Coping with Unemployed Poverty: A Qualitative Study

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Submitted in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
under the Executive Committee
of the Graduate School of Arts and Sciences

COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY
2012

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ABSTRACT

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A century of psychological research exists on the impact of unemployment on individuals. However, missing from the literature is a consideration of the social context of unemployed persons and the ways in which persons cope with their unemployment. This study sought to examine the experiences of unemployed persons in poverty, poverty being a social context frequently ignored in psychological literature. In addition, the study aimed to explore the psychological impact of these experiences, the strategies used by the poor to cope, and the appraised effectiveness of coping strategies. Participants were 21 unemployed adults living in poverty. Face-to-face semi-structured interviews were conducted and analyzed using Consensual Qualitative Research (CQR) methodology. Fifteen domains emerged from the CQR analysis to show that unemployed poverty is an experience of widespread disruption to daily, social, and family life. Financial hardship and social isolation were commonplace and financial hardship was expressed to be the most stressful of experiences. Participants associated a range of emotions with their unemployment including sadness, hopelessness, anger, and a sense of low self-regard. However, a variety of emotion-focused, problem-focused, and religious coping strategies were utilized to cope. Religious coping and reliance on community resources that were empowering were reported to be the most effective coping strategies. Secondary analysis was conducted by examining the frequencies of categories by gender. Women more frequently reported financial hardship and were more socially isolated than men. Additionally, women more frequently reported sadness and hopelessness. The results are discussed with consideration

to socio-political context of poverty and recommendations made for clinical practice and future research.

Keywords: unemployment, poverty, coping

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Completing my doctoral degree would not have been possible without the love and support of my parents, Herman and Merna Chambers. Mommy and daddy, I am in awe of your commitment to us, there are very few like you. “I would thank you from the bottom of my heart, but for you my heart has no bottom.” Thank you so much, I love you both with all my heart.

I owe special acknowledgment to my advisor, Dr. Laura Smith, who worked tirelessly on several drafts of this dissertation. Laura, I was ever amazed at how quickly you responded to my questions, my drafts, and my concerns. You brought such a depth of knowledge to this work. Your dedication to poor and working class men and women is inspiring. You are truly a mentor in every sense of the word.

I could not have completed the analysis without the help and support of Kristen Adams and Kendall Bassard who worked with me for over one year transcribing and analyzing interviews. We spent many a late night working through materials. I am grateful for your dedication to this work.

Special thanks to Josh Shepherd, Mary Galeone, RSM, and Rachel Waltz. You welcomed me with open arms into your organizations. I wish continued prosperity and support in the work that you do so well. Special thanks also to Anne Kappler, RSM, Regina Ward, RSM and Karen Wright who gave me much needed leads on where to conduct interviews.

To my cohort, thank you for the feedback on my work, the encouraging e-mails and phone calls, the prayers, and the celebratory dinners. I was lucky to land into a cohort of such intelligent women from all walks of life. We have endured much together throughout these past

years. I am so happy to have met you and hope that we will remain in each other's lives for a long time to come.

Very special thanks to my friends Cecilia Rougier and Leo Douglas. Cecilia, I bless the day that I met you. You refused to let me give in to my tantrums, you cheered me on with prayers and well wishes, called me to find out if I was working on my drafts, and reminded me of why I was doing this work in the first place. Leo, it was so wonderful to have a fellow Jamaican on this road. Your own dedication to your dissertation was inspiring and your encouragement invaluable.

I have a very special place in my heart for the Sisters of Mercy and for the Franciscan Sisters of Allegany. Much of what I have learned about being in solidarity with the marginalized comes from your example. I know that so many of you were praying for me. Sisters Anne, Regina, Marie, Gloria, Kathy, Sharon, Eileen, Helen and so many, many others. Thank you.

Finally, I owe so much to the men and women who allowed me to witness to their lives. Thank you. You have been among my most valuable teachers.

Debbie-Ann Chambers

February 2012

DEDICATION

I dedicate this dissertation to men and women everywhere trying to find work, feed your families, secure adequate housing, and live in dignity. You deserve for your voices to be heard, you deserve your place at the table.

I dedicate this dissertation secondly to my three beautiful nieces Tiffany, Gabrielle, and Tia. I hope you grow up to be women of justice who will stand in solidarity with others to fight for a socially just world. Your auntie loves you very, very much.

Chapter I: Introduction

To disrupt, according to the Merriam-Webster Dictionary (2009), is “to interrupt the normal course or unity of.” A life disruption then, is anything that interrupts the normal course or development of our lives. For many people in the United States, interruptions of development may include things that interrupt mental and physical health, family life, education, and the ability to work. Disruptions can elevate stress, drain psychological resources, and challenge self-identity. As such, they are an important area of inquiry in psychological research.

One life disruption has been shown to do all of the above is a disruption in employment. Employment is “work that involves a contractual relationship between an employer and an employee, a relationship in which there is an exchange of economic rewards for labor and that involves rights and responsibilities” (Feather, 1990 p 4). Disruptions in this relationship can take many forms such as job demotion where the progression of a career is set back; underemployment where one does not work for adequate pay or hours; job loss where work is lost through termination or lay-off; and unemployment where one would like to but cannot find work.

All of the above disruptions have been shown to be stressful and drain our psychological resources. Job demotion increases chronic illness and leads to decreased productivity and loss of morale (More, 1962), underemployment has a negative effect on health, and psychological well-being (Dooley, 2003; Prause & Dooley, 1997), and unemployment has been consistently shown to have a deleterious effect on well-being including physical health, self-esteem, depression and anxiety, feelings of anger, and suicidal ideation (Bakke, 1933; Ferguson, Boden, & Horwood, 2007; Fryer, 1992; Fryer & Fagan, 2003; Galambos, Barker, & Kran, 2006; Jahoda, Lazarsfeld,

& Zeisel, 1971; Kessler, Turner, & House, 1988; Ortega, Canino, & Alegria, 2008; Warr, Jackson, & Banks, 1988).

Unemployment in particular has garnered much attention from scholars throughout the social sciences, including the fields of economics, sociology, and psychology, which supports the extent of its significance. Unemployment is stressful (Langens & Morse, 2006); it deprives people of the manifest and latent functions of employment (Jahoda, 1981; 1982). These are the wages (manifest functions) and provision of social activities, imposition of time structure, and the status and identity (latent functions) that employment offers. As such, the unemployed may not be able to pay bills or take adequate care of themselves and their families, may feel increasingly dependent on others for survival, and may feel socially isolated because of an inability to reciprocate social obligations (Madonia, 1983). Much of our knowledge of unemployment as a stressful event with a deleterious effect on well-being comes from the fact that it has been studied as a psychological variable for 100 years. However, some aspects of unemployment remain to be explored thoroughly.

For the most part, unemployment has been studied in restricted samples. Fryer (1992), for example, pointed out that that the majority of research on unemployment and mental health has focused on White middle-class males in their middle years. This occurs despite the fact that unemployment rates are consistently as much as twice as high for Blacks than for Whites (McGeehan & Warren, 2009). In addition, unemployment is rampant in poor communities (Riemer, 1998; Wilson, 1996). In fact, the majority of unemployed Americans are people living in poverty (McCarthy, Jones, Penne, & Watkins 1985) and unemployment of long duration increases the possibility that people will be thrown into poverty. The effects of unemployment in poor communities are so widespread that Wilson (1996), a sociologist, argued that many of the

negative behaviors that are evidenced among poor people, such as high incarceration rates, family dissolution, and illicit behaviors are a problem of unemployment, not the people themselves. The reason for the restricted focus on White middle class samples is unclear, although psychology has long been criticized for its neglect of issues pertaining to people in poverty (Blustein, McWhirter, & Perry, 2005; Lott, 2002; Reid, 1993; Smith, 2005) and only recently has started moving away from a pathologized view of the poor (Turner & Lehning, 2007). The result of this neglect, especially in the unemployment literature, is that not all forms of unemployment are well understood.

Addressing unemployment in a context where people have limited resources and options available to them raises questions about how poor people cope with unemployment. Paradoxically, coping as a variable of interest in the relationship between unemployment and well-being has gone largely unaddressed (McKee-Ryan, Song, Wanberg, & Kinicki, 2005). This neglect has occurred even though coping is a concept that has been intimately linked to the concept of stress (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984; Pearlin & Schooler, 1978) and is one of the most widely studied concepts in psychology (Hoffball, Schwarzer, & Chon, 1998).

Coping refers to the thoughts and behaviors used to manage the internal and external demands of situations appraised as stressful (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Coping strategies have been found to account for a large amount of variance in research that does incorporate it as a variable in testing the relationship between unemployment and mental health (Julkunen, 2001). This evidence suggests that it may be worthwhile, therefore, to build upon the scant literature on coping in the context of unemployment.

This study seeks to make a contribution to the unemployment research by accomplishing two related goals. The first is to explicitly study the effects of unemployment in the context of

poverty in hopes of redressing the limited sampling which has thus far characterized this literature. Secondly, coping as a potentially important variable in the relationship between unemployment and mental health will be investigated. As will be discussed, studying coping may have theoretical implications in addition to practical implications for practitioners who work with the unemployed poor.

The criticisms of both the unemployment and coping research suggest that coping in the context of unemployment may be better understood by employing qualitative analyses. Much of the unemployment research has been criticized for limiting the understanding of the experience of unemployment by using mostly traditional survey-based approaches (Fryer & Fagan, 2003; McLaughlin, 1992). Perry (2000) further suggests that not only is rich detailed information overlooked by doing this, but unemployed persons are erroneously believed to be passive because of the lack of description of the resourceful ways in which some people manage their experience of unemployment. Similarly, coping researchers have argued that relying solely on quantitative scales with derived summary scores has unjustifiably simplified the complexity of coping behavior (Coyne & Raciappo, 2000; Sommerfield, 1997; Sommerfield & McCrae, 2000). Qualitative approaches are unique in their ability to “humanize social experience, to place individuals in rich historic and social contexts, and to understand human behavior in all of its complexity” (Fine, 2007, p. 460). The current study is designed to profit from these characteristics by employing a qualitative approach to the investigation of unemployed poverty and the ways in which people cope with these experiences.

Chapter II: Review of the Literature

This review of the literature will begin by defining unemployment as an area of scholarly inquiry. The relationship of unemployment status to measures of psychological distress and well-being will also be explored; in fact, much of the unemployment literature is focused on this relationship. The review will then turn to a discussion of the limitations in current understanding of the unemployment experience with specific reference to the paucity of context-specific research and in-depth qualitative analyses. Unemployment as a problem of particular significance in poor communities will then be addressed following a definition of poverty itself. Finally, the significance of coping to an understanding of unemployment and poverty will be introduced through an overview of the coping literature.

Unemployment

The definition of unemployment. Defining unemployment as an area of scholarly inquiry is more complex than everyday usage of this term would imply. According to the Merriam Webster-Dictionary (2009), unemployment is the state of being unemployed. The unemployed, then, are those who are not engaged in gainful occupation. However, the United States Department of Labor adds specificity to this definition by defining the unemployed as "people who do not have a job, have *actively* looked for work in the prior four weeks, and are currently available for work" (U.S. Department of Labor, 2008). This is consistent with the International Labor Organization's (ILO) definition of unemployment, which is used in many countries. While this definition appropriately excludes people who do not work and are not interested in working, a number of scholars (e.g. Dooley, 2003; Dooley, Fielding, & Levi, 1996; Fryer & Fagan, 2003) have critiqued this definition because it does not take into account people who, because of discouragement due to lack of success in finding jobs, have given up looking for

jobs for periods longer than four weeks. This pool of people is often referred to as discouraged workers, and rather than being counted as unemployed, they are regarded as out of the labor force (Dooley, Fielding, & Levi, 1996).

Alternative estimates conducted in the United Kingdom (UK) underscore the ambiguities of the U.S. Department of Labor's and the ILO's definition of unemployment. The Broad Labor Force survey, for example, includes people who are unemployed and are able to start work in two weeks but who may have stopped looking for employment. Fryer and Fagan (2003) noted that using this definition resulted in a UK unemployment rate between December 2001 and February 2002 that was over 70% higher that the ILO calculation would have been, an increase from 1,520,000 people to 2,127,000 people. Use of the U.S. Department of Labor's definition of unemployment in research, then, potentially limits our understanding of the experience of unemployment by ignoring a large segment of the population of people who are out of work. As a result, Jahoda (1982) used what she called a social psychological definition of unemployment rather than the legal definition by regarding the unemployed as "all those who have not got a job but would like to have one, or who when they have no job are dependent on some financial support from whatever source for their livelihood" (p.13).

The complexity of unemployment is further illustrated by the different types of unemployment that have been posited to exist. These include frictional unemployment, cyclical unemployment, and structural unemployment (McCarthy, Jones, Penne, & Watkins, 1985). Frictional unemployment refers to joblessness that occurs because a worker moves from one employment setting to another or takes a break from work. Frictionally unemployed workers would not be considered unemployed from either the Department of Labor's, The ILO's or Jahoda's (1982) definition because they have taken a break from work or are simply waiting to

start work. The second type of unemployment is cyclical unemployment, which occurs when people become unemployed because of a decline in an industry or the economy. Finally, structural unemployment refers to joblessness that occurs because of wider structural issues such as deficiencies in workers' skills, insufficiency of jobs, and discrimination (McCarthy et al., 1985).

McCarthy et al. (1985) note that it is structural unemployment which is the most destructive form of unemployment and most pervasive in poor communities. Wilson (1996) supported the same position in the book *When Work Disappears*, which documented the devastating effects of pervasive inner-city joblessness. Wilson attributed inner-city unemployment to sociocultural and economic forces, including increasing technology that displaces low-skilled, poorly-educated workers, and negative employer perceptions about inner-city minorities. Structural unemployment has not, however, received vast attention in the literature. To illustrate, a review and meta-analyses by Murphy and Athanasou (1999) began with the authors' stated intention *not* to "pay detailed attention to personal and contextual factors" (p. 83) -- and drawing from McCarthy et al.'s definition, structural employment is mostly about contextual factors. Unemployment in all its forms, therefore, may not be well understood by the field despite the attention to unemployment in the psychological literature.

The history of unemployment. Historically, unemployment has not always been recognized as an issue of concern, partly because it is a phenomenon that came about when waged work became the principal form of labor during the industrial revolutions of the 18th and 19th centuries (Dooley, 2003; Perry, 2000). The industrial revolution, with its introduction of machinery and industry, led to a wide-scale creation of jobs and the increasing dominance of hired and paid labor. Working for the survival of oneself and one's family changed from

working the land in individual subsistence farming to working in an industry for wages with which one purchased needed goods. However, as competition among industries increased and owners fought to cut costs, job loss and unemployment became an ill-fated possibility for many (Hanish, 1999; Perry, 2000).

Even then, unemployment itself did not become an important concept due in part to classical economic theory. Classical economic theory, which was widely accepted, postulated that in a laissez-faire capitalist economy, supply would naturally match demand in all markets, including the labor market; unemployment was not, therefore, supposed to logically exist (Perry, 2000). Possibly because of this belief in dominant economic theories, it was not until 1895 that the term unemployment came into common use, as indicated by its entry in the Oxford English Dictionary (Perry, 2000). Since then however, unemployment has drawn scrutiny from scholars throughout the social sciences, including fields of economics, sociology, and psychology. Economists, for example, grapple with explaining why unemployment exists (McLaughlin, 1992). Theories range from the very conservative, which state that people are unemployed because they do not want to work, to the liberal which cite structural problems in the economy. Sociologists are often more concerned with the effects of unemployment on communities and whole societies. In psychology, most of the emphasis is on the relationship between unemployment and individual mental health/psychological well-being.

Unemployment and psychological well-being. Attention to the mental health consequences of unemployment in psychological literature may have appeared in the psychological literature as early as 1910. At that time, the relationship between joblessness and alcohol abuse was studied in England by Rowntree and Lasker (Dooley, 2003). However, it was not until the 1930s and the emergence of the Great Depression that this issue began to receive

significant attention. During this time of worldwide economic turmoil, losing jobs because of the downturn in the economy became commonplace, making issues of unemployment a particular interest of researchers and raising unemployment citations in the literature from single to double digits (Dooley, 2003).

One of the most widely-cited studies of unemployment was conducted during this time by Marie Jahoda, Paul Lazersfeld, and Hans Zeisel (1971). Fryer (1992) described their study as "one of the most impressive pieces of social scientific fieldwork to be published and probably the most frequently cited publication in unemployment and mental health" (p. 257). The backdrop for the study was an economic depression in 1930s Austria that was considered to be even worse than the depression of the United States (Jahoda, Lazarsfeld, & Zeisel, 1971). Jahoda et al. set out to investigate the effects of unemployment in the town of Marienthal, in which three-quarters of the families depended on unemployment payments for their livelihood as a result of the depression and consequent fall in industries. Marienthal was particularly devastated by the depression because the town's livelihood depended on a large flax mill factory which stopped production and closed its doors due to the difficult economic times.

Several methodologies were used to understand the effect of unemployment on the community and its people, including observations, interviews, action research, and document analysis. Jahoda et al.'s (1971) findings documented the widespread effects of unemployment on a community, including the community's descent into poverty, family disharmony, depression, despair, apathy, demoralization, passivity, and a resignation among the people about the hopelessness of their futures.

More specifically, Jahoda et al. (1971) found four different attitudes resulting from unemployment. The first was *resignation* in which people experienced hopelessness and no

relationship to the future but at the same time were able to take care of their households and children and had an overall feeling of relative well-being. The second attitude was an *unbroken* one in which families were able to take care of their household, had plans for the future, and had an overall feeling of subjective well-being. The remaining two attitudes were both categorized as broken. *Despair* was an attitude in which families were able to keep their household in order but there were general feelings of despair, depression, hopelessness, and no efforts were made to find employment. Finally, an attitude of *apathy* was one in which families were no longer able to take care of the household, family life began to disintegrate, and plans were no longer made for the future.

After collecting detailed information on a sample of 100 families from multiple sources, Jahoda et al. (1971) estimated that 70% of these families fell into the resigned category, suggesting that mass unemployment had a negative effect on the mental health of the residents of Marienthal. Furthermore, they found that the less the families' financial resources were, the more broken their attitudes, suggesting that financial resources played a role in mediating the relationship between unemployment and mental health. People whose attitudes could be described as unbroken earned, on average, 34 schillings per month, while those who could be described as resigned earned 30 schillings, those in despair earned 25 schillings, and those in apathy made earned 19 schillings.

A relative upsurge in research attention to unemployment occurred in the 1980s following the recession of 1981-1983 (Dooley, 2003; Fryer, 1992). Despite the 50-year difference, the findings were similar to those noted in the 1930s by Jahoda et al. (1971): a strong, inverse relationship was demonstrated to exist between unemployment and psychological well-being (Fryer, 1992). For example, Kessler, Turner, and House (1988) studied the effects of

unemployment and health in a Southeastern Michigan community. They conducted a cross-sectional study comparing three groups of respondents: currently-unemployed persons (*n*= 146), previously-unemployed persons (*n*= 162) and people with stable employment (*n*= 184). The sample was mostly blue-collar workers, and was furthermore 60 % male, 20% black, and 50% married. The average age of participants was 35 years. Using depression, anxiety, and somatization as mental health indicators, the effects of unemployment were found to be consistently significant; unemployment was consistently associated with poor health outcomes for their sample. The experience of unemployment was also associated with levels of distress severe enough to warrant professional intervention. Additionally, Kessler et al. found that financial strain was the only significant mediator in the relationship between the two variables (they tested both financial strain and marital strain). Financial strain accounted for 41% of the variance in a measure of anxiety and 100% of the variance in a measure of somatization. This suggests therefore, as did Jahoda et al.'s (1971) study, that financial strain plays an important role in the relationship between unemployment and mental health.

Warr, Jackson, and Banks (1988) reviewed eleven studies of unemployment including both cross-sectional and longitudinal studies. They found a significant decrease in mental health for people of all ages following unemployment. Significant main effects for employment status were consistently identified. The cross-sectional studies that compared groups of employed persons to unemployed persons showed lower levels of affective well-being among unemployed people than among their employed counterparts. Longitudinal studies showed that moving into unemployment caused a reduction in well-being, while moving from unemployment to employment caused an increase in well-being.

Along these lines, a longitudinal study of unemployed persons and their families by Liem and Liem (1988) found that unemployed white- and blue-collar workers showed higher levels of psychological symptoms than their employed counterparts, especially with regard to anxiety and depression. By the end of one year, the group that was reemployed showed a significant decline in symptoms. They also found a pronounced effect of job loss on marital relationship such that the ratio of separations and divorces among the unemployed as compared to employed families was seven to two. Husbands and wives in the unemployed group also reported significantly less cohesion and more conflict in their families than did spouses in the employed group. Liem and Liem's study was exemplary because it broadened the impact of unemployment to the family members of unemployed persons.

Since the 1980s, research has continued to highlight the negative effect of unemployment on psychological health. Unemployment has repeatedly been found to be associated with higher depression and lower self-esteem (Dooley & Prause, 1995; Galambos, Barker, & Krahn, 2006), increased risks of suicidal ideation and number of suicide attempts (Fergusson, Boden, & Harwwod, 2008), poorer subjective quality of life (Hultman & Hemlin, 2008), and higher levels of aggression in unemployed samples versus employed samples (Fischer, Greitemeyer, & Frey, 2008).

Reviews (e.g. Dooley, Fielding, & Levi, 1996; Hanisch, 1999; Latack, Kinicki, & Prussia, 1995) and meta-analytic studies (McKee-Ryan, Wanberg, & Kinicki, 2005; Murphy & Athanasou, 1999) have also documented the impact of unemployment. Murphy and Athanasou (1999) conducted a meta-analysis of 16 longitudinal studies. In five of these studies, which included 616 participants, they found that moving from employment to unemployment had a mean weighted effect size of 0.36 on mental health. While this statistic suggests a small effect,

Murphy and Athanasou cited small sample size as a probable limitation of their investigation and cautioned that the results should therefore be regarded as tentative. On the other hand, seven of the 16 studies, which included 1509 participants, provided data on the effect of moving from unemployment to employment. They found that moving from unemployment to employment had a mean weighted average effect size of 0.54 on mental health, which can be considered a large effect. As noted previously, Murphy and Athanasou clearly stated that they did not attend to personal and contextual factors in their review of the unemployment literature. Therefore, while their analysis is useful, it follows a tradition of de-contextualized studies in unemployment research (Feather, 1990; Fryer & Fagan, 2003).

McKee-Ryan et al. (2005) critiqued Murphy and Athanasou's (1999) review for its small sample size and for not correcting the effect size calculations for measurement error. Therefore, they calculated effect sizes for a larger sample than Murphy and Athanasou. Specifically, 52 cross-sectional studies containing 64 independent samples that compared well-being among 6,684 unemployed and 15, 988 employed individuals were sampled. The results indicated that unemployed people had significantly lower levels of mental health (mean weighted effect size of -.57), life satisfaction (mean weighted effect size of -.48), marital or family satisfaction (mean weighted effect size of -.21), and subjective physical health (mean weighted effect size of -.45) than did employed people. In an analysis of 15 longitudinal studies, McKee-Ryan et al. found that unemployed workers who became reemployed demonstrated significant improvement in mental health (mean weighted effect size of -0.89), and life satisfaction (mean weighted effect size of -3.04). The findings for mental health and life satisfaction seem particularly noteworthy given that a large effect size is considered to be .50 or greater (Field, 2005).

McKee-Ryan et al.'s (2005) review is indeed comprehensive. However, much like previous critiques of the unemployment research, much of it appears de-contextualized. It appears that demographic information such as education, occupational status, gender, and race were used only as control variables. While controlling for the effects of these variables is an important statistical procedure for quantitative research, it does not do much to aid our understanding of the experience of unemployed people who may be marginalized in the labor market because of limited education and occupational status and because of their gender and race.

Despite limitations, the findings from studies on the relationship between unemployment and mental health/psychological well-being have led to the development of theories which attempt to explain why unemployment has such a deleterious effect on mental health, which will be described in the following section.

Theories of unemployment. Within the unemployment literature, a number of theories have attempted to delineate the relationship between unemployment and mental health by suggesting mediating variables. Two of these theories that have been widely cited in the psychological literature are Jahoda's theory (1981, 1982) and Warr's (1997) Vitamin Model. Feather (1990) noted that Jahoda's theory has been "the main theoretical position available for analyzing employment effects" (p. 36). Creed and Klisch (2005) listed the theory as one of two theoretical perspectives that have dominated the research on the effects of unemployment on psychological well-being. Specifically, Jahoda (1981; 1982) proposed that employment has both manifest and latent functions. The manifest functions refer to the provision of wages to workers. As such, loss of wages due to unemployment results in financial hardship which affects standard of living and consequently psychological well-being. However, Jahoda also pointed to the fact

that when financial hardship is buffered by such things as government welfare, the negative effects of unemployment on psychological well-being and family life can still be seen, suggesting that there may be other benefits of employment other than wages. Latent functions include the imposition of a time structure, provision of social activities apart from those in family life, participation in a collective purpose and effort, and status and identity. As such, loss of employment results not only in the loss of income but also in the loss of less tangible benefits which may also impact mental health and well-being.

Research has lent support to some of these propositions by Jahoda (1981, 1982). For example, Thomas, Benzevel, and Stansfield (2007), explored financial changes (similar to financial strain) as a mediator between unemployment and mental health. They conducted a longitudinal analysis with a sample of 14, 686 people, 16 years and older. Similar to findings in other studies on the relationship between unemployment and mental health, transitions to unemployment were associated with increased risk of psychological distress for both men and for women, while transitions from unemployment to paid employment resulted in decreased psychological distress for men and women. Financial difficulty partially mediated these relationships: men who became unemployed and were worse off financially were more likely to experience psychological distress than men who were not. On the other hand, the beneficial health effect for people who left unemployment and became employed was confined to those who were better off financially. Another study by Creed and McIntyre (2001) directly tested Jahoda's theory. They found evidence that all latent and manifest benefits were significantly related to psychological distress and accounted for 52% of the variance in psychological distress, indicating that unemployed individuals had less access to latent and manifest benefits than their employed counterparts.

