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The Stigmatization of Hunger: The Impact of Social Stigma on Arkansas Youths' Food Security

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The Stigmatization of Hunger: The Impact of Social Stigma on Arkansas Youths' Food Security

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Abstract

In Arkansas, 26.3% of children are food insecure, meaning they do not have enough or lack the ability to obtain enough food for adequate nutrition (Miller 2019). In recent years, a new phenomenon has been taking place called lunch shaming where children are sometimes forced to wear signs or handstamps that say the child's lunch account is overdue. This research analyzes how the media frames food insecurity and how perceived social stigmas affect a student's willingness to seek out help when struggling with food security.

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I.   Introduction

In Arkansas, children bear the brunt of food insecurity and food insecurity rates overall are well above national averages. The child food insecurity rate in Arkansas, 30% in rural areas and 26.3% in urban areas, is higher than the food insecurity rate for all persons in Arkansas, ranging from, 17.9% in rural areas to 16.6% in urban areas (Miller 2019). This is very different from the USDA's findings that children are usually spared from reduced food intake in food insecure households (2019).[1]

This research seeks to determine how Arkansas' largest daily newspaper, the *Arkansas Democrat-Gazette* , frames its coverage of poverty and food insecurity and asks if the newspaper's coverage perpetuates any negative social stigmas to the state's youth. This will be done through a content analysis of the paper's coverage of food insecurity and interviews with Arkansas high school students. The news media has faced some criticism on this front; a 2013 study of *The New York Times* showed the paper framed poverty in a negative way (Rose 2013).

The content analysis and interviews conducted for this thesis showed surprising results. In a small survey of Northwest Arkansas high school students, 42% said they would rather go hungry than seek out help if they could not afford lunch. While there is a powerful stigma present, it does not seem to come from a fear of being mocked by their peers. None of the students interviewed said they thought other students would mock or shun them if they did not have lunch money. The stigma does not seem to stem from the Arkansas media as the teens interviewed said they did not read the local newspaper. In addition, a content analysis of the *Democrat-Gazette* poverty coverage did not reveal a negative bias to the food insecure.

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[1] For context on the youth food insecurity rates, some 23% of Arkansans were under the age of eighteen in 2018 according to the U.S. Census (2019); this is close to the national rate of 22% under age 18.

Rather, the newspaper attributed food insecurity to temporary economic and physical barriers outside the individual's control. While this research sought to determine the extent to which the Arkansas media perpetuated negative social stigmas about food insecurity, the findings do not suggest the *Arkansas Democrat-Gazette* contributed to the stigma. Further research is still needed as students expressed a heavy stigma and would rather not eat than ask for help.

II.   Literature Review

The United States Department of Agriculture uses a four-tier scale to define a person's level of food security. The first is high food security where there are no reports of issues accessing food or limiting food intake (USDA 2019). The next is marginal food security. If someone is marginally food secure, the individual expresses some anxiety over a shortage of food with little or no indications of changes in diet or food intake (USDA 2019). The third level is low food security where there are reports of reduced quality, variability, or desirability with little or no indication of reduced food intake (USDA 2019). The final category is very low food security where the individual reports multiple instances of disrupted eating patterns and reduced food intake (USDA 2019).

Trends in food security are different in Arkansas than in the rest of the nation in both the overall food insecurity rate and who is most impacted. In 2017, 15 million households (11.8%) in the United States were food insecure at some point during the year (USDA 2019). Of those households, 9.3 million were classified as having low food security and 5.8 million had very low food security (USDA 2019).

Food insecurity in the U.S. decreased between 2016 and 2017. In 2017, 11.8% of households were food insecure, whereas 12.3% were food insecure in 2016 (USDA 2019). Even in households with very low food security, children are usually spared from large reductions in

food intake (USDA 2019). However, in 2.9 million households, both adults and children under the age of 18 were food insecure in 2017 (USDA 2019). In 250,000 households, one or more children reported reduced food intake and disrupted eating patterns (USDA 2019).

Food Security in Arkansas

Food insecurity is particularly prevalent in Arkansas -- the food insecurity rate was 17.9% in rural areas and 16.6% in urban areas[2] (Miller 2019). Urban counties are those with large cities compared to other cities in the state. Those counties are Benton, Washington, Crawford, Sebastian, Miller, Faulkner, Pulsaki, Saline, Garland, Jefferson, Craighead and Crittenden (Miller 2019). The median population of these counties is 101,571 (Census 2010). All other counties are considered rural. In 2017, 41% of Arkansans lived in rural regions (Miller 2019).

