

# Who Benefits

## Experimental Evidence of Gender Differences in Aid Allocations

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# Motivation

Welfare in the United States is highly stigmatized (Goffman 1968; Pinker 2017). The public tends to support aid to the “deserving poor,” but not social safety net spending (Feldman and Steenbergen 2001).

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Despite this, we know remarkably little about gender differences in attitudes toward welfare recipients and perceptions of deservingness.

# Motivation

Most empirical research about welfare recipients holds gender constant, examining...

- race (Gilens 1996; Hayes and Mitchell 2022)
- worker qualifications (DeSante 2013)
- marital status (Lichter, Baston, and Brown 2004)
- employment (Harris 1993; Willrich 2000)

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By examining men and women in isolation from each other, it's hard to understand how gender effects welfare attitudes and perceptions of deservingness

# My Question

When men and women are put in direct competition for scarce aid resources, how do women fare compared to similarly-situated men? Are they perceived as more deserving?

# Theory: What is Deservingness?

Americans think of *deservingness* along five dimensions (van Oorschot 2000):

- 1 **Control:** poor people's their responsibility for their neediness
- 2 **Need:** the greater the level of need, the more deserving
- 3 **Identity:** the identity of the poor, their 'pleasantness'
- 4 **Attitude:** poor people's attitude towards support, or their docility or gratefulness
- 5 **Reciprocity:** the degree to which support has been 'earned'



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Women (especially mothers) seeking aid are more likely to be seen as victimized, needy, pleasant, and docile (Monnat 2010; Glick and Fisk 1999).

Whereas men seeking aid are usually seen as failed breadwinners or lazy "home slackers" (Willrich 2000), in control of their poverty and having not earned aid.

# Hypothesis 1

**H1.** On average, male applicants will be awarded less than female applicants.

Americans value hard work and “earning” aid (Sniderman and Tetlock 1986; Sniderman, Carmines, Layman and Carter 1996; McClosky and Zaller 1984)

Likely motivated by a desire to see recipients get back into the workforce and off of aid

The features on which men and women are judged as “good workers” are therefore theoretically relevant to evaluations of their deservingness.

Men and women are evaluated differently for expressing the same traits (Arnault et al. 2001)

Evidence suggests that third-party evaluations of worker quality pay higher returns for women and little to no returns for men (Abel, Burger and Piraino 2020; Dadgar and Trimble 2015).

# Hypotheses

**H2a.** For male applicants, there will be no significant difference between amounts awarded to “Excellent” workers as compared to “Poor” workers.

**H2b.** For female applicants, there will be a significant difference between amounts awarded to “Excellent” workers as compared to “Poor” workers.

# Empirical Approach

YouGov survey experiment (n=1800); nationally representative sample + low SES oversample<sup>1</sup>

Following DeSante (2013), subjects are shown two applications for state aid

Each has a stated need of \$900 with a budget constraint of \$1,500 Prompt

Any funds not given to the applicants go to the state to “offset the state budgetary deficit” (principled objection)

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<sup>1</sup>Funded by a Civic Engagement Grant from the Institute of Politics

# Empirical Approach

## WORK FIRST ASSISTANCE APPLICATION

Applicant Name: Misty [REDACTED] Date of Application: [REDACTED]  
Address: [REDACTED] Telephone: [REDACTED]  
County: [REDACTED]  
Case No.: [REDACTED] District No.: [REDACTED]

### HOUSEHOLD: List all household members for whom Assistance is being requested:

(Non-Applicant household members are not required to provide a social security number, immigrant, or citizen status)

Name	Date of Birth	Sex	Social Security No.	Citizen/Eligible Immigrant	Relationship
[REDACTED]	08/16/2010	M	[REDACTED]	Y	Son
[REDACTED]	04/14/2012	F	[REDACTED]	Y	Daughter

Total assessed monthly need: \$ 900.00

Worker Quality Assessment (circle one):

Poor

Excellent

Applicant Statement: I understand that it is against the law for me to make false statements and that I am

# Empirical Approach

I use names (Sandra, James, Sammie, Misty) to cue applicants' gender. Names

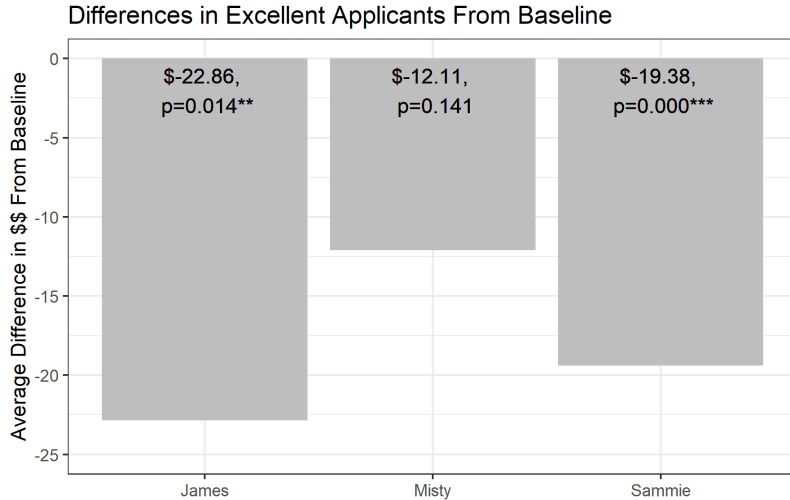
Following DeSante (2013) and Hayes and Mitchel (2022), I use a binary “Worker Quality Rating” (Excellent/Poor) to denote quality

