Moving forward from the riots: A comparative community investigation into socioeconomic status, social capital and life satisfaction

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**ABSTRACT**

This study aimed to explore contributing factors of the 2011 riots, specifically the instigators of social inequalities. The previously acknowledged relationships between socioeconomic status, social capital and life satisfaction were investigated. Furthermore, category variables pertaining to the riots (emotional affect, inequalities and hopefulness) were explored in relation to the continuous life measures. Socioeconomic status was a combined measure of occupational status (Office for National Statistics, 2010a), educational qualifications (Office for National Statistics, 2010b) and annual income (HM Revenue and Customs, 2012); consistent with Weber’s (1946) approach to social class. Social capital (Renzaho et al., 2012) and life satisfaction (Neto, 1992), were measured using previously developed scales.

Seventy-four Greater Manchester residents (M = 37, F = 37) of all ages completed the online questionnaire. Pearson’s correlation, independent-sample t-tests and standard multiple regression analysis, were employed to assess the relationships between-measures and to explore the differences between-subjects. Socioeconomic status and social capital positively correlated with life satisfaction ($p < .01$). Hopefulness correlated with high levels of all three continuous life measures ($p < .05$). This research demonstrates that socioeconomic status and social capital are significant determinants of life satisfaction. Implications for; government policies, reducing social problems and narrowing social inequalities are discussed.

**KEY WORDS:** RIOTS INEQUALITIES SOCIO-ECONOMIC STATUS SOCIAL CAPITAL NEO-LIBERALISM
Introduction

Five Days in August
On Thursday 4th August, Mark Duggan was fatally shot by police officers in Tottenham, an incident which was immediately reported to the Independent Police Complaints Commission. In protest of his rumoured ‘assassination’ family and friends in their hundreds took to the streets of Tottenham in protest. What began as a peaceful demonstration culminated to; the tragic loss of five lives, the destruction of hundreds of businesses and homes, and a total cost (for an already economically struggling country) of more than half a billion pounds (Laville, 2011, Morrell et al., 2011).

Between the 6th and 10th of August 2011, the riots spread at an unprecedented rate affecting 66 areas of Britain. During these shocking five days, in excess of 15,000 people were involved in; violence, arson, criminal damage and theft. Subsequently, these events worsened already existing societal problems such as collective pessimism regarding the future and residents living in fear of their own communities (Singh et al., 2012). ‘The Riots Communities and Victims Panel (RCVP) was established to investigate the causes of the riots and to consider what more could be done to build greater social and economic resilience in communities’ (Singh et al., 2012, p.3).

Although it is not possible to identify a single cause of the riots, the RCVP identified seven key underlying factors; children and parents, building personal resilience, hopes and dreams, riots and the brands, the usual suspects, police and the public, and community engagement, involvement and cohesion (Singh et al., 2011; Singh et al., 2012).

Collectively the British media and academics have portrayed the public disorder as a desperate response to; inequalities, poverty, unemployment, deprivation, a lack of work opportunities and unequal access to education (Bawdon, 2012; BPS, 2011; James, 2011; Žižek, 2012). In order to study these social and economic variables this research focuses in depth upon two of the RCVP underlying factors:

1) ‘Hopes and dreams

2) Community engagement, involvement and cohesion’

(Singh et al., 2012).

Hopes and Dreams in ‘Broken Britain’
Much academic research shows stringent connections between education, occupation, income and inequalities (Feinstein, 1993; Wilkinson & Pickett, 2010). Social inequality can be determined by one’s socioeconomic status, which
measures an individual’s economic and social position in relation to others based upon, education, occupation and income (Kagan et al., 2011). It is argued that ‘education is the key to one’s position in the stratification system’ (Ross & Wu, 2009, p.720), as it is the variable that structures future occupation and income.

Statistics from the riots illustrate that two thirds of juveniles brought before the courts had special educational needs, and that only 11% had achieved five or more A*-C GCSE grades including English and Maths. Moreover, 64% of 10-17 year olds lived in the most deprived areas of Britain, whilst only 3% lived in the least deprived regions (Berman, 2011; Home Office, 2011; Ministry of Justice, 2011; Singh et al., 2011).

In light of these figures it is perhaps unsurprising that one of the key findings of the RCVP was that young people described a lack of hopes and dreams for the future. ‘Too many young people continue to leave school neither work nor life ready. They face an increasingly competitive job market, resulting in high levels of youth unemployment’ (Singh et al., 2012, p.59). Residents of the communities affected by the rioting revealed that young people believe ‘getting an education was the key to the golden gate, but a year after graduation they were still struggling to find work’ (James, 2011). The Not in Employment, Education or Training (NEET) figure for 2011 was the worst since records began. Furthermore, since the start of the recession in 2008, the NEET figure has consistently risen from 15.4% to 18.5% in 2012 (Department for Education, 2012).