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[2] In this research I use the University of Arkansas System Division of Agriculture's definitions of urban and rural areas in Arkansas.
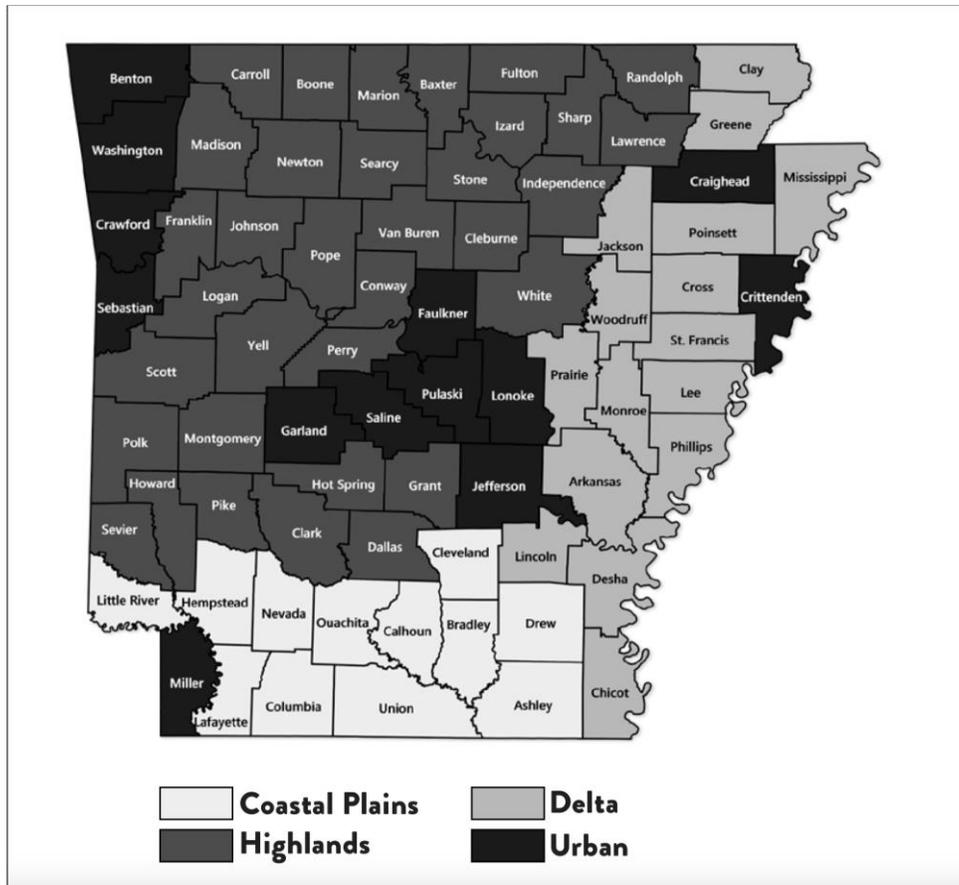
Map depicting urban counties in Arkansas. Miller, W., & Knapp, T. (2019). Rural Profile of Arkansas 2019. Retrieved from https://www.uaex.edu/publications/pdf/MP551 2019 Rural Profile Web.pdf

The Arkansas food security data departs from the national data again in terms of child food security. In 2016, the child food insecurity rate in rural regions was 30% and for urban areas, 22% (Miller 2019). Out of Arkansas' 75 counties, more than half - 39 - were classified by the USDA's Economic Research Service as having persistent childhood poverty. Counties deemed as having persistent childhood poverty had child poverty rates above 20% in 1980, 1990, and 2000 census and the American Community Survey 2007-2011 (Miller 2019).

These issues are particularly prevalent in the Delta and Coastal Plains regions of the state. The child poverty rate in those areas is 36% and almost 90% of the Delta and two-thirds of the Coastal Plains regions have persistent childhood poverty (Miller 2019). Counties that have been

declared as having persistent childhood poverty have had 20% or more of their children were under the federal poverty line in the 1980, 1990, 2000 censuses and the 2007-2011 American Community Survey (USDA 2019).

Food deserts contribute to Arkansas overall high food insecurity rate. Dukto's research (2012) defines a food desert as an area where there is limited access to a variety of healthy and affordable foods. For example, a person lives in an area where the closest grocery store is a few miles away. You need transportation to get to the grocery store, What if they don't have a car? Or let's say they do, but they can't afford gas and groceries? These areas might only have a gas station or convenience store accessible to them. These types of stores generally do not sell fresh foods like fruits and vegetables. This dramatically reduces the variety and quality of the food available, particularly for low-income households.

Purchasing power also impacts food security. Food costs vary, meaning that the same amount of money will not buy the same amount of food everywhere (Bartfeld 2015).

Food insecurity, academic achievement, and development

Food insecurity in children has been linked to developmental issues later on in life. In a survey that examined low income households in Arkansas, Massachusetts, Maryland, Minnesota, and Pennsylvania a link between these two variables. Rose-Jacob's (2008) research found that 21% were food insecure. Of the food insecure, 14% were developmentally at risk. The study concluded that children that come from low-income and food insecure households are more likely to be developmentally at risk, than those from low-income and food secure homes. Not only does food insecurity have adverse effects on physical development, but it also has a negative impact on school achievement.

Winicki's (2003) research found math scores declined in tandem with measures of food security. Those who were marginally food insecure, on average, scored 3.21 points less than those that were food secure. Those in the very food insecure category scored an average of 4.17 below the average score of the food secure group. Children's thoughts are focused on their growing hunger and food, instead of their studies. These two studies show a clear correlation between food insecurity and cognitive function and academic achievement. When a child is focused on his or her hunger, or trying to figure out where their next meal will come from, they are distracted from their studies. At the same time, they are not receiving all the nutrients required to achieve healthy, normal brain development.

SNAP, School Breakfast Program, and National School Lunch Program

The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), the School Breakfast Program (SBP), and the National School Lunch Program (NSLP) are all federally funded and state implemented programs that give financial assistance to low-income or food insecure households (Bartfeld 2015). There are policy linkages between the SNAP and School Breakfast Program and National School Lunch Program at both the state and household levels that greatly impact a child's access to meals (Bartfeld 2015).

The SBP and NSLP give financial assistance to states to provide subsidized meals to students who qualify. The amount of funding for meals and the amount of funding provided to run the program is determined by how many students qualify for free, reduced-price, or full-price meals (Bartfeld 2015). The USDA estimates that more than 21 million children receive a free or reduced-price lunch through the NSLP and 10 million breakfast from the SBP each month (Bartfeld 2015).

