
Identifying Responses to Inequality: The Potential of Qualitative and Mixed-Methods Research



Vivian Louie

WILLIAM T. GRANT FOUNDATION

JUNE 2016

 **William T. Grant**
FOUNDATION

Preface

Reducing inequality for youth ages 5 to 25 in the United States is one of our primary research interests. The defining element of the Foundation's work in this area is our focus on responses to inequality—not the causes, contours or consequences of inequality, which have been the point of much prior work. We believe that research that uses qualitative or mixed methods is essential to building and understanding programs, policies and practices that reduce inequality in youth outcomes.

Qualitative studies have a powerful role to play in reducing inequality, as they can potentially reveal and richly describe the patterns underlying cultural and social relationships (Geertz, 1973). Qualitative studies can also bring to light how these patterns can be changed. Mixed-methods studies leverage the strengths of qualitative work in combination with quantitative studies. For the purposes of this essay, we broadly define quantitative studies as those that have variables as the units of analysis, employ hypothesis testing and mathematical analyses, and result in generalizable findings.¹ We broadly define qualitative studies as

those that have cases as the units of analysis, and involve analyses of people's behaviors, perspectives, and subjective experiences.

Since the launch of our reducing inequality initiative in 2014, we have mainly received applications to study questions that beg quantitative studies. But we see research to reduce inequality as a complex endeavor—one that uses a wide range of designs and methods to investigate important questions that they are well suited to answer. As part of the Foundation's larger effort to attract—and fund—qualitative and mixed-methods studies, this essay has two primary aims: 1) to highlight why and how qualitative and mixed-methods studies are crucial to reducing inequality, and 2) to showcase qualitative and mixed-methods research that we funded as part of our previous focus on understanding the social settings of youth development.

¹Small (2011) offers a more detailed discussion of how qualitative, quantitative, and mixed-methods studies have been defined across different disciplines. For instance, he elaborates on "the choice of sample size, the logic of data collection, the approach to analysis and the general orientation toward knowledge" (57). See also Yoshikawa, Weisner, Kalil, and Way (2008) for a discussion of mixed methods in developmental science. Further, the American Psychological Association's Publications and Communications Qualitative Article Reporting Standards Task Force has recently formed out of recognition that the APA manual does not sufficiently address qualitative or mixed-methods reporting standards.

Why Qualitative Research?

With its focus on meaning making, qualitative research has a particular power to reveal the “how” of human experience, and, thus, also the “why.” Qualitative methods can get to the meaning of events, concepts, situations and behaviors as people understand them; they can uncover the contradictions in these interpretations, and richly describe and explain how and why people understand or experience the same thing in different ways. In the process of this research, we gain insight into how broader social forces shape individuals’ lived experiences and the ways in which they respond. This information is crucial to understanding, for instance, *why* a policy works in some places but not in others, or *why* a given practice might create unintended challenges. These kinds of realities form the fuller picture of inequality that is critical to see if we are to understand how to effectively *respond* to inequality.

Let us consider what we might learn from qualitative research that examines two policies aimed at improving the outcomes of poor children and youth. One is a welfare-to-work policy for poor mothers; the rationale here is that increased maternal employment leads to improved academic outcomes for the children. The second policy requires high-stakes testing in public schools; the rationale here is that children will do better if they are held to higher standards. Quantitative inquiries are well-positioned to investigate whether each policy impacts youth outcomes and the nature of that impact. But a limitation of quantitative work, as it relates to this example, is that the relationship between the two policies and youth outcomes would remain difficult to understand. Qualitative inquiry, however, affords the opportunity to explore this relationship, and, in turn, reveal contradictions in the policies’ goals that might interact and result in poor outcomes for children. Thus, if we are interested in *why* an impact occurs or does not occur, we should investigate *how* the individuals who are affected by the policies respond to them. For this, *qualitative inquiry* is particularly useful.