A positive relationship between education and well-being has been widely reported in academic literature. ‘Having higher qualifications is associated with
greater happiness, life satisfaction, self-esteem, self-efficacy, and reduced risk of depression’ (Sabates & Hammond, 2008, p.3). However, this has been criticised by Easterlin (1995), who found that high level qualifications may have negative effects on well-being due to increased stress, low job satisfaction and not meeting expectations that are raised by education. In spite of this criticism there is much existing research linking lower socioeconomic status and social inequality with negative life outcomes such as learned helplessness, chronic stress and prevalence of mental health problems (Baum et al., 1999; Ross & Mirowsky 1992). Wilkinson’s (2000) view of social inequality suggests that well-being is determined by what we think and feel about our material and social circumstances. It could therefore be argued that lower socioeconomic status and pessimism for the future are likely to be associated with lower life satisfaction.

Wilkinson and Pickett (2010) present evidence demonstrating that increases in the prevalence of social problems such as ‘lower social cohesion … increase[d] violence, teenage births, obesity [and] drug abuse’ (Wilkinson & Pickett, 2010, p.193) are the unintended consequences of income inequalities, produced by neoliberal ideologies. It is argued that neoliberal principles which endorse ‘social welfare reduction and penal expansion at the bottom of the class structure, in contrast to a laissez-faire attitude at the top’ (Slater, 2011, p. 106) produce marginality in Britain.

The rioting, arson, looting and violence, that gripped the nation in 2011, were portrayed by politicians and the media as mindless criminality, in accordance with broken society discourses (Slater, 2011). However, others argue that the looting was not ‘mindless violence’ but rather ‘a response to … deprivation, poverty, unemployment, cuts to the educational maintenance allowance (EMA), anger, and inequalities’ (James, 2011). Broken society discourses could therefore be argued against, in favour of reforms to Britain’s ‘broken state’ (Slater, 2011).

Community Engagement, Involvement and Cohesion
Within a community ‘connections of trust and participation in public affairs, enhances community capacity to create structures of cohesion and support that benefit the population and produce positive health, welfare, educational and social outcomes’ (Nelson & Prilleltensky, 2005, p.95). Features of social life, such as norms, trust and networks that facilitate positive economic, social and health outcomes, are collectively referred to as social capital.

The finding that social integration can enhance population well-being can be dated back to Durkheim’s (1897) research into suicide (as cited in Kawachi et al., 1999). Since 1897, research into the associations between social capital and well-being has become increasingly popular and many now use social capital as one
explanation of social inequalities (Kawachi et al., 1999; Putnam, 1995; Stanton-Salazar & Dornbusch, 1995; Verhaeghe & Tampubolon, 2012). Bourdieu (1989) suggested that a person situated in a higher socioeconomic position is likely to experience more social capital. In contrast, a person lower in the stratification system is less likely to experience the positive outcomes of social capital, leading to oppression, social conflicts and inequalities.

In recent years there has been much interest in the possible decline of social capital in Western societies. Paxton (1999) through empirical research found a decline in social capital and a general decline of trust in individuals. Statistics from the riots lend support to these findings, as the RCVP found that 61% of people do not agree that theirs is a close, tight knit community (Singh et al., 2012). However, Rothstein’s (2001) investigation of Swedish society is a critical case, as social capital has increased in Sweden since the 1950s.

Zygmunt Bauman (2000) suggests that we have moved towards a more individualised society where we have new responsibilities of the self, due to neoliberal globalization. ‘In the sociology of Zygmunt Bauman (2000), contemporary society, labelled consumer society by Bauman, is viewed as liquid modernity, which underlines mobility as indicative of our time’ (Abrahamson, 2004, p.171). Empowerment and self-actualisation are thought to be achieved through consumption choices such as life-long learning, acquisition of skills, careers and pensions (Gane, 2001). In this sense, neoliberalism supports the hypothesis that there is a relationship between socioeconomic and life satisfaction. Bauman (2000) argues that in our neoliberal society, community no longer has the same effects upon well-being. Yet there are recent empirical studies showing consistent associations between community engagement, involvement and cohesion and life satisfaction (Renzaho et al., 2012).