SNAP also gives assistance to low-income or food insecure households by providing funds to purchase food. To participate in SNAP, a household has to qualify and the qualifications are largely set by each state. SNAP is an automatic fiscal stabilizer meaning that when market incomes fall during recessions, SNAP participation "automatically" rises (Bartfeld 2015). When economic expansion occurs, SNAP participation falls (Bartfeld 2015). Over the last three decades, peaks in SNAP participation coincide with higher unemployment rates (Bartfeld 2015). However, lower incomes and growing economic inequality have led many states to adopt broad-based categorical eligibility to participate in the SNAP program to make the program available to more households (Bartfeld 2015). Broad-based categorical eligibility allows states to use more generous income limits and remove the liquid asset test, in some cases (Bartfeld 2015). Currently, 41 states have adopted broad-based categorical eligibility for SNAP participation (Bartfeld 2015). Arkansas has not adopted broad-based categorical eligibility (DHS 2019).

Lunch Shaming

Lunch shaming, the act of stigmatizing a child who cannot afford school lunch, has been reported in states around the country. The stories cover instances of lunch shaming and policies and individuals stepping in to prevent it. However, little has been done to stop this phenomenon. A bill written by Senator Udall (2017) was read on the Senate floor and referred to the Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry. This bill is an amendment to the Richard B. Russell National School Lunch Act to ban lunch shaming. The bill would prohibit public stigmatization of a child lacking the funds for school meals. For example, having to wear wristbands or a hand stamp that says that student is out of lunch money. Schools also couldn't require children with outstanding tabs to perform chores or other activities that aren't required by students in general. It would also prohibit making a child throw away food that was served to

them when they cannot pay. All communication about an outstanding lunch tab must be between the school and the parent and not include the child. A child can deliver a letter about the tab that is addressed to the parents, as long as the letter is given to the child in a way that doesn't stigmatize them. However, except for adding cosponsors, no other action has been taken on the bill since May 2017.

Social Stigma

Lunch shaming is a type of social stigma. Elias defines shame in *Social Theory* as a "fear of social degradation or, more generally, of other people's gestures of superiority (Krivisto 2013)." In other words, it is an emotion that is felt when an event outside of a person's control causes a person to fear that they are inferior to another person in some way. Elias' writing poses two important factors of stigma: humans have a tendency to perceive people as superior or inferior to themselves and that that perception regulates our actions. Granfield's (1991) study of working class college students in elite academic environments in *Making It By Faking It* exemplifies this phenomenon.

Granfield (1991) studied students entering an Ivy League law school that came from working class homes. When the students first entered the school that was a majority upper class and white, they defined themselves based on their accomplishments. However, after a short time there, they began to see themselves differently. They began to see their backgrounds as a burden, instead of something to be proud of like before they went to law school. They used their humbler beginnings as an acumen of what they were capable of and could achieve. Granfield wrote, "Working-class students began to experience a crisis in competency (Granfield 1991)."

These students also felt a certain need to perform at a higher level to feel on par with their upper class colleagues. This added a higher level of stress on the students, "Incoming working

class students reported significantly higher levels of personal stress than did their counterparts with more elite backgrounds" (Granfield 1991).

These students then began to find ways to compensate for their perceived inferiority-- they began to regulate their behavior to try and distance themselves from the stigma associated with the working class. "Working class students must disengage from their backgrounds if they desire to escape feeling discredited," wrote Granfield (Granfield 1991). This process of concealing aspects of oneself is called stigma management. People trying to conceal a certain social stigma with adopt an identity or characteristics associated with those of a higher social status. This literature examining food insecurity, poverty, lunch shaming and stigma all helped shape the analysis of media coverage on hunger and interviews with students about stigma of poverty.

Media framing theory

In 1974, sociologist Erving Goffman published *Frame Analysis: An Essay on the Organization of Experience.* In it, he set out to explain how people receive and understand information and how they use that information to make sense of the world around them. Goffman wrote that people hold conceptual frames. These frames are used to organize a person's life experience and which would, in turn, influence an individual's actions. Goffman illustrated his idea using a picture frame. A person uses a picture frame to hold up a picture. Similarly, a person uses conceptual frames to hold together and make sense of whatever they are experiencing (Goffman 1986).

For example, if an individual meets another person who has a ring on their left finger, that individual can surmise that person is most likely married. They can know that person is married without being told using previous knowledge of marriage and wedding rings. This

sociological principle of frame analysis was later adopted by mass communications theorists to explain how the media creates some of these frames and how frames can be used to set agendas (Ytreberg 2002).

Frame analysis in mass communications

Frame Analysis was not written about how the media. Rather, Goffman's frame analysis is about how people construct meaning in general (Goffman 1886). However, it has been adopted and used by media theorists to help explain how people use the media to create meaning in their everyday lives (Ytreberg 2002). Framing theory has been widely used and refined by mass communications researchers like Dietram Scheufele. Modern day media framing uses the idea of social constructivism. Under social constructivism, media is believed to have strong impact in creating social reality by "framing" or creating images of everyday life (Scheufele 1999). These frames are created by the media and are then used by the public to make sense of and discuss events, issues and ideas. That second part of the media framing theory is also one of the limitations to the theory (Scheufele 1999).

Scheufele writes, "Media effects are limited by an interaction between mass media and its recipients (Scheufele 1999)."

