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Deservingness in the eye of the beholder: A vignette study on the moderating role of cultural profiles in supporting activation policies

Gielens E., Roosma F., Achterberg P. Deservingness in the eye of the beholder: A vignette study on the moderating role of cultural profiles in supporting activation policies

People support welfare policy if its beneficiaries are perceived as deserving of support. This study found that individuals' cultural worldviews play a role in assessing the deservingness of welfare recipients. We investigated whether four different cultural profiles find some beneficiaries to be more deserving than others and how this relates to support for social rights (welfare benefit, retraining, job coach) and obligations (mandatory volunteering). A Dutch vignette experiment showed that reasons for supporting social rights differ between people with different cultural profiles: equality advocates grant support if beneficiaries are *needy*, while the centre and trusting groups do so when beneficiaries *reciprocate*. We found that irrespective of deservingness, people with equality-advocating and trusting profiles tend to be more supportive of social rights, whereas socially disoriented citizens tend to emphasise the importance of obligations. In general, obliging beneficiaries to do volunteer work was deemed appropriate by almost all respondents in the study, whereas their cultural values determined the ways in which they considered social rights to have been earned.

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Key words: activation policy, cultural profiles, deservingness, policy support, social welfare policy, welfare reform, vignette experiment

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Introduction

Throughout Europe, welfare states are undergoing major reforms. Faced with stagnating economies and structural unemployment in the early 1980s, governments turned to managing the increasingly costly system of social support by introducing more selective benefits and activating policies (Greer, 2016). Meanwhile, demographic and global economic dynamics have altered social groups in society and the relations between them (Rubery, 2011). Migration, ageing populations, female labour market participation and increased flexible employment pose new problems that challenge the conventional notion of worker solidarity. As a result, the question of welfare redistribution is back on the agenda. At its core, this debate is one of distributional justice, a question of 'who should get what and why' (Van Oorschot, 2000). The extent to which someone is deemed deserving of social support depends on the individual characteristics of the beneficiary such as neediness, prior or future contributions,

identity and responsibility for his or her own situation. But, as social contexts change and power relations between groups in society shift, so too does the perceived *deservingness* of these groups (Jeene, Van Oorschot, & Uunk, 2014). The deservingness of target groups has been studied since the 1980s (Cook, 1979; De Swaan, 1988), and since then the field has developed in both a theoretical and a methodological sense (Van Oorschot, Roosma, Meuleman, & Reeskens, 2017). In this article, we contribute to this expanding field of deservingness literature in two ways.

A first contribution to the literature lies in examining how perceptions of deservingness are related to activating welfare policies. Activation policies are part of the trend towards transforming the welfare state into an 'enabling state' (Gilbert, 2004), in which benefits have been complemented with other measures intended to reduce welfare dependency, such as job coaches, re-education tracks and mandatory volunteering practices. Activation policies aiming to provide a

non-committal service to beneficiaries – such as re-education programmes and job coaches – can be seen as a social right, whereas behavioural conditions attached to receiving the benefit – such as mandatory volunteering, active job seeking or mandatory job training – are social obligations. While the popular criteria for deserving traditional welfare benefits are well documented (Jeene & Van Oorschot, 2013; Van Oorschot, 2006), there is little research on which characteristics matter for ‘deserving’ activation policies (Roosma & Jeene, 2017). Studying support for activation policies is also relevant from a societal perspective. Public views on redistributive concerns tend to influence social policies indirectly (Manza, Cook, & Page, 2002) and taking into account public opinions on redistribution issues is essential to their social legitimacy. Thus, mapping and understanding the perceived deservingness of those who are subject to activation policies is equally important to the democratic process.

Secondly and most importantly, we stress that cultural values affect the importance of deservingness criteria in determining support for social rights and obligations. While most scholars agree that all criteria are not of equal importance in determining the deservingness of welfare beneficiaries, there is no clear consensus on which dimensions are important among which groups of people. Reeskens and Van der Meer (2014) found that immigrants are considered less worthy of support to the extent that other characteristics no longer matter (referring to the criterion of *identity*). In contrast, Bang Petersen, Sznycer, Cosmides, and Tooby (2012) and Mau (2003) argued that the ability to return the favour (*reciprocity*) is of central importance to deserving support. Others have found that personal responsibility (*control*) is the dominant element in assessing deservingness (Cook & Barrett, 1992; Van Oorschot, 2000). As Van Oorschot and Roosma (2015) pointed out, these differences likely result from the salience of deservingness criteria in different situations and among different social or cultural groups. People interpret social situations using specific cultural lenses, resulting in different deservingness evaluations of welfare recipients between cultural groups. For example, those with strong feelings of anomie (i.e., distrust and isolation) more strongly feel that welfare beneficiaries are lazy free-riders (Achterberg, Houtman, & Derks, 2011). Similarly, the relative importance of deservingness criteria might well be structured by cultural worldviews shared by these groups. A second goal of this study was, therefore, to assess to what extent cultural profiles attribute varying gravity to deservingness criteria.

