lending a decentralized aspect across the agencies (Rainey, 2009).

Within the last several years, the Food and Nutrition Service has implemented new performance measures that they call the Modernization Initiative (USDA, 2012). This initiative was borne out of increased caseloads at

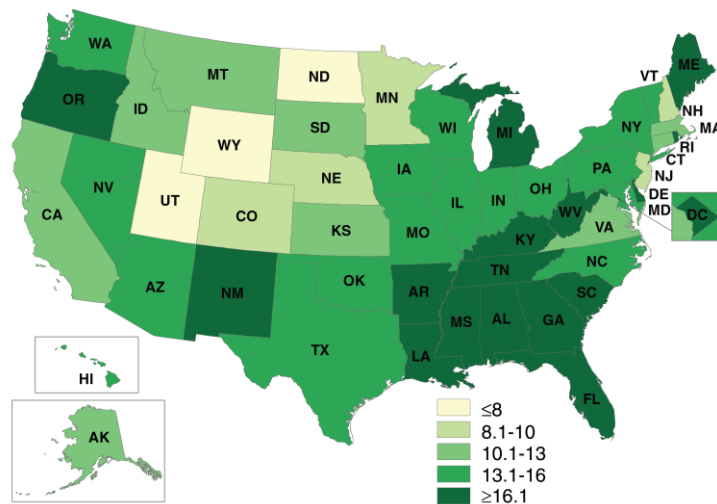
the state level. The new broad performance measures are listed as: (1) efficiency, (2) program access, (3) accuracy and (4) integrity, and customer service (USDA FNS, 2012). It is easy to trace these goals back to the objectives provided above, with the addition to these goals of a focus on customer service. The “on-the-ground” initiatives that are used to assess the program’s achievement of these goals are eight-fold: (1) call centers, (2) online systems, (3) document imaging, (4), kiosks, (5) partnering, (6) waiver of face-to-face interviews, (7) shortened interviews, and (8) online expedited applications (USDA Food and Nutrition Service, 2012). The result is some measure of autonomy at the state level and within the offices and programs administered by the agencies. The example of South Carolina will illustrate the state-level functioning of the program.

Regulations: Federal regulations of program eligibility and requirements

Nationally, applicant eligibility is determined through assessment of three criteria: gross income, net income, and resources (“Eligibility | Food and Nutrition Service,” n.d.). Gross income for the applicant household must be at or below 130% of the federal poverty line (around \$26,000 a year for a family of three). Net income must be at or below the federal poverty line (around \$20,000 for a family of three). Resources (also called assets) must fall below certain limits depending on whether the applicant’s household includes elderly or disabled (\$2,250 for non-elderly or disabled and \$3,250 for those with elderly or disabled) (USDA, 2015a). States may choose, however, whether to assess resources as part of eligibility. The maximum benefit allowance for a single individual is

\$194.00, a household of four is \$649.00, and household of eight is \$1169.00 (USDA, 2015a). As of April of 2016, the average benefit per person for the nation was around \$126.00 (USDA, Food and Nutrition Service, 2016b). Across the United States participation rates vary across and within regions but as of 2014, the Southeastern United States has some of the highest rates of participation in the nation, with almost every state in the region having greater than or equal to 16% of state population participating the program (figure 2.3) (USDA Economic Research Service Administrator, n.d.). Below I will examine the SNAP program in the South Carolina context, discussing the state-level structure of the program and provide a snapshot of participation rates and benefit amounts for the state.

Percent of population receiving SNAP benefits in FY 2014



Source: USDA, Economic Research Service using data from USDA, Food and Nutrition Service.

Figure 2.3 Percent of population receiving SNAP benefits in 2014

State-level Functioning: The South Carolina SNAP program

South Carolina has a total population of around 4.8 million persons. Of that 4.8 million, around 782,000 were SNAP participants as of January of 2016 (USDA, Food and Nutrition Service, 2016a) and the total benefit amount for the state in February 2016 was around \$96.5 million dollars (USDA, Food and Nutrition Service, 2016).

As a result of the Modernization Initiative discussed above, the South Carolina Department of Social Services (DSS), in which the SNAP program is housed and administered through county-level DSS agencies across the state's 46 counties, restructured its workflow patterns with the roll out of a new pattern in 2012 called the Regional Specialized Workflow plan (*South Carolina Department of Social Services Annual Accountability Report, 2012-2013, 2013*). Prior to 2012, county-level offices processed individual client cases from initial interview through benefit dispersal. With an increase in caseloads resulting from the recession of 2008-2009, particularly in counties containing the state's largest cities (i.e., Columbia in Richland County, Charleston in Charleston county, and Greenville in Greenville County), workloads were uneven (*South Carolina Department of Social Services Annual Accountability Report, 2012-2013, 2013*). Overall, the state saw an increase in caseload from 250,000 to over 450,000 in the years between the recession and 2012, reflecting changes in household earnings and the two policy changes from the ARRA stimulus bill discussed above. In line with the federal government's Modernization Initiative, South Carolina attempted to disperse the workload across the state's 46 counties.

Under the new model applicants are directed to a toll-free number to call for an initial eligibility interview over the phone. Through telephone interactions the applicant is made aware of information needed and a timeframe for program approval and benefit dispersal (*South Carolina Department of Social Services Annual Accountability Report, 2012-2013, 2013*; Personal communication, February 2016). County-level offices then process client applications and manage enrolled cases according to their county's designated role as an Economic Support Intake, Maintenance, or Finishing Center (figure A.3). The State DSS Office believes that this "regional processing center concept" is more efficient for staff time and helps the agency "better manage the distribution workload thereby ensuring timely delivery of benefits to needy citizens" (*South Carolina Department of Social Services Annual Accountability Report, 2012-2013, 2013, p. 11*).

2.2 THEORIES AND APPROACHES IN THE CONSTRUCTION OF PERSPECTIVE: MEDIA, DISCOURSE, AND IDEOLOGY

The construction and use of language is seen as a uniquely human phenomenon, often conceptualized as the distinguishing mode of cultural creation, interaction, and transmission (Duranti, 2001; Geertz, 1973). Discourse, according to Fairclough, is the socially-determined use of language (Fairclough, 2001). That is, language and society are co-constructing and context dependent and discourse, by way of this interaction, produces texts, both written and spoken that must be interpreted. The investigation of discourse, called discourse analysis, focuses on identifying and understanding the processes of discourse production and interpretation, and as such, must consider the underlying factors

and contexts within which these discourses are produced and interpreted. Rather than a purely academic exercise, discourse analysis allows for investigation into the real-world effects that discourse engenders. As Fairclough states, “discourse is part of a social practice and contributes to the reproduction of social structures” (Fairclough, 2001 p. 75). This is echoed by Duranti (2008 p.214), who relates the importance of discourse to everyday life, stating, “discourse actively shapes the surrounding world, especially in terms of social identities.”

As in any conversation, multiple contributing voices and the volume of the voice coupled with the identity of the individual speaker determines the influence of a given statement on the overall conversation. Put another way, the power of a voice lends differential influence to a discourse whether in face-to face conversation or at a much larger level. Powerful participants in a discourse can exercise constraints over less-powerful participants, therefore effecting their contribution to the overall discourse. Powerful participants in a discourse can also constrain the contents of the discourse, limiting or controlling knowledge and beliefs around a given subject, which also influences social relationships and social identities of both the powerful and less-powerful participants in the discourse (Fairclough, 2001). The power of a participant often rests on perceived authority lent through myriad factors such as official position, expertise, social capital, status, charisma, etc. (Gilsenan, 1996). Each of these factors is likely related to the other such that often the authority of the participant in the discourse is difficult for the other participants in the discourse to articulate. Frequently, in

terms of spoken or written discourse, power through authority is assessed by the context within which the discourse or text is created.

With discourse's capacity to aid in reproducing social structures and influence the construction and maintenance of social identities it holds considerable power. However, does the form of the discourse further affect its influence? Fairclough conceptualizes discourse, as a process that produces texts, both written and oral (Fairclough, 2001). In both written and oral forms, however, is the packaging, as it were, of the content of a discourse consequential to its interpretation, whether in face-to-face interactions or through printed text?

Built into the creation of a discourse are the underpinnings of the differential influence of powerful contributors that construct the parameters of what counts as valid within that discourse. In the United States as in many other countries, the media are positioned such that they function as a powerful voice, lending fundamental influence to the construction of many discourses. The study of media discourses has a long tradition in academia and is a mainstay of certain fields such as journalism, mass communications, sociology, anthropology, and public health (Abu-Lughod, 2008; Ginsburg, Abu-Lughod, & Larkin, 2002; Kim & Anne Willis, 2007; Kim et al., 2010). Further, research has shown that media coverage and framing of issues can influence individuals' perceptions (Nelson, Clawson, & Oxley, 1997), public opinion (McCombs, 2013), political agenda-setting (McCombs & Shaw, 1972), and policy creation (Papadakis, 1992). Often, this influence is circular, with public opinion of a media-covered issue influencing policy creation through political channels (Strömberg, 2001). Commonly, the

media employs a narrative form in relating information to its audiences, which is an effective way of presenting events such that information contained within the narratives can convey underlying perspectives, conceptions, and representations that influence the recipients of media narratives. But in what ways are these perspectives, conceptions, and representations packaged?

Studies have employed framing theory in assessing media coverage of topics and events. Framing theory acknowledges the complexity of issues and the possibility of viewing any issue from a range of perspectives, thereby influencing the viewer's conceptualization of the issue and, subsequently their thinking about it (Chong & Druckman, 2007; Entman, 1993; Van Gorp, 2007). In this way, the framing of an issue or event by national media through a narrative influences public opinion because of the large reach. For example, studies have investigated the media discourse around social issues (Kim et al., 2010), environmental issues (Gamson & Modigliani, 1989; McComas & Shanahan, 1999), and health issues (Dorfman, Wallack, & Woodruff, 2005; Kim & Anne Willis, 2007). The conscious employment of framing, presenting or highlighting a particular side of a dynamic issue, often aligns with perspectives associated with particular ideologies, whether political, social, or other. Media narratives often carry their ideologically imbued contents under the guise of objective reporting of observable events. Charles Briggs (2007), in his article on narratives of violence and the media, suggests that narratives can serve as indexes stating that, "by virtue of their capacity to construct events, to fashion aspects of social life into discrete, spatiotemporally ordered events and sense of agency and causality,

narratives project temporalities that seem to mirror the temporality of ...events.” (Briggs, 2007 p. 323). Put another way, incorporating notions of beginnings and ends and cause and effect play to expected phenomena, based on culturally bounded and defined expectations and knowing, that relate to truth. The indexical function of media narratives, Briggs posits, lies in their ability to “seem to be exactly like the objects they represent” (Briggs, 2007 p. 324). Context matters in terms of perceptions of narrative truth and, over time, media presentation of narratives can develop characters that act as indexes, or what Agha would call icons (Agha, 2007) that come not only to represent the reality of events as reported in a media article but also as entities that contain meanings that become associated with those icons. For example, George Lakoff has investigated the use of metaphor in political speeches regarding justifications for deciding to enter into what would become the Gulf War and examined their ability to partially construct the perceived reality of audiences of those speeches (Lakoff, 1991; Lakoff & others, 1993). For example, General Schwarzkoff’s metaphoric comparison of the occupation of Kuwait as “rape” serves as a carrier of meaning and a structuring agent in perceptions of a reality about a particular event (Lakoff, 1991). As such, decisions about courses of action are structured based on that perception of the occupation as an acute and abhorrent action, such as rape. Media narratives frequently feature characters (that is, people or things that are involved in an event) that are imbued with meaning and function as indexes that reference certain ideologies, conceptions, or representations of all manner of people, places, and ideas.

How individuals construct their worldview and make sense of their place in existence has been the subject of social science analyses for generations (d'Andrade, 1995). Interpretive anthropologist Clifford Geertz envisioned “common sense” as employing bounded systems of cultural meaning that often carry implicit ideologies of being such that telling someone to “be sensible” must carry along with it ample contextual and cultural understanding in order to be performed (Geertz, 1992). For example, a commonly used rhetorical device, the metaphor, can serve as a mechanism to link a mental image to a host of implied meanings (D'Andrade, 1981; Lakoff, 1991, 1993). In discussions of food insecurity and the role of SNAP, war metaphors are commonly used. For example, in a press release to the public about SNAP fraud, the USDA situated SNAP as “the first line of defense against hunger” and situated the program as “never more critical to fight against hunger” (“Trafficking | Food and Nutrition Service,” n.d.).

Likewise, cognitive mappings, called schema (d'Andrade, 1995) are built on a set of constructed logics that can be deployed in different contexts. The study of how we think, of course, has been boggling minds for millennia and was the subject of famous thinkers like Plato, however schema theory has been developed and evolved over the past few centuries with many conceptualizations of what they are and how they influence perception (D'Andrade, 1981). In this dissertation I will employ the cognitive psychologist George Mandler's definition of schemas as “bounded, distinct, and unitary representations” (d'Andrade, 1995, p. 122). The process of schematization occurs as individuals use “cognitive

categories into which [they] code environmental information and by which [they] interpret such information” (Downs & Stea, 1973, p. 19). What is apparent, then, is that schematic representations are constructed using context-dependent information and understood through the individual’s lens, comprised of their unique understanding of the way the world works, drawn from their lived-experiences.

In the context of this study on the perspectives of the SNAP program and its participants, the logics and “common sense” perspectives of project respondents were reflective of the values of merit, work ethic and individualism, what has been called the Bootstrap ideology (Gordon 1989) (figure 2.4). The metaphor of the bootstrap, specifically, the image of a person “pulling themselves up by their bootstraps” has been a common American idiom for years but the source is unknown (McNamee & Miller, 2009). This image has been embodied by the literary figure, Horatio Alger, a boy of low status who works hard and becomes rich and powerful. Alger stands as what Sherry Ortner has called a “key scenario”, in this case a prescription for success (Ortner, 1973). Over time, the bootstrap theory has become entrenched in “common sense” understandings (Geertz, 1992; Ortner, 1973) and has become an ideology (Gordon, 1989).

Building on the general conception of an ideology as the “basis of the social representations shared by members of a group (Van Dijk, 1998, p. 8), the bootstrap ideology invokes the common “American Dream”. This “dream” is built on values, or processes of evaluation, for ideologies (Van Dijk, 1998:76), of individualism, meritocracy, and work ethic (Becker & Marecek, 2008; Bullock,

2013; Weber, 2002). I employ Bullock’s conception of individualism as “a cluster of beliefs” that focuses on self-fulfillment, responsibility, and achievement. I share McNamee and Miller’s (2009) conception of meritocracy as the belief that a person “gets ahead” because of their effort. Aspects of the value of work ethic, or a focus on hard individual work and a deferment of reward, I draw from Bullock (2013) and Weber (2002).

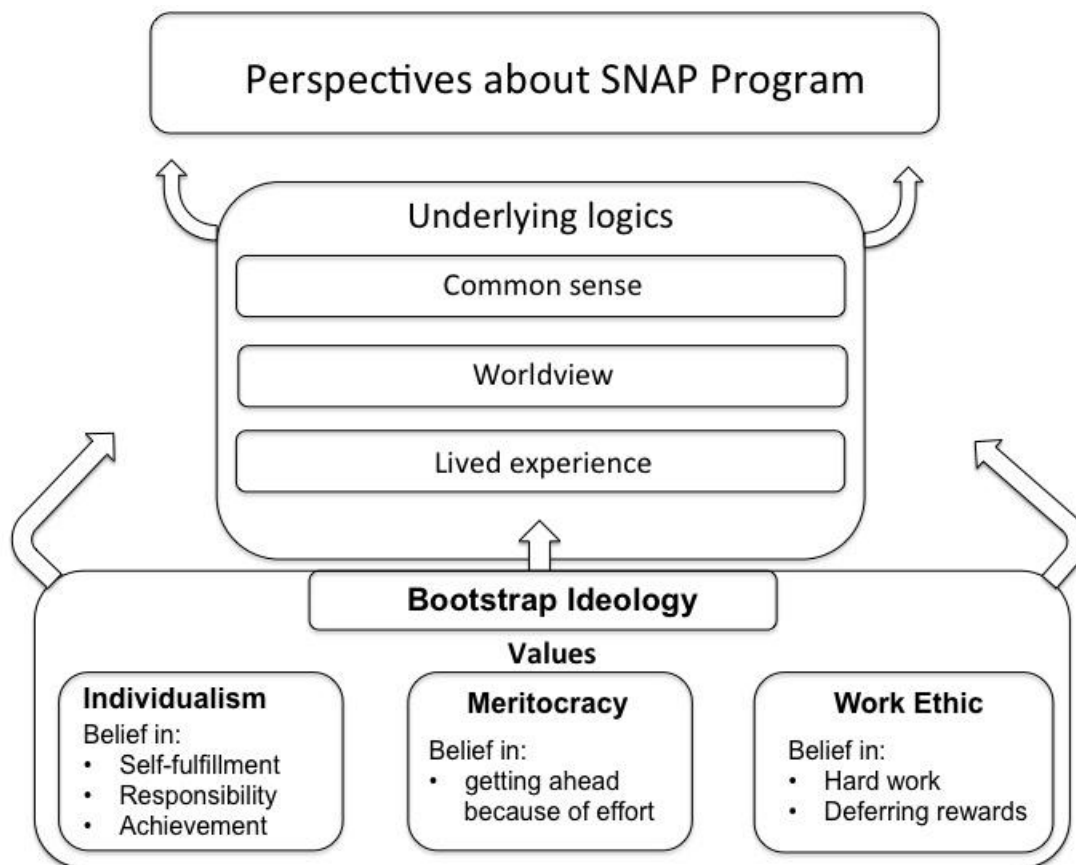


Figure 2.4 Schematic of the Bootstrap Ideology and contributing values and logics underlying perspective

Assessments of the existence and veracity of these values in another person are often tied to perceptions of the visible “signs” displayed by the

individual, such as car brands or food purchases, including those associated with luxury lifestyles (Agha, 2015). In addition, how the person is seen as “performing” their lifestyle also informs these assessments and ties in with the perceived deservingness of the individual. For example, individuals might levy assessments of a person’s choice of car brand against their perception of whether that choice matches with the person’s assumed social class and “makes sense” in terms of fiscal responsibility or prudence.

2.3 CONCEPTUALIZING POVERTY

During the span of the first half of the twentieth century, theories of “the poor” shifted from arguments steeped in biological determinism to seemingly more palatable arguments of cultural catalysts for poverty, such as Lewis’ “Culture of Poverty” (Lewis, 1966). This theory blends individualism and social structuralism such that a groups’ values and traits are developed as a result of structural constraints associated with poverty (Lewis, 1966; Seccombe et al., 1998). It was no longer immigrant Italians’ innate propensity for poverty because of their brain sizes so much as it was their cultural artifacts that led them into a poor lifestyle. During the last half of the twentieth century poverty and “the poor” were viewed through blended lenses of race and culture, each cementing conceptions about a monolithic population, “the poor”, often cast as, at worst, a moral threat and, at best, hapless victims (Goode & Maskovsky, 2001). Feagin’s (1972) attributions of poverty as individualistic, structural, and fatalistic was foundational to subsequent poverty researchers. Findings from this work have made their way into lay discussions of poverty (Bullock, 2013), typically in

perspectives viewing the poor as “lazy, uneducated, lacking skills, or not having the same values as those who are successful” (Karjanen, 2010: 6). Further, conceptualizations of poverty often relate to the “visibility” of it by others. For example, experiences of homelessness can be highly visible in urban settings as compared to “the working poor” or what David Shipler (2008) has called “the invisible poor”. The experiences of the “working poor” are varied and dynamic (Shipler, 2008) and because of this it may not be readily identifiable under the schemas of what poverty “looks like”. Further, researchers may not be able to accurately characterize or measure the prevalence of working poverty (Karjanen, 2010).

Over the last 20 years ideas about “the poor” have retained elements of “the culture of poverty”. Many in the media, politics, and the public discuss poverty in psychological and ethical terms (Weiner, Osborne, & Rudolph, 2010), often citing dependency and morality as the main impediments to “the poor” pulling themselves up by their bootstraps and achieving the meritocratic, individualistic American dream (Carr, 2006). In fact, the deployment of racism has been used as a method of undermining solidarity among poor African Americans for generations (Quadagno, 1996). This is evidenced in the example of cultivated perceptions of enslaved Blacks as ignorant and lazy, which could be strategically reflected by slaves to deflect suspicion, which furthered hegemonic domination and reified those negative perceptions (Gilens, 2009b). What is not widely presented in media, politics, or public discourses however, is the employment of agency, organizing, and grassroots leadership at the community-

level aimed at eliminating poverty by addressing the context-specific needs of locals rather than the top-down implementation of programs and policies that are designed by outsiders and measured through “best practices” using a “one size fits all” approach (Naples, 2014). In fact, the SNAP program could be considered one of those “one size fits all” programs.

Despite efforts by grassroots leadership at the community-level to provide contextually relevant approaches to reducing poverty, “the poor” are still commonly discussed as a subaltern population that lacks agency. A July 22, 2014 article from Time magazine points at the dangerous continuance of this discourse. It bears the title, “*NYC Apartment Building Will Have Separate Door for Lower Rent Tenants. What’s Up With That?*” (Regnier, 2014). A headline from the Telegraph provides a more incendiary, if not more telling, title: “*New York Opens the Door for the Segregation of Rich and Poor in Apartment Blocks*” (Walden, 2014). These articles cover the recent news that a luxury waterfront apartment building in Upper West Side Manhattan is to be built that includes some lower-income units. The building will include a separate entrance for the affordable units, which has been dubbed the “poor door” by the media. A quote from another real estate developer provides a business perspective. He states that, “no one ever said that the goal was full integration of these populations...so now you have politicians talking about that, saying how horrible those back doors are. I think it’s unfair to expect very high-income homeowners who paid a fortune to live in their building to have to be in the same boat as low-income renters, who are very fortunate to live in a new building in a great neighborhood” (Regnier

2014). The main danger of perspectives like this is the underlying ideologically based perspectives of “the poor” that stem from theories such as those provided above that have survived the last century. In this quote there is the static description of “the poor” set in opposition to “the rich” with the assumption of deserved merit attached to the rich, while the poor are charged with the moral obligation to feel fortunate that they might have access to a certain building and neighborhood in which to live. Performing poverty, based on this perspective, means to display contrition for an assumed undeserved access to material culture. Further, because of the ubiquity of these ideas and the monolithic portrayal of the poor as a population, individuals that would be seen as belonging to this group can also employ these ideologies in their assessment of “the poor”. In this way, these ideas support a cycle of blame and function as a form of ideological hegemony, that is, a process by which a consensus is obtained between dominant and subordinate groups” and the subordinate group takes dominant ideologies as “commonsense” (Seccombe et al., 1998: 862). Also, in this way, “the poor” within media narratives can serve the indexical, perhaps even metaphorical, functions presented through Briggs (2007) and Lakoff (1990).

“The poor” have always been a marginalized population in America. Frequently seen as less than full citizens, every action is scrutinized and judged. Ong, providing the perspective of Corrigan and Sayer and Foucault, sees this process through a governmentality lens, which posits that the state forwards a “project of moral regulation” in citizen-making (Corrigan & Sayer, 1985; Foucault, Burchell, Gordon, & Miller, 1991; Ong, 1996). She further provides a

conceptualization of monolithic portrayals of the poor by stating that, “this role of the state in universalizing citizenship is paradoxically attained through a process of individuation whereby people are constructed in definitive and specific ways as citizens- taxpayers, workers, consumers, and welfare-dependents” (Ong 1996: 738). Indeed, it has been shown that citizenship is not simply a binary option based on official state documentation and status. Rather, citizenship can be cast in incremental terms and that informal perceptions of the “fullness” of a person’s or groups’ citizen-status can be more important than legal assignment (Kruijt, Sojo, & Grynspar, 2002; McCargo, 2011).

2.4 SPECIFIC AIMS AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS

2014 marked the 50-year anniversary of President Johnson’s declaration of the ‘War on Poverty’. Since the waging of that war half a century ago the United States has created and implemented a variety of programs that seek to eliminate poverty and its related phenomenon, hunger. As Senator George McGovern said, “hunger is a political condition” (McGovern 2001) and the phenomenon of poverty in the United States is intricately and conceptually linked to food acquisition and eating. In fact, measurement of poverty through the use of thresholds, upon which eligibility criteria for many governmental assistance programs are determined, was designed in the 1960’s based on the US Department of Agriculture’s Thrifty Food Plan and the “ideal” allocation of 30% of household income spent on food (Bullock 2013). The measurement of poverty through the use of thresholds, then, was built on assumptions of “right practice”.

It was a prescription for proper household financial spending on food; a prescription for being.

The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP, formerly known as Food Stamps) is the largest food assistance program in the nation and, according to some, is positioned to play a crucial role in the reduction of poverty (McGovern, 2001; Tiehen et al., 2012; Yaktine et al., 2013). The program has received copious attention from scholars and policy-makers. Many researchers have investigated the effects of the program for individuals and households around food insecurity, poverty, and links to health through economic (Gundersen et al., 2011; McKernan et al., 2003; Yaktine et al., 2013), health (Frongillo et al., 2006), and social lenses. Investigations into the social conditions around SNAP participation are frequently focused on stigma of program participation and usage (Blumkin et al., 2008; Kaye et al., 2013; Kreider et al., 2012; Zekeri, 2003). The background factors that contribute to social concepts, such as stigma, however, have not been adequately investigated for the SNAP program.

The SNAP program is controversial, drawing support or opposition from political, media, and societal actors across the nation. Political and public discussions have been ongoing over the past several years regarding the goals of the program, with some seeing it as the income transfer program and others as a nutrition enhancement program based on the rebranding of the program in 2008. Further, judgment frequently centers on individual participants in the program. “Conventional wisdom” suggests that participation in the program might

be a visible comment on ones' self-worth and contributes to stigma associated with program participation (Zekeri, 2003). With the power to help shape social issues (Kim et al., 2010), the media acts as a powerful voice in the discourse surrounding the SNAP program through their creation and presentation of narratives about the program and its participants. Frequently these narratives contain framings that disguise ideologies and meanings associated with different perspectives on poverty, the role of government in welfare and food assistance, and notions regarding the parameters of citizenship and belonging that have important implications for policy development and program implementation. These larger issues will be addressed through a mixed-method examination of perspectives of the SNAP program and its participants byway of an identification and conceptualization the media discourse around the SNAP program (specific aim 1) and investigation into perspectives about the program held by frontline workers and program participants (specific aim 2).

Specific aim 1: Locate and conceptualize the media discourse around the SNAP program and its participants. It will address this aim through following five research questions:

1. What characters are presented in media-constructed articles about the SNAP program and its participants?
2. As presented in media articles about the SNAP program and its participants, whose responsibility is it to address issues of poverty and hunger?

3. What frames are included in media-constructed articles about the SNAP program and its participants?
4. What frames are most commonly used in articles that focus on a specific group's responsibility to address poverty or hunger in the United States?
5. What frames are most commonly used in articles by conservative and liberal news outlets? And how are they similar or different?

Specific aim 2: Explore the perspectives about the SNAP program and its participants held by SNAP participants and frontline workers and reactions to media discourse. It will address this aim through following five research questions:

1. What perspectives do project participants have on the SNAP program and SNAP participants
2. How do people react to and interpret specific-media constructed narratives about the SNAP program and its participants
 - i. What logics are used that might contribute to how respondents make sense of the SNAP program and its participants?

