

WHY THERE IS A DISCONNECT BETWEEN RESEARCH AND POLICY, AND WHAT WE CAN DO

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Why is it that an advanced society with access to top universities and scientists, which boasts of more Nobel Prize winners than any other country in the world, fails to use research to inform policy decisions in any substantive fashion? This chapter rounds up the usual suspects for why it is so hard to bring rigorous research and analysis to bear on some of our most vexing and perplexing social challenges. As a foundation for the chapters to come, the book begins with definitions of key terms and concepts.

This is the greatest intellectual challenge of our time. If we want research to make a difference in the world, if we want to justify all the dollars going to research funding, we need to figure out what it takes for research to influence policy and practice in a way that actually improves child and youth outcomes.

Vivian Tseng (2019b)

Success or failure in the application of social science [to the policy process] depends on the mesh between scientific skills and political interests of the social scientist on the one side, and the political skills and the scientific interests of the policy maker on the other.

Suzanne Berger (1980, p. vii)

Ron Haskins, a respected former Republican committee staffer in Congress and now a Brookings Institution scholar, was asked several years ago about the role research played in what was, at the time, a contentious congressional debate about welfare reform. Without missing a beat, he responded that, based on his personal experience, the best research might exert 5 percent of the total influence on the policy debate, with an upside potential of 10 percent. Personal values and political power, Haskins went on to say to his now silent and disappointed audience, were what really mattered in Congress. His assessment might be more pessimistic today. Since 2017, when the Trump administration began, over 1,600 scientists have left their positions in the federal government, most from despair that their advice would now be ignored (Plumer & Davenport, 2019; Winter, 2020) and future input simply not sought or at least not heeded. Steps also have been taken to eliminate science units in federal agencies and disband at least one-third of expert advisory committees (Gamoran, 2019). Robert Brulle, an environmental sociologist at Drexel University, complained that some political officials had abandoned science

during the 2020 COVID-19 pandemic: “I am alarmed that clear scientific facts such as basic epidemiology, can be negated by ideological rhetoric. It is as if we are in the Middle Ages, with superstition and irrationality ruling public behavior” (cited in Terkel, 2020).

As troublesome as these contemporary events are, tensions between those who seek to understand the world and those who seek to govern it have always been there in one form or another. A distinguished former state welfare official, Don Winstead, who also has held a top research-oriented position in the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, tells the following story. Upon convincing a key Florida state legislator to support a reform initiative, he asked for additional resources to evaluate whether the proposed changes might be effective. The legislative leader paused and then commented with incredulity: “If you don’t know whether or not the program is going to work, why are you asking me to sponsor it?” This was a classic failure to communicate between the worlds of analysis and of action. Winstead, an innovator and evidence-focused administrator at heart, was looking for new and promising policy opportunities to be empirically vetted, whereas the practical political actor was looking for the certitude to justify the investment of public dollars (Lennon & Corbett, 2003). This was a classic clash between the research culture and the policy culture.

Another stark example occurred at the time when welfare reform garnered national attention. When it looked as if the federally mandated evaluation of the program being done in Wisconsin might not be producing supportive results, a political kerfuffle broke out between state officials and the researchers doing the evaluation. The researchers accused the state of meddling in their science, and state officials accused the academics of having an ideological bias. When a federal intervention failed to resolve the differences, the evaluation team was fired by the state and the expected evaluation was never completed. This was more than a failure to communicate. It was a dispute about the roles each side expected from the other in applying science to assess a politicized public issue (Corbett, 2018c). Here, the connection between science and policy had been ruptured completely.

Vignettes, of course, are not convincing evidence, at least as we employ that term in this book. Still—and to borrow a well-worn phrase from former Vice President Al Gore—these stories touch upon an inconvenient truth. Those who believe that public policy and rigorous research ought to inform each other confront a bitter reality. We see a substantial gap between the production of research and its utilization. It is a divide that has plagued us since the techniques of modern science emerged at the dawn of the 17th century. Take for instance, when Galileo Galilei’s espousal of the Copernican view of a helio-centered solar system brought him into a contentious dispute with Vatican officials. The policymakers of that era were not impressed by the scientific breakthroughs of the man now considered by some as the father of modern physics.

Misunderstanding and miscommunication continue to this day between those we have labeled *research producers* and those we call *research consumers*. *Research producers* include academic scholars and researchers, program evaluators, and a variety of policy analysts who interpret data and research (Goodvin & Lee, 2017). They belong to the community of those trying to better understand the world. Some do original research and others interpret and synthesize scholarly work for practical applications, often with considerable originality. As a body, they continue to generate voluminous reports, papers, and research articles, sometimes for the sake of science and sometimes with the explicit purpose of shaping public policy.

Research consumers are those who interpret, implement, and manage policy (Kendall-Taylor & Levitt, 2017). They belong to the community of those trying to manage the

world for the greater good. Several scholars with extensive policy experience contend that research is used more than is commonly thought (Bogenschneider, Corbett et al., 2019; Gormley, 2011; Grisso & Steinberg, 2005; Henig, 2008). Few, however, would dispute that too many policy decisions are made with scant, or at least very selective, attention to the vast stores of available scientific knowledge (Gamoran, 2018; Peterson, 2018).

Why is this so? After all, we think of our nation as an advanced, rational society with access to top universities and scientists that boasts of more Nobel Prize winners than any other country in the world (Greshko, 2018). Moreover, we continue to produce ever-growing volumes of increasingly sophisticated research and policy-oriented analysis. “Contemporary poverty research is very much an American invention, with a degree of specialization and an institutional apparatus that is unmatched in other parts of the world” (O’Connor, 2002, p. 3). Arguably, however, our national comparative advantage in science all too often fails to inform our public decisions in any direct or substantive fashion, whereas some of our peer nations aggressively push evidence-based policy agendas, even though their scientific capabilities fall short of ours (Dunworth, Hannaway, Holahan, & Turner, 2008). A U.K. white paper issued back in 1999 committed that nation to using evidence and research so that policy could better deliver on its long-term goals (Cabinet Office, 1999). This initiative stipulates that evidence will henceforth play a critical role in policymaking. The U.K. funding of research and policymaker partnerships has decreased the divide between them and increased the use of research evidence in policy and practice (Gamoran, 2019; Rubin, 2019). One prominent example is the audacious pledge of Prime Minister Tony Blair to end child poverty back when he was Prime Minister. He implemented a three-pronged set of evidence-based reforms, which was continued and expanded upon by the conservative government of Prime Minister David Cameron (Waldfoegel, 2010).

This gap between research production and policy application in the United States is not a new challenge. Some members of the academic community as well as the policy elite have been trying to figure out how to bring research to bear on policymaking for well over a hundred years (Smith, 1991). Academics traditionally have operated from the premise that policy decisions would be more effective and efficient if they were based on rigorous research and dispassionate analysis. Though one may argue that such a perspective is driven by the self-serving motives of an academic worldview (Oliver, Lorenc, & Innvaer, 2014), it is difficult not to warm to such an opinion.

