**Abstract:**

**Introduction**

Are Americans gender-blind in rewarding hard work, or is the value of effort conditional on being a man or a woman? We have long known that women experience discrimination in ways that men do not. Research has shown that women receive different treatment in everything from applying to jobs (Quadlin 2018) to running for office (Hassell and Visalvanich 2019) to the price they pay for basic household goods (Betz, Fortuano, and O’Brien 2021; Bessendorf 2018). Women earn less than their male counterparts (Mandel 2013) and have long comprised the overwhelming majority of those on welfare (Fraser 1987; Smith, Appio, and Cho 2012). Despite this, and well-documented reality that welfare attitudes are racialized (Gilens 1999), the feminization of welfare attitudes has received limited attention from scholars (but see Rabinowitz et al. 2009). Emblematic of this is the fact that most experimental work on the racialization of welfare attitudes use female names or images when cuing race (Winter 2006; Desante 2013; MORE). Yet there remains uncertainty about whether we should expect male favoritism to carry into welfare allotment. The vast literature documenting more favorable treatment of men as compared to women in salary negotiations, hiring, and elections suggests that men may receive favorable treatment also in welfare allotment as in these other domains. However, welfare is distinct from electoral and hiring environments in that it carries with it social stigma () and negative stereotypes (). It is possible that men seeking welfare may be “punished” for failing to achieve the Western, masculine ideal of breadwinning ().

This article adds to the literature on welfare in America and bureaucratic responsiveness in several ways. First, given the competing intuitions behind rewarding or punishing men seeking welfare, an experimental test of both hypotheses is presented. On one hand, men’s hard work tends to be rewarded more and more frequently than women’s, even when the quality of their work is comparable (Joshi, Son, and Roh 2014). This may be due to stereotypes of men as “breadwinners,” supporting a family, contrasted with women as “caregivers,” (). The perception of and reward for men as breadwinners may translate into more favorable perceptions of men seeking welfare, as a last resort effort to provide for a family (). Meanwhile, negative caregiver stereotypes may play into negative evaluations of women seeking welfare, such as that of the “welfare queen,” [explanation of term]. On the other hand, Americans believe people “ought to take care of their personal problems by themselves” without relying on the government for aid (Sniderman and Brody 1977, 501). Notably, this “pull yourself up by your bootstraps” mentality appears to be concentrated among men, with women regarding welfare more positively and as a higher priority (). Given this and the fact that more women receive benefits, welfare itself may seen as a women’s issue. Indeed, many public aid programs such as [list them] are targeted at women. The feminization of welfare, combined with the apparent failure of men seeking public assistance to pull themselves up by their bootstraps and be breadwinners, may contribute to a distaste for men receiving public benefits: such policies help those who should be helping themselves (Bobocel et al. 1998; Katz and Hass 1988; Sniderman and Tetlock 1986; Sniderman et al. 1996).

The central purpose of this article is to enter the debate about modern sexism, welfare, and traditional American values to show that when men and women are put in direct competition for scarce resources, gender-based prejudice interacts with American values of hard work to amplify existing, harmful stereotypes about men and women. To that end, this research provides evidence that

**Theory and Hypotheses**

Pateman () suggests that when women are not viewed as equal agents in the marketplace, they cannot benefit equally from the “patriarchal” welfare state.

THIS SECTION IS A MESS IGNORE IT JUST READ THE HYPOTHESES

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

H2. On average, high-competence names will be awarded more than low-competence names.

H3.For male applicants, there will be no significant difference between amounts awarded to “Excellent” workers as compared to “Poor” workers.

**Research Design and Data**

In order to test how sexism, sex, and objective and perceived work ethic shape Americans’ attitudes toward welfare, I conducted a survey experiment in which participants were asked to budget money to different pairs of applicants for state assistance. Using hand-redacted welfare applications, I manipulate the targets’ for assistance sex, objective work-quality rating, and perceived competence. To do so, I use two male and two female names from Hayes and Mitchell’s (2020) name-characteristics dataset: Sandra, James, Misty, and Sammie. These names were specifically selected to minimize the likelihood that factors other than sex, objective, and perceived work ethic would affect treatment.

First, names are used rather than more overt cues to minimize demand effects (De Quidt, Vesterlund, and Wilson 2019). Experimenter demand effects refer to changes in behavior that result from study participants wanting to help the experimenter confirm her underlying hypothesis. Second, to mitigate concerns about the effects of race and the racialization of welfare confounding results, all four names chosen were coded as racially distinct white names in the Hayes and Mitchell (2020) names dataset.[[1]](#footnote-1) Thirdly and finally, these names are matched on characteristics that Americans have long reported are relevant considerations when considering welfare support (Sinderman and Brody 1977; Bobocel et al. 1998; Katz and Hass 1988; Sniderman and Tetlock 1986; Sniderman et al. 1996). Sandra and James are rated highly in professionalism, competence, and work ethic, while Sammie and Misty are rated lower in all three characteristics. Figure [] below shows the complete breakdown of name-characteristics.