CHAPTER 3 METHODS

Introduction

This research project employed a mixed-methods design, incorporating quantitative and qualitative components, sequentially. The overall project was comprised of two specific aims:

- (1) Locate and summarize the media discourse around the SNAP program and its participants.
- (2) Explore the perspectives about the SNAP program and its participants held by SNAP participants and frontline workers and reactions to media discourse.

A brief overview of the methods for each study aim is presented, followed by detailed description of methods organized by specific aim. Finally, some concluding thoughts are presented that discuss how the combination of methods provide a comprehensive investigation into discourse and perspectives about the SNAP program and its participants.

Overview of methods

To address specific aim 1, I employed a quantitative content analysis for news media articles produced over the period of one year (December 2013-December 2014) that focused on SNAP to identify the media discourse around the program and its participants. To identify and characterize the discourse, I sampled articles from print, television, and Internet news media outlets. I examined the selected articles, identified the characters (figures featured prominently in the articles), frames (Entman, 1993), political ideology of the outlet (Conservative or liberal), and assigned responsibility to end hunger and poverty. I calculated frequencies of each of frame and performed Chi-square tests to assess the type of frames employed by political ideology of the outlet and assignation of responsibility.

To address specific aim 2, I employed an interpretive qualitative design using semi-structured and informal interviews with SNAP participants and frontline workers to explore perspectives about the SNAP program and its participants. To gain deeper insight into how their perspectives corresponded to the frames identified in the quantitative analysis I investigated respondent reactions to vignettes (Barter & Renold, 1999) constructed by the researcher that reflected the frames of the SNAP media discourse identified in specific aim 1.

3.1 METHODS FOR AIM 1: LOCATING AND CONCEPTUALIZING THE MEDIA DISCOURSE AROUND THE SNAP PROGRAM AND ITS PARTICIPANTS

Defining the sample

The process for sampling media stories involved the following.

(a) *Determining a timeline from which to search for media content.* Using the SYSOMOS media collection software package, I gathered media articles from December 2013 to December 2014, with sampling and analysis beginning in January of 2015. I chose the 2013-2014 time period because the political climate around the SNAP program was focused on the 2014 Farm Bill, which was passed on February 4, 2014 and signed into law on February 7, 2014. Sampling articles from this time period allowed me to capture SNAP-focused articles produced during the final months leading up to the passage of the Bill and the remaining nine months of the year after it was passed.

(b) *Choosing media sources.* In an effort to capture a wide range of media perspectives on the SNAP program, I sought media content from sources perceived to be aligned with differing political ideologies (e.g., liberal, conservative). Further, the national media sources have been stratified by their medium; print, broadcast, and news aggregator sites, since the public access media from across media platforms. The media outlets chosen for this project were: The New York Times, The New York Post, MSNBC, Fox News, The Huffington Post, and The Daily Caller. I considered The New York Times, MSNBC, and The Huffington Post as liberal outlets and The New York Post, Fox News, and The Daily Caller as conservative outlets (Iyengar & Hahn, 2009).

While these outlets are considered to reflect conservative and liberal ideologies

they are clustered around a centrist perspective when compared to far “left” liberal and far “right” conservative across the political ideological spectrum. Political ideology (liberal and conservative) that is presented by mainstream US media outlets like those included here, could be envisioned as more closely reflecting corporate interests and definitions of liberal and conservative based on what consumers want and how multinational corporations politically identify (Kellner, 2011). For example, “ the ownership by conservative corporations of dominant media corporations helps explain mainstream media support of the Bush-Cheney administration and its policies, such as the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq (Kellner, 2011, p. 11) Likewise, this may explain why “liberal” media outlets like MSNBC have neglected to provide much coverage of the Bernie Sanders presidential campaign, which embodies a far left perspective about the role of the state. Viewed in this way, then, the media content gathered for this study may nominally originate from conservative or liberal leaning news outlets but may also reflect the influence of corporate owners. Content was gathered using the SYSOMOS media collection software package.

(c) *Defining search terms.* I was interested in gathering media stories that contained discussion of the SNAP program and/ or SNAP participants. After a preliminary search using the term “SNAP”, I noted that media stories that employ the current name of the program, SNAP, invariably also include the term food stamps through statements such as, “...the SNAP program, formerly the Food Stamp Program...”.Therefore, to find these stories through SYSOMOS software I

defined my search terms as simply “food stamp”, “foodstamp”, “food stamps”, and “foodstamps”.

(d) *Sampling the data.* I sought a target sample of 300 stories, which would result in a sampling error of 5.7%, ensuring that results found in this sample would likely be an accurate representation of the media content of the total population of media stories (Neuendorf, 2002). I expected around half of the articles pulled by the query, using the previously described parameters, to be “unrelated” to my research focus due to linked content or replicated articles circulated around outlets (Neuendorf, 2002). To account for this, I randomly sampled articles from outlets that returned more than 100 articles using the randomization formula in Excel 2010. After retrieving a total of 1499 available articles from across all six outlets, the relatedness of the article was coded to ensure that the article truly was focused on the SNAP program or its participants rather than just an article containing the search terms in passing and “unrelated” articles were removed. Common examples of unrelated stories included (1) duplicates of original stories that were picked up by another outlet and (2) stories that only contained the keywords outside of the body of the article, such as in the comments section. To illustrate this process, I had an initial sample of 1010 articles from the Huffington Post internet aggregator news site. I took a random sample of 100 stories from this news site and after eliminating duplicates and unrelated articles ended up including 47 articles from the Huffington Post. The final sample included 295 articles, which are summarized in table 3.1.

Table 3.1 Description of sample

Media Outlet	Articles with keyword in document	Sampling	Final number of articles analyzed
The New York Post	56	56	13% (39)
The New York Times	34	34	9% (27)
Fox News	127	100	22% (66)
MSNBC	185	100	22% (66)
The Daily Caller	87	87	17% (50)
The Huffington Post	1010	100	16% (47)
Total	1499		100% (295)

Coding process

The codebook, variable definitions, and intercoder reliability for this project (table 3.2) was constructed using a semi-inductive approach (Neuendorf, 2002). Based on prior literature, field experience, and the research questions for the project, an *a priori* code list was first developed. The *a priori* codebook was applied to a small sample (n= 20) of media stories for fit of definition. The codebook was revised and augmented as a result of this application and then applied to the total sample of 295 articles. The codebook contains 13 variables, which contribute to three larger constructs, conceptualized as: (1) characters, (2) frames, and (3) responsibility. The mention of a character (e.g., politician, public) in an article was coded as “yes/no”. Multiple characters could be coded for each article. In contrast, each article was only assigned one frame and responsibility code. Each article was coded as presenting a dominant frame (e.g., health, cost)

and a dominant attribution of responsibility (e.g., personal, government).

Approximately 15% of the total article sample was double-coded (44 articles) and inter-rater reliability corrected for agreement by chance (*Krippendorff's alpha*) was calculated for each variable. Based on prior research I sought inter-rater reliability scores of no lower than .80 for each variable and for the overall alpha for the combined variables (Neuendorf, 2002). As presented in table 3.2, I achieved an overall alpha across the variables of .91 and specific variable alphas of .80 or higher.

Table 3.2 Coding variables, definitions, and intercoder reliability ($\alpha = .91$)

Frames: Presenting or highlighting a particular side of a dynamic issue

Nutrition ($\alpha = .81$)	Focuses on health or specifics of eating of individual or population. Could discuss fat, calories, or anything that points to health or wellness
Hunger ($\alpha = .81$)	Focuses on lack of food availability or access of individual, household, or population. Might use terms such as food security, food insecurity, or hunger.
Cost/ money ($\alpha = .81$)	Focuses on cost of SNAP program or welfare or assistance programs. Might also focus on money or cost in terms of household expenses.
Individualism ($\alpha = .80$)	Focuses on individualistic values or characteristics of a person or nation or population. Might discuss terms like work ethic, dependency, or personal fortitude.
Fraud ($\alpha = .90$)	Focuses on illegal use of the SNAP program, or participation in the SNAP program, such as selling EBT dollars for personal income.

Characters: People or groups that are included within a news outlet's article

Politicians ($\alpha = .80$)	Any individual that is identified as working for the government in an elected or appointed capacity at either the state or federal level
SNAP Participants ($\alpha = .80$)	Any mentioned person that uses the SNAP program

The Public ($\alpha= 1$)	Any mention of the "the public" or "citizens" or discussion of America in terms of its people at large
Farmers ($\alpha= 1$)	Any mention of farmer(s) in article
Retailers ($\alpha= 1$)	Any mention of the term retailer or retail or specifically names retail establishment within the context of the SNAP program or participants

Responsibility: Presenting specific groups or people as responsible for addressing the issues of poverty or lack of food for individuals or groups

Personal responsibility ($\alpha= .81$)	Discussing specific people or individuals as responsible for addressing the issues of poverty or hunger for individuals or groups
Public responsibility ($\alpha= .80$)	Discussing the public as responsible for addressing the issues of poverty or hunger for individuals or groups
Government responsibility ($\alpha= .81$)	Discussing the government or specific governmental programs, as responsible for addressing the issues of poverty or hunger for individuals or groups

Analysis

The variables media outlet, character, frame, and responsibility were all categorical. Statistical analysis was conducted using STATA 13 statistical analysis software (Statacorp, n.d.). In each article, I coded for the presence (1) or absence (0) of characters, responsibility, and frames as defined in the analytic codebook (table 3.2). Frequency tables were calculated for character (table 4.3), responsibility (table 4.4), and frame (table 4.5) variables to determine which characters were mentioned when each type of responsibility was attributed, and which single frames were employed within each news outlet. Pearson's χ^2 tests were then run to assess whether frequencies of characters mentioned by responsibility attribution were statistically different. Next, I sought to determine which employed frames were used by types of responsibility attribution present in

the article (table 4.6) and then which employed frames were more or less common by political ideology of the news site (table 4.7). I used Pearson's χ^2 tests to examine differences in responsibility attribution for each frame and differences in use of frames by political ideology of the media outlets.

3.2 METHODS FOR AIM 2: EXPLORING THE PERSPECTIVES ABOUT THE SNAP PROGRAM AND ITS PARTICIPANTS HELD BY SNAP PARTICIPANTS AND FRONTLINE WORKERS AND REACTIONS TO MEDIA DISCOURSE

Study design and sampling

This study used an interpretive qualitative design that combined elements of discourse and schema analysis with emergent coding and constant comparative methods, drawing influences from a grounded theory approach to data analysis as described by Bernard 2011, Strauss and Corbin 1990, Patton 2014. This study employed a maximum-variation sampling frame (Patton, 2005), which privileges variation of sample and seeks to identify patterns by "capturing the core experiences and central, shared dimensions of a setting or phenomenon" (Patton 2002, p. 235). As such, participants were selected to vary primarily in their relation to the SNAP program and secondarily in their demographic characteristics. Primarily, I was interested in gathering a wide range of perspectives from among individuals that interacted with the SNAP program in a variety of ways so I organized my recruitment of respondents into categories. The categories were (1) SNAP participants and (2) frontline workers (official and unofficial).

Based on prior field experience I chose to sub-divide the frontline workers into two categories: official and unofficial because there are individuals that interact with the SNAP program as part of their job but are not employed by the

state's SNAP agency, but by a participating retailer, a volunteer organization, or an advocacy group. Therefore I expected that unofficial frontline workers might have different perspectives from both SNAP participants and official frontline workers.

Official frontline workers were conceptualized as those whose occupation was primarily focused on administering the SNAP program or delivering it to program participants. These individuals also directly received salary from SNAP program funding. For example, County and state-level Department of Social Security employees or SNAP outreach-funded employees. Official frontline workers have been examined as strategically positioned individuals whose jobs are to “make” policy (Kingfisher, 1998) and as such their perspectives are important to gather.

Unofficial frontline workers were conceptualized as those whose occupations involved interacting with the SNAP program through the use of electronic benefits transfer (EBT) cards by SNAP participants, but this interaction was tangential to their job description. For example, grocery store cashiers or farmers market workers that transact SNAP dollars. Unofficial frontline workers enact policy through their facilitation or prohibition of selected items by SNAP participants and as such their perspectives are valuable in terms of investigating a range of perspectives about the SNAP program.

Consistent with a maximum variation sampling methodology, I sought a diverse sample of participants that ranged in age, geographic location, sex, and race. Eligible respondents must have been over 18 years old and either currently

enrolled in the SNAP program or currently employed in a position as an official or unofficial frontline SNAP worker during the time of the study.

Recruitment

Recruitment occurred across the state of South Carolina through a combination of flyer placement, cold-calling, and snowball recruitment methodology (Bernard, 2011). To recruit unofficial frontline worker grocery store cashiers, flyers were placed in employee break rooms in a variety of regional and national grocery store chains (figure B.1). To recruit official frontline workers a combination of cold-calling county-level Department of Social Services offices and personal connections to health department personnel were accessed to set up interviews. To recruit SNAP participants, personal connections were accessed to begin recruitment. Connections were developed through previous interactions between the researcher and the respondent through another research project. I followed personal connection recruitment with snowball recruitment, whereby study respondents recommended someone else that might be eligible to participate (Bernard, 2011). Finally, recruitment flyers were hung in public libraries across South Carolina (figure B.2). A twenty-dollar incentive was offered to SNAP participants and unofficial frontline workers to compensate them for their time. Official frontline employees at Department of Social Services offices were not allowed to accept incentives for participation and so were not offered the incentive to complete the interview. I recruited and interviewed respondents until I achieved saturation of themes (Altheide & Johnson, 1994; Creswell & Miller, 2000).

This study was reviewed by the University of South Carolina Institutional Review Board. Informed consent was obtained from all project respondents and I assured all respondents of confidentiality through de-identification and secure storage of data, as in accordance with standard human subjects research requirements. To further ensure confidentiality I used pseudonyms for each respondent in transcripts and demographic documents.

Interview construction and process

This study was guided by theories of media framing, discourse and ideology and underlying logics. To this end I asked questions in the semi-structured interview guide (table 3.3) that sought to elicit respondents' opinions and perspectives through their conceptualizations of phenomena, such as "what do you think about poverty in the United States, what does it look like to you?". Further, I organized the guide to incorporate elements of media framing, conceptualizations of phenomena, perspectives on those phenomena and the specifically the SNAP program, and finally the relationships between discourse and ideology through reactions to vignettes. These elements were represented through the following interview guide structure: (1) mainstream news media, (2) poverty and hunger in America, (3) the SNAP program and its participants, and (4) researcher constructed vignettes that portrayed frames found in the media content analysis. Questions for the first three topics primed participants to be thinking about their views on the media, poverty, hunger and the SNAP program and prepare them to respond to the vignettes. The data for this analysis draw exclusively from the last section of the interview that included these vignettes.

The constructed vignettes (Barter & Renold, 1999) sought to gain perspectives through reaction to reading specific passages that corresponded to the findings of a previously conducted media content analysis of the media discourse around the SNAP program (Younginer et al., in preparation). Findings from that study revealed four common media frames used most often in the overall media discourse around SNAP. The frames were: (1) cost, (2) fraud, (3) individualism, and (4) health. In constructing the vignettes, the cost, fraud, and health frames were based on factual information about the SNAP program, as presented by the USDA. The individualism frame was constructed from a combination of media articles from a range of media outlets to include elements that were commonly found in media articles about individual SNAP participants. These elements included family structure and sex of the main character and their specific actions in relation to SNAP participation, such as finding work or explanation of why they enrolled in the program. The project respondents were asked to read the vignettes and then provide their general opinion of what they just read and then were asked follow-up questions related to the specific vignette.

Table 3.3 Interview guide questions

Introductory questions

1. To begin, please tell me a bit about yourself. Anything you'd like to share.
F1-1: Would you mind sharing your age?
F1-2: What race would you consider yourself to be?

Questions about news media

2. So, in what ways do you get your news?
Probe their responses (That is, do you watch, read the news? Would you consider yourself a "news junkie"? What types of news media do you mostly consume?)
3. Tell me about the role that media plays in terms of informing you about issues.
Probe: do you think this is true for others?
4. What are your opinions of the news media, generally?
F4-1: TV news stations (Fox, MSNBC, CNN, Others?)
F4-2: newspapers (NY Times, NY Post, USA Today, State newspaper, Others?)
F4-3: Internet news sites (Huffington Post, Daily Caller, Others?)
5. What sorts of media stories do you see/ read about SNAP?
6. What do you think about them?
F6-1: Do you prefer to read or see particular types of stories/ what resonates with you?
Probe: opinion pieces, news articles, personal interests stories
7. Overall, what sort of role do you think the media plays in people's ideas about welfare in this country?
F7-1: Poverty in general?
F7-2: The SNAP program specifically?

Questions about poverty and hunger in America

8. What do you think of when I say "public assistance"?
F8-1: What are some types of assistance that we have in this country?
9. When I say "welfare" what do you think of?
Probe: What sorts of programs, etc.?
10. What do you think about poverty in the United States?
F10-1: Is it a problem? How big?
11. When I say the phrase "the poor" who does that mean to you?
12. Would you say that hunger is problem in America? Why, or why not?
13. Whose main responsibility is it to eliminate or combat hunger?
F13-1: What about poverty?

Questions about SNAP

14. Have you heard of the SNAP program?

15. Have you heard of the food stamp program?

[If they haven't heard of it: "The SNAP program is a federal program that provides monthly funds to people that have an income of less than 130% of the federal poverty line. The funds may be used for food items that are not hot, prepared foods."]

16. Tell me what you know about it.

F16-1: What is it? What does it do? Who is it for?

17. Would you consider SNAP to be welfare?

18. What do you think the vast majority of peoples' opinions about welfare are?

Probe: The SNAP program?

19. What are some things that you hear others saying about SNAP as a program or people that use SNAP?

20. Do you think that race plays a role in others' opinions about the program or its participants?

Probe around their responses

SNAP participants

21a. Could you share with me any experiences you have had with SNAP workers?

F21-1: With cashiers? With anyone else that directly interacts with you in terms of using SNAP?

Frontline workers

5b. Could you tell me a bit about your role in the SNAP program?

F15b-1: What sorts of interactions do you have in terms of dealing with the program?

F15b-2: Responsibilities, etc.?

Discussion of media frames

Vignette A- cost

Currently, around 46 million people are enrolled in the SNAP program, with the average person receiving \$125 per month. The average household of four receives around \$450 a month. The annual national budget for the SNAP program in 2015 is around \$75 billion.

22. In your opinion, what is the main point or points of this selected passage?

23. Do you agree/ disagree with the points that it's making?

24. How does this selected passage fit in with what you think about the SNAP program

Vignette B- fraud

SNAP fraud is when SNAP benefits are exchanged for cash. This is called trafficking and it is against the law. SNAP fraud also happens when someone lies on their application to get benefits or to get more benefits than they are supposed to get. SNAP fraud also happens when a retailer has been disqualified from the program for past abuse and lies on the application to get in the program again. The trafficking rate has fallen over the last two decades, from about 4 cents on the dollar in 1993 to about 1 cent in 2006-08.

-
25. In your opinion, what is the main point or points of this selected passage?
 26. Please describe what you picture when you think of SNAP fraud.
 27. In your opinion, what sorts of things count as fraud?
 28. Do you think fraud is a big problem in the SNAP program?

Vignette D- Individualism

A 34-year-old single mother of 4 young children lives in Columbia, SC. She is a high school graduate who enrolled in college for nursing but didn't complete her degree after she could no longer afford the tuition. Unable to find work she enrolled in the SNAP program in 2009 and now receives around \$500 per month in EBT. Jones plans to continue receiving SNAP saying, "I have been looking for work but I can't find anything that pays enough so I'll just keep on getting EBT until I can find a decent, well-paying job. I mean, EBT lets me get pretty much anything I need food-wise for the house, so that's very helpful".

33. What's your opinion of the person just from reading this short passage?
34. What do you think about her decision to stay on SNAP?
35. What would change your opinion of her?

Vignette C- health

For more than 40 years, the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) has served as the foundation of America's national nutrition safety net. As of Oct. 1, 2008, Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) is the new name for the federal Food Stamp Program. The new name reflects changes made to meet the needs of clients, including a focus on hunger and nutrition and an increase in benefit amounts.

29. In your opinion, what is the main point or points of this selected passage?
 30. In your opinion, what is the goal of the SNAP program?
 31. Should it have a different goal or goals?
 32. What do you think about the regulation of certain foods as allowable for purchase?
-

Sample

Guided by a maximum variation sampling frame (Patton, 2005), I recruited respondents from varying geographic locations so as to capture a potentially wider range of perspectives as the SNAP program may be administered in slightly different ways across urban and rural settings and contexts (figure 3.1) and demographics such as age range, race, and interactions with the SNAP program (table 3.4). I recruited a sample of twenty total respondents, comprised

of SNAP participants (n=6), unofficial frontline workers (n=4), and official frontline line workers (n=10).

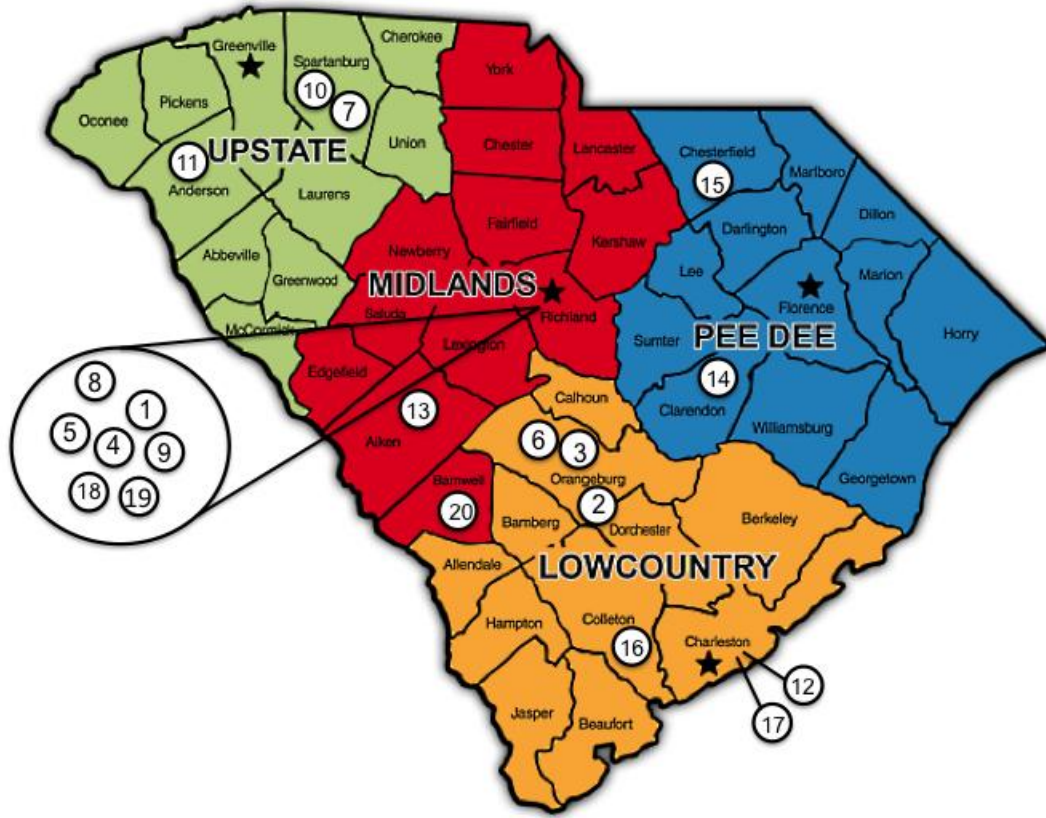


Figure 3.1 Geographic locations of study respondents

Table 3.4 Summary of respondent demographics (n=20)

	n	%
Respondent Categories		
SNAP Participants	6	30%
Official Frontline Workers	10	50%
Unofficial Frontline Workers	4	20
Race		
African American	6	30%
White	13	65%
Bi-racial	1	5%
Sex		
Male	4	20%
Female	16	80%
Age Range¹		
18-29	5	25%
30-39	6	30%
40-49	2	10%
50-59	2	10%
60+	3	15%

¹ Two respondents declined to provide an age

Analytic approach

Interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim by the researcher and the external transcription service, Verbal Ink. Interviews transcribed by the external transcription service were checked for accuracy against the original audio files by the primary researcher listening to the original audio and following along in the written transcript, searching for and correcting inconsistencies. Interview transcripts were entered into Nvivo 10 qualitative analysis software (QSR International Pty Ltd, 2012). My approach and analysis was informed by cognitive and linguistic social science theories and analytic techniques (Bernard, 2001; Briggs 2005; Duranti, 2001; Glaser and Strauss, 2009). I combined elements of discourse and schema analysis with emergent, inductive approaches (Bernard, 2011, d"Andrade 1995, Downs and Stea 1973).

While traditional discourse analysis examines natural speech interactions (Bernard, 2011; Briggs, 2005; Duranti, 2001), I constructed an essentialization of the media discourse around the SNAP program (Younginer et al. 2016, in preparation), reflecting the thematic dimensions of that discourse. I formatted this essentialized discourse as vignettes that were presented to participants. This essentialized media discourse was used as the catalyst for respondent reactions to the thematic dimensions through which I emergently coded the responses (Glaser & Strauss, 2009).

Data coding and analysis

Data coding proceeded in two phases: First, I coded emergent respondent perspectives by frame represented in each vignette. I then used emergent coding

to identify respondent logics across the frames. Next I interpretively examined coding of respondents' logics using a discourse and schema-based analytic approach to identify underlying ideologies shaping perspectives.

To achieve the first phase I employed the constant comparative method to discover emergent themes (Glaser & Strauss, 2009). First, I examined one quarter (n=5) of the transcripts and identified preliminary emergent thematic categories. I then applied those themes to the rest of the transcripts, shifting or regrouping themes as needed. Throughout this process I performed peer debriefing (Patton, 2005) among the researchers to verify the identification of themes. For every respondent I inductively examined their responses to each vignette and created emergent themes across the sample for each vignette that included each respondent's reaction to the particular vignette (table B.3).

To achieve the second phase, I employed interpretive discourse analysis methods, which draws from linguistic anthropology and schema analysis, which in turn draw from cognitive psychology (Bernard, 2011). I identified "logics" respondents employed by examining their reactions to the media frames. To do this I looked for passages where respondents presented their opinion of an action described in a vignette or perspective of a concept contained in the vignette. I used these statements to represent the internal logics by which the respondent interpreted the passage. For example, statements made by respondents in response to a vignette were frequently followed by justification for that statement. Typically, this resulted in statements structured as "I think X (perspective) because A, B, and C (logic)." In a sense, the logics are analytically

identifiable by the “because”, relating some contextualized understanding of how the respondent made sense of the perspective that can be interpreted by the researcher. Further, logics could be implicit or explicit and could employ rhetorical devices such as metaphor (Lakoff, 1991) or culturally-bound schemas (D’Andrade, 1981) which contained “known” steps or processes that to an insider might appear as “common sense” (Geertz, 1992). To identify logics in the transcripts I identified statements that implicitly or explicitly included metaphors, such as “getting ahead”, “maintaining”, “staying afloat”, and “the edge”. I also identified statements that implicitly or explicitly contained “because” justifications for perspectives, as well as identified statements that implicitly or explicitly alluded to “common sense” or worldviews. These statements were often presented as common sayings, such as “don’t judge because you never know” or as passed-down knowledge such as “my grandmother always told me...” . A list of emergent themes that represent respondent logics is presented in table B.2. Through this process underlying logics emerged that provided insight into the ideologies contributing the perspectives of the project respondents.