In sum, we assessed whether deservingness criteria explain differences in support for activating welfare policies (containing both social rights and obligations)

and whether the relative importance of deservingness criteria differs between individuals with different cultural profiles.

To meet these research aims, we conducted a survey experiment among a representative sample of the Dutch population of 1,802 respondents (part of the CentERdata panel, Tilburg) in 2013. This survey contained a vignette experiment that we used to assess the weight of deservingness criteria when expressing policy support. Our analysis proceeded in three steps. First, we performed a cluster analysis in which we defined cultural profiles based on people’s socio-economic and cultural values. In a next step, we assessed differences between people with different cultural profiles in their support for welfare policy, namely to provide a fictive beneficiary with a welfare benefit, providing coaching and re-education, and with obliging beneficiaries to do voluntary work. Lastly, we examined if people with different cultural profiles respond to deservingness criteria differently with respect to their support for stimulating and sanctioning activation policies.

In the following sections, we outline the theory and our expectations on how the relative importance of deservingness criteria differs between people with different cultural profiles and how that affects activation policy support. Next, the data and methods are presented, after which we discuss our results. In the last section, we reflect on our findings and make recommendations for future research.

Cultural profiles and support for social rights and obligations

Scholars concerned with the legitimacy of various social benefits argue that the perceived deservingness of the target group plays a pivotal role: If beneficiaries are seen as more deserving of benefits, support for the social policy programme is generally stronger (Van Oorschot & Roosma, 2015). In analysing the deservingness of target groups, Van Oorschot and Roosma (2015) distinguished primary and secondary targeting. Primary targeting differentiates between broad groups of citizens that can be categorised along broadly defined risks or needs. Primary target groups are, for instance, ‘the old’, ‘the unemployed’ or ‘the disabled’. Secondary targeting focuses on differences in deservingness *within* a primary target group, varying in individual characteristics that make the beneficiary more or less deserving. Examples are unemployed people with or without children, or unemployed who have contributed or have not contributed to the unemployment scheme. Following this distinction, some deservingness studies have focused on comparing the deservingness of different primary target groups (Laenen & Meuleman, 2017b; Van Oorschot, 2006),

while other studies have assessed the deservingness *within* particular primary target groups (see e.g., Jeene & Van Oorschot, 2013; Jeene, Van Oorschot, & Uunk, 2013; Kootstra, 2014). In this study, we focused on differences in deservingness within the group of unemployed people, as this allowed us to investigate the relative weight of deservingness criteria in determining public support for activation policies.

Deservingness criteria and their relative importance

Deservingness theory states that the assessment of deservingness is based on five criteria, developed by Van Oorschot (2000) based on previous work of Cook (1979) and De Swaan (1988). Categories or individuals who 'score' higher on these criteria are deemed more deserving by the public. The first criterion is the level of *need*. People in greater need – for instance, unemployed with children or unemployed without savings – are seen as more deserving than people who have the means to take care of themselves. The level of *control* over neediness is the second criterion. People who are seen as responsible for their own situation are seen as less deserving. Unemployed people who have quit their job are more to blame for their situation of dependency than are people who were fired as a result of an economic crisis. Third, the criteria of *identity* suggests that people who are closer to 'us' are perceived as more deserving of benefits. This identity can refer to kinship relations, nationalities or other social groups. In the recent literature on deservingness, this criterion has been applied particularly to study the deservingness of immigrants and other ethnic groups in relation to the welfare state (Kootstra, 2014; Reeskens & Van der Meer, 2014). The criterion of *reciprocity* contains the idea that people who do something in return for their benefit (such as doing voluntary work while being unemployed, which is now an aspect of activation policies), or people who have contributed to the unemployment scheme in the past (those who have 'earned' support), are perceived as more deserving. The fifth criterion is *attitude*, the level of gratefulness or willingness to comply that the beneficiary displays (Van Oorschot & Roosma, 2015).