With ever-increasing amounts of data and analysis emerging from our universities and research/evaluation firms, it is unlikely that even the most studious of public officials can sort through and make sense of the science available to them (Gamoran, 2018; Peterson, 2018). And to make matters worse, the political payoff for using science often competes directly with input from the constituents or interest groups that are key to reelection bids. The image of a hungry mule situated among several large bales of hay comes to mind. If there were just one bale, the ravenous mule would settle down to enjoy a fine repast. But with several to choose from, the poor beast cannot decide and soon starves.

Defining Key Terms

What exactly is meant by this notion of making *evidence-based policy*? What does it mean to use research to improve policy and practice?

Policy

Let us start with the concept of *policy*. We define it as follows: “Policy is the development, enactment, and implementation of a plan or course of action carried out through a law, rule, code, or other mechanism in the public or private sector” (Bogenschneider, 2014, p. 43). Sometimes policies are specific and obvious. A law is passed governing who will get publicly funded health-care coverage, under what circumstances, and at what price. But in a larger sense, policies can be less transparent and more diffuse. Think of the unwritten standards that shape behaviors in bureaucracies. Even though never formalized, they govern interactions between people and, thus, have the force of policy. How often have we heard the phrase “but we have always done it this way”.

For us, however, policy encompasses what a rule is, how it was developed, and how it is carried out. Policies are found in numerous domains and can be economic, environmental, legal, or international in character. In that sense, our concept of *policy* is broad yet still explicit or formalized in some legal fashion. We are concerned about any formulation that governs what is done, for whom, how, and under what circumstances. We embrace these stipulations whether issued from a legislative body or legitimate executive officials at all levels of government (Lester, 2018).

Social Policy

Yet, in another sense, our scope is much more limited. We focus primarily on social policies that directly attempt to improve the quality of life of individuals and families (Bogenschneider, 2014, 2020a; Bogenschneider et al., 2020; Jacobs & Davies, 1994); in particular, our interests lie in how policies affect vulnerable families and children.

For many questions, we look to research as a final arbiter when it is unsuited to perform that role. Technical questions are one kind of challenge. They can be exceedingly complex (think of President Kennedy’s charge to get a man to the moon), but eminently doable since the complexity is subject to scientific solutions. Given the willingness to spend enough money, science was able to provide the necessary input to realize that goal. The moon shot had a clear and unambiguous goal. The trick was only in how to do it and how to pay for it.

Social policies, however, can be horses of a decidedly different color that go well beyond technological challenges. Social policies encompass deeply held values and preconceived ideas about how the world should work. High-profile and polarized issues that are driven by passion, such as abortion and reproductive rights, may well exceed the authority attached to scientific evidence. However, other social policy issues, such as those involving youth and families, are viewed as a valued population that policymakers of vastly different political perspectives deem to be deserving of support. Because youth and families embody a widely shared value premise, they are a pocket of policies where polarization is perceived as less important and science is sometimes seen as more important (Bogenschneider et al., 2020). Yet no matter the degree of relevance to policymakers and receptivity to research, social policies are somewhat unique in that they involve a high degree of uncertainty about government’s proper role in such matters (Bogenschneider et al., 2020).

Evidence-Based Policy

Policymakers use a range of evidence for their decisions, including constituent views, political calculation, gut instinct, and personal values. Our focus here is on research

evidence. We talk of evidence-based policy as if it were a tangible phenomenon, as if we possess a scholarly consensus that might be applied directly to difficult societal issues. The real world, however, is much more complicated. Our science is not that definitive, nor is science the only legitimate and proper basis for making policy decisions. In fact, it may be far more accurate to label our vision as advancing *research-shaped decision-making* or *evidence-informed policymaking*, as some have argued (Boaz, Davies, Fraser, & Nutley, 2019b). That said, we continue to use the term *evidence-based policymaking* because it is still the common parlance used in research and policy circles, though we expect that will change over time.

In our definition, we think of evidence-based policy as a three-pronged process. First, evidence-based policy encompasses the application of rigorous research methods to better understand the problems that confront and confound policymakers, and also to build credible evidence about which policies, programs, and practices are effective (Baron, 2018). Second, our definition encompasses the actions of elected officials, such as governors, members of Congress, and state legislators, who use credible research evidence to enact laws that establish policies, programs, administrative activities, and so forth. Third, our definition embraces the implementation of laws in research-based ways by program administrators, managers, and front-line staff (Lester, 2018).

Research Evidence

Clearly, we can tangle ourselves in very convoluted semantic labyrinths here. To simplify matters, we approach the concept of evidence in a conscribed manner by defining it, as the William T. Grant Foundation does, as “empirical findings derived from systematic data collection and analyses” often verified by peer review and derived according to accepted scientific protocols. We begin with an initial premise that there is a set of scientific methods that serious scientists and scholars agree constitutes a proper way for testing ideas to distinguish fact from mere belief or casual supposition (Pinker, 2018). This definition includes quantitative and qualitative studies and encompasses numerical and conceptual insights (Rickinson & McKenzie, 2020).

In our definition, we think of research evidence more broadly than a specific product and more as an open-ended process of knowledge creation and testing that is “independent”, “collective”, and “cumulative” (Henig, 2008, p. 152). However daunting the challenge, the scientific community works toward building a body of sound knowledge to help inform even the most contentious of policy issues, even if it cannot solve or resolve them.

Social Research Evidence

In particular, we focus on the intersection between social policy and social research and what can be done to improve the connection between the two. Davies and Nutley (2008) define social research as “any systematic process of critical investigation and evaluation, theory building, data collection, analysis and codification aimed at understanding the social world, as well as the interactions between this world and public policy/public service” (p. 7). Social research encompasses the same rigorous methods, the same scientific protocols, as do all other research arenas. The practitioners of social research are bound by the same canons of behavior as their peers in the hard sciences and exhibit similar attitudinal dispositions to their craft.

Truth, however, seems more elusive in the social science arena than it does in the hard sciences. Social issues are associated with a universe of research and science subject to

conflicting interpretation and application. The intersection of social science and social policy is fraught with a particularly high level of uncertainty.

What Went Wrong: Rounding Up the “Usual Suspects”

What happened to the promise of science and dispassionate analysis? Without question, there are multiple explanations for the conundrum of why science fails to inform social policy with any consistency. To borrow Claude Rains’s famous line from the movie *Casablanca*, let us “round up some of the usual suspects”. These suspects, which are found in prominent theories purporting to explain why research is underutilized in policymaking, tap into various quirks inherent in the character of the policymaking process itself, the inherent limitations of scientific inquiry, and the societal structure of democratic institutions. We also believe that the underutilization of research stems from the very nature of the structural environments in which research producers and consumers operate. Each of these theoretical suspects undoubtedly contributes something to the illumination of this gap between these two communities of research producers and consumers. We review each of these categories of theories next.