**Chart

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Subjects are given a budgeting task in which the respondent is asked to allocate $1,500 to two applicants for federal assistance, each of whom is said to need $900. Respondents may also choose to give some (or all) of the funds to “offset the state deficit.” Given the budget constraint—both applicants’ full need cannot be met—I use the amount awarded to each—Applicant 1, Applicant 2, and the Government—as an estimate of an applicant’s “deservingness.” These allocations are my main variables of interest. Everything about the applicants remains identical, except for a *worker quality assessment* of Excellent or Poor and their name, which cues both *sex* and *competence* (high or low). Given this, if an applicant receives a different allocation across treatments, we can infer that this difference is due to experimental manipulation. As the applicant’s characteristics were manipulated via random assignment, any difference in the relative importance respondents place on fiscal responsibility—illustrated by giving more to offset the budget deficit—can also be traced back to the experimental treatment. This deficit option also allows for individuals to take a principled position (a socially desirable and available option) to decide that the money would be better spent in some other way.

In order to isolate the effects of sex versus the traits people ascribe to different names, I fielded a survey experiment with YouGov (n=1,824) [[2]](#footnote-2) in April 2022 modeled after DeSante (2013) and Hayes and Mitchell (2020). Respondents viewed two applications identical in appearance to the original experiment. Rather than randomizing both applications, all respondents viewed the same baseline application of “Sandra” who was rated as “Excellent” compared to a second application. I used a 2x2x2 factorial design for this second application, randomizing sex (male/female), competence (high/low), and quality assessment (excellent/poor) of the second application, using James, Misty, and Sammie as my cue for sex and competence. Respondents were then asked to allocate funding to the two applicants or to offset the state budgetary deficit.

**Experimental Results**

Figure [] plots the dollars given the Applicant 2 by the dollars given to Applicant 1. In each panel, the observations for that treatment condition are shown in black with the full observations shown in light gray.

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**Hypotheses and Treatments**

H6. On average, male applicants (James/Sammie) will be awarded less than female applicants (Sandra/Misty).

**Partial Support.** Excellent Misty earns the same as Excellent Sandra. Excellent/Poor James and Sammie earn less than Excellent Sandra. Poor Misty earns less than excellent Sandra. No difference between Excellent/Poor Misty and Excellent/Poor James and Sammie.

H7. On average, high-competence (Sandra/James) names will be awarded more than low-competence names (Sammie/Misty).

**Working on analysis**

H8a. For female applicants (Sandra/Misty), those rated as “Excellent” workers will be awarded, on average, more than those rated “Poor” workers. For example, “Excellent” Sandra is expected to be awarded more than “Poor” Sandra.

**Full support.**

H8b.For male applicants (James/Sammie), there will be no significant difference between amounts awarded to “Excellent” workers as compared to “Poor” workers. For example, “Excellent” James is expected to not earn significantly more or less than “Poor” James.

**Full support.**

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| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Applicant A** | **Applicant B** | **Applicant A Mean** | **Applicant B Mean** | **p-value** |
| Sandra (Exc) | Misty (Exc) | 655.3067 | 643.1981 | 0.141 |
| Sandra (Exc) | Misty (Poor) | 687.2525 | 611.7973 | **0.000** |
| Sandra (Exc) | James (Exc) | 642.0604 | 619.1980 | **0.014** |
| Sandra (Exc) | James (Poor) | 687.5596 | 600.5894 | **0.000** |
| Sandra (Exc) | Sammie (Exc) | 635.9801 | 616.5980 | **0.011** |
| Sandra (Exc) | Sammie (Poor) | 691.4822 | 600.3172 | **0.000** |
| Misty (Exc) | Misty (Poor) | 643.198 | 611.797 | **0.044** |
| James (Exc) | James (Poor) | 619.198 | 600.589 | 0.256 |
| Sammie (Exc) | Sammie (Poor) | 616.598 | 600.317 | 0.351 |
| Misty (Exc) | Sammie (Exc) | 643.198 | 616.598 | 0.104 |
| Misty (Poor) | Sammie (Poor) | 611.797 | 600.317 | 0.494 |
| James (Exc) | Sammie (Exc) | 619.198 | 616.598 | 0.88 |
| James (Poor) | Sammie (Poor) | 600.589 | 600.317 | 0.986 |

**Experimental Results**

**Empirical Relevance**

**Conclusions**

1. Footnote on how we’d ideally have a treatment with these four names and four corresponding black names so we’d understand the racial *and* gender dynamics of welfare allotment, but budgetary constraints and power concerns forced [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Pre-registration footnote and link here [↑](#footnote-ref-2)