In other words, the frames themselves, or the images of reality the media create, only have meaning if society gives it to them. It is media discourse that allows people to use the frames to break down and analyze events. Media discourse is the process by which people construct meaning. Or, through media discourse people create reality (Gamson 1992). In this research, the frames used by the *Arkansas Democrat-Gazette* will be identified. The frames used by the paper help shape Arkansans' views of food insecurity.

Haney and Manzolati's (1988) study of popular television crime dramas found that their viewers were more afraid of street crimes and violent crimes than they were of white collar and corporate crimes. This is due, in part, because these tv shows overrepresent the frequency of street and violent crime and underrepresented the frequency of white collar and corporate crime compared to what happens in reality. The violent-crime-is-rampant belief is accepted by viewers by viewers discussing the shows and using the frames created in these shows to make sense of their world.

Framing and poverty

When poverty is covered, it is usually reduced to faceless numbers and statistics. For example, a 2013 Wall Street Journal article called *U.S. News: Poverty Levels Off -- For Some* discusses census data that showed that the number of U.S. citizens living below the federal poverty line had stabilized, but those below the line were poorer than they had been in years, using only statistics and interviews with economists (Shah 2013). No one living in poverty was interviewed. This lack of coverage has been called "benign neglect," as it hides the realities of poverty from the rest of the public (Kendall 2011). That makes the frames used in the stories that cover poverty all the more important.

The frames, and therefore the way the public sees the world or an issue, are important because it determines possible solutions (Kingdon 2011). The framing of poverty and food insecurity is important in that it helps shape public perception and , therefore, affects responses to the issue. Previous research into frame analysis and poverty show that the frame most often used in news coverage equates poverty with laziness and that those in poverty are to blame for their circumstances. This frame, when adopted, puts the blame on those in poverty, therefore eliminating any governmental or institutional programs or actions to reduce poverty. This frame

remains in media coverage, in part, because news coverage of poverty is generally episodic and lacks context and discussion of causal factors (Redden 2014).

For example, a study called *The Mediation of Poverty : The News, New Media, and Politics* by Joanna Redden (2014) analyzed news coverage in Canada and the United Kingdom and found that it was common practice to present poverty as "an issue evaluated and understood based on quantifications, calculations, and cost benefit analyses," without mentioning the many causes of poverty, an explanation as to why poverty should be eliminated, or any possible solutions. By not going into the many causal factors of poverty (location, cost of living, job prospects, cost of food, to name just a few of hundreds), it makes it easier to perpetuate the frame and place the blame those facing it (Redden 2014). If a story were to discuss the causes of poverty, most that cannot be controlled by those experiencing poverty, it would be difficult to write off poverty as the byproduct of laziness.

A study 2013 by Max Rose and Frank Baumgartner analyzing *The New York Times* coverage of poverty-related stories from 1960-2008 found five frames, or five different understandings of poverty that were used in the stories.

The researchers define the five frames as such: "misery and neglect: the poor constitute a separate society living in urban slums or rural decay; social disorder: the poor commit crimes or riot in the streets, causing policymakers to focus on the dangers of failure to address the concerns of the poor; economic and physical barriers: the poor are without money because of temporary economic conditions, disabilities, or old age; laziness and dysfunction: the poor avoid work and are content to stay at home and have children; and cheating: the poor take advantage of the welfare system to get rich and reap undeserved benefits" (Rose 2013).

The researchers then analyzed government spending during those years. They found a correlation between the amount of government spending and the public's perception of poverty (Rose 2013). Starting in the early 1960s and peaking in 1978, there is a steady increase in government spending on poverty relief programs (Rose 2013). Government spending on these programs underwent a steep decline between 1979-1983. Since the dramatic decline to 2008, government spending remained relatively flat though poverty increased.

When looking at the frames over the years, the researchers noticed a more optimistic and sympathetic outlook on poverty in the 1960s-1970s, where poverty received a lot of attention from President Johnson and other government officials (Rose 2013). Starting in the early 1980s, public opinion began to change. Media coverage of poverty in the early 1960s looked at poverty as a whole and looked for systematic solutions (Rose 2013). As time went on the conversation changed to look at poverty on a more individualistic level with false and misleading depictions of poor Americans (Rose 2013). Starting in the mid-1960s and into the 1970s media outlets disproportionately showed more black welfare recipients, creating misconceptions about the poor which coincided with a decrease in public support for government aid programs (Rose 2013). Throughout the 1980s and 1990s this individualistic lens continued and fostered public unease at the idea of people receiving welfare and not working (Rose 2013). In the 1990s politicians and media outlets stereotyped Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) recipients as "Welfare Queens"-- women who did not work out of laziness and tended have many children (Rose 2013). This progression helped lead to the frame most commonly used in 2008: the individual is responsible for his circumstances and government intervention will cause more harm than good" (Rose 2013).

As the researchers Rose and Baumgartner put it, "It tells a story of increased concern, dramatic aid increases, and then an equally dramatic reversal: a slow withering away of public and government concern with helping the poor" (Rose 2013).

This strongly suggests that through framing, the media plays a role in how the public perceive issues. Another example of the media's effect on public opinion and resulting government action comes from a study of Canadian press coverage of poverty and food security. In 2012, 13% of Canadian households were food insecure and most action to decrease food insecurity occurred at the municipal level. A quantitative analysis of 547 articles gathered from 18 Canadian news outlets found that 70% called for the government to take action. In addition, two frames used in the coverage were identified (Collins 2016).