While considered important, Jahoda's (1981; 1982) theory has not escaped criticism. Winefield et al. (1993) suggested that one of the assumptions of the theory is that any job is better than no job. This however, has been proven incorrect by studies that show that underemployment has similar detrimental effects on mental health and psychological well-being as unemployment (Dooley, 2003; Dooley & Catalano, 2003; Dooley & Prause, 2003; Friedland & Price, 2003; Jensen & Slack, 2003; Prause & Dooley, 1997). Fryer (1986) has also critiqued the theory for presenting the unemployed person as a passive object at the mercy of external forces. Perry (2000) also critiqued the notion that unemployed people are passive bystanders of their fate, in that unemployed persons have to work hard to cope with the economic and social burdens of unemployment.

Warr's (1987) Vitamin Model attempted to build on Jahoda's (1981; 1982) theory and is described by Feather (1990) as comprehensive and fully-developed in its consideration of the work and non-work environment on the unemployed person. Warr suggested that there are nine features in the environment related to mental health. These are (a) the opportunity for control, that is, the degree of control a person has over the events in his/her life, (b) the opportunity for skill use, that is, the degree to which the environment provides an opportunity for a person to develop his or her competence and skill, (c) the extent to which the environment produces goals and tasks which keep a person active and motivated and provides a sense of purpose, (d) the extent to which the environment provides for a variety of experiences, (e) the extent to which the environment provides some degree of predictability, clear statements about expected roles and behaviors, (f) the extent to which a person has access to money, (g) the extent to which there is physical security, (h) the extent to which the environment provides opportunities to connect with

others interpersonally, and (i) the extent to which the environment provides opportunities for roles which provide status and esteem.

Warr (1987) posited that these nine features of the environment act as “vitamins”. Just as some vitamins can be harmful if they are consumed in too high a level, so too can some of the environmental factors. Additionally, just as some vitamins reach a ceiling with regard to their ability to impact health, so do some of the environmental factors. Hanisch (1999) suggested that Warr’s model explains why some people may feel refreshed after losing a job and some may not. For example, someone who loses a job where he/she had too many externally generated goals may feel relieved at the notion of not having to deal with the many demands of the job anymore. Warr’s model may also be helpful in understanding the effect of unemployment in certain social environments. For example, unemployment in an environment in which a person experiences limited control over the events in his/her life, such as unemployed persons facing restrictive welfare policies, might be qualitatively different from unemployment in a context where someone feels that he/she has relative control. Feather (1990) proposed that while extant theories might explain the psychological impact of unemployment, more theoretical understanding is needed to understand some of the behavioral consequences of unemployment, such as the effect of unemployment on job-seeking behavior and people’s use of time.

Limitations of the unemployment research. The extant literature illustrates the scope of scientific inquiry on unemployment. Yet, despite having been studied for decades, our knowledge of the experience of unemployment is still limited. First, much of the research on unemployment has ignored the environment in which unemployment occurs, despite theories such as Warr’s (1987) that suggest that the context of unemployment is important in the understanding of the effect of unemployment. Feather (1990) stated that it was erroneous to treat

the unemployed population as a homogeneous group. McLaughlin (1992) has suggested that even studies which include social class as a variable have not attended sufficiently to the complexity of social class and have not extended our understanding of unemployed poverty. Perry (2000) noted that the literature on unemployment has "ripped" the unemployed individual from his/her social and political context (p. 198). Fryer and Fagan (2003) suggested that orthodox research has only paid "lip service" (p. 91) to income-related factors in the unemployment experience partly because the methods used to investigate unemployment are not sensitive to the complex issues of unemployed poverty.

When contextual factors such as social class are considered in research, they are often studied as variables to be controlled or as mediating variables in a quantitative analysis (Liu. et al, 2004). Moreover, studies of social class rarely take into consideration the voices of the poor themselves, which again limits our understanding of structural unemployment. For example, early research by Payne, Warr, and Hartley (1984) explicitly undertook to understand the role of social class on psychological ill-health during unemployment. This study nevertheless excluded women and non-whites despite a history of elevated poverty rates among people of color and women.

Critiques of the unemployment research have also addressed the methods used to study unemployment. Fryer and Fagan (2003) have been particularly critical, noting that much of the unemployment literature has not only been quantitative but has been carried out in an intrusive, bureaucratized way. Critical analysis of quantitative methodology also indicates that important information is often lost because of the necessity to make the analyses fit statistical assumptions. For example, Winefield, Tiggeman, Winefield, and Goldney (1993) noted that in order to permit meaningful statistical analyses, they had to remove research participants who found and lost jobs

from an unemployed group in their longitudinal analyses of the effects of unemployment. The unfortunate reality for many poor persons however, is that their working life is characterized by cycling in and out of low-paying work. As such, their experience of unemployment may not be captured even in longitudinal analyses which have been hailed as superior in understanding the psychological impact of unemployment. McLaughlin (1992) has also noted that the detail and texture of unemployed poverty has been missed by employing survey research that is mostly closed-ended, brief, and easily quantifiable.

Coping with unemployment has also received little attention in the research on the relationship between unemployment and mental health (Feather, 1990; Kessler, Turner, & House, 1988; McKee-Ryan et al., 2005; Van der Merwe & Greeff, 2003). McKee-Ryan et al. (2005), after conducting a meta-analysis on psychological and physical well-being during unemployment, concluded that not enough is known about how individuals cope with job loss and how different forms of coping may be differentially helpful. Understanding the role of coping in this type of research has been described as essential to developing preventative interventions (Kessler et al., 1998) and may be one of the most salient gaps in the research on unemployment and well-being (McKee-Ryan et al., 2005). How individuals with limited financial and social resources cope with, and ultimately adjust to their unemployment experience is an area ripe for research. As Liem and Liem (1998) argued, an approach is needed that recognizes efficacy, resilience, assertiveness, and intentionality of the part of unemployed workers. One way of understanding how people actively respond to and adjust to unemployment is through investigating how they actively cope with unemployment (Feather, 1990).

To fully address these limitations, it is necessary to first explicate an alternative context for unemployment—that is, unemployment in poor communities—to ascertain some of the issues

that need to be addressed in a more qualitative study of the experience of unemployment. The following section reviews the scant research on unemployment in poor communities.

Unemployment in poor communities. Though, as discussed earlier, it is rarely studied in this context, unemployment is rampant in poor communities (Newman, 1999; Reimer, 1988; Wilson, 1996) even in times of economic prosperity (Goodwin, 1972). Commenting on societal inclinations to ignore concentrations of poverty and unemployment, McLaughlin (1992) observed:

> Unemployment is not a price "we" all have to pay to restructure the economy and hold down inflation. Presented in this way, the real story of unemployment is hidden—that it is the same people who are always at risk of unemployment in an inefficient labour market founded on structured inequalities of locality, sex, race, disability, and age (p. xiii).

One reason for the lack of research attention to unemployment in the context of poverty may be pejorative attributions as to why the poor are unemployed. For example, monetarists, a branch of economists who study money and its effects, have claimed that the poor do not want to work because of the income they can receive in the welfare system (Caravale, 1997; McLaughlin, 1992).

This notion that the poor do not actually want to work has been empirically investigated and generally found to be lacking in legitimacy. Goodwin (1972) conducted a large scale survey of 4,000 individuals and concluded that there were no differences between the poor and non poor with regards to a desire to work. Reimer (1988) proposed that Americans are poor for three reasons:

> 1) They cannot work, or old age exempts them from work, yet their unearned income is below the poverty line. 2) They can work, but they cannot find jobs, and their joblessness either leaves them without any income or with an income from other sources too low to get them above the poverty line. 3) They are working, but their wages are low, so low that, whether or not combined with other sources of income, they fall below the poverty line (p.8).

Other researchers have also shed light on this issue by documenting the many barriers to employment faced by the poor that keep the poor unemployed. Proposed barriers have included low human capital, which is the lack of possession of assets such as a high school education, job training, job skills such as reading, writing, and computer skills, and work experience (Cheng, 2006; Danziger, Kalil, & Anderson, 2000). Poverty restricts access to educational opportunities (Axelson, 1985). The poor must surmount substantial disparities in educational access, through which schools in poor areas are plagued by large class sizes, less qualified teachers, less access to textbooks, and overall lower financial investment by the government (Blustein et al., 2005; Kozol, 2005; Lott, 2002).

The poor are also more likely to be bankrupt with regard to cultural capital (Beeghley, 2008; Bourdieu, 1986 as cited in Gilbert, 2008). Cultural capital was conceptualized by Pierre Bourdieu (1971) as culturally-specific knowledge or competence that represents an asset to the holder. This facility with the customs and norms of the dominant culture often helps people to obtain and keep jobs. Middle class children are taught, through socialization, the norms of networking with others in their social class to obtain and keep middle class jobs, and specific behaviors such as getting to a job on time. The poor often do not have these opportunities because they may be segregated in communities with other poor unemployed or underemployed

persons. In addition, the crowded, understaffed, under- resourced schools in their neighborhoods may not teach them the valued norms of the dominant work culture.

Other situational barriers that may be faced by the poor include housing issues or homelessness, problems with child care, and mental health barriers (Danziger, 2000; Dworsky & Courtney, 2007; Lee & Vinokur, 2007). The poor also often have to deal with overt discrimination and classist attitudes (Bullock, Wyche, & Williams, 2001), including beliefs that they are unmotivated and lazy (Cozzarelli, Wilkinson, & Tagler, 2001). Wilson (1996), for example, documented a host of harsh and derogatory attitudes regarding the employment of poor jobless people of color, including beliefs that people on welfare had no work ethic or job skills, and that inner-city residents were dishonest and lazy.

Danziger et al. (2000) found among a sample of 728 women on welfare that 85% had at least one barrier to employment and the more barriers the women had, the least likely they were to gain employment. In Dworky and Courtney's (2007) sample of 1075 welfare applicants, the mean number of barriers reported was 2.8, and one-third of their sample reported four or more barriers to employment. Furthermore, the possibility of employment has been shown to decrease as the number of barriers increases (Danziger, 2000; Lee and Vinokur, 2007), even when the intention to find work increases at the same time (Lee & Vinokur, 2007).

It is worth noting that these realities exist in contradiction to increasingly restrictive welfare policies. For example, the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996 replaced the long term aid to needy families with temporary aid (Temporary Aid to Needy Families or TANF). The change stipulated that people can only be on welfare for a limited period of time, versus having the opportunity to receive assistance for as long as necessary. Welfare recipients can now be on welfare for two years at a time, five years

total (Haveman & Wolfe, 1998), and must show evidence that they are actively seeking employment to remain on welfare. Not only are the welfare policies restrictive, but welfare recipients face a host of humiliating experiences during the welfare process (Collins, 2005). A recent survey of welfare recipients in New York City (Gotbaum, 2008) found that the experience of receiving welfare is plagued by confusing rules and regulations, errors in record-keeping, long lines and a generally inefficient system. Welfare recipients also often have to endure derogatory treatment because of welfare receipt. As one unemployed welfare recipient stated in an interview:

> Welfare is completely crap because they give you the runaround. It's like two, three, four steps forward and they pull you back two or three more. It's like they don't help you grow, they want you to depend on them, they want you to sit there and cry (Hays, 2003, p. 94).

The conundrum here is that the poor are pressured to find employment, yet at the same time, face a greater number of barriers to employment than people in other socioeconomic groups. These barriers, in turn adversely affect the ability of people in poverty to find and sustain adequate employment. However, restrictive welfare policies and the "demonizing" (Hays, 2003, p. 122) of poor unemployed persons on welfare by the general public do not seem to take this problem into consideration. This explication argues for the examination of unemployment in the context of poverty to understand the experiences of the poor unemployed, but researchers have rarely undertaken this work. One study by McGhee and Fryer (1989) stands as an exception in exploring the social psychological dimensions of unemployed poverty. The findings suggested that the way income is delivered, others' expectations of one's income, and various family coping behaviors and strategies were among important aspects of the experience.

Further examination of poverty as a context for unemployment requires consideration of poverty itself as a construct, to which the next section will turn.

Poverty

Defining poverty and consequently determining who is to be classified as poor is a complex and even controversial undertaking (Joassart-Marcelli, 2005; Turo & Krause, 2009). As defined by the U.S. government, a poor individual is one who lives in a household that does not earn enough income to be above an amount representing the poverty rate for the number of people in that household. This poverty rate was established in 1963 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2008) by tripling the cost of the economy food plan— the Department of Agriculture's 1955 estimate of how much money families of three or more spent on food. The food plan was also adjusted for the different spending patterns of smaller households (single member households and households with less than three persons) so that the line would vary according to the size of the family. Currently, the U.S. Census Bureau still uses the same measure derived from a food plan calculated 40 years ago, periodically adjusting the line with the inflation rate. A single person has to make less than $10, 590 a year to be considered as falling below the poverty line while a family of three with two children under 18 years old would have to make less than $16, 705 a year (U.S. Census Bureau, 2008).

The calculation of the poverty line has drawn sharp criticisms from several quarters. Twenty years ago, Reimer (1988), gave a blazing critique of the measure by stating that "the story of how the poverty line came into being only reinforces the value of ongoing scrutiny. It is…a classic American yarn of nimbleness and absurdity—one Mark Twain would have relished, had he lived in our time" (p.16). Specifically, criticisms of the poverty line include the fact that the income measure only takes into account the income necessary for food. It does not

incorporate transportation costs, clothing, shelter, or other necessary expenditures. It accounts for income before taxes, including sales and other regressive taxes on consumer goods (Beeghley, 2008) and as such the actual income received by the members of households may be less than specified in the calculation. Furthermore, it does not vary by state and as such does not take into account that differing regional costs of living.

Despite the controversies surrounding the Census Bureau's definition of poverty, it is a definition widely used by social scientists and policy makers (Joassart-Marcelli, 2005). Research utilizing the census bureau's definition may neglect to capture the experiences of a significant number of people who may not fall below the poverty line but who have great difficulty meeting their basic needs of food, clothing, shelter, and health-care (Joassart-Marcelli, 2005). Research using alternative estimates of poverty adjust the poverty threshold by a certain percentage (for example 120% and 200% above the poverty line). The problem with this method however, is that the adjustments do not take into account the differing cost of living in different geographic regions throughout the U.S. As such, while someone in one state might be able to meet his/her basic needs if he/ she makes 120% or 200% above the poverty line, someone in another state may not be able to do so (Joassart-Marcelli, 2005). Furthermore, calculating the poverty threshold using these measures can become quite laborious.

An additional problem with using the income-based poverty threshold is that income level does not capture the intricacies of poverty (Liu et al., 2004; Smith, 2008). Poverty is more than a matter of material deprivation; it is also a social location in which people are deprived of educational and occupational resources, and lack power to influence debate and make decisions (World Bank, 2000). Researchers interested in capturing the lack of educational and occupational resources may use the Hollinsghead Index of Social Position (Hollingshead &

Redlich, 1958) to select a sample of people in poverty. The Hollingshead Index of Social Position is one of the most widely used tools to measure social class in psychological research (Liu et al., 2004) as it takes into account a person's residence, occupation, and education to categorize people into different social classes including the lower class/poor. However, this measure has been also been critiqued as out of date by scholars who have challenged the way social class is measured in psychological research (Liu et al., 2004).

Although low income is a relevant aspect of life in poverty, references to poverty that depend solely upon numerical cut-offs such as the poverty rate are not class-based designations at all. Based on the social class typologies formulated by Zweig (2000) and Leondar-Ross (2005), Smith (2008) presented an expanded delineation of social class which incorporates poverty and is moreover organized around access to socioeconomic power. According to this typology, poverty as a class designation includes "predominantly working-class people, who, because of unemployment, low-wage jobs, health problems, or other crises, are without enough income to support their basic needs" (p. 901). The working class is defined as "people who have little control over the availability or content of jobs, and little say in decisions that affect their access to health care, education, and housing. They tend to have lower levels of income, net worth, and formal education than the more powerful classes" (p. 901). The middle class is understood to comprise individuals who "have more autonomy and control in work settings than do working-class people and more economic security;" the owning class includes people, who are not forced to work for a living because they "own and control the resources by which other people earn a living" and "who also have significant social, cultural, and political power relative to other classes" (p. 902).

In summary, poverty is a complex occurrence marked by financial strain and hardship and lack of access to power and necessary resources. Access to employment is limited by structural barriers that the poor face and by restrictive welfare policies that are supposed to help, not hurt, the poor. In the face of unemployment and poverty, how do people cope? Do these coping strategies mitigate the effects that a life in unemployed poverty can have on their psychological well-being? The review will now address coping as a variable of interest in the study of unemployed poverty.

Coping

Coping is a psychological concept which, according to Hoffball, Schwarzer, and Chon (1998), is the most widely studied topic in all of contemporary psychology. This statement was echoed by Coyne and Racioppo (2000), who noted that between the term's first appearance in psychological abstracts in 1967 and the year 2000, 23,000 references to coping could be found with a PsycINFO search. Even more recently, Aldwin (2007) noted that the concept of coping has even become popular in contemporary American culture as evidenced by a proliferation of print and broadcast media addressing the topic. An important concept for many reasons, effective coping serves to allow individuals "1) to reduce harmful environmental conditions and enhance prospects of recovery, 2) to tolerate or adjust to negative events and realities, 3) to maintain a positive self-image, 4) to maintain emotional equilibrium, and 5) to continue satisfying relationships with others" (Cohen & Lazarus, 1979, p. 232). These effects seem to render coping a relevant issue in the study of unemployed poverty.

Historically, coping has been understood in the context of ego defense and psychopathology. Scholars like Menninger (1963), Haan (1977), and Vaillant (1977) (as seen in Folkman & Moskowitz, 2004) viewed coping as unconscious, mature, ego processes that are

internal traits of the person and that can be hierarchically organized from primitive to mature ego defenses. Implicit in this person-specific understanding of the coping process is that coping responses/strategies[1] are stable traits of a person and not specific responses to particular situations. As such, the coping strategies a person uses in the face of marriage problems are the same strategies a person would use in the face of unemployment.

This approach also does not acknowledge that in the face of the same stressor (e.g. unemployment), the demands of the environment and resources available to the person changes across situations and as such coping responses/strategies may vary. For example, someone who is unemployed but is supported by family and receives mailed unemployment checks might experience and cope with the stress of unemployment in a different way than someone who is unemployed, has no family support, and has to go the welfare office. Finally, by treating coping as an ego defense, the focus of coping is primarily to regulate emotions rather than, or in addition to, problem solving (Folkman and Lazarus, 1980). The conceptualization of coping as a stable, internal trait of a person is often referred to as coping *style* (Aldwin, 2007) and largely omits social context in the theory of coping.

Counter to the coping style model of coping, sociologists such as Pearlin and Schooler (1978) considered coping to be primarily a function of one's social context. As such, in order to effectively understand coping, the context of the problems people contend with must be considered. Accordingly, they defined coping as "any response to external life-strains that serve to prevent, avoid, or control emotional distress" (p.3). Furthermore, they recognized that people had social *and* psychological resources that impacted, but were separate from, their coping responses. According to Pearlin and Schooler (1978) social resources include the interpersonal networks of family, friends, neighbors, and voluntary associations that a person can rely on for

[1] The term coping response is often used interchangeably with the term coping strategy in the literature.

support. Psychological resources are the personality characteristics that people draw upon to help them withstand the challenges and threats of their environment. These may include self-esteem and mastery, which is, the extent to which people believe that they have control over their lives.

Pearlin and Schooler (1978) expanded upon the concept of coping by suggesting that is not a one-dimensional construct but that it exists at a number of levels and that there are many behaviors, cognitions, and perceptions associated with coping. In a study of 2,300 people between the ages of 18 and 65, they found that these various behaviors are used to accomplish one of three major things—to change the stressful situation, to control the meaning of the stressful situation before a stressful reaction occurs, or to control the stressful reaction after it has emerged. As such, in their model, coping serves more functions than the ego-defense model of coping where the function is primarily emotion regulation. Pearlin and Schooler also acknowledged that there are some contexts in which people may not be able to change the stressful situation and so instead have to cope by changing the meaning of the stressful encounter or controlling the stressful reaction. Consequently, since there are times when people cannot eliminate problems from their lives, the effectiveness of coping must be judged on how well it prevents hardships from resulting in emotional stress.

While Pearlin and Schooler's (1978) model moves away from a person-specific approach to a situation-specific approach to coping, a further paradigm shift arrived with the work of Lazarus and Folkman (1984). These authors posited a transactional model of coping in which the person and the environment are said to be in an ongoing relationship where each affects the other. Coping is defined by Lazarus and Folkman (1984) as "constantly changing cognitive and behavioral efforts to manage specific external and/or internal demands that are appraised as

taxing or exceeding the resources of the person" (p. 14). This definition highlights coping as a response to a stressful demand, coping as an active process that requires mobilization of effort on the part of the individual, and coping as situation-specific (rather than an internal trait of a person that remains the same across situations or context).

Appraisal is an important concept in this model as appraisal and coping influence each other in a reciprocal manner. Appraisal is a cognitive process in which a person evaluates what is at stake and what coping resources and options are available to him/her (Folkman & Lazarus, 1980). There are three types of appraisals: harm-loss appraisals, which refer to the evaluation that harm has already occurred; threat appraisals referring to the evaluation that harm or loss has not yet occurred but is anticipated; and challenges appraisals, which refer to the evaluation of an anticipated opportunity for master or gain. Lazarus and Folkman note that the degree to which a person experiences stress depends on the appraisal made and the coping resources and options available. So, for example, if someone is unemployed but appraises the situation as a challenge, he/she may experience less stress than someone who is unemployed but appraises the situation as a harm/loss that has already occurred. The concept of appraisal lends itself to many possible theories about how and in what contexts one may experience stress. For example, in terms of unemployment, appraisal may change at different points during the length of unemployment. So, unemployment may be considered a challenge at some point but then may change over time to an appraisal of threat or loss or vice versa. It also seems plausible that appraisal will vary according to context, so unemployment may be viewed as a challenge in times of economic growth but in times of recession, it may be viewed as a threat or loss.

Hoffball, Schwarzer, and Chon (1998) also noted that an advantage of Lazarus and Folkman's model of coping is that it takes into account the resources that persons have available

to them and note that people with more resources (be it self or environmental resources) may be better able to cope with stressful situations than people with less resources. In this model, persons are less likely to be viewed as defective when they are not able to access the resources or draw on appropriate skills to cope with a stressful situation (Aldwin, 2007).

Lazarus and Folkman (1984) further proposed that there are two broad categories of coping responses with regard to an event that is appraised as stressful: regulating the emotional response to the situation (*emotion-focused coping*) and managing or altering the problem that is causing distress (*problem-solving coping*). The coping response (emotion-focused or problem-solving) will also vary according to the resources, such as health and material resources, at a person's disposal. These two types of coping responses are broad distinctions that can encompass a variety of behaviors. For example, Carver, Scheier, and Weintruab (1989) found that active coping, planning, suppression of competing activities, restraint coping, and seeking of instrumental support were all behaviors that encompassed problem-solving coping, while seeking of emotional support, positive reinterpretation, acceptance, denial, and turning to religion encompassed emotion-focused coping.

While Lazarus and Folkman's model shifts perspective from a person-specific only model to a consideration of the interaction between person and the environment, it is not without critique. Folkman and Maskowitz (2004) noted that while the separation of coping responses into problem-focused and emotion-focused coping is a widely-used formulation in research, this distinction can mask adaptive versus maladaptive forms of coping, especially in specific contexts. For example, both denial and turning to religion are categorized as emotion-focused coping; however, denial may be maladaptive in certain situations while turning to religion may be adaptive. This is a distinction that is important to retain. As such, some researchers (e.g.

Langens & Morse, 2006) who study coping in a specific context move away from the problem-focused and emotion-focused distinction and toward a distinction between adaptive and maladaptive coping responses/strategies.

Another critique of Lazarus and Folkman's theoretical framework is that it is based on Eurocentric notions of coping behavior and ignores the values, norms, and overall worldview of people of color. For example, Utsey, Adams, and Bolden (2000) asserted that Lazarus and Folkman's dichotomy of coping strategies into emotion-focused and problem-solving strategies is insufficient to account for this and other Afrocentric worldviews and practices from which African Americans draw. Such critiques are important to this study of coping with unemployed poverty given the racial inequality demonstrated to exist in current unemployment statistics (McGhee & Warren, 2009).

Measuring coping. Much of the research on coping has utilized cross-sectional designs (Aldwin, 2007; Folkman & Maskowitz, 2004; Somerfield & McCrae, 2000) using quantitative measures such as the The Ways of Coping Scale (WOCS) (Folkman & Lazarus, 1980, 1988) and the COPE inventory (Carver et. al, 1989). These methods of assessing coping have come under criticism due to claims that the measures are psychometrically poor. However, Aldwin (2007) noted that it is erroneous to apply the psychometric rigor of personality scales to scales such as the WOCS and COPE that are intended to be used in the field. Other researchers (Utsey et al., 2000; Yeh, Inman, Kim, & Okubo, 2006) have noted the Eurocentric bias implicit in these measures and their inability to accurately capture the experience of people of color and as such have developed instruments such as the Afrocultural Coping Systems Inventory (ACSI) (Utsey et al., 2000) to assess the experiences of people of color. Others have noted a conspicuous absence of religious coping on the more traditional inventories (Pargament, Koenig, & Perez, 2000). The

WOCS and COPE only have a few items related to religious coping despite Gallup poll (2005) findings that for a majority of Americans, religious faith is very important to their lives.

Other critiques about the measurement of coping have been about using quantitative methods. Coyne and Racioppo (2000) have said that when coping is reduced to a summary score, as it has to be on quantitative scales, many important aspects of coping are lost. Somerfield (1997) and Somerfield and McCrae (2000) argued that much of the complexity of coping is lost in cross-sectional quantitative research and much can be gained from narrative approaches that include in depth analysis of participants' past and current experiences with regard to the issue being studied. For example, in discussing the difficulties with assessing how people cope with cancer, Somerfeld (1997) described a wide range of experiences associated with having cancer such as physical symptoms, experience of health care, and recovery. Somerfeld argued that is difficult to ascertain to which of these experiences if any, participants are referring when asked to respond to a checklist with regard to how they cope with cancer. Furthermore, it is possible that a deeper understanding of participants' experiences of the coping process is missed with quantitative analysis, as argued by Folkman and Maskowitz (2004). However, they also stated that there is no single best way to study coping, as all methodologies have limitations. Therefore, they suggested that measuring coping is an art as well as a science, and that the art is in selecting an approach that best fits and is most useful to the researcher.