Wilkinson and Pickett (2010) present wide-ranging evidence suggesting that more equal societies are better for everyone, including the wealthy. The key theme of this research is therefore the pursuit of social equality and justice and it is rooted in community and social psychology. Hence, a social constructionist theoretical standpoint has been taken in order to analyse how participant’s experiences and views are socially mediated and historically situated (Parker, 1998). The unrest of summer 2011 detrimentally impacted upon all levels of British society and many would agree that understanding the reasons why people rioted is fundamental to preventing future disturbances (Singh et al., 2012).
Aims and Hypotheses

The overall aim of this investigation was to explore the causal factors of social inequalities in the UK, that are considered to be significant underlying causes as to why the summer riots of 2011 occurred (Singh et al., 2012). This research focuses upon residents of Greater Manchester, an area of the UK that experienced rioting behaviour. The primary aims were to explore the acknowledged relationships between the independent variables socioeconomic status and social capital, and the dependent variable life satisfaction. Literature recognises that socioeconomic status and social capital are major determinants of well-being (Bourdieu, 1989; Renzaho et al., 2012; Sabates & Hammond, 2008; Wilkinson, 2000). However, very few previous studies have simultaneously analysed the economic and the social indicators when addressing determinants of life satisfaction.

Categorical measures were employed to explore whether participants; were emotionally affected by the riots (emotional affect), believed there to be a growing gap between the rich and the poor (inequalities), and felt hopeful for the future (hopefulness). The secondary aims of this research were to explore the differences in continuous variable scores in relation to the three category variables.

It was hypothesised that:

H1. There will be significant and positive correlations between SES and life satisfaction.
H2. There will be significant and positive correlations between social capital and life satisfaction.
H3. There will be a significant difference between whether or not participants were emotionally affected by the riots and the three continuous variable scores (socioeconomic status, social capital and life satisfaction).
H4. There will be a significant difference between whether or not participants felt there was a growing gap between the rich and the poor and the three continuous variable scores.
H5. There will be a significant difference between whether or not participants felt hopeful for the future and the three continuous variable scores.
Method

Pre-study
Participants were recruited through mediating with a gatekeeper. Initially the researcher contacted a sergeant within the Greater Manchester Police service, by means of a formal letter (Appendix A). The police sergeant provided the researcher with the contact details of the gatekeeper, a neighbourhood manager employed by Manchester City Council. The researcher and neighbourhood manager communicated via email and telephone, during which written and verbal permissions to access the participant group were obtained. Power analyses\(^1\) (Appendix B) conducted prior to the main study indicated that a minimum of 29 participants were required.

On behalf of the researcher the gatekeeper distributed the online questionnaire to 350 community contacts via email. These community contacts were comprised of local community and voluntary groups, and Greater Manchester residents interested in receiving information regarding local activities. The distribution of the questionnaire received a 21.14% response rate, culminating in a final sample of 74 participants.

This specific participant group was targeted, as previous research has identified a relationship between community interest and social change processes (Chaskin, 2001). Citizens engaged with their communities are believed to have invested interests in improving the quality of services, solving complex problems and creating an inclusive society (Office for the Community and Voluntary Sector, n.d.). It could therefore be argued that as the participants in this study are engaged with their communities, they are more likely to be concerned with neighbourhood problems.

A pilot study of 6 participants (N=6), recruited via an opportunity sample, was conducted. Of these participants, 4 were male and 2 were female. Each participant completed the study online in the presence of the researcher, which allowed for instantaneous feedback. No amendments were made as a result of the pilot study. However, an indication of the length of time required to complete the questionnaire was obtained, with times ranging from 6.12 to 13.35 minutes, and a mean time of 9.52 minutes. As a result, in the main study participants were advised that the questionnaire would take approximately 10 minutes to complete.

\(^1\) Power analyses were conducted using G*Power3 (Faul 2013; Faul et al., 2007) based on normative standard deviations for a primary outcome measure (life satisfaction) at a significance level of .05, a power of .80 and a large effect size (Cohen’s \(d = .50\)) – indicating that 29 participants were required to detect a significant difference.
Design
The continuous variables in this research were socioeconomic status, social capital and life satisfaction. The category variables in this investigation were whether participants reported; being emotionally affected by the riots (emotional affect), a growing gap between the rich and the poor (inequalities), and feeling hopeful for the future (hopefulness).

For hypotheses one and two, the within-subjects independent variables were socioeconomic status and social capital, with life satisfaction as the dependent variable. For hypotheses three, four and five; the between-subjects independent variables were socioeconomic status, social capital and life satisfaction. The dependent variables were emotional affect, inequalities and hopefulness. All variables were investigated using self-report measures. This investigation adopted a correlational design, assigning participants numeric scores for each factor.

Participants
The final sample consisted of 74 participants, of these participants, 50% were male (N=37) and 50% were female (N=37). Participant age was categorised using a scale from previous research (Sweiry & Willitts, 2012). The age groups were; 16-24 years, 25-49 years, 49-64 years and 65+ years. Table 1 displays the sample characteristics.

Table 1: Sample Characteristics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sample Characteristics</th>
<th>Participant Numbers (N=74)</th>
<th>Participant Percentages</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>%Female</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>%Male</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age-group</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>%18-24 years</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>%25-49 years</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>32.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>%50-64 years</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>28.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>%65+ years</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>12.2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Materials
The questionnaire was designed and built through the use of the website ‘www.freeonlinesurveys.com’. The same website was also employed to host the questionnaire (Appendix C) which presented an amalgamation of demographic variables, category variables and the three individual measures listed below.