The first was a negative attitude when the senior government was mentioned or profiled in the story. The coverage was more accusatory in tone. Municipal governments and their actions and programs to help food insecurity received a more positive coverage. The municipalities were framed as those who could do the most to help reduce food insecurity. This shows that the media help set and reinforce the trend that municipalities did the most work in reducing food insecurity (Collins 2016).

Critiques of framing theory

Framing theory is considered to be an offshoot of agenda setting theory. Under the original agenda setting theory, the media does not tell people what to think about a certain issue or events, but what issues or events to care about.

Some researchers argue that there has been a lack of research into the frame creation process compared to the amount of research to identify the media frames themselves (Borah 2011). Carragee and Roefs (2004) argue that more research needs to be done to explore the many

different factors, including politicians, organizations and social movements, that impact the frame making process.

Some research that has been done into the frame making process focuses on how the elite help shape media frames. Some argue that frame production is not always driven by the elite. Citizens interpret media messages based on their own experiences and background knowledge, then discuss their interpretations with others. This public discourse, in turn, helps create frames Borah 2011).

III.   Main Hypothesis

There have been numerous studies on food insecurity in minors and the effectiveness of emergency food resources. However, not enough has been done to explore how the media's coverage has an impact on the stigma of food insecurity stigmas or how food insecurity is viewed.

One of the main focus points of this research will be on how media coverage impacts any social stigmas associated with food security. Does current Arkansas media coverage have a positive effect on how food insecurity is viewed? Does it perpetuate any stereotypes associated with food security or break them down? How does the media shape our perception of food insecurity and our understanding of the problem in the U.S?

My hypothesis is that social stigmas associated with food security will prevent a student from using emergency food resources. Because of perceived stigmas, students will seek help from their peers for help before they will from administrators or emergency food programs. Those with larger, connected social circles, or more social capital, will have a higher level of food security. In addition, media coverage will have a negative effect and strengthen stigmas

associated with food insecurity and make it seem like it is the individual to blame for their circumstances.

IV.   Methodology

I used a mixed-methods approach with my research. First, I conducted a content analysis of all news articles published in the last five years that mention food security as a way to measure stigma in the issue. These *Arkansas Democrat-Gazette* articles were drawn from the U.S. News database. The *Arkansas Democrat-Gazette* was selected because it is the state's largest daily newspaper. It was originally two different and independently owned newspapers, the *Arkansas Democrat* and the *Arkansas Gazette* (Nelson 2018). The two merged and formed the *Arkansas Democrat-Gazette* in 1991 (Nelson 2018). *The Arkansas Gazette* won two Pulitzer Prizes in 1958 for it's coverage of the 1957 desegregation of Little Rock High School (Nelson 2018). The paper opposed the actions of then governor Orval Faubus, a controversial decision that cost them many readers (Nelson 2018). The *Arkansas Democrat-Gazette* and has had a history of leading on difficult issues as shown by its coverage of the Little Rock Nine. However, the paper has a conservative editorial page and operates in one of the most conservative states in the nation. I categorized the articles into one of five different frames used in Rose's study of the *New York Times* as set forth in the following chart:

Content Analysis Themes	
misery and neglect	the poor constitute a separate society living in urban slums or rural decay; food security is discussed solely in a rural context; articles talking about teaching low-income families about healthy eating and cooking; article mentions food deserts
social disorder	the poor commit crimes or riot in the streets, causing policymakers to focus on the dangers of failure to address the concerns of the poor; article mentions a lack of government and/or community support; legislators not taking action or misunderstanding the problem
economic and physical barriers	the poor are without money because of temporary economic conditions, disabilities, or old age; used terms such as people in need or needy families, want a hand up not a hand out; article discussed food banks and other food security related nonprofits
laziness and dysfunction	the poor avoid work and are content to stay at home and have children; mentions the word lazy or laziness, handouts and welfare
cheating	the poor take advantage of the welfare system to get rich and reap undeserved benefits; articles use terms like handouts, bootstraps, welfare and food stamps[3]

Next, I conducted ten in-person interviews with Lemke Journalism Project students. The

Lemke Journalism Project is an outreach and recruiting program offered by the University of

Arkansas' School of Journalism and Strategic Media. All high school students from the

Northwest Arkansas area are invited to attend. Schools whose students were in attendance

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[3] Rose, M., & Baumgartner, F. R. (2013). Framing the poor: Media coverage and U.S. poverty policy, 1960–2008. *Policy Studies Journal, 41*(1), 22-53. doi:10.1111/psj.12001

included Rogers High School, Springdale High School, Harber High School and Fayetteville

High School. All Lemke Journalism Project students were asked to participate and seven

consented to be interviewed. These interviews were kept anonymous and recorded. After

transcription, the audio files were destroyed. The first three questions asked on the survey and

the interview are written by the USDA's Economic Research Unit and are used to determine the

level of food security:

1. In the last 12 months, did you run out of food and lack money to buy more?
2. In the last 12 months, were you ever hungry, but didn't eat, because there wasn't enough money for food? (Yes/No)
3. In the last 12 months, did you or other adults in the household ever cut the size of your meals or skip meals because there wasn't enough money for food?

The next set of questions will focus on stigma and media coverage.

1. If you didn't have lunch money, who would you go to? Why?
2. How many of your friends would you consider to be close friends?
3. Do you have a best friend?
4. Do you ever eat meals at friends' houses? How often?
5. Do students make fun of you if you don't have lunch money?
6. If you didn't have enough food at home, would you tell anyone? Why?
7. Do you consume any news? How?
8. In the last 12 months have you seen any news stories (online, newspapers, TV, etc.) about food security?
9. What do you remember from those news stories?
10. Did those stories accurately reflect your situation?