Another relevant critique of the measurement of coping with regard to this study is that the effectiveness of coping with chronic stressors is not well understood because coping is often measured at an abstract level (Coyne & Racioppo, 2000; Folkman & Maskowitz, 2004) rather than in a specific context. Indeed, unemployment is one of several chronic stressors which may be challenging with regard to coping (Folkman & Maskowitz, 2004).

Coping and unemployment. A few studies have attempted to address the effectiveness of coping strategies in the context of unemployment. Van der Merwe and Greeff (2003) investigated the effect of the coping mechanisms (both coping resources and coping responses) of 82 unemployed African men on observed stress. They found that period of unemployment was the only demographic variable (they measured age, education level, and number of children as well) that was significantly related to observed stress, with approximately 40% of the variance in observed stress attributable to unemployment. They also found that all coping responses investigated (responses to loss of income, and problem solution and behavioral responses such as redefining the problem, spiritual support, and use of community resources) had a significant negative relationship to stress levels. Furthermore, Van der Merwe and Greeff conducted a stepwise regression and found that use of community resources was the only coping response that displayed a significant mediating effect in the relationship between stressful life events and observed stress.

Van der Merwe and Greeff (2003) did not directly test the role of coping responses on the relationship between length of unemployment and observed stress but were more interested in the coping strategies of unemployed African men in reducing the relationship between a number of stressful life events and perceived stress. They concluded that use of community resources was a coping response that mediated the impact of stressful life events on perceived stress -- a questionable interpretation as they did not follow the guidelines of Barron and Kenny (1986) to establish mediation. Instead, they deduced mediation from a reduction in the beta coefficient of the predictor variable (stressful life events) as this coping response was entered in a stepwise regression.

Langens and Mose (2006) tested the role of coping in the relationship between unemployment and well-being by studying whether a change in coping strategies mediated the relationship between duration of unemployment and measures of well-being. The study took place in Germany; 119 participants were surveyed. Neither the race nor the social class of participants was reported. Coping strategies were assessed using a German translation of the Brief COPE (Carver, 1997). The Brief COPE assesses 14 coping strategies/responses: active coping, planning, seeking instrumental support, positive reframing, seeking emotional support, denial, behavioral disengagement, substance abuse, self-blame, venting emotions, acceptance, humor, and religion. Based on their review of the unemployment literature, they divided the 10 coping strategies of the Brief COPE into two scales—productive and non-productive coping strategies and dropped three (acceptance, humor, and religion) that they felt were hard to categorize as productive or non-productive coping. They defined productive coping with unemployment as active coping, planning, seeking instrumental support, seeking emotional support, and positive reframing. They defined non-productive coping as denial, behavioral disengagement, substance abuse, self-blame and venting emotions because these strategies are disruptive to social relationships and physical health and are likely to increase negative mood and decrease health.

Langens and Mose (2006) found that length of unemployment was significantly related to negative affect and somatic complaints. They also found that length of unemployment was significantly and positively related to non-productive coping. That is, the longer people were unemployed, the more likely they were to use non-productive coping strategies. Finally, Langens and Mose entered duration of unemployment, non-productive coping and somatic complaints in a path analysis since both duration of unemployment and coping strategies were

related to somatic complaints. All the criteria for mediation were met following the guidelines of Baron and Kenny (1996). That is, duration of unemployment predicted somatic complaints and non-productive coping. Non-productive coping predicted somatic complaints after controlling for duration of unemployment, and duration of unemployment no longer predicted somatic complaints after controlling for non-productive coping. This study is helpful in understanding the role of coping in the relationship between unemployment and well-being. However, the incorporation of coping as a mediational variable suggests that coping strategy in this instance explains *why* (Barron & Kenny, 1986) unemployment has such a deleterious effect on well-being. In other words, testing coping as a mediator tells us more about coping style than coping response/strategy (Aldwin, 2007).

Kessler, Turner, and House (1988) studied financial and cognitive coping behavior as a moderator between length of unemployment and mental and physical health. They found that coping behavior significantly modified the impact of current unemployment on ill health by reducing the impact of unemployment on ill health. Financial coping, for example using public assistance, protected against physical illness, while coping that avoided intrusive thoughts protected against anxiety. While the Kessler et al. (1988) study provides a helpful start in understanding the role of coping in the relationship between unemployment and mental health, there is scope for investigating a wider array of coping behaviors. Coping research has shown that there are a wide variety of coping behaviors other than financial and cognitive coping. Additionally, given the prior critiques on the use of quantitative methods of studying coping behavior, it may be beneficial to employ a narrative approach to the investigation of unemployment. One argument that could be made for studying unemployment in a quantitative way similar to Kessler, Turner, and House is that coping effectiveness is well ascertained by the

use of advanced statistical techniques testing moderation. However, other researchers have found that coping effectiveness can be studied qualitatively by asking the respondents themselves whether they felt the coping strategies they used were effective (Phinney & Haas, 2003).

As the above research illustrates, coping in the context of unemployment is not only scant but has been investigated via quantitative analyses exclusively. This has helped to increase our understanding of the mediational and moderating role of coping in the relationship between unemployment and well-being, but it has limited the study of coping strategies to those that can be measured by standardized instruments. Using these instruments to inform interventions with poor unemployed persons would mean possibly imposing strategies that do not lend themselves well to the unique context of poverty.

Statement of the Problem

The review of the literature just presented suggests that while the research on unemployment and mental health/well-being is vast, more nuanced research on the experience of unemployment especially in the context of poverty is lacking. Poor communities are social locations where the problems associated with unemployment may reach their pinnacle: unemployment is prevalent, significant barriers to employment exist, and resources for coping may be limited. As such, this study seeks first to address these gaps in the research by studying the experience of unemployment in the context of poverty.

Second, researchers (e.g. McKee-Ryan et al., 2005) have specifically called for more research investigating the role of coping in the relationship between unemployment and mental health/well-being. Because coping has been under-researched in the unemployment literature, this study also seeks to explore strategies used by the poor to cope with the experience of unemployed poverty.

Finally, this study seeks to address some of the methodological concerns regarding the coping and unemployment research by using a qualitative approach to understanding the experience of unemployment and the ways in which people cope with unemployment. As Feather (1992) noted, there is much detailed information that can be gained by using qualitative inquiry in the study of coping with unemployment. Folkman and Maskowitz (2004) also suggested that including narrative approaches in coping research can help to uncover ways of coping that are not included on coping scales. This may be especially relevant for exploring coping in the context of unemployment for poor individuals who may use unique and innovative ways to cope that are not captured by coping inventories designed with middle-class samples.

Accordingly, the research questions for this study are:

1. What are the experiences of unemployment specific to unemployed persons in poverty?
2. What experiences are appraised as most stressful?
3. What is the psychological impact of these experiences on poor unemployed persons?
4. What personal and social resources and coping strategies are used by the poor unemployed to cope with unemployment?
5. What coping strategies are deemed to be most effective in managing the experience of unemployment?

Chapter III: Method

The qualitative research methodology used in this study was Consensual Qualitative Research (CQR) (Hill, Thompson & Williams, 1997). CQR is a methodology aimed at capturing the essence of a phenomenon through rigorous, in-depth examination of narratives from people who experience the phenomenon being studied (Hill, Thompson, Hess, et al., 2005; Hill et al., 1997). In describing the paradigmatic stance represented by CQR, Hill et al. (1997; 2005) stated that CQR is predominantly constructivist; that is, it is based on the belief that there are multiple truths which are valid, and that people construct their realties. Such a stance benefits the purposes of this study because it requires that people are understood within the specific context – poverty, in this case – in which they construct and make meaning of their realities.

Participants

Twenty-five participants were recruited for the study. This is a larger sample size than the eight to fifteen suggested by Hill et al. (1997, 2005). The large sample size was chosen given the broad focus of the research and given the possibility of a fairly heterogeneous sample, that is, the possibility that participants would have a wide array of experiences and cultural backgrounds. With a heterogeneous sample, too few cases can result in unstable results (Hill et al., 2005). Hill et al. (2005) also suggested that large samples can be subdivided into smaller, homogenous groups for further analysis; recruiting 25 participants would increase the possibility of this type of analysis. To be included in the study participants had to be unemployed according to Jahoda's (1984) social psychological definition of unemployment: people who do not have a job but would like to have one and who, when they have no job, are dependent on some financial source of support for their livelihood. Participants also had to be poor according to Smith's

(2008) definition; that is, their circumstances of living were such that they were without enough income to meet their families' basic needs.

Given the inclusion criteria, three participants' interviews were excluded from the final sample. One participant revealed during her interview that she considered herself to be middle class and two others disclosed that they were currently working part-time. A fourth participant's interview was excluded from the final sample because his interview was discontinued when he became paranoid and irritable. As a result, a final sample of twenty-one adults was used for the study, well over the minimum sample size of 8 to 10 usually specified for CQR (Hill et al.; 1997, 2005). Table 1 presents participants' demographics.

The majority of participants were male, African American, and single. Participants ranged in age from 25 to 62, with an average age of 44 years old. Participants varied in educational level but no participant had a college degree: eight participants did not complete high school, seven participants had the equivalent of a high school diploma, and six participants had some college experience. All 21 participants were living in poverty as evidenced by their eligibility for and receipt of some type of public assistance, with the majority of participants receiving multiple benefits. Benefits included government funded cash assistance, food stamps, Medicaid, government subsidized housing, and WeCare, which is assistance for persons with medical and mental health barriers to employment. Additionally, a sizeable number of participants, eleven in all, were homeless.

All 21 participants were unemployed. Twenty of the 21 participants were looking for work by various means including looking in classified advertisements, attending work readiness programs, and asking friends about opportunities to work. One participant was not looking for work at the time of interviewing. The length of unemployment ranged from three months to 132

months, with an average length of 40 months of unemployment. The bureau of labor considers people who are unemployed 27 weeks or more to be long-term unemployed. A report by the congressional budget office on long-term unemployment (2006) indicated that the characteristics of the long-term unemployed include men and women who are not college educated, single, and of Black and Hispanic backgrounds. These are the characteristics of the men and women in this study’s sample. As such, the participants in this sample are considered to be long-term unemployed.

Table 1
Participant Demographics

	N	%
Gender		
Male	11	52
Female	9	43
Transgendered Female	1	5
Age		
25-34	3	14
35-44	8	38
45-54	7	33
55 and over	3	14
Race/Ethnicity		
Black/African American	13	62
Hispanic/Latino	6	29
White/Non-Hispanic	2	9
Marital Status		
Single	15	71
Married	1	5
Domestic Partnership	2	9
Separated	1	5
Divorced	2	9
Education		
Less than High School	8	38
High School/GED	7	33
Some College	6	29
Homeless		
Yes	11	52
No	10	48
Public Benefits		
Yes	21	100
No	0	0

Participant Demographics

	N	%
Number of Public Benefits		
One	8	38
Two	4	19
Three	7	33
Four	2	10
Prior Work History		
Yes	21	100
No	0	0
Length of Unemployment		
Less than 12 months	3	14
12-23 months	5	24
24-35 months	6	29
36 months and greater	7	33
Looking for Work		
Looking	20	95
Not looking	1	5

Procedures

Prior to beginning the data collection, two pilot interviews were completed to assess prospective participants' understanding of and reactions to the interview questions. Two African American women in their mid-forties, both unemployed, and in poverty were invited to participate in the pilot. The women were recruited from the job training program in which the researcher was a psychology extern. The purpose of the pilot was explained to the women. The women were also informed of the voluntary and confidential nature of the interview, that they could end participation at any time, and that their participation would not affect their standing, either positively or negatively, in the program. The interviews lasted approximately 60 minutes; the women were interviewed from a semi-structured protocol based on the research questions. After the interview the women were asked to give feedback on the questions asked, the style of interviewing, and general comments about the process. Based on the feedback received from the pilot interviews, a small number of questions were reworded in order to increase the clarity of

the questions asked. For example, the women preferred the word “coping” to the phrase “dealing with” for a question written to ascertain how participants coped with unemployment. They believed the word “coping” would get more detailed responses from participants. Both women also gave feedback on the ideal remuneration for the study. When asked if they thought participants would prefer cash or a gift card, both suggested cash and as such this was the remuneration given for the study.

Participants for the study were recruited from three community-based agencies in New York City. Social workers and other staff were approached and meetings set up to discuss the study. Flyers were put up in one agency and classroom presentations were made in the two others to inform prospective participants about the study. In both the meetings with staff and the classroom presentations, the criteria for inclusion were explicitly stated: adult men and women who were out of work, who wanted to find work, and who were struggling with poverty were invited to participate in the study. Accordingly, flyers for the study explicitly called for the participation of unemployed men and women who needed assistance to make ends meet; the flyer also described the study as an attempt to understand the experiences of unemployed poverty (see Appendix C).

One of the agencies from which participants were recruited was a work readiness program in Brooklyn, New York in which the researcher was a psychology extern; however, men and women that the researcher saw for individual or group therapy were not eligible to participate in the study. Additionally, participants were informed that the research study was separate from the researcher’s work at the program, that the information they disclosed would be held in confidence, and their participation in the study would not affect their participation in the program. The second agency was a soup kitchen and drop-in community center in Brooklyn,

New York that provides the surrounding community with free meals, social work and advocacy services, and a safe space to stay and interact with others throughout the day. The third agency was a community center in the Bronx, New York that serves the needs of the community through job training, child care facilities, social work, and legal services.

Participants were asked to participate in a face-to-face interview with the primary researcher; all interviews took place in a private space in one of the three agencies. Prior to the beginning of the interview, each participant was informed of the nature and purposes of the research, the risks of participation, and the rights to participation. For example, participants were told that discussing the stressors associated with unemployment may bring up strong emotions and that they may become more aware of or re-experience emotional difficulties during the interview. As such, participants were advised that they were free to end their participation at any time during the interview should they become uncomfortable. Additionally, they were told that they would be encouraged to withdraw from the study if they were observed to be experiencing undue discomfort or distress. A list of counseling agencies, hotlines, and public hospitals were available for participants if they experienced distress and needed a referral.

Once participants read and received a copy of the letter of informed consent and signed the note detailing their rights to participation, they were given 15 dollars and asked to sign a receipt, for which they received a copy. Prior to the interview, all participants completed a demographic survey. The interviews lasted an average of 50 minutes (range = 22-82 minutes). All interviews were audiotaped and transcribed with participants' consent. All interviews were audiotaped and transcribed with participants' consent.

During the interviews, participants' were carefully listened to and follow up questions asked to ensure that participants met inclusion criteria. For example, two participants mentioned

working at the time of interview and their answers to follow-up questions revealed that they were working part-time. These participants were unsatisfied with their hours of work and rates of pay and considered themselves to be unemployed because they wanted full-time work. However, because they did not meet criteria for being without a job their interviews were excluded from the analysis. When participants' discussed the help of spouses, follow up questions to ascertain spouses' social class were asked. For example, one participant disclosed that her husband had three jobs to help make ends meet in the household. This disclosure was used as an opportunity to ask follow up questions about the participants' social class; the participant disclosed that her spouse worked off the books in low paying jobs such as working in a fish market, that his employment was not stable, and that his salary was not enough to help the family make ends meet. In cases such as this the participant was considered to be in poverty.

Instruments

Demographic form. A demographic form (Appendix A) was used to collect data including participants' age, race, ethnicity, educational level, marital status, employment status, length of unemployment, and welfare status.

Interview protocol. In accordance with Hill et al.'s (1997) recommendations, a semi-structured interview protocol with open-ended questions (see Appendix B) was developed for use in the study. Items were based on the study's research questions along with feedback received during pilot interviews and the input from a meeting with researchers of advanced skill in qualitative methods.

Data Analysis

According to Hill et al. (1997, 2005), CQR has three main steps: 1) responses to the interviews are divided into domains (or topic areas), 2) core ideas, which are brief summaries

that capture the essence of the interview, are developed for the material in each domain for each case, and 3) a cross analysis is conducted, in which categories are developed to describe common themes in the core ideas within domains across cases.

A fourth step was introduced in this study—the categories developed were further examined by clustering them according to male and female gender (transgender analysis was excluded because there were not sufficient numbers of transgender participants). Similar examinations of group differences occur throughout the extant CQR literature (Chang & Berk, 2009; Knox, Burkard, Johnson, Suzuki, & Ponterotto, 2003). Furthermore, there were 11 males and 9 females in the study; the number of participants in each of these groups, therefore, fell well within Hill et al.'s (1997; 2005) stipulations for the minimal sample size necessary for a CQR analysis.

CQR is conducted in a team of three to five researchers who argue the interpretation of the data to a consensus following the three main steps. A team of three researchers was used for this study. At two different points during the process, the analysis is presented to one or two auditors who give feedback to the team on the data analysis. One auditor was used for this study.

Research team. The team for the CQR analysis consisted of the primary researcher, a Black, middle-class, Jamaican female and doctoral student in counseling psychology who had, prior to data analysis, approximately three years' experience counseling unemployed men and women in poverty. The second team member was a White, middle-class female and graduate of a masters' level counseling program who at time of data analysis was first unemployed and then underemployed. The third team member was an African American, middle-class female and masters' level counseling student who, during data analysis, was completing her practicum at an outpatient substance abuse program in New York City. The auditor was a White, middle-class

female faculty member in a counseling psychology program who had expert knowledge of conducting and auditing CQR studies.

Consistent with Hill et al.'s (1997, 2005) guidelines, the three team members openly discussed their expectations and biases about the possible results of study. This was done prior to data collection and data analysis so as to minimize the impact of these expectations and biases on the analysis. Hill et al. (1997) defined expectations as "beliefs that researchers have found based on reading the literature and thinking about and developing research questions" (p. 538). All three team members were members of a larger research team at the university that focused on these issues. As a result, team members started the analysis with prior research experience and study of issues related to poverty. The expectations of the team included the belief that the experience of both unemployment and poverty would be difficult and burdensome, resulting in participants' reporting feelings of depression and various other negative emotions. Team members also believed that the experience of being on public assistance would be described as frustrating, and expected that participants would use avoidance and other forms of negative coping to deal with difficult emotions. However, they also anticipated that participants would use spiritual and religious coping. Finally, the team expected that experiences of racism, mostly institutionalized, would be a consistent theme throughout the analysis.

Hill et al. (1997) defined researcher biases as "personal issues that make it difficult for researchers to respond objectively to the data" (p.539). The team's potential biases included the fact that the primary researcher had three years of experience working with the poor unemployed, enjoyed working with this population, and had developed a strong desire to lend voice to the frustrations of a life of poverty. The other team members, being aware of her bias, challenged the researcher throughout the analysis if she appeared to disregard parts of the

transcripts that shed a less than positive light on participants. Additionally, they challenged the researcher when she appeared to rely too strongly upon her work experience or experience collecting data in interpreting vague sections of the transcripts.

One team member was unemployed at the beginning of and during periods of the analysis. Prior to the analysis she disclosed her concern that her experience with unemployment might cloud her objectivity when analyzing the transcripts. Throughout analysis the team challenged her if she appeared to be using her experience of unemployment to interpret the reported experiences of participants. Another team member reported that her experiences of being raised in a working class family might possibly lead her to make biased interpretations when reviewing portions of transcripts in which participants talked about their struggles to make ends meet. As such, the team challenged her interpretations of the data in connection with her personal experiences of financial struggle and classism.

Additionally, two of the three team members were Black women and had experiences with racism; the team member who was White identified herself as an anti-racist. Team members agreed to challenge each other if they appeared to interpret participants' disclosures to relate to racism or if they argued for including themes of racism when participants' did not explicitly report racist themes. This was particularly important as a majority of participants identified as persons of color and it is not difficult to use the concept of racism to make interpretations of their experiences. However, at the very initial stages of CQR, Hill et al. (1997, 2005) encourage researchers to refrain from interpretations in order to summarize participants' narratives exactly as they report it.

Finally, all but one team member was new to CQR. In these situations, Hill et al. (2005) emphasized the necessity of training. As such, team members participated in months of training

prior to the data analysis. The team studied Hill et al.'s (1997) training manual and Hill et al.'s (2005) update on CQR. Exemplar dissertations and studies using CQR were also read. The team also met with an experienced CQR researcher to learn and review steps of the CQR process. The team also transcribed and analyzed one pilot interview to practice coding and coring of data prior to the actual data analysis.

Coding data into domains. The first step of data analyses consisted of coding data into domains. The team of researchers began by reviewing the interview protocol and the results of the pilot interviews and arguing to consensus on a start list of domains that represented the content of the transcribed interviews. Each researcher then independently reviewed one transcript to assign portions of that transcript, from a phrase to several sentences, to a domain. The complete transcript was sectioned and coded into domains. The team then met and argued to consensus the best possible coding of the transcript. Following this, a second transcript was sectioned and coded into domains and the team met for a second time to argue to consensus on coding. A consensus version of the two transcripts, consisting of the domain titles and all the interview data for each domain was sent to the auditor for review and feedback. The team then discussed which of the auditor's comments would be incorporated and which would not. The domain list was adjusted as necessary. All but two of the transcripts were then sectioned into domains; two transcripts were withheld from this process for a stability check (described below).

Abstracting core ideas. Core ideas are summaries of the content of each domain for a given interview. The purpose of developing core ideas is to capture the essence of what the participants say in a concise, clear manner (Hill et al., 1997). At this stage, interpretations of the meaning of the data are not made; rather the goal is to simply represent as closely as possible the participants' perspectives. The team members decided on their core ideas separately. Once this

was done, the team met and argued the core ideas to consensus. The team then submitted materials to the auditor who reviewed the core ideas and gave feedback on whether the categories were accurate and concise. The auditor's feedback included changing wording and adding additional detail to a few of the cored domains to better capture the essence of participants' stories. The team met, discussed the review, and came to consensus to incorporate the reviewer's feedback.

Cross-analysis. The cross-analysis is intended to get at a new level of abstraction (Hill et al., 1997) by reviewing data across cases for similarities. The team examined the core ideas within all the domains and clustered them into categories. The team then argued the clustering of categories to consensus and this consensus was sent to the auditor for review. The auditor's reviews included renaming domain titles to more accurately fit the content cored, collapsing two domains as the domains appeared redundant, and excluding one domain as it added very little to the analysis. By consensus, the auditor's feedback was accepted and the domains and categories were revised.

Stability check. To check the stability of findings, that is, whether new cases change the results, the two transcripts that were put aside at the beginning of the analyses were analyzed in the same manner to see if new domains, core ideas, or categories arose, or if the frequency of categories changed. The original frequency labels remained unchanged and as such the results were considered stable.

Chapter IV: Results

Fifteen domains emerged from the CQR analysis. These domains, as well as the categories represented within each domain, will be presented in this chapter. Consistent with the stipulations of Hill et al. (2005), frequency labels were applied to each category and reported. Categories applying to 20 or 21 cases were labeled *general*, those applying to 11 to 19 cases were labeled *typical*, and those applying to four to 10 cases were labeled *variant*. Categories applying to only one, two, or three cases were labeled rare and were not retained in the analysis as they are considered uncharacteristic of the study's sample. Domains, categories, and frequencies are displayed in Table 3.

Consistent with Hill et al.'s (1997) suggestions, a narrative illustrating a typical participant's experience is presented below. Hill et al. (1997) suggested that researchers construct such a narrative, or prototype, from the confluence of all categories with general or typical frequencies. In this study, participants were mostly men and mostly persons of color; as such the narrative is of an unemployed man of color.

The typical participant of this study can be represented as a 44-year-old, single, unemployed man of color who has a high school education, has been unemployed for almost three and a half years, and is supported by public assistance and food stamps. The participant would like to work and is looking for work through several means—looking in the classified ads, sending out resumes, asking people about work, and going to different agencies to get help. Work has meaning for the participant because it would allow him to provide for himself and family, and would provide him with a sense of security. He has worked for pay in the past but has become unemployed because health concerns forced him to leave work. He currently relies on government assistance to make ends meet and finds the most difficult aspect of

unemployment to be his inability to buy necessities because of lack of money. He cannot pay bills and he is not able to provide for his family; this lack of money has been the greatest disruption to his life.

Unemployment has had a significant effect on the participant's life and on his emotions. He feels sad, sometimes to the point of depression, and can feel hopeless about finding work. He also finds himself to feel angry because of his situation. He is angry with himself because of past mistakes that he believes has led him down this road. The participant holds himself in low regard; he feels worthless and his self-esteem and pride have suffered. His social life has also been negatively affected, as he has limited social interactions. The participant believes that, generally, the poor are unemployed because they lack access to adequate education.

To cope with the effects of unemployment, the participant turns to God and to his religious/spiritual beliefs. He prays, reads scriptures, and believes that God is watching over him. He also copes by talking with others and trying to keep a positive attitude despite his difficulties. He reframes his disappointments. The participant believes that his belief in God/religious practices have been the most effective way of coping with his unemployment. He also believes that the community agencies with whom he has worked have typically been helpful, even empowering.

Domains and Categories

Analysis of the transcripts yielded 16 domains. Cross-analysis of these domains revealed between three and 14 categories. The domains as well as their categories highlight participants' experiences with unemployed poverty, and will be outlined in this section.

The meaning of work. This domain describes the personal meaning of work and its importance to participants' lives. By its very nature, it also sets the stage to show what the loss

of work means to the poor unemployed. One typical category emerged from the domain—*work allows me to provide for myself/my family and provides a sense of security.* The majority of participants, in other words, found work important in that it meant that they would be able to take care of themselves and their families. A participant who had been unemployed for 8 years said, "Work means survival…having a home, not being homeless, taking care of my responsibility, my children…survival basically." Another participant explained:

> Work means… to have an income, to not only better yourself economically… [but to] see that you will fulfill your obligations when it comes down to your housing, to, comes down to your spouse and your siblings, understand? Nobody wants to have no money … when you don't have any money everything falls. You can't pay your bills, and you can't enjoy yourself.

