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Attitudinal Predictors of Preferred Policy Options: Contrasting AFDC with Work Programs

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Two studies were conducted in order to determine the attitudinal predictors of support for AFDC, work programs, and the option of the government playing no role in protecting the welfare of poor children whose families have no income. The first study evaluated this question in 362 students of Criminal Justice, Business, Urban Studies, and Public Administration at an urban university in Georgia. The second study evaluated the question in a telephone poll sample of 822 randomly sampled Georgians throughout the state. Majorities in both samples preferred work programs. In the student sample, all three choice groups were distinguishable on the variables of beliefs about the causes of poverty, the Work Ethic, concern over the widening gap between the rich and the poor, and belief that the government should play a role in protecting its citizen's welfare. In the poll sample, those opting for no government role were distinguished from those choosing AFDC or work programs, although the latter two choice groups did not differ. A measure of attitude toward work programs was included in Study 1. This attitude measure was not correlated with the Work Ethic, although it did correlate with other predictor attitudes. Over 70% of both samples identified AFDC as the most expensive policy option. However, even among those who perceived work programs to be the more expensive option the bulk still preferred this option. Implications for sustaining public support for high quality work programs are generated.

In August of 1996, President Clinton signed the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act. This bill effectively ends the federal entitlement program called AFDC. According to the provisions of the new legislation, federal funding for aid to families of low income children will provided in

the form of block grants to states. Federal legislation places a five year maximum life time limit on the federal allowance for any family receiving a cash grant and individuals must be involved in some form of gainful activity after two years receipt of benefits. States will have latitude in determining the form of the work requirements for families who have received less than five years of federal cash grant subsidies (Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act, 1996, P.L. 104-193). The devolution of decision making authority to each state forecasts sharp debate on these issues throughout the country.

Within the last thirty years, there has been a marked shift in public opinion toward programs for the poor as well as the visibility of liberal advocacy (Fredrickson, 1996; Lewin, 1995). Recognizing the shift in public opinion, Garfinkel (1985) has urged that social workers identify programs to address the needs of the poor which might be more readily supported by the public. Some studies suggest that there is greater support for public assistance programs which require participants to work than for cash grants alone (Ellwood, 1996; Garin, Molyneux, & DiVall, 1994; Hendrickson & Axelson, 1985; Ogren, 1973; Smith, 1987). Further, work programs are believed to be less stigmatizing (Williamson, 1974).

Perhaps the most extensive study of public opinion on alternatives for welfare reform was the project completed in 1993 by a group of five public-policy organizations. This consortium conducted eight focus groups and a national survey of 1,020 registered voters. The findings were summarized by Garin et al. (1994). This survey found that the public prefers government sponsored work programs of unspecified program length to a rigid two year limit on welfare benefits (seven to one). Although there was massive disappointment in then extant system (AFDC) captured in the perception that welfare programs support dependence, the majority also felt that the government should do more to assist poor children. The survey results suggested that the public is eager for new approaches for assisting poor children even though strong disillusionment for programs of the past is evident.

Identifying the Assumptions and Beliefs Associated with Support for Particular Programs

David Ellwood (1996), the Clinton administration's expert on public welfare, has suggested that the impending debate on

welfare reform should begin by "articulating core values" (p. 29). Strategies for addressing the needs of the poor, should emerge out of values. If the social work community is to effectively advocate for the poor, it is important to identify those core values in the American community which are manifested in particular programmatic responses to the poor. Choosing policy options that comport with the values, attitudes, and assumptions of the public should result in greater public support. Moreover, even when the majority supports a policy option, reservations against specific programs held by the minority should be identified so that effective counter arguments can be formulated.

Although the attitudinal and demographic predictors of support for the AFDC program have been explored, there has been little exploration of the attitudinal factors predicting support or opposition to alternative forms of assistance to children. Persons who take umbrage at providing direct cash payments to parents who are not engaged in gainful activity, might find that ensuring employment at viable wages to be a comfortable option for safeguarding children. Whether the same attitudes and assumptions which predict opposition to AFDC will also predict opposition to alternative policies (viz., work programs) for assisting poor children is an unexplored issue. Although Wilson (1996, p. 204) speculates that job training programs are less likely to challenge the American values of "individualism and the work ethic", little data exist for identifying the values related to support for work programs.

This study seeks to identify the assumptions and attitudes of individuals who are for and against various policy alternatives for addressing the needs of poor children. Attitudinal predictors of support for AFDC, work programs, and the option of no governmental involvement will be explored in this study.

Relevant Variables in Predicting Opposition to AFDC

Beliefs about the causes of poverty. In the general population, specific beliefs about the causes of poverty do predict support for cash grants to the poor. People who believe that poverty is caused by business recessions or discrimination as opposed to lack of individual effort (i.e., attributions to structural factors) are more likely to support funding for the poor. No one has however examined whether these beliefs also foster support for

work programs. This study will include a bipolar measure of beliefs about the causes of poverty with one end of the scale featuring individual qualities and the other capturing societal factors. This will enable an analysis of how beliefs regarding the causal factors producing poverty relate to support for various policy options.

