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How income shapes moral judgments of prosocial behavior[☆]

Jenny G. Olson^{a,*}, Brent McFerran^b, Andrea C. Morales^c, Darren W. Dahl^d

^a Department of Marketing, Indiana University, 1309 East Tenth Street, Room 2100, Bloomington, IN 47405, USA

^b Marketing Area, Simon Fraser University, 8888 University Way, Burnaby, BC V5A 1S6, Canada

^c Department of Marketing, Arizona State University, 300 E. Lemon Street, Tempe, AZ 85287, USA

^d Marketing and Behavioural Science Division, University of British Columbia, 2053 Main Mall, Vancouver, BC V6T 1Z2, Canada



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ABSTRACT

The current research extends past work on how consumers (as “observers”) view ethical choices made by others (“actors”). Using a person-centered approach to moral judgments, we show that consumers are judged differentially, based on their income, for engaging in certain prosocial behaviors. Nine studies demonstrate that engaging in the same prosocial behavior, such as volunteering, leads to different responses depending on whether the actor earns income versus receives government assistance. Consistent with our theorizing, we find that aid recipients are given less latitude in how they spend their time than those earning an income and are scrutinized to a greater degree for their choices because people believe their time would be better spent seeking employment. Consequently, the lower moral judgments of aid recipients who choose to volunteer (vs. income earners) are driven, at least in part, by the anger observers feel about the perceived misuse of time. Additional information or cues about employment efforts or work inability attenuate these judgments. Importantly, we document implications for support for federal spending on welfare programs.

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1. Introduction

The number of people receiving government assistance is sizable. Many countries—including those in Asia, Europe, Latin America, and North America—have seen a rise in the number of people receiving benefits over the years, a total now reaching into the billions (Kwon, 2005; Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2018; World Bank Group, 2018). Ensuring that citizens who are unable to fully support themselves have access to food, healthcare, and employment assistance is a top priority. Indeed, social welfare spending (as a percentage of gross domestic product) represents a significant portion of many countries' federal budgets. Public expenditures averaged just over 20% across 36 countries in 2018 (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2019). Spending was highest in France at over 30%, with Belgium, Finland, Denmark, Italy, Austria, Sweden, and Germany at >25%.

The extent to which the welfare state is supported depends, in no small part, on public sentiment. In any democracy, citizens elect politicians based on policy promises and decisions; in turn, elected officials are then accountable to the electorate. Previous research has demonstrated that support for government spending on welfare programs is directly related to how the voting public perceives beneficiaries (Henry, Reyna, & Weiner, 2004). Let us take an example. William recently signed up for an unpaid volunteer position at a local museum. For 12 hours a week, he gives guided tours and helps with administrative tasks. How moral of a

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* Corresponding author.

E-mail addresses: jgolson@iu.edu, (J.G. Olson), brent.mcferran@sfu.ca, (B. McFerran), acmorales@asu.edu, (A.C. Morales), darren.dahl@sauder.ubc.ca, (D.W. Dahl).

person is William? Would your response differ if he earned a relatively low versus a high income? What if he was receiving government assistance? Recent research demonstrates that consumers make moral judgments of ethical purchase decisions as a function of the actor's income (Olson, McFerran, Morales, & Dahl, 2016). In that work, income earners were seen as more moral when buying organic food, renting a hybrid vehicle, or making monetary donations, whereas low-income consumers receiving government assistance were seen as less moral for making identical choices, in part because such choices are associated with price premiums (e.g., Chang, 2011; De Pelsmacker, Driesen, & Rayp, 2005; van Doorn & Verhoef, 2011). However, not all ethical choices require money. William's volunteering at the museum requires giving *time*, which previous research demonstrates is perceived as a more moral act than giving an equivalent amount of money (Reed, Aquino, & Levy, 2007). Likewise, time is a resource that those receiving government assistance may be perceived as having in abundance (cf. DeVoe & Pfeffer, 2011), which could positively influence perceptions of volunteering.

The current research, however, contends that donations of time and other non-financial resources by low-income consumers receiving government assistance¹ (i.e., welfare recipients or aid recipients) may be subject to similar scrutiny as financial expenditures. We propose, and demonstrate in a series of nine studies, that the divergence in moral attributions originally observed by Olson et al. (2016) is only one instance of a much broader phenomenon that applies to prosocial behavior and time management as well. We show that aid recipients are scrutinized to a greater extent than income earners, with observers demonstrating a strong bias toward believing that aid recipients should be using their time to pursue employment opportunities above all else. As a result, they are given narrower latitude in how they use their time, and can even be seen as more moral for choosing *not* to engage in prosocial behaviors when such behaviors take time away from gaining paid employment. Given these strongly held beliefs over how aid recipients should be using their time, we propose that the asymmetry in moral judgments between those receiving government assistance (vs. income earners) is driven, at least in part, by anger over the perceived misuse of time. As such, additional information or cues suggesting that aid recipients are taking steps toward improving their employment status should attenuate these judgments. Importantly, we also show that the simple act of volunteering among aid recipients (vs. no mention of volunteering) not only shapes judgments of the individual aid recipients, but that this information can also impact observers' views toward federal tax policy more broadly.

Our research makes several contributions. First, we extend Olson et al. (2016) from financial expenditures to time expenditures, demonstrating moral judgment effects that are conditional on factors they did not examine (e.g., efforts to improve employability). In particular, we focus on how specific characteristics of the *person* engaging in prosocial behavior can change perceptions of the individual's moral character. As such, our research contributes to the literature on person-centered moral judgments, which has emphasized shifting away from studying the permissibility of an act to an emphasis on the person doing the act (e.g., Uhlmann, Pizarro, & Diermeier, 2015). Unlike act-based judgments that generally focus on the degree of harm caused (e.g., Haidt, Koller, & Dias, 1993), person-based judgments focus on whether an act conveys information about an actor's underlying traits. Consistent with this, we show that the same (prosocial) act leads to different perceptions of the individual engaging in the act based upon the nature of his or her income. We also document evidence that the effect is driven, at least in part, by feelings of anger.

Second, our research is the first (to our knowledge) to demonstrate that "appropriate" time allocation depends upon income. Previous research on the economic value of time features an actor perspective: feeling relatively wealthy (vs. poor) is associated with greater time pressure because "time is money" (DeVoe & Pfeffer, 2011). Hamermesh and Lee (2007) document similar time scarcity effects as a function of earnings in Australia, Germany, Korea, and the United States. Time is a finite resource, so "wasting" even one hour (e.g., by not working) carries opportunity costs. Given that individuals perceive opportunity costs for their own time, it stands to reason that they perceive them for others as well. As such, we contribute to this literature by taking an observer perspective and documenting novel effects for individuals seen as spending time unproductively. Because government programs are supported by taxpayer ("their") dollars, observers may feel justified in suggesting how aid recipients spend their time.

Third, these moral judgment effects have policy relevance. We demonstrate that consumers prefer different patterns of tax redistribution as a function of viewing aid recipients making non-financial choices. Specifically, consumers allocate fewer tax dollars toward supporting government assistance programs after hearing about an aid recipient who volunteers his time (vs. no mention of volunteering). Volunteering uniquely and negatively impacts support for government assistance programs (i.e., support toward other programs like immigration, international affairs, agriculture, and science are unaffected).

Finally, our research contributes to the literature on tainted altruism, which has found that an actor's self-interested motive taints his or her volunteer efforts (Newman & Cain, 2014). The current research holds underlying motives constant and instead considers whether an actor's income can also taint moral judgments stemming from identical prosocial behaviors. In contrast to actor effects (i.e., where the participant themselves is the focus of investigation), our work focuses on observer effects of others' acts. In this respect, our work more closely mirrors research on third-party moral judgments (e.g., Graham, Haidt, & Nosek, 2009; Pitesa & Thau, 2014), but such papers largely investigate how characteristics of the observer impact judgments; here, we manipulate characteristics of the actor.

¹ There is no single, international definition of government assistance, which is also referred to as "social assistance," "social safety net," or "aid." For the purposes of our research, we will refer to "government assistance" as a range of benefits and services available to residents lacking sufficient income from other sources, which guarantee a minimum level of subsistence (cf. Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2018).

2. Conceptual development

Common stereotypes levied against lower-income groups, including aid recipients, can consist of being perceived as irresponsible, impulsive, and as lower in moral values, character, work ethic, and motivation than higher-income groups (Bullock, Wyche, & Williams, 2001; Cozzarelli, Wilkinson, & Tagler, 2001; Lott, 2002; Shepherd & Campbell, 2020). Note that lower-income groups are not all created equal; the *source* of income matters. Earning low wages from a job is not perceived the same as receiving low, unearned wages from the government, as the latter is judged especially harshly (Fiske, Xu, Cuddy, & Glick, 1999). Consumers react differently to “poor people” versus “welfare recipients” because their respective stereotypes have different attributional content. While aid recipients are seen as in control and responsible for their poverty, the poor are seen as less in control and less responsible for their poverty (Henry et al., 2004). One reason for these stereotypes and attributional content is the historical emphasis on hard work in Western cultures (Mirels & Garrett, 1971; Weber, 1905/1958), where effort benefits both the individual and the common good, and idleness is seen as a moral failing.