Measures
Socioeconomic Status (SES)
It is widely acknowledged that socioeconomic status is an important indicator of social inequalities. However, a theoretical dispute exists between Weberian and Marxist approaches (Marks, 2000; Wohlfarth, 1997). This study conceptualises socioeconomic status as comprising levels of education, income and occupation. This continuous measurement of socioeconomic status is consistent with Weber’s (1946) approach. In this investigation, socioeconomic status was measured by combing pre-existing categories of; occupational status (Office for National Statistics, 2010a), educational qualifications (Office for National Statistics, 2010b) and annual income (HM Revenue and Customs, 2012). Occupational status ranged from 1 (unemployed) to 8 (higher managerial), qualifications from 1 (none) to 7 (degree), and annual income ranged from 1 (£0-£9,999) to 4 (£30,000+). Socioeconomic status was scored by totalling education, income and occupation; a high score indicated higher socioeconomic status. The measure had acceptable reliability (α = .70).

Social Capital
An existing model developed by Renzaho et al. (2012) was used to measure social capital. The social capital measure incorporated 13 items measuring the quality of services and opportunities in the neighbourhood, community connections, sense of neighbourhood pride, and government trustworthiness. Each social capital item was scored using a Likert type scale, where responses for items 1-4 ranged from 1 (very poor) to 5 (very good), and responses for items 5-13 ranged from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). An overall score was achieved by totalling the responses; a high score indicated higher social capital. The measure had good reliability (α = .89).

Life Satisfaction
Neto’s (1992) Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS) was employed to measure life satisfaction. The SWLS is an ‘overall assessment of life satisfaction as cognitive-judgemental process, rather as a measurement of specific satisfaction areas’ (Neto, 1992, p.125). The life satisfaction measure consisted of 5 items and was answered using a Likert type scale, where responses ranged from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). An overall life satisfaction score was achieved by totalling the responses; a high score indicated higher life satisfaction. The measure had good reliability (α = .88).
Procedure
The website ‘www.freeonlinesurveys.com’ was selected as the most appropriate platform from which to host the questionnaire (Appendix C), based upon time and financial restraints. The welcome page of the questionnaire was aimed towards briefing participants, outlining the participant’s right to withdraw, providing the researcher’s contact details and obtaining informed consent. Subsequently, the questionnaire requested demographic information including gender and age, which was succeeded by education, income and occupation questions that comprised the socioeconomic measure. Followed by; the three dichotomous category variable questions, the social capital items and the life satisfaction scale. Prior to the submission of the completed questionnaire participants were provided with a debriefing page.

Controls
As responses were gathered exclusively online, compared with traditional research contexts, there was a reduced degree of control over the research environment. The researcher did not have control over the environmental conditions participants were responding under, nor any distractions that may have taken place. This investigation did not involve psychometric testing therefore the need for strict controls were less evident. Procedural variability was controlled for, by administering the exact same questionnaire, in precisely the same format to all participants, so not to impact the validity of the study (British Psychological Society, 2009).

Statistical Analysis
The raw data obtained from the questionnaire was entered and coded (Appendix D) into IBM SPSS Statistics version 19 for Windows (IBM Corp, 2010), which was used for all computations. All graphs and tables were derived from SPSS outputs (Appendix E). Prior to statistical analysing the hypotheses, reliability analysis was conducted for each continuous variable. To explore the relationships between-measures (hypotheses one and two), Pearson product-moment correlation was conducted. Independent t-tests were used to explore the between-subjects relationships (hypotheses three, four and five). Standard multiple regression was also performed to explore the interrelationships of the continuous variables.

Ethical Considerations
This study was conducted within the British Psychological Society (BPS) ethical guidelines (BPS, 2009); in addition the BPS guidelines for ethical practice in psychological research online were adhered to (BPS, 2007). The Manchester Metropolitan University ethics committee required the submission and approval of an Application for Ethics Approval Form (Appendix F1) and an Ethics Check Form (Appendix F2) prior to data collection.
All participants were over the age of 18 and therefore able to give informed consent via the welcome page of the questionnaire. The welcome page also briefed participants and informed them of their right to withdraw at any time. In accordance with the BPS guidelines for online research, if a participant exited the browser part way through the questionnaire, this was understood as withdrawal from the investigation and therefore no data from partially complete questionnaires was used (BPS, 2007). Upon completing the questionnaire participants were asked if they were happy for their data to be used. Subsequently partakers were then thanked and debriefed.