The Protestant Work Ethic. A sturdy predictor of whether one is for or against AFDC is the individual's subscription to the Protestant Work Ethic (McDonald, 1972). Surprisingly, the correlation between the Protestant Work Ethic and opposition to cash grants is strong even among those who recognize that structural factors cause poverty (Feldman, 1983; Iyengar, 1989; Williamson, 1974; Zucker & Weiner, 1993). Apparently, even when people recognize that unfairness and factors beyond the control of the individual can contribute to poverty, belief in the Work Ethic fosters objections to the strategy of providing case benefits. Whether subscribers to the Work Ethic would also object to work programs for the poor has not been explored. Because work is being encouraged with government sponsored work programs, it may be that persons high on endorsement of the Protestant Work Ethic might be favorable toward such programs. The Mirels and Garrett (1971) measure of the Protestant Work Ethic will be included in this study to determine how this variable relates to support for the various policy alternatives.

Proper role for government. Many believe that the purpose of government is to provide a mechanism for pooling the efforts of many so that the lives of individuals are protected. The statement "America is a rich country" captures the notion of an aggregate rather than a collection of individuals whose outcomes are diverse and independent. Further, the concept of "brother's keeper" has a tradition in Christianity. Tourganeau, Rasinski, Bradburn, and D'Andrade (1989a & 1989b), have found that questions which raise the salience of the collective responsibilities increase support for welfare for the poor. Questions relating to government responsibility to citizens in general and children in particular will be included in this study to determine how this variable interacts with other variables in predicting support for various policy alternatives.

Populist Concerns about the Growing Disparity between the Rich and the Poor in this Country

The stagnation in American wages along with the widening gap between the rich and the poor has been documented (Head, 1996; Phillips, 1990; Thurow, 1996) and brought to public attention during the Republican primaries by Patrick Buchanan (Stark, 1996). Both the middle class and the poor are affected by the decline in American wages (Katz, 1989). The concern over the widening gap between the rich and poor is of relatively recent origin, and its relationship to support for various programs to meet the needs of the poor has not been examined. A scale assessing concern about the widening gap between the rich and the poor will be included in this study.

Unexplored Pragmatic Factors Relevant to Policy Decisions

Beyond attitudinal factors which might influence a specific individual's support for particular policies for the poor, a host of pragmatic considerations are relevant. It should be remembered that during the depression occurring in the beginning half of the 20th century (prior to the Social Security Act of 1935) states began providing cash grants to unemployed parents. This state response was motivated, at least in part, by the increase in the number of children in orphanages (Moynihan, 1996; NASW, 1995). Apparently, the states recognized that it is cheaper to pay unemployed parents to care for their own children, than it is to pay unrelated workers to care for children in state funded orphanages. The economic dynamic still operates. Currently, there is a documented inverse relationship between the level of welfare benefits in a state and the greater number of children living apart from their parents (Edin & Jencks, 1992). Regardless of other values and attitudes, the cost of alternative programs might be a factor in making policy decisions. This study will include a question asking subjects to select the policy option which they perceive to be the most costly. The purpose is to determine whether perceived cost operates as a factor when people select preferred policy options.

Inclusion of a Scale Assessing Negative Stereotypes of Welfare Recipients

Often studies assessing attitudes toward public assistance

have confounded items evaluating specific policies with items evaluating recipients of these policies. For example, the Anderson scale, a measure of attitudes toward public welfare, (Anderson, 1965) contains items which refer to public welfare programs and items which refer to recipients of public welfare. Attitudes toward governmental policies can be distinguished from attitudes toward recipients of these policies. In the present research, a measure of attitude toward work programs and a measure of attitude toward AFDC which only reference the policies themselves, will be included. In order to determine how attitudes about those needing to access governmental programs detract or contribute to support for programmatic policies, a separate scale assessing attitude toward welfare recipients will be included in the present research.

Study 1

Purpose of the Present Study

The purpose of this study is (1) to determine whether work programs are viewed more favorably than AFDC and (2) to determine how the various attitudes and assumptions relate to support for AFDC and work programs. Potential predictor attitude-variables included in this study are: Protestant Work Ethic, attributions for poverty to structural factors in the economy as opposed to individual factors, subscription to the belief that the government has a role in ensuring the welfare of its citizens, concern about the growing disparity between the rich and the poor, negative stereotypic views of welfare recipients, and perceptions regarding the cost of the various policy options.

The purpose of this study is to identify attitudes and assumptions that predict support for the various policy options. The study will examine the relationships among variables. Although survey information regarding the percentage of Americans who support various policy options would be useful, conducting a survey based upon a representative sample is beyond the scope of the Study 1. A convenience sample of college students which is appropriate for addressing how variables are related to each other, albeit inappropriate for population parameter estimation, will be employed for Study 1.

Study 1 utilizes a college student sample. The reliability of attitudes are likely to be greater in informed sample (Babbie, 1996). The choice of a college student sample was made because college students are more likely to be informed about current events, and thus are more likely to be informed about the AFDC and work programs issues. By employing a sample in which better reliability is achieved, the possibility of discovering true relationships among variables given that the variables are veridically associated is increased.

Method

Students enrolled in classes in Criminal Justice, Urban Studies, Public Administration, and Business responded to our questionnaire during their regular class period. Subjects were apprised that the questionnaire was confidential and contained no identifying information. Completion was voluntary and there was no penalty for refusal.

Before responding to questions regarding work programs and AFDC, students first read a brief description of each program. The work program, Work First, was described consistent with the program that operates in the state of Georgia (Georgia Council on Social Welfare, 1995), although similar programs operate in other states (Fein, 1994). The precise descriptions which subjects read are presented in Appendix 1.