In pursuing these questions, Katherine Newman and Margaret Chin (2003) exposed a misalignment between the goals of each of the aforementioned policies that resulted in potential negative impact for children. They found that the time crunch from the new jobs of the welfare to work policy left mothers less time to be with their children, just when that time was becoming even more critical as their children were preparing for high-stakes tests at school. To effectively respond to inequality and improve youth outcomes, policymakers should consider these kinds of realities, which qualitative research is well-suited to reveal.

Mixed-methods studies, which pair qualitative and quantitative methods, are necessary because they have the power to yield generalizable findings along with related insights that tap into people’s lived experiences and “the subtle, often invisible social mechanisms” that affect those experiences (Carter and Reardon, 2014: 16). Consider the research of Jonathan Guryan, a grantee funded under the Foundation’s former initiative on understanding youth social settings. Along with his colleagues, Guryan worked with the Chicago Public Schools to test an intervention that had been found to have promising effects on student attendance and school persistence. Guryan and his colleagues sought to learn more about the program’s impact on school-related outcomes for students in grades 1–7; the team embarked on a nuanced mixed-methods study that focused on the social processes and mediating mechanisms that drove the program’s effects. Quantitative analyses indicated that the intervention had a significant impact on attendance. These analyses did not speak to *why* students were chronically absent, but the qualitative component of the research did.

To get to *why*, however, there first had to be attention paid to *how*. In this case, the researchers needed to investigate how students decided whether to go to school or not. Interviews with students opened a window into the complexities

of their daily lives, revealing, for instance, how many of them were confined to their homes due to the uptick in neighborhood violence in Chicago, and how their school absences were driven more by home and familial factors like parental illness than purposely skipping or avoiding school. That students were chronically absent, then, had little to do with schooling itself.

This example shows what we gain when quantitative research, where one must anticipate what needs to be measured, is paired with more open-ended qualitative methods, where one can gain unexpected but nevertheless important insights. In this case, efforts to address student absenteeism and improve academic or social-emotional outcomes could possibly be improved or developed by learning *why* students are chronically absent. And the answers to this question might point to unanticipated non-school factors that could be further examined.

In sum, qualitative and mixed-methods approaches are essential to identifying and understanding effective means to reduce inequality. Reducing inequality involves equalizing outcomes, which can be readily measured, but it also requires *capturing the meanings* attached to the sociocultural, political, and psychological aspects of inequality, whether among individuals or institutions. And it requires analyzing how these meanings inform the interactions between individuals, and between individuals and institutions, thereby enabling researchers to answer *how* and *why* particular responses to inequality might be effective. Given our call for research on building, understanding, testing, and improving programs, policies, or practices to reduce inequality, a clear need exists for the kinds of penetrating research questions that qualitative and mixed methods are well-suited to answering.

How and Why: Questions that are well-suited for qualitative and mixed methods

Our reducing inequality initiative centers on identifying effective strategies for responding to inequality. A major part of this focus is building understanding of how and why particular strategies might be effective. One area of inquiry that is essential to building this understanding is the social processes that involve interactions between individuals, or between an individual and her or his context.

Social processes in educational achievement gaps

For instance, many policymakers, practitioners, and researchers are focused on educational achievement gaps, or disparities in grades, test scores, and course content, across groups of students. One question that arises from this focus is how schools may provide the same chances to learn for all students and, in the process, reduce achievement gaps by race, ethnicity, and/or income. Such gaps may exist because a school does in fact offer unequal learning opportunities for

students based on the students' "different backgrounds, resources, and dispositions" (Carter and Reardon, 2014: 3). Consequently, the development of effective strategies to reduce achievement gaps would depend, in part, on knowledge of how and why different students get different opportunities. Furthermore, it would depend on how students understand the information they receive, identify good prospects, and make the best decisions for themselves.

To unpack questions related to the achievement gap, Prudence Carter (2005) interviewed low-income African American and Latino adolescents living near New York City. She found that the cultural practices of some youth (for instance, wearing a "hooded sweatshirt" and frequently speaking "black vernacular dialect") was seen by them as being at odds with how teachers saw a motivated learner (for instance, wearing Eddie Bauer and not using slang). This perceived disconnect, Carter wrote, "facilitates the students' limited attachment to school and their academic disengagement" (viii).