Originally, it was planned to conduct interviews with high school students at Decatur High

School in Decatur, Arkansas. While the school was accommodating and wanted to participate in

the research, the interviews were cancelled due to the 2020 Covid-19 pandemic. Arkansas public

schools cancelled in person classes because of the pandemic before the interviews could be

conducted.

V.   Results

Content Analysis

A search for the term "food insecurity" in the U.S. News Archive of the *Arkansas Democrat-Gazette* between January 2014 and December 2019 obtained 286. Those 286 articles were read and put into one of the five frames developed by Rose for his study of *The New York Times*.

Percentage of Frames
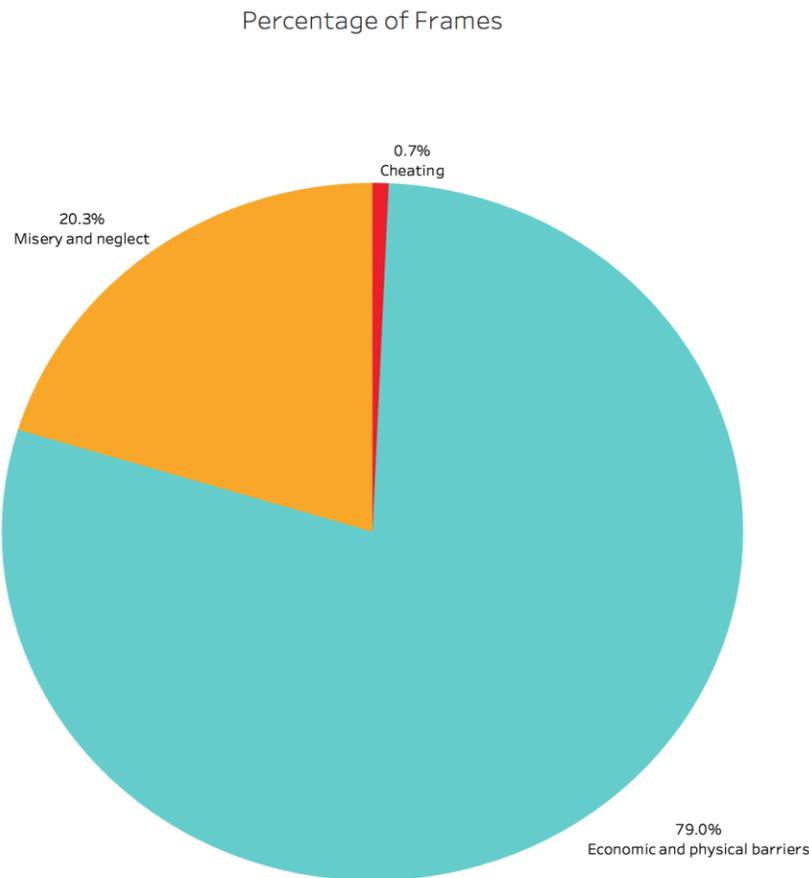
Results from *Arkansas Democrat-Gazette* content analysis.

Overall, most of the articles fit into either the misery and neglect frame or the physical and economic barriers frame. The majority of the articles, 226 of them or 79%, fit into the physical and economic barriers frame where the poor are described as "without money because of temporary economic conditions, disabilities, or old age (Rose)." These articles were placed in

this category because they used terms such as people in need or needy families, want a hand up not a hand out and/or discussed food banks and other food security related nonprofits. Of all the articles examined, 58 (20.3%) fit into the misery and neglect frame, meaning "the poor constitute a separate society living in urban slums or rural decay (Rose)." Articles were placed in this category because food security is discussed solely in a rural context, articles talking about teaching low-income families about healthy eating and cooking, and/or the article mentions food deserts. Two articles (0.7%) fit into the cheating frame where the poor "take advantage of the welfare system to get rich and reap undeserved benefits (Rose)." These articles used terms like handouts, bootstraps, welfare and food stamps.

Themes within the articles

A. Charity. There was a present theme of looking at food security through charitable giving amongst a majority of the articles. Most of the articles mention either a charity fundraiser, food banks, volunteer work or some other form of charitable work. The term "food bank" appeared at least once in 110 of the articles. The term "people in need" appeared in the articles seven times and community calendars with listings for food drives and fundraisers appeared 23 times. For example, the lede in an 2019 article about the Arkansas Food Bank read, "The Arkansas Food Bank received a city permit earlier this month for its roughly $4 million project that officials say will allow it to put more volunteers to work and get more food to people in need next year" (Herzog 2019). The charity theme also included profiles of individuals in Northwest Arkansas who are founders, directors, or advocates of charitable organizations that focus on food security. Profiles of these individuals appear in 14 of the articles. There was also a pattern of listing donations to food banks by corporations, specifically Tyson Foods Inc. whose donations to food banks and food security initiatives were mentioned 10 times.

B. Faith**.** There was a clear theme of faith, particularly the Christian faith, throughout the articles analyzed. Either the word faith, god, or church appeared 37 times. Most of the time, these articles mentioned a food bank that was either backed or housed by a church or had a faith-based mission. For example, in an article about a Searcy, Arkansas, couple who created a free community orchard began, "In the spirit of their Christian faith, Dustin Lavender and his wife, Rachel, wanted to do something to help feed the people in the area" (Buffalo 2019).