All subjects were shown Sandra with an “Excellent” rating as a baseline as Applicant 1

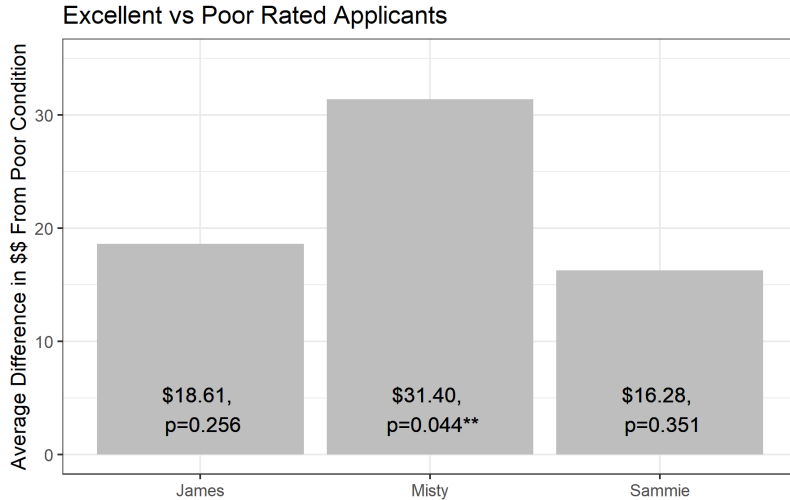
Applicant 2 is a randomly assigned a name (James, Sammie, or Misty) and quality rating (Excellent/Poor) with equal probability



# Results: H1 - Men Receive Less?



## Results: H2a-b - Worker Quality



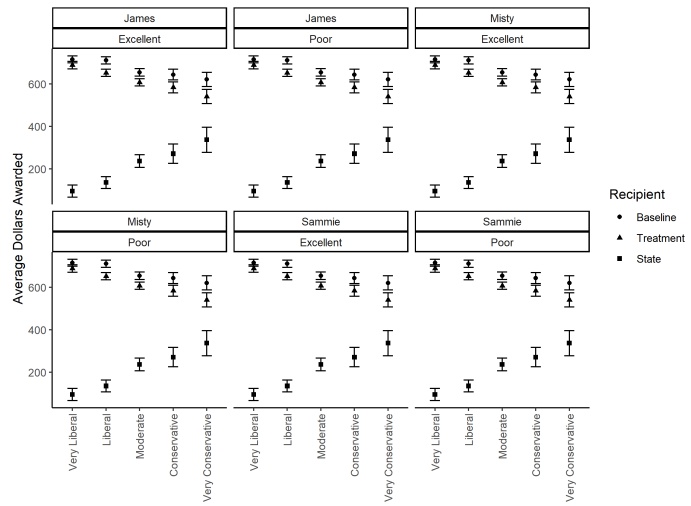
# Confirming the Mechanism

I predicted that changing the gender of the treatment name caused these effects

However, maybe these results are driven by respondent ideology

More liberal respondents favor more aid in general compared to conservative respondents

# Confirming the Mechanism



# Confirming the Mechanism

My results hold when stratified by ideology, except among respondents who identify as “very liberal”

These findings are also robust to stratifying by gender, mitigating concerns about simple in-group bias. Gender

Additionally, these findings substantively replicate when I split the sample into the nationally representative and low SES subsamples Nat. Pop Low SES

- (though many results are statistically insignificant, likely due to lack of power)

# Conclusion

I find that Americans tend to view that women as more deserving than men

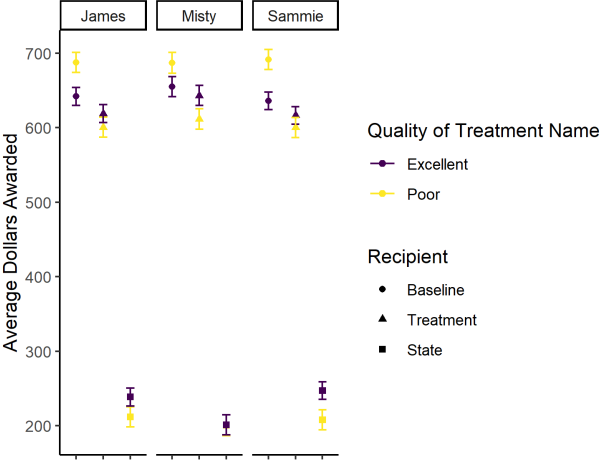
This effect appears to be driven by the “stickiness” of perceptions of men’s deservingness and increasing the quality of women applicants

One implication of these results is that aid programs aimed toward women should have higher public approval than programs aimed toward the whole public or which mostly benefit men

Ideally, future work will be able to replicate this design on a sample of bureaucrats.