Combining the coding from phase one on emergent themes by frame and phase two on logics employed across all frames allowed us to analyze and present the data at multiple levels. First, the overall themes that emerged from analysis of individual vignettes provides insight into perspectives for each media frame. Second, I present (Bernard, 2011) an analysis of the logics that underpin the respondent perspectives and provide an opportunity to identify potential common ground in seemingly contradictory perspectives. Finally, I present an

analysis of the relationships between emergent logics that were employed by the respondents across the vignettes and position them within the Bootstrap Ideology.

Concluding thoughts

Through the methods described above I was able to achieve the aims of the overall project: (1) identifying and conceptualizing the news media discourse around the SNAP program and its participants and (2) exploring the perspectives of SNAP participants and frontline workers about the SNAP program and its participants through their reactions to the media discourse. Conceptually, this project offers a way to encapsulate an influential and publicly available discourse (the media discourse) focused on the SNAP program and contextualize individual reactions to the media discourse as filtered through respondent-held perspectives of the SNAP program and its participants. Additionally, it provides and accounting and analysis for the underlying logics that contribute to respondents' perspectives, which offers a way for researchers to understand the contextualized perspectives of individuals and potentially to identify common ground in seemingly opposed viewpoints.

CHAPTER 4

MANUSCRIPTS

4.1 MEDIA DISCOURSE AROUND THE SNAP PROGRAM DURING THE CONTENTIOUS PASSAGE OF THE AGRICULTURAL ACT OF 2014¹

Abstract

The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP, formerly called the Food Stamp Program) is one of the largest food assistance programs in the United States. It serves almost 46 million people and has been shown to reduce food insecurity, which has been called “one of the most important nutrition-related public health issues in the United States”. Despite SNAP’s effect on food insecurity the program is contentious, including a significantly delayed passage of the federal bill that contains the authorization and budget for the SNAP program, colloquially called the Farm Bill. At the nexus of the political perspectives about the program is the news media, which is positioned to influence political and public opinions and decision-making around the SNAP policy. However, there has not been a systematic exploration of the media discourse around the SNAP program. The purpose of this study is to identify the news media discourse around the SNAP program and its participants and situate that discourse within larger political and social contexts.

¹ Younginer, N. A., Blake, C. E., Jones, S. J., Kingsolver, A. E., & Kim, S. H. To be submitted.

I gathered a sample of 295 articles across six news outlets representing three modes of presentation: print (New York Times and New York Post), television (MSNBC and Fox News), and Internet news aggregator sites (The Daily Caller and The Huffington Post). I semi-inductively coded the articles for the characters present in the articles, assignment of responsibility to address hunger and poverty, and the general framing of the article. I found that the most commonly included characters were politicians (n=187) and SNAP participants (n=180), followed by the public (n=121). The most commonly mentioned entity responsible for addressing poverty and hunger was the government (24%) followed by personal and public responsibility, 21% and 4% respectively. The most commonly employed frame was costs of the program (53%), followed by individualism (16%), health (12%), and fraud (11%). Articles that employed a cost framing were more likely to present the government as responsible for addressing hunger or poverty ($p < .01$). Articles from liberal outlets were more likely to employ a health frame and, articles from conservative outlets were more likely to employ a fraud frame ($p < .01$).

The use of these frames by media outlets reflects the political debates that were occurring around the passage of the 2014 Farm Bill, which typically focused on the cost of the SNAP program and legislation around drug testing of applicants and work requirements. Because almost 80% of the 2014 Farm Bill spending is allocated for nutrition programs the public health community should consider the bill foremost a Nutrition Bill with significant implications for millions of people. The dominant media focus on cost of the program, individualism, and

fraud rather than health points to the need for public health researchers and practitioners to act as advocates for nutrition assistance programs and policies through active participation in the media discourse around programs such as SNAP.

Problem and Study Purpose

The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP, formerly called the Food Stamp Program) is one of the largest food assistance programs in the United States (Tiehen et al., 2012). It serves almost 46 million individuals (USDA 2015) and has been shown to reduce the likelihood of food insecurity (Mykerezi & Mills, 2010; Nord, 2012; Ratcliffe et al., 2011) and poverty (Tiehen et al., 2012), and even increase academic performance in children (Frongillo et al., 2006).

Food insecurity has been linked to a host of negative health and social developmental outcomes for children (Jyoti, Frongillo, & Jones, 2005), obesity in adults (Pan, Sherry, Njai, & Blanck, 2012), and poorer overall health with higher nutritional risk among the elderly (Lee & Frongillo, 2001).

Despite the potential for the SNAP program to reduce food insecurity and poverty, and subsequently, have a positive effect on health for all age groups, the program is contentious. Politically, this contention is demonstrated through the significantly delayed passage of the federal bill that contains the authorization and budget for the SNAP program, the Farm Bill. Socially, some people do not approve of the program and believe it is an entitlement program that is abused more often than not and to participate in it signifies a personal failure (Tropman, 1989).

At the nexus of the political and social perspectives about the program is the news media. News media stories influence and reflect perspectives of the SNAP program. Taken collectively as the media discourse, news media stories stand as an “artifact” of American culture that reflect and influence concerns and beliefs (Gilens, 2009a), shape social issues (Kim et al., 2010), and help set political and policy agendas (M. McCombs, 2013). Much of news media’s power lies in its ability to introduce its audiences to issues beyond their direct individual experiences and serve as “evidence” for the formation of personal opinion (Gilens, 2009a), typically fitting within larger cultural frames (Van Gorp, 2007). Despite the important role the SNAP program plays in the health and economic wellbeing of 46 million people, to my knowledge, there has not been a systematic exploration of the media discourse around the SNAP program and its participants.

In addition to presenting the news media discourse around the SNAP program, I argue public health practitioners occupy a strategic position to influence the media discourse, and subsequently the political and public opinions and decisions around the SNAP program. As such, public health practitioners must realize the need for their voice as program and policy advocates for nutrition programs such as SNAP, which have a significant public health impact for millions of children, adults, and elderly across the nation (Patricia Elliott & Raziano, 2012). Therefore, the purpose of this study is to identify the news media discourse around the SNAP program and its participants and situate that discourse within larger political and social contexts.

The Contentious Passage of the Agricultural Act of 2014 and the Role of News Media

The SNAP program has been legislatively housed within the Farm Bill since 1973 (Gritter, 2015) along with other nutrition-focused programs. While the Farm Bill is often viewed as predominantly an agricultural bill, almost 80% of the total funding package for the Bill is allocated to nutrition programs, leading some to call it first and foremost a nutrition bill (Patricia Elliott & Raziano, 2012; Zulauf & Orden, 2014).

Although the passage of the 2014 Farm Bill was particularly contentious and centered on the debates regarding the SNAP program, SNAP escaped relatively unchanged. Interestingly, some have argued it is the very fact that the SNAP program is contained within the large omnibus bill that serves as shield from drastic changes, such as welfare's shift to block grants (Gritter, 2015).

The Agricultural Act of 2014 marks the 11th passage of the omnibus bill that drives most US Farm policy (Jackson et al., 2009) and funds some nutrition programs (Patricia Elliott & Raziano, 2012). The history of the bill can be traced to Depression-era America and a need to respond to collapsing agriculture prices due to overproduction and declining farmer income resulting in higher rates of unemployment (Patricia Elliott & Raziano, 2012). A series of laws and programs were created to address these two issues and from these seeds the first Farm Bill, the Food and Agriculture Act of 1964 was passed. The Farm Bill has expanded its juridical reach since the 1965 act and the current Farm Bill is composed of twelve sections, called titles, that address commodity crops and

insurance, forestry, foreign aid, energy, rural development, and nutrition, among others.

The passage of the 2014 Farm Bill was particularly contentious and much of the debate was tied to the larger economic context. With the national recession of 2008-2009 still fresh on the minds of citizens and politicians, “deficit reduction, entitlement programs, taxes, and policies to stimulate employment and growth dominated the domestic political dialogue” (Zulauf & Orden, 2014, p. 24). As such, “voracious objections” were raised by conservatives around farm support and nutrition assistance, with one version of the bill removing the nutrition title from the bill altogether (Gritter, 2015; Zulauf & Orden, 2014). The Farm Bill was to be enacted by the end of the 112th Congress, in fall of 2012. This goal was not met. Instead, the 112th Congress passed a stopgap measure to extend the provisions of the 2008 Farm Bill by one year, ending September 30, 2013. With three months remaining in the extension period, the Senate approved a version of the Bill that House Republicans rejected. In reply, the House presented a Farm Bill that retained farm safety net programs but completely removed the Nutrition Title from the bill, which had been home to nutrition assistance programs, such as SNAP, for more than forty years (Gritter, 2015). This new House-supported stand-alone resolution, called the Nutrition Reform and Work Opportunity Act (H.R. 3102), included cuts to the SNAP program that would have reduced SNAP spending almost \$40 billion by limiting the number of Able-Bodied Working Adults Without Dependents (ABAWDs), removing categorical eligibility of applicants, a feature of the program through which SNAP

eligibility is automatic if the applicant is a participant in certain other means-tested assistance programs (Congressional Budget Office, 2013). The House bill also proposed allowing states to subject SNAP applicants and participants to drug testing (Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, 2014). Eventually, the two House bills were merged, returning the SNAP program back to the Farm Bill. In the end, the Farm Bill signed by President Obama on February 7, 2014 contained authorization and funding for the SNAP program that did not include the House-proposed cuts and drug testing components. Rather than cutting the program by almost \$40 billion over ten years the final budget contained around \$8 billion dollars of cuts over ten years through removal of a mechanism that previously had included a benefit increase to cover utility expenses for states that participated in this practice (Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, 2014). Although the debate and eventual passage of the Farm Bill occurred in a political context, non-political institutions historically and currently play a significant role in influencing the debates voiced by the lawmakers. Some of these non-political institutions include lobbying groups, agribusinesses, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) representing farmers, and the media (Brasier, 2002).

The application of framing theory in identifying the media discourse around the SNAP program

In the year leading up to the eventual passage of the 2014 Farm Bill, news media outlets produced many articles about the SNAP program and its participants, representing the SNAP media discourse. In the United States as in many other countries, the media are positioned such that they function as a powerful voice, lending fundamental influence to the construction and

communication of many discourses (Van Gorp, 2007). The study of media discourses has a long tradition in academia and is a mainstay of certain fields such as journalism, mass communications, sociology, anthropology, and public health (Abu-Lughod, 2008; Ginsburg et al., 2002; Kim & Anne Willis, 2007; Kim et al., 2010).

Commonly, the media use narratives in the form of articles to relate information. Information contained within these stories conveys underlying perspectives, conceptions, and representations (Van Gorp, 2007). Typically, such articles are “framed” so as to direct the attention of the audience toward a particular frame. Framing theory acknowledges the complexity of issues and the possibility of viewing any issue from a range of perspectives, thereby influencing the viewer’s conceptualization of the issue and, subsequently their thinking about it (Chong & Druckman, 2007; Entman, 1993; Van Gorp, 2007). In this way the framing of an issue or event by national media through an article influences public opinion because of the large reach of the stories being presented. For example, studies have investigated the media discourse around social issues (Kim et al., 2010), environmental issues (Gamson & Modigliani, 1989; McComas & Shanahan, 1999), and health issues (Dorfman et al., 2005; Kim & Anne Willis, 2007). The conscious employment of framing, of presenting or highlighting a particular side of a dynamic issue, often aligns with perspectives associated with particular ideologies, whether political, social, or other. Media articles often carry their ideologically-imbued contents under the guise of objective reporting of observable events. The interpretation of frames, however, is often unconscious

and relates to the deeply held ideas and beliefs within the individual. Uptake by audiences of the messages contained within media stories is variable as individuals are not passive message-receivers. Rather they are engaged, meaning-making participants in society that facilitate the transmission of media-constructed stories, filtered through their own contexts (Agha, 2011; Briggs, 2007). This study will investigate a sample of media articles around the SNAP program and its participants with an aim to discover what frames are used in the media discourse around the program and its participants and how those frames are contextualized. It will address this aim through following five research questions:

1. What characters are presented in media-constructed articles about the SNAP program and its participants?
2. As presented in media articles about the SNAP program and its participants, whose responsibility is it to address issues of poverty and hunger?
3. What frames are included in media-constructed articles about the SNAP program and its participants?
4. What frames are most commonly used in articles that focus on a specific group's responsibility to address poverty or hunger in the United States?
5. What frames are most commonly used in articles by conservative and liberal news outlets?

Defining the sample

The process for sampling media stories involved the following.

(a) *Determining a timeline from which to search for media content.* Using the SYSOMOS media collection software package, I gathered media articles from December 2013 to December 2014, with sampling and analysis beginning in January of 2015. I chose the 2013-2014 time period because the political climate around the SNAP program was focused on the 2014 Farm Bill, which was passed on February 4, 2014 and signed into law on February 7, 2014. Sampling articles from this time period would capture SNAP-focused articles produced during the final months leading up to the passage of the Bill as well as the remaining nine months of the year after it was passed.

(b) *Choosing media sources.* In an effort to capture a wide range of media perspectives on the SNAP program, I sought media content from sources perceived to be aligned with differing political ideologies (e.g., liberal, conservative). Further, the national media sources have been stratified by their medium; print, broadcast, and news aggregator sites, since the public access media from across media platforms. The media outlets chosen for this project were: The New York Times, The New York Post, MSNBC, Fox News, The Huffington Post, and The Daily Caller. I considered The New York Times, MSNBC, and The Huffington Post as liberal outlets and The New York Post, Fox News, and The Daily Caller as conservative outlets (Iyengar & Hahn, 2009). While these outlets are considered to reflect conservative and liberal ideologies they are clustered around a centrist perspective when compared to far “left”

liberal and far “right” conservative across the political ideological spectrum. Political ideology (liberal and conservative) that is presented by mainstream US media outlets like those included here, could be envisioned as more closely reflecting corporate interests and definitions of liberal and conservative based on what consumers want and how multinational corporations politically identify (Kellner, 2011). For example, “ the ownership by conservative corporations of dominant media corporations helps explain mainstream media support of the Bush-Cheney administration and its policies, such as the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq (Kellner, 2011, p. 11) Likewise, this may explain why “liberal” media outlets like MSNBC have neglected to provide much coverage of the Bernie Sanders presidential campaign, which embodies a far left perspective about the role of the state. Viewed in this way, then, the media content gathered for this study may nominally originate from conservative or liberal leaning news outlets but may also reflect the influence of corporate owners. Content was gathered using the SYSOMOS media collection software package.

(c) *Defining search terms.* I was interested in gathering media stories that contained discussion of the SNAP program and/ or SNAP participants. After a preliminary search using the term “SNAP, I noted that media stories that employ the current name of the program, SNAP, invariably also include the term food stamps through statements such as, “...the SNAP program, formerly the Food Stamp Program...”. Therefore, to find these stories through SYSOMOS software I defined my search terms as simply “food stamp”, “foodstamp”, “food stamps”, and “foodstamps”.

(d) *Sampling the data.* I sought to obtain a sample of 300 stories, which would result in a sampling error of 5.7%, ensuring that results found in this sample would likely be an accurate representation of the media content of the total population of media stories (Neuendorf, 2002). I expected around half of the articles pulled by the query using the previously described parameters to be “unrelated” to our research focus due to linked content or replicated articles circulated around outlets (Neuendorf, 2002). To account for this I randomly sampled articles from outlets that returned more than 100 articles using the randomization formula in Excel 2010. After drawing the initial sample of 1499 articles from across all six outlets, the relatedness of the article was coded to ensure that the article truly was focused on the SNAP program or its participants rather than just an article containing the search terms and “unrelated” articles were removed. Common examples of unrelated stories included (1) duplicates of original stories that were picked up by another outlet and (2) stories that only contained the keywords outside of the body of the article, such as in the comments section. To illustrate this process, I had an initial sample of 1010 articles from the Huffington Post internet aggregator news site. I took a random sample of 100 stories from this news site and after eliminating duplicates and unrelated articles ended up including 47 articles from the Huffington Post. My final sample included 295 articles, which are summarized in table 4.1.

Table 4.1 Description of sample

Media Outlet	Articles with keyword in document	Sampling	Final number of articles analyzed
The New York Post	56	56	13% (39)
The New York Times	34	34	9% (27)
Fox News	127	100	22% (66)
MSNBC	185	100	22% (66)
The Daily Caller	87	87	17% (50)
The Huffington Post	1010	100	16% (47)
Total	1499		100% (295)

Coding process

The codebook, variable definitions, and intercoder reliability for this project (table 3.2) was constructed using a semi-inductive approach (Neuendorf, 2002). Based on prior literature, field experience, and the research questions for the project, an *a priori* code list was first developed. The *a priori* codebook was applied to a small sample (n= 20) of media stories. The codebook was revised and augmented as a result of this application and then applied to the total sample of 295 articles. The codebook contains 13 variables, which contribute to three larger constructs, conceptualized as: (1) characters, (2) frames, and (3) responsibility. The codebook was revised and augmented as a result of this application. The mention of a character (e.g., politician, public) in an article was coded as “yes/no”. Multiple characters could be coded for each article. In contrast, each article was only assigned one frame and responsibility code.

Each article was coded as presenting a dominant frame (e.g., health, cost) and a dominant attribution of responsibility (e.g., personal, government). Approximately 15% of the total article sample was double-coded (44 articles) and inter-rater reliability corrected for agreement by chance (*Krippendorff's alpha*) was calculated for each variable. Based on prior research I sought inter-rate reliability scores of no lower than .80 for each variable and for the overall alpha for the combined variables (Neuendorf, 2002). As presented in table 4.2, I achieved an overall alpha across the variables of .91 and specific variable alphas of .80 or higher.

Table 4.2 Coding variables, definitions, and intercoder reliability ($\alpha = .91$)

Frames: Presenting or highlighting a particular side of a dynamic issue	
Nutrition ($\alpha = 1$)	Focuses on health or specifics of eating of individual or population. Could discuss fat, calories, or anything that points to health or wellness
Hunger ($\alpha = .81$)	Focuses on lack of food availability or access of individual, household, or population. Might use terms such as food security, food insecurity, or hunger.
Cost/ money ($\alpha = 1$)	Focuses on cost of SNAP program or welfare or assistance programs. Might also focus on money or cost in terms of household expenses.
Individualism ($\alpha = .80$)	Focuses on individualistic values or characteristics of a person or nation or population. Might discuss terms like work ethic, dependency, or personal fortitude.
Fraud ($\alpha = .90$)	Focuses on illegal use of the SNAP program, or participation in the SNAP program, such as selling EBT dollars for personal income.
Characters: People or groups that are included within a news outlet's article	
Politicians ($\alpha = .80$)	Any individual that is identified as working for the government in an elected or appointed capacity at either the state or federal level
SNAP Participants	Any mentioned person that uses the SNAP program

($\alpha = 1$)

The Public ($\alpha = 1$)	Any mention of the "the public" or "citizens" or discussion of America in terms of its people at large
Farmers ($\alpha = 1$)	Any mention of farmer(s) in article
Retailers ($\alpha = 1$)	Any mention of the term retailer or retail or specifically names retail establishment within the context of the SNAP program or participants

Responsibility: Presenting specific groups or people as responsible for addressing the issues of poverty or lack of food for individuals or groups

Personal responsibility ($\alpha = .81$)	Discussing specific people or individuals as responsible for addressing the issues of poverty or hunger for individuals or groups
Public responsibility ($\alpha = .80$)	Discussing the public as responsible for addressing the issues of poverty or hunger for individuals or groups
Government responsibility ($\alpha = .81$)	Discussing the government or specific governmental programs, as responsible for addressing the issues of poverty or hunger for individuals or groups

Analysis

The variables media outlet, character, frame, and responsibility were all categorical. Statistical analysis was conducted using STATA 13 statistical analysis software (Statacorp, n.d.). In each article, I coded for the presence (1) or absence (0) of characters, responsibility, and frames as defined in the analytic codebook (table 3.2). Frequency tables were calculated for character (table 4.3), responsibility (table 4.4), and frame (table 4.5) variables to determine which characters were mentioned when each type of responsibility was attributed, and which single frames were employed within each news outlet. Mentions of responsibility and frame were counted as mutually exclusive for a given article, whereas the character variable was not. This meant that I counted mentions of

any characters present in an article but only the dominant mention of responsibility or frame in a given article. Pearson's χ^2 tests were then run to assess whether frequencies of characters mentioned by responsibility attribution were statistically different. Next, I sought to determine which employed frames were used by types of responsibility attribution present in the article (table 4.6) and then which employed frames were more or less common by political ideology of the news site (table 4.7). I used Pearson's χ^2 tests to examine differences in responsibility attribution for each frame and differences in use of frames by political ideology of the media outlets. To determine whether there were differences in attribution of governmental versus personal responsibility within each frame, I ran post-hoc 2 x 2 contingency tables. To determine whether each frame was more or less common across political ideologies, I ran post-hoc 2 x 2 contingency tables between conservative and liberal outlets by frame.

Characters present in media articles

Research question 1 asks what characters are presented in media articles about the SNAP program and its participants. As shown in table 4.3, six characters were identified: (1) politicians, (2) SNAP participants, (3) frontline workers, (4) the public, (5), farmers, and (6) retailers. Of the six identified characters, the three most commonly presented within the sample were politicians (n=187), SNAP participants (n=180), and the public (n=121). Often, multiple characters were mentioned within the same article and the distribution across the media outlets for all characters was fairly even.

Table 4.3 Mentions of characters by media outlet

<u>Media Outlet</u>	Characters					
	<u>Politician</u>	<u>SNAP participant</u>	<u>Frontline worker</u>	<u>Public</u>	<u>Farmer</u>	<u>Retailer</u>
New York Post	23	17	4	18	0	3
New York Times	13	16	7	13	5	5
Fox News	43	43	6	28	4	3
MSNBC	52	45	2	26	6	5
The Daily Caller	28	30	6	19	4	7
The Huffington Post	28	29	1	17	1	10
Total	187	180	26	121	20	33

Responsibility to address issues

Research question 2 asks whose responsibility is it to address issues of poverty and food insecurity as presented in media articles about the SNAP program and its participants. Table 4.4 depicts three identified foci of responsibility presented in the articles, (1) personal responsibility, (2) public responsibility, and (3) government responsibility. Government responsibility was mentioned in one quarter (n=70, 24%) of the sample and the distribution was fairly even across the media outlets. Personal responsibility was mentioned in one fifth (n=61, 21%) of the sample and public responsibility was the least-mentioned (n=13, 4%). The difference between the number of total articles highlighting governmental versus personal responsibility was not significant, however the differences between governmental versus public responsibility and public versus personal responsibility were both significant ($p < .01$).

Table 4.4 Dominant mentions of responsibility by media outlet (n=295)

<u>Media Outlet</u>	<u>Responsibility</u>				<u>Total</u>
	<u>Personal Responsibility</u> ²	<u>Public Responsibility</u> ¹²	<u>Government Responsibility</u> ¹	<u>None Mentioned</u>	
New York Post	3% (8)	0% (1)	4% (12)	6% (18)	13% (39)
New York Times	3% (2)	0% (0)	5% (16)	3% (9)	9% (27)
Fox News	4% (13)	0% (1)	5% (14)	13% (38)	22% (66)
MSNBC	6% (17)	2% (5)	5% (14)	10% (30)	22% (66)
The Daily Caller	5% (16)	0% (1)	0% (1)	11% (32)	17% (50)
The Huffington Post	2% (5)	2% (5)	4% (13)	8% (24)	15% (47)
Total	23% (61)	4% (13)	23% (70)	51% (151)	100% (295)

¹ post hoc 2x2 contingency table revealed significant differences ($p < .01$) between government and public responsibility

² post hoc 2x2 contingency table revealed significant differences ($p < .01$) between public and personal responsibility

Frames presented in media articles

Research question 3 asks what frames are used in articles about the SNAP program and its participants. Analysis of the sample revealed four dominant frames: (1) health, (2) cost, (3) individualism, and (4) fraud, which can be seen in Table 4.5. More than half of the sample of articles employed a cost framing (53%). The second most commonly employed frame was individualism (16%). The frequency of articles using a cost frame was significantly higher than for other frames ($p < .01$). The frequency of articles using the other three frames were not significantly different from each other.

As shown in table 4.5, all six media outlets had articles that included a cost frame and the distribution was fairly even across all outlets, with the New York Times including this framing least often (n=2, or 7%). Articles that employed this frame discussed the SNAP program, typically along with other assistance programs, in terms of their costs to the taxpayers. Typically, dollar amounts were presented in terms of total figures of program budget.

Articles that employed a health frame (12%, n=36) included sub-themes of nutrition (n=8), hunger (n=23), and obesity (n=5). Their usage was commonly centered on discussions of personal or household health in the context of the SNAP program and therefore these sub-themes were grouped together as a health frame.

Fraud was mentioned in 11% of media articles. Fox News mentioned SNAP program fraud most frequently (n=12 or 18%) as compared to other outlets. Fraud was typically discussed in terms of programmatic abuse by individual program participants.

Table 4.5 Dominant mentions of frames by media outlet

<u>Media Outlet</u>	<u>Frames</u>					<u>Total</u>
	<u>Health</u>	<u>Cost</u>	<u>Individualism</u>	<u>Fraud</u>	<u>None</u>	
New York Post	2% (1)	59% (23)	15% (6)	13% (5)	10% (4)	100% (39)
New York Times	33% (9)	41% (11)	7% (2)	11% (3)	7% (2)	100% (27)
Fox News	1% (1)	53% (35)	17% (11)	18% (12)	11% (7)	100% (66)
MSNBC	17% (11)	56% (37)	18% (12)	4% (3)	4% (3)	100% (66)
The Daily Caller	14% (7)	40% (20)	20% (10)	16% (8)	10% (5)	100% (50)
The Huffington Post	15% (7)	64% (30)	13% (6)	0% (0)	8% (4)	100% (47)
Total	12% (36)	53% (156)	16% (47)	11% (31)	8% (25)	100% (295)

Responsibility and Framing

Research question 4 asks what frames are most commonly used in articles that focus on a specific group's responsibility to address poverty in the United States. As depicted in table 4.6, a Pearson's χ^2 test indicated that there were significant differences between types of responsibility attributed within each frame ($p = <.01$, $\chi^2 = 66.2263$). Of the articles that mentioned responsibility to address the issues of poverty or hunger, government responsibility was more likely to be mentioned in articles with a health ($p < .05$) or cost frame ($p < .01$). Personal responsibility was most likely to be mentioned in articles with an individualism frame ($p < .01$). This means that articles that employed a cost

framing were more likely to present the government as responsible for addressing hunger or poverty as opposed to personal responsibility. This was also true for the health framing, with articles more likely to cite governmental responsibility to address hunger and poverty when presented from a health framing. In contrast, personal responsibility to address hunger and poverty was more likely to be cited when articles employed an individualism framing.

Table 4.6 Entity responsible for addressing issues by article frame¹

Responsibility	Frame					Total
	Health	Cost	Individualism ¹	Fraud	No frame	
Personal responsibility	14% (5)	12% (19)	57% (27)	23% (7)	12% (3)	20% (61)
Government responsibility	47% (17)	26% (41)	8% (4)	13% (4)	16% (4)	24% (70)
Public responsibility	5% (2)	1% (7)	6% (3)	0% (0)	4% (1)	4% (13)
None mentioned	33% (12)	57% (89)	28% (13)	64% (20)	68% (17)	51% (151)
Total	(36)	(156)	(47)	(31)	(25)	(295)

¹ $p < .01$

note: post-hoc 2x2 contingency table calculations for personal versus governmental responsibility were run only within each frame to draw comparisons between frames by type of responsibility.