The youth believed that they were not seen by teachers as motivated learners. But context is critical here. It makes sense for the African-American and Latino young men to adopt a certain façade—a mask of toughness—as a strategy to navigate the low-income communities in which they live. These are places where an “underground economy” has emerged in the wake of the widespread disappearance of work in the formal labor market (Wilson, 1996).



Drawing on what she learned from interviewing youth and visiting their neighborhoods, Carter advises teachers and school officials to reach out to youth across the cultural divide.

But a mask of toughness, which makes sense in neighborhoods—where unemployment was high and gang fights were frequent—does not make sense in the schools the boys attend and the service jobs they hope to get. In the latter contexts, a tough posture comes across to teachers and potential employers as threatening. Drawing on what she learned from interviewing the youth and visiting their neighborhoods, Carter advises teachers and school officials to reach out to youth across the cultural divide. But they do not have to do this alone. Rather, they should draw on the help of those youth who can successfully straddle multiple cultural worlds. In doing so, the adults can expand their perception of what a motivated learner is, and, in the process, facilitate entrée to advanced courses and other opportunities for students from a wide range of self-representations.

Social processes in workforce outcomes and opportunities

Another example of the importance of understanding social processes concerns the question of how social networks and relationships can shape employment experiences and outcomes, especially for young people. How can workplace networks provide similar types of information to

employees in the early stages of their careers as a means to reduce unequal outcomes? The people one knows and the types of information they share can impact how well one fares in life. But not all networks are the same in terms of the individuals they comprise or the usefulness of the information shared. Young people, for instance, may obtain access to different, and often, unequal information, and this can have unequal material consequences (Carter and Reardon, 2014). If the economy remains robust, the retirement of the white baby boomers, particularly men, should open up room in top leadership positions for highly-educated women and minorities (Alba, 2009; 2016). But qualitative research has signaled that the road to the top begins early in the career pipeline and might be much bumpier than one might assume.

Margaret Chin's (2016) interviews with Asian-American professionals in the corporate world expose some of the potential roadblocks. Demonstrating that one is an academic striver, a strategy that works well in high school and college, does not necessarily have the same payoff in the workplace, where the rules are less clear-cut and often involve more than skills and talent alone. A key advantage in the workplace is showing that you are a “cultural fit” with the executives in charge. For the individuals in Chin's study, however, this was not necessarily an easy or even visible task.

The professionals, born or raised in the United States, were from immigrant families and had grown up in immigrant homes. Many from middle-class immigrant family backgrounds were the first in their families to work in the corporate world (their parents were more often employed in science, accounting, research, or engineering fields). These professionals were entering a new world with unfamiliar rules. They had to learn the value of making small talk, networking, and deciphering the unspoken rules of the corporate world, including which assignments were important to have and how to manage one's professional image. Having mentors and colleagues who could guide them proved critical. Oftentimes, these relationships and resources were provided through diversity or affirmative action programs.

Attention to these processes requires thoughtful interviewing and observations in workplaces, as well as informal gatherings where connections are made and relationships sustained. While quan-

titative studies can investigate whether social networks contribute to promotion and to what degree, qualitative studies can illustrate how network membership is decided, as well as how knowledge is transmitted through these networks. In this example, which focuses on effective responses to inequality in workforce opportunities and outcomes, we would need to know how and why different people get different opportunities, and in what ways these factors shape outcomes.

Social capital and the processes of social exclusion

Both of the above examples involve social capital, or the information we obtain from the people we know and the understanding of how to successfully apply this information (Louie, 2012; 2014). But the importance of social capital to reducing inequality is *not* just about individuals or groups having access to helpful resources. The process is more complex than that, as we can see when considering the case of people living in poverty.