In the current research, we propose that the negative attributions people hold of aid recipients as unmotivated and lazy carry over to color perceptions of their actions, including when they make seemingly “good” choices. While it may seem obvious that someone receiving government aid using his or her time being idle or engaging in “darksided” behaviors (e.g., gambling, drinking) would be viewed unfavorably, our studies focus on *prosocial* behavior, which is (by definition) beneficial to other people and/or society as a whole (Batson & Powell, 2003). If prosocial behavior enhances collective well-being, then any actor engaging in such behavior should be viewed more favorably. Indeed, research shows that prosocial behavior has significant positive benefits, leading to improvements in physical and mental health, as well as overall well-being, both at the individual (Borgonovi, 2008; Detollenaere, Willems, & Baert, 2017) and organizational and community level (Bolino, Turnley, & Bloodgood, 2002; Gilster, 2012). However, we contend that observers' reactions toward actors engaging in prosocial behavior will change as a function of an actor's income.

Although our primary focus is on moral judgments following prosocial time expenditures, we begin by assessing: 1) spontaneous reactions toward income groups who choose to volunteer (i.e., scale-free evidence of sentiment), and 2) expectations for appropriate time expenditures. First, we propose that the choice to volunteer by those receiving government assistance will be met with mixed sentiment. Based upon the income stereotyping literature (Bullock et al., 2001; Cozzarelli et al., 2001; Fiske et al., 1999; Henry et al., 2004; Lott, 2002), we anticipate that a “welfare recipient” will elicit (net) negativity among observers whereas an “income earner” will elicit (net) positivity; adding the moral act of “volunteering” should generate positivity for members of either income group (cf. Reed et al., 2007). For a given actor's income level and volunteering, we contend that observers' spontaneous reactions will be negative toward aid recipients (no mention of volunteering), ambivalent toward aid recipients who volunteer, positive toward income earners (no mention of volunteering), and positive toward income earners who volunteer. Second, there exists a belief that aid recipients *should* be devoting the totality of their resources toward gaining economic independence (Henry et al., 2004). We predict that the historical emphasis placed on working should lead consumers to emphasize employment-related endeavors over other endeavors like volunteering. Individuals who are already working (income earners) should not be held to the same standards, affording them greater flexibility in time usage.

Even more critically, and the primary focus of the paper, we propose that these spontaneous associations and expectations carry over to impact moral judgments of actors following prosocial time expenditures. We predict that aid recipients will be evaluated less positively (sometimes even negatively) than income earners for engaging in equivalent prosocial behaviors. Formally:

H1. The nature of an actor's income will moderate observers' moral judgments of the target, such that income earners will receive a moral boost for volunteering, but aid recipients will not.

Violating work expectations can result in feelings of anger, one of three other-critical moral emotions (Rozin, Lowery, Imada, & Haidt, 1999). In contrast to contempt and disgust, which are sparked by violations of community and divinity (respectively), feelings of anger are sparked by violations of freedom and autonomy. Not working and accepting government aid may be perceived as violating the (Western) cultural expectation of self-sufficiency. Indeed, in the absence of an act, consumers feel more anger toward “non-working” welfare recipients than “working” poor people (Henry et al., 2004). Importantly, we propose that felt anger leads to lower moral judgments toward aid recipients relative to income earners. The basis for this prediction is that, when behaviors are controllable (like volunteering), people have moral, emotional responses like anger or gratitude, which motivate them to punish or reward those engaging in such behaviors (Weiner, 2000). Attributions of controllability trigger emotional responses, and the emotional responses drive subsequent judgments and actions (Weiner, 1995). If observers believe aid recipients should be spending their time seeking paid employment, aid recipients who choose to volunteer may be judged as less moral because of the anger observers feel in response to the perceived misuse of time. The perceived motivation, or lack thereof, to find paid employment is critical in shaping attributions of those receiving government assistance (Petersen, Sznycer, Cosmides, & Tooby, 2012). Formally:

H2. Among those receiving government assistance, the effect of choosing to volunteer on an observer's moral judgments will be mediated by felt anger.

Our framework also implies that if additional information or cues are present to change the context around prosocial behavior, aid recipients might be evaluated differently. One way that the anger stemming from the perceived misuse of time could be mitigated is by changing the opportunity costs for a given expenditure (Spiller, 2011). For example, time spent volunteering could be time spent filling out job applications. We propose that prosocial behaviors that help aid recipients achieve economic

independence (vs. do not) will lead them to be perceived as relatively more moral. For example, if volunteering may potentially lead to future employment, the lower moral judgments toward this group (vs. income earners) for choosing to volunteer should be mitigated. Similarly, pursuing higher education should be viewed favorably, as educational attainment is associated with lower unemployment, economic mobility, and a lower likelihood of needing government assistance (Chen, 2017; Ma, Pender, & Welch, 2016). Lastly, some aid recipients are physically or psychologically less able or unable to participate in the traditional economy via paid employment. We predict that people whose ability to work is constrained should elicit less anger and result in relatively more favorable moral judgments. Formally:

H3. Among those receiving government assistance, circumstances that signal the target's inability and/or effort to gain employment will attenuate the effect of volunteering on an observer's moral judgments.

Finally, we test a policy consequence of our framework. When consumers see an aid recipient volunteering (vs. no mention of volunteering), we predict that they will allocate fewer tax dollars to support welfare programs. Support for the welfare state depends, at least in part, on how observers view aid recipients (Henry et al., 2004). Observing the public behavior of one, salient target can influence perceptions of the broader social group and its norms (cf. Paluck & Shepherd, 2012). Thus, if volunteering is considered a suboptimal usage of an aid recipient's time, then negative reactions toward one aid recipient who chooses to volunteer should spill over to influence perceptions of other aid recipients. The end result is that aid recipients (as a category), will be derogated, which will manifest as observers being less willing to support government allocation of "their" tax dollars toward welfare programs. Formally:

H4. Observers will allocate fewer tax dollars to welfare programs after being exposed to an aid recipient who volunteers his or her time (vs. control).

We test these hypotheses in a series of nine studies. Taken together, our results provide critical insights into the moral asymmetry that exists between aid recipients and income earners for identical consumption choices.

3. Study 1A: Volunteering elicits mixed sentiment for aid recipients

We begin by examining the natural associations consumers have toward members of different income groups and their choice of volunteering. Although we focus on aid recipients, we included an income-earning condition as a point of comparison.

3.1. Participants and procedure

Four hundred American adults (54% female; $M_{\text{age}} = 37.25$, $SD_{\text{age}} = 12.52$) recruited from Amazon Mechanical Turk (MTurk) completed the study in exchange for payment.² Participants were randomly assigned to one condition in a 2 (Income: Welfare vs. Earner) \times 2 (Volunteer: Volunteer vs. Control) between-subjects design. Participants read about "Tyler," an able-bodied person in his 30s. Tyler was described as either "receiving \$12,000 a year in welfare benefits" or "earning \$85,000 a year in paid wages."³ Following Olson et al. (2016), we chose \$12,000 to represent a "low" income level because this is the level of income used to determine financial eligibility for federal aid programs in the United States (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2015). We selected \$85,000 to represent high-income because the top 25% of United States households report income greater than \$85,000 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2011).

In addition to income information, the scenario always described Tyler as having 20 hours of free time every week. We mentioned time expenditures, unrelated to volunteering, to add richness to the scenario (e.g., he liked spending time with friends, following his favorite musical artists on social media). Participants in the Volunteer condition read one additional line that stated, "Tyler also volunteers two days every week at the local art museum." This statement was omitted in the Control condition.

Following the scenario, participants listed the first 3–5 words or phrases that came to mind when thinking about Tyler. Participants then rated each of their sentiments on a -5 (very negative) to 5 (very positive) scale. We averaged ratings to form a sentiment index ($\alpha = .94$). In addition to self-reported sentiment, we used the Linguistic Inquiry and Word Count (LIWC) program to assess emotional tone (Pennebaker, Boyd, Jordan, & Blackburn, 2015). Emotional tone is one of four, research-based composite measures; it is measured along a 0–100 scale where higher numbers indicate greater positivity and lower numbers indicate greater negativity.⁴

3.2. Results and discussion

A 2 (Income) \times 2 (Volunteer) analysis of variance (ANOVA) on the sentiment index revealed two main effects ($ps \leq .001$) qualified by a significant interaction ($F(1, 396) = 8.59$, $p = .004$, $\eta_p^2 = .02$; see Fig. 1 Panel A). One-sample t -tests against 0 indicated that average sentiment toward welfare recipients is negative (e.g., "unmotivated" and "lazy"; $M = -2.43$, $SD = 2.72$; $t(96) =$

² Outside of specifying participants' current location (i.e., country of residence), we did not use a priori screening rules for excluding participants here or in any subsequent studies. Data from all participants were included.