A direct question asking subjects to select their preference for addressing the needs of poor children whose parents do not have an income was included in the questionnaire. Options were limited to AFDC, Work First (Georgia's version of work programs), or "no governmental role". Additionally, subjects responded to a scale evaluating the AFDC program and a scale evaluating Work First. The same scale (identical items) was used to evaluate both policies. Scale items were modeled after items from Alston and Dean, (1972); Anderson, (1965); Furnham and Gunter (1984); Kallen and Miller (1971); Ogren (1973); and Tourangeau, Rasinski, & D'Andrade, (1991). The order of presentation for two scales was counterbalanced. Half of the subjects were asked the AFDC questions first, whereas the other half were asked the work programs questions first. Subjects were randomly assigned to receive one of

two versions of the form. In both versions, questions about policy alternatives were presented first, prior to attitudinal predictor measures also included in the questionnaire.

Along with the policy alternative questions students completed the Protestant Work Ethic scale (Mirels & Garrett, 1971); a scale assessing the perceived causes of poverty based upon Feagin's (1972) approach supplemented by items from similar measures developed by Feldman (1982), Furnham (1982) and Nilson (1981); a scale assessing belief in the government's responsibility to ensure the welfare of its citizens developed from a measure by Rasinski (1987) and Tourangeau, Rasinski, Bradburn, and D'Andrade (1989a & 1989b); a scale assessing endorsement of the negative stereotype of welfare recipients constructed by isolating those items referring to welfare recipients as opposed to welfare programs from extant attitude measures (e.g., the Anderson, 1965, scale) of social welfare; and a scale assessing subject's concern about the widening gap between the rich and the poor. A question asking which approach (AFDC, no program, or work programs) would be most expensive for the country was also included. The original scales had been developed through extensive pilot testing to achieve relatively short scales with good internal reliability. Specific scales items are available upon request from the authors.

Results

The sample consisted of 362 students. Table 1 provides demographic information describing the sample. Across classes, approximately 20 students opted not to participate. The bulk of the non-participation occurred when the questionnaire was handed out at the end of class, when students were free to leave.

Reliabilities of the Measures

The internal consistency of the measures employed in the study ranged from .76 to .91. Coefficient alphas are presented in Table 2. Correlations among the measures are presented in Table 3.

Responses to Forced Choice Question Assessing Policy Preference

Responses to the forced choice question requiring respondents to indicate their preferred policy for supporting children whose parents are unemployed are presented in Table 4 along

Table 1

Demographic characteristics of the student sample.

<i>Characteristic</i>	<i>Average or % of Respondents</i>
Poor	4.2%
Working Class	28.9%
Middle Class	48.8%
Upper Middle Class	16.3%
Wealthy	5.0%
AFDC as Adult or Child	12.0%
Females	44.6%
Afro-American	25.4%
Euro-American	51.4%
Hispanics	1.7%
Asian-American	1.1%
International Students	3.0%
Age	32.6 years

with responses to the forced choice question requiring respondents to indicate which policy option would be the most expensive in terms of monetary cost.

Predictors of Responses to the Forced Choice Question Assessing Policy Preference

There was no evidence of a relationship between respondent choice of preferred policy option and perception of monetary cost of these options, Chi square (4)=7.19, N=345, $p=.126$. (Specific numbers are presented in Table 12 with comparison findings from Study 2).

The scale means for predictor scales in the three policy-preference groups (AFDC, work programs, no government role) are presented in Table 5. Group means sharing particular subscripts are not statistically significantly from each other. Basically, persons selecting the AFDC policy option were less conservative than all other subjects on all predictor variables. Persons choosing work programs as their preferred option were also distinguished from other groups. Persons choosing "no government role" as their preferred choice endorsed more extreme views than those

Table 2

Internal reliabilities of the predictor variables in student sample.

<i>Scale</i>	<i>Coefficient Alpha</i>
Attitude toward AFDC (15 items)	.88
Attitude toward work programs (15 items)	.87
Government responsibility for ensuring citizen's welfare (14 items)	.87
Concern about gap between rich and the poor (10 items)	.76
Negative stereotype of welfare recipients (8 items)	.91
Structural factors as opposed to individual factors cause poverty (17 items)	.84
Protestant Work Ethic (19 items)	.77

Table 3

Correlations among the predictor variables in the student sample.

	<i>Government</i>	<i>Gap</i>	<i>Negative Stereotype</i>	<i>Reasons</i>	<i>Ethic</i>
Government	1.00	-.70**	-.59**	.63**	.44**
Gap		1.00	.53**	-.67**	-.35**
Negative Stereotype			1.00	-.68**	-.46**
Reasons				1.00	.47**
Ethic					1.00

** indicates significance at the .001 level.

preferring AFDC and those preferring work programs on all measures.

Multivariate analyses with the forced choice response as the dependent variable. Results of a Logistic Regression comparing persons preferring AFDC to work programs are presented in Table 6. The dichotomous, dependent-variable comparing those preferring AFDC to those preferring work programs was regressed

Table 4

Choice of preferred policy option and perception of most costly choice in student sample.