In a 2015 essay, sociologists Linda Burton and Whitney Welsh point out that people living below the poverty line might not trust the gatekeepers of resources, be they individuals or institutions. Despite much of the research on poverty in the United States (Pathways Special Issue, 2015; 2016), we still lack a nuanced understanding of different levels of poverty.² But ethnographic work, for instance, can help us better understand poor people's "everyday community, social, work, and familial life," and their subjective understandings of their social position and how they respond to it (Gans, 2014: 198-199). Because they can have important consequences for the lives of youth, it is critical to understand the everyday disconnects between poor families and the institutions that provide valuable resources. For example, family members might not know about high-quality youth programs in their neighborhoods, or how to enroll their children. If they are aware of the programs, they still might not enroll their children. In both scenarios, youth miss out on an opportunity that could help them do better in school and further develop socio-emotional skills.

Qualitative work could examine how and why these families do not engage with the programs that represent a potentially beneficial resource. This is precisely the kind of information that is necessary to develop effective policies to reduce economic inequality for people living below the poverty line. We need to know the starting point for individuals in order to craft meaningful institutional interactions that involve them.

Burton and Welsh make the critical point that if poverty interventions do not consider the social exclusion that shapes the lives of poor people, they are unlikely to be successful. This is because social exclusion "is not just a situation, but a process..." (3). This process, which is not exclusive to the poor, takes several generic forms. *Othering*, for example, happens when particular groups of people are seen as "different or inferior," and thus are not appreciated as full members of a society. *Oppressive othering* identifies groups with fewer advantages as "morally or intellectually deficient." This is illustrated, for instance, in the belief that the poor are poor because they deserve to be. Implicit othering associates the advantages of a successful group to positive group-based features and implies that less successful groups do not have those traits. An example of implicit othering would be the statement that Asian-Americans do well because they work hard and do not complain. The implicit message to fellow non-White minority groups is "why can't you just do the same?" (Louie, 2004). Defensive othering involves the mechanisms used by individuals to cope with being negatively stigmatized; this can include people using the dominant language of othering to distance themselves from fellow individuals cast at society's margins—i.e., "I'm not like them" (Louie, 2012).

Another coping mechanism for a disadvantaged group is to behave and strategize in ways that "inadvertently perpetuate the existing social hierarchy" and their place within it. This is called *subordinate adaptation*. *Boundary maintenance* refers to the actions taken by the dominant group to retain their status by limiting others' access to crucial resources, such as well-resourced, safe neighborhoods with high-quality schools. Finally, *emotion management* describes the ways that individuals,

² The bottom income strata in the United States include people living in deep poverty, i.e., their income is "half or less of the official poverty line income," and in extreme poverty, i.e., their income is "13% of the official poverty line" (Gans, 2014: 196). However, government agencies do not collect social and economic data about these populations in the same ways they do for others. The result is that "not much more is known about the populations in deep and extreme poverty themselves" (Gans, 2014: 197).

who are well-aware of their marginalization, have to navigate and reconcile their own emotions about their circumstances and experiences. In addition to these social processes is the effect of public discourse that argues non-dominant groups do not exercise enough personal responsibility to have improved lives and access to power, and generally, minimizes their interests.

Responding to the social processes of exclusion

To return to the example of people living in poverty, the sum consequences of all of the above contribute to and characterize the social exclusion experienced by the poor. As daunting as this reality is, the effects of such processes *can* be countered. A quantitative study certainly can indicate whether othering occurs in a given environment, and the extent of it, but qualitative research can unearth how it feels to experience one of these processes, and how this experience might affect one's everyday social interactions, including developing trust in institutions and people who might be in a position to help. As an example, Burton and Welsh point to sociologist Mario Small's (2009) organizational analysis of childcare centers. The ethnographic portion of Small's analysis reveals that it is not enough to have well-resourced institutions in poor neighborhoods. What matters is that people actually *use* those institutions. A policy strategy that solely involves getting people into the institution is still not enough, as it does not take into account the barriers that exist when people of different social statuses—poor mothers and childcare center staff, in Small's example—actually come together.