³ We disentangle the effects of unemployment status and receiving welfare benefits explicitly in Studies 3 and 4C.

⁴ Although the other three composite scores (i.e., analytical thinking, clout, and authentic) were not of theoretical interest, we assessed them for completeness. These additional analyses can be found in Web Appendix A.

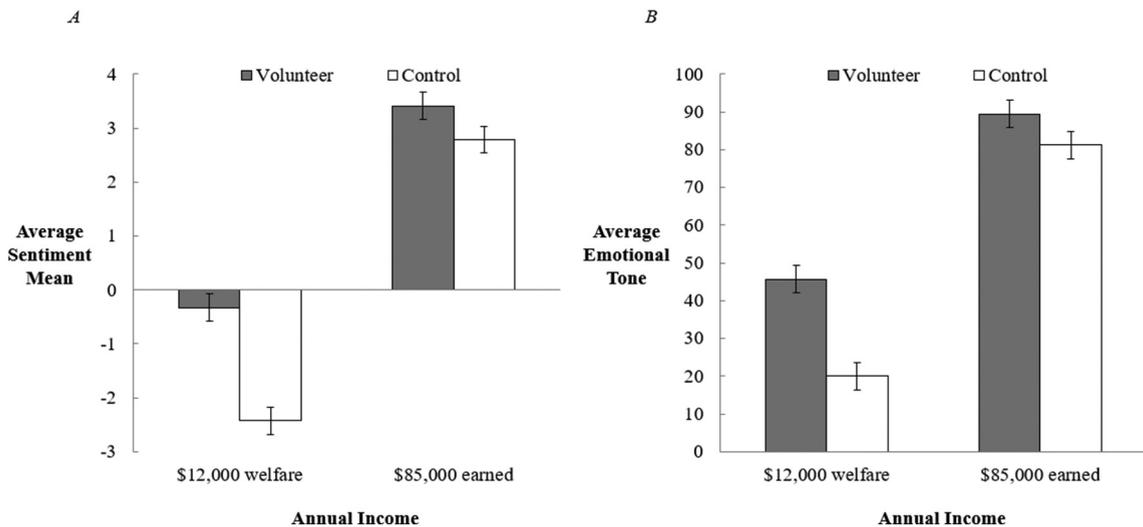


Fig. 1. Panel A (self-reported sentiment) and Panel B (emotional tone assessed via LIWC) feature sentiment analyses as a function the target's annual income and volunteer status (Study 1A). Error bars represent one standard error above and below the mean.

8.77, $p < .001$, $d = .89$). Consistent with our theorizing, a welfare recipient who chooses to volunteer was met with ambivalence, as sentiments were neither explicitly positive nor negative (e.g., “selfish” but also “friendly”; $M = -.33$, $SD = 3.03$; $t(101) = 1.10$, $p = .28$). Conversely, relatively wealthy consumers generated uniformly positive reactions whether they chose to volunteer (e.g., “caring” and “generous”; $M = 3.41$, $SD = 1.76$; $t(98) = 19.31$, $p < .001$, $d = 1.94$) or not (e.g., “hardworking”; $M = 2.79$, $SD = 2.33$; $t(101) = 12.10$, $p < .001$, $d = 1.20$). See Web Appendix B for word clouds of all the sentiments by condition.

The LIWC analysis revealed similar results. Again, a 2 (Income) \times 2 (Volunteer) ANOVA on emotional tone revealed two main effects ($ps \leq .001$) qualified by a significant interaction ($F(1, 396) = 5.85$, $p = .016$, $\eta_p^2 = .02$; see Fig. 1 Panel B). We used a series of one-sample t -tests against 50 (scale midpoint) to assess valence differences across conditions. Sentiment toward welfare recipients who volunteer was neither positive nor negative ($M = 45.71$, $SD = 46.42$; $t(101) = .93$, $p = .35$). Welfare recipients elicited negativity when volunteering was not mentioned ($M = 19.99$, $SD = 35.10$; $t(96) = 8.42$, $p < .001$, $d = .86$). Conversely, income earners elicited positivity whether they chose to volunteer ($M = 89.37$, $SD = 26.32$; $t(98) = 14.88$, $p < .001$, $d = 1.50$) or not ($M = 81.24$, $SD = 34.43$; $t(101) = 9.16$, $p < .001$, $d = .91$).

Study 1A demonstrates that volunteering is viewed differently when done by those who are earning (vs. not earning) income. While volunteering is universally positive for income earners, it is (at best) neutral for those receiving government assistance. Using both consumer-reported sentiment and linguistic software, the pattern of results supports our conceptualization (see Web Appendix C for a conceptual replication featuring a gender-neutral target and a one-time volunteer decision vs. an ongoing commitment). Here, we used a free-response format to capture spontaneous consumer sentiment; this renders void the criticism that scaled items primed differences. Having established this, we move to more structured measures in subsequent studies.

4. Study 1B: How should aid recipients be spending their time?

Our next two studies examine perceptions of how aid recipients *should* be spending their time. While Study 1B focuses on aid recipients only, Study 1C compares aid recipients against other income groups. Study 1B also examines whether expectations of appropriate time expenditures are specific to the United States or extend to other countries.

4.1. Participants and procedure

We surveyed 104 adults from the United States, 191 adults from the United Kingdom, and 104 adults from Germany. Participants from the United States (50% female; $M_{age} = 36.89$, $SD_{age} = 11.37$) were recruited through MTurk, while participants from the United Kingdom (68% female; $M_{age} = 35.15$, $SD_{age} = 12.26$) and Germany were recruited through Prolific (38% female; $M_{age} = 28.70$, $SD_{age} = 8.94$).

Participants read a brief description of recent policy efforts aimed at requiring able-bodied, working age beneficiaries to take part in predetermined activities in exchange for aid (Pew Charitable Trusts, 2018). The activities included working, seeking job training, going to school, and volunteering. We asked participants to allocate 100 points across these four options (presented in a randomized order) to indicate what they felt “welfare recipients should be doing.” For example, if they felt they should be focusing their time on one option, they would allocate all 100 points to it; if they felt they should be dividing their time equally across these four options, they would allocate 25 points to each option.

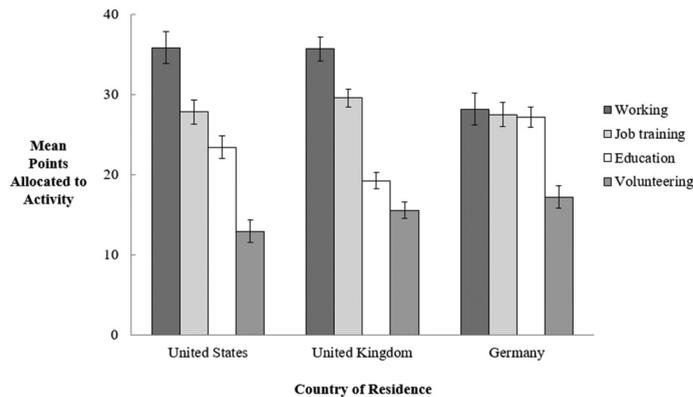


Fig. 2. Time allocation as a function of participants' country of residence (Study 1B). Error bars represent one standard error above and below the mean.

Following time allocations, participants completed a variety of demographic items (e.g., age, sex, political orientation, previous experience with welfare). The central results were robust across all demographic variables included (see Web Appendix D for analysis details).

4.2. Results and discussion

A 3 (Country) \times 4 (Time) mixed ANOVA revealed a significant main effect for Time ($F(3, 1188) = 62.13, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .14$). Collapsing across country, participants allocated the most points toward working ($M = 33.74, SD = 20.51$), followed by job training ($M = 28.56, SD = 15.21$), education ($M = 22.39, SD = 14.46$), and volunteering ($M = 15.31, SD = 14.26$). All pairwise comparisons between activities were significant ($ps \leq .002, ds \geq .15$). Importantly, time allocations differed as a function of participants' country of residence ($F(6, 1188) = 4.85, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .02$). Fig. 2 reveals that residents of the United States and the United Kingdom share similar perceptions: working is viewed as the most appropriate use of welfare recipients' time, followed by job training, education, and volunteering (within each country: $ps < .05, ds \geq .20$). Residents of Germany value working, job training, and education equally ($ps \geq .74$). What unites the three countries is that citizens allocated significantly fewer points toward volunteering compared to the other three activities ($ps < .05, ds \geq .17$).