The study did not present any danger to participants or the researcher, nor did the study involve deception. Participants were however provided with the researcher’s and supervisor’s contact details, and were encouraged to make contact if they had any questions or concerns.

Results

Reliability Analysis
Before the commencement of statistical analysis, the internal reliability of the individual continuous measures, socioeconomic status (SES), social capital and life satisfaction, was tested. For each scale the Cronbach’s alpha (α) coefficients were above .70, which is generally recognised as an acceptable internal consistency value (Nunnally, 1978).

Table 2: Cronbach’s Alpha for the Continuous Variables

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Number of items in variable score</th>
<th>Cronbach’s alpha</th>
<th>95% Confidence Interval for alpha</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Lower</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SES</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>.70</td>
<td>.56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Capital</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>.89</td>
<td>.85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Satisfaction with Life</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>.88</td>
<td>.83</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
It can be deduced from table 2 that social capital was found to have good reliability ($\alpha = .89$), as was life satisfaction ($\alpha = .88$), and SES was found to have acceptable reliability ($\alpha = .70$) (George & Mallery, 2009).

**Descriptive Statistics**

**Table 3: Descriptive Statistics for the Continuous Variables (N=74)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Minimum</th>
<th>Maximum</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>SES</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>10.80</td>
<td>4.64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Capital</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>40.43</td>
<td>9.16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Satisfaction with Life</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>16.16</td>
<td>4.68</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3 shows that the mean SES score ($M = 10.80$) falls above the mid-score (9.5) for this scale. Similarly the mean score for social capital ($M = 40.43$) falls above the scale’s mid-score (32.5). The mean score for satisfaction with life ($M = 16.16$) also falls above the scale’s mid-score (12.5). Suggesting that, on average, the participant sample displays above average scores on all three continuous variables.

**Table 4: Frequencies of the Category Variables (N=74)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Frequency (Yes)</th>
<th>Frequency (No)</th>
<th>Per cent (Yes)</th>
<th>Per cent (No)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Emotional affect</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>37.80</td>
<td>62.20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inequalities</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>93.20</td>
<td>6.80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hopefulness</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>62.20</td>
<td>37.80</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It can be seen from table 4 that the majority of participants reported; being emotionally affected by the riots (62.20%), growing inequalities (93.20%) and hopefulness for the future (62.20%).
Correlations between Measures

Hypothesis 1: Socioeconomic status (SES) and life satisfaction
The relationship between SES and life satisfaction was investigated using Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient. Preliminary analyses were performed to ensure no violation of the assumptions of normality, linearity and homoscedasticity. There was a positive correlation between the two continuous variables, $r = .50$, $n = 74$, $p < .01$, with high levels of SES associated with high levels of life satisfaction. According to Field (2009), $r = .50$ indicates a large correlation, suggesting quite a strong relationship between SES and life satisfaction.

Hypothesis 2: Social capital and life satisfaction
The relationship between social capital and life satisfaction was also investigated using Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient. Once again preliminary analyses were performed. There was a positive correlation between the two continuous variables, $r = .52$, $n = 74$, $p < .01$, with high levels of social capital associated with high levels of life satisfaction. Again there was a large correlation $r = .52$, suggesting quite a strong relationship between social capital and life satisfaction (Field, 2009).

Correlations between Subjects
A total of nine independent-samples t-tests were conducted to compare the continuous variable scores with each of the three category variables.

Hypothesis 3: Emotional affect and continuous variables
The first independent t-test was conducted to compare SES scores for whether participants were emotionally affected by the riots or not. SES scores were higher for those emotionally affected ($M = 11.11$) compared with respondents who were not ($M = 10.61$). However, this difference was not statistically significant, $t(72) = .45$, $p > .05^2$.

The second independent t-test was conducted to compare social capital scores for whether participants were emotionally affected by the riots or not. Social capital scores were lower for those emotionally affected ($M = 38.79$) compared with respondents who were not ($M = 41.43$). However, this difference was not statistically significant, $t(72) = 1.21$, $p > .05^3$.

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$^2$ Levene’s test for equal variances was not significant so equal variances were assumed.

$^3$ Levene’s test for equal variances was not significant so equal variances were assumed.
The third independent t-test was conducted to compare life satisfaction scores for whether participants were emotionally affected by the riots or not. Life satisfaction scores were significantly lower for those emotionally affected ($M = 14.71$) compared with respondents who were not ($M = 17.04$), with a moderate-sized effect, $t(72) = 2.13$, $p < .05^4$, $d = 0.51^5$. Figure 2 illustrates these findings.

![Figure 2](image-url)

**Figure 2**: A bar graph to illustrate the mean differences between the continuous variable scores when compared with the category variable emotional affect.