Small explicitly highlights the kinds of information enabled by his mixed-methods design, and the ways in which they contribute to a richer base of knowledge on how to reduce inequalities. He drew on two quantitative datasets, the Fragile Families and Child Wellbeing Study, a national panel survey of about 3,500 mothers whose children were born 1998-2000, and the Childcare Centers and Families Survey of about "300 centers randomly sampled in New York City in 2004" (24). With the quantitative surveys, Small was able to test whether "childcare center participation is associated with larger networks and greater wellbeing," and assess hypotheses derived from the qualitative work (25), which drew from interviews mainly conducted with 67 mothers, and case studies of 23

centers in New York City. Through these methods, Small uncovered the organizational practices that allowed the childcare centers to acquire useful information and build trust over time between staff and the mothers—the latter of which was critical to the mothers' use of information that had been transmitted to them. With the interviews, Small was able to see "how ties are formed, what types of ties these are, how trust and obligations operate, and how useful the connections truly are for those purported to benefit from them" (25).

In order for social exclusion to be countered, two crucial pieces had to be present. First, the leaders of the childcare centers took advantage of opportunities to broker "ties to other organizations and resources" (16). Through these ties, the leaders brought into the centers information that would be useful to the mothers, including information about free meals and toys, free or discounted tickets to cultural events, housing and schools, and direct services, like free dental and health care for the children. Second, the mothers paid many visits to the centers over a lengthy period of time. In these settings, which were non-competitive—another plus—the mothers had numerous interactions with the childcare providers. And most importantly, these interactions forged positive emotional bonds between the staff, who drew on the standards of their professional training to identify with the mothers, as well as the mothers themselves. Trust is a two-way street. Given the reciprocal trust that developed, the possibilities for social processes of exclusion faded into the background, and the task of working together to care for the children came into the foreground.

This work provides a compelling point of departure for the next stage of research to reduce inequality. For instance, researchers might seek to investigate how the organizational practices highlighted by Small's study could be developed and implemented. As Burton and Welsh suggest, we need to "consider what types of discourse, micro processes, and social interactions are occurring on the ground level in peoples' everyday lives that are inhibiting a more profound reduction in poverty" (11). The clarion call of our reducing inequality initiative is for researchers to do the kind of nuanced work that will get us there.

The Value of Qualitative and Mixed Methods Research: Examples from our Portfolio on the Social Settings of Youth Development

As part of our former research initiative on understanding youth social settings, which ran from 2004 to 2014, the Foundation funded a number of projects that illustrate the unique potential of qualitative research, especially when it is integrated as part of a mixed-methods study. While these projects predated the Foundation's reducing inequality initiative, a handful intersect with our current interest in identifying effective strategies to reduce inequality in youth outcomes.

Moving to Opportunity

One notable example centers on a pressing social problem: how to improve the quality of the neighborhoods where poor families live. In 1994, the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) launched the Moving to Opportunity program (MTO), a randomized housing mobility experiment that ran for four years and provided poor families the opportunity to move into non-poor neighborhoods. The guiding principle of the program was that living in better resourced neighborhoods—those that are safer and have less poverty and better performing schools—would improve youth outcomes.

The experiment was conducted in Baltimore, Boston, Chicago, Los Angeles, and New York. MTO focused on families with children who were living in public housing located in high-poverty neighborhoods, where the rate of poverty exceeded 40 percent. The program gave 4,600 eligible families the chance to move to private-market housing in better off neighborhoods. Families were randomly assigned to one of three groups: those that received housing vouchers that they could use only in low-poverty neighborhoods, those that received traditional Section 8 housing vouchers that they could use anywhere, and those that received no vouchers.

Families were interviewed 10 to 15 years later as part of the program evaluation, which was designed to reveal the program's long-term effects, as well as the mechanisms for those effects and

how they unfolded over time. As Small (2011) points out, MTO serves as a powerful example of a nested mixed-methods design. Nested data refers to multiple types of data being drawn from the "same actors, organizations, or entities" (68). These kinds of studies have been especially effective in policy research that includes randomized control trials.³ In the case of MTO, all participants were surveyed, and a random subsample was selected for in-depth interviews or observations.