Study 1B indicates that consumers believe aid recipients should be allocating their time toward employment-related endeavors. Relative to working, job training, and education, volunteering is considered the least appropriate use of this group's time.

5. Study 1C: Perceptions of appropriate time expenditures vary by income

While Study 1B examined perceptions of aid recipients in isolation, Study 1C compares this group against three groups of income-earners. We also included a range of other time expenditures beyond employment-related activities and volunteering. Relative to aid recipients, we predicted that income-earning groups would be granted more freedom in how they *should* spend time.

5.1. Participants and procedure

Two hundred American adults (50% female; $M_{\text{age}} = 37.78, SD_{\text{age}} = 12.20$) from MTurk completed the study in exchange for payment. Participants read about "Steve," an able-bodied person in his 30s. Importantly, Steve was described as either "unemployed and receiving \$12,000 a year in welfare benefits," "employed and earning \$12,000 a year in paid wages," "employed and earning \$85,000 a year in paid wages," or as "employed" (no specification of income level).

Following the income manipulation, participants were asked for their thoughts on how Steve should spend 60 hours over the next week. Specifically, they allocated 60 hours across 10 different activities to indicate what they felt he should be doing with his time. The 10 activities were presented in a randomized order and included the following: 1) pursuing better employment opportunities, 2) taking complimentary enrichment classes at the community center, 3) volunteering at a homeless shelter, 4) spending time with family members, 5) hanging out with friends, 6) watching TV or playing video games, 7) going to the gym, 8) going to coffee shops, 9) reading news articles online, and 10) browsing and posting on social media.

5.2. Results and discussion

A 4 (Income) \times 10 (Time) mixed ANOVA revealed a significant main effect for Time ($F(9, 1764) = 51.02, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .21$) that was qualified by a significant interaction ($F(27, 1764) = 27.90, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .30$). Mean time allocations for each income group are displayed in Fig. 3. Compared to the three income-earning groups ($Ms \leq 10.38$), participants allocated significantly more hours toward seeking better employment opportunities for welfare recipients ($M = 27.88, SD = 17.44; ps < .001, ds \geq 1.21$). Generally speaking, income-earning groups were granted more latitude in their time expenditures than welfare

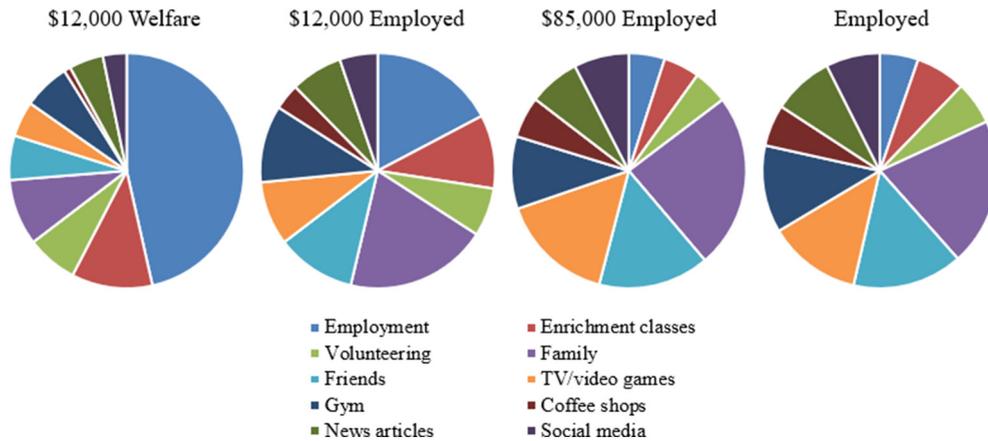


Fig. 3. Time allocation (across 60 hours) as a function of the target's income (Study 1C).

recipients. For instance, spending time with family ($ps < .001$, $ds \geq 1.00$) and friends ($ps < .001$, $ds \geq .58$) were considered relatively more appropriate endeavors for those earning paid wages.

Studies 1A-1C document consumers' spontaneous associations and expectations for how aid recipients *should* be allocating their time (e.g., toward employment-related endeavors, not volunteering). A supplemental study on prosocial choices asked whether aid recipients "should" or "should not" give their resources to charity (see Web Appendix E). Absent income information, 88% of people said an individual "should" donate to charity; when the individual was described as a welfare recipient, that percentage dropped to 58%. Next, we move away from perceptions of how aid recipients "should spend their time" to evaluate reactions toward this group when they *actively make one consumption choice over another*. Because Study 1A, in conjunction with previous research (e.g., Cozzarelli et al., 2001; Lott, 2002), demonstrates that aid recipients themselves are often perceived as lazy and unmotivated, we propose that such perceptions may carry over to shape how other people respond to their time expenditures. The next several studies examine this possibility by assessing moral judgments in response to specific, prosocial time expenditures.

6. Study 2: Moral judgments in response to volunteering versus not volunteering

Study 2 tests whether volunteering (vs. no mention of volunteering) reflects more favorably on some income groups than others. Given the general perception that "welfare = bad" but "volunteering = good" (resulting in mixed sentiments when aid recipients volunteer; Study 1A), we anticipate that consumers who earn their income (earning = good) will be rewarded for volunteering to a greater degree than aid recipients, who may not be rewarded at all (H1).

6.1. Participants and procedure

Two hundred American adults (43% female; $M_{age} = 35.16$, $SD_{age} = 11.41$) from MTurk completed the study in exchange for payment. Participants were randomly assigned to one condition in a 2 (Income: Welfare vs. Earner) \times 2 (Volunteer: Present vs. Control) between-subjects design. Participants read the exact same scenario about Tyler from Study 1A. After reading about Tyler, participants evaluated him along four, 7-point semantic differential scales. These items (cruel/kindhearted, unethical/ethical, immoral/moral, and uncaring/caring) were averaged to form a morality index ($\alpha = .95$; Olson et al., 2016).

6.2. Results and discussion

A 2 (Income) \times 2 (Volunteer) ANOVA revealed two main effects ($ps \leq .003$) qualified by a significant interaction ($F(1, 196) = 5.45$, $p = .021$, $\eta_p^2 = .03$; see Fig. 4). Planned contrasts revealed that welfare recipients were perceived similarly whether they chose to volunteer or not ($M = 3.78$, $SD = 1.33$ vs. $M = 3.66$, $SD = 1.48$; $t(196) = .49$, $p = .63$). Conversely, income earners were perceived as significantly more moral when they chose to volunteer versus not ($M = 6.18$, $SD = .73$ vs. $M = 5.29$, $SD = .96$; $t(196) = 3.77$, $p < .001$, $d = 1.05$).

These results demonstrate that the exact same prosocial time expenditure is viewed differently depending on income (H1). Consistent with our theorizing, aid recipients are met with ambivalence when they volunteer, here noted by no difference in perceived morality. While this study provides a clean theory test with little contextual information provided in the stimuli, in reality, every action carries opportunity costs (Spiller, 2011). In Study 2, the control condition simply omitted any reference to volunteering versus describing another active choice. Our next study manipulates opportunity costs directly by contrasting choosing to volunteer against choosing to participate in work-related activities. Importantly, we also provide an initial test of the proposed underlying mechanism.

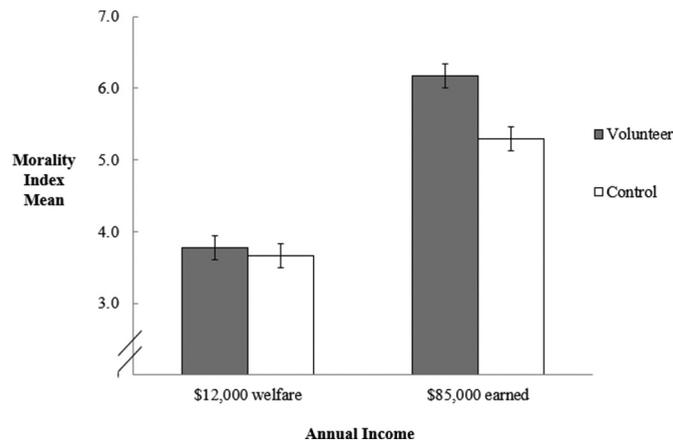


Fig. 4. Moral judgments as a function the target's annual income and volunteer status (Study 2). Error bars represent one standard error above and below the mean.