C. Teaching**.** Another theme that appeared in the data was mention of classes or educational initiatives aimed at lower income families to teach them healthy eating habits. This theme turned up in 25 of the articles. The tone of the articles is that low-income families do not understand what is healthy, which adds to their poor nutrition. For example, in August 2018 there was a profile of the Arkansas Hunger Alliance's Cooking Matters courses. The course was described as, "a culinary and nutrition education program from the Arkansas Hunger Relief Alliance that teaches low income families and individuals how to assemble and make healthful meals (Clancy 2018)." Conversely, 20 of the articles mentioned that it was hard for the food insecure to get healthy foods like fresh produce as they are more expensive than prepackaged foods and they are often not donated to food banks.

D. Child hunger**.** Of the articles analyzed 22%, or 64 articles, were either about or mentioned child hunger. Little attention was paid to the causes of childhood food security, instead it focused on food resources for children. Food pantries for students on school campuses were mentioned in 38 of the articles. Backpack lunch programs, programs where students can take home snacks and meals for the weekend, were mentioned in 24 of the articles. Summer food programs where students can get meals over the summer were mentioned 14 times. Comparatively, the National School Lunch Program and the School Breakfast Program got little attention as they were only

mentioned in seven of the articles. These articles also seemed to stress numbers and statistics about child hunger. For example, one story from July 2019 about the Children's Summer Feeding Program started with the statistic that one in four children in Arkansas are food insecure and then listed six more throughout the story (Pierce 2019).

E. Food waste**.** Food waste was mentioned in 18 of the articles and was talked about as one solution to food insecurity like in this editorial from April 2016: "Not only does food loss and waste have tremendous environmental impacts, but experts project reducing it by just 15% could theoretically provide enough food to feed more than 25 million Americans every year, meeting the needs of more than half of all Americans living with hunger" (Vilsack 2019).

Several articles showed programs reducing food waste in action. There was a story featuring some Arkansas Tech students for creating a food recovery program where uneaten food from the university cafeteria would be donated to area food banks (Keith 2015). Another story discussed the city of Fayetteville considering a food recycling program (Ryburn 2016).

F. Senior hunger. One of the most prevalent themes that appeared within the articles was senior citizen hunger. Senior hunger was mentioned in 24 of the articles. These articles focused on some of the factors that contribute to senior food security. For example, one article from 2017 discussed several factors: a trend of grandparents caring for grandchildren, fixed incomes, medical bills and mobility issues.

"Nearly one in five Arkansas senior citizens experiences food insecurity... The fixed incomes from the jobs they worked don't provide enough to pay for medical expenses, bills and their food, according to a study from the Arkansas Center for Health Improvement (Monk 2017)."

These stories seemed to portray seniors dealing with food insecurity in a more positive light in comparison to child hunger. All 24 of the articles mentioning senior hunger fit into the social and economic frame where the poor are described as "without money because of temporary economic conditions, disabilities, or old age (Rose)." Whereas not all the articles discussing child hunger did.

Lemke Journalism Project Interviews

Seven high school students who participated in the Lemke Journalism Project at the University of Arkansas were interviewed for this research. These students attended Springdale High School in Springdale, Arkansas; Rogers High School in Rogers, Arkansas; Rogers Heritage High School also in Rogers, Arkansas; and McDonald County High School in McDonald County, Missouri. The students ranged in ages from fourteen to eighteen. Five of the students interviewed were female and two were male. Four identified as Hispanic or Latino and three identified as Caucasian. In the interviews, students were asked questions developed by the USDA to place individuals on the four-tier food security scale. Two of the students had low food security at one point in the last twelve months. One student had periodically dealt with very low food security throughout her life, but had sufficient food in the last year. The other four students were food secure. Four of the students qualified for free and reduced lunch this school year.

The students interviewed seemed to take on a fair amount of the responsibility of making sure their basic needs were met. For example, one sixteen-year-old student from Rogers High School mentioned that she worked between 15-20 hours per week and purchased her own personal care items like toothpaste. She said she saves a bulk of her wages to purchase a car in the future. That same sense of responsibility translated into food. When asked who she would

reach out to if she had no money for lunch, she said no one. The student said she viewed the matter as private.

Out of the seven students interviewed, three said they would not tell someone if they did not have lunch money or ran out of food at home. All three of these students were female. Four said they would talk to a parent or another relative.

Another Rogers High student, who is eighteen, had struggled with food insecurity at different periods throughout her life. The most recent episode, was roughly two years ago when her mother was diagnosed with cancer. The student was sixteen and had to begin working and become the breadwinner for herself and her mother while also staying in school. She said that back then it was a struggle for her to feed herself, but she never told anyone. She also didn't reach out for help when she was in elementary school struggling with food insecurity either. Her mother's cancer is now in remission and was able to return to work. As a result, the student hasn't struggled with a lack of food in the last year. She did say, however, that if she began to struggle again, she would reach out for help.

"I didn't really let anybody know what was going on [when my mom was sick]. I guess….I guess I didn't want to be a burden. But now that it's over and I've told people what was going on. They said I should have told them and that I could never be a burden. I know that now."

A student from Rogers High School who also said she would not tell anyone if she did not have enough money for lunch said that she would feel embarrassed if she did so.

"I just wouldn't eat….It would be embarrassing to me," she said.

When asked if she thought other students would make fun of her, she said no.