The quantitative analyses of MTO revealed that a majority of families did not use their vouchers to move, and even those who did move did not stay long in their new, better resourced neighborhoods. Of the latter group, some subsequently moved into high-poverty areas. These outcomes were contrary to the goals of MTO, and the findings were disappointing to the policymakers who had pushed for the program. The critical question was *why?*

Conventional wisdom suggested that poor families did not gravitate to or stay in better off neighborhoods because they simply "did not want to" live among neighbors so different from them. This is where Kathryn Edin and her fellow qualitative researchers stepped in to find answers.

The team's findings ultimately contradicted the assumptions of the conventional wisdom. With funding from our Foundation, Edin and colleagues conducted two rounds of qualitative interviews and neighborhood and classroom observations for the MTO evaluation in Baltimore and Chicago, from 2003-2004, and again from 2010-2011. They found that families in low-poverty neighborhoods did in fact appreciate their advantages, and did not leave out of discomfort with the neighborhoods' racial and economic diversity. Instead, they tended to leave because of problems with their landlords or their rental units. Typical problems included a hike in rent that exceeded the program's guidelines, or a major maintenance issue that went unaddressed. Sometimes units did not meet the standards required by annual inspections.

³ A randomized control trial study involves the random allocation of people (e.g., participants) to receive one of a number of interventions and measurement of people's outcomes, typically pre- and post- intervention (Jadad and Enkin, 2007).

Families who experienced these challenges tended to return to high poverty areas because they found it difficult to navigate housing markets that were so highly segregated. Many needed more counseling than MTO could provide.

We might assume that incentives to move would seem prone to fail, because families are not interested in moving to or staying in more advantaged neighborhoods. But findings from the qualitative work suggest quite a different response, and in fact contribute to a case for incentives or sanctions for landlords to maintain their rental units,



The qualitative research in these examples showed why well-intentioned policies that were designed to improve poor families' neighborhood quality as a means of improving youth outcomes were less effective than envisioned.

as well as more one-on-one support for families during and following their initial move. Interviewers found that the families made the decision to live in high-poverty areas based on a calculus derived from a long history of living in impoverished housing circumstances. To start with, the families had low expectations for the quality of their neighborhoods. They believed that if they kept to themselves, their children would stay safe. If they moved back to a high-poverty neighborhood, the families took comfort in living "on a good block" in an unsafe neighborhood (Edin, DeLuca, and Owens, 2012: 187). Families had similarly low expectations for their children's schools: though the schools may have been poor quality, some parents believed that their children's hard work in school mattered more than the school itself.

Housing Choice Vouchers

Stefanie DeLuca, a former William T. Grant Scholar (2008-2013), had been an interviewer for the MTO Baltimore study in 2003-2004, and was a co-Principal Investigator with Kathryn Edin for the 2010-2011 work. As part of her Scholars award, DeLuca

and her team sought to answer a similar set of questions around Housing Choice Vouchers (HCV), formerly known as Section 8. Families could use these vouchers to rent a home in the private market, as long as the landlord was willing to participate in the program. HCV also are designed to help minority families move into neighborhoods with more racial and economic integration than the ones where they were living.

Like MTO, HCV's disappointing outcomes raised questions: "Given its potential, why hasn't the HCV program been more effective in helping minority families move into lower poverty, less segregated neighborhoods?" (De Luca, Garboden, and Rosenblatt, 2013: 271).

To find the answers, DeLuca and her team conducted four years of fieldwork with 100 low-income African-American parents in the Mobile metro area of Alabama. These parents were a sub-sample of the households in the Mobile Youth Survey (MYS), which surveyed 10- to 18-year-olds living in 13 of the area's poorest communities, from 1998-2011. MYS was designed to investigate the factors involved with violence, sexually risky behavior, and substance use and abuse among young people and adults. In interviewing the heads of household and observing how they actually lived— having meals together, socializing with their family and friends, attending community meetings, and joining them on housing searches—the team was able to understand the significant constraints faced by families. Their analyses show-case how individuals and institutions interact in ways that policymakers need to understand if they want more families to use the vouchers to live in lower poverty, less segregated neighborhoods.