7. Study 3: Volunteering versus sending out resumes elicits anger

Study 3 focuses on aid recipients, specifically. Importantly, we hold unemployment status constant and examine whether moral judgments are harsher for individuals receiving government assistance versus not receiving assistance when they choose to volunteer instead of sending out resumes. We predict that seeing a welfare recipient volunteer instead of investing in work-related activities will spark the moral emotion of anger, ultimately resulting in lower perceived morality. Importantly, anger should drive moral judgments when a welfare recipient chooses to volunteer, but not when he chooses to send out resumes. The former case may be considered idle, whereas the latter case is directly improving his employment prospects, and ultimately, his ability to discontinue the receipt of government assistance. Thus, Study 3 provide an initial test of H2.

7.1. Participants and procedure

A total of 199 American adults (45% female; $M_{age} = 34.93$, $SD_{age} = 10.91$) from MTurk completed the study in exchange for payment. Participants were randomly assigned to one condition in a 2 (Welfare Benefits: Yes vs. No) \times 2 (Time: Resumes vs. Volunteering) between-subjects design. All participants were presented with a scenario about a 30-something named Nick. He was described as unemployed, but abled-bodied, and as either “receiving welfare benefits” or “not receiving welfare benefits.” After looking at his calendar and accounting for other commitments, Nick identified 15 free hours. He was deciding between two possible uses for his time: 1) he could volunteer at the local art museum, or 2) he could send out resumes for possible employment. Participants were assigned to either the Resumes (“Nick decides to spend his 15 hours sending out resumes instead of volunteering”) or Volunteering (“Nick decides to spend his 15 hours volunteering instead of sending out resumes”) condition.

After reading about Nick's time expenditure, participants evaluated him on the morality index used previously ($\alpha = .87$). Following this key dependent measure, participants evaluated the extent to which thinking about Nick and his time management made them feel irritated, angry, upset, bothered, happy, and proud (we included these last two filler items to minimize suspicion; 1 = *not at all*, 7 = *very much*). Responses to the first four items were averaged to form an anger index ($\alpha = .95$), which served as our proposed mediator.

7.2. Results

A 2 (Welfare Benefits) \times 2 (Time) ANOVA on the morality index revealed a significant main effect for Welfare ($F(1, 195) = 14.31$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .07$) that was qualified by a significant interaction ($F(1, 195) = 13.42$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .06$; see Fig. 5). Planned contrasts revealed that unemployed welfare recipients were perceived as significantly *less* moral when they chose to volunteer instead of sending out resumes ($M = 4.69$, $SD = 1.50$ vs. $M = 5.33$, $SD = .99$; $t(195) = 2.88$, $p = .004$, $d = .50$). Conversely, unemployed non-recipients were perceived as significantly *more* moral for the same choice ($M = 5.87$, $SD = .89$ vs. $M = 5.35$, $SD = .95$; $t(195) = 2.30$, $p = .022$, $d = .56$). We can also assess differences by time expenditure. Although both unemployed groups were equally moral when sending out resumes ($t(195) < 1$), welfare recipients were considered significantly *less* moral than non-recipients when choosing to volunteer ($t(195) = 5.25$, $p < .001$, $d = .95$).

Next, a similar ANOVA was conducted on the anger index. The results revealed two main effects ($ps \leq .001$) qualified by a significant interaction ($F(1, 195) = 13.78$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .07$; see Fig. 6). Planned contrasts revealed that unemployed welfare recipients elicited significantly *more* anger when they chose to volunteer instead of sending out resumes ($M = 3.76$, $SD = 1.75$ vs. $M = 1.83$, $SD = 1.33$; $t(195) = 6.44$, $p < .001$, $d = 1.24$). Anger toward unemployed non-recipients did not differ as a function

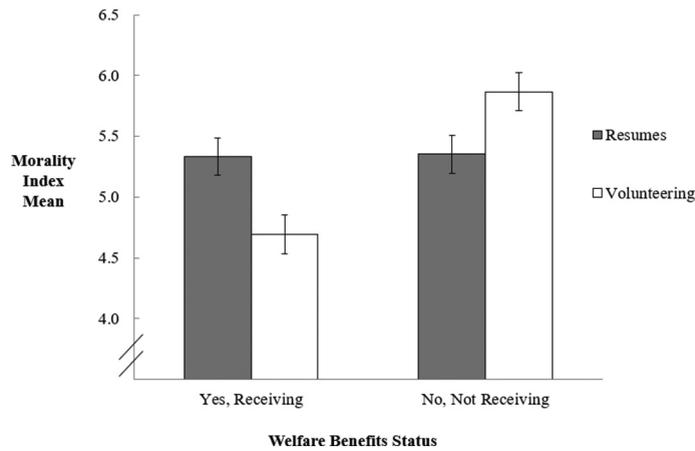


Fig. 5. Moral judgments as a function of the target's welfare status and time expenditure (Study 3). Error bars represent one standard error above and below the mean.

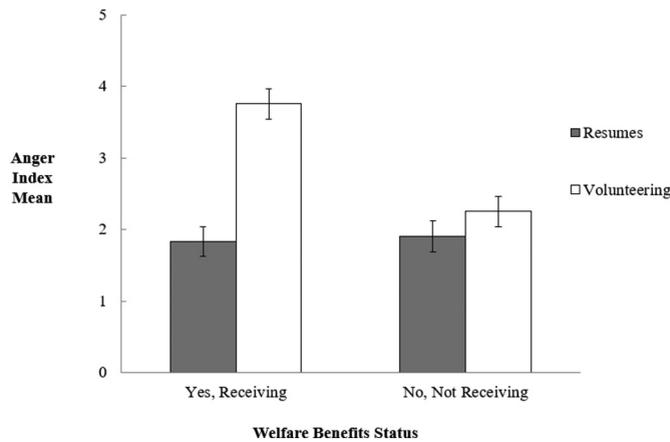


Fig. 6. Felt anger as a function of the target's welfare status and time expenditure (Study 3). Error bars represent one standard error above and below the mean.

of time expenditure ($M = 2.26, SD = 1.53$ vs. $M = 1.90, SD = 1.35$; $t(195) = 1.17, p = .24$). We also note that volunteering elicited significantly more anger when the target was receiving welfare benefits versus not ($t(195) = 4.99, p < .001, d = .91$).

Next, we used a moderated mediation model to test whether the relationship between receiving welfare benefits ($-.5 = \text{no}, .5 = \text{yes}$) and perceived morality was mediated by anger, and whether the indirect effect differed by the target's time expenditure ($-.5 = \text{resumes}, .5 = \text{volunteering}$; model 8 in Hayes, 2013). Controlling for the strong negative association between anger and morality ($\beta = -.28, t(194) = 5.75, p < .001$), the results reveal that the original interaction between welfare benefits and time expenditure reduces in magnitude ($\beta = -1.15$ to $\beta = -.71$). Importantly, the results indicate a significant indirect effect for anger when the target chose to volunteer ($\beta = -.42$; 95% CI: $-.72, -.19$) but *not* when the target chose to send out resumes ($\beta = .02$; 95% CI: $-.14, .16$). Thus, unemployed welfare recipients who chose to volunteer versus send out resumes elicited greater anger, which ultimately reduced their perceived morality (H2). (Note that mediation effects were unique to felt anger, as felt pride and happiness did not mediate the effects of receiving welfare benefits on perceived morality.)

7.3. Discussion

Study 3 demonstrates that the exact same time expenditure can produce different moral judgments as a function of who is doing the choosing. Specifically, unemployed welfare recipients are seen as less moral when they volunteer versus send out resumes; unemployed non-recipients are seen as more moral for the identical choice. Of central importance, these results provide some mechanism evidence (H2): differences in anger drive perceptions of morality only when actors allocate time toward non-employment related endeavors, not when they allocate time toward enhancing employment likelihood (i.e., what they *should* be doing; Studies 1B and 1C). If anger can drive moral attributions, then contextual factors that minimize anger should alleviate negative judgments. Our next three studies examine this possibility (H3).

8. Study 4A: Attenuating judgments via paid employment opportunities

Our studies thus far demonstrate the people receiving government assistance are given less latitude in how they spend their time than those earning an income. If aid recipients choose to volunteer (indeed, this is a proposed and/or instituted requirement for some beneficiaries; Pew Charitable Trusts, 2018), one way of minimizing anger stemming from the perceived misuse of time is coupling volunteering with an employment opportunity. Thus, we predicted that aid recipients would be seen as more moral when they spend volunteer hours in a position that is likely (vs. unlikely) to lead to paid employment. For income earners, we did not anticipate differences in morality as a function of employment opportunity. These individuals are already employed and not subject to the same scrutiny as (taxpayer-subsidized) aid recipients.