People who claim benefits have different characteristics and are in different personal situations. In the eyes of the general public, there are characteristics and situations that make people more deserving of benefits, while other characteristics and situations lower the score on the deservingness criteria. Moreover, the weight people attach to the criteria differs. If the criterion *reciprocity* is more important to people than the criterion *attitude*, a higher score on *reciprocity* weighs heavier than a high score on the *attitude* criterion. Several scholars have claimed that some deservingness criteria are more important to people than others. Some scholars contend that *Identity* is a crucial factor

(Reeskens & Van der Meer, 2014), while others contend that *control* is decisive in determining beneficiaries' deservingness (Cook, 1979; De Swaan, 1988), or that *reciprocity* is the foundation of solidarity arrangements (Mau, 2003).

Rather than one criterion being decisive for determining deservingness, it is more likely that the importance of the deservingness criteria depends on both the context (e.g., labour market opportunities) and on the characteristics of the individual who is assessing the deservingness of the target group. For example, egalitarians might find *neediness* to be more relevant than libertarians do, compared with, for instance, *reciprocity* (Van Oorschot & Roosma, 2015). The varying results in a couple of recent survey experiments suggest that context and individual characteristics indeed influence the relative importance of deservingness criteria. Reeskens and Van der Meer (2017) found in their Dutch vignette study that the criteria of *control* and *reciprocity* are strongly embedded in assessing deservingness for unemployment benefits, while ethnic *identity* is the strongest predictor of a lower general deservingness assessment of such target groups. This strong impact of the *identity* criterion was confirmed in a study by Kootstra (2017) who analysed the deservingness of different groups of ethnic minorities in Britain. De Wilde (2017) found that social assistance case managers in Belgium were more likely to make positive decisions if the criteria of *attitude*, *control* and *reciprocity* are reflected in the respondents' characteristics. Van der Aa, Hiligsmann, Paulus, and Evers (2017) showed that for healthcare professionals and the general public in the Netherlands, medical *need* is essential in evaluating clients' deservingness (but with this criterion being more important to professionals than to the general public). These studies suggest that the relative importance of deservingness criteria differs depending on context and that it differs for different groups of individuals in relation to different types of social policies.

Cultural profiles and the relative importance of deservingness criteria

Our expectation was that differences between people in their reactions to welfare beneficiaries who meet, or fail to meet, a deservingness criterion could be attributed to their cultural profiles. One of the underlying reasons is that people, once they have formed an opinion on issues such as welfare, defending or justifying that opinion becomes their primary aim (Rajsic, Wilson, & Pratt, 2015). Moreover, people will use these overarching cultural profiles to 'develop a particular conceptualization of an issue or reorient their thinking about an issue' (Chong & Druckman, 2007, p. 104; see also Gamson & Modigliani, 1989; Scheufele,

1999). The mechanism underlying this process is that cultural profiles are functioning as ‘principles of selection, emphasis and presentation composed of little tacit theories about what exists, what happens, and what matters’ (Gitlin, 1980, p. 6). Further, people with different cultural profiles react differently to the same information. While some people will be culturally predisposed to stress the importance of some deservingness criteria, others will simply ignore information about these criteria and underscore others instead.

We thus assumed that people with different cultural profiles would attribute different importance to deservingness criteria. The presence of possibly important deservingness characteristics, depending on one’s cultural profile, impacts support for rights and obligations. This leads to between-profile-group differences in support for social rights and obligations with respect to unemployment benefits. People with different cultural profiles differ in their valuation of deservingness characteristics, which is why they can be expected to also show different levels of policy support in response to the same situation (Van Oorschot & Roosma, 2015).

Cultural profiles are conceptualised as combinations of social values shared across individuals (cf. Kahan, Braman, Slovic, Gastil, & Cohen, 2009). Using *combinations* of values, we acknowledge that people simultaneously hold a number of worldviews. Some values may be more relevant in some situations, but (most) situations do not meaningfully alter such fundamental beliefs. Different values correspond to different aspects of society; their correlation and interaction form a more general attitude towards society that cannot be captured by observing these values in isolation.

We regard economic egalitarianism, anomia and utilitarianism as *cultural values* constituting cultural profiles which in turn influence deservingness perceptions. These values relate to the socio-economic environment in contrasting ways. To start with the first, we know that value patterns and welfare attitudes reflect economic interests (cf. Svallfors, 1997). People with lower incomes tend, on average, to advocate for egalitarian policies, whereas higher income categories tend to be less in favour of such policies (Jæger, 2013; Van der Waal, Achterberg, & Houtman, 2007). Egalitarianism is related in the literature to a greater inclination of people to see welfare beneficiaries as *needy*, and to support the needy.¹

When valuing economic egalitarianism often (but not always) corresponds with socio-economic status, other cultural views can lead people to support policies that oppose their economic interests. Achterberg et al. (2011) found that anomic, lower class individuals who distrust and feel isolated from society tend

to reject welfare institutions and their state policies. They argued that the feeling of anomia leads to rejection of welfare policies because welfare recipients are thought to be lazy and take advantage of the system despite being able to work. Also, intolerance towards ethnic minorities and a reluctance to see immigrants as deserving of welfare seem to be intrinsically linked to such anomic feelings (Van der Waal, Achterberg, Houtman, De Koster, & Manevska, 2010). We expected, therefore, that people who are anomic attribute greater importance to the criteria of *control* and *identity*. Thus, we have included this cultural factor in our study.