Theoretical Consideration #1: The Character of the Policymaking Process

This cluster of theories offers several reasons why the very nature of the policy process may diminish the utility of science as a basis for making decisions. Policymaking is a political process that falls outside the bounds of scientific decision-making. Because the methods of social science are linear, time intensive, and governed by the canons of science, it is challenging for researchers to respond to the fast-breaking, influence-driven policy process (Gamoran, 2018). Our aim is not to be exhaustive here, but rather to introduce a few factors that threaten the utility of science in light of how the policy process works.

First, the expectations around science may simply have been unrealistic because the policy process is far more complex than those outside the policy arena typically imagine. If the policy process were driven by a single criterion, it would be a much more straightforward task. In the past, research use was premised on the simplistic notion that it can be more or less injected directly into the policy process, which Pettigrew (1985) coined as the “hypodermic model”. This model falls short because no one factor typically determines an outcome nor can the policy process be reduced to a single action. Moreover, the social sciences seldom produce the kind of smoking-gun evidence or “killer studies” (Henig, 2008) that can single-handedly settle disputes on complex, multiply determined policy problems. Finding statistically significant effects on outcomes of interest may prove convincing to scientists, but unpersuasive to policymakers, who must weigh the magnitude of the effects with so many other factors of which scholars are only dimly aware. What would a new policy direction cost? What about its logistical feasibility? How would key supporters view a new direction if it increased the role of government or challenged the prevailing political consensus? And worse, what if the new evidence endorsed policies and programs that upset key constituencies normally allied with the policymaker? Statistical significance merely confirms that an impact is not likely attributable to chance. Substantive significance means that the impacts are still worth pursuing after taking into account a whole range of other critical considerations that arise throughout the policy process (Goodvin & Lee, 2017).

Key Concepts 1.1. The Failure of Science to Shape Policy: Rounding Up the Usual Suspects

Theoretical Consideration 1: The Character of the Policymaking Process

- Expectations of what research can contribute are often unrealistic;
- Policy decisions are not driven solely by numbers or data;
- The real world changes faster than science can accommodate; and
- Politics is becoming more polarized.

Theoretical Consideration 2: The Limitations of Scientific Inquiry

- Social problems are complex and the capacity of scientific tools and ways of framing research questions fail to capture this complexity;
- Randomized controlled trials can discover what works, but not why it works, under what conditions, or for which populations; and
- The application of even the most rigorous findings is often overlooked.

Theoretical Consideration 3: The Societal Structure of Democratic Institutions

- The complexity of democratic decision-making constrains the role of science;
- In the United States, the fragmentation of power complicates decision-making;
- The U.S. version of democracy presumes competition of ideas and diminishes the prospects that decisions will be influenced by any single factor; and
- In other corporatist countries, experts are situated in strong political parties, more institutionalized labor and employer federations, and moderately centralized governments.

Theoretical Consideration 4: The Structural Environment in Which Researchers and Policymakers Operate

- They view the world through the lens of their education, training, and lived experience;
- They speak different languages and use different communication styles;
- They respond to diverse signals and incentives; and
- The norms of their workplace demand different behaviors.

Second, policy decisions are not driven solely by numbers or data, nor should they be. As Kingdon (2011) points out, the doing of policy involves a complicated, often subjective, calculus that weighs numerous competing factors, including values, career aspirations, media attention, and constituent views, among many others. Evidence can and does play a role, but often a subordinate one to factors that are more salient at the time than data.

Third, the policy world sometimes changes faster than science can accommodate. Policymakers confront the world on a real-time basis. They often receive immediate reports on emerging problems and soon become aware of new possibilities for policy and program responses. Policymakers are pressured to take prompt action. As aptly put by Vivian Tseng, Vice President of the William T. Grant Foundation, policymakers often need “answers yesterday for the decisions they need to make today” (Tseng, 2020b). The pace of science is notably slower, irrespective of how hard scholars labor. Academics, especially from the traditional disciplines, spend little time in the so-called “real world”, so research and evaluations often are not timely, and cutting-edge issues may not filter through the literature for some time.

Finally, we live in times when “ideology divides the country and politics polarizes the population” (Kendall-Taylor & Levitt, 2017, p. 709). Veteran political observers note that the level of partisanship has increased in the political class in recent decades (Haidt & Hetherington, 2012; Henig, 2008; Mayhew, 2011; Mann & Ornstein, 2016; Peterson, 2018). Several suspects are blamed for this polarizing trend. Money has become a dominant factor in running for office and the financial contributions flow to candidates who will deliver on the agendas of special-interest groups (Mayer, 2017; Rivlin, 2006). The Internet, 24-hour instant news, and other recent communication innovations make the political process transparent—a good thing in many respects. But such ready access to information makes it riskier to do business with political adversaries because one’s political base can easily become aware of and perhaps angered by any compromises or concessions that are made (Pinker, 2018). The whole process of selecting candidates, with the growing importance of primaries, can weed out candidates representing the middle of the road; these early stages of campaigning involve fewer active participants and give an edge to the more extreme elements in each party (Rosenthal, 2009).

Theoretical Consideration #2: The Limitations of Scientific Inquiry

The potential of science to bring reason and dispassionate analysis to policymaking is quickly tarnished by the inherent limitations of social science inquiry, which are exacerbated by the unavoidable ambiguity of policy issues. Social problems are notoriously difficult to define and solve, yet science requires clear definitions of problems and unambiguous criteria for solutions. An integral strength of science is its methodology, yet those very methods can sometimes result in findings so abstract, narrow, and circumstantial that their utility in guiding policy decisions is diminished. The result is a disconnect between what policymakers want to know and what science can provide.

The utility of research for policy development purposes is also limited by the ways in which researchers tend to frame research questions. Too often, the questions are narrow, often driven by the methodologies in which researchers are proficient (Gamoran, 2018). According to Weiss (1978), researchers “do not pick the research method to suit the problem but almost unwittingly see that aspect of the problem to which their methodology applies” (p. 45).

Even when they get the policy question right, research producers by the nature of their training tend to focus on what specific program or policy caused a certain outcome. The identification of an increasing number of effective programs was made possible by the advent of the randomized controlled trial, which for policy purposes, is one of the most important and useful scientific advances (Baron, 2018; Haskins, 2018). The randomized controlled trial became the gold standard of evaluation because of its ability to control for confounding factors. Yet the results still are valid only in the population involved in

the trial, as well as under its specific conditions, such as dosage and duration. Because a program works somewhere does not mean that it will work everywhere or under all conditions (Gamoran, 2018). To what other populations can the results be applied (Cartwright & Hardie, 2012)? What kind of demographic, social, economic, political, or contextual differences might make the application of a new research-driven insight risky or even result in unanticipated side effects? What works in Situation A might not work in Situation B. A welfare reform initiative that works in a state with a booming economy might be doomed in an area with slack labor demand. Slight differences in a successful program, evaluated in a hot-house environment where resources are not a question, can fail to replicate when introduced into the real world under ordinary circumstances with resource constraints. The Achilles heel of the evidence-based movement, according to Haskins (2018), is the failure to replicate.