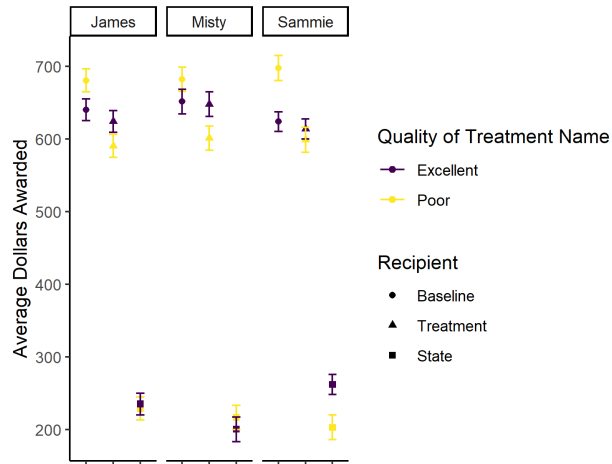
Thank you!  
swarr15@ur.rochester.edu

# Appendix - Full Results Fig

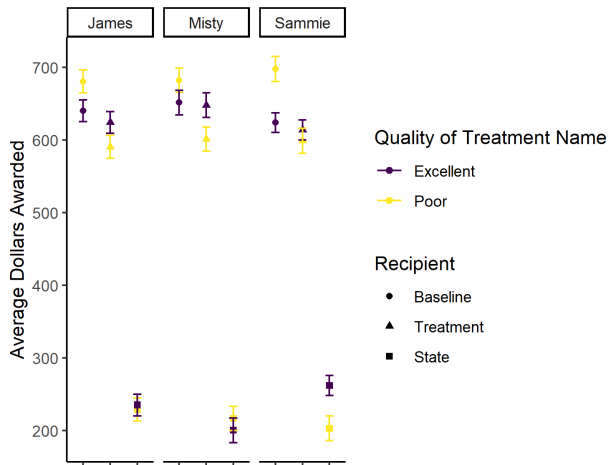




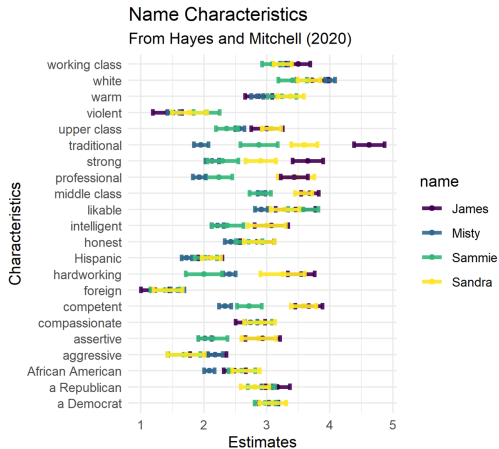
# Appendix - Nationally Representative Results



# Appendix - Low SES Results



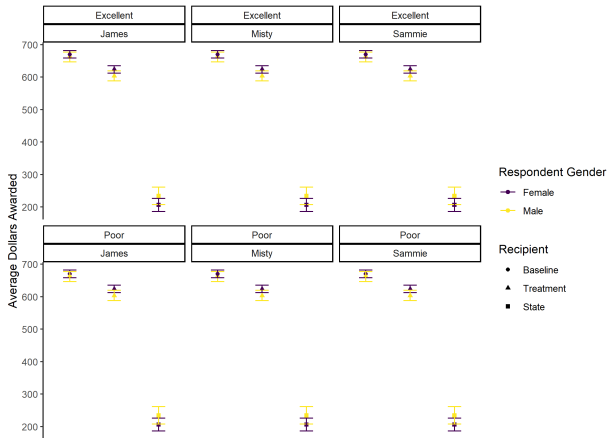
# Appendix - Name Characteristics



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# Appendix - Gender of Respondents



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# Prompt

Respondents receive the following prompt:

*Researchers have been hired to consult with a nearby state's welfare agency. Below you will find two applicants for government assistance. The application information has been redacted to hide information that may identify individual applicants.*

*Each applicant has a state-assessed level of need of \$900 per month. Your task is to allocate \$1,500 between the two applicants. You can allocate any amount between \$0 and \$900 to each applicant. Any remaining funds will be used to offset the state's budget deficit. Please enter three numbers below.*

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Appendix