Political Ideology and Framing

Research question 5 asks, what frames are most commonly used in articles by conservative and liberal news outlets? I calculated a Pearson χ^2 test that compared the political ideology of the sample by frame and found statistically

significant differences ($p = <.01$, $\chi^2 = 22.9443$). As depicted in Table 7, the six media outlets were grouped by perceived political ideological leaning: conservative or liberal. Conservative outlets were the New York Post, Fox News, and the Daily Caller. Liberal outlets were the New York Times, MSNBC, and the Huffington Post. As discussed above, the cost frame was the most commonly presented and, as shown in table 4.7, articles found in conservative and liberal outlets equally used this frame. This was also true for the individualism frame. Conversely, the health frame was presented in articles three times more often in liberal outlets than conservative outlets (9% as compared to 3% for conservative outlets) ($p < .01$). The fraud frame was more commonly used in articles found in conservative outlets (8%) as compared to liberal outlets (2%) ($p < .01$). This means that articles sampled from liberal outlets were more likely to employ a health frame than articles sampled from conservative outlets. Conversely, articles from conservative outlets were more likely to employ a fraud frame than articles from liberal outlets.

Table 4.7 Political ideology of outlets by article frame¹

Media Outlet	Frames				
	Health¹	Cost	Individualism	Fraud¹	None
Liberal (n=140)	75% (27)	50% (78)	43% (20)	19% (6)	36% (9)
Conservative (n=155)	25% (9)	50% (78)	58% (27)	81% (25)	64% (16)
Total	100% (36)	100% (156)	100% (47)	100% (31)	100% (25)

¹ $p = <.01$

Note. Percentages calculated from total article sample (n=295).

Discussion and Conclusions

The delayed passage of the 2014 Farm Bill was particularly contentious. Much of the contention was directed at the funding and programmatic functioning of the SNAP program, which currently serves around 46 million people (USDA, 2015b) and has been shown to reduce food insecurity, which has been called “one of the most important nutrition-related public health issues in the United States” (Gundersen et al., 2011, p. 282). During the time period from which the analyzed sample was derived, divisive political debates were occurring around the funding of the SNAP program, with two main issues stalling passage of the budget: (1) drug and work requirements and (2) the budget total. Media articles written during this time period followed suit in overwhelmingly presenting articles that predominantly framed the issue as either program costs, individualism, health, or fraud. These framings feed into the larger value of American individualism (Bullock, 2013) and relate to perspectives on the performance of poverty (Seccombe et al., 1998) and critiques of welfare in the United States (Gilens, 2009a).

As a field, public health has increasingly focused on improving population health through policy development and critique. For instance, researchers have focused on the role of the Farm Bill in creating obesogenic environments through federal crop subsidies, arguing that this massive piece of legislation has an important influence on health and is not simply agriculture policy (Jackson et al., 2009). The Farm Bill has been the primary safety net for farmers and progenitor of agricultural policy in the US for over forty years (Gritter, 2015; Zulauf & Orden,

2014). However, since the Bill's inception nutrition funding has increased to the point that in the 2014 Farm Bill over three quarters of the total budget is allocated for the Nutrition title, leading some to consider it a Nutrition Bill first and foremost (Patricia Elliott & Raziano, 2012).

Voices contributing to the political debates regarding the SNAP program include non-political institutions such as lobbyists, interest groups, and the media (Brasier, 2002). The media is a particularly influential institution in terms of political debate, issue identification, responsibility assignment, and public perspectives of issues and programs (Dancey & Goren, 2010; Gilens, 2009a; Kim et al., 2010; M. McCombs, 2013). However, while these outlets are considered to reflect conservative and liberal ideologies they are clustered around a centrist perspective when compared to far "left" liberal and far "right" conservative across the political ideological spectrum. Political ideology (liberal and conservative) as filtered through mainstream US media outlets like those investigated here, could be envisioned as more closely reflecting corporate interests and definitions of liberal and conservative based on what consumers want and how multinational corporations politically identify (Kellner, 2011). For example, "the ownership by conservative corporations of dominant media corporations helps explain mainstream media support of the Bush-Cheney administration and its policies, such as the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq (Kellner, 2011, p. 11). Likewise, this may explain why "liberal" media outlets like MSNBC have neglected to provide much coverage of the Bernie Sanders presidential campaign, which embodies a very left perspective about the role of the state.

Viewed in this way, then, the media content gathered for this study may nominally originate from conservative or liberal leaning news outlets but may also reflect the influence of corporate owners.

Findings from this study indicate that media content generated from December 2013 to December 2014 across six mass media news outlets presented commonly mentioned characters, types of responsibility, and dominant frames in discussing the SNAP program and its participants. The most commonly mentioned characters were politicians and SNAP participants and the public. Infrequently mentioned were frontline workers, farmers, and retailers. Using a semi-inductive approach to refine the variable list revealed conspicuously absent characters, such as corporations that can heavily influence food assistance policies, and subsequently, the food system (Gottlieb & Joshi, 2010; Nestle, 2013).

Four dominant frames were present in the sample: cost, individualism, health, and fraud. Most common among the frames was the cost associated with the program followed by articles that discussed the individualism of people in relation to the program. Health was also a salient frame used in discussing the program and its participants but was only mentioned in 12% of the sample. Least commonly present in the article sample was the frame of fraud (11%).

Often coupled with each of these four frames was a presentation of responsibility to address the issues of poverty and hunger. The three foci of responsibility were personal, public, and governmental. More than half (51%) of the articles in the sample did not mention responsibility to address issues of

hunger and poverty but of those that did, governmental responsibility was the most frequently cited (25%) and was more likely to be found within articles employing a cost or health frame. This finding presents a different result than some prior research into media-presented attributions of poverty, which typically focus on personal and societal –level attributions and responsibility (Iyengar, 1990, 1991; Kim et al., 2010). It is possible that the political context, the passage of the Farm Bill, influenced the SNAP media discourse to locate its focus on governmental and cost related issues.

The conclusions presented in this study may be limited by several factors. This study included a sample of media articles from national mainstream print, Internet, and television media outlets. However, I did not include a complete sampling of all mainstream news outlets so my findings may be less generalizable. For instance I did not sample social media so as to include the perspective of audiences to media articles, which may play an important role in the co-construction media discourses. Further, findings may be limited to the specific time period from which the articles were gathered (December 2013-December 2014) and due to our cross-sectional design, cause and effect of media articles and any influence on political debate content cannot be assessed. Coupled with our cross-sectional design is the use of our semi-inductive approach, which may have excluded alternative discourses related to food assistance, the food system movements, or food politics, which tie in with the SNAP discourse but are somewhat distinct (Alkon and Mares 2011, Nestle 2013). Even with these limitations, the sample size of almost 300 articles and the

use of semi-indicative coding ensured that our findings represent accurate reflections of the media discourse for this topic and findings from this study have important implications for the role of media in addressing public health issues.

The media constructs a social reality (Van Gorp, 2007) of the SNAP program which frames the discourse predominantly around programmatic cost tied to government responsibility. Public health researchers should be informed advocates of legislation that authorizes, funds, and prescribes governmental food assistance programs, such as the Farm Bill for SNAP. If, the Farm Bill is predominantly a nutrition bill, then we need to unmask the “behind the scenes” characters that do not appear in media stories but who are influencing policy that has impact on our food system and implications for food justice (Gottlieb & Joshi, 2010). Public health researchers and practitioners should act as advocates for nutrition assistance programs and policies through active participation in the media discourse to effect real and meaningful change.

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4.2 WHAT IT MEANS TO BE AMERICAN: LOCATING IDEOLOGY AND LOGICS IN PERSPECTIVES ABOUT THE SNAP PROGRAM THROUGH REACTIONS TO MEDIA VIGNETTES²

Abstract

The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) is the largest food assistance program in the nation. The program focuses on low-income and food insecure populations but its economic reach is felt across the entire United States population. Despite this, the program is controversial, drawing support or opposition from political, media, and public and private entities. Influencing and reflecting these perspectives is the news media discourse around SNAP. The program has received much attention from scholars and policy-makers but the background factors that contribute to social concepts, such as stigma of participation have not been adequately investigated. This study provides an accounting of the employed logics and ideologies that contribute to the perspectives of SNAP participants and frontline workers about the program.

I collected a maximum variation sample of 20 frontline workers and SNAP participants across South Carolina. With each respondent I conducted a semi-structured qualitative interview that focused on their perspectives of the SNAP program and its participants via their reactions to researcher-constructed vignettes that reflected four frames within mainstream news media SNAP discourse: (1) cost of the program, (2) fraud, (3) individualism, and (4) health. My

² Younginer, N. A., Blake, C. E., Jones, S. J., Kingsolver, A. E., & Kim, S. H. To be submitted

approach and analysis was informed by cognitive social science theories, discourse analysis, and constant comparative methods.

Results portray the conflicting logics presented by the project respondents that primarily stem from a Bootstrap ideology, built on values of meritocracy, individualism and work ethic, with each respondent presenting their image of how to be an active, engaged individual while negotiating dynamics of household and perceptions held by society. Regardless of position, project respondents' perspectives of the SNAP program and its participants were frequently rooted in the common American Bootstrap ideology. Specifically, respondents discussed the cost frame in terms of levels of scale: nation, community, household, and individual costs. They discussed fraud by describing "good" and "bad" fraud and the relationship to ethical performance of agency. They discussed individualism through the locus of decision-making in negotiating personal and household success, and discussed the health frame in terms of personal freedom related to the hypothetical regulation of allowable foods under SNAP policy.

Understanding how people contextualize and rationalize their opinions could help researchers and policy-makers develop and evolve policies that are more flexible, adaptive, and sensitive to how different people might interpret specific policies and programs. This has direct implications for public health practice, food assistance programming, and policy development and evolution.

Introduction

In 2014 the United States marked the 50-year anniversary of President Johnson's declaration of the 'War on Poverty'. Since the waging of that war half a

century ago, the United States has created a variety of programs to eliminate poverty and its related phenomenon, hunger. As Senator George McGovern said, “hunger is a political condition” (McGovern, 2001) and the phenomenon of poverty in the United States is intricately and conceptually linked to food acquisition, eating, living, and livelihood. Measurement of poverty through the use of income thresholds, upon which eligibility criteria and benefit allocations for governmental assistance programs such as the Supplement Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP, formerly known as the Food Stamp Program) are determined, were designed in the 1960’s based on the US Department of Agriculture’s Thrifty Food Plan and the “ideal” allocation of 30% of household income spent on food (Bullock 2013; Wilde, 2013). The measurement of poverty through the use of thresholds was built on assumptions of “right practice”. It is a prescription for proper household financial spending on food; in a sense, a prescription for “how to be”.

SNAP has received copious attention from scholars and policy-makers. Many researchers have investigated the effects of the program for individuals and households around food insecurity, poverty, and links to health through economic (Gundersen et al., 2011; McKernan et al., 2003; Yaktine et al., 2013), health (Frongillo et al., 2006), and social lenses. Investigations into the social conditions around SNAP participation are frequently focused on stigma of program participation and usage (Blumkin et al., 2008; Kaye et al., 2013; Kreider et al., 2012; Zekeri, 2003). The background factors that contribute to social

concepts, such as stigma, however, have not been adequately investigated for the SNAP program.

SNAP is the largest food assistance program in the nation and is positioned to play a crucial role in the reduction of poverty, hunger, and food insecurity (McGovern, 2001; Tiehen et al., 2012; Yaktine et al., 2013). While the program focuses on low-income and food insecure populations, the program's economic reach is felt across the entire United States population. To this point, SNAP benefits covered almost 10% of at-home food spending for the whole nation as of 2010 (Wilde, 2013) and it has been estimated that each increase of \$1 billion in SNAP expenditures could increase the US GDP by \$1.79 billion and raise employment by 8,900 to 17,900 jobs (Hanson, 2010). Despite the nationwide economic effect of SNAP the program is controversial, drawing support or opposition from political (Gritter, 2015), media (Gilens, 2009a), and public entities (Zekeri, 2003). Influencing and reflecting perspectives of the program, news media stories stand as an "artifact" of American culture that reflect and influence concerns and beliefs (Gilens, 2009a), shape social issues (Kim et al., 2010), and help set political and policy agendas (M. McCombs, 2013). Much of news media's power lies in its ability to introduce its audiences to issues beyond their direct individual experiences and serve as "evidence" for the formation of personal opinion (Gilens, 2009a).

Because of news media's potential reflection of and influence on social issues and individual perceptions, I have used the news media discourse around the SNAP program and its participants (Younginer et al. in preparation) as a

vehicle through which to investigate the perspectives of SNAP program participants and frontline workers, who are strategically positioned to enact policy (Kingfisher, 1998; Morgen, Acker, & Weigt, 2013).

A brief history and overview of the SNAP program

The roots of the SNAP program can be traced back to 1939 with the creation of the first food stamp program, which lasted until 1943. Emerging from the Great Depression many Americans were dealing with hunger and poverty. Simultaneously, the Department of Agriculture was struggling to find a destination for a surplus of farm crops. Then Secretary of the Department of Agriculture, Henry Wallace, conceived this first food stamp program as a way to simultaneously reduce the crop surplus and eliminate hunger in American households (Poppendieck, 2014). In a sense then, the program was envisioned as an income transfer program, the main goal of which being the reduction of agricultural surplus with a secondary goal of reducing hunger, which speaks to the current governmental location of the program within the United States Department of Agriculture. This early program was codified into law under the Food Stamp Act of 1964 and since the mid 1960's the program has consistently gone through expansion, contraction, and redefinitions of scope (Gritter, 2015). Catalysts in these programmatic changes have often been supporters of different interests, such as urban supporters of nutrition programs and rural supporters of agricultural programs (Gritter, 2015). In the 1960's, legislators estimated that the program would serve around 4 million and cost around \$360 million, however, by 1975 the program was serving around 17 million at a cost of almost \$4.5 billion

(USDA, 2015). As of 2015 the program, whose name changed from food stamps to SNAP in 2008, serves around 46 million people with a budget of around \$74 billion (USDA Food and Nutrition Service Annual Summary, 2015).

Nationally, applicant eligibility is determined through an investigation into three criteria: gross income, net income, and resources (“Eligibility | Food and Nutrition Service,” n.d.). Gross income for the applicant household must be at or below 130% of the federal poverty line (around \$26,000 a year for a family of three in 2016). Net income must be at or below the federal poverty line (around \$20,000 for a family of three in 2016). Resources (also called assets) must fall below certain limits depending on whether the applicant’s household includes elderly or disabled (\$2,250 for non-elderly or disabled and \$3,250 for those with elderly or disabled) (USDA, 2015a). States have the choice whether to assess resources in the determination of eligibility. While the program is funded through federal legislation and policy is written at the federal level, states have some measure of autonomy in the implementation of their specific programs and may seek waivers to address state-level programmatic features, such as specific eligibility requirements like whether to count automobile values as assets. Many of these waivers are accepted by the Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) at the USDA but others, such as recently submitted waivers by several states to regulate specific foods allowable under future state-level SNAP policy, historically have been denied. The denied waivers each sought to regulate food based on assignments of “healthy” and “unhealthy” foods, essentially banning foods deemed unhealthy, such as sodas (Brownell & Ludwig, 2011). Currently,

regulations allow any non-prepared or hot foods to be purchased from over 250,000 retailers across the United States. Purchases of alcohol, tobacco, or non-household item are not allowed (USDA, 2016).

Media Discourse

Discourse, according to Fairclough (2001), is the socially-determined use of language. The investigation of discourse, discourse analysis, focuses on identifying and understanding the processes of discourse production and interpretation, and as such, must consider the underlying factors and contexts within which these discourses are produced and interpreted. Discourse analysis can reveal “hidden ideological constructions” (Fairclough, 2001) that can link to the worldview of individual and therefore factor into their perspective of a given concept. As “artifacts” of American culture (Gilens, 2009a), news stories can contribute to perspectives and opinions around a given issue (M. McCombs, 2013). The total of news stories created around a given issue comprised the media discourse on that issue. Within the media discourse, there are collections of stories that portray particular frames (Chong & Druckman, 2007), or aspects, of the issue, within the discourse. Younginer et al (In preparation) found four dominant frames that comprised the media discourse around the SNAP program: cost, fraud, individualism, and health. The cost frame represents news articles that discussed the costs associated with SNAP program funding and benefits allocation. The fraud frame represents news articles that discussed program abuse, such as trafficking in benefits, among participants and retailers. The individualism frame represents news articles that discussed the actions of

individuals in relation to the SNAP program, such as human interest articles that focused on how a participant might use their benefits.

The Bootstrap Ideology

How individuals construct their worldview and make sense of their place in existence has been the subject of social science analyses for generations (d'Andrade, 1995). Interpretive anthropologist Clifford Geertz envisioned “common sense” as employing bounded systems of cultural meaning that often carry implicit ideologies of being such that telling someone to “be sensible” must carry along with it ample contextual and cultural understanding in order to be performed (Geertz, 1992). For example, a commonly used rhetorical device, the metaphor, can serve as a mechanism to link a mental image to a host of implied meanings (d'Andrade, 1981; Lakoff, 1991, 1993). In discussions of food insecurity and the role of SNAP, war metaphors are commonly used. For example, in a press release to the public about SNAP fraud, the USDA situated SNAP as “the first line of defense against hunger” and situated the program as “never more critical to fight against hunger” (“Trafficking | Food and Nutrition Service,” n.d.). Likewise, cognitive mappings, called schema (d'Andrade, 1995) are built on a set of constructed logics that can be deployed in different contexts and are often imbued with underlying values that contribute to particular ideologies, which “allow people to organize social beliefs about what is the case, good or bad, right or wrong...and to act accordingly” (Van Dijk 1998: 6).

The metaphor of the bootstrap, specifically, the image of a person “pulling themselves up by their bootstraps” has been a common American idiom for years

but the source is unknown (McNamee & Miller, 2009). This image has been embodied by the literary figure, Horatio Alger, a boy of low status who works hard and becomes rich and powerful. Alger stands as what Sherry Ortner has called a “key scenario”, in this case a prescription for success (Ortner, 1973). Over time, the bootstrap theory has become entrenched in “common sense” understandings (Geertz, 1992; Ortner, 1973) and has become an ideology (Gordon, 1989). Building on the general conception of an ideology as the “basis of the social representations shared by members of a group (Van Dijk, 1998, p. 8), the bootstrap ideology invokes the common “American Dream”. This “dream” is built on values, or processes of evaluation...for ideologies (Van Dijk, 1998:76), of individualism, meritocracy, and work ethic (Becker & Marecek, 2008; Bullock, 2013; Weber, 2002). I employ Bullock’s conception of individualism as “a cluster of beliefs” that focuses on self-fulfillment, responsibility, and achievement. I share McNamee and Miller’s (2009) conception of meritocracy as the belief that a person “gets ahead” because of their effort. Aspects of the value of work ethic, or a focus on hard individual work and a deferment of reward, I draw from Bullock (2013) and Weber (2002) (figure 4.1). Assessments of the existence and veracity of these values in another person are often tied to perceptions of the visible “signs” displayed by the individual, such as car brands or food purchases associated with luxury lifestyles (Agha, 2015). In addition, how the person is seen as “performing” their lifestyle also informs these assessments, such as outward perceptions of whether the person is trying to look for work if they are unemployed.

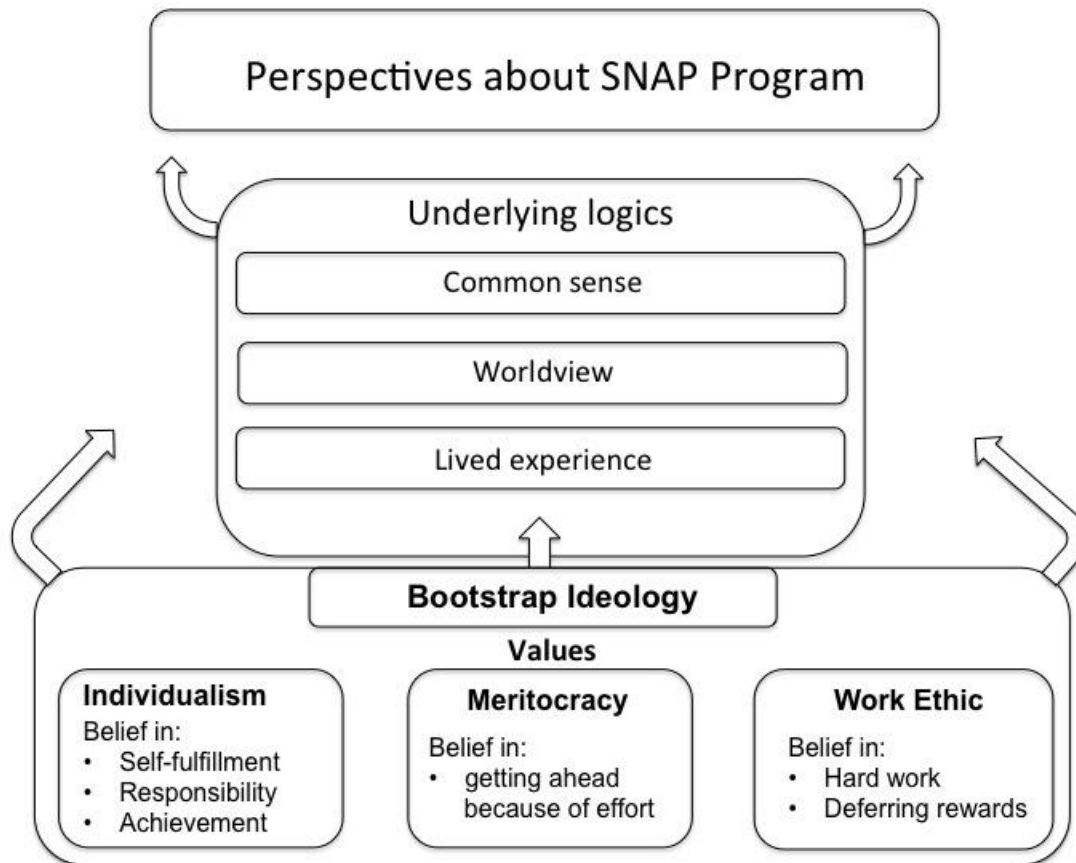


Figure 4.1 Schematic of the values contributing to the Bootstrap Ideology

The SNAP program is the largest food assistance program in the United States. It serves over 46 million people and has been found to reduce poverty (Tiehen et al., 2012) and food insecurity (Ratcliffe et al., 2011). However, “conventional wisdom” suggests that participation in the program might be a visible comment on ones’ self-worth and contributes to stigma associated with program participation (Zekeri, 2003). In unpacking some of the “conventional wisdom” that Zekeri refers to that result in social effects, such as stigma, this study provides an accounting of the employed logics and ideology that contribute

to the perspectives of these strategically positioned individuals. I argue that many of the conflicting logics presented by the project respondents stem from the same underlying Bootstrap ideology, built on values of meritocracy, individualism and work ethic, with each respondent presenting their image of how to be an active, engaged individual while negotiating the dynamics of household and perceptions of society.

Study design and sampling

This study used an interpretive qualitative design that combined elements of discourse and schema analysis with emergent coding and constant comparative methods, drawing influences from a grounded theory approach to data analysis as described by (Bernard 2011, Strauss and Corbin 1990, Patton 2014). This study employed a maximum-variation sampling frame (Patton, 2005), which privileges variation of sample and seeks to identify patterns by "capturing the core experiences and central, shared dimensions of a setting or phenomenon" (Patton 2002, p. 235). As such, participants were selected to vary primarily in their relation to the SNAP program and secondarily in their demographic characteristics. Primarily, I was interested in gathering a wide range of perspectives from among individuals that interacted with the SNAP program in a variety of ways so I organized my recruitment of respondents into categories. The categories were (1) SNAP participants and (2) frontline workers (official and unofficial).

Based on prior field experience I chose to sub-divide the frontline workers into two categories: official and unofficial because there are individuals that

interact with the SNAP program as part of their job but are not employed by the state's SNAP agency, but by a participating retailer, a volunteer organization, or an advocacy group. Therefore I expected that unofficial frontline workers might have different perspectives from both SNAP participants and official frontline workers.

Official frontline workers were conceptualized as those whose occupation was significantly focused on administering the SNAP program or delivering it to program participants. These individuals also directly received SNAP funding through their employment. For example, County and state-level Department of Social Security employees or SNAP outreach-funded employees. Official frontline workers have been examined as strategically positioned individuals whose jobs are to “make” policy (Kingfisher, 1998) and as such their perspectives are important to gather.

Unofficial frontline workers were conceptualized as those whose occupations involved interacting with the SNAP program but this interaction was tangential to their job description. For example, grocery store cashiers or farmers market workers that transact SNAP dollars. Unofficial frontline workers enact policy through their facilitation or prohibition of selected items by SNAP participants and as such their perspectives are valuable in terms of investigating a range of perspectives about the SNAP program.

Consistent with a maximum variation sampling methodology, I sought a diverse sample of participants that ranged in age, geographic location, sex, and race. Eligible respondents must have been over 18 years old and either currently

enrolled in the SNAP program or currently employed in a position as an official or unofficial frontline SNAP worker during the time of the study.

Recruitment

Recruitment occurred across the state of South Carolina through a combination of flyer placement, cold-calling, and snowball methodology (Bernard, 2011). To recruit unofficial frontline worker grocery store cashiers, flyers were placed in employee break rooms in a variety of regional and national grocery store chains. To recruit official frontline workers a combination of cold-calling county-level Department of Social Services offices and personal connections were accessed to set up interviews. To recruit SNAP participants, personal connections were accessed to begin recruitment followed by snowball recruit from previous study participants as well as placing recruitment flyers in public libraries across South Carolina. A twenty-dollar incentive was offered to SNAP participants and unofficial frontline workers. Official frontline employees at Department of Social Services offices were not allowed to accept incentives for participation and so were not offered the incentive to complete the interview. I recruited and interviewed respondents until I achieved saturation of themes (Altheide & Johnson, 1994; Creswell & Miller, 2000).

This study was reviewed by the University of South Carolina Institutional Review Board. Informed consent was obtained from all project respondents and assured all respondents of confidentiality, as in accordance with standard human subjects research requirements. To further ensure confidentiality I used pseudonyms for each respondent in transcripts and demographic documents.

Interview construction and process

The interview guide (table 4.8) sought the opinions and perspectives of project respondents on four related topics: (1) mainstream news media, (2) poverty and hunger in America, (3) the SNAP program and its participants, and (4) researcher constructed vignettes. Questions for the first three topics primed participants to be thinking about their views on the media, poverty, hunger and the SNAP program and prepare them to respond to the vignettes. The data for this analysis draws exclusively from the last section of the interview that included these vignettes. The constructed vignettes (Barter & Renold, 1999) sought to gain perspectives through reaction to reading specific passages that corresponded to the findings of a previously conducted media content analysis of the media discourse around the SNAP program (Younginer et al. in preparation). Findings from that study revealed four common media frames used most often in the overall media discourse around SNAP. The frames were: (1) cost, (2) fraud, (3) individualism, and (4) health. In constructing the vignettes, the cost, fraud, and health frames were based on factual information as presented by the USDA about the SNAP program. The individualism frame was constructed from a combination of media articles from a range of media outlets to include elements that were commonly found in media articles about individual SNAP participants. The project respondents were asked to read the vignettes and then provide their general opinion of what they just read and then were asked follow-up questions related to the specific vignette.