Similarly, a variant number of participants reported that *work means independence*, often expressing discomfort with the experience of having to depend on others or the experience of not having the independence to do as they wished.

A variant number of participants emphasized in particular that *work means freedom from public assistance.* This category has special significance given the primacy of public assistance in the lives of the unemployed poor. One participant who had been unemployed for three months said, "When I work, I feel freedom because I don't have to take in welfare." Another described with disdain the prospect of being on government assistance:

> Man, how close is that to modern day slavery than anything? You see what I'm saying? So you give me a little $600 at the beginning of every month, if I'm on drugs, I'll be broke the next day if not that night or even if I'm paying say $400 for a room, out of $600 how do I eat? How do I pay the, it's, it's dead end that's not getting any better.

> You know, this is like the wound that is never going to heal. So, at least if I work, you know what I'm saying, there's always a way that I could, I can achieve, I can grow, there's always room for advancement, regardless of whatever job.

These categories suggest that participants derive much of their meaning of work in terms of the wages that work would provide, that is, its manifest functions, to use language from Jahoda (1981; 1982). However, a variant number of participants also attributed meaning to the latent functions of work (Jahoda, 1981; 1982), that is, the ability to give meaning and structure to life. A variant number of participants, for example, reported that *work provides a sense of purpose/fulfillment.* As an interviewee who had been unemployed for three years said:

> [Work] means that somebody wants something I can do, and it means I can contribute to something. It's very important, because it means there is a reason for me to be here in this world. Otherwise, sometimes I think, what am I doing here?

Along the same lines, a variant number of participants also reported that *work provided positive structure to my daily life* and that *work provides welcome opportunities to be responsible.*

Participants' reasons for and understanding of their unemployment. The second domain contained information regarding participants' perceptions of the reasons for their current unemployment and for some participants, what led to past experiences of unemployment. Additionally, participants tried to make sense of their unemployment by looking for deeper meaning, sometimes existentially and at other times citing structural injustice. Eight variant categories further described the data. One variant group of participants explained that *health concerns forced me to leave work.* One participant, for example, shared this account:

> February I was hit by a car last year, February thirteenth, and I was out of work over the limit that's allowed by law. By law you're allowed 26 weeks of disability, I was out 38

> weeks because of my injuries. So when I was feeling better to return I was told I was no longer needed.

Another interviewee also explained how poor health can lead to unemployment:

> I used to be security for [a major New York City] Hospital and a lot of things was happening, it was, it got very stressful. I've been injured on that job many times due to the patients and it just got stressful in the emergency room. And I started having anxiety attacks … my blood pressure started getting worse and it seemed like every time I went to go, wanted to go work, I say oh here comes a challenge, so my doctor say well why don't you change your line of work, which I did, and then when I went into further security they was putting me in places that I didn't like, you know I, I said oh what am I gonna do here? Now, I, here's where my health start to come in, the high blood pressure, the anxiety attacks then also I started having little trouble with my family, not my wife, you understand, I, I started getting edgy and I started suffering from depression, I used to take medication for that and for anxiety…so I say that my health played a big part. My health played a big part of why I'm not working now.

Other participants were honest about health-related problems, such as substance abuse, and how these concerns affected their ability to work. Specifically, a variant number of participants reported *my drug use got in the way of working*. One interviewee connected his drug use to his unemployment but also saw it as a negative consequence of living in an impoverished neighborhood:

> I came to be unemployed because growing up in the ghetto it's a lot of things that shorten, that shortcomes you. I got involved with drugs, it's a drug pack area…just didn't have the willingness to continue to seek a lot of things. When...you have a disease

> with drugs, you not taking it serious and just being around people that's in the same predicament that you are…I was around people like a ghost town, people that really don't want nothing out of life, so I guess that was it.

Participants also cited structural inequities that they saw as creating barriers to employment. For example, three of the variant categories in this domain were *I believe employers are discriminating against me and won't hire me*; *employers don't want to hire or keep me because of my criminal record*; and *I don't have the education and skills employers want*. For example, one interviewee who had been out of work for two years gave this account:

> It's like I said you know there are less opportunities out there for poor people and the competition is very hard. Even though you know I have skills. I think there are a lot of discriminations, because of, when people ask me you know what college did you go to? Do you have a college degree? How long you've been working? And because I was without work for two years people think that I'm not ready.

Other variant groups of participants reported other kinds of work terminations, such as *I quit after becoming dissatisfied with work* or *I was laid off from work*. For example, one interviewee gave the following reasons for quitting various jobs:

> I got tired of those fast food restaurants and I quit. Because at the time they wasn't even paying good minimum wages and I just worked twelve hours a day just to get a paycheck for one-hundred and fifty dollars…twelve hours a day! I was like, I was at Burger King, I was at, um, Kentucky Fried Chicken. You know, I did that for about what, five years, five or six years I did that, back and forth between the two of them. Then I had a whole different job. That was a good while…and that only lasted about, about a year 'cause it

> was a too quiet thing and I only got that job from somebody else. Other than that it's been hard to get a job. I haven't worked since then.

Despite the frustrations, the lack of control over health issues, being laid off, or just deciding to quit work, a variant number of participants supplied an existential explanation for their current situation by stating that *things happen for a reason*. For example, one participant had reached the point of surrendering her situation to her higher power:

> You know, I have a lot of faith…everything happens for a reason. I really believe, like you know, in my higher power. I really believe whatever He chose for me in my life is just what I'm going to go through, you know. Maybe it's a learning experience…maybe, it's, you know, there is something in it that I may not know or I may know later…you know, so I just leave it in His hands.

The effects of unemployment on participants' daily life. This domain highlighted the day-to-day lived experience of unemployed poverty. One typical category emerged: *lack of income from unemployment has disrupted my daily life*. Within this category, participants reported the devastating effects of the lack of income in their daily lives. Some were unable to pay bills or fulfill responsibilities, others were pressed into homelessness, and others were unable to even take care of basic hygiene. One participant who had been unemployed for two years described her life after becoming unemployed:

> From that point on my life went down the drain…from that point on I couldn't pay the rent, I didn't have any place to go and uh, that's why I ended being homeless because I was evicted from my apartment. I didn't have no, uhm savings in my account.

Another participant who had been unemployed for 15 months reported similar frustrations with housing because of lack of income:

> Where I live now, I pay for that apartment, the landlord abandoned that building. The building is no good now, flood in the living room, everything, and I don't have the financial thing now to get up and just leave.

Five other categories were found to be variant. A variant number of participants characterized the disruption of unemployment as *my daily life is without the structure that employment provides.* Participants spoke of boredom, having nothing to do and no reason to get out of bed, and the danger of idly hanging out in the street. Another category spoke to the daily experience of being at the mercy of government or community institutions—a variant number of participants reported *my daily survival is made possible by community or government resources*. For these participants, relying on the help of various institutions made for either a positive or a negative daily experience. One participant who had been unemployed for 12 months made mention of both the positive and negative aspects of depending on institutions as he first described his experience with the shelter system and then his relief at being able to rely on Veterans Administration Services:

> I just recently went back into the shelters…it's like being on work release, you know like prisoners on work release…'cause at 5:30 you have to get up, 7 o clock you have to get out of there and then you can't, they won't let you back in till 5 o clock, which doesn't bother me because I, I got places to go. If it wasn't for the Veteran's I'd be standing in front of the building right now.

A variant number of participants also said that *people don't value or trust me*. The participants believed that others thought they were lazy, criminal, ignorant, or worthless. As one participant said:

> That's how society view you if you are jobless. People turn their back on you because they say, you know, people might say well she's lazy she should be doing something else…people do not see what the person is doing to get ready to get a job or if the person is really looking for a job and cannot find it. Because in my case I've been looking for a job for two years now and I haven't been able to get a job. [Society] stereotyped you as lazy despite the fact that you are working very hard to find work.

One variant category spoke to the resilience of participants in creating order in their daily lives: *I find ways to stay busy throughout the day.* Structuring strategies included attending job training programs, volunteering, visiting community agencies, looking for work, and window shopping. Finally, a variant number of participants said *unemployment hasn't affected my daily routine*. These were participants who had found ways to schedule their days or believed that because they were always the "stay at home" type, they were not affected by not having much to do.

Making ends meet. This domain addressed the many ways in which the poor unemployed manage to survive. Seven variant categories illustrated not only the diversity of means of survival, but also that each participant used several different methods to make ends meet. A variant number of participants said *I rely on government assistance*; other variant categories included *I rely on community resources (e.g. churches, soup kitchens), I rely on help from family and friends, I do odd jobs* and *I budget carefully*. In addition, some participants reported *I've used illegal activities to get by*, specifying activities such as cashing out food stamps for money and selling drugs. One participant who had been unemployed for 18 months illustrated the many strategies that participants used to survive financially:

> I get my food stamps. I trade that in for money. My girl she get food stamps and she trade hers in for money. You know, I go to a program. I get a car fare check once a month. And it's all by the grace of God that, you know, I make it, you make it every month. And plus, then we renting out a room in our apartment, cause we got a two-bedroom apartment, so therefore, we rent that room out, cause you know, people need, people need help out here. Everybody need help. So, you know, she pays her rent every week, on time. You know? So, everything working out, one hand washes the other, both hand wash the face.

A variant number of participants also stated *I'm not making ends meet*. Most of these participants cited problems in finding adequate food to eat. One participant who had been unemployed for two years described the experience of not being able to make ends meet in the following way:

> I don't even try to make them meet. Because it's almost impossible, it's impossible; I can't make them meet because, because I can't even grab the two ends together and pull them together, it's impossible. So I can't even attempt to.

When asked what that experience was like for her, she replied, "It's like screaming in a house of deaf people."

The effects of unemployment on participants' social life. This domain addressed the experience of unemployed poverty as it pertained to participants' social lives. In a typical category, participants volunteered that *I've limited my interactions with friends and others since being unemployed*. Some did not want to depend on friends to pay for them to go out; others were too embarrassed about not having money. A participant who had been unemployed for three months said:

> You see, I don't have money; I can't go [out] because when you go outside you need to spend money. I feel alone too, you know…oh my God, I feel bad because my friend say Maria [not participant's real name], why you no call me? I don't want to say I don't have money, you know, I don't like that.

The impact of unemployment on participants' social life was not restricted to the newly unemployed. Another interviewee who had been unemployed for nine years said the following:

> I can't run away. You stuck, you don't have no money go nowhere, like to the movies or go like, for instance for me, I'm not from this area but from [another area of Brooklyn] so it affect me, I can't even go down there until I get some kind of money to go down there. It's frustrating, you get mad, you wanna punch a wall.

A variant number of participants specifically referenced their romantic life when discussing the impact of unemployment on their social life: *being unemployed negatively impacts my romantic life*. The participants believed that unemployment either strained existing romantic partnerships or hindered their ability to date and consequently find partners. A participant with 15 months of unemployment discussed her relationship with her partner since being unemployed:

> So now that I'm not working then I just see him just laid back and not doing nothing or the money he gets he just fuck it up, messes it up… he usually fuck it up to where there's nothing to eat, nothing, and then he looking in my face to do it, so yeah, that there yeah, almost went to jail a few times, a lot of things because I get so frustrated with him. You know, and then you know the whole time I worked you wanted or needed nothing! And now you lay here, you don't even try to work knowing that I can't, you know.

Another interviewee discussed the problems he had with dating because of his perception that women who live in his neighborhood want men who can provide for them:

> It affected me because I wanted to date certain people and I didn't, just didn't have the money. You must have money to date because don't no woman really want nobody that's broke… if you don't have any money she's gonna really need somebody and the way certain women are around here, that's the way they are. Now you can meet, you have to meet the right person that don't really value that… so you all can have a nice relationship, nice dating but like I said it's the way, it's the way we grow up in the ghetto.

The effects of unemployment on participants' family life. Categories in this domain reflected the participants' observations of the effects of unemployment on their role in the family and on their relationships with family members. A typical number of participants reported *I am not able to provide for my family.* Not being to pay household bills, buy children necessities or gifts, or send money abroad for family members often meant that children and other family would also feel the effects of poverty. A participant with two years of unemployment spoke about the deleterious effects of her unemployment and poverty on her daughter:

> Sometime my daughter says, "I need money for transportation or for eating and the university. I'm hungry, I don't have money"… she looking for a job now because, you know, she know that we need money for supplies… I don't like that she working because I like that she going to the school, you know, because it hard to be working and study because I live that life… I come from the family very poor, you know… I live the life to work and study together and I know that is no good. You know, I don't like it that my daughter live that life.

Relationships with family members also changed, as evidenced by the three variant categories in this domain. Some participants reported *I am not able to spend time with family as I would like because of lack of money*. These participants were often unable to visit family

members living in other states or to go out with family members. Participants in another variant category shared I *don't want to be around my family because I'm not working* for specific reasons such as having no money to give grandchildren, not being able repay family loans, or because of embarrassment about their unemployment and lack of money. One participant who was unemployed for two years said the following about the change in her interaction with family members:

> I try not to go around because then it's like I'm needy for things and you know, and everybody has their own life so. You know? I don't wanna be a burden, you know that and that's how I feel when I go around my family. Because I need so much, you know and I have nothing…When I had a job I go around my family, ain't nothing, 'cause I have! I have my own, I don't have to, I don't have to ask for nothing and even if I did I could pay it back!

A variant number of participants also reported that *there are more arguments/resentments in my family since I've been unemployed.* One participant who had been unemployed for six months described the following argument with his ex-wife and the mother of his son over lack of money:

> One day we got into an argument she said, she told me point blank, she said, "when are you ever gonna have some good money?". .. I went into a rage! I got into such a rage I went straight to the liquor store… I kissed my son good bye, I gave him what I gave him I went straight to the liquor store and I tell you I got drunk after she said that.

Participants' appraisal of the most difficult aspects of unemployment. One typical category emerged within this domain: *lacking money and the necessities money can buy* was most frequently considered to be the most challenging aspect of unemployment. One

participant's comments were poignant in making clear that it is not only lack of money that is difficult, but also being without the security of knowing when money will come in:

> Well, the most difficult thing is you know not having money, not looking forward to getting money. See when you employed you know that you getting money. And not knowing that you're not gonna get any money, that's it. That's the part right here.

Three variant categories also described this domain. A variant number of participants said that *not being able to provide for my family* was most difficult. Another variant number mentioned *not being productive/ wasted time* and *the process of searching for jobs* to be especially challenging aspects of unemployment. For these participants looking for work, trying to dress and interview professionally, and not getting responses from employers were reported as stressful. One interviewee described the stress of her job search:

> Trying to find a job, you know, ahm, making sure that the interview goes well, because you don't wanna screw up an interview 'cause if you screw up an interview, you not gonna get the job period. And they gonna look at you like you're dumb. And then you gotta dress professional. And then you gotta be there early if possible, I mean it's, it's stressful.

The effects of unemployment on participants' emotions. The contents of this domain address the reported affective impact of unemployment on poor unemployed persons. Two categories emerged as typical for the domain: *I feel sad and/or hopeless* and *I feel angry*. A typical number of participants expressed sadness (sometimes to the point of depression), lack of motivation, and hopelessness due to their unemployment. One participant described her hopelessness in the following way:

> Right now I feel hopeless I don't have that much, it's like I don't have anything to look forward to right now because whatever I do it doesn't work and I feel like that right now, I don't have a future. Because the more I wait, you know, to get a job, and you know like it's something I got to save some money for when I get older, it's very uh, I feel hopeless in a way.

The participant went on to describe accompanying feelings of depression:

> …I'm secluded, it makes me feel, like, depressed, it's kind of depressing when you are out of work for such a long time. And I feel like, I feel embarrassed. I don't go out and I don't socialize. Like I said before, because people usually ask you, you know, what are you doing for a living?

Another participant also reported similar themes of sadness and depression with accompanying physical pains which she considered to be the embodiment of her sadness:

> It affected my feel…uh, many, many things. Yeah, because I don't feel happy, you know. I feel so sad…Sometime I feel sick, you know? I feel depressed. Sometimes I feel pain in my heart, because when you thinking a lot about the problem that affected the heart…that's affecting my mind, you know... because when I don't work, I feel that light go out for me because I feel like I don't have…how you explain…I don't feel that I want to do nothing, you know? Sometimes I want to stay on the bed all that day.

Participants' anger about being unemployed was sometimes directed at themselves because of perceived mistakes they made in the past. These mistakes included not finishing high school, walking off a job, or incurring a criminal record. A participant with a criminal record and eight years of unemployment described his anger:

> Anger as far as things that happened in my life and things that I did as far as the life I was living, when I really didn't have to do that. My life wouldn't been ended up the way it is now. You know, so sometimes I beat myself up about that and I should have just went the right way instead of turning left …you know, I get mad at myself for that.

Other participants' anger was directed at others, including family members who they felt pressured them for money. Still other participants just felt angry in general, almost as if they walked around with anger. One interviewee explained:

> It gets me mad because I shouldn't going through this. I shouldn't be going through this because I came from a household that, you know, you worked for what you need and what you want. And right now, because of my back situation I can't do anything, it depresses me, it makes me more angry because I just, I just feel like I'm not getting what I need, you know I'm not getting what I need, blah! I'm not getting what I need right now!

When the participant was asked to describe what her anger looked like, she said: "I have an attitude, I'm cursing people out, telling people to go screw themselves."

There were also three variant categories within the domain. Variant numbers of participants said *I am stressed or anxious, I am frustrated*, and finally *I am embarrassed/hurt*. One participant, for example, shared the following experience:

> If you live on the outskirts of the city it's kinda hard to, to walk around and do things. Which is stressful too, because you know if you going job searching and you don't have the money to get from point A to point B then you gotta worry about you know, this is my last, this is my last trip on this ticket here, you know, where am I gonna go? Am I gonna be able to get back home? What am I going to do after that? You know. And

> that's, that can be real stressful. And that's, that's the unfortunate thing about being out of work, you know here you trying to find work but it's kinda hard to find work when you can't go out to find it.

The effects of unemployment on participants' sense of self. In this domain, participants described how they felt about or viewed themselves. A typical number of participants said, *because I'm unemployed I hold myself in low regard*. These participants reported feeling useless, lacking pride or dignity, and suffering from low self-esteem. One interviewee described the progression of her unemployment:

> But then it got worse because then I felt useless. I felt, what's the point, then what am I gonna do? I feel I'm not wanted, I'm not contributing to anyone.

Similarly, another participant described a loss of dignity and self-esteem related to a loss of independence:

> You feel kinda weak, it hurts your pride and your dignity…and then you start losing your self-esteem, you know you don't feel really proud about yourself. You know when you had it all going, it was alright but now that's done disappeared now, so you start losing your self-esteem, your pride and most of all you lose your independence within yourself.

One category in this domain was found to be variant: *being out of work hasn't changed how I feel about or how I see myself*. This category contrasts with the typical category in this domain in which participants reported a deleterious effect on their sense of self. One participant in this category suggested that the continued help from others was the reason that unemployment did not affect her sense of self:

> I know it wasn't my fault so it doesn't [affect how I feel], it's good because just like I said I'm getting help from somebody that's seeing me when I was at my best. Some people still have faith in me and that makes me keep faith in myself.

Coping with unemployment. Three typical categories emerged within this domain. Participants typically said *my belief in God/religious practices helps me to cope*. These participants reported praying often, reading scripture, and believing in a God who would provide for them. When one participant was asked how he coped, he made reference to his faith:

> I have my bible and I try to keep my faith up and I have good friends that help me keep my faith up. You gotta keep your faith in Jesus man, that's one thing, He's holding on to me…

Other participants' belief that God would provide for them helped them to cope with different aspects of their unemployment such as being turned down for a job:

> I still put my trust in Him [God]…He really directs everything, He's the director. You know. He pushes the direction which we should go. [There are times] I feel like I'm supposed to get this job, but in reality, that's not the job for me…I don't think He wanted me to have that job. He'll let me know the job that I'm supposed to have because He'll let me get it.

Likewise, participants' faith in a benevolent, ever present God helped them to feel supported and cared for during their distress. One participant made mention of this in the following way:

> God, nobody else, just him [helps]. I know He cares about me. I have faith in him anyway, always there. A lot of things and situations I've been in he's been helping me through it, just like I told you. He didn't make it stop to where I was out here being

> dragged off the street, going back to jail or none of that, He picked me up and let me know, keep on moving.

Participants also explained that *talking to people in my support system help me to cope*. Participants typically reported that talking to friends, to family members, or to people in a similar situation to them helped them to cope with unemployment. One participant reported that talking to men who had been in similar situations helped because it restored his pride and created a feeling of fellowship with his peers:

> And with the men's group, even if you're broke, we have it to where, alright, these two aren't working so since we're working we're gonna take care of you in the meeting tonight. So then there's no pride, I don't have to say I don't got it, I don't wanna go, because this is my brother here.

Participants also typically stressed the importance of keeping a positive attitude despite their situation: *I try to keep a positive attitude or reframe disappointment to cope*. These participants tried to remain hopeful and optimistic. They did this in part by trying to reframe their disappointments as happening for a reason or telling themselves that things could be worse. For example, one interviewee reframed her experience by telling herself she now has more time to spend with her children:

> I try to find the positive things because it's too much stress and it's not good to be with all of the negative when I have my three kids. So I try to see that sometimes I have time to be with them and I try to help them with their homework, sit down as a family to eat together, so it's also that I have to see a positive way because if not, I'll go crazy.

Eight variant categories also emerged in this domain, illustrating a spectrum of coping strategies employed by participants. Some strategies were self-reflective, such as *I cope by staying focused*

on the present and *relying on the wisdom gained from past experiences helps me to cope*. Others were more active coping strategies, such as *my leisure activities help me to cope, I get help from community resources/government assistance to cope,* and *I look for work or go to job training*. Other strategies appeared harmful or isolating, such as *I cope by trying to ignore or distract myself from difficulties*. A variant number of participants reported ignoring difficulties, even denying being unemployed, or going to bed when feeling depressed. Participants also said, *I hide my feelings/keep my feelings to myself* and *I drink /used to drink alcohol to cope* and in order to numb pain.

Participants' appraisal of the most effective coping methods. This domain contained information regarding those coping strategies that participants believed were actually effective in helping them cope with the challenges of unemployment. A typical number of participants reported *my belief in God/religious practices are effective.* Participants reported that their faith kept them motivated, eased their depression and made them feel better. One interviewee, when asked to comment on his religious faith as a coping strategy, said "It keeps the fire burning, it keeps the desire going, it keeps telling me, Jeremiah [not participant's real name], we got you." When discussing the effectiveness of her coping strategies, another participant said that she walked with a smile on her face. She explained that her ability to do that came from

> God, nobody else, just Him. I know he cares about me, I have faith in Him anyway, [it's] always there. A lot of things and situations I've been in he's been helping me through it, just like I told you. He didn't make it stop to where I was out here being dragged off the street, going back to jail or none of that, He picked me up and let me know, keep on moving.

One variant category also emerged from this domain. A variant number of participants said *volunteering/staying active is effective.* The contrast between the number of coping strategies used and the number of coping strategies actually reported to be effective is noteworthy. Many of the strategies that participants reported using, even those typically used, were not described as effective in coping with unemployment.

Participants' reflections on community resources. One category was found to be typical among participants' evaluations of the community resources and agencies with which they interacted: *community resources are helpful/empowering*. Participants found community agencies to be sources of skills training and fellowship with peers. Furthermore, they were described as helpful places that offered legal and counseling services and much needed necessities. An interviewee said this about one particular agency:

> When I came the first time, they treated me with smile, with respect. The said excuse me, they apologize if they kept me waiting. They received me even if I was a little late, they still gave me food, asked me if I wanted seconds.

A variant number of participants also said that *government assistance is adequate/helpful*. These participants were helped by government assistance to meet their basic needs. One participant who had been unemployed for two years reported an appreciation for government assistance despite the complexities of the application process:

> At the beginning it's stressful because you have to answer all these questions and go through, it's a long time, it's a long wait, so it's stressful. Sometimes I even had thought of giving up and not doing it because they actually make it a little bit hard. They ask for letters for this, letters for that, copy of this. And so it's hard, but then again I really needed it, so I had to deal with it. And now it's been very helpful…the money that they

> give me helps. They give me part for the rent. Not much, it's $400 and I have to pay $1100 but it's helped because I have to put the whole $1100 is hard. And the food stamps, it's really good because they help me …I buy the food.

On the other hand, a variant number of participants reported what they believed to be ineffective about community resources. Some said that *community resources are unhelpful/frustrating*; these participants cited overcrowded shelters, unhelpful job fairs, and conflict-ridden agencies. A variant number of participants also said that *government assistance is frustrating/demeaning*. An interviewee shared her exasperation with welfare, stating:

> It is frustrating! Going in there! Being aggravated with them damn people! You gotta sit in there for 15 hours for them to tell you no! [Sucks teeth] Or tell you yes! But you gotta wait all damn day! You gotta spend your whole day in there. And that's frustrating, that's so, my God it's sickening.

Finally, possibly due to the frustrating experiences, a variant number of participants said that *more resources are needed in the community*.

Participants' reflections on the intersection of unemployment and social class. Participants' reflections on the intersections of social class and experiences of unemployment yielded three variant categories. A variant number of participants believed that *unemployment is more difficult for the poor because other social classes have a financial cushion*. For example, one participant shared the following opinion:

> Maybe they got some assets they can fall back on, IRA's or CD's, still has some stash in the bank, something like that. But unemployed and [poor] don't have no bank account or got annuities coming in or something like that. I don't, so I, I'm quite sure [if] I was in

> another class being unemployed, you wouldn't be looking at me as you, you wouldn't see me as you see now.

Another variant group voiced the contrasting view that *unemployment is easier for the poor because they are used to struggling*:

> Well, I would believe people that's poor, you know [the way] I kind of grew up, is kind of used to dealing with little, you know, not much. [They are] kind of used to dealing with little, so it's not that hard when they have to struggle that way, because they kind of used to it... Some people that I would assume that's middle class or have money, they're not used to being without to that degree, so it might affect them more.