	AFDC	Work Programs	No Government Role
Percentage Selecting as Preferred Policy	5%	80.0%	10.8%
Percentage Selecting as Most Costly Policy	63.3%	18.2%	14.1%

onto predictor variables. Results suggested that concern about the widening gap between the rich and the poor and a negative stereotypic views of welfare recipients contributed unique explanatory power in distinguishing the groups.

Results of a Logistic Regression comparing those preferring some role for the government (AFDC or work programs) in ensuring the welfare of children versus those endorsing "no government role" are presented in Table 7. Results suggested that the belief that the government is obligated to protect the welfare of its people and a negative stereotypic views of welfare recipients contributed uniquely in distinguishing those who prefer that the government play no role.

MANOVAs were conducted to determine whether the set of five variables differed significantly in the three choice groups (those selecting AFDC as their preferred policy option, those selecting work programs, and those selecting "no government role"). The overall test of difference among the three groups was significant, Wilks lambda (10,614)=.66560, $p < .0001$. The test of those selecting AFDC or work programs versus those selecting "no government role" was significant, Wilks lambda (5,307)=.68466, $p < .0001$. Additional pair-wise tests were also significant: AFDC versus "no government role; Wilks lambda (5,307)=.71360, $p < .0001$; AFDC versus work programs, Wilks Lambda (5,307)=.88069, $p < .0001$; work programs versus "no government role", Wilks lambda (5,307)=.75620, $p < .0001$.

Table 5

Comparisons of means of those selecting AFDC, Work Programs, or "No Government Role" as a preferred policy option on predictor variables in student sample.

<i>Predictor Variable</i>	<i>AFDC</i>	<i>Work Programs</i>	<i>No Government Role</i>
Attitude toward AFDC	4.92 _a	6.24 _b	8.20 _c
Attitude toward work programs	5.28 _a	4.28 _b	6.08 _c
Structural factors as opposed to individual reasons cause poverty	6.92 _a	5.59 _b	4.04 _c
Work Ethic	3.96 _a	4.68 _b	5.49 _c
Concern about gap between rich and poor	2.59 _a	4.33 _b	5.94 _c
Government's responsibility	4.30 _a	6.47 _b	7.98 _c
Negative stereotype of welfare recipients	3.29 _a	5.68 _b	7.87 _c
Age	39.7 _a	30.1 _b	28.3 _b

Means with different subscripts differ at the .05 level.

Responses to the Attitude Measure Evaluating AFDC

Zero-order correlations between the attitude-toward-AFDC measure and predictor variables are presented in Table 8. A more positive attitude toward AFDC was correlated with all predictors. When a Multiple Regression analysis was performed, ($R=.63$, $F(5,310)=39.74$, $p<.00001$) four predictor variables achieved significant semipartial correlations: a lesser endorsement of a negative stereotypic view of welfare recipients ($\beta=.4226$, $t(310)=6.58$, $p=.00001$); endorsement of structural factors as causes of poverty ($\beta=-.2672$, $t(307)=4.059$, $p<.0003$); the Work Ethic ($\beta=.1119$, $t(307)=2.34$, $p<.03$); and belief that the government should ensure the welfare of its citizens ($\beta=-.1284$, $t(307)=1.97$, $p=.05$).

Responses to the Attitude Measure Evaluating Work Programs

Order of presentation did affect responses on the attitude-toward-work-programs measure. Work programs are evaluated

Table 6

*Logistic Regression results of independent predictors distinguishing those preferring AFDC versus Work Programs in student sample.**

Model Chi Square (5)=39.865, N=282, p<.00001

<i>Variable</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>S.E.</i>	<i>Wald</i>	<i>Significance Level</i>
Negative Stereotypic View	.4870	.2126	5.2457	.0220
Concern about Gap	.7847	.3041	6.6595	.0099
Government's Responsibility	-.4263	.3041	1.2551	.2626
Work Ethic	-.0851	.3010	.0800	.7773
Structural Factors as Reasons for Poverty	.2228	.3383	.4337	.5102

* A forced entry procedure was employed

Table 7

*Logistic Regression results of independent predictors distinguishing those preferring some government role (lumping AFDC and Work Programs) versus "No Government Role" in student sample.**

Model Chi Square (5)=71.391, N=314, p<.0001

<i>Variable</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>S.E.</i>	<i>Wald</i>	<i>Significance Level</i>
Negative Stereotypic View	.3406	.1722	3.9127	.05
Government Responsibility	-1.0269	.2770	13.7393	.0002
Concern about Gap	.0242	.2392	.0103	.9193
Work Ethic	.2512	.2598	.9353	.3335
Structural Factors as Reasons for Poverty	-.2543	.2772	.8416	.3590

* A forced entry procedure was employed

Table 8

Correlation between the attitude-toward-AFDC-scale and predictor variables in student sample. (All correlations were computed on N=309).

<i>Scale</i>	<i>Correlation Coefficient</i>	<i>Probability</i>
Attitude toward work programs (15 items)	.38	.001
Structural factors as opposed to individual factors cause poverty (17 items)	.53	.001
Work Ethic (19 items)	-.24	.001
Concern about gap between rich and the poor (10 items)	.38	.001
Government responsibility for ensuring citizen's welfare (14 items)	.47	.001
Negative stereotypic view of welfare recipients (8 items)	.59	.001

more favorably when viewed in contrast to AFDC. The mean value when the work programs questions were presented before the AFDC questions was 4.82, whereas the mean value was 4.25 when the work programs questions followed the AFDC questions, $t(339)=3.73, p=.0001$.