Table 4.8 Representative interview guide questions

Questions about news media	
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Tell me about the role that media plays in terms of informing you about issues. 2. What are your opinions of the news media, generally? 3. What sorts of media stories do you see/ read about SNAP? 	
Questions about poverty and hunger in America	
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. What do you think about poverty in the United States? 2. Could you describe poverty? What is it? 3. Would you say that hunger is problem in America? Why, or why not? 4. Whose main responsibility is it to eliminate or combat hunger? Poverty? 	
Questions about SNAP	
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Have you heard of the SNAP program? Have you heard of the food stamp program? 2. What is it? What does it do? Who is it for? 3. What do you think the vast majority of peoples' opinions about the SNAP program are? 	
<p style="text-align: center;"><u>SNAP participants</u></p> <p>5a. Could you share with me any experiences you have had with SNAP workers?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • With cashiers? With anyone else that directly interacts with you in terms of using SNAP? <p>6a. Tell me some of the experiences that contributed to you enrolling in the program?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Probe about specific steps they went/ go through as participant 	<p style="text-align: center;"><u>Frontline workers</u></p> <p>5b. Could you tell me a bit about your role in the SNAP program?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What sorts of interactions do you have in terms of dealing with the program? • Responsibilities, etc.?
Discussion of media frames	
<p><u>Vignette A- cost</u> <i>Currently, around 46 million people are enrolled in the SNAP program, with the average person receiving \$125 per month. The average household of four receives around \$450 a month. The annual national budget for the SNAP program in 2015 is around \$75 billion.</i></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 22. In your opinion, what is the main point or points of this selected passage? 23. Do you agree/ disagree with the points that it's making? 24. How does this selected passage fit in with what you think about the SNAP program/ SNAP participants? 	
<p><u>Vignette B- fraud</u> <i>SNAP fraud is when SNAP benefits are exchanged for cash. This is called trafficking and it is against the law. SNAP fraud also happens when someone lies on their application to get benefits or to get more benefits than they are supposed to get. SNAP fraud also happens when a retailer has been disqualified from the program for past abuse and lies on the application to get in the program again. The trafficking rate has fallen over the last two decades, from about 4 cents on the dollar in 1993 to about 1 cent in 2006-08.</i></p>	

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25. In your opinion, what is the main point or points of this selected passage?
26. Please describe what you picture when you think of SNAP fraud.
27. In your opinion, what sorts of things count as fraud?
28. Do you think fraud is a big problem in the SNAP program?
-

Vignette D- Individualism

A 34-year-old single mother of 4 young children lives in Columbia, SC. She is a high school graduate who enrolled in college for nursing but didn't complete her degree after she could no longer afford the tuition. Unable to find work she enrolled in the SNAP program in 2009 and now receives around \$500 per month in EBT. Jones plans to continue receiving SNAP saying, "I have been looking for work but I can't find anything that pays enough so I'll just keep on getting EBT until I can find a decent, well-paying job. I mean, EBT lets me get pretty much anything I need food-wise for the house, so that's very helpful".

33. What's your opinion of the person just from reading this short passage?
34. What do you think about her decision to stay on SNAP?
35. What would change your opinion of her?
-

Vignette C- health

For more than 40 years, the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) has served as the foundation of America's national nutrition safety net. As of Oct. 1, 2008, Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) is the new name for the federal Food Stamp Program. The new name reflects changes made to meet the needs of clients, including a focus on hunger and nutrition and an increase in benefit amounts.

29. In your opinion, what is the main point or points of this selected passage?
30. In your opinion, what is the goal of the SNAP program?
31. Should it have a different goal or goals?
32. What do you think about the regulation of certain foods as allowable for purchase?
-

Analytic approach

Interviews were audio recorded and transcribed verbatim by the researcher and the external transcription service, Verbal Ink. Interviews transcribed by the external transcription service were checked for accuracy against the original audio files by the primary researcher listening to the original audio and following along in the written transcript, searching for and correcting inconsistencies. Interview transcripts were entered into Nvivo 10 qualitative analysis software (QSR International Pty Ltd, 2012). My approach and analysis was informed by cognitive and linguistic social science theories and analytic

techniques (Bernard, 2001; Briggs 2005; Duranti, 2001; Glaser and Strauss, 2009). I combined elements of discourse and schema analysis with emergent , inductive approaches (Bernard, 2011, d"Andrade 1995, Downs and Stea 1973).

While traditional discourse analysis examines natural speech interactions (Bernard, 2011; Briggs, 2005; Duranti, 2001), I constructed an essentialization of the media discourse around the SNAP program (Younginer et al. 2016, in preparation), reflecting the thematic dimensions of that discourse. I formatted this essentialized discourse as vignettes that were presented to participants. This essentialized media discourse was used as the catalyst for respondent reactions to the thematic dimensions through which I emergently coded the responses (Glaser & Strauss, 2009).

Data coding and analysis

Data coding proceeded in two phases: First, I coded emergent respondent perspectives by frame represented in each vignette. I then used emergent coding to identify respondent logics across the frames. Next I interpretively examined coding of respondents' logics using a discourse and schema-based analytic approach to identify underlying ideologies shaping perspectives.

To achieve the first phase I employed the constant comparative method to discover emergent themes (Glaser & Strauss, 2009). First, I examined one quarter (n=5) of the transcripts and identified preliminary emergent thematic categories. I then applied those themes to the rest of the transcripts, shifting or regrouping themes as needed. Throughout this process I performed peer debriefing (Patton, 2005) among the researchers to verify the identification of

themes. For every respondent I inductively examined their responses to each vignette and created emergent themes across the sample for each vignette that included each respondent's reaction to the particular vignette (table B.3).

To achieve the second phase, I employed interpretive discourse analysis methods, which draws from linguistic anthropology and schema analysis, which in turn draw from cognitive psychology (Bernard, 2011). I identified "logics" respondents employed by examining their reactions to the media frames. To do this I looked for passages where respondents presented their opinion of an action described in a vignette or perspective of a concept contained in the vignette. I used these statements to represent the internal logics by which the respondent interpreted the passage. For example, statements made by respondents in response to a vignette were frequently followed by justification for that statement. Typically, this resulted in statements structured as "I think X (perspective) because A, B, and C (logic)." In a sense, the logics are analytically identifiable by the "because", relating some contextualized understanding or how the respondent made sense of the perspective that can be interpreted by the researcher. Further, logics could be implicit or explicit and could employ rhetorical devices such as metaphor (Lakoff, 1991) or culturally-bound schemas (D'Andrade, 1981) which contained "known" steps or processes that to an insider might appear as "common sense" (Geertz, 1992). To identify logics in the transcripts I identified statements that implicitly or explicitly included metaphors, such as "getting ahead", "maintaining", "staying afloat", "the edge". I also identified statements that implicitly or explicitly contained "because" justifications

for perspectives, as well as identified statements that implicitly or explicitly alluded to “common sense” or worldviews. These statements were often presented as common sayings, such as “don’t judge because you never know” or as passed-down knowledge such as “my grandmother always told me...”. A list of emergent themes that represent respondent logics is presented in table B.2. Through this process underlying logics emerged that provided insight into the ideologies contributing the perspectives of the project respondents.

Combining the coding from phase one on emergent themes by frame and phase two on logics employed across all frames allowed us to analyze and present the data at multiple levels. First, the overall themes that emerged from analysis of individual vignettes provides insight into perspectives for each media frame. Second, I present (Bernard, 2011) an analysis of the logics that underpin the respondent perspectives and provide an opportunity to identify potential common ground in seemingly contradictory perspectives. Finally, I present an analysis of the relationships between emergent logics that were employed by the respondents across the vignettes and position them within the Bootstrap Ideology.

Results

I recruited respondents that had different positions in their relation to the SNAP program as SNAP participants, official, and unofficial frontline workers (table 4.9). Additionally, I had a relatively demographically and geographically diverse respondent sample that included men and women, Whites and African Americans, ranging in ages from twenty years to mid-seventies. Respondents

also lived in urban and rural regions of South Carolina. I obtained a sample of twenty respondents (SNAP participants n=6, official frontline workers n= 10, unofficial frontline workers n= 4). I found through initial analysis that respondent statements were thematically more similar through similar logics rather than through their SNAP recruitment position (SNAP participant, official frontline worker, unofficial frontline worker), which pointed to a more general underlying phenomenon at work. As such, I present results across recruitment position rather than by recruitment group.

Table 4.9 Summary of respondent demographics (n=20)

	n	%
Respondent Categories		
SNAP Participants	6	30%
Official Frontline Workers	10	50%
Unofficial Frontline Workers	4	20%
Race		
African American	6	30%
White	13	65%
Bi-racial	1	5%
Sex		
Male	4	20%
Female	16	80%
Age Range¹		
18-29	5	25%
30-39	6	30%
40-49	2	10%
50-59	2	10%
60+	3	15%

¹ Two respondents declined to provide an age

Reactions to SNAP media vignettes and respondent perspectives- locating worldview, ideology, and logics

Below, I present the emergent perspectives of project respondents as they reacted to vignettes reflecting the media frames that comprised the dominant SNAP media discourse. The vignettes focused on (1) cost of the program, (2) fraud, (3) individualism, and (4) health. I then juxtapose perspectives of thematically representative project respondents to showcase conflicting perspectives as well as common ground through identification of employed logics and the influence of the Bootstrap ideology in the construction of those logics.

Perceptions of SNAP cost and levels of scale: the cost frame

The first SNAP media frame presented as a vignette to project respondents was the cost of the SNAP program (table 4.8: vignette A). The range of perspectives offered by the respondents can be conceptually grouped into three themes (table 4.10): (1) costs match with experience or knowledge, (2) costs do not match with experience or knowledge and, (3) critique of the program costs. Respondents discussed costs that did or did not match with their perceptions based on personal or professional experiences. Frequently, in instances when the costs did not match with experience it was because the respondent's experiences were on an individual level. Consequently, many of the respondents "did the math", calculating the costs of the household or individual down from the national level. This finding relates to how individuals might incorporate personal experience at an individual level in their perspectives of national issues, such as the budget or enrollment numbers for the SNAP program. Rather than offer perspectives on the prompt's matching with

experience, some respondents offered critiques of the program related to program enrollment, national budget, and individual or household benefit amounts. These critiques centered on the scales of benefit amounts for different populations, such as the low benefit amounts given to elderly.

Table 4.10 Themes and contributing perspectives of the cost vignette

Cost frame		
Theme	Perspective contributing to theme	Representative Quote
Match or non-match with experiences or knowledge	National budget higher or lower than expected	"The one that I was surprised by the most is the total budget. I didn't realize it was that high so that surprised me. Actually the numbers all seemed kind of high to me based on people that I've talked to. I feel like we get a lot of people saying, "I only get \$15.00 a month," or, "It's not worth it to apply, because I'm not gonna get enough,"- Kim, OFW
	Household allotment high or lower than expected	"So that's, and they get that a month? That's a little money for if you got four people".- Jane, SP, 70's."
	Expected amount per person to be higher	"Okay so these numbers are a little bit lower then? - Yeah, that right there all." – Christian, SP
	Professional or personal experience	"I'm looking at my gross income limit. I mean, for a household of four, if they had no income, no expenses, and they got full allotment, it's \$649 a month. So on average, that's probably about right, 'cause you're gonna have some in there that are gonna have that income. So, I agree 100 percent with that." - Anna, OFW
	When breaking it down to the person seems right	"Breaking down of the averages, I would say, yes, they do. Some people I'm thinking of are a family of four [and they] receive around that amount. So I think that definitely seems right to me".- Ashley, UFW
Critique of program or numbers	The amount given per household is too low-not enough to cover a family of four	"I don't know the size of your family, but if your family is a household of four, do you think \$450.00 a month can buy all the food items for your family, even if the program's intended to be supplemental...No".- Lindsey, OFW
	Enrollment would be higher if given fairly to all people	"I guess when you think about every state probably so. And I think if it was given fairly it would probably be maybe almost double that because like I said there are families out here who need assistance. And are denied simply. They make 50 cents or a dollar more [than the income limit] or they're a college student or just who knows why people get denied these days?"-Carol, SP

Elderly people don't get as much but they have to eat too and it's easier for younger person to work	"I know sometimes like an elderly person who's retired doesn't get that much. They only get that one payment and maybe social security or disability and then they got to pay their bills and they still need food for the house. Like other younger people may be getting it because of their kids or family that they have but it seems like they could do better than elderly people. They can get more offered to them than elderly or retired and they still have to have food on the table for themselves. Why would there be a difference? I understand kids, you know, have to eat and everything but why is it different from an elderly person?"-Michelle, UFW
Enrollment would be higher because of the economy except pride keeps people from enrolling	"I guess it would be higher if everybody would – a lotta people have pride and don't wanna go and just apply just because some people just feel that it's – I guess their pride – if they were a higher person, then they all of a sudden lost they job or whatever, they didn't feel like they would go and get EBT because somebody would look at 'em differently or somethin' like that".- Carrie, SP
Not all people enrolled need the program	"Well first of all the 46 million people being enrolled that's insane. Because I mean if - I'm saying if not that I believe that all 46 million people need as a necessity to be in this program but it blows my mind that there's that many people that are enrolled in the SNAP program."- Theresa, UFW

Note: SP=SNAP participant; OFW= Official Frontline Worker; UFW= Unofficial Frontline Worker

I selected three respondents to serve as representative voices reflecting the themes discovered in the respondent sample: costs matching with experience or knowledge, cost not matching with experience or knowledge, and critiques of the costs of the program. Jared, an official frontline worker, felt that the cost vignette reflected his professional experience in administering the program. However, he acknowledged that a lot people in his community felt that the program costs were much too high. Jared shared experiences he has had in arguing for support of the cost of the SNAP program in his community by asking others to consider the effect SNAP has on local economies. As can be seen in paragraph A3 of table C.1, he states that SNAP dollars “roll over”, meaning that when a SNAP participant spends money from their EBT card that money goes to support the many employees that work in the larger food system. As he says, *“that dollar’s rolling over so many times, it builds our economy back up.”*

Kim, an official frontline worker, expected the national budget of the program to be lower. She based this expectation on her professional experience of hearing from individual program participants that the benefit amounts are so low for them that it may not even be worth applying. Kim points to her perspective as oriented from a smaller level, saying in paragraph B2 (table C.1), *“It's higher I guess because I look at it so much on a state and local level often and, like, a lot of our numbers are so much smaller than this.”*

Michelle, an unofficial frontline worker, critiqued the program. In reaction to the national enrollment numbers for the program she commented on the low benefit amounts for the elderly. She felt that since younger people are typically able to engage in the economy in more ways they have access to more opportunity than elderly, saying in paragraph C2 (table C.1), *“They get more offered to them than maybe people who live with one or two in the household that, like said, are elderly or retired and they still have to have food on the table for themselves.”*

Each of the respondents seemed to mentally juxtapose levels of scale. In sum, they agreed that the SNAP program is very large in terms of number of enrolled and cost of the program. However, each also refers to the effect of the program on a smaller level: community, household, and individual. Finally, there was critique of the program and the scaling of benefit amounts for certain groups such as the elderly who may feel that the amounts are too low to make applying worthwhile.

“Good” and “bad” fraud and the relationship to ethical performance of agency: the fraud frame

The second media frame identified in the SNAP media discourse was fraud in the SNAP program (table 4.8: vignette B). Respondents’ reactions to the fraud frame reflected two general themes (table 4.11): (1) type, and (2) prevalence. Types of fraud could further be broken down into fraud that could be considered either “good” or “bad”. Good fraud included actions that would technically be considered fraud under SNAP policy (such as trafficking, or selling SNAP dollars for goods), but were seen by respondents as being needed to manage a household or actively engage in society. Examples of good fraud were bartering for needed items, trafficking SNAP dollars for household essentials, and sharing SNAP-purchased foods with non-household members. Bad fraud included actions such as lying on a SNAP application, not reporting household changes, such as income or who lived there, and trafficking for non-essential items, such as drugs. Prevalence was discussed by respondents in terms of reactions to the rates of fraud presented in the vignette. These reactions were rooted in personal and professional experiences. Respondents felt that SNAP fraud was either a big problem, not a big problem, increasing, decreasing, or that the rates presented were inaccurate based on personal experience.

Table 4.11 Themes and contributing perspectives of the fraud vignette

Fraud frame		
Theme	Specific perspective	Representative Respondent Quote
Type of fraud-bad	Fraud is not reporting income change	"The biggest one that we'll have is, uh, the husband will be in the home, and as soon as the husband finds a job, because we have ways of finding that out because it shows up on a wage match. And if it's that kind of job. If it's paid under the table we won't ever know that". –Mindy, OFW
	Fraud is lying on your application	"I think about lying on your application to get more and for us and my last retail job if they have to use the SNAP card at like Walmart or something we can't give the customer back cash for it". - Michelle, UFW
		"SNAP fraud is two broad spectrums. You have the client side; you have the retailer side. Client side is lying about their situation to get more benefits, because, again, they think this is their survival. Sometimes they do stretch the truth or modify the truth in order to help ensure survival of their family." - Lindsey, OFW
		"You got an application, and I can lie and say I don't work – I don't do this, and I can get \$189.00 for the first time and then \$194.00 from now on. When they find out about it, then you don't get nothing, and then there's a penalty and they kick you off the SNAPs until you reapply after six months, and stuff like that". – Stephanie, SP
	Fraud is trafficking	"The first thing I picture is, I think I mentioned my aunt earlier. I can't tell you how many times she's told me about some teacher that she worked with in Atlanta who had a file folder full of EBT cards that she had purchased from people. So, that's my first thought is that image. Then I think of under-the-table stuff at, like, a gas station, when retailers allow people to buy things like cigarettes – those are the two kinda major things that I think of." - Kim, OFW
		"I see a lot of people taking food stamps and it's a shame because they want the money. I'd rather eat than trade it in for the money."- Christian, SP
		"The people that really need it and, and they givin' it to them and they're not usin' it for what they need to use, and there's some people out there that need it "– Carrie, SP
Type of fraud-good	Bartering should not be fraud	"So of course I would never knowingly commit fraud. However, even at 26 I know about the barter system. And if I like my daughter needs diapers. I don't think it should be wrong if someone else needs a pack of

		chicken you know to barter." - Carol, SP
	Trafficking for essentials should not be fraud	"Sometimes you have to do, and I say that because I've been a situation where I had to buy – I had to, um, purchase food for someone for them to give me money so I can pay for my rent. You know, that's the only the case that I've ever did it, but I found myself in a situation, but that's the only way that the rent was gonna be – get paid that month". –Leslie, SP "People get a whole bunch of food stamps and they selling them for whatever. And if it's for the light bill or something or water bill, keep your lights from cutting off or something, but just for personal, you know, just enjoying life with it, I think that should not be. And then it makes it harder on the people that's getting it, when they doing it makes it much harder on us to get it".- Jane, SP
	Fraud should not be parents separating and not reporting right away	"But normally, in that case with fraud, when I say adding benefit group members, which adding ... we don't consider that fraud, because they can't help that ... or I don't. I don't write a claim up on that, because by the time it gets to us it could be a month later. So you don't really want to hold them responsible for something that they reported, but yet can't help that we didn't get it until a month later. But, you know, normally it's those that lie on the application. That's, that's the majority that we see".- Anna, OFW
	Fraud should not be others eating food purchased with SNAP	"You know, when – if you got food stamps, those food stamps are for you and you only. Technically, if I came to your house and you fixed pot of stew, beef and rice, you ain't supposed to give me none of that. We know good and well that if I come, you know, or grandma. Grandma's baked a cake and here comes granddaughter in there. Gran, can I have a piece of cake? No, I – I fixed it with food stamps, you can't – you know, we know that's gonna happen."- Jared, OFW
Fraud Prevalence	Fraud is not a big problem	"We run the fraud line so I can tell you that we get calls, but it's not an overwhelming problem".- Michael, OFW
	Surprised the rate went down	I was surprised to see that it went down. I don't know why I guess because it's such a, um, I guess negative viewpoint of people having SNAP and so it's cool to see proof that it's not really a big deal.- Bonnie, OFW
	fraud is growing because of shift to decentralized state administration system	"And fraud is growing more and more with the change in our ways of doing business. Fraud is easier to happen unfortunately, because in the past when we all had our own counties that we did as a whole, and we did from beginning to end process, you know the people in your county. And you know who they're married to, and where they're working, and you know that. And now that we're different sections you get people from every county, and you don't know their situation. And it makes it easier for them to not be truthful at times". –Kate, OFW
	probably lower than people think because media distorts the truth	"I think that this is probably, um, a lot lower than a lot of people would like you to think that it is. I mean one cent on the dollar for fraud, I mean I guess any amount is too much, but one cent on the dollar I think a lot of people think that it's a good, you know, we were talking about media. When you listen to the media they want you to think that it's a lot higher

		than that when in actuality assuming this is factual".-Laura, UFW
	Fraud is common	"SNAP fraud. My favorite rant. So, this happens all the time. People exchanging their EBT for cash. I never really thought about the retail - when the retailers have been disqualified. I feel like that's just something that's not as prevalent as the person with the SNAP abusing it."- Theresa, UFW.
		"First comments happens very often. Um I know of – I guess [in my town] just people I know of um and they're like at other universities in college and um they'll say they know of people who are getting all these groceries you know for their college. You definitely are living on a budget. But they know people that will sell their SNAP – their SNAP benefits for cash. It's like the double money issue. So like 25, 50 SNAP dollars for that. Um yeah, so that's definitely a big problem."- Ashley, UFW

Note: SP=SNAP participant; OFW= Official Frontline Worker; UFW= Unofficial Frontline Worker

I selected three respondents to represent the emergent themes of types of fraud and prevalence. In discussing fraud, each respondent articulated their opinion and experience filtered through their worldview as it relates to ethical performances of agency. Viewed through a meritocratic individualistic lens, each respondent employed logics that relate to performing as a fully engaged and ethical American citizen.

In table C.2 Leslie, describing a type of good fraud, provided a critique of the sale of SNAP dollars for stigmatized items like drugs or alcohol but also for items like clothing. She did, however, acknowledge that because of complicated household financial dynamics, selling SNAP dollars for household needs, such as rent, should not be seen as fraud. In paragraph A1 she says, *“what’s the use of getting [SNAP dollars] if I don’t have anywhere to store them?”* Leslie also comments on the duty of the individual to help others. Leslie created and maintains a charity for young girls in her community and in paragraph A2 she acknowledges the complicated assessment of SNAP participant food choices by

lawmakers, realizing that they might say, “*oh wow, she spent this...spent that on’...*” but she contextualized her logic by saying, “*for instance, for my [charity organization] kickoff, that’s how I was able to get all the food, because I’m not getting help...’okay, well she’s not utilizing it right because look at all this junk she’s buying’, but I bought it for a purpose*”. For Leslie, the important factor is that she is actively trying to better her community but because of assessments and judgments of her choices the focus is misplaced and she might be seen first as a “SNAP abuser” rather than engaged citizen.

Carol, describing another type of good fraud, discussed bartering, or trading of goods, among SNAP participants. While she acknowledges that selling SNAP dollars for cash is wrong and is definitely fraud, she does describe bartering for items as not fraud. She invokes logics of patriotism and the entrepreneurial American spirit in her assessment of bartering in paragraph B1 (table C.2), saying, “*our great nation is founded on these types of things...it’s been going on for years*”. Further, in paragraph B3 she invokes religiously-based morality of care for others saying, “*I am my sisters and brothers keeper...I believe in helping my neighbors*”.

Describing the high prevalence of fraud, Theresa, an unofficial frontline worker, feels that she sees regular abuse of the program through participants lending (Electronic Benefits transfer (EBT) cards to non-enrolled individuals. In paragraph C2 (table C.2) she states that although she could likely qualify for the program she does not apply for it. She says, “*I have two jobs, and I’m a new college graduate...and it’s not even a pride thing for me but... I don’t want to be a*

burden on the system. I've always believed in working honestly". In contrast, as seen in paragraph C3, she feels that many SNAP participants can free up their income through using SNAP, which allows them to buy things that they do not need. She states, *"if you are broke...you live within your means [a]nd people with EBT don't have to live within their means because now they have money to go out to the club or get nails done or whatever"*. Theresa's perspective might be rooted in logics of fairness and justice, as viewed through the lens of Bootstrap ideology. She "did everything right" by going to school and trying to live honestly and sees abuse of the program (as she contextualizes it) as a breach of ethics and perhaps, a breakdown of the reward of success afforded by Bootstrap ideology adherence.

Decision-making and personal and household success: the individualism frame

Respondents' perspectives on the individualism media frame (Table 4.8: Vignette C) were oriented around decision-making and time (see table 4.12). Respondents focused their perspectives either on the person (the mother in the vignette) or on the household (her children). Person-focused perspectives targeted her decisions as it related to her personal actions in finding or not finding work or her pursuit of education. Household-focused perspectives targeted the mother's decisions in the context of her larger household, such as deciding to enroll in SNAP to have money to feed her children. Respondents also weaved temporality into their perspectives, focusing on "now" or "the future". Perspectives incorporating "the now" included statements related to "just getting any job" or using the SNAP program "as a crutch". Perspectives incorporating the

future included statements about serving as a role model for children or offered perspectives rooted in the process of getting a job now as ladder to success.