**Hypothesis 4: Inequalities and continuous variables**

The fourth independent t-test was conducted to compare SES scores for whether participants felt there was a growing gap between the rich and the poor. SES scores were higher for those who reported inequalities ($M = 10.83$) compared with respondents who felt there were not growing inequalities ($M = 10.40$)\(^6\). However, this difference was not statistically significant $t(72) = .20$, $p > .05^7$.

\(^4\) Levene’s test for equal variances was not significant so equal variances were assumed.

\(^5\) All effect sizes reported were calculated using an effects size calculator (Cepeda, 2011) and interpreted using Cohen’s (1992) guidelines (small effect = .20, moderate effect = .50, large effect = .80).

\(^6\) The results for the inequalities independent t-tests must be taken with caution, as the vast majority of participants felt there was a gap between the rich and the poor (N = 69) compared with only (N =5) who didn’t. This is explored further in the discussion.

\(^7\) Levene’s test for equal variances was not significant so equal variances were assumed.
The fifth independent t-test was conducted to compare social capital scores for whether participants felt there was a growing gap between the rich and the poor. Social capital scores were lower for those who reported inequalities ($M = 40.30$) compared with respondents who felt there were not growing inequalities ($M = 42.20$). However, this difference was not statistically significant $t(72) = .44, p > .05^8$.

The sixth independent t-test was conducted to compare life satisfaction scores for whether participants felt there was a growing gap between the rich and the poor. Life satisfaction scores were lower for those who reported inequalities ($M = 16.13$) compared with respondents who felt there were not growing inequalities ($M = 16.60$). However, this difference was not statistically significant $t(72) = .22, p > .05^9$. **Figure 3** illustrates these findings.

![Figure 3](image)

**Figure 3**: A bar graph to illustrate the mean differences between the continuous variable scores when compared with the category variable inequalities.

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8 Levene’s test for equal variances was not significant so equal variances were assumed.

9 Levene’s test for equal variances was not significant so equal variances were assumed.
**Hypothesis 5: Hopefulness and continuous variables**

The seventh independent t-test was conducted to compare the SES scores for whether participants felt hopeful for the future or not. SES scores were significantly higher for participants who reported feeling hopeful for the future ($M = 11.85$) compared with respondents who did not ($M = 9.07$), with a moderate-sized effect, $t(72) = 2.59$, $p < .05^{10}$, $d = .62$.

The eighth independent t-test was conducted to compare social capital scores for whether participants felt hopeful for the future or not. Social capital scores were significantly higher for participants who reported feeling hopeful for the future ($M = 44.74$) compared with respondents who did not ($M = 33.36$), with a large-sized effect, $t(72) = 6.48$, $p < .001^{11}$, $d = 1.55$.

The ninth independent t-test was conducted to compare life satisfaction scores for whether participants felt hopeful for the future or not. Life satisfaction scores were significantly higher for participants who reported feeling hopeful for the future ($M = 17.91$) compared with respondents who did not ($M = 13.29$), with a large-sized effect, $t(42.44) = 4.28$, $p < .001^{12}$, $d = 1.03$. **Figure 4** illustrates these findings.

![Figure 4](image)

**Figure 4:** A bar graph to illustrate the mean differences between the continuous variable scores when compared with the category variable hopefulness.

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10 Levene’s test for equal variances was not significant so equal variances were assumed.
11 Levene’s test for equal variances was not significant so equal variances were assumed.
12 Levene’s test for equal variances was significant so equal variances were not assumed.
Regression Analysis

Standard multiple regression analysis was used to assess the ability of the two independent variables (SES and social capital) to predict life satisfaction. Preliminary analyses were conducted to ensure no violation of the assumptions of normality, linearity, multicollinearity and homoscedasticity. The results of the regression indicated the two predictors explained 34.30% of the variance in life satisfaction ($R^2 = .34, F(2,71) = 18.52, p < .001$). It was found that both independent variables significantly predicted life satisfaction, with social capital recording a higher beta value ($\beta = .36, p < .01$) than SES ($\beta = .32, p < .01$).

Discussion

This research aimed to explore differences in socioeconomic status and social capital as instigators of social inequalities, which are believed to have been significant underlying factors of the 2011 riots. The main findings were that both socioeconomic status and social capital measures were significantly and positively correlated with life satisfaction. Feeling hopeful for the future was also significantly correlated with all three continuous variables.

Hypothesis 1: Socioeconomic status and life satisfaction

In line with H1, this study found significant and positive correlations between socioeconomic status and life satisfaction ($r = .52, n = 74, p < .01$). Participants with higher levels of socioeconomic status were found to be more satisfied with their lives than those with lower levels of socioeconomic status. These findings were consistent with previous research into socioeconomic positions and well-being (Baum et al., 1999; Ross & Mirowsky, 1992).