Collapsing over order of presentation, responses to the work programs evaluation were contrasted to responses to the AFDC evaluation. The mean evaluation of work programs (4.53) differed significantly from the mean evaluation of AFDC (6.40), $t(336)=18.59, p=.0001$. Work programs received the more positive evaluation.

Zero-order correlations between attitude-toward-work programs and predictor variables are presented in Table 9. All predictor variables were related save for the Protestant Ethic scale. In a Multiple Regression analysis, attitude-toward-work-programs was regressed onto the predictor scales. This yielded a Multiple R of .46 ($F(5,305)=16.22, p<.00001$). Results suggested that three

Table 9

Correlation between the attitude-toward-work-program-scale and predictor variables in student sample. (All correlations were computed on N=309).

<i>Scale</i>	<i>Correlation Coefficient</i>	<i>Probability</i>
Attitude toward AFDC (15 items)	.38	.001
Structural factors as opposed to individual factors cause poverty (17 items)	.34	.001
Work Ethic (19 items)	-.08	ns
Concern about gap between rich and the poor (10 items)	.26	.001
Government responsibility for ensuring citizen's welfare (14 items)	.41	.001
Negative stereotypic view of welfare recipients (8 items)	.29	.001

predictor variables contributed unique explanatory power: belief that government should assume a role in ensuring the welfare of people (beta=-.6, $t(305)=-5.39$, $p<.0001$); the Protestant Work Ethic (beta=-.21, $t(305)=2.82$, $p<.05$); and beliefs regarding the causes of poverty (beta=-.21, $t(305)=-2.45$, $p<.005$).¹

Discussion of Study 1

Preferred Policy Option

The results of Study 1 suggest that our subjects favor work programs over other policy options. The forced choice finding was bolstered by the results from an attitude measure which suggested that work programs are viewed more favorably than is AFDC.

Only a relatively small fraction of our subjects (11%) indicated that they preferred government to play no role in ensuring the welfare of children whose parents were without an income. These individuals were more extreme in their conservative views on most attitudinal measures (Protestant Work Ethic, belief that the

government should ensure the welfare of its citizens, attributing poverty to structural factors in the economy, concern about the widening gap between the rich and the poor, negative evaluation of AFDC).

Predictors of Positive Attitudes Toward Work Programs

Some of the same predictors of a positive attitude toward cash grant programs emerged as predictive of a positive attitude toward work programs. Those who harbored greater concern about the widening gap between the rich and the poor, who attributed poverty to structural factors to a greater extent, who were less disdainful of welfare recipients, and who believed that the government has a responsibility to ensure the welfare of its citizens displayed more positive attitudes toward work programs. Persons selecting work programs as a preferred policy alternative tended to be more conservative in their views than those selecting AFDC but less conservative than those selecting "no government role".

In Study 1, there was no evidence that concern about the relative costs of various policy alternatives influenced subjects' choice of preferred policy option. Apparently, support for work programs is based upon considerations to ensure the welfare of citizens, to address the widening gap between the rich and the poor, etc. These considerations eclipse concerns regarding the relative costs of various program options.

In Study 1, the evaluation of work programs was more positive if the work program was evaluated after the AFDC program than when it was presented in its own right. Apparently, positive evaluations of work programs are enhanced by the contrast effect with the previous policy of AFDC. This finding may have implications for influential approaches to groups who might object to work programs. If work programs can be presented in contrast to AFDC, this policy option may receive a more welcome reception from conservative camps.

A sturdy predictor of opposition to cash grant programs is the Protestant Work Ethic. Apparently, for persons who strongly value initiative, industry, and effort, a system of rewarding inactivity is very distasteful. In Study 1, the attitude measure of work programs did not correlate with the Protestant Work Ethic scale.

However, persons selecting "no government role" were still more extreme on the Work Ethic scale than those opting for some form of government assistance for the poor.

Our findings suggested that views of welfare recipients and attitude toward the AFDC program are distinguishable. However, negative views toward welfare recipients do predict attitudes toward work programs and AFDC. Further, negative views of welfare recipients contributes unique explanatory power in predicting attitudes toward AFDC, but not toward work programs.

Study 2

We attempted to replicate our major findings with a larger, more representative sample. The Applied Research Center at Georgia State University conducts phone surveys of representative samples of Georgia citizens. Due to the costly nature of surveys, we were unable to repeat Study 1 in its entirety. Through the Applied Research Center, we were able to determine how preference for policies for addressing the needs of poor children related to (1) perceived costs of various policy options; (2) the Protestant Work Ethic; (3) concern about the widening gap between the rich and the poor; (4) beliefs about the causes of poverty; and (5) beliefs that the government should play a role in protecting the welfare of citizens.