8.1. Participants and procedure

Three hundred American adults (49% female; $M_{\text{age}} = 37.09$, $SD_{\text{age}} = 13.40$) from MTurk completed the study in exchange for payment. Participants were randomly assigned to one of six conditions in a 3 (Annual Income: \$12,000 in welfare benefits vs. \$12,000 earned vs. \$85,000 earned) \times 2 (Employment: Yes vs. No) between-subjects design. All participants were presented with a scenario about Jake, a person in his 30s who had recently signed up for an unpaid volunteer position at the local art museum. He was described as spending 12 hours each week giving guided tours and helping with administrative tasks at the museum. In addition to the target's income information, a single word in a statement at the end of the scenario served as our key manipulation. Participants were assigned to either the Employment ("The volunteer position is likely to lead to future employment at the museum.") or No Employment ("The volunteer position is unlikely to lead to future employment at the museum.") condition. The key dependent variable was the morality index ($\alpha = .93$).

8.2. Results and discussion

A 3 (Income) \times 2 (Employment) ANOVA was conducted on the morality index. A significant main effect of income ($F(2, 294) = 10.65$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .07$) was qualified by a significant interaction ($F(2, 294) = 4.14$, $p = .017$, $\eta_p^2 = .03$; see Fig. 7). A series of planned contrasts was conducted to test our predictions within each of the three income levels. As predicted, \$12,000 welfare recipients were perceived as significantly more moral when they volunteered in a position that was likely versus unlikely to lead to future employment ($M = 5.72$, $SD = 1.01$ vs. $M = 5.05$, $SD = 1.26$; $t(294) = 3.08$, $p = .002$, $d = .60$). Targets earning \$12,000 a year were evaluated similarly whether the position had employment potential or not ($M = 5.78$, $SD = 1.09$ vs. $M = 5.98$, $SD = 1.01$; $t(294) < 1$). Similarly, having the possibility of future employment versus not did not lead to differential judgments of targets earning \$85,000 a year ($M = 6.13$, $SD = .88$ vs. $M = 6.03$, $SD = 1.24$; $t(294) < 1$).

The next set of analyses examined differences within the two employment conditions. When employment was unlikely, both \$12,000 earners and \$85,000 earners were perceived as significantly more moral than \$12,000 welfare recipients (both $t_s \geq 4.28$, $p_s < .001$, $d_s \geq .79$). The two income-earning conditions did not differ ($t(294) < 1$). When the volunteer position was likely to lead to employment, \$12,000 welfare recipients were perceived similarly to \$12,000 earners ($t(294) < 1$), but marginally less moral than \$85,000 earners ($t(294) = 1.84$, $p = .07$, $d = .43$). The two income-earning conditions did not differ ($t(294) = 1.61$, $p = .11$, $d = .36$).

These results indicate that aid recipients are seen as less moral when they choose to volunteer for a position that is unlikely versus likely to lead to paid employment. This judgment does not extend to low- or high-income earners. These findings provide further support for the primacy of working: (high) income earners are not (generally) perceived as idle and therefore do not have to justify their time expenditures. Aid recipients, on the other hand, are subject to an idleness stereotype that carries over to shape how others view their actions, unless there are cues that mitigate (at least partially) these attributions (H3).

9. Study 4B: Attenuating judgments via educational prospects

In addition to coupling volunteering with employment, pursuing higher education is another cue that someone is actively taking steps toward improving his or her employment status. Higher education may be seen as boosting self-sufficiency and minimizing future reliance on government assistance programs (Chen, 2017; Ma et al., 2016). Thus, aid recipients who are earning a college degree (vs. not) should elicit less harsh moral judgments when volunteering. Of course, whether they are pursuing a degree or not, aid recipients will likely always be seen as relatively idle compared to low-income earners (i.e., the former should be spending all of their time improving employment prospects; Henry et al., 2004). However, when volunteer hours are coupled with educational attainment, the negative impact of volunteering on moral judgments should be reduced. Compared to aid recipients, low-income earners (who are employed and paying taxes) should be perceived similarly whether they are earning a degree or not.

9.1. Participants and procedure

Two hundred American adults (59% female; $M_{\text{age}} = 36.63$, $SD_{\text{age}} = 11.24$) from MTurk completed the study in exchange for payment. Participants were randomly assigned to one of four conditions in a 2 (Income: Welfare vs. Earned) \times 2 (Education: Yes vs. No) between-subjects design. Participants read about a person named Mike in his 30s who volunteers at a science museum. Those in the Welfare condition read that Mike is "unemployed and receives welfare benefits. The amount of government

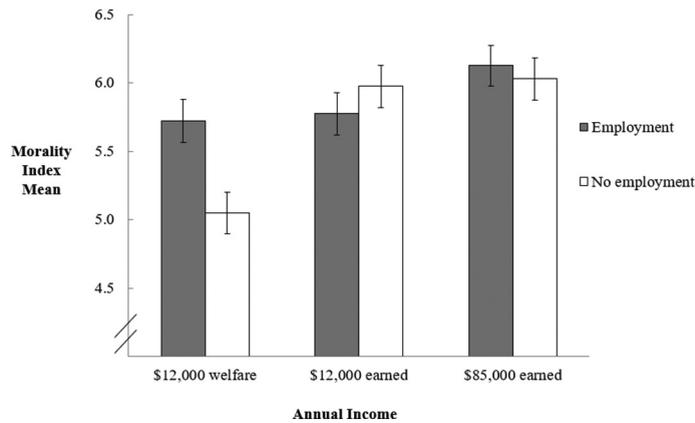


Fig. 7. Moral judgments as a function of the target's annual income and type of employment opportunity (Study 4A). Error bars represent one standard error above and below the mean.

assistance he receives is equal to the amount of income he would earn working 35 hours a week for minimum wage.” Note that this amounts to just over \$13,000 a year, which is close to the federal poverty line of \$12,000 used in previous studies (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2015). Those in the Earned condition read that Mike is “employed and earns his income by working 35 hours a week for minimum wage.” Thus, both income groups had the same amount of income at their disposal; the only difference was whether the income is earned or unearned.

After this income information, participants either received the following statement about his education or not: “Mike wants to improve his employment status and is currently taking online classes to earn a bachelor's degree in business administration.” Lastly, all participants received a description of Mike's charitable activities. Namely, Mike “likes to hang out at the local nature museum and offered to help out there (without pay) for 10 hours every week. He does things like pass out flyers, clean up displays, and unpack boxes.” After reading about Mike, participants evaluated him on the morality index ($\alpha = .92$).

9.2. Results and discussion

A 2 (Income) × 2 (Education) ANOVA revealed two main effects ($ps < .05$) that were qualified by a significant interaction ($F(1, 196) = 8.42, p = .004, \eta_p^2 = .04$; see Fig. 8). Planned contrasts revealed that welfare recipients were perceived as significantly more moral when their volunteering was coupled with educational attainment versus not ($M = 5.72, SD = 1.00$ vs. $M = 5.08, SD = 1.09; t(196) = 3.54, p = .001, d = .62$). Conversely, low-income earners were evaluated similarly whether they were working toward a bachelor's degree or not ($M = 6.19, SD = .81$ vs. $M = 6.29, SD = .67; t(196) < 1$). For completeness, we also examined differences within the two education conditions. Whether the target was pursuing higher education or not, the low-income earner was perceived as significantly more moral than the welfare recipient for engaging in the same volunteering activity (both $ts \geq 2.60, ps \leq .01, ds \geq .52$).

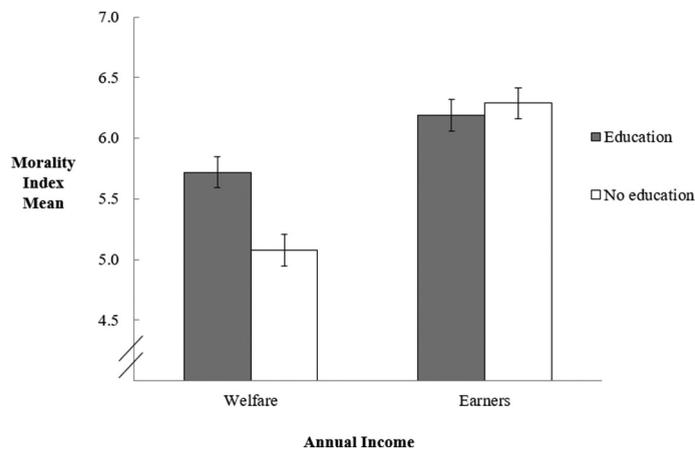


Fig. 8. Moral judgments as a function of the target's annual income and educational pursuits (Study 4B). Error bars represent one standard error above and below the mean.