The widespread public disorder experienced during the 2011 riots, was set against a backdrop of unrelenting demand for personal responsibility and mass consumption. It is argued that within our consumer capitalist society ‘fullness of consumer enjoyment means fullness of life’ (Bauman, 2011). The findings in support of H1 may be explained by this notion; participants with higher levels of income (a component of socioeconomic status), may have reported greater levels of satisfaction with their lives as they are able to consume more than participants with lower socioeconomic status and lower income. A study of five countries – Australia, Britain, Germany, Hungry and The Netherlands – consistently discovered that income and material wealth (gained through consumption) significantly affected life satisfaction (Headey et al., 2008). Evidence has shown that income inequalities are causal factors of social problems (Wilkinson & Pickett, 2010); as ‘people with a higher socioeconomic position in society have a greater array of life chances and more opportunities to lead a flourishing life’ (Marmot et al., 2010, p.3).
Neoliberal ideologies maintain that marketization facilitates economic wealth (Martínez & Arnoldo, 1998). As consumers, we have more choice and it is our consumption choices, such as life-long learning and continual acquisition of skill, that enable us to become self-enterprising, to better our situations and to achieve self-actualisation (Abrahamson, 2004; Banet-Weiser & Mukherjee, 2012; Kim & Zurlo, 2009). This advanced liberal emphasis on personal responsibility accentuates the notion that ‘education is the key to one’s position in the stratification system’ (Ross & Wu, 2009, p.720).

Neoliberal ideologies can be observed within government reforms to educational policies, such as; privatisation of universities, tripling student fees, the introduction of academies and abandoning educational maintenance allowance. Despite the advantages of free-markets and privatisation, advanced liberal policies are believed to amplify inequalities, as education becomes yet another wealth dependent commodity (Dunleavy, 2011). However, there is evidence to suggest the existence of educational inequalities prior to neoliberalism. A longitudinal survey of 5,000 British people born in 1946, the ‘golden age’ of school building in Britain, found that; ‘children of manual working class parents were less likely to go to grammar school than children of middle class parents, even if they achieved relatively high test scores… they were also less likely to go on into further or higher education’ (Medical Research Council, 2011, p.8).

Despite the rise in university fees, UCAS have recently reported that ‘application rates from disadvantaged 18 year olds are … at, or close to, record levels’ (UCAS, 2013). However, young people from disadvantaged areas are still almost three times less likely to apply to university than their wealthier peers (Feldman, 2012; Paton, 2012). Heckman (2011) argues against university fees as barriers to higher education and proposes that the inequalities in higher education participation rates between different socioeconomic groups are determined early in school careers.

Statistics show that alongside the increase in social problems, education expenditure in the UK has consistently risen since 2005 (Bolton, 2012). However, a breakdown of expenditure by type of education reveals that in 2012; pre-primary and primary education received funding of £779 million, compared with £17,623 million in secondary education (HM Treasury, 2012). When considered against the empirical finding that ‘investment in early education for disadvantaged children from birth to age 5 helps reduce the achievement gap, reduce the need for special education … and reduce overall social costs’ (Heckman, 2011, p.32), this disparity between primary and secondary education expenditure appears to be significant in explaining social inequalities. The recently announced 2013 budget illustrates that growth commitments remain focused on higher education; ‘in 2013, 100 free schools [are] expected to open [and] 30 university technical colleges [are] expected to be open by September 2014’ (HM Treasury, 2013, p.34). When the
literature is reflected upon, early education is considered to be the crucial
determinant of future socioeconomic status, and the present research has found
significant links between socioeconomic status and life satisfaction. This study
therefore proposes that investing in the early years of disadvantaged children's
lives is likely to have a significant impact on reducing social inequalities and their
deleterious consequences, thus increasing life satisfaction.

Hypothesis 2: Social capital and life satisfaction
In line with H2, this study found significant and positive correlations between social
capital and life satisfaction ($r = .52, n = 74, p < .01$). Participants with higher levels
of social capital were found to be more satisfied with their lives, compared to those
with lower levels of social capital. These findings were consistent with previous
community research into social capital and well-being (Bourdieu, 1989; Putnam
1995).

One aspect of the social capital measure used in this study was the quality of
services and opportunities in the community. Previous research contends that the
quality of services such as education, health, justice and transportation are crucial
to individual life satisfaction (Helliwell, 2003). The neoliberal policies of reducing
state intervention in public services and increasing marketization were introduced
in the early 1980s under the rule of Margaret Thatcher. Interestingly, much
research reports a decline in social capital for the last 30 years (Paxton, 1999;
Putnam 1993; Putnam 1995). Some argue that the neoliberal emphasis on
personal responsibility is responsible for declines in trust and community
connectedness (Helliwell, 2006; Hickel, 2012). Diwan (2000) emphasises the
importance of social capital by arguing that ‘interconnections with other human
beings … give us inner strength and emotional security [that] defines our quality of
life (Diwan, 2000, p.305).