Method

During the week preceding the November 1996 presidential election, 822 randomly selected Georgians responded to questions regarding their preferences for addressing the needs of poor children along with a series of other questions regarding election preferences contained in the larger Georgia Poll telephone survey. Subject selection was accomplished to create a representative sample of Georgians. Although oversampling of some groups occurred attributable to the fact that particular types of individuals tend to answer the phone, weightings were applied to results to correct for inadvertent non-representativeness. As in Study 1, subjects were given a brief description of Work First (the Georgia version of a work program) and AFDC before responding to

questions. The same forced choice questions employed in Study 1 were used to assess preference for addressing the needs of poor children and perceived relative cost of the various policies. Also included in the questionnaire were the 3 items to assess the Protestant Work ethic; 2 items to assess beliefs about the causes of poverty; 3 items to assess concern about the widening gap between the rich and the poor; and 2 items to assess the belief that the government should play a role in ensuring the welfare of citizens. Those items with the highest correlations to their respective total scale found in Study 1 were selected to represent their scale in Study 2.

Results

Demographic information regarding the 822 participants included in Study 2 are presented in Table 10. Responses to the forced choice question requiring respondents to indicate their preferred policy for supporting children whose parents are unemployed and responses to the forced choice question requiring respondents to indicate which policy option would be most expensive are presented in Table 11.

Predictors of Preferred Policy Choice

Perceived cost of various policy options was associated with choice of policy option, Chi Square (4)=81.12, $N=710$, $p<.0001$. (The specific findings are presented in Table 12). Surprisingly, of those 211 subjects (29.7% of the total sample) who perceived Work First as the most expensive policy option, 84% still selected Work First as their preferred policy option.

Attitude Predictor Measures

With respect to predictor variable scales, the correlations among the items believed to comprise a scale were evaluated. Items that failed to cohere with other items were deleted from the scale. In multivariate analysis six individual items and a two item composite of the Work Ethic were considered in the analysis. The mean values of predictor scales for the three groups (AFDC, Work First, No Government Role) are presented in Table 13. Groups with shared subscripts do not differ significantly.

Table 10

Demographic characteristics of the poll sample.

<i>Characteristic</i>	<i>Average or % of Respondents Value</i>
Earned less than \$15,000	8.4%
Earned between \$15,000–\$24,999	13.5%
Earned between \$25,000–\$34,999	18.0%
Earned between \$35,000–\$49,999	15.8%
Earned between \$50,000–\$74,999	11.8%
Earned over \$75,000	15.7%
Females	59.6%
Afro-American	24.0%
Euro-American	59.4%
Hispanics	1.1%
Multi-Racial	8.8%
Native American	.9%
Age	40 years

Table 11

Choice of preferred policy option and perception of most costly choice in poll sample.

	<i>AFDC</i>	<i>Work Programs</i>	<i>No Government Role</i>
Percentage Selecting as Preferred Policy	11.5%	71.3%	9.6%
Percentage Selecting as Most Costly Policy	50.8%	26.5%	12.6%

Multivariate Analyses with the Forced Choice Response as the Dependent Variable

As in Study 1, a dichotomous variable was created comparing persons preferring AFDC to work programs. A Logistic Regression was performed. The identified uniquely contributing predictor variables are presented in Table 14. A dichotomous variable

Table 12

How Perceived Cost Relates to Choice of Policy.

<i>Poll Data:</i>			
<i>Perceived Most Costly:</i>	<i>AFDC</i>	<i>Work</i>	<i>No Role</i>
<i>Choice:</i>			
AFDC	54	22	10
Work Program	318	177	53
No Government Role	28	12	36
<i>Student Data:</i>			
<i>Perceived Most Costly:</i>	<i>AFDC</i>	<i>Work</i>	<i>No Role</i>
<i>Choice:</i>			
AFDC	8	6	4
Work Program	192	57	41
No Government Role	29	3	5

Table 13

Poll Data: The means for specific Likert Scale items in the Preferred Choice Groups. Scale values ranged from 1 to 10.

	<i>AFDC</i>	<i>Work First</i>	<i>No Government Role</i>
Lack of Effort Causes Poverty $F(2,720)=12.31$ $p<.0001$	3.66 _a	5.03 _b	5.89 _c
Two Item Work Ethic $F(2,583)=3.44$ $p=.03$	6.29 _a	6.58 _a	7.39 _b
Sponsor policies to reduce the gap $F(2,684)=7.35$ $p=.0007$	5.44 _a	5.35 _a	6.93 _b

continued

Table 13, *continued*

	AFDC	Work First	No Government Role
Democracy can survive with gap $F(2,687)=7.77$ $p=.0005$	5.48 _a	5.14 _a	6.61 _b
Gap is biggest problem in country $F(2,659)=8.622$ $p=.0003$	5.94 _a	5.14 _b	3.80 _c
Responsibility for children left to parents $F(2,726)=17.11$ $p<.0001$	5.46 _a	5.92 _a	7.96 _b
Government cannot be responsible $F(2,720)=21.17$ $p<.00001$	3.70 _a	3.60 _a	5.76 _b

Means with different subscripts differ at the .05 level.

comparing those preferring some role for the government (AFDC or work programs) in ensuring the welfare of children versus those endorsing "no government role" was created. The uniquely contributing predictors, which included considerations of cost, from a Logistic Regression are presented in Table 15. Beyond these analyses, a significant MANOVA finding suggested that the three policy choice groups (AFDC, Work First, Government Assumes No Role) differ on the set of seven dependent variables.²

Discussion of Study 2

Consistent with results from Study 1, the majority of Georgians do prefer work programs to cash grants for the poor or the government playing no role in supporting the families of poor children. Two items, one concerning beliefs about the causes of

Table 14

*Logistic Regression results of independent predictors distinguishing those preferring AFDC versus Work Programs in poll sample.**

Model Chi Square (9)=16.167, N=570, p<.06

<i>Variable</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>S.E.</i>	<i>Wald</i>	<i>Significance Level</i>
Lack of effort causes poverty	.1120	.0454	6.0825	.01

* A forced entry procedure was employed

The categorical, cost-variable was tested as two dummy-variable vectors with "work programs perceived as the most expensive" serving as the standard of comparison.