Even if the intervention can be replicated for the target population, does the size of the benefit exceed the magnitude of the costs, and, given the gravitational pull of the status quo, what are the chances that the intervention will continue after the demonstration ends? Deaton and Cartwright (2018) raise these critical questions that point out limitations of the very methodology considered the “gold standard” in evaluation. Randomized controlled trials can build scientific knowledge by discovering “what works” but without knowing “why” they work, “we run the risk of worthless casual ‘fairy story’ theorizing . . . which leaves us uninformed as to whether the policy should be implemented” in the real world (p. 21).

When research producers do examine why policies or programs are effective, they like to isolate *the* explanatory variable responsible for shifts in the outcome of interest. Yet researchers define efficacy in such a narrow way that “credibility in estimation can lead to incredibility in use” (Deaton & Cartwright, 2018, p. 3). Real life and real policy contexts are complex and involve numerous interdependent influences. Both our analytical tools and our way of framing research questions too often fail to incorporate this complexity (Maynard, 2006).

Even with our most rigorous forms of scientific evidence, huge gaps in knowledge can remain when the findings are applied to the real world. Applying findings is an important element of effectiveness in the policy world, which too often has been overlooked in scientific inquiry in the research world.

Theoretical Consideration #3: The Societal Structure of Democratic Institutions

This theoretical cluster focuses on the societal structures that link research and policy. All rich democracies produce a cadre of academicians and researchers. Unlike most democracies, however, the U.S. version tends to fragment power in very deliberative ways. We celebrate the pull and tug of the democratic process, all of which serve to diminish the prospects of any policy actually seeing the light of day or being decided by a single factor. In some important ways, our policy process presumes competition and contention, a kind of Darwinian process where only the sturdiest ideas survive. This, however, is hardly an atmosphere that embraces elegant reasoning and dispassionate dialogue. In the United States, the pathways for integrating the institutions of research and power are, to borrow a phrase from Robert Frost, roads less often taken.

In other democracies, however, trails have been blazed between the seats of power and the ivory tower that allow for a more regular and rational interchange of ideas and insights. Traffic is heavier, according to Wilensky (1997), because of where the experts

are located. In contrast to the United States, experts in more corporatist countries like Austria, Germany, Japan, Norway, and Sweden, and to a lesser extent, Belgium and the Netherlands, are situated in strong political parties, more institutionalized labor and employer federations, and moderately centralized governments with the capacity to implement policy. In these democracies, the argument goes that problems identified in the seats of power more readily bubble up to the ivory tower, and knowledge gained in the ivory tower more systematically percolates down to the ground.

*Theoretical Consideration #4: The Structural Environments
in Which Researchers and Policymakers Operate*

This set of theories focuses less on societal structures and more on the actors and modes of decision-making in the research and policy communities. These theories posit that research is underused in policymaking because researchers and policymakers come from disparate communities and operate in distinct structural environments that engage in discrete core technologies. The very institutions through which research is generated and public policy is enacted typically operate in ways that conflict with one another and that can be counterproductive to evidence-based policymaking.

To bridge these conflicting communities, Nathan Caplan (1979) introduced the original two-communities theory that proposed that research was underutilized in policymaking because researchers and policymakers come from two different communities. Our latest reincarnation of this theory has extended beyond its conceptual appeal to deconstructing the “cultural” impediments to optimal communication. Culture is defined as a whole set of norms, rewards, and operating procedures that profoundly shape the way inhabitants think, act, and perceive the world. Researchers and policymakers are conceptualized to bring disparate professional backgrounds to their work and to operate in distinct institutional settings that substantively shape how they view their role in the world and act on a day-to-day basis (Bogensneider & Corbett, 2010a; Bogensneider, Corbett et al., 2019). They speak different languages, use different communication styles, and respond to diverse signals and incentives. The foundational premise of these theories is that a better understanding of a community’s inhabitants, institutions, and cultures could improve communication between researchers and policymakers, and enhance research utilization in policymaking. Understanding the cultural forces that frustrate the production and consumption of research is fundamental to developing strategies for effectively facilitating its use.

**What We Need to Know to Enhance Evidence-Based Policy:
Initial Factors to Consider**

We must confront an age-old conundrum. As our capacity to increase the supply of research has increased exponentially, we still struggle with bringing objective, dispassionate analysis to bear upon some of our most vexing and perplexing social challenges (Gamoran, 2018; Shonkoff & Bales, 2011). Our operating premise, perhaps overly pessimistic, is that we can do little about many of the explanatory “suspects” that we have reviewed here, which suggests the futility of using social science research to change the way the policymaking process works. Indeed, it is unlikely that policymaking will develop into a rational reflective process, that researchers will develop methodologies that completely overcome the limitations or biases inherent in their studies, or that more centralized societal structures will emerge to integrate research and power.

Thus, we focus instead on the broader structural environments in which research producers and consumers operate. In this work, we introduce an extended model, which we call the *community dissonance theory* (see Chapter 7 for additional details). This theoretical framework portrays research producers and research consumers as functioning within a discrete number of disparate communities that find it difficult to communicate with each other. This communication breakdown occurs because each community operates within distinct professional and institutional cultures with different decision-making processes, interactional styles, epistemological frameworks, influence loops, focal interests, and salient stakeholders. Thus, the underutilization of research in policymaking is because of a communication gap that is attributable, at least in part, to behavioral factors. If the underlying forces are indeed behavioral, then they may well be less immutable and more malleable than many of the other factors at fault. If we acknowledge and pay careful attention to several pragmatic processes and procedures, we can increase communication and trust across the two cultures and, in so doing, enhance the utilization of research in policy decisions.

In keeping with this theoretical argument, we adhere to the more moderate view of many policymakers (Kenley, 2019; Miller, 2019; Olsen, 2019) and scholars (Gormley, 2011; Grisso & Steinberg, 2005; Henig, 2008)—that research can have at least some incremental impact on policy some of the time. Surely, it can have a broader impact than it currently enjoys. At the same time, we are fully aware of the complexities of using evidence to inform policy, the topic we turn to next. In truth, there is no simple, linear relation. Sometimes science is used, sometimes not. Sometimes it is used correctly, other times it is misused and misconstrued for political or partisan purposes. Sometimes researchers communicate well with policymakers, and other times they appear to represent quite different species. Efforts to connect research and policy can be fruitful, frustrating, futile, and even fun.