Study 4B highlights education as another boundary condition (H3). Although aid recipients are seen as relatively less moral when choosing to volunteer, the effect is weakened when they are actively taking college-level courses. Improving employment prospects via higher education may be seen as reducing future reliance on taxpayer support and therefore elicit less negative attributions. Along with Study 4A, these results suggest that improving employment prospects can help protect (at least partially) aid recipients from negative moral judgments.

10. Study 4C: Attenuating judgments by being perceived as less able to work

The previous two studies identified two conditions that make volunteering by aid recipients seem more palatable. Study 4C features another such condition: disability status. Having a disability is generally perceived as being beyond one's control, which is important because personal control over one's choices is a key component of moral attributions (Jones & Davis, 1965). People who are physically unable to work are rarely actively choosing *not* to work. Thus, we predicted that volunteering by an aid recipient who had a disability would be relatively more moral than the same time expenditure by an aid recipient without an ostensible disability. Additionally, Study 4C provided an additional test of the proposed process via felt anger (H2) and extended the inquiry to a female target.

10.1. Participants and procedure

A total of 201 American adults (49% female; $M_{\text{age}} = 36.96$, $SD_{\text{age}} = 12.37$) from MTurk completed the study in exchange for payment. Adapting the scenario from Study 4B, participants read about a female actor named "Amanda" who was described as in her 30s and volunteered 10 hours a week. Importantly, Amanda was described as either "unemployed but does not receive any welfare benefits," "unemployed and receives welfare benefits," "unemployed and receives welfare benefits...Amanda has a disability that prevents her from working; she is unable to hold a traditional job," or as "employed and earns her income." In all four conditions, the amount of assistance and earned income was described as equivalent to working 35 hours a week for minimum wage. Following the scenario, participants first evaluated Amanda on the morality index ($\alpha = .93$) and then the anger index from Study 3 ($\alpha = .94$).

10.2. Results and discussion

A one-way ANOVA on the morality index revealed significant differences across the four income groups ($F(3, 197) = 8.30$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .11$). Planned contrasts revealed that unemployed welfare recipients ($M = 5.38$, $SD = 1.48$) were perceived as significantly *less* moral when volunteering compared to unemployed non-recipients ($M = 6.40$, $SD = .77$), unemployed welfare recipients with a disability ($M = 6.04$, $SD = 1.12$), and employed individuals ($M = 6.29$, $SD = 1.04$; all $t_s \geq 2.93$, $p_s \leq .004$, $d_s \geq .50$). Importantly, having a (seemingly uncontrollable) disability puts an aid recipient's morality back at the level of someone who is employed and earning wages ($t(197) = 1.09$, $p = .28$). These results support H3.

A one-way ANOVA on the anger index revealed a similar pattern of results across the four income groups ($F(3, 197) = 5.40$, $p = .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .08$). To assess the role of anger in driving the effect of income on moral judgments, we ran a mediation model (model 4; Hayes, 2013) featuring unemployed welfare recipients as the reference category. The results revealed that unemployed welfare recipients elicited significantly greater anger ($M = 2.42$, $SD = 1.67$) than unemployed non-recipients ($M = 1.72$, $SD = 1.31$; $\beta = -.71$, $t(197) = 2.62$, $p = .01$), unemployed welfare recipients with a disability ($M = 1.65$, $SD = 1.39$; $\beta = -.77$, $t(197) = 2.83$, $p = .005$), and employed individuals ($M = 1.38$, $SD = 1.00$; $\beta = -1.04$, $t(197) = 3.84$, $p < .001$). When we regressed morality on anger, we found a significant negative effect ($\beta = -.41$, $t(196) = 7.90$, $p < .001$). As predicted, the indirect effects for unemployed non-recipients ($\beta = .29$; 95% CI: .05, .58), unemployed welfare recipients with a disability ($\beta = .31$; 95% CI: .06, .58), and employed individuals were all significant ($\beta = .42$; 95% CI: .20, .68). Thus, welfare beneficiaries who choose to volunteer their time elicit greater anger among observers than three other income groups and are, ultimately, judged more harshly for equivalent prosocial activities (H2).

This study highlights an important factor that can attenuate negativity toward aid recipients. Along with Study 3, Study 4C demonstrates directly that anger is a key driver of moral attributions toward individuals with varying economic circumstances. The results also indicate that the moral judgment processes extend to female actors and that unemployment status alone is insufficient to elicit anger. Only when unemployment is coupled with receiving government assistance does it spark negative reactions (cf. Study 3).

11. Study 5: Federal tax allocation policy

Up until this point, we have examined spontaneous inferences, perceptions of appropriate time usage, and moral judgments. Study 5 examines a downstream consequence of our findings that extends beyond individual person-perceptions to federal tax policy. Specifically, we used a tax allocation task to assess whether reactions toward aid recipients volunteering has potential implications beyond impacting perceptions and judgments of others. We anticipated that individuals would be less supportive of welfare programs after considering a welfare recipient who volunteers (vs. no information about volunteering; H4).

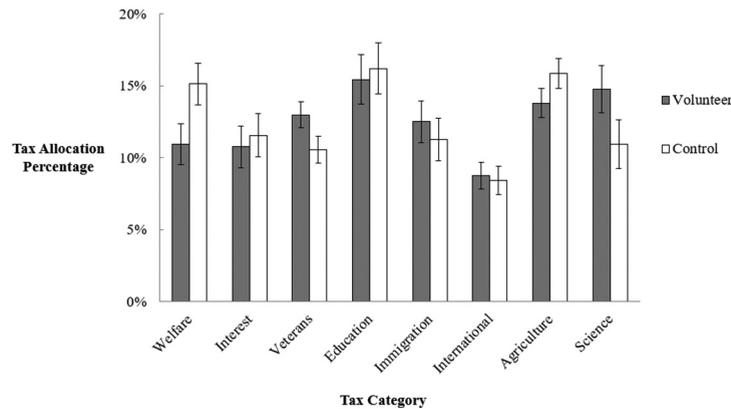


Fig. 9. Mean tax dollar allocation across different government programs (Study 5). Error bars represent one standard error above and below the mean.

11.1. Participants and procedure

One hundred American adults (31% female; $M_{\text{age}} = 34.68$, $SD_{\text{age}} = 10.23$) from MTurk completed the study in exchange for payment. As part of the cover story, all participants were told that the research was being conducted on behalf of a government advisory think tank; they would be collecting and aggregating responses from American taxpayers to help reform tax allocation policies at the federal level. As part of the research, we interviewed American citizens about their lifestyle. Participants were randomly assigned to view one of two interview transcripts (Volunteer vs. Control), which contained responses from “someone who will be impacted by the federal budget you propose.” All participants read about “Brandon” who was unemployed and received \$12,000 a year in welfare benefits. He shared information about his favorite foods (that was neutral in content) and also provided information about how he liked to spend his free time. Everything was identical except for a single line that was present in the Volunteer condition (omitted in the Control condition): “I also spend a good chunk of time at the botanical gardens as a volunteer tour guide.”

After reading the interview, participants completed a tax allocation task modeled after the United States taxpayer receipt (as an example, see <https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/2014-taxreceipt>; Lamberton, 2013; Lin & McFerran, 2016). Participants were told to allocate their tax dollars across various programs and services in a way they deemed optimal (responses were forced to sum to 100%). We emphasized that the eight target categories represented some of the possible categories from the taxpayer receipt (presented in a randomized order): 1) welfare benefits, 2) net interest on federal debt, 3) veterans benefits, 4) education and job training, 5) immigration, law enforcement, and administration of justice, 6) international affairs, 7) agriculture, natural resources, energy, and environment, and 8) science, space, and technology programs. We omitted healthcare and defense spending because they are highly politicized and collectively total over 50% of the (actual) tax bill, to reduce variance. We specifically chose a volunteering context that was unrelated to politics or government spending to avoid any potential demand effects.

11.2. Results and discussion

In this final study, our primary interest was mean tax allocation toward the welfare benefits category. Supporting H4, participants allocated a significantly lower percentage of their tax dollars to this category when the interviewee mentioned volunteering versus did not mention volunteering ($M = 10.95$, $SD = 7.38$ vs. $M = 15.13$, $SD = 12.58$; $t(98) = 2.04$, $p = .044$, $d = .41$; see Fig. 9 for mean allocations across categories). We made no predictions regarding the other categories, as the usage of a constant-sum scale means that lower allocations to one category implies higher allocations to other categories. That said, there was one marginal difference for veterans benefits such that participants allocated a higher percentage in response to the volunteer versus control scenario ($M = 12.99$, $SD = 6.37$ vs. $M = 10.58$, $SD = 6.56$; $t(98) = 1.86$, $p = .066$). No other categories were significant ($ps \geq .11$). In conclusion, hearing about someone receiving government benefits and volunteering (uniquely and negatively) influenced support for welfare programs.