Due to the number of individual items included as potential predictor variables in the analysis only information for significant predictors is presented

poverty and another pertaining to concern about the gap between the rich and the poor contributed to the differentiation of those preferring cash grant programs compared to those preferring work programs. Those preferring no government role versus some form of government involvement differed in exhibiting decreased belief that poverty is caused by structural factors in the society, more endorsement of Protestant Work Ethic questions, lesser concern about the widening gap between the rich and the poor, diminished belief that the government should play a role in protecting the welfare of poor children.

Major findings regarding how attitudinal predictors related to policy preferences which emerged in Study 1 were replicated in Study 2. For the most part, those who chose "no government role in protecting the welfare of poor children" differed on all predictor variables in both studies. Of the variables differentiating between those choosing AFDC versus work programs in the student sample (the Work Ethic, negative views of welfare recipients, concern about the gap between the rich and the poor, beliefs about the causes of poverty, and endorsement of the government's responsibility to protect its citizens), fewer items distinguished these groups in the poll subjects. However, the distinguishability

Table 15

*Logistic Regression results of independent predictors distinguishing those preferring some government role (lumping AFDC and Work Programs) versus "No Government Role" in poll sample.**

Model Chi Square (9)=105.089 N=639, p<.0001

<i>Variable</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>S.E.</i>	<i>Wald</i>	<i>Significance Level</i>
Gap between rich and poor is big problem	-.1095	.0461	5.6356	.02
Government must leave responsibility for children to parents	.1662	.0592	7.8833	.005
Government cannot be responsible for children	.1288	.0544	5.0967	.02
Cost of work programs versus no government role	2.0238	.4061	24.9432	.00001

* A forced entry procedure was employed

Due to the number of individual items included as potential predictor variables in the analysis only information for significant predictors is presented

The categorical, cost-variable was tested as two dummy-variable vectors with "work programs perceived as the most expensive" serving as the standard of comparison.

of those choosing AFDC versus work programs was supported by multivariate analyses examining the set of variables in both samples. Concern about the gap between the rich and the poor emerged as a unique predictor of policy choice in both samples which implies that this concern is a conceptually distinct predictor in informing choice of preferred policy options.

A major problem was evident in the poll data. The fact that reverse scored items failed to correlate with other items intended to measure the same construct compromise inferences from the findings in Study 2. Response set (the tendency for some subjects to disagree or agree regardless of the content of the statement) may have influenced subject responses. The findings from Study 2

regarding attitudinal predictors of policy choices should be regarded as suggestive due to measurement problems. Measurement problems, of this sort, compromise reliability. Diminished reliability may have vitiated the power to distinguish additional differences between subjects choosing AFDC compared to subjects choosing work programs as a preferred policy option.

Consistent with results from Study 1, responses to the question asking poll subjects to select the policy option they believed was the most expensive indicated that the bulk of subjects perceive AFDC to be most expensive. Although there was no evidence that perceived cost influenced policy choice in the student sample, perceived cost was related to choice of policy option in Study 2 employing the wider, more representative sample. Moreover, perceived cost contributed uniquely to predicting the dichotomous variable of those preferring that the government play no role versus those preferring the government play some role. The discrepancy in results between the poll data and the student data suggests that the influence of perceived cost in influencing public policy should be further investigated. However, even in the poll sample, the bulk of poll subjects believing work programs would be most expensive, still preferred this policy option. This latter finding combined with the results from Study 1 suggest that greater relative cost will not exert a strong influence is tempering public enthusiasm for work programs.

General Discussion

Consistent with other studies, our findings suggest that work programs are favored by the bulk of Georgians. Support for work programs was correlated with concern over the widening gap between the rich and the poor, attributions to structural factors in the society as causes of poverty, a belief that government should play a role in supporting the welfare of citizens, and a less negative attitude toward welfare recipients. For the most part the same attitudinal predictors that distinguish persons supporting AFDC also distinguish those supporting work programs. However, those preferring work programs over other policies seem to be more middle of the road than those preferring AFDC (cash grant programs). Their attitudes fall between those who prefer

cash grant programs and those preferring that the government assume no role.

One impetus for present research was to determine whether those individuals who harbor a strong Work Ethic can support government sponsored work programs. The findings are somewhat equivocal. In Study 1, where a fifteen item, attitude-toward-work-programs-scale was employed, no association between the Work Ethic scale and this attitude measure emerged. However, in both Studies 1 and 2, those preferring "no government role in protecting poor children" were distinguished by their higher scores on the Work Ethic. Perhaps the conclusion to draw is that people high on the Work Ethic can accept work programs, although those scoring highly on this construct, at least as assessed by the Mirels and Garrett scale, still prefer "no government role."