To get us started down this road, let us capsuleize some of the challenges of getting research producers and consumers on the same page. We delve into these in more depth and sophistication as the book unfolds. Let us start with a few factors that may impede our understanding of the science-policy connection and that make quick fixes unlikely to be of much use. The basics that researchers need to know include getting a handle on differences in the communities of research consumers and producers, the distinctive ways that they interact with each other, and the nature of research and policy questions.

Key Concepts 1.2. Why Connections Between the Research and Policy Communities Are So Challenging

- Not all research consumers are alike;
- Not all research producers are alike;
- Not all interactions between research producers and consumers are alike;
- Not all research studies lend themselves to policy questions; and
- Not all policy questions lend themselves to research studies.

Not All Research Consumers Are Alike

We must be far more appreciative of the complex character of the policy world. On the research-consumption side, we have those who make policy. Lawmakers in statehouses

and Congress may get the most public attention, but they are not the only actors involved in doing the public's business. Many higher-level officials in executive agencies also make policy as they interpret legislation, write regulations, and make the myriad of implementation decisions that transform policy ideas into practice (Lester, 2018). At the same time, we have a host of public officials who manage policies and programs on a daily basis. Though it is tempting to dismiss this population as those who merely execute decisions made by others, this view would be naïve indeed (Eggers & O'Leary, 2009; Lipsky, 1980). Discretion at the operational level is a powerful tool for doing a lot more than merely carrying out what others have determined. Also, public functions increasingly are being outsourced to nonprofit and for-profit agencies. Finally, there are all those who work at the margins of the policy process in hopes of shaping policy decisions and how they are carried out. All these policy actors look to research to inform their craft. What each group needs from research producers, however, may be quite different.

Tom and Karen have compared notes on the research consumers they have worked with in the Welfare Peer Assistance Network (WELPAN) and the Family Impact Seminars (Seminars) initiatives. WELPAN was a network of senior welfare officials who met to dialogue with their peers about cutting-edge ideas and directions that included, from time to time, top political appointees as well as bureaucrats with a more operational focus. The Seminars, on the other hand, are a model for bringing quality research to state legislators as well as other high-level policy officials from the governor's office and executive branch agencies.

Across these two initiatives, we have worked to bring research and sound analysis to a variety of policymakers. Based on our combined experiences, two overriding lessons emerged. First, where you sit shapes where you stand. Legislators typically need general knowledge about what works and whether the policies being floated are good ideas. They need to be pointed in the direction of identifying which policies will be effective and efficient. Similarly, top political appointees in executive agencies need input on a more general level. As you move down the state agency bureaucracies, the information needs change somewhat. Agency bureaucrats have specialized training and experience on a narrower scope of expertise. For them, salient pieces of the puzzle are information about why things work as they do, whether they apply to different populations, and what best practices can make things work better.

Despite these differences, there are many similarities. All policymakers are busy. They need input in a way that they can understand. They need a basis for trusting the messenger.

Not All Research Producers Are Alike

Similarly, we cannot assume that all research producers are alike. They differ in so many ways. First, they differ by disciplinary preparation. Economists do not see the world in the same way that sociologists do, or political scientists, or any of the other disciplines that engage in social policy research. Second, they differ in terms of methodological preferences. Some feel that social knowledge can only be advanced through formal experiments where subjects are randomly assigned to treatment and control groups. Others are comfortable with quantitative methods using econometric and other advanced estimation techniques to deal, for example, with observed and unobserved heterogeneity across key groups. Still others feel that contributions to the knowledge base can come from qualitative methods and case studies, and that these less quantitative methods add richly textured information to the understanding of a complex world.

Finally, research producers operate in vastly different institutional settings. There are academics doing basic research and academics doing applied work. Some are situated in research-oriented universities, others in think tanks and evaluation firms, others in advocacy organizations, and still others within government itself (Goodvin & Lee, 2017). Each of these groups has its own operating climate and professional culture. Even today, much of the best applied research and program evaluation in the social sciences takes place outside the ivory tower (Tseng & Gamoran, 2017). Again, where one sits, as the old saying goes, shapes where one stands in critically important ways, such as how one thinks about research and what its contributions to the policy process might be.

As an example, the Institute for Research on Poverty is a university-based interdisciplinary research organization focused on a common interest—the understanding of poverty and its amelioration. And some of that collaboration does take place. Yet achieving the ideal of interdisciplinary research remained a challenge until representatives from disparate disciplines came to appreciate what each can contribute. Over his four decades at the institute, Tom noticed that when economists gave a talk at a sponsored, brown-bag seminar, the audience often was dominated by economists. When a sociologist delivered the talk, the composition of the audience morphed in the expected direction—more sociologists. Tom occasionally noted that those in the audience from other disciplines (than the presenter) could be seen glancing at their watches as if to say, “When will this drivel come to an end?”

Not All Interactions Between Research Producers and Consumers Are Alike

Not all settings and strategies where research producers and consumers intersect are the same. How do you get information into the hands (and minds) of policymakers in ways that will be useful to them? Both worlds struggle with this issue. Think about it first from the policymakers’ perspective. What if they confront what we call a *wicked social problem* where desired outcomes are conflicted, theory is unsettled, and tactics for making progress are disputed (Sutherland et al., 2012)? Where would the decision-makers go for informative research? We know they don’t read scholarly journals (McMurtrie, 2013), but would they read a lengthy report, seek out a technical briefing, or attend an academic conference? What about the researcher who might have an answer to the question, or a new way of looking at it? What do they do with their findings—mail an article to a legislator or the governor, call and ask for a meeting, or work with intermediary organizations and advocacy groups?

The point is that research producers and consumers come from different worlds. They operate differently in terms of preferred relational styles and respond to distinct environmental or social cues. The primary objective of researchers is the discovery of evidence, whereas the primary objective of policymakers is the instrumental use of evidence, broadly conceived as designing good legislation, stopping bad legislation, persuading colleagues to their point of view, earning the respect of colleagues, and so forth (Bimber, 1996; Bogenschneider, Day, & Parrott, 2019). Influence in the policy world is based on trust and common sense. Influence involves who is delivering the message, how information is communicated, and whether the message comports with underlying values (Bogenschneider & Bogenschneider, 2020).

Influence in the research world is based largely on using accepted methods and rigorous procedures, and convincing others that scientific protocols were followed in the pursuit of truth. Research is based on precise adherence to well-established standards, whereas politics is based on negotiation and compromise and even pure power. Blending these worlds is not easy. Two of many illustrative examples are given here.

The trade organization for welfare and related human service organizations held a meeting many years ago that brought together the leaders of welfare reform organizations and researchers from universities and top evaluation firms. The purpose of the meeting was to summit on how we should evaluate welfare reform as it unfolded. Over the first two days, researchers lectured to the audience about what they were doing and why it was important to the welfare leaders. On day three, several welfare leaders were scheduled to talk about their management and theoretical issues for which they needed help. But only three researchers remained for the third day. Finding out what was on the mind of their purported audience apparently was not a big priority for many members of the research-producing community. That struck Tom as extremely odd. Why wouldn't researchers be falling all over themselves to find out what the consumers of their research were concerned about?