Specifically, DeLuca and colleagues found that families had difficulty meeting the federally mandated window of 60 days to find a home using their housing voucher (extensions are discretionary, and, during this project, were rarely granted in Mobile). Families without cars were especially stymied. Lists of available units provided by the housing authority did not prove to be very helpful, as they were often out of date. Here, as in MTO, families had to navigate a housing market with more "affordable rentals in lower-income neighborhoods" (DeLuca, Garboden, and Rosenblatt, 2013: 280).

Indeed, as Burton, Welsh, and Small have illustrated in other examples, the gatekeepers of the resources were a big part of the story. Federal evaluation guidelines of public housing authority employees offer relatively few points to staff for succeeding in helping families move to low-poverty and non-segregated neighborhoods. Staff therefore may have little incentive to make this a priority. Similarly, in addition to housing authorities, landlords who participate in the program are also gatekeepers, and DeLuca and her colleagues rightfully call out the need for researchers to understand how the program incentivizes or disincentivizes certain behaviors on their part.

Taken together, these studies produced deep insights that would not have been accessible through quantitative research alone. The qualitative research in these examples showed why well-intentioned policies that were designed to improve poor families' neighborhood quality as a means of improving youth outcomes were less effective than envisioned. The research also generated important and useful hypotheses about how to improve and strengthen the policies. A particular challenge with "black box" randomized controlled trials is a focus on whether the intervention worked or did not work. While this approach is certainly important, it misses key pieces of the puzzle that could tell us how to improve what is already in place.

Further, the insights from the housing studies expose unanswered questions for researchers to investigate, including how organizational practices can incorporate the knowledge generated about how families, landlords, and institutions engage with one another. The insights reveal the lived experiences behind the quantifiable outcomes, and spell out compelling hypotheses that may be tested in future quantitative work.

In their new book, Stefanie DeLuca, Susan Clamper-Lundquist, and Kathryn Edin (2016) draw on their interviews and observations with Baltimore youth to tell the story of a "glass half full and a glass half empty" (5). Thanks to their own resilience and the impact of policies that have improved their neighborhoods, most of these young people had climbed out of poverty and were doing better than their parents. And yet, due to roadblocks in college access and an exploitative labor market, most have fallen short of their own expectations and probable potential. They found themselves in low wage jobs with few prospects for stability and advancement. We still have more to know in order to reduce inequality in youth outcomes, including how to spur more effective uptake of services. Qualitative and mixed-methods studies that illuminate how and why programs succeed or fail to achieve their intended outcomes are essential to this task.

Conclusion

The strength of qualitative research is that it can tap into the unexpected; it can generate unanticipated insights that lead to new discoveries, generate fresh questions, and challenge even our own assumptions. But, as a longtime funder of research, we know that discipline, forethought, and adherence to well-thought out research plans are fundamental aspects of this work. As Eli Lieber writes, proposals that demonstrate "fluency and awareness at all stages—from clearly articulated research questions, to well-chosen methods and designs, to a keen eye on how findings will support meaningful conclusions—often make the most convincing case that they will lead to important and sound research" (Lieber, 2016). In addition to Eli's suggestions for applicants, and the exam-

ples and ideas I've shared in this essay, we have also compiled annotated excerpts from successful research proposals [on our website](#), which we encourage all potential applicants to review.

We hope that these resources help you to envision the types of qualitative and mixed methods research that we know are vital to the pursuit of our mission. Despite the scope of the challenge, research that thoughtfully considers the types of "how" and "why" questions that qualitative methods are well-suited to answering can form a body of knowledge that leads to change, helps reduce inequality, and improves opportunities and outcomes for young people across the country.