Table 4.12 Themes and contributing perspectives of the Individualism vignette

Individualism frame			
Themes	Specific perspectives	Representative Respondent Quotes	
Person focus	Future	Someone who doesn't think for the future	"That's a naïve lady. And that is a – someone that doesn't think for the future and that's really sad".- Lindsey, OFW
		You can't depend on government all your life	"Basically people [are] taking advantage, so it's good to find a job, because you can't depend on the government all your life. So she'll probably be able to find a job sooner or later in the long run. If I was in her shoes and I had four children, I wouldn't mind the stamps, but I would be working. But she ain't trying to find no job. That's the way she's putting it". - Stephanie, SP
		Your job builds your experience	"So initial reaction is when you try to help certain people again they use it as a crutch. So I definitely understand that she was unable to find one at first. But the problem I have is when she says that she can't find anything that pays enough. Start by finding something that pays something...you job builds your experience... How are you expecting to get a better job if you don't start somewhere?"- .- Ashley, UFW
		You take a job and you look for a better one	"You know, as, as her outlook on it, a little bit backwards maybe, but I always tell my little boy all the time, you can't judge where people are at because not everyone took the same path to get there. I mean she may need to take a job and still get the EBT. You take a job and you look for the better job, but it's like I said before, not everybody came from the same place I came from, you know what I mean?" - Laura, UFW
		Try to use SNAP as something that will help in the long run	"You can rely on the EBT or SNAP but , like I said, try to better yourself or not just like give a excuse, like say, "ok, I got the EBT, got the SNAP food stamps and I'm not gonna, I'm gonna take advantage of it, I'm not gonna do any better". So try to put it to something that'll help you out in the long run, try to move, strive for better instead of depending on that".- Michelle, UFW

	Typical client	"That's pretty average. That's – a lot of our single mothers you know, have to rely on SNAP. And it is a supplement to what they don't have, which is, I mean it's pretty spot-on with that. When we talk to our clients, you know, we say this is not the way of life." - Kate.
Now	Typical client	"It seems just like a typical client to me. I think that describes a lot of people. I think it seems like what we deal with all the time. You know, not being able afford the tuition. And I guess the first thing I think about is college students. Because you have folks who don't do anything to better themselves who can get food stamps their whole lives, never work, never do anything. And here's somebody who's trying to better themselves. Hopefully get a job and get off the program".-Dolores, OFW
	Typical recipient	"I'm kind of doing what I said people shouldn't do, but it seems like a pretty typical SNAP recipient. I think it shows that receiving SNAP is not a result of the lack of effort. It seems like she's doing the best she can and she doesn't have the resources that she needs to live without receiving government benefits".- Kim, OFW
	SNAP meets needs so why bother getting job	"We have those that think that they don't have to go get a job as long as they ... as we are taking care of them. You know. It meets their needs. Why bother? You know? So, we hear that a lot".- Anna, OFW
	Impressed she's trying to go to school	"I think I'm kinda impressed that she's tryin' to go to school. Um, and then you know I'm not surprised that she couldn't afford it because school tuition is so expensive. Um, but I mean EBT helps her and that's what she needs". - Bonnie, OFW
	She's doing the best she can with what she has	"I guess you can point out the fact that you know she's going to use the EBT until she finds a decent paying job. And I can't say that will be a goal of mines, but I don't necessarily feel like she's abusing the system. Especially when this makes it is seem like she is actively looking for employment. She is actively you know trying to better herself. She couldn't afford tuition. She's not– not just somebody who wants to sit up and use the system. I think– I think she's doing the best she can with what she has." - Carol, SP
	A lot of women would rather get EBT than work	"Yeah you gotta a lot of women that do that now. They'd rather get EBT than work. As long as they know they got some kinda income coming inside their house, they good with that. What stands out most that she's a high school graduate but drop out of college because she couldn't afford the tuition. So she had to get some kind of income coming in to her since she ain't got no job". -- Christian, SP

		<p>Don't rely on SNAP to avoid getting job</p>	<p>"Well I think that as long as she really needs it I can understand it. But if you're refusing to take other jobs that could help you, I don't think you should just continue getting [SNAP]. I would think about somebody else that could use them more than me and just getting them because you don't wanna take a certain job or something to help yourself. But in the mean time sometime we turn down things when we could get some help, we won't have to depend on others. I don't ever wanna have to really be depending on people. If I can do it myself I'd rather others have it".- Jane, SP</p>
		<p>She's not being proactive enough</p>	<p>"She's just like, "Oh well if something else comes along." You know, and that happens a lot. I feel like people who receive these benefits have this mindset that they have EBT and they don't plan on changing it. They don't plan on looking for a better job or furthering their education which, I know, the whole, being able to afford college and stuff like that that's a barrier to it. Because see this issue isn't just about SNAP, you know, this is about everything. As far as education being able to, you know the affordability and the access to nutritional foods. I mean there's so many barriers to it. And see I would feel for this hypothetical single mother with four children but I just I don't feel like it's something you should look at like, "Oh I'm just going to get EBT for now until I find something later." Because it doesn't really seem like, in this scenario that it's something that's she trying to actively do. It's just kind of like, "Oh later on, you know, maybe one day I won't need EBT anymore."- Theresa, UFW</p>
		<p>This person is the exception, not the rule- most people are desperate to find work</p>	<p>"Her statement that EBT gets anything she needs food wise for the house, I can't even imagine somebody who's on [SNAP] that is their primary – not just primary food source, but maybe a primary income source is gonna say, "Hey, I'm just happy as can be." So the people that I talk to that are actually receiving what paltry public benefits we get in South Carolina are desperate to find work, and most of them are working in some way, and so this caricature of a person may indeed exist, but she is the exception and not the rule". - Michael, OFW</p>
		<p>Person needs motivating</p>	<p>"This lady needs a little motivating. You can do it. You gotta go back and we've got programs that we can help her. -So we here at DSS that's part of what we promote is trying to figure out and some clients you can motivate to do, you know, more. I always say I'm in hopes of even if we don't reach but one, that one out of the group, good job, you know and I think it builds a satisfaction with them too."- Mindy, OFW</p>

Household focus	Future	Role model for children	"The problem you have in situation like this is these four young children. Their role model is their mama and their mama stays home every day, so what's gonna motivate these four young children to not do the same thing?" - Jared, OFW
	Now	She can't afford to take the job. It's not worth it	"So, um, I guess you just have to look at it from different perspectives, but \$13.00 would do nothing for me, because I'll feel like – I still won't be able to stay afloat, you know, really because I'll have no – you know, I'll have to put them in childcare. That's gonna be most of my check right there. And then my rent is gonna go up, my benefits are gonna decrease, so I'm gonna have to replace the food that I'm getting now that we're accustomed to, so to speak, with, you know, money out of my pocket now. It's just not worth it".- Leslie, SP
		Choice between feeding children working underpaying job	"It's very hard to do with four kids and yourself on \$500.00 a month. If she can't find a job, she has to feed her kids. So, what other alternative do she have? So it was – her choice was to have food on the table for her kids, or work that short end job and not have enough food for her kids to eat".- Carrie, SP

Note: SP=SNAP participant; OFW= Official Frontline Worker; UFW= Unofficial Frontline Worker

The individualism vignette focused on the actions of a single mother regarding her enrollment in the SNAP program. Four respondents were selected to represent the themes discovered across all of the respondents. All four of the selected project respondents presented perspectives that were focused on time and steps to individual success. Further, two of the respondents related this temporal worldview to the role of parents in shaping the worldview of their children. Viewed through the lens of the Bootstrap Ideology, these perspectives could be seen as comments on the work ethic of the woman in the vignette. However, the logics at work for each of the selected project respondents prioritize the parameters and focus of decision-making so what seems like low work ethic for the individual woman to one respondent is viewed as strategic planning for a household for another.

Ashley, an unofficial frontline worker, feels that the woman's actions and decisions present a person who is not an "upright citizen" and doesn't "help herself". Further in paragraph A1 of table C.3 she employed logics built into the narrative of success wherein success is eventually attained through small incremental steps, invoking the metaphorical ladder to success. She says, *"your job builds your experiences. You can get that better job...how are you gonna expect to get a decent paying job if you aren't starting somewhere."* In paragraph A3 Ashley considers the woman's decision to not take a job that doesn't pay enough as a moral dilemma. She acknowledges that it would be a struggle to take an underpaying job but employs a logic rooted in work ethic values when she says, *"it's getting comfortable with the system... again just taking advantage of help that she has become comfortable with – it's a moral dilemma, because people who are advocates of SNAP are trying to help people who need it."*

Anna, an official frontline worker, discussed the person in the prompt as representative of some of her clients. She focused on the decision of the mother in the vignette's decisions to stay on SNAP and not continue looking for work. Anna said in paragraph B2 (table C.3), *"we have those that think that they don't have to go get a job as long as we are taking care of them. It meets their needs, why bother?"* She further comments on some of her clients discussing the benefits not covering their food needs and Anna questions their purchasing habits, saying in paragraph B1 (table C.3) *"[they are] buying more than they need, as far as rib eyes and T-bones...buy what you need, you don't have to eat ribeye every week."*

Lindsey (table C.3), an official frontline worker, believes the woman in the vignette is “naïve” and does not “*think for the future*”. Lindsey focuses on the woman’s decision to not finish her degree as a significant roadblock to her future success. Further, Lindsey believes that through continued governmental benefits program participation, the woman in the vignette is “reinforcing to her children a way of life”. However, as a program administrator Lindsey feels that the woman “has a right to her lifestyle...this is America” but that she want to, “*expose her to some other recourse so that she can meet some of the goals that she at one had time had for herself*”.

Carrie, a SNAP participant and mother of a young daughter, provides a critique of Ashley’s logic of getting any job as way to “build up high” and Lindsey’s logic of “thinking for the future”. Essentially, both logics are rooted in the concept of time; which, depending on circumstance can be viewed as a luxury. In paragraph D1 (table C.3) Carrie states that, “*her choice was to have food on the table for her kids, or work that short end job and not have enough food for her kids to eat*”. Actively orienting the decision-making locus around “the now” of feeding her children, Carrie also describes the social and potentially legal consequences that this decision carries when she says in paragraph D2, “*that’s the aspect I look at it from because if she’s sending kids to school hungry, they are gonna look at her as an unfit mother, so I think her choice was right*”.

The hypothetical regulation of SNAP allowable foods: the health frame

Respondents’ perspectives on the health frame (table 4.8: vignette D) were oriented around agreement with the program’s foci, critiques of the stated

foci, the 2008 program name change (from The Food Stamp Program to SNAP), and the potential regulation of allowable foods under SNAP policy (table 4.13). Respondent statements that focused on the program's foci centered specifically on themes of nutrition and hunger. Some respondents also offered critiques of the program's foci of hunger and its supplemental role in total household food acquisition. Further, respondents offered perspectives that indicating that the program name change in 2008 was undertaken to reduce stigma and actually had an effect of costing more money. Many respondents also brought up the hypothetical regulation of allowable foods under future SNAP policy. An interview question was added to seek this perspective from remaining respondents. This debate represents the nexus of perspectives on the goals of the program and problems of obesity in the United States and directly relates to public health and food assistance policy development and evolution. Because of this, I will focus solely on this aspect of the health frame. The section below reflects the perspectives of three respondents around hypothetical decisions to regulate allowable foods under SNAP policy. Each presented a perspective that articulated on the role of personal choice in the face of individual health but each gave different weight to personal choice in the context of SNAP.

Table 4.13 Themes and contributing perspectives of the health vignette

Health frame		
Theme	Perspective contributing to theme	Representative Quote
Agreement with stated program foci	Goal is to address hunger	"Yes, they did change that name. Supplement Nutrition Assistance Program to make it sound like it's meeting the needs of those that actually meet the hunger criteria, rather than food stamps". Anna, OFW
	Goal is to address nutrition	"[the program] emphasize[s] not only nutrition education, but lifestyle modification to increase health. Um, South Carolina is not where we – we need to be, and in fact some other states are ahead of us."- Lindsey, OFW
Critiques of program foci	There should be nutrition education	"if you're going to have a program named Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program there should be some kind of initiation towards nutrition. I mean I just feel like the education process, um, should be there. They should put a lot of effort into education about food. What's healthy? What's not? And also too well I guess that wouldn't be really, um, a part of SNAP but, you know, affordability and access to nutritional foods and stuff like that." Theresa, UFW
	It's not really supplemental	"It's [supposed to be] supplemental, but like just truth be told from experience like it's for – I know it's called the supplemental program, but for a lot of families it's not supplemental". - Leslie, SP
	Focus on making healthy food cheaper	"If I wanted to eat healthy and like I said shop at Whole Foods or even at Wal-Mart and just get you know strictly organic and foods such as that, I wouldn't be able to make it. Like my family wouldn't make it on what I have available for a month at all." - Carol, SP
	Focus on fresh foods	"I do think, you know, just like, you know, our program where we're, you know, pushing, you know, eating fresh and eating local and, you know, I think that there could be more programs that address that part of it. You know not even, I mean yeah, eating local that's something that's important to us and maybe that's not as important on the big national scale, but you know, eating fresh, buying produce and, you know, spending your SNAP dollars that way". Laura, UFW
2008 program name change	Change related to cost	"Changing the name to SNAP from food stamps, that's just something the government – and all it did was cost us more money, because every form you got that used to have food stamps on it, a new one gotta be done with SNAP".- Jared, OFW

	Change related to stigma and perception of program and participants	"I personally think that they changed it because they wanted to get rid of the stigma of food stamp recipients, because stamps were just – there's a stigma of you know, you're lazy and you're just wanting something, and SNAP would be a little less intrusive."- Kate, OFW
SNAP regulation	SNAP allowable foods should be regulated	"And these same people that have all this money on the EBT card are buying frivolously. You know, the crab legs, birthday cakes, all this stuff. And usually it's junk food too. Which is also something another issue that I have with it. Is that, um, you know, I feel like they should change how they regulate it."- Theresa, UFW
	SNAP allowable foods should NOT be regulated	"I would hate it, but part of living in a free society is trying to teach people to act responsibly, not for government to impose its belief that certain things are preferable, uh, over others, be that who somebody falls in love with or who or what foods they eat."- Michael, OFW

Note: SP=SNAP participant; OFW= Official Frontline Worker; UFW= Unofficial Frontline Worker

Leslie, a SNAP participant, struggled to arrive at a determination of whether to regulate purchases for SNAP participants. As seen in paragraph A1 of table C.4, she thought that regulating purchases would have a beneficial effect on obesity but she stated that ultimately, “ *I’m trying to make healthier choices about what I buy but I think it should be the individual’s choice*”. She then presented some context as to why regulating might not have the desired effect and pointed to the politics and logistics of eating healthy foods. She said in paragraph A2 (table C.4) that, “ *I look at it from some people’s perspectives- like one girl was saying that she doesn’t have transportation to get...to the store, so they walk back and forth to the corner store. What does a convenience store have that healthy? [T]hey try to throw apples and stuff like that but most of the time you find fruit flies and you don’t want it...They have all those little convenience snacks... just to fill the void so they won’t be hungry, but it’s not necessarily nutritious*”.

Kim, an official frontline worker, felt that regulating food purchases for SNAP participants was the wrong way to go. In paragraph B1 (table C.4) she shares that addressing obesity through regulation is a passive and autonomy-limiting method to employ, stating, *[w]hat I don't want to happen is restrictions on what people can buy - that seems to be the most public sort of idea for addressing obesity through SNAP is, like, "Okay, well then just, like, restrict what people can buy and then, we don't have to worry about it." But I don't think taking away autonomy is the way to go. I just don't – I don't like the idea of telling people what they can and can't get*.

She does, however, believe that individual nutrition education is a useful method to addressing obesity.

Anna, an official frontline worker at a county-level DSS office, believed that regulation of allowable foods would be an effective method to improving nutrition and ultimately orients her perspective in the logic of program goal alignment. As she says in paragraph C2 (table C.4), *"I think if you're gonna put the nutrition aspect in the name there needs to be some nutritional value as to what they should be able to purchases when they go to the store. Especially if you have a household of kids, you just don't want to buy chips and Cokes"*.

Right practice and right teaching of the Bootstrap Ideology at work in the logics of respondents

I have shown respondent perspectives about the SNAP program and its participants through reactions to vignettes reflecting the dominant frames of the SNAP media discourse. Here I present themes of the overall logics employed by respondents as they reacted to the media frame vignettes (table 4.14) and

situate the themes within the Bootstrap Ideology. Respondent logics grouped into two overall thematic expressions: orthopraxy right practice or performance and right doctrine or teaching. I conceptualize these themes as logics related to respondent's contextualized experiences of performing their agency and their prescription of proper conduct as they relate to the values of the Bootstrap Ideology.

In discussing their perspectives of the SNAP program, respondents employed logics related to their own actions, which were oriented within the Bootstrap Ideological values of individualism, meritocracy, and work ethic. As shown in table 4.14, the specific logics employed focused on ways in which the respondents were active agents through bartering, which is an American tradition; helping others and feeding others as right practice; negotiating success and deferment of reward is contextually dependent on circumstances.

Respondents likewise provided logics that related to the unofficial doctrine of the Bootstrap Ideology, informed by the values of individualism, meritocracy, and work ethic. As shown in table 4.14, the specific logics employed were fiscal responsibility, personal responsibility, and autonomy; parental role modeling for future generations; personal grit is an admirable trait; self-betterment should be a personal goal, incremental job experience and education are pathways to success; and empathy-that you can understand others through the lens of the individual, such as knowing a person is "on their own path".

Table 4.14 Overall logic themes for project respondents

Theme	Logic	Representative Quote
Right practice	Bartering is American	"If I have SNAP and I need – my daughter needs diapers. I don't think it should be wrong if someone else needs a pack of chicken you know to barter. I mean people – our great nation is founded on these type of things. Like it's been going on for years. So I think it should be reevaluated. I think everything should be reevaluated on a case by case basis. I don't think it's necessarily – well, according to SNAP it's fraud to barter your services you know or whatnot. But I think that's something that if found out should be forgiven. People need things. And I for one don't think this falls under fraud, but like I for one you know had taken a pack of chicken out my freezer and I know I bartered on SNAP and my cousin has five kids. And you know it's the end of the month and she doesn't have X Y Z, why not?"- Carol, SP
	Norms of hospitality	"My grandmother told me, she said, "You never turn away someone who wants to eat ever." Because I mean just as well as tomorrow I may not know where my next meal is or where it would come from. You know someone that I don't even know could be you know suffering from the same – same problems. And who am I not to feed a person"- Michelle, UFW
	Helping others	"So I may see that they need a little help, so I'll give them what I can. It's not – you know, I can't always give them money, so I'll just, you know, give them food or give them a few packages of whatever. And then I know of some elderly, they may not have – so I make sure – every month I just make sure that I help somebody else, because it was a blessing for me to get it".- Leslie, SP
	Negotiating deferment of reward and success	"That, um, that she couldn't find a good job that paid enough to get her off, and if she got any other job, it wouldn't have been enough to feed her kids: So it was – her choice was to have food on the table for her kids, or work that short end job and not have enough food for her kids to eat. So it was a choice that she had to make and I think she made the choice she thought was right".- Carrie, SP
Right teaching	Fiscal responsibility	"They've (SNAP participants) gone out and extended with all these loans out here that then they don't have money to purchase food. So, you know, I think some education for budgeting and finances and, we used to do some of that here but we don't".- Mindy, OFW
	Personal responsibility and autonomy	"Part of living in a free society is trying to teach people to act responsibly, not for government to impose, and this is a strange thing for a liberal to say, but not for government to impose its belief that certain things are preferable, uh, over others, be that who somebody falls in love with or who or what foods they eat".- Michael, OFW
	Parental role modeling	"The problem you have in situation like this is these four young children. Their role model is their mama and their mama stays home every day, so what's gonna motivate these four young children to not do the same thing? And that's – that's where we try to change."- Jared, OFW
	Grit	"So I guess if there were [laughs] – I hate even saying this, but if there were, like – it seemed like she wasn't – it seemed like she was trying less, you know, then I would probably be more likely to be like, "Oh, well

		you need to, like, try harder." - Kim, OFW
	Self-betterment	"If they don't have children or if they don't meet certain criteria. And probably most employees if not all would say that that's something they disagree with, the policy they disagree with because you have folks who don't do anything to better themselves who can get food stamps their whole lives, never work, never do anything. And here's somebody who's trying to better themselves. Hopefully get a job and get off the program but they can't get food stamps". - Dolores, OFW
	Pathways to success	"In this situation if she had a job then she wouldn't receive by any means the \$500 per month. But your job builds your experiences. You can get that better job. So how are you gonna expect to get a decent paying job if you aren't starting somewhere. Everyone has to start low and build up high." - - Ashley, UFW
	Understanding others	"I always tell my little boy all the time, you can't judge where people are at because not everyone took the same path to get there."- Laura, UFW

Note: SP=SNAP participant; OFW= Official Frontline Worker; UFW= Unofficial Frontline Worker

Taken together, the logics employed across the respondents are situated within a context much larger than just the SNAP program. The overall picture that is painted creates a person that is responsible, tenacious, focused on self-betterment, and is engaged in society. How a person chooses to embody that image however is contextually and experientially influenced such that the image may look very different to different people and, thus, perspectives of that person would likewise, be varied.

For example, the perspectives presented for the health frame concerning the regulation of allowable foods as part of SNAP policy articulate around logics of autonomy and individual choice, the logistics and politics of accessing and eating health foods, and programmatic goal alignment. Taken together these logics encapsulate those presented in the perspectives above for the cost, fraud, and individualism frames. Based on the overall perspectives that emerged from the respondents, I saw perspectives of cost oriented around notions of personal experience and scale of the program. Fraud perspectives were oriented around how individuals contextualized their own and others actions as “good” or “bad”. Individualism perspectives were oriented around personal or household decision-making and assessments of success as filtered through conceptions of time. Below I will situate our findings and present implications for public health policy and practice using the SNAP regulation debate as a vehicle for discussion.

Discussion and Implications

This study presented perspectives and logics about the SNAP program held by SNAP participants and frontline workers through their reactions to media

discourse around the SNAP program. The media discourse was represented by the creation of vignettes that reflected the four dominant frames of the SNAP media discourse: (1) cost of the program, (2) fraud in the program, (3) individualism, and (4) health. I found that respondents discussed the cost frame in terms of levels of scale; situating their opinion of whether the program costs too much or not within their breakdown of costs for the nation overall down to the individual level of the household or person. Respondents discussed fraud frame in terms of “good” and “bad” fraud, with the delineation overall being rooted in individual agency. Good fraud might be things like bartering SNAP dollars for items that the household needs or using SNAP purchased foods for family outside the household or hosting a charity organization dinner. Respondents discussed the individualism frame in terms of decision-making in negotiating personal or household success. That is, how a member of a household decides to what course to take in feeding their family through SNAP participation and potential employment. Finally, respondents discussed the health frame in terms of the potential regulation of allowable SNAP purchases. The discussion of this frame revolved around the role of the program in promoting nutrition and allowing personal freedom of choice.

In the context of this study on the perspectives about the SNAP program and its participants, the logics and “common sense” perspectives of project respondents were reflective of the values of merit, work ethic and individualism, what has been called the Bootstrap Ideology (Gordon, 1989) (figure 4.1).

Coupled within some of the statements by project respondents were glimmers of

alternative ideologies that could be viewed as linked to the Bootstrap Ideology through their linguistic combination with Bootstrap logics and perspectives. For example, alternative ideologies were linguistically identifiable in statements such as Carol's about being her bother and sister's keeper. Carol nested this ideological influence within her discussion of SNAP fraud and bartering. Carol's statement about being her brothers' and sisters' keeper and other like it from Leslie, who saw it as her duty to help others, could be oriented religious or collectivist ideologies (Dalley, 1988). Further, a Libertarian ideology is implicitly referenced by a few of the respondents (Hall, 2000). For example, Michael believes that part of living in a free society is not having government exert its will on its citizens. Future studies should investigate the existence and depth of alternative ideologies in relation to perspectives on the SNAP program as well as explore further connections in the influence of Bootstrap Ideology and consumerism on other public health and food assistance programs.

SNAP has received copious attention from scholars and policy-makers. Many researchers have investigated the effects of the program for individuals and households around food insecurity, poverty, and links to health through economic (Gundersen et al., 2011; McKernan et al., 2003; Yaktine et al., 2013), health (Frongillo et al., 2006), and social lenses. Investigations into the social conditions around SNAP participation are frequently focused on stigma of program participation and usage (Blumkin et al., 2008; Kaye et al., 2013; Kreider et al., 2012; Zekeri, 2003). The background factors that contribute to social concepts, such as stigma, however, have not been adequately investigated for

the SNAP program. This study follows the call from Danziger (2010), whose tracking of effects of reforms to the cash welfare program over time revealed the need for investigation into other safety net programs, such as SNAP. Through our location and contextualization of the perspectives of project respondents several public health and policy implications and recommendations become visible.

As Jared stated when trying to talk to opponents of the SNAP program, SNAP dollars service more than just the households that receive the benefits. Some research has shown that they function just like any other economic stimulus in a community and, in a sense, are very efficient because they influence the broader economy (Wilde 2013). Indeed, SNAP dollars have been linked to not only specific communities but the entire GDP of the United States (Hanson, 2010). However, the logic of SNAP dollars stimulating local economies has been shown to be exaggerated. For example, many SNAP dollars do not go into local economies, rather they support large scale retail and multinational corporations (Martinez 2010).

SNAP program fraud is a multi-textured, context specific phenomenon but is measured in static ways and potentially functions socially as a metaphor (Lakoff, 1991) that conjures images of conscious, deceptive activity. Federally, fraud is measured through the rate of trafficking, a specific scenario in which SNAP EBT dollars are exchanged for cash (“What is SNAP Fraud? | Food and Nutrition Service,” n.d.). It does not include program abuse or other policy infractions such as bartering. As several respondents shared, using SNAP

dollars to barter for other needed services or items for a household or choosing to use SNAP-purchased food as a component of community betterment events may technically be fraud under SNAP regulations but could also be seen through a lens of individual empowerment. Further, project respondents distinguished between use SNAP in economic circulation and using it for transaction of illegal and/ or unhealthy items. Although the fraud rate for SNAP is much lower than many other federal programs and has even decreased over time (“What is SNAP Fraud? | Food and Nutrition Service,” n.d.), several respondents perceived fraud as increasing and rampant. A re-evaluation of the concept of fraud is needed that is more dynamic and flexible and that allows for the unpunished agency of SNAP participants.

Interestingly, no participants discussed the existence or prevalence of corporate fraud. Perhaps this omission reflects a “strategic silence” (Achino-Loeb, 2006), an intentional deflection away from influential characters in the SNAP media discourse. The silence might be linked to “behind the scenes” relationships between media outlets and their corporate owners (Kellner 2011) or connections between the media, corporations and lobbyists (Nestle 2013). These potential connections and relationships should be investigated and laid bare through future research.

I also see the need for policy evolution around fixed boundaries of income eligibility. As was demonstrated in the above sections, what may look like a lack of work ethic from one perspective is actually conscious decision-making around household income viewed through another perspective. Fear of losing all benefits

because of taking a job should not be part of participation in the program and a factor in household decision-making. Finally, the public health and political debate around the regulation of allowable purchases under SNAP is a pressing issue. The debate might exist because the SNAP program could be viewed as more than just a food assistance program. It could be seen as the nexus of commonly held, seemingly intuitive solutions to poverty and hunger: money and food. However, opinions of how to properly allocate these solutions are rooted in ideological perspectives as well as economic and political, social, and public health interests. Economically, SNAP contributes greatly to corporate interests. For example, it is estimated that around 18% of all EBT dollars were spent at Wal-Mart in 2012, totaling around \$17 billion for the retailer (Berman, 2013). Further, political interests, influenced by food lobbyists, are also deeply tied to which foods are allowable under SNAP policy (Brownell & Ludwig, 2011; Nestle, 2013). Socially, the debate articulates around the role of ethics, specifically issues of individual freedom of choice (Barnhill, King, Kass, & Faden, 2014; Kass, Hecht, Paul, & Birnbach, 2014) Public health practitioners are often used as the “case makers” for political and economic arguments for or against the regulation of SNAP purchases, with obesity commonly being the fulcrum upon which the arguments sway (Ludwig DS, Blumenthal SJ, & Willett WC, 2012). Understanding how people contextualize and rationalize their opinions could help researchers and policy-makers think through policy issues and how different people might interpret specific policies and programs. This has direct implications for deriving solutions, programming, and policy development and evolution. For

example, as case makers, public health practitioners' personally-held notions of what I means to be a "good, healthy citizen" influence their interpretation of policies, such as the potential regulation of allowable foods under SNAP policy.