Finally, a third variant group saw no distinction: *there is no difference in the experience of unemployment among social classes*.

Participants' attributions for unemployment among the poor. One typical category corresponded to participants' attributions for unemployment among the poor. Typically, participants believed that *lack of education* was the primary reason for unemployment among the poor, with the suggested causes including the lack of good schools for poor communities and a lack of adequate training opportunities. As one participant put it:

> The poor man can't even get a job if he tried to because he doesn't have enough knowledge to get the job that the, the rich man knows more about, you know?! You know the person in poverty, how often do you see them go to college, you know? Have a bachelor's degree or something like that. They barely got a high school diploma.

However, as some participants discussed lack of education among the poor, it became apparent that they blamed of the poor for their own lack of education. One participant stated:

> If you middle class, you thinking lawyer, architect, physician, to send your kid to school. We’re not thinking that, we’re not, how many people in the ghetto where I grew up [said] yeah, I want to be a doctor? But you never pursue a school or medical school that would finance you or look for opportunities to gain monies to go to this school. Whereas the middle class, they would try to make sure that they child or their relative are schooled properly or have this opportunity to become a physician, a lawyer, architect, etc. etc.

There were five variant categories regarding attribution for poverty. Three had to do with structural attributions, including *racism/discrimination*, *unjust politics/social injustice*, and *no jobs or lack of opportunities in poor neighborhoods*. In a fourth variant category, the poor were described as falling victim to *drugs and alcohol* due to the extent of drug problems in poor neighborhoods. Finally, a variant number of participants offered individualistic attributions in reporting that the poor are unemployed because the *poor do not want to work/are lazy*. One such interviewee did not hold back as he described what he thought was the laziness of the poor:

> Well, unemployment among the poor because a lot of the poor are either in jail, on drugs, or just damn lazy…laying under public assistance. They want you to go to work when you sign up for public assistance. So you get some people that just want food stamps, “I ain't doing no damn work assignment. I ain't working for that little bit of money”, so then they are not going to the interviews. It's the laziness.

Participants’ experience of the interview. Participants were asked to comment on their experience of the interview. Typically, participants said that *it was good to talk and express feelings/the interview was therapeutic*. For example, one participant shared:

> This was very uplifting because you know I feel like, I feel like I just talked to a psychiatrist and I had a problem. Excuse me I felt like I just, this made my day because

you know why? If I don't talk to you I'll end up being in a park talking to myself. You understand me…I was waiting for something like this. You understand? I waiting for something like this, I feel great!

Another variant number of participants said *I enjoyed the opportunity to be helpful*, and indicated that it felt good to know that they had something worthwhile to offer another person.

Gender Differences

Splitting the data set by gender produced several changes to the category frequencies (Table 4). For example, several general categories emerged by gender where they had not existed within the full-sample analysis. Among women, emergent general categories were *work allows me to provide for myself/my family and provides a sense of security*; *I am not able to provide for my family;* and *I feel sad and/or hopeless*. An emergent general category for men was *community resources are helpful/empowering*.

Typical categories also emerged for women that had not been so classified within the full sample, and which were not typical categories for men. Women typically reported *I don't have the skills and education that employers want as* a reason for being unemployed. Other categories that were typical for women only were *I rely on government assistance* and *I budget carefully* to make ends meet. When asked to reflect on their experiences with community resources, they typically reported that *government assistance is frustrating/demeaning*. To cope with the experience of unemployment, women typically reported *my leisure activities help me to cope*.

Additionally, two categories that were originally reported as typical experiences of the participants as a whole revealed themselves to be typical experiences for women only after the analysis was split by gender. Women were found to typically report that *health concerns forced me to leave work* and *I've limited interactions with my friends and others since being*

unemployed whereas only a variant number of men reported these categories. Two typical categories emerged for men and not for women: *I find ways to stay busy throughout the day* and *I get help from community resources/government assistance*.

Most variant categories did not change when analyzed separately by gender. However, for women, eight categories that were considered variant in the full-sample analysis became rare categories for women, and as such are not representative of the women in this study. These categories included *my drug use got in the way of working;* similarly, women in the study did not endorse *drugs/alcohol* as an attribution for unemployment among the poor. Women rarely reported that *community resources are unhelpful/frustrating* or I *cope by staying focused on the present. Searching for jobs* was rarely reported as the most difficult experience of unemployment for women, and no woman in the study reported *not being productive/wasted time* as a difficulty that she had experienced. Finally, a rare number of women attributed unemployment among the poor to *no jobs* or believed the poor unemployed to be *lazy*.

Other categories that were initially labeled as variant experiences for the full sample became rare experiences for men. A rare number of men reported *I quit after becoming dissatisfied with work*, *I believe things happen for a reason*, or *I don't have the education and skills employers want* as reasons for their unemployment. Men rarely reported *I budget carefully* when describing how they make ends meet or that *I am not able to make ends meet*. They also rarely reported that they were *not able to spend time with family as I would like*. Finally, while a variant number of women reported that *I hide my feelings/keep my feelings to myself*, only a rare number of men reported this.

Chapter V: Discussion

This study sought to add to the existing literature on unemployment by addressing the lived experiences of the poor unemployed, a population often ignored in the literature (Fryer & Fagan, 2003) but, paradoxically, one that bears the direst consequences of unemployment (Wilson, 1996). Living in poverty and with unemployment can be tremendously difficult for individuals and their communities; not only do the poor unemployed experience financial strain and material deprivation but as poor persons they also bear the burden of negative stereotypes and public denigration in ways that other social classes do not (Bullock, Wyche, & Williams, 2001; Cozzarelli, Wilkinson, & Tagler, 2001; Gans, 1995; Hays, 2003; Wilson, 1996).

The denigration of the poor unemployed can be observed in the questions that are part of public discourse and government debate. These questions include, do the poor want to work? Are they deserving of help? What policies are needed to make them more responsible? With regard to the latter, the widespread assumption of irresponsibility among the poor has been interpreted as a guiding motivation behind the development of the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Act of 1996) (Albert and Skolnick, 2006; Bialik, 2011; Hays, 2003). It was hoped that the results of this study would give voice to this marginalized population by further explicating their experiences. Additionally, the study aimed to shed light on how the poor unemployed cope with their experiences, thereby adding to both the extant unemployment and coping literature as well as unearthing new data for the field of psychology.

The discussion section will begin with an elucidation of the results to answer the five research questions of this study:

1. What are the experiences of unemployment specific to unemployed persons in poverty?

2. What experiences are appraised as most stressful?

3. What is the psychological impact of these experiences on poor unemployed persons?

4. What personal and social resources and coping strategies are used by the poor unemployed to cope with unemployment?

5. What coping strategies are deemed to be most effective in managing the experience of unemployment?

The discussion will then address the place of the findings with regard to the existing literature and the implications for clinical practice. Finally, the limitations of the study and suggestions for future research will be explored.

The economic climate in which the study took place should also be mentioned, given that it lends context to participants' narratives and is helpful in appreciating the reality of their lived experiences. This study began in the fall of 2008, an era that the National Bureau of Economic Research (2008) declared a recession, or a time of "significant decline in economic activity spread across the economy, lasting more than a few months, normally visible in production, employment, real income, and other indicators" (p.1). Lehman Brothers, a prominent securities firm, declared bankruptcy, and Merrill Lynch, one of the world's leading financial management companies was sold. The *New York Times* heralded these events as some of the most dramatic in Wall Street history (Sorkin, 2008).

At the time of these interviews, the unemployment rate hovered at approximately 9.5 percent, more than twice the unemployment rate at the same time ten years prior (United States Department of Labor, 2008). The statistics in New York City were similarly high; moreover, poor and working class neighborhoods had up to three times the unemployment rates of middle class to wealthy neighborhoods (Fiscal Policy Institute, 2009). The poor were being pushed

further to the margins as people with more education and skill competed for fewer entry level jobs (*The Economist, 2011*). Additionally, the ability of the poor to rebound from crisis was undermined by public spending cuts and increases in prices (*The Economist*, 2011). Undoubtedly, the time in which this study was undertaken was an especially significant one in understanding the experience of unemployed poverty and in giving a platform to the voices of the poor unemployed.

Research Questions

In this section, the study's findings will be explored in the context of each of the five original research questions.

Research Question 1: What are the experiences of unemployment specific to unemployed persons living in poverty? With regard to this central question, participants' experiences can be understood from examining material primarily from four domains: a*) participants' reasons for and understanding of their unemployment, b*) *the effects of unemployment on participants' daily life, c)the effects of unemployment on participants' social life,* and *d) the effects of unemployment on participants' family life*.

Varied reasons for unemployment. The first domain, *participants' reasons for and understanding of their unemployment*, illustrates the many ways in which participants have come to be unemployed, the barriers that exist to re-employment, and their experiences of these circumstances. It also challenges prevailing stereotypes of the poor as lazy and immoral (Bullock, Wyche, and Williams, 2001; Cozzarelli, Wilkinson & Tagler, 2001) and the viewpoint of the PRWORA that the poor are unemployed because of their irresponsibility and lack of motivation to work (Albert and Skolnick, 2006; Hays, 2003). The remaining four domains

highlight the material deprivation, lack of structure, and daily humiliation intrinsic to a life of unemployed poverty and the effects of these experiences on social and family life.

Participants' responses indicated no widely-agreed upon reason for their unemployment. Participants reported variously that they were forced to leave work because of health concerns, because they were laid off from work when companies closed or needed to cut costs, because they left unsatisfying work, or when they lost jobs due to drug use. Participants were also jobless after incarceration because of discriminatory hiring practices that disadvantaged people with criminal records. The diversity of reasons for these participants' unemployment calls into question the argument that irresponsibility on the part of the poor leads to unemployment.

The results also highlight the structural barriers that participants faced in finding work, such as inadequate education and skill, discrimination, and prior criminal records, characteristics that coincide with the findings of other studies of poverty (Danzinger, Kalil, & Anderson 2000; Dworsky & Courtney, 2007; Lee & Vinokur, 2007). Perhaps the presence of these barriers explained the chronic unemployment among participants. Sixty-two percent of the participants were unemployed for two years or more, the average length of unemployment was 40.38 months, and the median length of unemployment was 24 months (Table 1). These figures contrasted with United States labor statistics of that time, in which the average length of unemployment was 20 weeks and the median length of unemployment was 10 weeks (Ilg, 2011). The difference in numbers suggests that the economic recession of the day alone could not fully explain the degree of participants' unemployment.

Structural inequities were referenced even when participants remained unemployed after quitting work. For some participants, intolerable working conditions caused them to quit. One

participant explained how tired she was of working long hours for a wage that she could not live on:

> I got tired of those fast food restaurants and I quit. Because at the time they wasn't even paying minimum wages and I just worked twelve hours a day just to get a paycheck for one-hundred and fifty dollars…twelve hours a day!

A second participant detailed a harsh working environment in which she was punished for taking a day off:

> I was working at [name of place] and I became unemployed, I was not fired. I just did not want to continue working, because I could not stand having people curse me all day, every day…and because when I needed a day off, and I asked for it, they said sure you can ask for days off anytime you need it. And I said I'm coming back exactly this day and I was back that day. They didn't schedule me for that day and they made me wait hours and hours and sometimes all day.

These participants' narratives point to the systematic injustices that create unemployment and maintain poverty. The participants quoted above at one point found themselves among the working poor—working for long hours, in subpar conditions, unable to adequately provide for themselves (Newman, 1999). When they could no longer tolerate these conditions -- conditions which have also been documented to be hazardous to mental health (Dooley, 2003; Dooley & Catalano, 2003; Dooley & Prause, 2003; Friedland & Price, 2003; Jensen & Slack, 2003; Prause & Dooley, 1997) -- they quit their jobs and joined the ranks of the unemployed poor. However, structural barriers make it hard to find adequate work.

In general, participants' understanding of their unemployment varied, but there was considerable evidence that participants believed that the labor market was challenging to

negotiate and that their life circumstances, be it ill health, criminal records, or lack of education and skill, made it difficult for them to be gainfully employed. The discussion will segue to an exploration of the lived experiences of unemployed poverty as illustrated by the effects of unemployment on participants' daily lives and on their social and family lives.

Disrupted daily lives. The results illustrated lives riddled by disruptions due to lack of income, resources, and power. Participants talked about becoming homeless, being unable to move out of substandard housing, being unable to purchase necessities, being unable to afford transportation, and being unable to enjoy things that others take for granted. The following quote illustrates the host of disruptions that participants had to endure because of their unemployment and poverty:

> Where I live now I pay for that apartment, the landlord abandoned that building, the building is no good now, flood in the living room, everything, and I don't have the financial thing now to get up and just leave...I don't get to buy clothes like I used to, I gotta go to the Goodwill, stuff like that. I can't dress like I want to. But I try you know, but it's just a big difference, big letdown…

The experiences of deprivation were being lived out within the context of desire and effort to escape them, but with an accompanying difficulty in doing so. Participants' narratives were reminiscent of the material deprivation and lack of power to which the World Development Report of 2000/2001 (World Bank, 2000) referred in describing poverty as a condition in which there is a lack of basic necessities and a lack of access to power and security.

The theme of deprivation also ran through participants' reports that their lives were without structure. This lack of structure can literally be dangerous for unemployed persons in poverty because of the communities in which they live and socialize. One participant

emphasized how dangerous it was for him to stand on the street corner because he had nowhere to go:

> You know you got nowhere to go, there's nothing to do! And you become stagnated; this is how you can get in trouble. I could be sitting on a corner standing next to some people, 'cause I have nowhere to go, and I don't know what they have on them… let's say, say the cops do roll by…now you're guilty by association. Again stop and frisk, profiling, a lot of this comes into it because if I was on my way to a job or going somewhere, I don't have the time to stand [there].

For this participant and others like him, a life of unemployed poverty limited available choices and increased the likelihood of coming under suspicion by the wider society.

In a similar vein, participants' stories reflected experiences of daily humiliations. One of the categories which illuminated this the most was the category *people don't value or trust me.* This category highlighted participants' experiences of disregard and devaluation because of their position as poor unemployed persons. The narratives of these participants' experiences with unemployment mirror the narratives of participants in other studies that investigated the lived experience of poverty (Collins 2005; Hays, 2003; Wilson, 1996). In this study, the experiences that led participants to believe that others do not trust or value them seemed to be a combination of society's stigmatization of the poor and the 'pull yourself up by your bootstraps' mentality of U.S. culture that emphasizes the role of individual effort in success. Notably, participants gave this account of their experiences in an economic climate in which unemployment was widespread. This juxtaposition suggests that distrust of the poor is so ingrained that even during times of well-known employment scarcity, society may be readily willing to believe the worst regarding poor workers' inability to gain employment.

Finally, not all participants believed that unemployment disrupted their daily lives, as evidenced by participants who reported that *unemployment hasn't affected my daily routine*, a variant category in the domain *the effects of unemployment on participants' daily* life. Closer examination of this category however, yielded conflicting results. Five participants reported that their daily routine was unaffected, yet two of these participants also reported financial strain, which *is* a disruption to daily life, with one of the two participants reporting at another point in the interview that, "it [unemployment] affect me, I can't put food on the table and if you could put food, it only be a very small amount, little bit." A third participant also reported the dire consequences of unemployment to his life at other points in the interview. Another participant reported, "I try not to think about it" before stating that her participation in an internship helps her days to be unaffected by unemployment -- suggesting that to cope, she prefers not to think of her life's disruptions but also that she has found ways to structure her life. Only one person believed that unemployment did not affect her daily routine because she is a "stay-at-home person." Given these stated contradictions, it may be more accurate to say that only rarely did participants believe that unemployment was *not* a disruption to their daily lives.

Disrupted social lives. The domain *the effects of unemployment on participants' social life* highlighted isolation or loneliness due to disruption of friendship and romantic networks. Participants stated that they had limited interactions with friends since being unemployed and that being unemployed was an impediment to a satisfying romantic life. Participants cited lack of money and embarrassment as reasons for not interacting with others in the way that they either used to or would like to. Participants' limited interactions with others dovetail with psychological theory and research that has long asserted that friendship, connection with others, and social networks are basic human needs that help individuals to develop and thrive

(Knickmeyer, Sexton, & Mishimura, 2002). Goodman, Smyth, and Banyard (2010) also noted that, for the poor in particular, the pragmatic and emotional resources available in social networks alleviate powerlessness and dearth of opportunities to change people's lived realities. Isolation cuts people off from potential social, economic, and political resources. However, social isolation seems to be common in poor communities (Mickelson & Kubzansky, 2003 as cited in Goodman et al., 2010).

Not all participants reported a disruption in their social networks; results indicated that a number of both men and women reported that unemployment had had no effect on their social lives. One participant, for example, reported that she had never had a social life or friends because of a dysfunctional upbringing, and as such unemployment had not affected her in this manner. Other participants seemed to indicate that their willingness to ask for monetary help and their reliance on friendship networks for support had in fact been their saving grace.

Disrupted family lives. The final domain considered to elucidate the experience of unemployed poverty is *the effects of unemployment on participants' family life*. The majority of participants reported unambiguously that unemployment had deleterious effects on family life. There was no category in this domain that detailed positive or no effect of unemployment on family life. This is significant because other domains, as previously discussed, have contained contradictory categories. For this sample of participants, the experience of unemployed poverty was particularly marked by a disruption in family life.

A review of the four categories within this domain points toward a lack of resources and isolation from family as the main causes of disruptions. The categories are, *I am not able to provide for my family*, *there are more arguments/resentments in my family since I've been unemployed*, *I don't want to go around family because I'm not working,* and *I am not able to*

spend time with family as I would like. An interpretation of this domain suggests that a lack of income seemed to result in a majority of persons not being able to provide for children and other family members, perhaps leading to further arguments and resentments for some.

Second, participants seemed to be isolated from family members because of embarrassment or because they could not afford to visit or spend time with family. Participants reported being embarrassed by their lack of finances, and they feared that they were a burden to other family members. This aspect of the experience, especially in the domain, *I don't want to go around family because I'm not working,* closely mirrors the social isolation mentioned in the discussion on the effects of unemployment on participants' social life. The isolation from family cuts these participants off from the resources that poor families may be able provide to each other (Boyd-Franklin, 1995). As the participant above noted, reciprocity is almost impossible under the financial strain of unemployed poverty, and if the families themselves are poor, reciprocity will be needed at some point (Goodman et al., 2010). For some participants then, it is better to stay away from family than to face this impossibility.

Research Question 1: Summary of the findings. In summary, the experience of unemployment specific to persons in poverty appears to be one of disrupted lives in which material deprivation, experiences of daily humiliation, and distrust by wider society are prevalent. In addition, participants appear socially isolated, mostly because of embarrassment, which in turn deprives them of the social and pragmatic resources inherent in friendship and family networks. It is an unfortunate cycle in which many participants are caught. Participants' lived realities are, however, not without areas of resilience which will be further considered in the discussion of participants' methods of coping with unemployment.

Research Question 2: What experiences are appraised as most stressful? An experience frequently appraised to be the most difficult was that of lacking money and the necessities money can buy. Participants had difficulty gaining access to housing, food, and transportation –basic necessities that are essential for everyday human life. This scarcity is necessarily stressful and it is not surprising, therefore, that participants referred to this deficiency as the most difficult aspect of unemployment. One participant, in bewilderment, described his experience as "crazy" when he reflected on the uncertainty of eating a decent meal or even a meal at all because of a lack of income. Not only did this participant appear bewildered by his experience, he seemed to indicate that people who were not in his predicament did not understand the lived realities of unemployed poverty. This sentiment—that others did not quite get it—was poignantly illustrated by another participant who described the experience as "screaming in a house full of deaf people."

Lack of adequate housing, experienced by over half of the sample, was also mentioned among the difficulties created by a lack of money. Safe, secure housing can provide respite from the stresses of a daily life of unemployment, but there was no such respite for many participants in this study. For some participants, homelessness or inadequate housing was a consequence of unemployment as they became unable to keep up with rent payments. For others, homelessness was not a direct consequence of unemployment, but their unemployment made it more difficult for them to transition out of homelessness. Regardless of the means of entry into homelessness or inadequate housing, participants were frustrated with their lot

Deprivation of basic necessities can make regaining employment more difficult. Housing issues or homelessness, for example, have been considered a situational barrier to employment (Danzinger et al., 2000; Dworsky & Courtney, 2007; Lee & Vinokur, 2007). It is difficult to

look for and sustain employment when one's housing is unstable. Lack of money for public transportation is also a barrier to employment as transportation is needed to go on job searches and interviews.

A number of participants reported stress associated with the inability to take care of their children as they would like. This finding underscores another theme that was corroborated in other interviews: participants who are unable to provide for their families not only have to deal with their own distress but must watch, sometimes helplessly, as family members and children suffer also. Shipler (2004) described the inability to take care of one's children as "a most painful price of poverty" (p. 207) and an experience that can leave poor parents feeling at their very cores like failures. One participant described this experience in the following way: "realizing that they [children] asked for something you can't provide, that's a hard thing for a parent…that leaves a real gaping hole inside the spirit."

Research Question 2: Summary of findings. In summary, a loss of the ability to meet one's basic needs—that is, a loss of the manifest functions of work (Jahoda 1981;1982)—was cited to be the most difficult experience of, and by extension, the most stressful experience of unemployment. As mentioned earlier, however, lack of adequate housing, clothing, and food is a deprivation of people's ability to live a genuinely human life. It follows naturally that these and other experiences mentioned by participants would have a deleterious effect on their psychological well-being. This probability leads to a consideration of the third research question—what psychological impact do these experiences have on participants?

Research Question 3: What is the psychological impact of these experiences on poor unemployed persons? The material from two domains best illustrates the psychological impact of unemployed poverty on participants: *effects of unemployment on participants' emotions* and

the *effects of unemployment on participants' sense of self*. A perusal of the typical categories within these domains suggests that participants typically feel sad and/or hopeless, are angry, and hold themselves in low regard because of their unemployment – feelings that are closely linked to depression (Heatherton & Wyland, 2003).

Sadness and hopelessness. The narratives of several participants may have been indicative of depression. Participants reported feeling "sad," "depressed," "despair[ing]," "hopeless," "unmotivated," "in the dark," "physically sick," "callous," and "despondent." Some participants reported that they slept more and did not talk to others as much, and one participant reported that she had stopped looking for jobs within the week of the interview because she felt sad and unmotivated. Specific reasons cited for sad mood and hopelessness included inability to find work, difficulties in the job search process, inability to meet basic needs, dependence on community resources, and loss of the latent functions of work.

Unemployment seemed to exert its impact upon participants' moods in multifaceted ways. In addition to being unemployed, a number of participants lacked the human capital to acquire jobs in a struggling economy. As one of the participants noted, each time she looked for work she had to face the grim reality that she was not qualified for many jobs. For other participants, unemployment was an added burden to an already difficult life. Participants faced a host of misfortunes including ill health and homelessness. One participant reported that her unemployment made her "more depressed" and that she consequently "went into a hole" because she "just didn't want to deal with nothing else."

The themes garnered from participants' narratives are strikingly similar to items of the Beck Depression Inventory (BDI; Beck, Ward, Mendelson, Mock, & Erbaugh, 1961), a widely-used instrument for measuring depression (Sterk, Theall, & Elifson, 2006). For example, the

BDI assesses the severity of sadness, irritation, loss of interest, pessimism, and worthless as indicators of depressed mood. These were obvious in participants' reports and suggest that a majority of participants exhibited mild to moderate depressive symptoms at some point during their unemployment.

Other indicators that participants may have been experiencing mild to moderate depressive symptoms are the anxiety and tension that they reported as indicated by the variant category *I am stressed/anxious*, the agitation that they experienced as indicated by the typical category, *I am angry*, and the widespread experience of low self-esteem as indicated by the typical category *because I'm unemployed I hold myself in low regard*. Over a half of depressed persons also experience anxiety and tension (Klerman & Wiessman, 1980). Additionally, depressed persons are also known to experience agitation (Klerman & Wiessman, 1980) and low self-esteem (Heatherton & Wyland, 2003).

Anger. A majority of participants reported that their unemployment made them feel angry. Participants' patience wore thin and anger mounted as a number of daily burdens increased their frustration. One participant first described how maddening it was not to have money and then further elaborated that his anger was evident when he got into fights with others:

> It's frustrating, you get mad…It makes you mad because you don't have no money in your pocket; you know what I'm saying? And if you have money, it's very little, you can't, you gotta stretch and you don't have a job, forget it!...I keep it inside, I keep it inside. I really keep it inside, I don't let it out. If it come out, it's gonna come out when I fight somebody or something like that, o.k.

Participants were also angry with themselves; some participants blamed themselves for past mistakes or circumstances that limited their ability to compete well in the job market. Other

participants did not appear to be angry at themselves or at any other specific people but were angry in the face of a system that was not working in their favor despite their efforts.

It is important to note that participants described their anger, irritability, and argumentativeness as deriving from and existing within the context of the stresses of unemployment and poverty. Popular media messages sometimes convey that the poor are hostile people with myriad behavioral problems because of poor socialization and corrupt values handed down to them by older generations (Gans, 1995). These messages do not take into consideration the full story—that unrelenting stress and unfulfilled goals can lead to aggressive behavior (Baron & Byrne, 1997). In fact, theories of social psychology posit that frustration that is viewed as illegitimate or unjustified produce stronger aggression than frustration that is expected or legitimate (Baron & Byrne, 1997). By way of this argument, it seems only logical that participants in this study felt angry when reflecting on their experience.

Low self-regard. Other indicators of the psychological impact of unemployment are derived from the effects of unemployment on participants' sense of self. A majority of participants reported that they held themselves in low regard because of their unemployment. For example, one participant made the following statement to suggest that his experiences left him feeling on the fringes of society, as though he did not count: "Most people want to work, and not being able to find a job is something that, I guess, you know, you feel like you waiting for a handout. I feel like I don't count." In a similar vein, several participants reported feeling "useless" and "worthless", with "lost" self-esteem and pride. Participants believed themselves to be failures as parents, to be worthless in comparison to working people, and to be unable to reach their goals. They also reported losing pride and confidence due to their dependence on others

and because of unsuccessful job applications/interviews. From these accounts it appears that the situation of unemployed poverty has a harmful effect on self-esteem.