Utilitarian individuals feel that society works best if everyone pursues his or her own happiness, and they stress their willingness to act if they receive something in return. As a consequence, they lack consideration for the needs of others. They also stress the importance of individual responsibility (Bellah, Madsen, Sullivan, Swidler, & Tipton, 1985; Derks, 2000) and believe that welfare support will make people dependent (O’Connor, 2001). Therefore, for them, deservingness is more dependent on *reciprocity* and *control* and less on the others’ *need*.

Although we began with certain expectations as to how separate cultural attitudes are related to the fact that some deservingness criteria weigh more heavily than others, we formulated no hypotheses about this for the reason that the first step in our analysis was exploratory. We did not know exactly what cultural profiles were likely to exist in the population.

In a first step, we determined peoples’ cultural profiles in a latent cluster analysis by assessing the combined influence of people’s positions on the three above-mentioned cultural values. In the next step, we analysed how people with different cultural profiles view unemployed people’s social rights and obligations. In the final step, we assessed how differences in support are related to the weight that people with different cultural profiles attach to the deservingness criteria, for both the social rights and obligations of the unemployed. We lastly offer post hoc theoretical interpretations of our results.

Support for activation policies and deservingness criteria

As mentioned above, we related the relative importance of deservingness criteria to our outcome variables, i.e., the two aspects of activation policies: support for the social right to unemployment entitlement and coaching, and support for attaching obligations to these entitlements. The Netherlands has been one of the frontrunners in the implementation of activation policies (Van Oorschot, 2002). These policies are part of a trend to transform the welfare state into a so-called ‘enabling state’ (Gilbert, 2004) that focuses more on

¹ Socio-structural characteristics are not of direct interest for the purposes of this article. The background characteristics of the cultural profiles can be found in Appendix D.

individual responsibility and employability. This trend towards stronger activation policies underlines the importance of criteria of deservingness, as benefits become more selective. It has intensified the debate on who is deserving of social support, shifting the social justice debate from 'benefits as a universal social right' to 'assessment of individuals' situation'. Social rights are targeted at those 'who are really needy' (*need*), accompanied by obligations to 'do something in return' (*reciprocity*) or cooperate in enhancing employability (*control*). It is thus likely that support for social rights at least partly depends on the perceived deservingness of its beneficiaries.

Support for benefit obligations seems to be similarly related to deservingness perceptions. Available studies into the legitimacy of these activation policies suggest that support for benefit obligations is widespread among the general public (Albrekt Larsen, 2008; Buss, Ebbinghaus, & Naumann, 2017; Houtman, 1997; Laenen & Meuleman, 2017a; Roosma & Jeene, 2017). Using Dutch 2006 data, Roosma and Jeene (2017) showed that the logic of the deservingness theory, which was developed to assess support for social rights, can be applied to assessing support for benefit obligations as well. They found that people who are perceived as being more deserving of social rights are also granted more leniency with respect to benefit obligations. However, the relation between perceived deservingness in social rights and obligations seems to be weakest for unemployed persons than for disabled persons and social assistance beneficiaries (Roosma & Jeene, 2017). The authors argued that obligations are particularly supported for the group of unemployed because favourable activation arguments in the public debate claim that obligations can lift people out of poverty. Laenen and Meuleman (2017a) confirmed the idea that perceived deservingness of social rights and perceived deservingness of obligations are in fact 'two sides of the same coin'. In their study, they found that when people believe that *control*, *reciprocity* and *attitude* are important criteria for defining if individuals are entitled to benefits, they tend to be more in favour of benefit obligations (welfare conditionality) as well (Laenen & Meuleman, 2017a).