However, this disconnect goes both ways. One WELPAN meeting focused on charting a possible future direction for the network. Members were asked a forced-choice question about whether future meetings should focus on innovative ideas drawn from research OR from other states. All the states (save one) chose their peers as the preferred source of new ideas, a finding similar to that in a 2001 independent review of WELPAN (SAL, 2001, p. 14). This experience raised Tom's curiosity as to why and how the currency of research had been so marginalized. It was not that this group necessarily disparaged science; they did not. It was a case of valuing more the input of those with whom they shared a common experience and a sense of trust. This ethnocentric focus on the interests of one's own community is one critical component of research underutilization.

Not All Research Studies Lend Themselves to Policy Questions

Too often, researchers focus on questions of interest to them. That is, what will advance their careers, bring scholarly distinction, or be of interest to their disciplinary colleagues (Gamoran, 2020)? Worse, they investigate questions simply because they can—the data and methods are readily available or financial support can easily be obtained. Perhaps the most overlooked aspect of increasing the policy utility of research involves getting the question right (Bednarek et al., 2018; Tseng & Gamoran, 2017). That involves ramping up the level of communication between research producers and consumers before research initiatives are set in stone. It involves generating new levels of communication and cooperation to ensure that research taps issues salient to the public in ways that can contribute to their resolution. Most important, this perspective suggests that the ideal points of interaction should not begin when the research is completed, but rather when the questions of interest are initially formulated (Tseng, 2012).

Not long after national welfare reform passed, Tom was asked to participate on an expert panel convened under the auspices of the National Academy of Sciences to address how best to evaluate the success of welfare reform and help the reform movement advance in the right direction. As Tom listened to fellow top researchers who composed the panel, he began to wonder if the study group was headed in the wrong direction.

As technically sophisticated as the group was, being replete with members from the academy and top-shelf research organizations, they were not particularly attuned to what was happening on the front lines of welfare reform. Welfare was becoming less and less about getting a check out the door and more and more about changing individual and family behaviors. Research questions and methods appropriate to understanding an

income-transfer program were not necessarily well suited to assessing a set of complex initiatives focused on behavioral change.

In short, the group of experts had to spend time and energy understanding the dynamics of how welfare programs had changed to get the research questions right. If you do not do that well enough, everything else will fail. Feeling somewhat frustrated that the mostly academic-based committee members were disconnected from the rapid changes taking place in the culture of welfare offices across the country, Tom persuaded them to allow him to show a set of video clips he had taken at local welfare sites in several states. Despite many good-humored jokes about who would bring the popcorn, the videos, which had mostly local officials talking about how they were radically transforming welfare, was an eye opener to the researchers. They realized that they risked developing recommendations for evaluation methods based on programmatic understandings that quickly were becoming outdated.

Yet the complexity does not stop here. Not all policy questions are amenable to scientific inquiry.

Not All Policy Questions Lend Themselves to Research Studies

Yet another macro factor must be considered—the very nature of the policy question itself. Arguably, some questions are more amenable to inputs from science than others. In recent studies, the odds that research would be applied to policy decisions were less likely on issues that were driven by morality, ideology, or passion. For instance, research was less likely to sway people on lightning-rod issues, such as abortion and reproductive rights, that divide people on religious or moral grounds (Bogenschneider & Bogenschneider, 2020).

Yet many researchers tend to overgeneralize the impenetrability of research on moral issues to all value-based issues. Looking at the history of social policy, some of the nation's most successful major legislation has been driven by shared values—women's rights, drunk driving, civil rights, and smoking (Orren, 1988). In Karen's recent study, we uncovered another pocket of issues that comprised a shared value premise where partisan polarization was less prevalent and where science played a more substantive role—youth and family issues. According to the legislators who championed them through the policy process, youth and family issues, unlike issues such as climate change, were widely seen as a “common interest”, though there was not always agreement about a “common answer” (Bogenschneider et al., 2020). When it came to identifying policy answers, one “very big split” between the parties was whether government was perceived as a force that can cause problems or as a recourse that can resolve them (Bogenschneider et al., 2020; Crowley, Supplee, Scott, & Brooks-Gunn, 2019).

Many of the most perplexing policy questions revolve around what we call *wicked problems*, where normative, theoretical, and partisan contention exists, and the problems themselves seem to exceed the authority of science (Sutherland et al., 2012). As we noted earlier, technical questions are one kind of challenge. They can be exceedingly complex. But given enough resources, science could provide answers to an array of what are essentially technical challenges. So-called wicked social problems typically involve emotional and normative questions where ends are in dispute, theoretical understanding is uncertain, and no policy alternative enjoys widespread support (Sutherland et al., 2012). For a long time, welfare reform had proven an intractable challenge because it touched on core, often contentious, societal issues—equality, fairness, family, personal

responsibility, sex, and work to name a few. Commenting on ways to evaluate controversial welfare reform initiatives, Robert Lovell, a former head evaluator of social programs in Michigan, highlighted

. . . the range of difficulties we face in applying the social science tools developed in the last 50 years to the problems faced by states in the next 5 years. This is not rocket science, it is much more difficult. The rocket engineer chooses among cost, weight, and reliability, has a very successful theory of physics to predict results, knows the goals exactly, and can test each component before assembling the product. Our tradeoffs among cost, reliability, timeliness, protection of subjects, and threats to validity are more complex, our theories have only weak, predictive power, we have as many goals as the number of programs we study, and we seldom have the luxury of studying each of our components separately.

(as cited in Boehnen, Corbett, & Ooms, 1997, p. 9)

Given all these complexities of getting research producers and research consumers on the same page, bringing research to bear on policymaking will take a policy mindset. Next, we turn to the principles that can guide you in the right directions and the caveats that can steer you away from unproductive deviations.

What We Need to Do to Build Evidence-Based Policy: Guiding Principles and Caveats

The hard truth is that we live in a complex world. We touch on all these complexities, some more than others, in the coming chapters. We do so with trepidation and hope. The trepidation emerges from our awareness of just how demanding is the task of doing both good science and good public policy. For example, consider the fact that university-based academics alone are generating research and analysis at a rapidly increasing rate, far more than can be absorbed by even their academic peers, let alone busy decision-makers (Jinha, 2010; Peterson, 2018). This increasing volume of output leads to more differentiation and specialization even within disciplines, thus complicating the task of cross-disciplinary communication and collaboration. The political world, at the same time, is seen as drifting further and further into partisan, ideological divides that threaten to shove science aside to a position of irrelevance (Binder, 2003; Contandriopoulos et al., 2010; Henig, 2008; Kendall-Taylor & Levitt, 2017; Peterson, 2018).