Self-esteem is an evaluation or attitude about the self as either worthy or unworthy (Heatherton & Wyland 2003). Historically, sociologists and social psychologists cite Cooley's (1902) theory of the looking glass self as a method by which high or low self-esteem is developed; so much so that Gecas and Shwalbe (1983) noted that the theory "is close to being an axiom within sociology" (p.77). According to Cooley's theory, people's self-concepts are molded on the evaluations of others in their social milieu (Gecas &Schwalabe, 1983; Heatherton & Wyland, 2003). From this standpoint, a category such as *people don't value or trust me* could help to explain participants' low self-regard. Participants lived in an environment in which they were viewed in a derogatory manner, mistrusted, and devalued because of their unemployment and poverty. These views, after some time, may have become internalized by participants.

Some scholars argue that Cooley's theory of the looking glass self can erroneously color people as passive because it does not take into account the active role that people play in their environments (Grecas & Schwalbe, 1983). This, coincidentally, is similar to Perry's (2000) critique of the vast unemployment literature, in that quantitative studies that simply identify a relationship between unemployment and other indicators of well-being, such as self-esteem, can make unemployed persons out to be passive recipients of their fate. An alternative perspective based on the concept of self-efficacy is that "we come to know ourselves and to evaluate ourselves from actions and their consequences and from our accomplishments and the products of our efforts" (Gecas & Schwalabe, 1983 p. 79).

From the perspective of self-efficacy, participants may have developed low self-regard because of unsuccessful efforts to find work or unsuccessful efforts to change and/or manage their situations. This was evidenced in participants' narratives. One participant said,

> I just feel like I have no worth! 'Cause in the beginning it wasn't that bad 'cause you know you think ok you gonna get a job. Couple of months go by and you don't get a job and you like, alright go to school. You go to school and then you still don't get no job and now it's like, alright this is ridiculous now! This has gone too far. I done did this, this, this, and this. Why am I not working?

Another participant reflected on his inability to live up to his expected role as a man because of his unemployment and how this consequently affected his self-worth:

> Sometimes it make me feel low and less of a man. You know? If I ask this person for that, alright once I get that and that's gone, then what, I'm going to ask somebody else? Then ask somebody else? You know, like, it just don't fit with me. And then I might have to pay the person back and how am I going to pay them back if I don't have, you know, nothing to pay them back with?

These narratives suggest that participants were actively involved in trying to change their situation, their unemployment or their ability to provide for themselves or others. When their efforts failed, participants felt badly about themselves.

Participants' reports of low self-worth also reflected the influence of a popular American cultural value, the "ideology of individualism" which Feagin (1975) alleged included the belief that "economic failure is an individual's own fault and reveals lack of effort and other character defects" (p. 91-92). It may be more accurate, then, to state that a combination of Cooley's 'looking-glass self' theory and the concept of self-efficacy best explain participants experiences

with low self-regard. Participants were active in trying to change their situations by trying to obtain jobs and by seeking assistance. However, when these efforts were unsuccessful, they internalized the dominant cultural values to blame themselves for their lack of success. This self-blame occurred despite the fact that participants reported discrimination and a lack of cultural capital -- a lack of education, racism, and/or other social injustice -- to be causes of unemployment among the poor. This exemplifies how deeply internalized dominant cultural values can be, and how these internalized values can affect self-esteem even in the face of other beliefs (Russell, 1996).

Not all participants however, held themselves in low regard. Some participants reported that being unemployed did not change their self concepts as seen in the variant category *being out of work hasn't changed how I feel about/see myself*. Participants did not often give explanations for why this was so. However, one participant made mention of the fact that people's faith in her helped her to continue to have faith in herself. She said the following:

> I know it [unemployment] wasn't my fault… it's good [my self-esteem] because just like I said, I'm getting help from somebody that's seen me when I was doing my best. Some people still have faith in me and that makes me keep faith in myself.

This participant's narrative suggests two things. First, her self-worth was not harmed because she did not blame herself for her situation—her attributions were not individualistic. Second, community support seems to have helped to buffer the effects of unemployed poverty, a finding that is consistent with other studies on the effects of poverty on well-being (Ali, Hawkins, & Chambers, 2010).

Research Question 3: Summary of findings. In summary, participants' experiences of unemployed poverty had a negative impact on mood and self-esteem. Themes of sadness, anger,

and low self-esteem further suggested that participants may have been experiencing mild to moderate depressive symptoms. Participants' reported feeling sad, despairing, hopeless, and unmotivated because of the lost latent functions of work, failed efforts to find work, and an inability to meet their basic needs. Participants' were also angry at themselves and towards others because of frustrated goals and regrets over past decisions which they believed contributed to their unemployment. Feelings of worthlessness and low self-esteem were also pervasive; many participants viewed themselves to be failures as parents and useless in society. It appeared as if participants came to devalue themselves in much the same way that others devalued them, and lost self-efficacy when their efforts to find work was unsuccessful. Furthermore, participants' narratives suggested that participants had internalized the dominant cultural value of individualism, which contributed toward their location of blame within themselves (Feagin, 1975; Russell, 1996).

Research Question 4: What personal and social resources and coping strategies are used by the poor unemployed to cope with unemployment? Despite the damaging effect of unemployed poverty on well-being, many participants tried to actively cope with their feelings and experiences. Some participants, for example, reported that their coping mechanisms helped to alleviate sadness and feelings of low self-regard. An exploration of participants' coping strategies therefore helped to further elucidate the experience of unemployed poverty by highlighting participants' efforts to manage their experiences.

Two domains best illustrate the personal and social resources and coping strategies used by the poor unemployed to cope. These are *coping with unemployment* and *making ends meet*. Participants utilized a host of coping strategies to manage their experience of unemployed poverty and to make ends meet. In fact, across domains, 17 strategies were found to be used by

participants. A basic assumption of stress theory is that individuals are active in dealing with stress (Milburn & D'Ercole, 1991). Relatedly, Pargament (1997) in a discussion of coping argued that "the maxim stressful life events cause distress is too simple" (p. 80-81) because people are actively engaged in transacting their environments. Undoubtedly, these assumptions are met in this sample; participants actively dealt with the stress of their daily lives in a variety of creative ways.

Problem-focused coping strategies. Participants engaged in a range of strategies to find work and to make ends meet. These efforts are probably best understood using Lazarus and Folkman's (1984) concept of problem-focused coping which is defined as the effort utilized to manage or alter problems causing distress.

Strategies to make ends meet. Participants' engagement in negotiating their environments is captured by the domain, *making ends meet*. Participants employed a host of resourceful strategies to combat the material deprivation they experienced. These strategies included relying on community resources, doing odd jobs, budgeting, getting help from government assistance, getting help from family and friends, and even using illegal activities to get by.

With regard to community resources, participants found themselves looking for security in soup kitchens, churches, shelters, and Goodwill. They were acutely aware of the importance of these resources to their daily lives. Community agencies appeared to play a vital role, in that government assistance, although viewed as helpful by some participants, rarely seemed provide enough means to alleviate participants' financial strain. From participants' reports, it seems that community agencies may play an even more crucial role in the lives of the homeless

unemployed, who without the support of these agencies would not get much respite from the shelter experience.

Some participants were frank about their use of illegal activities to help them get by. Two illegal activities were mentioned most frequently: selling drugs in the past and selling food stamps. Poverty scholars suggest that activities like these are often used to argue the *culture of poverty* theory (Gans, 1995; Hays, 2003; Wilson, 1996). This theory postulates that criminal behavior has taken root in poor communities because of deviant values passed down from one generation to the next. According to this view, illegal activities are conducted by misfits from weak family units who perpetuate a culture of corrupted behavior. Proponents of the culture of poverty theory also disparage the welfare system because of its believed tendency to perpetuate laziness and denigrate the value of work among poor people.

Critics of this theory however, argue that this perspective constitutes a “cultural demonization of the poor” (Hays, 2003 p. 181) that ignores the structural inequities that create widespread material deprivation in the first place. Others, like Reimen (1984) in his classic book, *The Rich Get Richer and the Poor Get Prison,* argue that the criminal justice system in the Unites States is rife with failures and inequities that disadvantage the poor and overlook crimes committed by the wealthy, resulting in public hostility towards and fear of the poor.

In this study, participants argued that the illegal activities are ways for them to surmount their material deprivation. Participants clearly indicated a desire for and value placed upon work, yet their narratives illustrated persons in need of making ends meet. For example, one participant detailed his experience of turning to drugs after becoming unemployed:

> Work started getting slow, then [it] just drift, and the next thing I know, I was doing day’s work here and there. Then altogether I stopped doing all that. Then that’s what like

> turned me into like, I started dealing with my man, trying to sell drugs to make ends meet… I wound up trying to sell drugs to get money, you know.

Strategies to find work. Participants were also actively engaged in looking for work. At the time of interviewing all but one participant reported engagement in the job search. Participants reported looking in classified ads, going online, visiting the Department of Labor, and attending job training and work readiness programs. As coping strategies, participants believed that their efforts kept them hopeful, busy, and prepared for work opportunities. Even when participants were doing other things their job search was not far from their minds as participants reported that they tried to be always prepared to take advantage of job opportunities that might present themselves.

Emotion-focused coping strategies. In addition to problem-focused strategies, participants attempted to manage the emotional toll that that their experiences placed on them. These efforts can be understood as emotion-focused coping strategies, which Lazarus and Folkman (1984) defined as attempts to regulate the emotional response to a situation. Participants talked to others in their support systems, reframed disappointments, and even suppressed feelings to cope. Interestingly, talking to others and reframing disappointments were two of the most common coping strategies used, suggesting that participants depended heavily on emotion-focused strategies to cope with their experiences.

Relying on social support. A majority of participants stated that talking to people in their support system helped them to cope. Participants spoke of turning to friends and family and sometimes professional helpers for support. A few participants also spoke of the benefits of talking with others who had been through or who were going through similar situations. The benefit gained from talking to others, especially those in similar situations, may be connected to

the principle of universality, according to which people discover that they are not unique in their struggles (Yalom, 1995). This experience of universality is considered to be therapeutic and as such, it is not surprising that participants found it to be valuable in dealing with the emotional toll of their lived reality.

There is some contradiction between the reported coping strategy of talking to others and participants' previous accounts of having limited interactions with friends and others. Participants mentioned being socially isolated, yet they also seemed aware that talking to people could help them to cope. Possibly, it was the feeling of embarrassment seen in the category *I am embarrassed* that kept participants isolated even though they were aware that socializing with others could possibly be helpful. The following quote by a participant seem to reflect this notion: "I haven't called my family in Puerto Rico, 'cause I, I don't want to tell them where I'm at." This participant later clarified by saying, "You know, I'm homeless, it's like, what, you know, what could I possibly have to tell them?" The idea that embarrassment can lead to social isolation was posited by Sarnoff and Zimbardo (1961), who found that people prefer to be alone rather than with others when faced with the possibility of an embarrassing encounter.

Reframing disappointments. A majority of participants also reported trying to keep a positive attitude or reframing disappointments to cope. Participants reframed disappointments and problems by putting a positive spin on them, for example, by reminding themselves that others were in worse predicaments, by being grateful for their health, or by believing that the disappointments and problems were opportunities to grow stronger. Participants reported that they reframed their experiences in an attempt to remain hopeful, optimistic, and motivated, even when their situations were difficult. For example, one participant reframed his situation as:

> It made me a stronger person, you know, and those experiences, you know, I write down in my journal or how I'm feeling for that day. And then in my music I write down those experiences as far as things I been around, things I did, things I see, you know? It makes me a little more creative in things to talk about.

Another participant who was homeless and living in a shelter reported that reading about and realizing that others had more problems than she did "just helps me deal."

As Pargament (1997) wrote, reframing has many purposes: "Suffering may become something explainable, bearable, and even valuable. Reframing is designed to conserve significance: to soften the blows of crises, to reaffirm that life has meaning in spite of its pain, to protect the sacred, however it may be defined" (p. 221-222). Studies on the effect of positive reframing have suggested that reframing can reduce depression and other negative emotion because it helps persons to attend to the more positive aspects of their experience (Kraft, Claiborn, & Dowd, 1985). Furthermore, positive reframing may encourage persons to engage in problem-focused coping (Folkman & Maskowitz, 2004). Therefore, keeping a positive attitude may have been helpful in keeping participants engaged in their job searches.

Denying or suppressing negative affect. Not all coping strategies utilized by participants appeared adaptive. Several participants reported *I drink or used to drink alcohol to cope, I cope by trying to ignore or distract myself from difficulties,* and *I hide my feelings/keep my feelings to myself*. These categories appeared to be efforts to deny, suppress, or numb negative affect. Emotional suppression is a form of avoidance that can lead to isolation, and a fragmented sense of self (Fosha, 2000). Given the host of personal and social problems that can arise from alcohol and drug abuse (World Health Organization Staff, 2001), attempts to cope through alcohol use is likely to have been detrimental for participants on many levels.

Religious coping. Religious coping was reported by participants as form of both emotion-focused and problem-focused coping. As such, it does not fit neatly into either category. Moreover, religious coping is often researched separately from other forms of coping (Harrison, Koenig, Hays, Eme-Akwari, & Pargament, 2001; Pargament, 1997; Pargament, Koenig, Tarakeshwar, & Hahn, 2004), partially because it is underrepresented in traditional inventories (Pargament, Koenig, & Perez, 2000). Therefore, religious coping warrants special attention.

Participants' efforts to cope through their beliefs in God or through religious practices coincide with other data about people living in poverty, particularly those who identify as Black/African American. A high proportion of Blacks and low income populations have reported reliance upon religion and prayer in times of stress (Chatters, Taylor, Jackson, & Lincoln, 2008; Pargament, 1997), perhaps because "in general, these groups have less access to secular resources and power in our culture. Religion for them represents an alternative, a resource that can be accessed more easily" (Pargament, 1997 p. 301). Additionally, Black churches tend to offer hope to members who endure stressful experiences (Boyd-Franklin, 1989). Utsey et al. (2000), in their study of the coping strategies of African Americans, identified spiritual-centered coping as a "core component of the African Personality" (p. 211).

Many participants reported that they believed in God and utilized religious practices to cope. These practices included prayer, scripture reading, and faith in a benevolent God. These beliefs and practices helped them to lessen worry and other negative emotions, instilled hope, and as one participant reported, "made [her] feel alive." Participants' beliefs in God or religious practices to heal or to help are possibly derived from sacred writings. The Judeo-Christian tradition, which is part of many Black and Latino churches, has sacred text which its members

may draw upon for comfort and support. Examples of this type of text include verses from the Psalms, a book of Hebrew poetry which includes phrases such as, "God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble. Therefore we will not fear, though the earth give way and the mountains fall into the heart of the sea" (Psalm 46:1-2 New International Version) or "The Lord is a refuge for the oppressed, a stronghold in times of trouble" (Psalm 9:9 New International Version). Possibly, participants were referring to texts like these when they spoke of reading their Bibles or holding them near to prevent psychological distress related to their unemployment:

> I used to be on the mental medication and all that, I haven't been on it for like five years now, and I want to keep it like that. That's why I have my Bible, I got a Bible in this drawer, I got a Bible in that drawer, got a Bible next to my bed, yeah.

In addition to helping them feel better, participants also believed that their faith and religious practices were just as viable a way to solve their problems as other means of problem-focused coping. Participants believed in a God who presented them with opportunities and believed that solutions to their problems came to them in prayer. One participant gave the following example to show how instrumental his practice of prayer was in helping him to find solutions to his problems:

> Let's say I have a problem, let me give you an example, a problem with someone and I'm really upset, or a situation where I have to do something. I'm gonna pray, and then an answer come to me when I'm laying down. It'll be a few answers, and I would evaluate that answer, no, I can't do it that way 'cause of this, and it, it'll just come.

Other participants had similar sentiments, such as one woman who described her firm belief in prayer:

> At the end of the night, I go to bed and I lie down. I say, "Well, what's gonna happen tomorrow?" And maybe something will come through, and I'll get a job eventually, and what not. So I just pray to God that that take place…I'm a firm believer, and I know prayer changes things...

Research Question 4: Summary of findings. To summarize, participants employed a host of creative strategies to manage the daily hassles, material deprivation, sadness, anger, and low self-regard associated with their social location as poor unemployed persons. Coping efforts included strategies aimed at finding work and making ends meet, and strategies to manage the emotional toll of unemployment, which included relying on social support, reframing disappointments, and suppressing negative affect. By and large, the narratives fit well into Lazarus and Folkman's (1984) conceptualization of coping as broadly categorized into problem-focused and emotion-focused strategies. Religious coping, because it did not fit neatly into either category, may be best understood as a separate strategy aimed at both managing emotions through providing catharsis and increasing hope, and solving problems through prayer and faith.

Research Question 5: What coping strategies are deemed to be most effective in managing the experience of unemployment? Participants deemed only a few of the strategies they employed to be effective. When asked what was most effective in managing their experience, participants reported only two strategies to have been effective: *belief in God/religious practices* and *volunteering or staying active*. Additionally, when asked to reflect on community resources as sources of support, a majority of participants reported that community resources were empowering to them and some reported that government assistance was helpful.

As evidenced by participants' narratives, the economic and psychological stressors of a life of unemployed poverty are relentless. Therefore, the difference between the number of coping strategies participants' utilized and the number that they found effective is a statement of how challenging it is to cope with the experience of unemployed poverty. Participants may have been all too aware that many of the strategies they used do not ultimately help them to surmount their obstacles in the long term. The strategies that the majority of participants found effective—religion, volunteering, and use of community resources -- were possibly the ones that offered the best hope of long term change or relief. Community resources offered opportunities to become involved in activism, to gain concrete work skills, and to benefit from a sense of community with staff and peers. Volunteering added structure to participants' days, and presented opportunities to be altruistic. Religious coping seems to have been relied upon when the limitations of human resources became apparent (Pargament, 1997).

The potential effectiveness of any of these coping strategies seems largely negated by the widespread sadness, anger, and low self-regard that participants reported. If any of these strategies were effective, why were participants so distressed? Folkman and Maskowitz (2004) contended that the assumption that that effective coping should lead to permanent resolutions to emotional distress is a "disservice" (p. 754) to an understanding of the complexities of coping in chronically stressful or challenging situations. Nevertheless, without coping efforts, participants may have spiraled further into depression (Smith, McCullough, & Poll, 2003). The strategies that participants reported to be effective can therefore also be assumed to be the ones that prevented them from spiraling further into despair and which gave them the ability, despite their distress, to muster the strength to contend with their daily stressors.

Research Question 5: Summary of findings. Of the many coping strategies utilized, participants apparently found relatively few to be effective. A number of participants found religious coping and volunteering/staying active to be effective, while community resources and government assistance were cited as helpful. The discrepancy between the number of coping strategies used and the number actually reported to be effective is a testament to the challenges of coping with the experience of unemployed poverty.

Research Questions and Findings: Overview. The picture that emerges from the confluence of all five research questions is that the experience of unemployed poverty is a challenging one to survive and to escape from. Material deprivation, homelessness, barriers to employment, and negative stereotypes by the wider society are common experiences which, together, cause a significant amount of sadness, social isolation, family disruption, anger, and low self-regard in adults who are poor and unemployed. Despite these experiences and feelings, participants strived to adapt to and cope with their circumstances through an array of strategies, although only a few were deemed effective.

Participants' reports of social isolation became comprehensible in consideration of what Belle (1983) described as the cost of social ties for poor persons: to engage in social and community networks, one has to be prepared to reciprocate help when needed. The participants in this study suggested that, when they could not reciprocate help to their family and friends but instead found themselves always on the receiving end of help, they became embarrassed and isolated themselves. The notion that participants withdrew from others out of embarrassment and inability to reciprocate also helps to explain the contradictory finding that a majority of participants, even though isolated, reported that talking to others in their support system helped them to cope.

The investigation of participants' coping methods was useful in contradicting the frequent characterization of poor unemployed people as passive recipients of their fate (Perry, 2000). Participants' coping efforts highlighted the challenges of dealing with unemployed poverty, and illustrated their attempts to be active in trying to regain power and control over their situations. Additionally, participants' reflections on the coping strategies that were most effective (as well as those that they utilized but which were not helpful, such as drug use or suppressing emotions) may be helpful to clinicians who work with this population.

The results of the analysis of participants' coping strategies also highlighted the usefulness of Lazarus and Folkman's (1984) model in understanding this population -- even though the model has been critiqued as derivative of Eurocentric norms. The area in which Lazarus and Folkman's model may have fallen short was in its failure to include religious coping, which may be neither a problem-focused nor an emotion-focused strategy, but rather something different or perhaps a combination of the two.

The findings of this study also present a unique opportunity to consider differences in the experience of unemployed poverty according to gender, and the following section of the discussion will outline these results.

Gendered Dimensions of Unemployed Poverty

Because the numbers of male and female participants in the study each corresponded to the numbers of participants required for CQR analysis, this study presented the opportunity to consider gendered dimensions of the research findings. Similar "sub-analyses" within the overall qualitative analysis has been utilized by a few CQR studies (Chang & Berk, 2009; Knox, Burkard, Johnson, Suzuki, & Ponterotto, 2003), however, it is not standard CQR practice and must be therefore be considered exploratory in the context of the present discussion. Such

preliminary discussion seems worthwhile given existing literature demonstrating that the rates and experience of poverty may vary by gender (Belle, 1990; Kabeer, 1996; Thibos, Lavin-Loucks, & Martin, 2007). For example, women are 40% more likely than men to live in poverty (Legal Momentum, 2003). Black and Hispanic women, who make up the majority of women in this study, have higher poverty rates than any other racial group (US Census Bureau, 2011). Furthermore, in 2008, when this study was conducted, nearly one-half of Black families and one-quarter of Hispanic families were headed by women with no spouse present; these families were also less likely to have an employed member than other families (US Department of Labor, 2009).

When the sub-analysis was conducted, the results showed that the frequency labels for a number of categories when they were reorganized according to gender (Table 4). The following sections present a discussion of these findings.

Increased rates of sadness and hopelessness among women. One of the most pronounced changes in the results after the data was split by gender appeared in the category *I feel sad and/or hopeless*: in women alone, this was a general category whereas in men alone, it was typical. It is perhaps not surprising to find this difference, as greater rates of depression in women has been described as among the most established of all psychiatric epidemiological findings (Bell, 1990; Kessler, 2006; Magovcevic & Addis, 2008; Maracek, 2006).

A host of biological, developmental, and psychological theories have been argued for this difference in the rates of depression, and the full explication of these theories is beyond the scope of this discussion. However, given the available results and considering what is known about the social context in which participants live, it is worthwhile to consider two relevant arguments. The first is that there are sociopolitical contributors to depression -- that depression is a social

suffering and not just a strictly biological one (Maracek, 2006). Women's reports of sadness and hopelessness can then be understood as a product of their lived realities, and in the context of the limited resources available to them. Belle (1983; 1990), whose scholarship has focused upon the mental health of women in poverty, has referred to these realities by arguing that poor women are at greater risk for depression because of the noxious conditions of a life of poverty which includes financial strain, limited child-rearing assistance, limited social networks, and dealing with the repeated failures of government bureaucracy.

The second argument is that men's depressive symptoms may be different. Rather than reporting sadness, men may more often engage in aggressive behavior, drug and alcohol use, social isolation or over-focusing on work because these behaviors are more consistent with masculine norms (Magovcevic & Addis, 2008). In other words, depression may be a culturally sanctioned practice through which people can express that they are suffering (Maracek, 2006), and the verbal articulation of sad mood by men is not culturally sanctioned. To explore this possibility, all the categories that were related to behaviors such as aggression and drug and alcohol use were reviewed for differences in frequency labels according to gender.

The categories *I am angry, I drink/used to drink alcohol to cope, I've limited my interactions with friends and others since being unemployed, I don't want to go around family because I'm not working, I find ways to stay busy throughout the day, and I do odd jobs* were reviewed according to their gender differences. Gender differences were found for only two of these categories. A typical number of men reported finding ways to stay busy while only a variant number of women did so and, as previously mentioned, women more frequently reported that they limited interactions with others. It is possible that trying to find things to keep busy is similar to the behavior of over-focusing on work, which Magovcevic and Addis (2008) believe

to be an indicator of men's depression. The men in this study may have been trying to find ways to distract themselves from negative affect. However, it is also likely that with child care and family responsibilities women did not need to go out to find ways to keep themselves busy. It is difficult therefore to say, based on the data collected, whether men were expressing sad mood and or hopelessness in a way that the initial analysis failed to capture.

One other possibility is that sadness was seen as a feminine emotion by male participants, and that men may have been less willing to report their experiences of sadness in an effort to appear more masculine. O'Neil, Good, and Holmes (1995), for example, found in an extensive review of research that men are socialized to restrict expression of emotion and avoid behaviors that may appear to be feminine. During the interview process, more effort was definitely required to elicit conversation about emotions with men. However, since men were not specifically asked about their beliefs about expressing sadness, it is difficult to ascertain whether this phenomenon accounted for any of the results.

Gender differences in coping. *G*ender differences were observed in participants' coping strategies. Relatively more men than women reported that they used community resources to cope, that they coped by staying focused on the present, or that they relied on wisdom gained from past experiences to cope. More women reported that they engaged in leisure activities and hid their feelings to cope. Men may have relied more on support from community agencies because more men in this sample were homeless. Men needed to go to soup kitchens, churches, or other agencies more frequently to survive. Men also reported that their experiences with these community agencies were empowering because of the resources they received and the way they were treated. Consequently, this interface with community agencies, which happened more frequently for men, may have been a buffer to depression. The reasons for men more frequently

staying focused on the present moment to cope and relying on the wisdom gained from past experiences are unclear, but these strategies may have been helpful in reducing their depressive affect. Staying in the present moment, for example, is a technique of mindfulness, a practice that has been shown to lead to reductions in depression (Baer, 2003).