All the students interviewed reported having fairly decent sized social circles. Most said they had between four and five people they considered to be close friends. One student said he talked to ten people on a near-daily basis. All the students but one said they had someone they considered to be a best friend. However, the students said they mostly see their friends at school or other school related activities. Four of the students said they see their friends outside of school on average once a month. Two of the students said they see their friends outside of school about once a week. Only one of the students said they eat meals at friends' houses. The same student also said he preferred to spend the night at a friend's house every weekend.

Stigma in the interviews

None of those interviewed said they felt that other students would mock them if they didn't have lunch money. However, there is still a clear negative stigma associated with food security as 42% of those interviewed said they would rather go hungry than tell someone. What seems to stop these students from reaching out for help does not seem to be a fear of being mocked by their friends, but rather what asking for help means about their ability to take care of their own needs as discussed above.

As one fourteen-year-old student put it, "It's my problem, not theirs."

Additionally, the Arkansas media does not seem to contribute to this stigma at all. Only one of the students reported actively seeking out the news on a daily basis. All the other students interviewed said they got their news almost solely from social media passively. Only two students could recall an article about food security or poverty, both of which were about disruptions in the food supply chain due to the 2020 Covid-19 outbreak.

Though it does not seem to be fear of ridicule of peers or the media creating a negative social stigma around food insecurity, there is still one present as the students interviewed would

rather go hungry than seek help. More research is needed to identify the root cause of this stigma.

Previous research

The findings of these interviews are similar to interviews I conducted at the 2019 Lemke Journalism Project. In 2019, 12 students were interviewed from Rogers High School, Springdale High School, Harber High School and Fayetteville High School. Of the twelve interviewed 83% were in the high food security category while 27% were food insecure on some level.

One similarity between the two groups is that both did not seem to think that students would mock or tease them if they did not have lunch money. Only one of the students interviewed in 2019 said they thought they would be mocked or teased if they did not have enough money for lunch. Both groups reported having larger friend groups and that they saw their friends mostly at school or school sanctioned events and activities. In 2019, several students described their parents as protective or strict, only letting them go to friends' houses two or three times a month.

One major difference between the two groups, however, is who they would go to if they needed lunch money. In 2019 a majority of the students, 37%, said they would ask a friend for lunch money if they needed it and 27% they wouldn't eat at all if they did not have money. Asking a relative and a school staff member or administrator for help tied, with both having 18% of those interviewed reporting they would seek out help from that source (Thompson 2019).

VI.   Conclusion

In analyzing the Arkansas Democrat-Gazette 's coverage of food insecurity in the last five years, the articles had a more positive tone that originally theorized, a departure from study of The New York Times poverty coverage. Rose found The New York Times' coverage of poverty was primarily framed in a positive light then morphed over time into the poor being framed as cheating the system (Rose 2013). In this study of 286 Arkansas Democrat-Gazette articles, 79% fell into the physical and economic barriers frame, 20.3% fit into the misery and neglect frame and 0.7% fell into the cheating frame. Additionally, there was no mention of lunch shaming in the coverage. According to media framing theory, the media frames how the public sees an issue which then determines possible solutions and responses (Kingdon 2011). As most of the *Arkansas Democrat-Gazette* coverage attributes food insecurity to temporary barriers outside the individual's control, this allows for many solutions to be considered. This is reflected in the newspaper coverage discussion of food banks, donations and food waste reduction.

One theme that appeared in the data was child hunger. These articles did not focus on the causes of childhood food security, but rather on school food banks, backpack lunch programs, and summer food programs. The National School Lunch Program and the School Breakfast Program received little attention in comparison. Another theme that appeared in the data, senior hunger, was discussed in a markedly different way than child hunger. Unlike the articles about child hunger, the articles discussing senior hunger detail some causes such as fixed incomes, medical bills, and a growing trend of grandparents becoming the primary caretakers of grandchildren. The articles about senior hunger also paint seniors struggling with food insecurity in a more positive light than food insecure children. All 24 articles that mention senior hunger

fall into the physical and economic barriers frame, however not all of the articles about child hunger did.

The positive coverage of food insecurity in the *Arkansas Democrat-Gazette* seems to fit align with two ethical imperatives of journalism established by the Society of Professional Journalists: to seek the truth and minimize harm. By not relying on negative stereotypes and exploring root causes of food insecurity, the *Arkansas Democrat-Gazette* is trying to give an accurate and honest account of food insecurity in Arkansas.

This research only analyzes one of the many news outlets in Arkansas. More comprehensive research needs to be done to fully to determine the extent to which Arkansas media outlets impact public perception of and social stigmas associated with food insecurity.

Seven high school students from the Northwest Arkansas area were interviewed for this research. These students seemed to take on a fair amount of responsibility when it came to making sure their basic needs were met. When asked if they would reach out for help if they did not have money for lunch, three of the students said they would not, three said they would tell a parent or another relative, and one said they would ask a teacher or friend. When the three students who said they would not tell someone if they were without lunch money were asked why they would not, they said it was their own problem and it would be embarrassing to tell someone else. None of the students said they thought other students would mock them if they did not have money for lunch. Additionally, there was no evidence in the interviews that the Arkansas media contributes to the stigma. There is still a powerful stigma present, as 42% of the student interviewed said they would rather go hungry than seek out help. The stigma seems to come from the student's sense of personal responsibility in making sure their needs were met. However, more research is needed to identify the root cause of the stigma.

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Appendix: Content Analysis search parameters

For this research, the America's News archive of the *Arkansas Democrat-Gazette* was used. The key search term was "food security" between January 1, 2014 and December 30, 2019. There were 312 total results. Of the results, 26 were thrown out as they did not pertain to food security.