We are in an era where many argue that we must do more to promote the marriage of research and policy. In a sense, we argue for moving in the direction of evidence-based policymaking as a marriage between those who generate research, our *research producers*, and those who use research as they go about society's business, our *research consumers*. Like all marital bonds, it is easier said than done. These diverse communities must begin to talk with one another, often and openly. Self-imposed isolation leads to mutual suspicion which, we argue, is counterproductive. The communication patterns necessary to make any professional marriage work between our increasingly complex set of research producers and consumers MUST go both ways, even multiple ways. This advice is not much different from what one would receive from a decent marital therapist. Ultimately, each will have to look honestly at the cultures within which they function and be sensitive to the culture of the other. Each may have to question basic assumptions and ways of doing business. Our challenge is to think through the ways in which we can

mitigate the impediments and difficulties that make communications between actors situated in these different cultures so difficult.

As we consider our overarching conundrum regarding whether science can play a more central role in the doing of policy, we might profit by remaining cognizant of four key factors. We argue that one needs to begin with a policy mindset—knowing what time frames to expect, which types of intercultural awareness are needed for entering and operating in a foreign land, where to start, and even how to define success.

Key Concepts 1.3. Building Evidence-Based Policy: Guiding Principles and Caveats

1. Doing policy is a marathon, not a sprint;
2. The notions of inhabitants, institutions, and cultures are foundational concepts;
3. Personal relationships are key; and
4. Common notions of success are overly simplistic.

1. Doing Policy Is a Marathon, Not a Sprint

We all tend to look at the present and assume it represents an enduring reality. Or perhaps we look back a decade and swoon over the good old days. In short, we all fall into thinking about the world in a linear fashion where things seem to be getting better or worse along some form of monotonic trend line. Reality, of course, is more complicated. The progress of science does not fast-forward based on a single killer study, but is rather an “independent, collective, cumulative, open-ended enterprise of knowledge creation and testing” (Henig, 2008, p. 152). Similarly, in policymaking, we often anticipate that a lightbulb will go off, an insight will sweep through the body politic, and suddenly a new era of understanding will be embraced for all time. That is not how wicked problems are resolved in the real world (Sutherland et al., 2012). Progress is in fits and starts, trend lines more curvilinear than straight, and success not always manifest to the casual glance or at a single point in time. Moving to a policy world where rigor plays a central role would represent a major transformation. Thus, doing public policy is a marathon, not a sprint (Tseng, 2020a).

2. The Notions of Inhabitants, Institutions, and Cultures Are Foundational Concepts

Progress toward an evidence-based policy world, at least to the extent that such a thing is feasible, is intimately rooted in the culture of the world in which each of us functions. This notion of culture is all-embracing. We will spend a great deal of time exploring the notion of culture throughout this work, so we will only provide the barest outline of the concept here. We use the word *culture* to embrace the languages, perspectives, prevalent behaviors, relationships, rewards and punishments, rules, and understandings in our individual worlds. It is the soup in which each of us functions, often without understanding its character or impact. It literally shapes how we see the world around us. For the moment, let us start with three focal points. First, the inhabitants of every cultural milieu bring with them a set of priors that shape their interactions in life. Second, each

inhabitant functions in an institutional setting that shapes behavior through its norms, languages, practices, and purposes. And third, there are distinct sets of cultural understandings that one embraces, almost unconsciously, which shapes relationships with colleagues and others as they go about their daily business.

We must understand how culture is learned, so we can better understand its role in our professional lives and the professional lives of those we hope to engage. Nominally, our own culture is shaped by many things, but foremost is our training, our professional position, and the community groups with which we choose to engage (or which are thrust upon us).

Remarkably, however, we remain unconscious of the cultural specifics that dominate our daily lives. We think of things that are specific to our world as universals. So, a researcher or academic approaching a policymaker is likely to assume that this other individual sees the world as he or she does (Kendall-Taylor & Levitt, 2017). Researchers may resort to using evidence in an aggressively assertive or advocacy-oriented manner. However, if they had knowledge of the ways researchers are stereotyped in the policy world, they would be persuaded that this is precisely the wrong tack to take. Excessive hubris feeds into the stereotype that academics are elitist eggheads. But why should researchers think otherwise and adopt a more sensitive approach unless, and this is the big factor, they take the time to look and understand this other person's worldview? Nothing creates more misunderstanding and breakdowns in communication than lack of intercultural awareness. Again, this is a theme we will revisit throughout.

3. *Personal Relationships Are Key*

To build evidence-based policy, where should we start? We do not have a shortage of policy issues that could benefit from science. We have never had more science and evidence than we have at present (Jinha, 2010). We have instant access to information through the Internet, social media, 24-hour news cycles, and so forth. These are not the problems in moving toward an evidence-based policy world. Science does not have a *communication* problem, according to Yanovitsky (2019); it has a *relationship* problem.

The fundamental importance of relationships is one of the main findings in a decade of research utilization studies being funded by the William T. Grant Foundation (Bogenschneider et al., 2020; Dumont, 2019; Frieze & Bogenschneider, 2009; Gamoran, 2018; Mayne et al., 2018; Nutley et al., 2007; Oliver & Cairney, 2019; Oliver, Lorenc et al., 2014; Tseng, 2012, 2020a; Tseng & Gamoran, 2017; Tseng, Fleischman, & Quintero, 2018). In accord with this body of evidence, our work in the policy world over many years has suggested to us that how and who brings evidence to policymakers is as important as the quality of the research itself. Because the policy world is so inundated with input, and the incentive for obfuscation and even subterfuge is so strong, trust in the messenger is key (Asen & Gurke, 2014; Bogenschneider & Bogenschneider, 2020; Dumont, 2019; Gamoran, 2018; Honig, Venkateswaran, McNeil, & Twitchell, 2014).

Trust requires several factors. You must take time to get to know your audience. You must seek out what they need to know, not what is easiest for you to provide. You must determine the most effective ways to communicate what they need and, even more importantly, want to know. You must respect your audience, understand their world, and realize that they do not necessarily see things as you do.

Everyone is busy. This is particularly true of research producers and research consumers. For busy policymakers, the credibility of research is determined by the reliability of the source. Trust in the source serves as a cognitive shortcut for validating or vilifying

the credibility of research (Bogenschneider & Bogenschneider, 2020). For researchers, publishing a study, particularly in a traditional venue that will earn the kudos of their peers, is not always the easiest way to generate the biggest returns in the policy world. Expanding one's reach takes making the time to build relationships.

4. Common Notions of Success Are Overly Simplistic

What we look at as evidence of success and what we ought to be looking at are often two different things. We are all impatient, perhaps overly optimistic on occasion. Advocates of evidence-based policymaking want to look at the end points of the process and see results. Can we trace new laws and regulations and program designs directly back to research and rigorous analysis? Granted, there are outlier examples where such a case might be made. But these are likely the exceptions rather than the rule. Science is not a monolithic and unifying input. Even in the physical sciences where laws appear more universal, controversy and competing interpretations abound. Is light a particle or a wave? In the social sciences, the world is even more uncertain. So-called evidence is often weak or contradictory or simply hard to apply directly to the real world.