Women's material deprivation. The social and economic context in which female participants lived appeared to be one of greater material deprivation and less access to resources. From a perusal of all the categories in this study, women more often reported that they were unable to provide for their families and unable to make ends meet (seen in the frequency labels associated with the categories *I'm not making ends meet* and *I am not able to provide for my family*). Women were also more likely to be reliant on government assistance, which can be seen both from the demographic information and from the category *I rely on government assistance* to make ends meet. Government assistance was a less than adequate resource, however, and women participants reported government assistance to be frustrating or demeaning. Belle (1990) has made a similar point about women's greater material deprivation by arguing that most people are poor for only one or two years but women who head households are at increased risk of experiencing persistent poverty.

Demographically, women were unemployed for longer periods than men—76% of women were unemployed for two years or more versus 54% of men. This can also be viewed as an indicator of increased material deprivation. Length of unemployment is also indicated as a direct cause of sad mood or hopelessness as length of unemployment is inversely related to well-being (Kessler, Turner, & House 1998; Langens & Mose, 2006; McKee-Ryan et al., 2005). Women may also have been more pessimistic about their opportunities to become employed and

to consequently escape poverty; the category *I don't have the education and skills employers want* was more frequently expressed by women than men.

There is no doubt that men also experienced material deprivation. However, because poor women are more often the heads of households they not only have to deal with the stress of their own deprivation, they must watch, often helplessly, as their children do without needed resources. As previously mentioned, this inability to provide for children can be very painful for poor parents (Shipler, 2004). The following narrative of one participant is a poignant example:

> [To see my daughter lose things], that hurt me more than anything else You know, because we're adults, we adjust, and we accept things and we deal, but for a child to have to experience something because of what their parents mishap…It puts a strain on me, 'cause it makes me feel like I failed my daughter…

Other women in the sample reported similar pain when, for example, they could not afford to see children who were in the custody of relatives, or when they witnessed their children struggling to help them make ends meet.

More of the men in this sample were homeless than were the women. In some respects, this fact stands in contradiction to women's more frequent reports of material deprivation. However, the specific living situations of the women were unknown, and some may have resided with family members, or were otherwise without a residence of their own. In addition, women appeared to bear more of the financial burden of raising a family, increasing their financial hardship irrespective of homelessness.

These findings are consistent with statistics which show that more women than men head households in poverty, and which indicate that women find it harder to pull themselves out of poverty because the work available to them pays less than the work available to men (Hayes,

2003; Kabeer, 1996; Thibos, Lavin-Loucks, & Martin, 2007). From the perspective of Maracek (2006) and Belle (1983, 1990), this is the socioeconomic context that might help to explain the more frequent expressions of sadness and hopelessness in female participants. A difference in material deprivation was not, however, the only finding from gender analysis. Women's social lives and thus their social contexts appeared to be different from the men's.

Women's social isolation. As evidenced by the categories *I've limited my interactions with friends and others since being unemployed* and *I'm not able to spend time with family as I would like*, women appeared more socially isolated than men. Limited social interaction may be especially detrimental to emotional well-being for women. Belle (1982) found that low-income mothers who were able to discuss their feelings with someone were less likely to experience depression than women who had someone to confide in. This has also been shown to be especially true for Black and Hispanic women (Sloan, Jason, & Addlesperger, 1996), who made up the majority of the sample of women in this study.

Goodman et al. (2010) noted that there may be two reasons for poor women's limited social networks. First, they may be reluctant to burden other poor women by relying on them for assistance. Secondly, any assistance received would require reciprocating this support at some time in the future, and as mentioned previously, such reciprocity may seem impossible to provide. Poor women's isolation resulting from an inability to reciprocate support has been termed "therapeutic withdrawal" (Tolsdorf, 1976 as cited in Belle, 1990). It is an adaptive response to the increased anxiety that results from a failure to perform as expected by family and friends. In this study, women's narratives affirmed that lack of money, embarrassment, and discomfort with depending on others when they had little money themselves were key contributors to their isolation, lending support to Goodman et al.'s (2010) and Belle's (1990)

claims. In addition, withdrawal was evident in women's narratives, not only because of an inability to live up to the expectations of reciprocal relationships but also because an inability to live up to internalized expectations of how women should present themselves. The following narrative gives an account of these expectations:

> I just, I can't just splurge like I want to, you know my friends, my family call me, oh, we're at this lounge, you know, there's this party, you know, come to this bar, come to the club, and I really don't want to do it, because I really don't have the money, you know. And regardless of how much clothes we have, when we say we're going out as women, we wanna buy something new...something different, you know

In summary, one of the most striking differences in the experience of unemployed poverty was that more frequent reports of sad mood and hopelessness were evidenced for women. Women appeared to rely more on coping strategies that suppressed negative affect and/or kept them isolated, which may have exacerbated their depressive symptoms. Women's material deprivation and how they coped with it, then, were important factors in their sad mood and hopelessness.

Contribution to the Literature

The earlier review of the extant unemployment literature revealed a number of gaps. These included the fact that unemployment in the context of poverty had not been substantively addressed despite decades of unemployment research and despite rampant unemployment in poor communities. In addition, the role of coping in the context of unemployment was, for the most part, neglected in both the unemployment and the coping literature. The discussion will now proceed to a consideration of the ways in which this study's findings supported existing literature and also filled some of its gaps.

Deleterious effects of unemployment. As noted in the literature review, the fact that unemployment has a deleterious effect on well-being has been undisputed for almost 100 years, and the findings of this study corroborate this fact. Participants drew their own causal links between unemployment and periods of sadness, hopelessness, and low self-esteem. Participants also noted the widespread harmful effects of unemployment on their social and family lives. As Jahoda's (1981, 1982) theory would predict, participants reported that unemployment had a negative impact on well-being because the manifest and latent functions of work were lost. Participants were distressed because they were without enough income to provide for themselves and their families or to engage in mutually beneficial social relations; participants were also distressed by the lacked of structure and purpose in their lives.

Jahoda's theory, however, fails to address the more nuanced issues that appeared to cause distress among participants whose social status corresponds to poverty. These issues included those of being undervalued or distrusted, navigating a system that privileges people with higher levels of human and cultural capital, and the experience of embarrassment about one's social position. While Jahoda's theory does mention the loss of status and identity as a stressor in unemployment, this does not appear to fully capture the sources of distress reflected in participants' narratives. The concept of classism goes further in this regard and can contribute much to conceptualizing the experience of unemployed poverty.

The role of classism. Classism refers to "the oppression of the poor through a network of everyday practices, attitudes, assumptions, behaviors and institutional rules" (Bullock, 1995, p. 119). These practices and institutional rules curtail access to economic, political, and cultural power (Zweig, 2000), making it difficult for poor persons to cross class lines to participate in mainstream opportunities and experiences.

Classist attitudes, practices, and rules seemed to permeate participants' lived experiences. For example, participants mentioned criminal records as barriers to employment. Institutionalized classism can be understood to operate at a number of levels within these experiences. The criminal justice system as currently configured does not account for the material deprivation and lack of opportunity that can breed criminal activity. Moreover, it has been critiqued as assigning harsher penalties for crimes committed by the poor (so called "street crimes") and sometimes no penalties for those committed by the wealthy. These crimes include perpetuating hazardous conditions for workers and profiting from products or goods that cause loss, injury, and even death to consumers (Reimen, 1984). Classism also influences hiring practices that exclude workers with criminal records despite their motivation to work and the fact that they have already paid their debt to society through prison, parole, or probation time.

In addition, participants mentioned lack of education as a barrier to employment, a barrier that may also reflect the operations of classism. Access to adequate educational resources has been shown to be significantly restricted in poor communities (e.g., Kozol, 2005), making it less likely for children of poor families to acquire the credentials that would enhance their employability. Moreover, a welfare system that restricts access to higher education through its strict work requirements has also been critiqued as having classist implications (Lott, 2002; Lott & Bullock, 2007). Participants were further relegated to the social margins by classist attitudes that devalued or stigmatized them because of their location as poor unemployed persons. Participants spoke of their perceptions that they were not trusted or valued. These experiences contributed to feelings of disempowerment and "impotence" (as one participant called it), and contributed to the wide-scale experience of low self-regard among participants. Participants' perceptions are affirmed by social psychological research results that have revealed negative

attitudes and assumptions regarding the poor (Bullock, Wyche, & Williams, 2001; Cozzarelli, Wilkinson, & Tagler, 2001; Gans, 1995; Hays, 2003; Wilson, 1996).

Social exclusion. Social exclusion, similar to classism, is a dynamic and multidimensional construct which describes the lack of access to power for certain subclasses of society in relation to other, more privileged classes (Byrne, 2005). By definition, social exclusion occurs when various forms of marginalization combine to isolate persons and prevent their full integration into the cultural process. These various forms of marginalization include exclusion from the participation in decision making and political processes and access to employment and material resources (Madanipour, Cars, & Allen, 1998).

Kieselbach (2003) advocated for attention to social exclusion in unemployment research when, in his study of long-term unemployed youth, he suggested that social exclusion was a theoretical framework useful in identifying the “social disintegration” (p. 69) that can result from long-term unemployment. Social exclusion also proves to be a useful theoretical framework from which to understand the lived experiences of the participants in this sample, who appeared to be marginalized in a myriad of ways. Byrne (2005) suggested that a proper discourse on social exclusion moves away from an individualistic rationalization for political, social, and economic marginalization towards a consideration of the social order that creates and maintains this exclusion in the first place. As such, the consideration of social exclusion in this discussion will extend the purview of unemployment research beyond a limited focus on the individual and the mental health consequences of unemployment to the consideration of the social order that creates and maintains long-term unemployment for certain classes of people.

To better understand how the participants may have lived socially excluded lives, it is useful to utilize an operationalized version of the construct. Kronauer (1998) suggested that

social exclusion was a result of the interaction of six types of exclusion: labor market exclusion, economic exclusion, institutional exclusion, social isolation, cultural exclusion, and spatial exclusion. The following discussion will outline a definition for these various types of exclusion and examine how the narratives of participants in this study illustrate them.

Labor market exclusion. Labor market exclusion occurs when barriers to employment exist for people who have few skills, making it difficult to enter or re-enter the workforce. This creates a sense of being marginalized and leads to feelings of low self-worth. Among the sample of participants in this study, low levels of education was a common demographic. No participant completed college and as many as 38 % of participants did not have a high school diploma or GED. To better illustrate, these percentages can be compared to the education level of the general population of New York City in 2008, at the time the study began. Statistics showed that participants had lower levels of education than the general population. In New York City, 15.7% of New Yorkers had less than a high school diploma (American Community Survey, 2008) and in Mnahattan, the borough with the lowest level of college educated persons, even 17.57% of the population were college educated (The Chronicle of Higher Education, 2011).

It is reasonable to suggest, therefore, that the participants in this sample experienced labor market exclusion as a result of inadequate levels of education. Participants themselves appeared to agree with this reasoning as they most frequently attributed a lack of education to unemployment among the poor. The women in particular appeared to believe that they were excluded from the labor force because of a dearth of skills as a majority expressed the belief that they did not have the education and skills employers want.

Economic exclusion. Being excluded from the labor market leads to a loss of the ability to take care of oneself and one's family, creates a dependency on the welfare state, and thus

creates or sustains poverty. Among the most frequently supported categories in the data analysis were those that suggested that lack of income due to unemployment disrupted daily life and made it difficult for participants to support themselves and their families. Furthermore, 62% of participants relied on more than two types of public benefits; participants reported that they relied on government welfare to make ends meet all the while still struggling. Finally, a majority of participants believed that work would allow them to provide for themselves and their families. These factors seem to suggest that participants in this sample experienced some level of economic exclusion.

Institutional exclusion. Due to a lack of access to private institutions, such as banks, unemployed men and women turn to state institutions for help. These institutions function to serve the marginalized; however, reliance on state institutions can create a sense of dependency and foster feelings of shame. As mentioned previously, it was commonplace among participants to turn to state institutions for help as evidenced by the number of people who relied on government welfare. Furthermore, for some participants, a majority of whom were women, reliance on government welfare was frustrating and demeaning. As such, the results illustrated both the dependence on state institutions and the accompanying feelings of shame characteristic of institutional exclusion. Possibly, one factor that negated some of the experience of institutional exclusion was the positive experience that participants had of community agencies as participants described their experience with private community agencies as empowering.

Social isolation. Labor market, economic, and institutional exclusion can lead to loss of or withdrawal from social networks, which may increase social isolation. As results showed, social isolation was one of the major findings of the study. Participants lacking the financial means to provide for themselves and their families, to socialize, and reciprocate social favors felt

ashamed and limited their interactions with friends and family as a result. Undoubtedly, social isolation was one of the primary examples of social exclusion in this sample.

Cultural exclusion. Society stigmatizes and sanctions the excluded because of their perceived inability to live according to social norms. Participants reported that in their daily lives they were not trusted or valued by society because of their social location as unemployed poor persons. As mentioned in the results, participants spoke of being stigmatized as "losers", distrusted as criminals, and shamed because of their inability to answer the often asked question of what they did for a living. Furthermore, some participants turned to drug sales or other illegal activities to make ends meet. This served to further stigmatize and sanction participants especially if they acquired criminal records. This was illustrated in the results as participants spoke of the discrimination they endured by employers who refused to hire persons with criminal records, a form of discrimination sanctioned by law.

Spatial exclusion. All the previous forms of exclusion can lead to segregation of excluded groups into geographic locations which are bereft of social infrastructure, such as shops, cultural events, and transportation. This is perhaps the one form of exclusion that was not specifically articulated by participants. However, some evidence existed in participants' narratives and demographics to suggest that spatial exclusion may have been a lived reality for participants. Fifty-two percent of participants were homeless and participants spoke of the sub-par and unsafe conditions in the three-quarter houses, shelters, apartments, and neighborhoods in which they lived, as well as their inability to escape their living conditions because of a lack of income.

High risk. Kieselbach (2003), from his study of 299 participants in six European countries, found that a combination of labor market exclusion, economic exclusion, and social

isolation operate to put persons who had been long-term unemployed at high risk for social exclusion. Furthermore, social isolation was one of the most important factors propelling persons into the high risk group. If this is so, the results of this study suggest that the experiences of participants exemplify the lived experience of people who are socially excluded. Participants perceived that they faced more difficulty in re-entering the workforce than did unemployed people of other social classes or educational backgrounds, given their qualifications and other barriers to employment. Relative to people outside the context of poverty, participants likely did not have as much power as other social classes to take care of themselves and their families, to spend their leisure time as well as they would have liked, to decide where they wanted to live and under what conditions, or to receive beneficial financial and social support. Since, as Byrne (2005) suggested, social exclusion is more an indicator of a flawed social order than of individual shortcomings, it may be reasonable to conclude that unemployment in the context of poverty also reflects structural problems that exist in society such as labor market and economic exclusion and other forms of institutional classism.

The role of gender. The results of this study also suggest that the experience of unemployed poverty may be gendered. This possibility constitutes a solid addition to the unemployment literature, which is mostly focused on the effects of unemployment on men (Fryer, 1992). Gender differences seen in this study may in part be due to the feminization of poverty, a phenomenon in which women experience poverty at higher rates than men (Thibos, Lavin-Loucks, & Martin, 2007), bear the burden of raising children in poverty more often than men, and have fewer opportunities in a labor market in which they earn less than men. Naturally, this phenomenon shapes women’s experiences, their ability to move out of poverty, and their ability to cope, a circumstance that has been addressed within feminist scholarship

(e.g., Kabeer, 1996; Richardson, 1993). The gendered dimensions of unemployed poverty, as evidenced in this study, support the argument that there are sociopolitical and societal contributions to depression (Bell 1983, 1990; Maracek, 2006). Investigations of unemployment that do not give adequate consideration to gender and social class may therefore undermine the usefulness of research to point psychologists towards the social and political issues that must be considered within research and practice..

The poor unemployed are neither unmotivated nor passive. Despite their daily experiences of material deprivation, isolation, and classism, the participants in this sample were not revealed to be unmotivated, passive, or lazy. In fact, participants had prior work histories, wanted to work, recognized the value of work, and reported a range of issues that had led to their unemployment. Participants also wanted financial independence and to be free from depending on others and from government assistance. This is in direct contrast to culture of poverty theories, which contend that the poor do not wish to work and are content to live on welfare or to resort to illegal activities. Without an increased focus upon the experiences of participants such as the ones in this study, the unemployment literature will continue to be without significant ability to challenge culture of poverty assumptions.

***Active coping strategies*.** Participants used a host of strategies to manage the emotional toll of unemployment and to solve the problems created by their unemployment. The concept of coping proved useful, therefore, in gaining a better understanding of the complexity of unemployment. Without it, the ways in which participants tried to transact their environment might have remained hidden and the lessons to be gathered from their narratives lost. Asking participants about their coping strategies provided an opportunity for them to speak about their

efforts to change their situations and to contribute to their communities. It even tapped into their expertise on what they believed was missing from their communities.

Interestingly, one of the critiques of the coping literature has been that popular theories such as Lazarus and Folkman's (1984) theory of coping are based on Eurocentric notions of coping, specifically categorizing coping efforts into either problem-focused or emotion-focused coping (Utsey et al., 2000). In that vein, these theories might not be expected to adequately capture these participants' experiences. However, when participants' coping efforts were examined, many of the strategies indeed appeared to be aimed at managing the emotional toll of unemployment and solving the problem of being without work, which is consistent with the idea of emotion-focused and problem-focused coping. Banyard (1995) made a similar discovery when studying the coping strategies of homeless mothers, and concluded that findings that supported Lazurus and Folkman's model were important in confirming "the applicability of coping theories to understudied and more chronically stressed samples than those on whom the theories were developed" (p. 888). Nevertheless, even though participants' efforts could largely be understood according to this theory, the methods of problem and emotion-focused coping that participants employed were not necessarily the ones covered on standardized coping scales. Coping strategies such as getting help from community resources and government assistance, doing odd jobs, and resorting to illegal activities are all strategies that paint a vivid picture of the lived reality of unemployed poverty—a picture that might not have emerged from a quantitative study using standardized measures.

Finally, because religious coping was seen as a blend of both problem solving and emotion-focused coping, it may be best to investigate religious coping as a separate strategy. This does not undermine the utility of Lazarus and Folkman's model but it does add some

complexity by showing that coping strategies do not have to fit neatly into either category and may be a combination of both. It also shows the diverse approaches that people who encounter chronically stressful situations use to manage their situations, and how fluid coping strategies can be depending on what is needed in the moment.

Limitations of the Study

The limitations of this study should be considered in interpreting its results. First, the sample had several unique characteristics. Half of the men and women in the sample were members of either a job training program or a community agency dedicated to the education of its members. These proportions are likely to be unrepresentative of the general population of poor unemployed persons in urban areas. Men and women enrolled in job training or other types of education programs are by their very nature involved in some type of problem-focused coping, a factor that may be reflected in this data.

In addition, many participants, especially women, described their responsibilities to their children and to their family. However, there was no demographic information collected on the number of children that participants had or the number of children living with participants. This information would have greatly added to the accuracy of conclusions made about women's domestic and child rearing responsibilities and about the financial strain experienced by parents in this sample.

Coping was measured globally by asking participants how they coped with their experiences after they detailed experiences and effects of unemployment. However, useful information may have been gained by asking participants how they coped with each specific stressor they named. Doing so might have added specificity to the descriptions of the coping process by delineating which coping strategies are used in which situations. Closely related to

this, coping was assessed by asking participants to reflect on their strategies in hindsight. Alternative techniques of assessing coping such as interviewing participants over a period of time and asking participants to journal the coping strategies as or after they use them may have produced different results.

Hill et al. (2005) suggested an additional step of establishing the trustworthiness of the data in CQR methodology. In this step, participants are invited to a focus group, results are presented and participants are asked to give feedback on whether the results fit their experience. Other researchers (Smith & Romero, 2010) have also included participants in the auditing stage as a way of member checking and increasing the validity of the data. Scheduling conflicts with two agencies and organizational changes in one agency made it difficult to complete this step and affects the interpretation of the data presented.

Finally, it must be noted that this study was limited in its ability to make a contribution to literature on the intersecting experience of race and social class among the unemployed despite a sample of mostly Black and Hispanic participants. Consensual Qualitative Research, as a methodology, requires that analyses flow from and faithfully represent the narratives of the participants (Hill et al., 2005). Participants did not explicitly mention race or racism as part of their lived experience often enough for a category of analysis to arise. As such, it may appear that the research team's expectation that institutionalized racism would be a consistent theme throughout the analysis was unfounded. This is a possibility. However, it is also a possibility that institutionalized racism and racial inequality was a subtext of the analysis. For example, a deficit in education and skill was one of the most cited reasons among participants for their inability to obtain employment; extant literature shows that ethnic minority children are presented with fewer opportunities to learn than White children and are "overrepresented in

lower curriculum tracks and ability groups" (Farkas, 2003 p. 1140). Health problems were also cited as one reason for unemployment; literature has shown that there are persistent racial disparities in health (Willams & Jackson, 2005). Discrimination due to criminal records was also cited as a barrier to employment; racial disparity in the criminal justice system, especially related to drug related incarcerations, is well documented (Alexander, 2010). It may be more accurate to say then that race and social class were intersecting identities at play in the lived experiences of participants. One way to have tested this assumption was to gain specific feedback on this in a focus group. However, as mentioned before, this was not possible and so the inability to thoroughly analyze and discuss race related themes is a limitation of the study.

Implications for Practice

Professional self-awareness. A number of men and women in this study reported experiences that could prime classist attitudes in psychologists and other practitioners. For example, some participants reported that they quit work, that drug use got in the way of working, that they had criminal records, or that they engaged in illegal activities to get by. A majority of participants also reported that they were angry because of their experiences, sometimes lashing out at others. Without an adequate consideration of the oppressive nature of poverty (Smith, Chambers, & Bratini, 2009), psychologists may be tempted to interpret these characteristics according to prevailing classist assumptions or culture of poverty theories that stereotype the poor as immoral. Psychologists by virtue of their role as helpers are not immune to these assumptions. On the contrary, psychology has been widely criticized as perpetuating classist practices in research and clinical practice (Blustein, McWhirter, & Perry, 2005; Lott, 2002; Smith, 2005, Smith, 2010; Turner & Lehning, 2007). Psychologists and other mental health

practitioners will not be able to work effectively with poor unemployed men and women without first engaging in efforts to bring their own classist assumptions into awareness.

It would be unfortunate for unemployed poor persons to repeat with mental health practitioners their experiences in wider society—that is, that people do not trust or value them. One of the strengths of therapy is that it can be a corrective emotional experience (Wachtel, 2008; Yalom, 1995). In order to provide this corrective experience for poor persons, mental health practitioners should avail themselves of opportunities to develop deeper self-awareness and socially just practices through a study of the poverty literature, by exploring their racial-cultural identities, and through engaging in workshops aimed at teaching anti-oppressive practices (Smith, 2005).

Conventional practices in community settings. Psychotherapy may have a multitude of benefits for this population, many of whom reported sad mood, hopelessness, anxiety, anger, and low self-regard. Group psychotherapy may be especially beneficial for women who more frequently reported social isolation. With heightened self-awareness, psychologists can enhance the effectiveness of these traditional interventions with poor unemployed clients.

Social isolation cuts people off from the opportunity to commiserate, grow with, and learn from others in their situations. Groups are unique in their ability to provide experiences of universality through bringing people together to share their experiences (Yalom, 1995). As such, groups may be powerful venues for the poor unemployed to redress their experiences of social isolation without the anxiety of needing to make financial reciprocations to their peers. For women in particular, groups may be helpful in modifying tendencies to hide feelings, which was discussed as one potential factor in participants' experiencing greater frequencies of sad mood.

In fact, Azocar, Miranda, and Valdes Dwyer (1996) have reported the success of group psychotherapy to treating depressed women in poverty.

Additionally, even though isolated, a majority of participants reported that they talked to others in their support system to cope. Group psychotherapy may be consistent with participants' values. Even participants' comments about the interview process—that it was helpful to talk, and that it felt good to be helpful—indicated that the group process may be valued as it can provide a venue for catharsis and give participants an opportunity to be altruistic by helping others in their support group.

Unconventional practices in community settings. Goodman, Smyth, and Banyard (2010) have argued that to increase control, power, and connection among the poor, clinicians must also be willing to move beyond the 50-minute hour. Participants' narratives have illustrated that unemployed men and women in poverty are indeed searching for ways to regain control and power in their lives. Participants continued to look for work despite the obstacles that faced them and they used active and creative ways to cope with their experiences including volunteering and staying active. Innovative approaches -- for example, practices based on the principles of participatory action research (PAR) -- can capitalize on these tendencies, which are in fact participants' strengths.

PAR is a process of research that "seeks to bring together action, reflection, theory and practice with others, in the pursuit of practical solutions to issues of pressing concerns to people" (Reason & Bradbury, 2001 p. 1). The unique strength of PAR is that it allows for persons to reflect on and bring action to issues such as discrimination, social injustice, and lack of opportunities in poor neighborhoods, which were all factors that participants reported when naming reasons that unemployment exists among the poor. Additionally, because PAR is also

focused on bringing about action, people who live lives similar to participants may consider PAR an effective coping strategy to dealing with unemployment. That participants also named laziness and lack of desire to work as reasons for unemployment is not a hindrance to PAR, as one of its strengths is the process of reflection in a group process which can raise personal and critical consciousness (Friere, 1970). Smith (2010) contended that persons who practice PAR “must be prepared to engage in a personal struggle with deeply embedded beliefs” (p. 117). This profoundly personal experience has been shown to be healing and empowering for community members (Smith & Romero, 2010).

PAR work has the potential, therefore, to be truly transformational for the poor unemployed, many of whom in this sample felt disempowered and devalued. Smith and Romero (2010), in an analysis of PAR as a socially just practice, found that community members who engaged in the process felt more valuable and more comfortable connecting with others in their family and social circles because of their experience in PAR. This speaks directly to the social isolation, sad mood, and low self-regard that participants reported experiencing.

Finally, engaging in participatory practices, where collaboration with the poor unemployed is done in a power-with rather than a power-over fashion, affords practitioners opportunities to be challenged and to grow in self-awareness (Smith, Chambers, & Bratini, 2009) which, as indicated previously, is important for practitioners who work with the poor unemployed. Participatory practices require psychologists to question their own preconceived notions of knowledge and expertise. Brydon-Miller, Greenwood, and Maguire (2003) called this process a willingness “to trust that other people know their own lives and their own interests better than you do” (p.2 1).