12. General discussion

In a series of nine studies, we show that judgments of how a person spends his or her time depend on the income status of that person. We demonstrate this effect via sentiment analyses (Study 1A), preferred allocations of time (Studies 1B and 1C), moral judgments (Studies 2, 3, 4A, 4B, and 4C), and desired tax spending allocations (Study 5). Our research makes several contributions to existing literature, which we elaborate upon below.

One central contribution of the current work is demonstrating that the divergence in moral attributions originally observed by Olson et al. (2016) is only one instance of a broader phenomenon that applies to prosocial behavior and time management as well. Prosocial behaviors like volunteering should generate widespread support, as these activities have both individual and societal benefits (Batson & Powell, 2003; Bolino et al., 2002; Borgonovi, 2008). However, the current research highlights that volunteering is

not always seen in a positive light; rather, individuals who choose to volunteer are viewed differently depending on whether they earn their income or receive government assistance.

Although volunteering is a positive activity that partially combats the negative, baseline stereotype of being lazy and unmotivated (Study 1A), we contribute by showing it can also spark anger among observing consumers, resulting in aid recipients being perceived as less moral for choosing to volunteer versus participate in work-related endeavors (a judgment not levied against people who are not receiving aid; Study 3, Study 4C). Specifically, when opportunity costs are made salient (e.g., Study 3), volunteering can be a liability for those receiving aid. When such costs are not made salient (e.g., Study 2), aid recipients are not derogated, but rather receive no benefit from volunteering. Thus, even in cases where it does not lower moral judgments, there is still an asymmetry in how volunteering makes income earners seem more moral but yet has no positive benefits for aid recipients. In either case, whether there is derogation or no benefit, the moral judgments diverge from those placed on income earners, who seem to receive a boost for volunteering in all of the circumstances examined here.

A pervasive Western ideology is that citizens should work hard, be self-sufficient, and live frugally (Mirels & Garrett, 1971; Weber, 1905/1958). Citizens are believed to have every opportunity to excel and be responsible, contributing members of society. Accepting government assistance violates these cultural expectations—beneficiaries are viewed as idle and unwilling to improve their economic conditions (Henry et al., 2004; Likki & Staerklé, 2015; Petersen et al., 2012). These perceptions are evident in surveys such that 83% of Americans favor a work requirement as a condition for receiving benefits (Rasmussen Reports, 2012). Relatedly, the current research contributes by demonstrating that citizens of the United States, United Kingdom, and Germany believe that aid recipients should be allocating much of their time toward employment-related endeavors (Study 1B). Volunteering was considered the least appropriate use of their time across these countries, after working, seeking job training, and pursuing education. Contrasted against low- and high-income earning individuals who are already working, aid recipients are granted much less latitude in how they spend their time (Study 1C). Perhaps as a reflection of public sentiments, numerous countries have proposed and/or imposed work-related requirements on beneficiaries (e.g., Australia, England, Netherlands, Scotland, Wales; Australian Department of Social Services, 2017; Blommesteijn & Mallee, 2009; Welfare Reform Act, 2012).

The moral judgment processes observed here may have additional implications for government agencies and non-profit organizations. Indeed, there is a fundamental tension between policy and the public: although lawmakers support volunteering as one means for able-bodied, working age adults to “earn” their benefits (Pew Charitable Trusts, 2018), our work establishes that aid recipients who choose to volunteer are subject to scrutiny. Although prosocial behavior is viewed as a positive behavior in which people *should* engage, there is ambivalence in whether others view volunteering as an appropriate behavior for welfare recipients (Study 1A). Contributing to this discussion, our research reveals a few, concrete ways that help mitigate harsher moral judgments of aid recipients who choose to volunteer (i.e., the (in)ability to work and/or actively taking steps to improve employment status; Studies 4A–4C). Our findings have meaning for non-profit organizations who may seek to provide opportunities for aid recipients. In managing attributions and perceptions from a broader set of stakeholders, it would be important to define volunteer opportunities for those receiving income assistance with an eye toward enhancing their employment opportunities.

From a public policy perspective, understanding these moral judgment dynamics is important for future initiatives aimed at building stronger, more engaged communities—the people passing moral judgments are the very same people casting votes and supporting non-profit initiatives. Indeed, the findings from Study 5 demonstrate that exposure to narratives about welfare recipients volunteering can significantly decrease public support for government aid programs. This finding has important implications for whether and how policymakers should allow volunteering to count as “work” in order to receive benefits. Specifically, it suggests that any volunteer effort should emphasize the goal of gaining employment or acquiring skills that are valuable in the marketplace to ensure that public support for welfare programs (more generally) is not compromised.

Our research also serves as a platform for future research at the intersection of marketplace morality (Kirmani, 2015) and supporting underrepresented, vulnerable groups (Mick, 2006). Although Study 1B surveyed people from Germany and the United Kingdom, future research could delve deeper into cross-cultural differences in response to aid recipients by manipulating the actor's and/or observer's nationality. One option would be to have observers from France evaluate an actor (i.e., an aid recipient) from Japan. In this scenario, the rater's own taxpayer dollars would not be used to subsidize others' (prosocial) time expenditures, potentially resulting in less harsh judgments. Relatedly, cross-national differences are likely to be plentiful, as moral judgments stemming from prosocial behaviors may vary as a function of numerous dimensions: political and public discourse surrounding the meaning of “need”; attributions toward poverty; attitudes toward wealth redistribution and migration policy; attitudes toward government efficiency and policy outcomes; the necessity/degree of government intervention; and the extent to which the government, the family, and the market are responsible for providing social and economic support, among others (Kim, Huh, Choi, & Lee, 2018; Pfau-Effinger, 2005; Roosma, Gelissen, & van Oorschot, 2013; van Oorschot, Opielka, & Pfau-Effinger, 2008).

Differing from the literature on tainted altruism, we were intentionally silent about the underlying motives for the focal behaviors in our studies, but future research could manipulate whether the actor has altruistic or selfish motives for prosocial behaviors. Altruism and prosocial behavior frequently align, but not always (Batson & Powell, 2003; Thøgersen, 1994). Prosocial behavior can be enacted without altruistic motives (e.g., volunteering just to be recognized at a high-profile gala), and altruistic motives do not always result in prosocial behaviors (e.g., wanting to protect the environment but not recycling). Several hypotheses for the relationship between motives and prosocial behavior are possible. Motives may not matter—it may be that aid recipients will always be perceived as less moral than income earners when engaging in prosocial behavior, regardless of the actor's underlying motivation. On the other hand, perhaps motives *do* matter. Explicit altruism among wealthier income earners may be perceived as insincere because they have the resources to help numerous charities; when they do volunteer, it is just one more cause in their

prosocial portfolio. Conversely, explicit altruism among aid recipients may be perceived as more genuine and, hence, more moral. They have fewer resources to give, so when they do give, their behavior may signal greater commitment to the cause. Note, however, that our research suggests that when motives are unspecified, they are *not* perceived as moral. Nonetheless, future research could add an explicit, altruistic motive and test whether moral judgments are enhanced. An additional motive one could hold for volunteering is a desire to avoid being idle. According to our framework, targets who volunteer “to remain busy” should be rewarded to a greater extent if they receive aid than if they do not. A mere desire to avoid idleness should combat the “lazy” stereotype that aid recipients often face (Study 1A).

Beyond the contextual factors examined here (e.g., employment opportunities), future studies could examine the frequency and/or magnitude of time expenditures within the same study. For example, volunteering one hour versus 35 hours may be perceived as relatively more appropriate for aid recipients because it is prosocial and may elicit less anger (i.e., there are 34 other hours they might be allocating toward employment-related endeavors). Different judgments may be levied against income earners. Although an empirical question, wealthier earners (in particular) might be seen in a relatively negative light for volunteering “only” one hour. Observers may have higher expectations of generosity for people with greater means. Interestingly, another possibility is that volunteering “too much” could work *against* income earners. Just like aid recipients, income earners make tradeoffs with their time. Volunteering too many hours, in addition to working, means spending less time with family. Indeed, Study 1C reveals that income earners *should* be spending relatively more time with family and friends than volunteering. Although being “busy” is often seen as a status symbol (Bellezza, Paharia, & Keinan, 2017), overextending oneself at work can lead to increased stress, burnout, and negative health consequences (Wigert & Agrawal, 2018). People who uphold cultural values of working hard may be seen as more “deserving” of disconnecting from work and relaxing.

In sum, examining how opportunity costs differ for different income groups, including the optimal amount of volunteering, is a promising question for future research. We hope this paper sparks further inquiry into many of the intriguing questions yet to be answered in this important domain.

Declarations of competing interest

None.

Appendix A. Supplementary data

Supplementary data to this article can be found online at <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijresmar.2020.07.001>.

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