More to the point, the policy process is long and complex with the final decisions being made at the conclusion of a lengthy process. There are many ways in which science can influence the policy process along the convoluted path from problem awareness to ultimate solution (Bogenschneider, Corbett et al., 2019; Gamoran, 2018; Prewitt, Schwandt, & Straf, 2012; Weiss, 1978).

For the policy novice, there is a tendency to look simplistically at causal links that are unidimensional in character. Does X cause Y? So, researchers and evaluators are trained to disentangle complexity and to seek out simple explanations. Will X reduce poverty, or get less-skilled people jobs, or result in happy families, or lead to productive young adults? It is a natural enough tendency to seek a singular solution, but likely misplaced. Just as there are few silver bullets that might resolve social maladies, there are not likely to be defined points of influence on policy decisions. A law or new program design seldom comes directly from a single "killer" study advanced at a given point in the policymaking process.

Some time ago, an innovative "make work pay" initiative was tried in Milwaukee and later a similar effort was launched in Canada. It was called the New Hope project. The pilot programs were carefully designed and evaluated by the nation's top social policy evaluation firm employing the highest standards of science (Miller, Huston, Duncan, McLoyd, & Weisner, 2008). The Annie E. Casey Foundation then supported an intensive effort to communicate the positive findings on labor supply and even child educational outcomes to policymakers across the land. Yet no one adopted the program in its entirety. Was it a failure? Hard to say since aspects of the model program were widely implemented in various forms. This pilot initiative, partly because the results were unsalable from the scientific point of view, did inform the public conversation and influence thinking about various aspects of assistance to poor families.

Conclusion

We tried to develop a book of broad applicability even though we largely illustrate our ideas using selected policy domains, namely, the social policy arenas of poverty and family policy. We acknowledge that there is scant evidence that policymaking can be transformed magically into a dispassionate, evidence-based enterprise. We are fully aware that there is much to support a pessimistic perspective. Yet we remain optimistic. We like

to think we are optimists who choose optimism with both eyes wide open to the potential perils.

The average citizen wants good government, wants solutions as opposed to endless division and debate, and wants competence over scoring political points (Smith, 1991). We have come to know many researchers who are committed to applying their work in the real world, even when the culture of the academy does not always appreciate or reward their endeavors. We admire their passion. We admire their intellect. We admire the research skills they bring to tackle some of the toughest issues of our times.

We also have come to know many policymakers out there who seek information on which to make hard choices about what to do for whom. They have always been there, even when it is not obvious at first glance. Recently, Karen personally sat across the desk from 128 sitting legislators in conversations that sometimes lasted over two hours. We respect them. We admire their passion, sometimes working on a bill for a decade before it passes. We admire the political skills they bring to tackle some of the toughest issues of our times.

Getting the research producers and consumers together, however, has proven a lot more difficult than one might have imagined. We know this gap between research and policy is quite unyielding to easy remedies. Yet examples exist that demonstrate it can be done, though not easily or without effort. Nonpartisan research institutes like the Washington State Institute for Public Policy have used rigorous meta-analyses to respond to policymaker requests with “Consumer-Reports” style reports that consistently have driven state policy decisions (Aos, 2007; Goodvin & Lee, 2017). Their approach, known as the *Results First Initiative*, has increased spending on effective programs and cut spending on ineffective programs in 27 states (Lester, 2018). A cadre of pioneering researchers, as described in Chapter 9, have stepped out of their comfort zone and worked closely with policymakers to drive policy changes (K. Bogenschneider, 2020a; Boehnen et al., 1997; Day, MacDermid Wadsworth et al., 2019; Grisso & Steinberg, 2005; Lipsey, 2009, 2012; Olds, 2010, 2016; Yoshikawa & Ariel, 2011). The Manpower Research and Demonstration Corporation, perhaps the preeminent evaluation firm doing welfare and workforce development studies, takes pride in doing a good deal of testifying before public officials and in developing easy-to-read reports that summarize their findings. Selected evaluation firms, policy think tanks, and representatives of the philanthropic community have taken great pains to prepare reports and documents that are written with a policy audience in mind.

Furthermore, on the policy side of our classic divide, we have seen politics become increasingly vitriolic and partisan. Yet, even amidst a resurgence of bitter partisanship, hints of positive change still occur. For the past decade or two, state and federal policymakers have been experiencing an “evidence-based uprising” (Haskins, 2018, p. 8). The passage of six “tiered-evidence” social programs enacted between 2009 and 2011 and the Foundation for Evidence-Based Policymaking Act in 2018 is pushing federal agencies to make better use of government data (Baron, 2018; Gamoran, 2019). Recently, federal policymakers have come together around criminal justice reform (bop.gov/inmates/fsa/overview.jsp), the Families First Coronavirus Response Act (www.congress.gov/bill/116th-congress/house-bill/6201), and the Family First Prevention Services Act (<https://familyfirstact.org/>).

If we don’t find ways to help researchers talk with policymakers, and vice versa, what might the future look like? Can we envision more partisanship and interest-driven policies? Can we envision even greater influence of money over science (Rivlin, 2006)? Will we see growing despair around the competence of government and further erosion of

public support for social science research (Tseng, 2019b)? When asked about what was important for academic researchers to know in working with policymakers, a state senator who held a leadership position replied as follows (response is paraphrased):

The University seems to be isolated and does not encourage and initiate contact with policymakers. Academics need to be much better connected to politics; otherwise, their budgets will get cut. In the face of significant cuts to the University and vindictive cuts to Extension, the University seems to think “this is not real.” They seem to be living in a different world as their budgets get sliced and brutalized. The University doesn’t seem to care, and academics don’t want to get their hands dirty in the political process.

When Karen is recruiting faculty and Extension staff to lead the state Family Impact Seminars, she often hears a common refrain—“This is not a good time. Our budgets are too tight.” Karen’s resolute reply is “If not now, when?” For some in academia, the time may be now. It may now be close to a matter of survival (see Tseng, 2019b).

We are not naïve. Doing public policy will never become a fully data-driven process, nor should we expect it to be. Any democracy must live with a give-and-take that is governed, in part, by values and positions that will never be fully informed by research evidence. Differences of opinion will always be vetted in an environment where a marketplace of ideas plays out in the public arena. In an important way, this is a strength inherent in our democratic process. At the same time, there is much that research evidence can do to reduce the level of conflict that tends to paralyze the policy process. Science will never fully replace values and power in the development of policy or in the ways that public matters are managed. In the end, though, we remain convinced that science can play a much bigger role than it now does.