Inclusion of religion and spirituality. Given the importance of religion in the lives of participants, it seems fitting that psychologists who endeavor to work with the poor unemployed become skilled at assessing and including issues of religion and spirituality in psychotherapy. Shafranske and Maloney (1996) have long argued that religion is too important to be excluded from psychotherapy; yet, psychologists continue to lack training in religion (Hage, Hopson, Seigel, Payton & Defanti, 2006). This lack of training and the historically tenuous relationship between psychotherapy and religion (Myers, 2004) increase the odds that less than competent care will be delivered to the population of poor unemployed persons. It may also increase the odds that people will leave psychologists' offices to seek support in places where they feel less social stigma (Chalfant et al., 1990).

The process of including religion and spirituality in psychotherapy first requires that psychologists develop an awareness of their own religious or spiritual values and how these values may impact their work (Bartoli, 2007; Frame 2001). Religion can be incorporated through religious assessment (Shafranske & Maloney, 1996) and in a variety of explicit and implicit ways within therapy (Tan, 1996). Through supervision and collaboration with each client, psychologists should choose the most appropriate method of being inclusive of religion in their therapeutic work. Finally, since religious coping was so widely endorsed among the participants, psychologists should familiarize themselves with the various forms of positive and negative religious coping and the differing effects that these forms have on psychological well-being (Pargament, 1997).

Summary. In summary, this study has several implications for practice. Participants' narratives of their lived experience and their coping strategies clearly indicate several means by which psychologists can work more effectively with the poor unemployed. Methods include

using traditional models of group therapy aimed at reducing social isolation and increasing a sense of belonging; using innovative approaches to therapy which incorporate more participatory approaches; employing participatory action research in community work; and being inclusive of religion and spirituality in psychotherapy.

Recommendations for Future Research

Several recommendations for future research are suggested by the results of this study. Firstly, a participatory action research (PAR) project researching the issues deemed most relevant by poor unemployed persons is recommended. There are many ways to conduct PAR (Herr & Anderson, 2005), and therefore many ways that community co-researchers could become involved. For example, the results of this study could be presented to a group of unemployed persons in poverty and the group, in collaboration with academic researchers, might find ways to further investigate themes that they want to better understand or that they believe are the most important issues around which action should be taken. Community researchers and academic researchers can mutually benefit from such a process. Action aimed at making real changes in the lives of community researchers will be comprised in such a project, and academic researchers will further their knowledge of unemployed poverty by collaborating with people who have the most expertise because of their lived experiences. PAR is likely to be satisfying to unemployed persons in poverty who believe that more resources are needed in the community, a sentiment that a number of participants in this study expressed when reflecting on community resources.

Secondly, because participants' narratives on coping appeared to fit well into Lazarus and Folkman's (1984) conceptualization of coping as broadly categorized into problem-focused and emotion-focused strategies, there is scope for using quantitative methodology to investigate

coping with unemployment among poor unemployed persons. Two potential scales to utilize in such a study are The Ways of Coping Scale (WOCS) (Folkman & Lazarus, 1980, 1988) and the COPE inventory (Carver et. al, 1989). (Pargament, Koenig, & Perez, 2000). The WOCS and COPE, however, have only have a few items related to religious coping which may be problematic in this population given the popularity of religious coping seen in this study. As such, using Pargament, Koenig, and Perez's (2000) Religious Coping Inventory (RCOPE) as a supplemental instrument would be beneficial.

Given that the majority of participants voiced the importance of religious coping to their well-being, a further independent study to gain a better understanding of the role of religious coping in the experience of unemployed poverty is warranted. Pargament (2007) has shown that religious coping is complex, and is comprised of various positive and negative forms of coping which are either a benefit or detriment to psychological well-being (Pargament, 2007). Positive religious coping, for example, includes congregational support and benevolent religious reframing while negative religious coping includes framing stressful events as God's punishment. This study did not go in depth into investigating how these various forms religious coping may have been used by participants and this area may be ripe for research.

Both qualitative and quantitative approaches can be used to better understand the role of religious coping in the experience of unemployed poverty. Quantitative approaches could utilize, as noted previously, the RCOPE, a quantitative measure of religious coping developed by Pargament, Koenig, and Perez (2000) to measure the various forms of religious coping as they moderate the relationship between unemployed poverty and various indicators of psychological well-being. As this study found correlates of depression and self-esteem to be widely-endorsed outcomes, scales measuring depression and self-esteem could be used as dependent variables in

the study. Qualitative approaches could include using CQR methodology or grounded theory methodology to explore religious coping as used by persons who are both poor and unemployed.

Fourthly, attributions for unemployment can be more fully investigated in future studies. In this study, relatively small numbers of participants fell within each category in the domains *participants reasons for and understanding of their unemployment* and a*ttributions for unemployment among the poor.* This large degree of variability suggests that this may be a promising area for research. Winefield, Tiggeman, and Winefield (1992), for example, found that internal attributions of unemployment were related to greater hopelessness and lower self-esteem among young adults aged 18 to 20. Winefield et al. (1992) did not report the social class of their participants and so it is possible that their sample differed from the participants in this study. As such, it is unclear whether these findings would be replicated in a population of poor unemployed adults. Additional findings regarding attributions for unemployment could have meaningful implications for clinical practice with the poor unemployed.

Quantitative means could be utilized to investigate attributions for unemployment and its impact on well-being in a sample of poor unemployed persons. Questionnaires designed to measure attributions for unemployment such as that of Winefield et al. (1992) and scales measuring self-esteem and depression, such as the Rosenberg (1965) Self-Esteem Scale and the Beck Depression Inventory could be used to identify relationships between attributions and self-esteem and depression.

Qualitatively, either CQR analysis or grounded theory approaches could be used to analyze interviews investigating participants' attributions for their own unemployed poverty and unemployed poverty in general. A benefit of qualitative methodology is that, during interviews, participants' attributions can be fully explored to accurately categorize them. For example, in a

quantitative study by Payne and Furnham (1990) poor education and qualification among the unemployed as a reason for unemployment was categorized as a fatalistic attribution. However, in this study, participants who attributed unemployment to lack of education gave either individualistic or structural reasons for lack of education when follow-up questions were asked. Asking participants to explain their attributions for unemployed poverty instead of relying on checklists appears to be useful in advancing research on attributions for unemployment.

Finally, this study could be recreated using different approaches to the investigation of coping, such as using participant diaries or interviewing a smaller sample of participants on multiple occasions. Using participant diaries or in-depth interviews over multiple occasions is even more likely to capture the complexity of coping that Somerfield and McCrae (2000) argued is lost in traditional research. While this study highlighted a host of coping strategies used by the poor unemployed, it is unlikely that in a single interview participants could precisely detail the majority of their coping efforts. Interviewing participants multiple times gives them an opportunity to reflect more deeply on their coping strategies, using diaries may be helpful to documenting how coping strategies are used soon after stressful encounters when the experiences are fresh in participants' minds.

Given that the lived experience of unemployed poor persons has been ignored throughout decades of unemployment research (Fryer & Fagan, 2003), and that psychology as a field has historically distanced itself from the concerns of the poor (Lott, 2002), these and other approaches to further research is warranted. In 2000, the American Psychological Association, in its Resolution on Poverty and Socioeconomic Status (APA, 2000) called for increased effort on the part of psychologists to conduct research that addressed the problems and issues of poverty. Psychologists dedicated to giving voice to the poor (e.g. Smith, 2010; Lott, 2002; Lott

& Bullock, 2001; Lott & Bullock, 2006) have also asked the question, “What are we waiting for?” (Smith, 2010 p. 3) as a call to other psychologists to move forward with action to end the social exclusion of the side of the poor and marginalized. The results of this study affirm the need for psychologists and other social scientists to go forward in collaboration with the poor unemployed in order to more accurately understand their experiences and to further social justice.

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Table 2
Participant Demographics by Gender

	Male		Female	
	N	**%**	**N**	**%**
Age				
25-34	1	9	2	22
35-44	3	27	4	44
45-54	6	55	1	11
55 and over	1	9	2	22
Race/Ethnicity				
Black/African American	10	91	3	33
Hispanic/Latino	1	9	5	56
White/Non-Hispanic	0	0	1	11
Marital Status				
Single	8	73	7	78
Married	1	9	0	0
Domestic Partnership	1	9	1	11
Separated	1	9	0	0
Divorced	0	0	1	11
Education				
Less than High School	5	46	3	33
High School/GED	4	36	3	33
Some College	2	18	3	33
Homeless				
Yes	7	64	4	36
No	4	36	5	45
Public Benefits				
Yes	11	100	9	100
No	0	0	0	0
Number of Public Benefits				
One	7	64	1	13
Two	0	0	3	38
Three	3	27	4	36
Four	1	9	1	13
Length of Unemployment				
Less than 12 months	1	9	2	25
12-23 months	4	36	1	13
24-35 months	2	18	3	38
36 months and greater	4	36	3	38
Looking for Work				
Looking	10	91	9	100
Not looking	1	9	0	0

Table 3

Cross-Analysis: Unemployed People in Poverty

Domains and Categories	Frequency Label
The Meaning of Work	
Work allows me to provide for myself/ my family and provides a sense of security	Typical
Work means independence	Variant
Work provides a sense of purpose/fulfillment	Variant
Work means freedom from government assistance	Variant
Work provides positive structure to daily life	Variant
Work provides welcome opportunities to be responsible	Variant
Participants' Reasons For and Understanding of Their Unemployment	
Health concerns forced me to leave work	Variant
I was laid off from work	Variant
I quit after becoming dissatisfied with work	Variant
My drug use got in the way of working	Variant
I believe employers are discriminating against me and won't hire me	Variant
Employers don't want to hire or keep me because of my criminal record	Variant
I don't have the education and skills employers want	Variant
I believe things happen for a reason and this is why I'm unemployed	Variant
The Effects of Unemployment on Participants' Daily Life	
Lack of income from unemployment has disrupted my daily life	Typical
I find ways to stay busy throughout the day	Variant
My daily survival is made possible by community/ government resources	Variant
My daily life is without the structure that employment provides	Variant

Table 3 (Continued)

Domains and Categories	Frequency Label
The Effects of Unemployment on Participants' Daily Life (Continued)	
People don't value or trust me	Variant
Unemployment hasn't affected my daily routine	Variant
Making Ends Meet	
I rely on community resources (e.g. churches, soup kitchens)	Variant
I do odd jobs	Variant
I rely on government assistance	Variant
I rely on help from family and friends	Variant
I budget carefully	Variant
I've used illegal activities to get by (e.g. sell drugs or cash food stamps)	Variant
I'm not making ends meet	Variant
The Effects of Unemployment on Participants' Social Life	
I've limited my interactions with friends and others since being unemployed	Typical
Being unemployed negatively impacts my romantic life	Variant
Unemployment has not affected my social life	Variant
The Effects of Unemployment on Participants' Family Life	
I am not able to provide for my family	Typical
There are more arguments/resentments in my family since I've been unemployed	Variant
I don't want to go around family because I'm not working	Variant
I am not able to spend time with family as I would like	Variant

Table 3 (Continued)

Domains and Categories	**Frequency Label**
Participants' Appraisal of the Most Difficult Aspects of Unemployment	
Lacking money and the necessities money can buy	Typical
Not being able to provide for my family	Variant
Not being productive/wasted time	Variant
The process of searching for jobs	Variant
The Effects of Unemployment on Participants' Emotions	
I feel sad and/or hopeless	Typical
I am angry	Typical
I am frustrated	Variant
I am stressed/anxious	Variant
I am embarrassed/hurt	Variant
The Effects of Unemployment on Participants' Sense of Self	
Because I'm unemployed I hold myself in low regard	Typical
Being out of work hasn't changed how I feel about/see myself	Variant
Coping with Unemployment	
My belief in God/Religious practices helps me to cope	Typical
Talking to people in my support system helps me to cope	Typical
I try to keep a positive attitude or reframe disappointment to cope	Typical
I cope by trying to ignore or distract myself from difficulties	Variant
I drink/used to drink alcohol to cope	Variant
My leisure activities help me to cope	Variant
I get help from community resources/government assistance to cope	Variant
I cope by staying focused on the present	Variant

Table 3 (Continued)

Domains and Categories	Frequency Label
Coping with Unemployment (Continued)	
I look for work/go to job training	Variant
Relying on the wisdom gained from my past experiences helps me to cope	Variant
I hide my feelings/keep my feelings to myself	Variant
Participants' Appraisal of the Effectiveness of Coping Methods Used	
My belief in God/religious practices are effective	Typical
Volunteering/staying active is effective	Variant
Trying to find work/job training is not effective	Variant
Participants' Reflections on Community Resources	
Community resources are helpful/empowering	Typical
Government assistance is frustrating/demeaning	Variant
Government assistance is adequate/helpful	Variant
Community resources are unhelpful/frustrating	Variant
More resources are needed in the community	Variant
Participants' Reflections on the Intersection of Unemployment and Social Class	
Unemployment is more difficult for the poor because other social classes have a financial cushion	Variant
Unemployment is easier for the poor because they are used to struggling,	Variant
There is no difference in the experience of unemployment	Variant

Table 3 (Continued)

Domains and Categories	**Frequency Label**
Participants' Attributions for Unemployment among the Poor	
Lacking education	Typical
Racism/discrimination	Variant
Unjust politics/social injustice	Variant
The poor do not want to work/are lazy	Variant
No jobs/lack of opportunities in poor neighborhoods	Variant
Drugs/alcohol	Variant
Participants' Experience of the Interview	
It was good to talk and to express feelings/ the interview was therapeutic	Typical
I enjoyed the opportunity to be helpful	Variant

Note: typical = 11 to 19 cases; variant = 4 to 10 cases.

Table 4

Gender-Analysis: Unemployed People in Poverty

Domains and Categories	**Frequency Labels**		
	All	**Male**	**Female**
The Meaning of Work			
Work allows me to provide for myself/ my family and provides a sense of security	Typical	**Typical**	**General**
Work means independence	Variant	Variant	Variant
Work provides a sense of purpose/fulfillment	Variant	Variant	Variant
Work means freedom from government assistance	Variant	Variant	Variant
Work provides positive structure to daily life	Variant	Variant	Variant
Work provides welcome opportunities to be responsible	Variant	Variant	Variant
Participants' Reasons For and Understanding of Their Unemployment			
Health concerns forced me to leave work	Variant	**Variant**	**Typical**
I was laid off from work	Variant	Variant	Variant
I quit after becoming dissatisfied with work	Variant	**Rare**	**Variant**
My drug use got in the way of working	Variant	**Variant**	**Rare**
I believe employers are discriminating against me and won't hire me	Variant	Variant	Variant
Employers don't want to hire or keep me because of my criminal record	Variant	Variant	Variant
I don't have the education and skills employers want	Variant	**Rare**	**Typical**
I believe things happen for a reason and this is why I'm unemployed	Variant	**Rare**	**Variant**
The Effects of Unemployment on Participants' Daily Life			
Lack of income from unemployment has disrupted my daily life	Typical	Typical	Typical

Table 4 (continued)

Domains and Categories	Frequency Labels		
	All	Male	Female
The Effects of Unemployment on Participants' Daily Life (Continued)			
I find ways to stay busy throughout the day	Variant	**Typical**	**Variant**
My daily survival is made possible by community/ government resources	Variant	Variant	Variant
My daily life is without the structure that employment provides	Variant	Variant	Variant
People don't value or trust me	Variant	Variant	Variant
Unemployment hasn't affected my daily routine	Variant	Variant	Variant
Making Ends Meet			
I rely on community resources (e.g. agencies, churches, soup kitchens)	Variant	Variant	Variant
I do odd jobs	Variant	Variant	Variant
I rely on government assistance	Variant	**Variant**	**Typical**
I rely on help from family and friends	Variant	Variant	Variant
I budget carefully	Variant	**Rare**	**Typical**
I've used illegal activities to get by (e.g. sell drugs or cash food stamps)	Variant	Variant	Variant
I'm not making ends meet	Variant	**Rare**	**Variant**
The Effects of Unemployment on Participants' Social Life			
I've limited my interactions with friends and others since being unemployed	Typical	**Variant**	**Typical**
Being unemployed negatively impacts my romantic life	Variant	Variant	Variant
Unemployment has not affected my social life	Variant	Variant	Variant

Table 4 (continued)

Domains and Categories	**Frequency Labels**		
	All	**Male**	**Female**
The Effects of Unemployment on Participants' Family Life			
I am not able to provide for my family	Typical	**Typical**	**General**
There are more arguments/resentments in my family since I've been unemployed	Variant	Variant	Variant
I don't want to go around family because I'm not working	Variant	Variant	Variant
I am not able to spend time with family as I would like	Variant	**Rare**	**Variant**
Participants' Appraisal of the Most Difficult Aspects of Unemployment			
Lacking money and the necessities money can buy	Typical	Typical	Typical
Not being able to provide for my family	Variant	Variant	Variant
Not being productive/wasted time	Variant	**Variant**	**Not Endorsed**
The process of searching for jobs	Variant	**Variant**	**Rare**
The Effects of Unemployment on Participants' Emotions			
I feel sad and/or hopeless	Typical	**Typical**	**General**
I am angry	Typical	Typical	Typical
I am frustrated	Variant	Variant	Variant
I am stressed/anxious	Variant	Variant	Variant
I am embarrassed/hurt	Variant	Variant	Variant
The Effects of Unemployment on Participants' Sense of Self			
Because I'm unemployed I hold myself in low regard	Typical	Typical	Typical
Being out of work hasn't changed how I feel about /see myself	Variant	Variant	Variant

Table 4 (continued)

Domains and Categories	**Frequency Labels**		
	All	**Male**	**Female**
Coping with Unemployment			
My belief in God/Religious practices helps me to cope	Typical	Typical	Typical
Talking to people in my support system helps me to cope	Typical	Typical	Typical
I try to keep a positive attitude or reframe disappointment to cope	Typical	Typical	Typical
I cope by trying to ignore or distract myself from difficulties	Variant	Variant	Variant
I drink/used to drink alcohol to cope	Variant	Variant	Variant
My leisure activities help me to cope	Variant	**Variant**	**Typical**
I get help from community resources (agencies, churches, soup kitchens, etc.)	Variant	**Typical**	**Variant**
I cope by staying focused on the present	Variant	**Variant**	**Rare**
I look for work/go to job training	Variant	Variant	Variant
Relying on the wisdom gained from my past experiences helps me to cope	Variant	**Variant**	**Not Endorsed**
I hide my feelings/keep my feelings to myself	Variant	**Rare**	**Variant**
Participants' Appraisal of the Effectiveness of Coping Methods Used			
My belief in God/religious practices are effective	Typical	Typical	Typical
Volunteering/staying active is effective	Variant	Variant	Variant
Trying to find work/job training is not effective	Variant	Variant	Variant
Participants' Reflections on Community Resources and Government Assistance			
Community resources are helpful/empowering	Typical	**General**	**Typical**
Community resources are unhelpful/frustrating	Variant	**Variant**	**Rare**

Table 4 (continued)

Domains and Categories	Frequency Labels		
	All	Male	Female
Participants' Reflections on Community Resources and Government Assistance (Continued)			
More resources are needed in the community	Variant	Variant	Variant
Government assistance is frustrating/demeaning	Variant	**Variant**	**Typical**
Government assistance is adequate/helpful	Variant	Variant	Variant
Participants' Reflections on the Intersection of Unemployment and Social Class			
Unemployment is more difficult for the poor because other social classes have a financial cushion	Variant	Variant	Variant
Unemployment is easier for the poor because they are used to struggling,	Variant	Variant	Variant
There is no difference in the experience of unemployment	Variant	Variant	Variant
Participants' Attributions for Unemployment among the Poor			
Lacking education	Typical	Typical	Typical
Racism/discrimination	Variant	Variant	Variant
Unjust politics/social injustice	Variant	Variant	Variant
The poor do not want to work/are lazy	Variant	**Variant**	**Rare**
No jobs/lack of opportunities in poor neighborhoods	Variant	**Variant**	**Rare**
Drugs/alcohol	Variant	**Variant**	**Not Endorsed**
Participants' Experience of the Interview			
It was good to talk and to express feelings/ the interview was therapeutic	Typical	Typical	Typical
I enjoyed the opportunity to be helpful	Variant	Variant	Variant

Note: typical for the full sample = 11 to 19 cases; variant = 4 to 10 cases. For men, general = 10 to 11 cases; typical = 6 to 9 cases; variant = 2 to 5 cases; rare = 1 case. For women, general = 8 to 9 cases; typical = 5 to 7 cases; variant = 2 to 4 cases; rare = 1 case. Not endorsed means that the category was not endorsed by any participant.

Appendix A

Demographic Questionnaire

Please answer each item by circling or filling in a response

1. What is your age? ______
2. Gender
   a. Male
   b. Female
3. What is your race/ethnicity?
   a. White/Non-Hispanic
   b. Black/African America
   c. Hispanic/Latino
   d. Asian/Pacific Islander
   e. Other (Please Specify) ___________________
4. What is your relationship status?
   a. Single
   b. Married
   c. Domestic Partner
   d. Divorced
   e. Separated
   f. Widowed

5. What is your highest level of education?

    a. Did not graduate from HS

    Please indicate last grade attended ________

    b. HS Diploma/GED

    c. Some college

    d. College degree

    e. Graduate degree

6. Have you ever worked for pay?

    a. Yes

    b. No

7. Are you currently working?

    a. Yes

    b. No

8. Are you in WEP (welfare employment program)?

    a. Yes

    b. No

9. Are you in a job readiness program?

    a. Yes

    b. No

10. How long have you been out of work? ____________

11. If you are not working, would you like to work?

    a. Yes

    b. No

12. Are you currently looking for work?
    a. Yes
    b. No
13. If you are currently looking for work, please list some activities that you’ve engaged in to find work?
    a. ________________________
    b. ________________________
    c. ________________________
    d. ________________________
14. Are you currently enrolled in any of these public benefits (please circle all that apply)
    a. Public Assistance
    b. Food Stamps
    c. Childcare Subsidy
    d. Homeless Diversion
    e. Medicaid
    f. WeCare
    g. Other (please specify) _____________
15. Do you currently have government subsidized housing?
    a. Yes
    b. No

16. Are you currently homeless?

    a. Yes

    b. No

Thank You for Your Participation!

Appendix B

Interview Protocol

1. What does work mean to you?
   Prompts
   Advantages of work?
   Disadvantages of work?
   Has the meaning of work changed over time and if so, please describe?

2. Tell me about how you came to be unemployed
   Prompt
   Tell me about any other times you've been unemployed and how you came to be unemployed then.

3. How has unemployment affected your day-to day life?
   Prompts
   How has it affected your daily routine?
   How has it affected your family life?
   How has it affected your social life?
   Please give examples.

4. How has being unemployed affected how you feel?
   Prompts
   Any feelings of sadness? Depression? Anger? Anxiety?
   Any positive feelings?
   Has this changed over time? Please describe.

5. How has being unemployed affected how you feel about yourself?
   Prompts
   Any negative feelings?
   Positive feelings?
   Has this changed over time? Please describe.

6. How has being unemployed affected how you behave?
   Prompts
   Any changes in how you act with others?
   Please give me examples
   Has this changed over time? Please describe.

7. In your experience, what have been the most difficult things about being unemployed?
   Prompts
   Please give me specific examples.
   How does that affect you?

8. How do you manage to make ends meet?

Prompts
Please give me specific examples
What has that been like for you?

9. Do you think the experience of being unemployed is different for people who are poor than for people who are not, like the middle and upper classes?
   Prompts
   How so?
   Could you give me specific examples?
   How does that make you feel?

10. Why do you think there is unemployment among the poor?
    Prompts
    Please give me specific examples?
    How do you feel about these things?

11. Why do you think you are unemployed?
    Prompts
    Could you give me specific examples?
    How do you feel about these things?

12. How do you cope with the experiences of being unemployed?
    Prompts
    You mentioned (state some of the experiences mentioned by participant), how do you cope with these things?
    You mentioned that you feel (state some of the feelings mentioned by the participant), how do you cope with these things?
    Please give me a specific example of times when you tried to cope.

13. How helpful have the ways that you try to cope been?
    Prompts
    What would you say have made these things helpful?

14. Tell me about the ways that you try to cope with your unemployment that have not been as helpful.
    Prompts
    What would you say have made these things not helpful?

15. I'm also interested in the resources in the community that may help people to cope with unemployment. This is any assistance (e.g. welfare, job training etc.) from government or social agencies, or from family and friends. Tell me about your experiences with any community resources that you have used to help you cope with being unemployed
    Prompts
    Tell me about any positive and negative aspects of your experiences
    Are there resources that you wished you had to help but don't have?

16. Is there anything else about your experience that you believe is important for me to know?

Thank participant!

Appendix C

Flyer

AN OPPORTUNITY TO TALK ABOUT YOUR EXPERIENCE OF UNEMPLOYMENT AND EARN $15!

- ARE YOU UNEMPLOYED AND WANT TO FIND WORK?
- ON SOME TYPE OF GOVERNEMNET ASSISTANCE OR HOMELESS?
- WOULD YOU LIKE TO MAKE $15 DOLLARS BY VOLUNTEERING TO BE INTERVIEWED ABOUT YOUR EXPERIENCES?

IF SO, CONSIDER THIS:

I AM A STUDENT AT TEACHERS COLLEGE, COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY AND AM INTERVIEWING UNEMPLOYED MEN AND WOMEN ABOUT THEIR EXPERIENCES OF UNEMPLOYMENT AS PART OF A STUDY ON COPING WITH UNEMPLOYED POVERTY. IF YOU WOULD LIKE TO PARTICIPATE IN THE STUDY PLEASE CALL ME, DEBBIE-ANN CHAMBERS, AT 718-852-9307 EXT 33. YOU WILL RECEIVE $15 FOR YOUR PARTICPATION.

Debbie-Ann Chambers
718-852-9307 ext. 33
Interview on unemployment

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