References

- Alba, R. (2009). *Blurring the color line: The new chance for a more integrated America*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Alba, R. & Yrizar Barbosa, G. (2016). Room at the top? Minority mobility and the transition to demographic diversity in the USA. *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 39(6): 917-938.
- Burton, L.M. & Welsh, W. (2015). *Inequality and opportunity: The role of exclusion, social capital, and generic social processes in upward mobility*. William T. Grant Foundation.
- Carter, P.L (2005). *Keeping it real: School success beyond black and white*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Carter, P.L. & Reardon, S.F. (2014). *Inequality matters*. William T. Grant Foundation.
- Chin, M.M. (2016). Asian Americans, bamboo ceilings, and affirmative action. *Contexts* Vol. 15, No. 1, pp. 70-73. ISSN 1536-5042.
- Clampet-Lundquist, S., DeLuca, S., Edin K, with Bell, M., Boyd, M., Condliffe, B., Holland, M. & Rosen, E. (2012). *Transition to adulthood among low-income youth: A qualitative study of young adults in the Baltimore site of the moving to opportunity Program*. Report for the United States Department of Housing and Urban Development.
- DeLuca, S., Clampet-Lundquist, S., & Edin, K. 2016. *Coming of Age in the Other America*. New York: Russell Sage Foundation.
- DeLuca, S., Garboden, P.M.E. & Rosenblatt, P. (2013). Segregating shelter: How housing policies shape the residential locations of low-income minority families. *ANNALS, AAPSS* 647: 268-299.
- Edin, K., DeLuca, S. & and Ann Owens. (2012). Constrained compliance: Solving the puzzle of MTO's lease-up rates and why mobility matters. *Cityscape* 14 (2): 181-194.
- Gans, H. (2014). Studying the bottom of American society. *DuBois Review* 11(2): 195-204.
- Jadad, A.R. & Enkin, M.W. (2007). *Randomized control trials: Questions, answers and musings*. Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing.
- Lieber, E. (2016) *Harnessing discovery: A primer for approaching mixed-methods research*. [blog post] Retrieved from: <http://wtgrantfoundation.org/digest/harnessing-discovery-primer-approaching-mixed-methods-research>.
- Louie, V. (2004). *Compelled to excel: Immigration, education and opportunity among Chinese Americans*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- Louie, V. (2011). Complicating the story of immigrant integration. In Suarez-Orozco, M., Louie, V. & and Suro, R. eds. *Writing immigration: Scholars and journalists in dialogue*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.
- Louie, V. (2012). *Keeping the immigrant bargain: The costs and rewards of success in America*. New York: Russell Sage Foundation.
- Louie, V. (2014). *How social capital can help close the achievement gap*. CUNY Institute for Education Policy. Retrieved from: <http://ciep.hunter.cuny.edu/how-social-capital-can-help-close-the-achievement-gap/#comments>.
- Newman, K.S. & Chin, M.M. (2003). High stakes: Time poverty, testing, and the children of the working poor. *Qualitative Sociology* 26 (1): 3-33.
- Small, M. (2009). *Unanticipated gains: Origins of network inequality in everyday life*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Small, M. (2011). How to conduct a mixed methods study: Recent trends in a rapidly growing literature. *Annual Review of Sociology* 37: 53-84.
- State of the states: The poverty and inequality report. *Pathways Special Issue 2015*. Stanford Center on Poverty and Inequality. Retrieved from: http://inequality.stanford.edu/sites/default/files/SOTU_2015.pdf.
- State of the union: *The Poverty and Inequality Report. Pathways Special Issue 2016*. Stanford Center on Poverty and Inequality. Retrieved from: <http://inequality.stanford.edu/sites/default/files/Pathways-SOTU-2016-2.pdf>.
- Wilson, W.J. (1996). *When work disappears: The world of the new urban poor*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf.
- Yoshikawa, H., Weisner, T., Kalil, A. & Way, N. (2008). Mixing qualitative and quantitative research in developmental science: Uses and methodological choices. *Developmental Psychology* 44(2): 344-354.
-