"Goodbye Welfare Queens, Hello Working Moms"

Understanding public opinion about welfare requires considering the influence of race and gender together.

Feminist welfare policy research includes race and gender.
Abramovitz, Regulating the Lives of Women (1996)

Existing public opinion welfare research focuses only on the role of race.
Gilens, Why Americans Hate Welfare (1999)

This work incorporates work from both fields, focusing on the intersection of race and gender.

Public opinion about welfare is shaped by gender and race specific opinions about welfare recipients.

Carly Hayden Foster
Visiting Assistant Professor
(Occupier of Lance LeLoup's office)

Race and Gender in Public Discourse

Race and Gender of Ronald Reagan's Welfare Queen
Gendered Racism

Race and Gender in Welfare Legislation Language
The preamble to Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWORA), the legislation that created TANF, reads:

"Marriage is the foundation of a successful society."
The preamble goes on to list the official goals of TANF:

1) to provide for assistance to needy families so that children maybe cared for in their own homes or in the homes of relatives;
2) to end the dependence of needy parents on government benefits by promoting job preparation, work, and marriage;
3) to prevent and reduce the incidence of out-of-wedlock pregnancies and establish annual numerical goals for preventing and reducing the incidence of these pregnancies; and
4) to encourage the formation and maintenance of two-parent families.
(US Public Law 104-193)

Public Discourse on welfare is reflected in measures of public opinion.

Poverty in America Survey

Jan-Feb 2001, N=1952

National Public Radio, Kaiser Family Foundation, Kennedy School of Government

In general, do you think people on welfare have higher, lower, or about the same moral values as other Americans?	Higher 3%	Same 63%	Lower 29%
Do you think welfare encourages women to have more children than they would have if they were not able to get welfare, or not?	Yes 57%	No 36%	
Do you support or oppose increasing government spending on cash assistance to families?	Support 54%	Oppose 40%	

Logistic Regression Model

Dependent Variable: Increase spending? (0 no, 1 yes)

Variables	B	Exp(B)
Do welfare recipients have lower moral values? (0 lower, 1 same or higher)	.318** (.153)	1.375
Does welfare encourage childbearing? (0 no, 1 yes)	-.418** (.164)	.658
Gender (0 male, 1 female)	-.001 (.155)	.999
Marital Status (0 not married, 1 married)	-.328** (.158)	.720
Education (0 not HS grad, 1 HS grad, 2 college grad)	-.639*** (.127)	.528
Party ID (0 Republican, 1 independent, 2 Democrat)	.146 (.104)	1.157
Race (0 white, 1 other race, 2 African American)	.220* (.122)	1.246
Constant	1.022*** (.298)	2.779
N	773	
Chi Square	61.509***	

*p> .10, **p> .05, ***p> .01

Poverty in America Survey, 2001

National Public Radio, Kaiser Family Foundation, Kennedy School of Government

Opinions about welfare mothers help to predict support for welfare spending.

- Respondents who think welfare mothers have lower moral values than other Americans are significantly less supportive of welfare spending than those who think that welfare moms share their moral values with other Americans.

  What might "morals" mean in the context of a survey on poverty and welfare?

- Respondents who think that welfare encourages increased childbearing on the part of poor single women are significantly less supportive of welfare spending than those who think that welfare does not influence the childbearing decisions of (potential) welfare mothers.

  Which women might be encouraged by welfare to have more children?

Results are not surprising, but they are important. They demonstrate that antipathy towards welfare spending is driven by more than just race.

National Race and Politics Survey
1991, N=2223
Survey Research Center, UC Berkeley

Selected Survey Questions
- How likely is it that she [the hypothetical welfare mother] will try really hard to find a job in the next year?
(42.3% not likely, 54.9% likely)
- How likely is it that she [the hypothetical welfare mother] will have another child to increase the size of her welfare check?
(35.0 % not likely, 61.1% likely)
- Would you prefer to see more spent, less spent, or the same amount of money spent on welfare as it has been?
(48.1% less, 30.5% same, 20.2% more)

Ordered Logit Model
Dependent Variable, Welfare spending (0, 1, 2)

Variables	White hypothetical welfare mother	Black hypothetical welfare mother
Party ID (0 Democrat, 1 independent, 2 Republican)	-.419** (.232)	-.176** (.078)
Gender (0 male, 1 female)	.044 (.122)	-.067 (.124)
Marital Status (0 not married, 1 married)	-.404** (.122)	-.182 (.124)
Education Level (0 not HS grad, 1 HS grad, 2 college grad)	.095 (.103)	-.040 (.103)
Respondent Race (0 white, 1 other race, 2 black)	.034 (.106)	.058 (.102)
Predicted Work Behavior (0 not likely to look for work, 1 likely to look for work)	.334*** (.129)	.441*** (.128)
Predicted Reproductive Behavior (0 not likely to have another baby, 1 likely to have another baby to increase the size of her welfare check)	-.202 (.133)	-.473*** (.136)
Welfare spending=0	-.467** (.232)	-.482** (.235)
Welfare Spending =1	1.079*** (.234)	.949*** (.237)
N	1011	984
Model Chi Square	57.831***	45.443***

*p> .10, **p> .05, ***p> .01

The National Race and Politics Survey (1991)

Intersectionality: Look only at race, or only at gender, and you miss the big picture.

Work behavior and reproductive behavior both predict support for welfare spending.

- Respondents who think that the hypothetical welfare mother, black or white, is likely to look for work, are much more likely to support welfare spending.

- Respondents who think that a black welfare mother is likely to have more children to get a bigger welfare check are much less likely to support welfare spending.

Goodbye Welfare Queens, Hello Working Moms

Race and gender together help to explain public opinion about welfare spending.

Future research:

Lasting rhetorical shift?

If the "Welfare Queen" gets rhetorically buried, will antipathy towards welfare dissipate?

If the public comes to see welfare moms as working moms, will public support for welfare increase?

(TESS)