Research has shown that deprived areas of Britain report lower levels of social
capital (Fone et al., 2007). As aforementioned, young people from such deprived
areas have fewer opportunities for education. Putnam (1995) contends that there
is a strong positive correlation between education and social capital. He suggests
that educated people are more likely to be joiners and ‘trusters’ because of the
skills, resources and inclinations that were imparted to them at home and in
school. Szreter (1999) criticises the British class-based education system for
creating dense social networks among elite groups, from which the remainder are
excluded. He argues that ‘only a good overall education system … can lay the
necessary foundations for the proliferation of social capital across the economy’
(Szreter, 1999, p.42).
This study's finding that social capital affects life satisfaction has implications for social inequalities. Improving social and recreational infrastructure within communities is likely to promote and facilitate social connectedness (social capital), thus improving life satisfaction (Renzaho et al., 2012). Furthermore, improving equal access to education (as discussed in the previous section on socioeconomic status) is also likely to positively impact upon social capital and well-being.

**Hypothesis 3: Emotional affect and continuous variables**
This research found that life satisfaction scores were significantly lower in the group of participants who reported being emotionally affected by the riots ($M = 14.71$) compared with respondents who were not ($M = 17.04$). Scores on the continuous variables socioeconomic status and social capital did not significantly differ. However, those who reported being emotionally affected by the unrest in 2011 did report lower levels of social capital. Although this is not a significant finding, it could be argued that such participants may reside in the more deprived areas of Greater Manchester that experienced rioting, thus more likely to be emotionally impacted upon, and to report lower levels of life satisfaction.

**Hypothesis 4: Inequalities and continuous variables**
This study found that scores on all three continuous variables did not significantly differ between the group of participants who felt there were growing inequalities and the group who did not. The vast majority of participants (93.20%) responded yes to the question of increasing inequalities, which may explain why a significant difference was not found between groups. It is recommended that employing a scale to measure the inequality variable could produce a more significant result.

**Hypothesis 5: Hopefulness and continuous variables**
Finally, in line with H5 this research found that scores on all three continuous variables significantly differed between the group of participants who felt hopeful for the future and the group that did not. People who hold favourable expectations for their future are referred to as having optimism (Carver et al., 2010). This study found that optimistic participants had significantly higher levels of socioeconomic status ($M = 11.85$) compared with pessimistic participants ($M = 9.07$), consistent with previous research. Evidence suggests that optimism relates to more persistence in educational efforts and to higher later income (Segerstrom, 2007).

Significantly higher levels of social capital were found among participants who reported feeling optimistic about the future ($M = 44.74$) compared with pessimistic participants ($M = 33.36$), consistent with previous research. A social capital investigation found that personal optimism strongly correlated with social trust, which is a key component of social capital (Rahn & Transue, 2002). Optimistic participants reported significantly higher levels of life satisfaction ($M = 17.91$).
compared with pessimistic participants ($M = 13.29$), consistent with previous research. Studies have confirmed cross-sectional and longitudinal associations between optimism and life satisfaction (Chang, 1998; Wrosch & Scheier, 2003).

**Illustrative summary of main findings**

Figure 5: A ‘nested’ model to highlight the interaction between factors of inequalities at different levels. Based on Bronfenbrenner’s (1979) ecological system
Limitations and future research

Initially this research intended to comparatively explore the differences between two opposing participant groups; residents of Greater Manchester (an area that experienced rioting) and residents of Warwickshire (an area that did not experience rioting). However, due to the constraints of an undergraduate dissertation, only one participant group could be studied.

Limits were also imposed upon the method used in this investigation. Future research may benefit from a mixed methods approach, incorporating qualitative methods such as interviews or focus groups. The combination of quantitative and qualitative data could reward future research with subjectivity as well as objectivity. The use of a larger national sample could permit the simultaneous identification of individual-level and societal-level determinants of life satisfaction, which could be particularly useful in identifying direct and indirect causes of social inequalities. Life satisfaction is a complex social construction, and it is therefore likely to be effected by other factors that have not been addressed in this research. The multiple regression analysis supports this criticism. A national version of this study could also incorporate additional socioeconomic variables such as health, justice and welfare services. Findings from such a study could have far reaching implications for many governmental policies and ultimately social inequalities.

Conclusion

The present study has shown that socioeconomic status and social capital are stringently linked with life satisfaction. Feeling optimistic for the future was also significantly associated with higher levels of socioeconomic status, social capital and life satisfaction. The discussion of results focuses upon how social problems, exemplified by the riots, are constructed; particularly through neoliberal government policies, which increase social inequalities. The importance of early intervention (especially in education) is emphasised in the pursuit of a more equal society, which would be better for everyone.
References


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