The findings from our studies do suggest ways in which public support for work programs might be further enhanced. More awareness of the structural factors in society associated with poverty, more awareness of the emerging disparity between the incomes of the rich and the poor, more attention to the role of government in protecting the welfare of its people, and more positive views of poor people should strengthen support for work programs. Despite the broad-based current public support for work programs, factors are in place which might erode this support. In line with suggestions of Videka-Sherman and Viggiani (1996), the social work community must become as diligent in swaying public opinion as conservative think-tanks have been in advancing the conservative agenda. The social work community should continue to enhance public awareness regarding the widening gap between the rich and the poor, structural factors contributing to poverty, and positive views of poor people to maximize support for innovative programs to assist low income families.

In Study 1, there was no evidence that perceived cost influenced choice of preferred policy option, although a relationship was found in Study 2. In both studies, however, the bulk of those subjects believing work programs to be the most expensive option still selected work programs as their preferred option. This finding is consistent with other studies showing the public favors work programs even if they cost more than AFDC (Garin

et al., 1994). At this point, cost is not a major factor diminishing support for work programs.

Concerns about the Future

Although Americans strongly favor work programs, objections can be envisioned in the future. The results of our studies suggested that most people believe the costs of AFDC exceed the costs of work programs. This finding is consistent with opinion surveys which also have found that the public underestimates the initial cost and sustained costs that putting welfare recipients to work will entail (Garin et al., 1994; Ellwood, 1996). Findings from the vaunted work program in Wisconsin implemented by Governor Tommy Thompson contradict these beliefs. This work program raised welfare expenditures from \$10 million to \$58 million. Expansion of the Wisconsin program was anticipated to require an additional 13% per year (Wills, 1996). Thus, good work programs will be costly, probably more costly than AFDC. Moreover, the expectation that work programs will only need to operate for a short period of time is unrealistic. Many considerations argue against the prediction that welfare mothers will, given two years worth of assistance, be able to provide for the care and feeding of their children. The jobs available to welfare mothers, at their current skill level, fail to pay hourly wages requisite to covering the costs of child care and most of the jobs in the unskilled sector do not offer medical insurance (Besharov, 1995; Gueron, 1995; Kerlin, 1993; Tilly & Albelda, 1994; Wilson, 1996). Furthermore, given that the jobs available to single mothers are often seasonal or temporary in nature, work programs may have difficulty in moving work program participants into sustained self-sufficiency (Edin & Jencks, 1992; Gueron, 1995; Hardina, 1996; Nichols-Casebolt & McClure, 1989).

A further problem is that jobs, at any wage level, may simply not exist. Although the economy has created new jobs, most of these jobs are in suburbs that are inaccessible to inner city welfare mothers, many of whom do not own cars (Orfield & Ashkinaze, 1991; Ong, 1996; Wilson, 1996, p. 154 & p. 221-225). Discrimination by employers against individuals with inner city, or public housing addresses, has been documented. Employers

prefer to hire immigrants rather than inner city residents, despite documentation showing that both groups are equally willing to work for low wages (Newman & Lennon, 1995; Wilson, 1996, 111–126). Despite welfare recipient's willingness to work, sufficient numbers of jobs may not be available.

Presently, part of the enthusiasm for work programs may emanate from public hopes that such programs will succeed in getting people to work. Should work programs fail to impact employment among the chronically poor, the broad based support for work programs might quickly weaken. As the cost factors become more widely recognized, the current broad support may dissolve. The social work community should be actively searching for future alternative policies.

Appendix 1:

Descriptions of the AFDC and Work First read by subjects before responding to questions.

Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) is a program begun in 1935 to assist low income mothers with children. Through this program, mothers receive a cash grant so that they have an income to support themselves and their children. To be eligible for the program, mothers must show that they do not have adequate income from other sources such as their own work or child support payments from the father.

Work First is a program developed to increase the work-force participation of individuals who have been on cash-grant public assistance (AFDC). Under the Work First program the county maintains a list of job openings. Public assistance recipients are required to accept employment. Employers have an incentive to employ public assistance recipients because they receive both the food stamp benefits and the AFDC cash benefit which previously were paid directly to the program participant. Employers are then required to pay the additional amount needed to bring wages up to the "minimum wage" level. Cash payments to employers continue for six months after which the employer is expected to assume responsibility for paying the full wages of the program

participant. During the initial six months in the program, participants receive a voucher from the state for child care.*

* This description of Work First is consistent with the program that operates in Georgia (Georgia Council on Social Welfare, 1995).

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Notes

1. The fact that the Protestant Ethic scale contributed to the Multiple R despite a lack of zero-order correlation with the attitude-toward-work programs scale suggests that this variable operates as a suppressor variable (Nunnally, 1967). Suppressor variables "suppress, or control for, irrelevant variance, that is, variance that is shared with the predictor and not with the criterion, thereby ridding the analysis of irrelevant variation, or noise" (Pedhazur, 1982, p. 104).
2. The "Omnibus" Wilks lambda was significant, Wilks (14,1306)=.87919, $p < .0001$. The special contrast of the subjects selecting AFDC versus Work First was significant, Wilks lambda (7,653)=.97780, $p = .04$. The special contrast of those selecting Work First versus no government role was significant, Wilks lambda (7,653)=.90329, $p < .0001$. The special contrast of those

selecting AFDC versus no government role was significant, Wilks lambda (7,653)=.91616, $p<.0001$. Finally, the special contrast comparing those selecting either Work First or AFDC versus no government role was significant, Wilks lambda (7,653)=.89922, $p<.0001$.