This study features numerous strengths such as theoretical grounding and methodological alignment however it does have some limitations. Generalizability is limited because of our small number of respondents, however I did provide a diversely gathered and deeply contextualized sample from across the state of South Carolina from among respondents of different position in relation to the SNAP program. Further, the critiques made against the SNAP program by SNAP participants and frontline workers may not be generalizable outside of South Carolina due to programmatic specificities in the state administration of the program

Conclusion

The SNAP program is the largest food assistance program in the United States. It serves over 46 million people and has been found to reduce poverty (Tiehen et al., 2012) and food insecurity (Ratcliffe et al., 2011). However, "conventional wisdom" suggests that participation in the program might be a visible comment on ones' self-worth and contributes to stigma associated with program participation (Zekeri, 2003). In unpacking some of the "conventional wisdom" that Zekeri refers to that result in social effects, such as stigma, this study revealed that perspectives of project respondents were oriented in the Bootstrap Ideology with logics built on the values of meritocracy, individualism, and work ethic. As such, critiques and perspectives of the program and its

participants could be viewed as veiled comments on “Americaness”. Further, taken together, the media vignettes presented to the project respondents create an image of “Americaness”, enacted through perspectives of the program and its participants as an assessment of cost for a service, the judgment of action through the lens of morality, the actions of the individual and their work ethic, and the maintenance of personal health. As was shown in the above sections, regardless of position, the respondents in this study enacted logics of participation and perspectives that spoke to their sense of agency; how they interacted with the world in ways that fit within their conceptions of “how to be” as a member of society.

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CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

5.1 INTRODUCING THE CONCLUSION: CONTENTION REDUX

The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP, formerly known as Food Stamps) is the largest food assistance program in the nation and, according to many, is positioned to play a crucial role in the reduction of poverty (McGovern, 2001; Tiehen et al., 2012; Yaktine et al., 2013) and food insecurity (Mykerezi & Mills, 2010; Ratcliffe et al., 2011). The program has also receives copious attention from scholars and policy-makers. Many researchers have investigated the effects of the program for individuals and households around food insecurity, poverty, and links to health through economic (Gundersen et al., 2011; McKernan et al., 2003; Yaktine et al., 2013), health (Frongillo et al., 2006), and social lenses. Investigations into the social conditions around SNAP participation are frequently focused on stigma of program participation and usage (Blumkin et al., 2008; Kaye et al., 2013; Kreider et al., 2012; Zekeri, 2003). The background factors that contribute to social concepts, such as stigma, however, have not been adequately investigated for the SNAP program and may play a large role in future SNAP policy evolution and public opinion about the program and its participants.

The SNAP program is controversial, drawing support or opposition from political and societal actors across the nation. Further, judgment frequently centers on individual participants in the program. The media acts as a powerful voice in the SNAP discourse, potentially influencing as well as reflecting political and public opinion. In this study I have identified the media discourse around the SNAP program, situated against the political debates surrounding the delayed passage of the 2014 Farm Bill, the omnibus bill that authorizes and funds SNAP as well as many other nutrition programs and much of the federal farming policy and programming for the country. I have also investigated the perspectives that SNAP participants and frontline workers hold about the program and elicited their reactions to the SNAP media discourse. Since the period of data collection for this study, the Farm Bill has passed with SNAP still safely wrapped within the bill's legislative comfort but SNAP is still a target for legislators. Likewise, SNAP participants are still targets of judgment and harassment. Two examples, one legislative and one personal will be highlighted here as a representation of the ongoing contention raised by the SNAP program and its participants.

During the divisive debates prior to the Farm Bill's passage the House of Representatives presented a version of the bill that removed SNAP authorization and funding from the Farm Bill entirely, authorizing it under its own standalone bill (H.R. 3102), called the Nutrition Reform and Work Opportunity Act. One focus of that measure was the targeting of SNAP participants that used illegal drugs, hanging program eligibility on a positive or negative drug test. Ultimately, that version of the bill was not passed but that has not stopped House lawmakers

from attempting this measure. On February 11, 2016, House Republican Robert Aderholt (R-AL), along with 6 other cosponsors, introduced the SNAP Empowerment and Accountability Act of 2016 (H.R. 4540). The bill's name conjures now-familiar Bootstrap ideological images of the empowered and accountable individual; how could anyone argue with that? However, the bill is targeted on drug testing and resulting eligibility of SNAP applicants and participants. Among its measures are amending the SNAP legislation contained within the Farm Bill to allow states to determine eligibility based on drug test results and authorizing \$600 million dollars each year for five years for states to use for drug treatment for individual SNAP applicants and participants "who test positive for controlled substances". SNAP legislation (linked with Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) legislation in the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996 -PRWORA) has long contained eligibility determined language based on felonious drug convictions by applicants and participants, but has not taken the step of hanging eligibility on simple drug usage (Congressional research Service, 2015). In an article from the Alabama News, Congressman Aderholt described the bill saying, "[t]his is a compassionate way to try and help these people who have issues, instead of turning the head." Data presenting the prevalence of drug abuse among SNAP participants is lacking, but the social fact (Durkheim, 1982) is that abuse is rampant. This contributes to negative assessments of "SNAP participants" as a collective, and individual judgment of SNAP participants, which can play out as overt harassment.

An article from Fox News that presented a viral video from a Wal-Mart patron described such person-to-person harassment. The article titled, “Woman confronts man for using food stamps at Wal-Mart” appeared online in early May 2016 and has since spread to many other outlets (“WATCH,” 2016). The video, taken by a witness and beginning mid-sentence, depicts a woman talking to a male customer purchasing food at the checkout lane. The woman says, “*usually when you’re raised that way you wanna [sic] work a lot harder to not go back to that*”, presumably referencing the man’s use of EBT to pay for his food. The man counters with the fact he puts in 50-60 hours a week, yet the woman still feels that she is paying for his food with her taxes, despite the fact that if he is working, likely he is paying into the system as well. The exchange becomes heated with a lot of profanity and the man tells the woman to “deal with it” and mind her business. The woman invokes the US Constitution and says “*I don’t have to. It’s a free country, remember? If I’m gonna be paying for all of your [stuff], the least I can do is talk*”. As I have shown above, this exchange is representative of many common logics employed in negative perceptions of the SNAP program and its participants and is potentially informed by individually-held values and ideologies as well as media discourse on the program.

The two examples presented here, one legislative and the other personal, reference the larger political and public debates and discourses circulating around the SNAP program and its participants. Further, the vehicle through which many of these debates and discourses are made available to the larger public is the news media, as they circularly influence and reflect content. In the

sections below I present a brief summary of the objectives and findings of this project, some implications for policy and practice, and some future directions that may stem from this project.

5.2 SUMMARY OF APPROACH AND FINDINGS FOR THIS STUDY

The overall purpose of this study was to identify and explore perspectives on the SNAP program and its participants in an attempt to systematically situate those perspectives within the phenomenon of the SNAP program as a contentious program. To achieve this overall objective I drew the perspectives from two sources: the news media and program stakeholders (participants and frontline workers). The two sources were visualized as specific aims that were undertaken sequentially. To address each aim specific research questions were investigated. The specific aims and research questions were:

(3) *Locate and conceptualize the media discourse around the SNAP program and its participants.*

- a) What characters are presented in media-constructed articles about the SNAP program and its participants?
- b) As presented in media articles about the SNAP program and its participants, whose responsibility is it to address issues of poverty and hunger?
- c) What frames are included in media-constructed articles about the SNAP program and its participants?

- d) What frames are most commonly used in articles that focus on a specific group's responsibility to address poverty or hunger in the United States?
- e) What frames are most commonly used in articles by conservative and liberal news outlets?

(4) Explore the perspectives about the SNAP program and its participants held by SNAP participants and frontline workers and reactions to media discourse.

- a) What perspectives do project respondents have about the SNAP program and SNAP participants?
- b) How do project respondents react to and interpret the SNAP media discourse?
 - i. What logics are used that might contribute to how respondents make sense of the SNAP program and its participants?

Specific aim 1: Media Discourse Around the SNAP Program During the Contentious Passage of the Agricultural Act of 2014

To address specific aim 1, I conducted a media content analysis of six national news media outlets perceived as being aligned with conservative or liberal political ideologies and representing print (The New York Times and The New York Post), broadcast (MSNBC and Fox News), and online news aggregator (The Huffington Post and The Daily Caller) outlets. I searched all content from those sources between December 2013 and December 2014, using search terms “food stamps” and “foodstamps” so as to collect the media

discourse around the SNAP program (which is almost exclusively referred to as food stamp in media articles) and its participants. I randomly sampled from the gathered population of content and analyzed a final sample of 295 articles.

Addressing the five research questions for this aim I identified the presence of characters included in the articles, the presentation of responsibility to address hunger and poverty, the frames employed in the present of the article content, and which frames were most employed by responsibility and political ideology.

Findings from this study indicated that the media discourse presented four general frames in discussing the SNAP program and its participants. Most common among the frames was the cost associated with the program followed by articles that discussed the individualism of people in relation to the program. Health was also a salient frame used in discussing the program and its participants but was only mentioned in 12% of the sample. Least commonly present in the article sample was the frame of fraud (11%). Often coupled with each of these four frames was a presentation of responsibility to address the issues of poverty and hunger. The three foci of responsibility were personal, public, and governmental, with governmental responsibility the most frequently mentioned (25% of the sample). This finding presents a different result than some prior research into media-presented attributions of poverty, which typically focus on personal and societal –level attributions and responsibility (Iyengar, 1990, 1991; Kim et al., 2010). It is possible that the political context, the passage of the Farm Bill, influenced the SNAP media discourse to locate its focus on governmental and cost related issues.

Specific aim 2: What It Means To Be American: Locating Ideology and Logics in Perspectives About the SNAP Program Through Reactions to Media Vignettes

Theoretically, this study was guided by the researcher's applied lenses of media framing, discourse and ideology and underlying logics. Methodologically, this study used an interpretive qualitative design that combined elements of discourse and schema analysis with emergent grounded theory and constant comparative methods (Bernard, 2011). I gathered a maximum variation sample that included SNAP participants, official frontline workers (SNAP program administrators), and unofficial frontline workers (grocery store cashiers and farmer's market workers that transact SNAP dollars). I recruited respondents from across South Carolina and achieved saturation of theme with 20 respondents (10 official frontline workers, 4 unofficial frontline workers, and 6 SNAP participants). For each respondent I conducted a semi-structured interview that sought their perspectives on news media, hunger, poverty, and the SNAP program. I also constructed four vignettes based on the frames identified in the media discourse (specific aim 1) with an intention to locate the logics employed to orient the respondents' perspectives. The vignettes focused on (1) cost of the program, (2) fraud, (3) individualism, and (4) health. The final section of the interview asked each respondent to read each vignette and provide their reactions to it and respond to some follow-up questions.

Respondents discussed the cost frame in terms of levels of scale; situating their opinion of whether the program costs too much or not within their breakdown of costs for the nation overall down to the individual level of the household or person. Respondents discussed fraud frame in terms of "good" and

“bad” fraud, with the delineation overall being rooted in the performance of agency. Good fraud might be things like bartering SNAP dollars for items that the household needs or using SNAP purchased foods for family outside the household or hosting a charity organization dinner. Respondents discussed the individualism frame in terms of the locus of decision-making in negotiating personal or household success. That is, how a member of a household decides to what course to take in feeding their family through SNAP participation and potential employment. Finally, respondents discussed the health frame in terms of the potential regulation of allowable SNAP purchases. The discussion of this frame revolved around the role of the program in promoting nutrition and allowing personal freedom of choice. Through the combination of emergent coding derived from elements of grounded theory (Strauss & Corbin, 1990) and an interpretive analytic lens (Bernard 2011), this study revealed that perspectives of project respondents were predominantly oriented in the Bootstrap Ideology with logics built on the values of meritocracy, individualism, and work ethic. As such, critiques and perspectives of the program and its participants could be viewed as veiled comments on “Americaness”. Further, taken together, the media vignettes presented to the project respondents create an image of “Americanenss”, enacted through perspectives of the program and its participants as an assessment of cost for a service, the judgment of action through the lens of morality, the actions of the individual and their work ethic, and the maintenance of personal health. As was shown in the above sections, regardless of position, the respondents in this study enacted logics of participation and perspectives that

spoke to their sense of agency; how they interacted with the world in ways that fit within their conceptions of “how to be” as a member of society.

Linkages between specific aim 1 and 2

The two studies undertaken in this project complement each other. The findings from specific aim 1 identified the dominant frames in the SNAP media discourse, which served as a catalyst for the exploration of respondent perspectives about the SNAP program in the second aim. Theoretically, the findings from specific aim 2 problematize the assumption that media audiences are passive- message receiving vessels. The interpretation of media-constructed framings of news articles is often unconscious and relates to the deeply held ideas and beliefs within the individual. Further, even with the application of framing in media stories uptake by audiences of the messages contained within media stories is variable as individuals are not passive message-receivers. Rather they are engaged, meaning-making participants in society that facilitate the transmission of media-constructed stories, filtered through their own contexts (Agha, 2011; Briggs, 2007). To this point, public health researchers, as meaning-making, message up-taking individuals should be informed advocates of legislation that authorizes, funds, and prescribes governmental food assistance programs, such as the Farm Bill for SNAP. If, the Farm Bill is predominantly a nutrition bill then we need to unmask the “behind the scenes” characters that do not appear in media stories but who are influencing policy so as to decentralize the food system nesting power in the roots of agency towards a system marked by food justice (Gottlieb & Joshi, 2010).

5.3 STRENGTHS AND LIMITATIONS OF THE TWO STUDIES

This project contains several strengths as well as limitations. For specific aim 1, the study included a sample of media articles from national print, Internet, and television media outlets. However, I did not include a complete sampling of all mainstream news outlets so our findings may be less generalizable. For instance I did not sample social media so as to include the perspective of audiences to media articles, which may play an important role in the co-construction media discourses. Further, findings may be limited to the specific time period from which the articles were gathered (December 2013- December 2014) and due to the cross-sectional design, cause and effect of media articles and any influence on political debate content cannot be assessed. Coupled with the cross-sectional design is the use of a semi-inductive approach, which may have excluded alternative discourses related to the food assistance, the food system, or food politics, which tie in with the SNAP discourse but are somewhat distinct. Even with these limitations, the sample size of almost 300 articles and the use of semi-indicative coding ensured that my findings represent accurate reflections of the media content for this sample and findings from this study have important implications for the role of media content in addressing public health issues

For specific aim 2, generalizability is limited because of the small number of respondents, however I did provide a diversely gathered and deeply contextualized sample from across the state of South Carolina from among respondents of different position in relation to the SNAP program. Further, the

critiques made against the SNAP program by SNAP participants and frontline workers may not be generalizable outside of South Carolina due to programmatic specificities in the state administration of the program.

5.4 IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICY AND PRACTICE

Implications for food assistance and nutrition policy: flexibility and agency

The findings presented above point to the important role of context in identifying perspectives. The context can be internal, as in the formulation of “common sense” applied to an issue. It is also external, as in the interwoven systems that contribute to issues such as poverty, food security, and hunger. As I have discussed, the Farm Bill is a massive piece of legislation that contains the authorization and funding for nutrition programs, chief among them the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program. As further presented, individuals’ perspectives regarding the SNAP program may be rooted in non-SNAP oriented logics such as work ethic, meritocracy, and individualism such that judgments of SNAP participants’ actions or perspectives on program features are measured against a non-programmatic rubric. For instance, using the rubric of values built into the Bootstrap what may look like a lack of work ethic from one perspective is actually conscious decision-making around household income viewed through another perspective. SNAP participants would likely be well served by policy evolution around fixed boundaries of income eligibility. Fear of losing all benefits because of taking a job should not be part of participation in the program and a factor in household decision-making. However, because of political, corporate, and public interests a policy shift like that would likely not pass. How then, do

policy-makers meet the needs of citizens yet make changes in a palatable way?

Interestingly, no participants discussed the existence or prevalence of corporate fraud. Perhaps this omission reflects a “strategic silence” (Achino-Loeb, 2006), an intentional deflection away from influential characters in the SNAP media discourse. The silence might be linked to “behind the scenes” relationships between media outlets and their corporate owners (Kellner 2011) or connections between the media, corporations and lobbyists (Nestle 2013). These potential connections and relationships should be investigated and laid bare through future research.

Attempting to identify and understand the contextual factors that contribute to a person’s perspective on programs such as SNAP can help provide ways in which to talk about potential policy changes in ways that are meaningful to opponents and supporters alike. The recognition of external contexts, for instance, have begun to be incorporated into federal food and nutrition policy in the form of new guidance for the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program Education (SNAP-ED), authorized and funded in the Farm Bill’s nutrition title. The program’s goal is to “improve the likelihood that persons eligible for SNAP will make healthy food choices within a limited budget and choose physically active lifestyles consistent with the current 2015-2020 Dietary Guidelines for Americans” (Ward, Ronald, 2015). While in the past this program centered on individually focused nutrition education, the new guidance will focus on changes to policy, systems, and environments to help facilitate the program’s nutrition and physical activity goals. Nutrition educators will now be able to act as advocates

for the creation of policies that facilitate nutrition and physical activity not just for SNAP-Ed participants but for the larger community, such as school and work wellness policies and joint use policies making private spaces open to the public. They will also work as advocates for systemic changes like linking farms to institutions such as hospitals and environmental changes like helping to establish community food gardens. This shift acknowledges the importance of contexts and provides the structure for individual agency to exert itself.

Implications for public health practice: advocacy and a return to the individual

During the time period from which the analyzed sample was derived, divisive political debates were occurring around the funding of the SNAP program, with two main issues stalling passage of the budget: (1) drug and work requirements and (2) the budget total. Media articles written during this time period followed suit in overwhelmingly presenting articles which framed the issue as either program cost or individual-focused. Both of these framings feed into the larger value of American individualism (Bullock, 2013) and relate to perspectives on the performance of poverty (Seccombe et al., 1998) and critiques of welfare in the United States (Gilens, 2009a). As a field, public health has increasingly focused on improving population health through policy development and critique. For instance, researchers have focused on the role of the Farm Bill in creating obesogenic, or obesity causing, environments through federal crop subsidies, arguing that this legislation has an important influence on health and is not simply agriculture policy (Jackson et al., 2009). The Farm Bill has been the primary safety net for farmers and progenitor of agricultural policy in the US for over forty

years (Gritter, 2015; Zulauf & Orden, 2014). However, since the Bill's inception the contribution of nutrition policy and funding has increased to the point that in the 2014 Farm Bill over three quarters of the total budget is allocated for the Nutrition title, leading the bill to be considered by some to be a Nutrition Bill first and foremost (Patricia Elliott & Raziano, 2012).

In much of public health research there has been a shift away from the individual level focus to one in which the social individual is embedded in the larger ecological contexts, such as their community and institutions. Drawing from Bronfenbrenner's Social Ecological Model, which depicted the embeddedness of the individual (Bronfenbrenner, 1994) through concentric rings of context, the model has since been applied to health promotion (Stokols, Allen, & Bellingham, 1996). In the original model, cultural elements, such as ideologies, are depicted as the largest concentric ring but in much health promotion and intervention work the rings are often characterized as individual, social context, physical context and policy context (Dorfman et al., 2005). The theoretical approach which this model affords allows for the individual actions to be linked to larger contexts, thus reducing potential for negative evaluations, such as victim-blaming. However, it can also have the effect of reducing the visible agency of the individual. What is needed is a research paradigm that is indeed oriented in larger, structural forces and systems but, because those systems are ultimately composed of meaning-making individuals, research should also incorporate the individual within such studies so as to elucidate the specific contexts that

influence the person as they act on their world, constructing a contextually-defined reality.

Using the SNAP program as one small corner of the structure-agency spectrum, future studies, sparked through the undertaking of this project and derived from the data collected for this project, as well as future-gathered data, could focus on social and contextual elements and phenomena. Below I present some future study topics that investigate the SNAP program and its participants through a phenomenological, constructionist lens that focuses on structural-agentive elements and employs research perspectives drawn from my training in linguistic anthropology, cognitive schematics, public administration theory, and public health advocacy.

5.5 FUTURE STUDIES

Media, capitalism, and the individual

This study would critique the assumption of media audiences as passive message receivers and cast them as active, meaning-making individuals that differentially uptake media messages. The perspectives about media held by project respondents will be nestled within a theoretical context that situates the media within the larger capitalist context. The purpose of this study will be to position the perspectives of project respondents against the news media as the creator of content that is perceived as aligned with its consumers preferences (Foster, 2006) and filtered through the capitalist mechanisms of market-driven journalism (McManus, 1994), commercial journalism (McChesney, 2015), and consumer and supplier relationship models (Tai & Chang, 2002).

Hunger, poverty, and power (use hunger poverty results)

Using data collected for this dissertation that has previously been analyzed, I will present the respondent conceptualizations of and perspectives about the phenomena of hunger and poverty. This discussion will be oriented in the lens of the Bootstrap Ideology but will also incorporate the role of perspectives on race and the influence of ideological hegemony.

Fraud as an indexical term

SNAP program fraud is a multi-textured, context specific phenomenon but is measured in static ways and potentially functions socially as a metaphor that conjures images of conscious, deceptive activity. Using data collected for this dissertation, this analysis would draw from Lakoff's notion of metaphors, applying this to the term "fraud". It is an indexical term that is loaded with assumptions and prescriptions of action. For example, the term fraud might conjure images of illicit activity, like the term illegal alien influences the conceptualization of immigrants. Using the term shifts focus onto individual and away from systemic issues. It's a bogeyman.

As several respondents shared, using SNAP dollars to barter for other needed services or items for a household or choosing to use SNAP-purchased food as a component of community betterment events may technically be fraud under SNAP regulations but could also be seen through a lens of individual empowerment. Although the fraud rate for SNAP is much lower than many other federal programs and has even decreased over time ("What is SNAP Fraud? | Food and Nutrition Service," n.d.), fraud is often perceived as increasing and

rampant. A re-evaluation of the concept of fraud is needed that is more dynamic and flexible and that allows for the unpunished agency of SNAP participants.

Qui Bono or Pro Bono: Recasting the SNAP Recipient

This idea for this study was drawn from the findings of the present study, specifically, through discussions of the cost frame with the project respondents.

SNAP dollars service more than just the households that receive the benefits. They function just like any other economic stimulus in a community and, in a sense, are very efficient because that influence the entire food system of local economies. Indeed, SNAP dollars have been linked to not only specific communities but the entire GDP of the United States (Hanson, 2010).

Economically, SNAP contributes greatly to corporate interests. For example, it is estimated that around 18% of all EBT dollars were spent at Wal-Mart in 2012, totaling around \$17 billion for the retailer (Berman, 2013). Further, political interests, influenced by food lobbyists, are also deeply tied to which foods are allowable under SNAP policy (Brownell & Ludwig, 2011; Nestle, 2013). However, “the SNAP recipient” is typically only characterized as the individual program participant. Many other entities benefit from SNAP benefits such as farmers, retailers, businesses, corporate entities (lobbyists as agents), and politicians. This study would elucidate the larger economic impact of SNAP and “recast” the role of the SNAP recipient.

The shift to Regional Specialized Workflow system and administrators thoughts on the shift

This project would draw from data collected for this dissertation and programmatic documents and would focus on the administrative shift to the

Regional Specialized Workflow model for Department of Social Services SNAP programmatic functioning in South Carolina. According to official frontline project respondents, these changes either enhanced and or detracted from client experience and even increased the possibility of program abuse. The resulting manuscript for his study would target public administration journals and, as such, would mainly focus on the perceptions of SNAP official frontline workers regarding the shift in workflow and how it affects client interactions and agency functioning.

5.6 FINAL CONCLUSIONS

Voices contributing to the political debates regarding the SNAP program include non-political institutions such as lobbyists, interest groups, and the media (Brasier, 2002). The media is a particularly influential institution in terms of political debate, issue identification, responsibility assignation, and public perspectives of issues and programs (Dancey & Goren, 2010; Gilens, 2009a; Kim et al., 2010; M. McCombs, 2013). This points to the need for public health researchers and practitioners to act as advocates for nutrition assistance programs and policies through active participation in the media discourse around these programs, such as SNAP. For example, the public health and political debate around the regulation of allowable purchases under SNAP is a pressing issue. The debate might exist because the SNAP program could be viewed as more than just a food assistance program. It could be seen as the nexus of commonly held, seemingly intuitive solutions to poverty and hunger: money and food. However, opinions of how to properly allocate these solutions are rooted in

ideological perspectives as well as economic and political, social, and public health interests. Socially, the debate articulates around the role of ethics, specifically issues of individual freedom of choice (Barnhill et al., 2014; Kass et al., 2014) Public health practitioners are often used as the “case makers” for political and economic arguments for or against the regulation of SNAP purchases, with obesity commonly being the fulcrum upon which the arguments sway (Ludwig DS et al., 2012). To this point, the findings in this study support Dorfman et al’s call for public health practitioners as advocates to understand the beliefs and values held by opposition and supporters of public debates (Dorfman et al., 2005). Toward this end, it is important to conduct research that allows for the identification of those beliefs and values and the location of their logical underpinnings.

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apartment-blocks.html](http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/northamerica/usa/10983365/New-York-opens-the-door-for-the-segregation-of-rich-and-poor-in-apartment-blocks.html)
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APPENDIX A – 2014 FARM BILL TITLES AND CHARTS AND MAPS FOR THE ADMINISTRATION OF THE SUPPLEMENTAL NURITION ASSISTANCE PROGRAM

Table A.1 2014 Farm Bill Titles, Source: (Johnson & Monke, 2014)

The 2014 Farm Bill (P.L. 113-79): Functions and Major Issues, by Title

•**Title I, Commodity Programs:** Provides farm payments when crop prices or revenues decline for major commodity crops, including wheat, corn, soybeans, peanuts, and rice. Includes disaster programs to help livestock and tree fruit producers manage production losses due to natural disasters. Other support includes margin insurance for dairy and marketing quotas, minimum price guarantees, and import barriers for sugar.

•**Title II, Conservation:** Encourages environmental stewardship and improved management practices. Working lands programs include Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) and Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP). Land retirement programs include the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP). Other aid is in the Agricultural Conservation Easement Program (ACEP) and Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCP).

•**Title III, Trade:** Provides support for U.S. agricultural export programs and international food assistance programs. Major programs included Market Access Program (MAP) and the primary U.S. food aid program, Food for Peace, which provides emergency and nonemergency food aid, among other programs. Other provisions address program changes related to World Trade Organization (WTO) obligations.

•**Title IV, Nutrition:** Provides nutrition assistance for low-income households through programs including the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP, formerly known as food stamps) and The Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP). Also supports the distribution of foods in schools.

•**Title V, Credit:** Provides federal direct and guaranteed loans to farmers, and loan eligibility rules and policies.

•**Title VI, Rural Development:** Supports business and community programs for planning, feasibility assessments, and coordination with other local, state, and federal programs. Programs include grants and loans for infrastructure, economic development, broadband and telecommunications, among other programs

•**Title VII, Research, Extension, and Related Matters:** Supports a wide range of agricultural research and extension programs that help farmers and ranchers become more efficient, innovative, and productive. Other types of research programs include biosecurity and response, biotechnology, and organic production.

•**Title VIII, Forestry:** Supports forestry management programs run by USDA's Forest Service.

•**Title IX, Energy:** Supports the development of farm and community renewable energy systems through grants, loan guarantees, and procurement assistance initiatives. Provisions cover the production, marketing, and processing of biofuels and biofuel feedstocks, and research, education, and demonstration programs.

•**Title X, Horticulture:** Supports specialty crops—fruits, vegetables, tree nuts, and floriculture and ornamental products—through a range of initiatives, including market promotion; plant pest and disease prevention; and public research; among other initiatives. Also provides assistance to support certified organic agricultural production.

•**Title XI, Crop Insurance:** Enhances the permanently authorized federal crop insurance program. New plans include Stacked Income Protection (STAX) for cotton and Supplemental Coverage Option (SCO) for other crops.

•**Title XII, Miscellaneous:** Programs not covered in other titles, including provisions affecting livestock and poultry production and limited-resource and socially disadvantaged farmers, among other provision

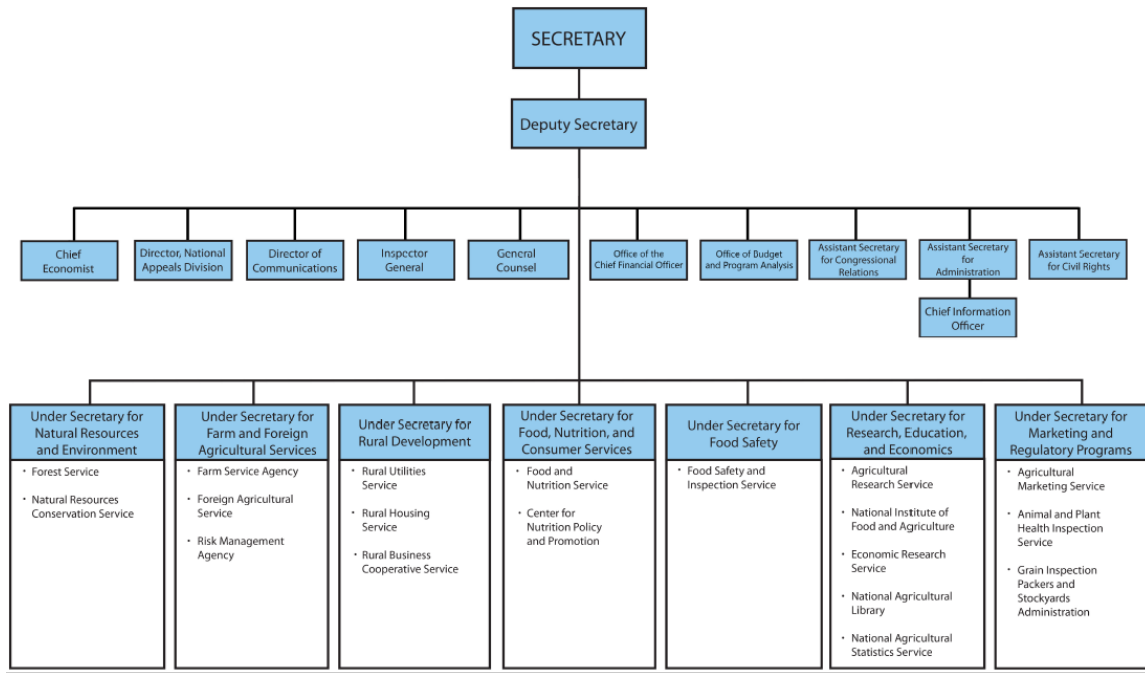
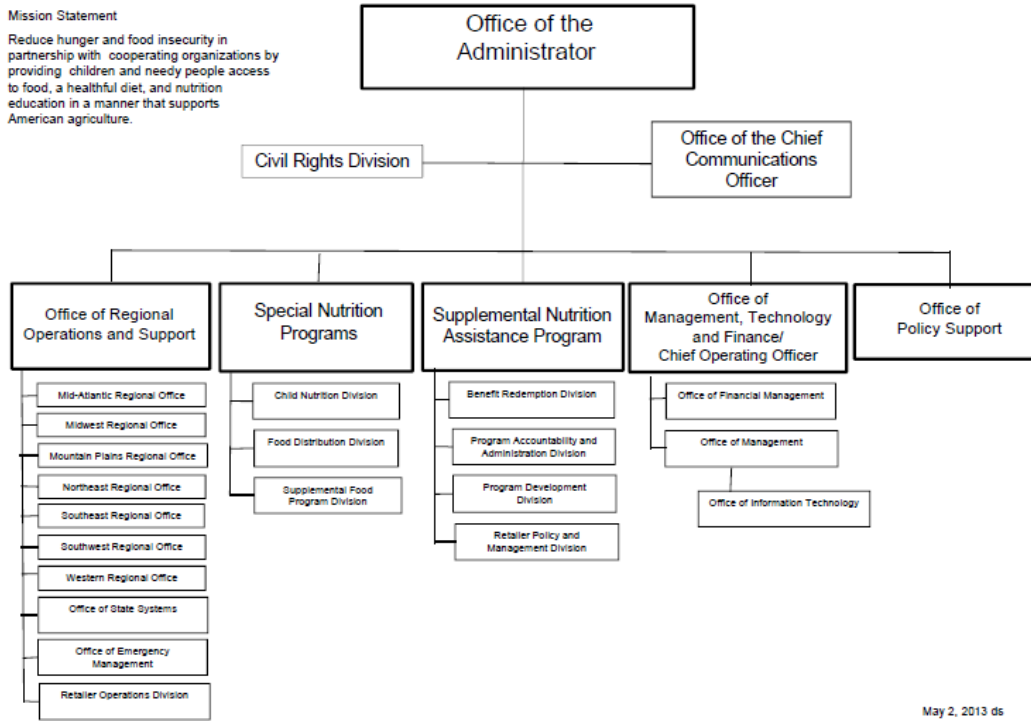


Figure A.1 Organizational chart for the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA)

Mission Statement

Reduce hunger and food insecurity in partnership with cooperating organizations by providing children and needy people access to food, a healthful diet, and nutrition education in a manner that supports American agriculture.



May 2, 2013 ds

Figure A.2. Organizational Chart for the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) Food and Nutrition Service

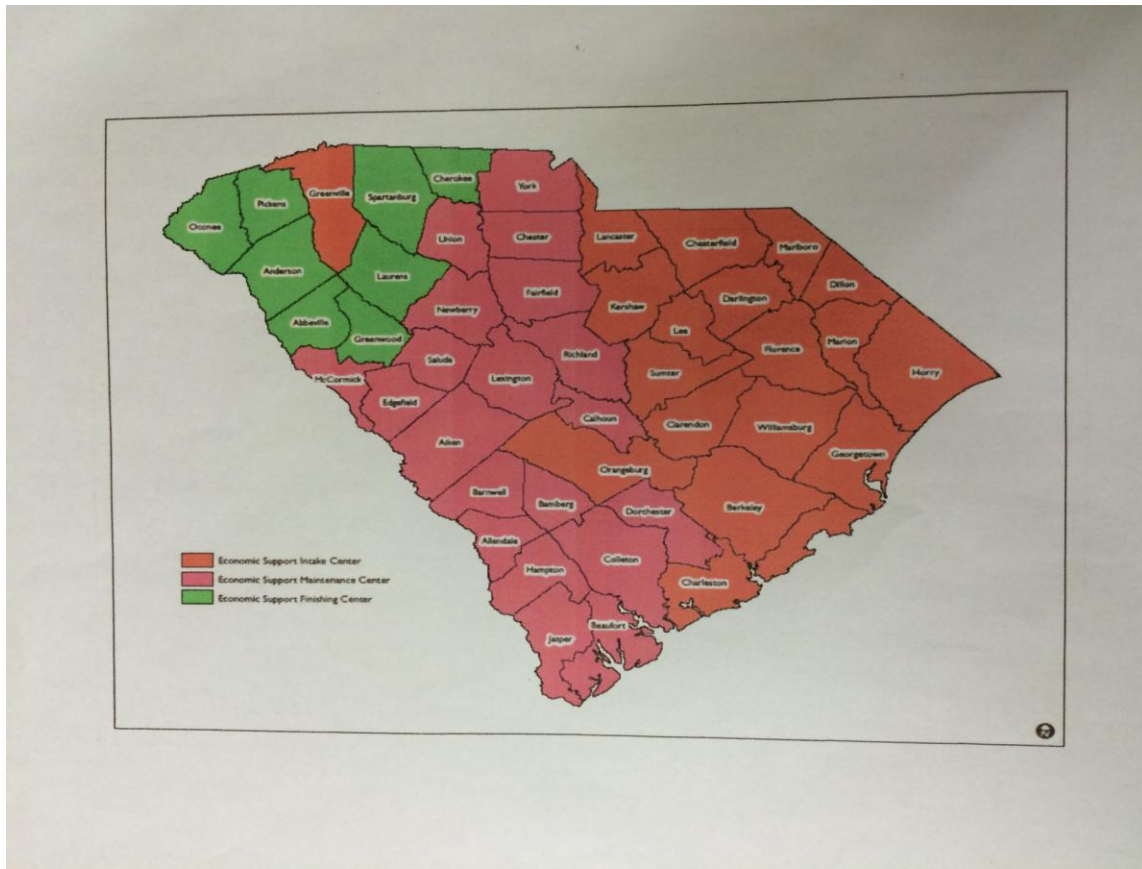


Figure A.3 DSS Regional Specialized Workflow map for South Carolina

APPENDIX B METHODOLOGICAL SUPPLEMENTS



Do you participate in the SNAP program? If so...
We need your help!



To schedule an interview or if you have questions

Contact
Nick Younger
at:
803-606-1997

If you participate in the SNAP program we want to talk with you about:

- Your opinions of news media
- Your opinions about hunger in America
- Your experiences with the SNAP program

\$20

 for
completing a
one-hour long
interview

SNAP Interview
803-606-1997

SNAP Interview
803-606-1997

SNAP Interview
803-606-1997

SNAP Interview
803-606-1997

SNAP Interview
803-606-1997

SNAP-Ed Interview
803-606-1997

SNAP Interview
803-606-1997

SNAP Interview
803-606-1997

SNAP Interview
803-606-1997

Figure B.1 Recruitment flyer for SNAP participants



What do you think about news media and the SNAP (food stamp) program?



http://america.nyopinion.com/12-13-10

To schedule an interview at a time and place convenient for you or if you have questions

Contact Nick Younginer at 803-606-1997

If you are a cashier we want to talk with you about:

- Your opinions of news media
- Your opinions about hunger in America
- Your opinions about the SNAP (food stamp) program

\$20 for completing a one-hour long interview

SNAP Interview
803-606-1997

SNAP Interview
803-606-1997

SNAP Interview
803-606-1997

SNAP Interview
803-606-1997

SNAP Interview
803-606-1997

SNAP-Ed Interview
803-606-1997

SNAP Interview
803-606-1997

SNAP Interview
803-606-1997

SNAP Interview
803-606-1997

Figure B.2 Recruitment flyer for cashiers

Table B.1 Theme list and contributing codes for emergent coding by vignette

Cost vignette	
Theme	Node
Match with experience or knowledge	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • National budget higher than expected • National budget lower than expected • Household allotment higher than expected • Household allotment lower than expected • Amount per person higher than expected • Numbers match with personal experience • Numbers do not match with personal experience • Numbers match with professional experience • Numbers do not match with professional experience • Doing the math
Critique of program costs or numbers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Flexibility in cut off limit • Household grocer budget • More money should be given • Benefits are not given fairly
Fraud vignette	
Theme	Node
Types of fraud	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fraud is... • Fraud ain't... • How to monitor use
Prevalence of fraud	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fraud is a big problem • Abuse is not a big problem • Surprise rate has fallen • Program administration allows fraud • The media distorts the truth about fraud
Individualism vignette	
Theme	Node
Person focused-oriented in the future	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Thinking for the future • Building experience • Can't depend on government all your life

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Using SNAP temporarily to help in the long run • Person seems typical • Help yourself • Show effort
Person focused- oriented in the now	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Person seems typical • Person is not typical • SNAP meets needs • I'm impressed with the person • Doing the best with what's available • Can't rely on SNAP • Must be proactive • Person needs motivating
Household focused- oriented in the future	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Parents are role models for children
Household focused-oriented in the now	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Taking a job may cost money • Choice between feeding children and working
Health vignette	
Theme	Node
Agreement with program foci	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focus is to address hunger • Focus is to address nutrition
Critiques of program foci	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focus is on food, not nutrition • Not really supplemental • Should make healthy food easier to get • Should make healthy food cheaper • Should focus on fresh foods
Program Name change	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Didn't know about it • Changed because of public perception, not foci • Name change just increased costs
Allowable food regulation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • They should regulate the foods that can be purchased • They should not regulate the foods that can be purchased

Table B.2 Code list for logics

Cost vignette	
Parent nodes	Child Nodes
Metaphor	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The program is a crutch • It's hard to stay afloat • Build to better job • See it from both sides • Can't win for losing • Domino effect • Living on the edge
Because	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • People need education to eat healthy • People need education to budget • Taking a job could cost you more • Negative views because I'm working and they're not • You should help others any way you can • \$500 dollars is not that much for four people • Policies inhibit work ethic
Common sense	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Got to get education before good job • Government should not impose its beliefs on others • Don't look down, don't judge because you never know • My grandma said you always feed everybody • Do what you gotta do
Worldview	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The poor will always be with us • People are inherently lazy • The poor are the noblest among us • Help others • Parents are role models for children

APPENDIX C

COMPANION RESULTS TABLES FOR AIM 2

Table C.1 Representative respondent reactions to the cost vignette

Cost Vignette		
<i>Currently, around 46 million people are enrolled in the SNAP program, with the average person receiving \$125 per month. The average household of four receives around \$450 a month. The annual national budget for the SNAP program in 2015 is around \$75 billion.</i>		
A. Jared- Costs match experience	B. Kim- Cost do not match experience	C. Michelle- Critique of enrollment
<p>A1. I've gave some talks in my Sunday School class [who are critical of the program costs] about this. I said yeah, it's a waste, but there's a lot of people that it's good – good for. And here's another thing that – that people don't understand, this is a little county here. We give out \$1.4 – right at \$1.35 million dollars a month in food stamps, this small county. If we took away those food stamps, they talking about gun laws, everybody better get a gun, because there's going to be theft. There's going to be break-in's, because there's a lot of people out here that will kill people to feed their family.</p> <p>A2. And – and here's the other thing. When you take away a small county like this, a rural county that – that, you know, don't have that much, we taking \$1.3 million dollars out of the community a month, you know. When you multiple that by 15, 16 million dollars a year, we gonna take that out of this county. These grocery stores are gonna close. You know, we can't support them.</p> <p>A3. People don't understand when you start</p>	<p>B1. I mean I was – the one that I was surprised by the most is, um, the total budget or the total expense. Um, I didn't realize it was that high, um, so that surprised me. The – yeah, actually the numbers all seemed kind of high to me based on, like, people that I've talked to. Um, I feel like we get a lot of people saying, "I only get \$15.00 a month," or, like, um, you know, "It's not worth it to apply, because I'm not gonna get enough," or – so it's actually this – everything seems higher than I would have expected.</p> <p>B2. It's higher I guess because I look at it so much on a state and local level often and, like, a lot of our numbers are so much smaller than this. You know, we recruit – or we complete applications for, like, 60 to 100 people a month. And so that compared to 46 million people is like, "Oh, we're a drop in the bucket." So it's – yeah, that's interesting.</p>	<p>C1. The amount of it given to certain persons. Why is it different? I know sometimes like an elderly person who's retired doesn't get that much and everything. They only get that one payment and maybe social security or disability and then they got to pay their bills and they still need food for the house. So, I'm looking at why the amount is limited. Like other younger people may be getting it because of their kids or family that they have but it seems like they could do better than elderly people.</p> <p>C2. They get more offered to them than maybe people who live with one or two in the household that, like said, are elderly or retired and they still have to have food on the table for themselves. Why would there be a difference? I understand kids, you know, have to eat and everything but why is it different, maybe, from an elderly person?</p>

rolling that dollars over, and my director said it several times, \$1.00 of food stamps gets turned over three or four, five times. Because when you – when you buy that from – from BI-LO, BI-LO is employing that manager and – and cash register person, the stocker, the meat man, and the people that's bringing it in there. That dollar's rolling over so many times, it builds our economy back up.

A4. I said yeah, I said, we can't stop all the fraud that ya'll are seeing like that, you know, and this – this person, this, uh, pushing out the buggy and putting it in a nice car, you don't know if she ain't doing that for a disabled, elderly person that can't get out. You know, so you don't really know the full story all the time. Food stamps is good for a lot of people.

Table C.2 Representative respondent reactions to the fraud vignette

<p align="center">Fraud Vignette</p> <p align="center"><i>SNAP fraud is when SNAP benefits are exchanged for cash. This is called trafficking and it is against the law. SNAP fraud also happens when someone lies on their application to get benefits or to get more benefits than they are supposed to get. SNAP fraud also happens when a retailer has been disqualified from the program for past abuse and lies on the application to get in the program again. The trafficking rate has fallen over the last two decades, from about 4 cents on the dollar in 1993 to about 1 cent in 2006-08.</i></p>		
<p align="center">A. Leslie- Good fraud-trafficking for essentials</p>	<p align="center">B. Carol- Good fraud- bartering</p>	<p align="center">C. Theresa- Prevalence</p>
<p>A1. So, I know a lot of people who are just misusing. They sell it for, you know, drugs, clothing, that type thing. I guess sometimes you have to do what you have to do to make do. And I say that because I've been in a situation where I had to buy food for someone for them to give me money so I can pay for my rent. You know, that's the only the case that I've ever did it, but I found myself in a situation, but that's the only way that the rent was gonna get paid that month. So it was either – what's the use of getting benefits if I don't have anywhere to store them, you know what I mean?</p> <p>A2. So it's sort of – it's a hard one, and I guess that's what lawmakers are trying to figure out, you know, because it's hard and there's no way that you can just – like I said, you know, they could look at my card and they could see, "Oh, wow. She spent this. She spent that on, um, you know" – for instance, for the – for my [charity organization] kickoff, that's how I was able to get all the food, you know, because I'm not getting help. But this is not going into my household, but I brought cupcakes, I brought ice cream so we can make</p>	<p>B1. I mean people – our great nation is founded on these types of things. Like it's been going on for years. So I think it should be reevaluated and, no, I don't think you should apply for SNAP and you know get \$100 and go out here and sell your \$100 for \$50. No. But I think everything should be reevaluated on a case-by-case basis. I don't think it's necessarily – well, according to SNAP it's fraud to barter your services you know or whatnot. But I think that's something that – I guess if found out should be forgiven. People need things. And I for one – I don't think this falls under fraud, but like I for one you know had taken a pack of chicken out my freezer and I know I bartered on SNAP and my cousin has five kids. And you know it's the end of the month and she doesn't have X Y Z, why not?</p> <p>B2. I am my sisters and brothers keeper and that's not limited to my own personal brothers, because I only have one. But like, I believe in helping my neighbors. So I think it's something it's needed. But I guess I understand the exchange for cash. I guess I'm speaking more bartering for certain.</p>	<p>C1. SNAP fraud. My favorite rant. So, this happens all the time. People exchanging their EBT for cash. I never really thought about the retail - when the retailers have been disqualified. I feel like that's just something that's not as prevalent as the person with the SNAP abusing it. You know, like, you know, like I said spending excessively. Buying things that you don't need. You know, I'm on a really tight budget. I have two jobs and I'm a new college graduate and people have asked me so many times like, "Why don't you get EBT?" Like my coworkers and stuff. And it's not even a pride thing for me but like the \$75 billion a year, like I don't want to be a part of putting that burden on the system. I've always believed in working honestly and I probably could qualify for it if I wanted it. But even on the tight budget that I am I still pay my own bills. I mean I barely get by but I pay my own bills.</p> <p>C2. So I just I feel like most people who get it don't really truly need it. It just frees up their money for beer and cigarettes and</p>

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sundaes – so I brought all the toppings and everything so we can make sundaes. They may look and say, "Oh, wow. She is just consuming a lot of sugar," but I didn't consume that stuff. You see what I mean? So you don't always know. So I guess they can look at it the same with – you know, they could just look, which would not be fair to a certain degree. They can just look and say, "Okay, well she's not utilizing it right, 'cause look at all this junk she's buying," but I bought it for a purpose.

all this other drugs and all this stuff. That sounds cliché but it really happens all the time. And people like I said passing it around, like family members will pass it around. You can tell because like when people come through my line and they forget - they don't know the pin for the EBT card and so they step to the side and call whoever it is and be like, "Hey what's your number for your pin?" Like obviously this isn't your card- but people do that. They pass their cards around and then they sell it- the whole "I'll give you \$50.00 on my EBT for \$20.00 cash or whatever." Stuff like that I've just seen so much of it, you know. You can just tell sometimes when people are using a card that's not theirs or they don't really need it. Or they'll be sitting in the line talking about how they're going to go out to the club this weekend and drinks are on me.

Table C.3 Representative respondent reactions to the individualism vignette

Individualism Vignette			
<p><i>A 34-year-old single mother of 4 young children lives in Columbia, SC. She is a high school graduate who enrolled in college for nursing but didn't complete her degree after she could no longer afford the tuition. Unable to find work she enrolled in the SNAP program in 2009 and now receives around \$500 per month in EBT. Jones plans to continue receiving SNAP saying, "I have been looking for work but I can't find anything that pays enough so I'll just keep on getting EBT until I can find a decent, well-paying job. I mean, EBT lets me get pretty much anything I need food-wise for the house, so that's very helpful".</i></p>			
A. Ashley- Person- future	B. Anna- Person-now	C. Lindsey- Household- future	D. Carrie- Household-now
<p>A1. So, initial reaction is when you try to help certain people again they use it as a crutch. They take advantage for it. So I definitely understand that she was unable to find one at first. The problem I have is the cause when she says that she can't find anything that pays enough. Start by finding something that pays something. So again it goes back to helping yourself. Rather than using the help as a crutch. Because in this situation if she had a job then she wouldn't receive by any means the \$500 per month. But your job builds your experiences. You can get that better job. So how are you gonna expect to get a decent paying job if you aren't starting somewhere. Everyone has to start low and build up high. So again it's just the using the system, I think.</p>	<p>B1. Now you'd be surprised those that will tell you, "This amount of money don't buy me, don't feed me, don't feed me and my children." Well, what are you buying it on? ...buying more than what they need, as far as rib eyes and T-bones and that kind of thing. Buy what you need. You don't have to eat rib eyes every week.</p> <p>B2. We have those that think that they don't have to go get a job as long as we are taking care of them. It meets their needs. Why bother? You know? This can bring on the negative aspect of what we do because if she's getting \$500 a month, and she knows that feeds her family of four, and she gets settled there, why</p>	<p>C1. That's a naïve lady and that is a – someone that doesn't think for the future and that's really sad.</p> <p>C2. As a personal person [not an administrator]- She's 34 years old, a mother of four children. So she is reinforcing to her children a way of life: governmental benefits. That's – children are – you know, lectures go so far with children, zero. You're reinforcing every day to put up with these bureaucrats, of which I am one.</p>	<p>D1. That she couldn't find a good job that paid enough to get her off, and if she got any other job, it wouldn't have been enough to feed her kids. So it was – her choice was to have food on the table for her kids, or work that short end job and not have enough food for her kids to eat. So it was a choice that she had to make and I think she made the choice she thought was right. To make sure her kids have somethin' to eat.</p> <p>D2. Because if they don't have the nutrition to go to school and learn, then they don't, they won't be able to learn anything in school because they'll be really hungry. So you have to look at it from – it's different ways you can look at it, and that's the aspect I look at it from because if she's sendin' kids to school hungry, then they gonna</p>

<p>A3. It's getting comfortable with the system. [It's] being given to you in good means and good understanding and good faith that you are going to be an upright citizen and help yourself. So it's definitely a moral dilemma. The moral dilemma would be this lady here again just taking advantage of help that she has become comfortable with – it's a moral dilemma, because people who are advocates of SNAP are trying to help people who need it.</p>	<p>would she? A lot of them, "Why do I bother? It's meeting my needs. I don't need anything else."</p>		<p>look at her as a unfit mother. So, I think her choice was right.</p> <p>D3. Someone else might look at it well, she had a chance to get a job, why didn't she get that job? And whether to stay on food stamps. But, what they fail to realize that the minimum wage with four kids – one person really can't make enough off of minimum wage. How will she be able to do it on four? But they didn't see it and they didn't understand it, they never been there.</p>
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Table C.4 Representative respondent reactions to the health vignette

Health Vignette		
<p><i>For more than 40 years, the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) has served as the foundation of America's national nutrition safety net. As of Oct. 1, 2008, Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) is the new name for the federal Food Stamp Program. The new name reflects changes made to meet the needs of clients, including a focus on hunger and nutrition and an increase in benefit amounts.</i></p>		
A. Leslie-	B. Kim-	C. Anna-
<p>A1. I'm not gonna say that's a bad idea, because I think it'll help take over the obesity. But then again I still feel like should that be someone else's choice? I'm trying to make healthier choices about what I buy and what I purchase – that type thing, but, um, I think it should be the individual's choice.</p> <p>A2. You can definitely, um – of course there's been a significant weight gain with me while being on it [SNAP], because, you know, you buy the things that you want. And, um, I look at it from some people's perspectives – like one girl was saying that she doesn't have transportation to get back and forth to the store, so they walk back and forth to the corner store. What does a convenience store have that's healthy? You know, they try to throw apples and stuff like that, but most of the time you find fruit flies and you don't want it. But they, um – she doesn't have transportation, so you get what you have. So what does a convenience store have? They have all those little convenience snacks that you want, and so they'll just walk all day, all night and get snacks back and forth just to fill</p>	<p>B1. What I don't want to happen is restrictions on what people can buy I think that has been the – that seems to be the most public sort of idea for addressing obesity through SNAP is, like, "Okay, well then just, like, restrict what people can buy and then, we don't have to worry about it." But I don't think taking away autonomy is the way to go.</p> <p>B2. I do think that there can be programs that – like SNAP-Ed and like programs that we do that encourage people to understand, how to use their SNAP benefits in both a cost-effective and, way that can get the maximum amount of nutrition out of those benefits. So I do like that educational component. I don't know that it needs to be, like, part of the actual SNAP program, 'cause I think there are so many places that are working with SNAP recipients to make them more aware of those things.</p> <p>B3. But, I think that's as far as we can go. I just don't – I don't like the idea of telling people what they can and can't get.</p>	<p>C1. This is my opinion. I think there ought to be some stricter guidelines as to what they should be able to buy on the assistance program, just because a lot of them do use it for junk.</p> <p>C2. And I think, if you're gonna put the nutrition aspect in the name, there needs to be some nutritional value as to what they should be able to purchase when they go to the store. Especially if you have a household of kids, you just don't want to buy chips and Cokes, and grant it, you can buy those, and that's fine. But I think there needs to be some nutritional ... you need to buy some nutrition. [Laughs] You know what I mean? There needs to be a healthy aspect to that.</p> <p>C3. I think if Michelle Obama had anything to do with it, she probably would. 'Cause, you know, she's all about that. They've changed all of that in the schools. I don't know if you knew that. Yeah. I've ... I have a middle schooler and a elementary schooler. And there are no longer ... in middle school, they cannot longer sell Gatorades anymore. No salt. All of that. So, yeah.</p>

the void, you know, or fill the, um – you know, so they won't be hungry, but it's not necessarily nutritious.

A3. And some people just don't eat or they're not – haven't been introduced to proper diets, so that can effect certain things. You know, I know some kids will not drink water. I know some kids that will not eat vegetables, you know? So it's almost like what do you do? You give them what they want, because you wanna make sure that they're eating something, and even if it's nutritious or not. So, you know, I've heard different stories, but, um, it can play a big part in obesity, 'cause like I said, you have access to just about everything on the market that you wanna buy. It just takes that discipline within that person to, um – to make healthier choices.

A4. I'm not perfect, but we are watching certain things, I definitely don't wanna get any of the illnesses that are associated with obesity. So, we're more conscious.

C4. I mean, they're kids. I mean, grant it, they need a healthy lunch. And a lot of times, there's a lot of kids that that's the only meal they get during the day. So I think there does need to be some nutritional value to that. But I don't think it all needs to be taken away.