We thus expected that deservingness criteria would be relevant for people in determining their support for, not only social benefits, but also benefit obligations. However, we followed a different approach here than in previous studies. We did not directly measure what importance people attach to the deservingness criteria and how this is related to support for benefit obligations. Instead, we presented people with a fictive story about a welfare recipient, randomly assigning respondents to versions with varying deservingness criteria. The impact of deservingness criteria was then

observed as the difference in the level of policy support between different versions of the story. In other words, deservingness was the experimental manipulation and policy support the outcome variable of interest. This study was the first to distinguish support for activation policies between different cultural profiles. Again we, therefore, followed a strategy of post hoc theoretical interpretations of the results.

Data and methods

Data

We tested our expectations using a vignette experiment as part of a survey conducted by CentERdata (Tilburg, the Netherlands) in 2013. Of all sampled respondents, 67.4% participated in the study and 63.5% gave valid answers on all questions used in the analysis. The final data set contained ($N = 1,802$) respondents, forming an approximately representative sample of Dutch citizens aged 16 and over.²

The vignette experiment

In the vignette experiment, participants read a short piece of text (vignette) with randomly assigned information on a welfare beneficiary. In such a quasi-experimental design, the deservingness of the beneficiary was manipulated experimentally by presenting respondents with a single different version of the vignette. Six dichotomously variable deservingness characteristics gave $2^6 = 64$ different versions of the vignette. The 1,802 respondents were randomly assigned to read one of these 64 versions, so that each vignette variant was read by approximately 28 respondents. Similarly, following from random assignment, each of the six conditions/deservingness characteristics was presented to approximately half of the sample.

As argued above, we differentiated *within* the primary target group of the unemployed. We placed a fictive unemployed individual (either Jan van de Marel or Tzanniss Tzannetakis) in different situations and asked respondents to what extent they believed Jan or Tzanniss was entitled to benefits, or support to find a job, or should be obliged to do voluntary work. In addition to his *identity* (Jan or Tzanniss), the welfare recipient had five other characteristics that could vary, representing four deservingness criteria in total. These characteristics were coded as dummy variables where participants read either one version or the other. By varying these characteristics, we assessed the relative weight of four deservingness criteria. In this way, we followed deservingness theory and previous vignette studies that have assessed the relative weight of the deservingness criteria in experimental studies (De Wilde,

² Notably, older, high income and havo/vwo (higher secondary) educated respondents are somewhat overrepresented in the sample. See Appendix F for details.

2017; Kootstra, 2017; Reeskens & Van der Meer, 2017; Van der Aa et al., 2017). The translated vignette can be found in Appendix A.

The deservingness criteria were translated in accordance with the situation of the unemployment beneficiary, as follows. The criterion of *identity* was covered by the variation in the names of the individuals. Jan van de Marel is a typical Dutch name. Tzanniss Tzannetakis is a Greek name and was intended to appeal to the perception that this individual is non-Dutch. The criterion of *need* was measured by varying the profession into construction worker (high need) and bank director (low need). The situation of having debts vs. having savings was a mixed case that could be interpreted as a matter of high need due to low funds, but also as a matter of low *control* when the person is perceived to be in debt due to poor lifestyle choices. Rather than making a definitive choice, we left both interpretations as a possibility. The criterion of *control* was measured by the cause of unemployment: a result of the economic crisis (low control) or a result of the individual's own malfunctioning (high control). *Reciprocity* was assessed by the act of looking for a new job: applying for a new job twice a week (high reciprocity) or not at all (low reciprocity). The effort of job hunting can in itself be seen as a way of repaying society for its support. *Attitude* was measured by the (un)willingness to move to another part of the country for a job. Since willingness or intent conveys an attitude rather than an act, it is closer to being an attitude than an act of *reciprocity*. Hence, this ought to indicate what personal sacrifice the fictional welfare recipient was *willing* to make. Note, however, that the *attitude* criterion is difficult to separate from *reciprocity* analytically, especially in vignette studies (cf. Meuleman, Roosma, & van Oorschot, 2017, p. 346).

Dependent and independent variables

After reading the text, participants were asked to rate, on a scale of 1–10, to what extent the fictitious recipient had the right to: (a) welfare benefits, (b) a job coach, (c) retraining (education), and whether he (d) should be obliged to do volunteer work while receiving benefits. These four variables thus measured policy support conditional on recipient deservingness. To simplify the analyses, answers were grouped into two dependent variables by means of factor analysis: social rights (deserving benefits, job coach and retraining) and social obligations (volunteering).³ Social rights questions were strongly positively correlated and formed a highly reliable scale ($\alpha = 0.814$).

³ Two components had eigenvalues greater than one ($\lambda_{\text{rights}} = 2.3$; $\lambda_{\text{obligations}} = 1.0$), respectively, explaining 56.4 and 25.1% of the total variance.

Lastly, the participants answered sets of questions on egalitarianism (previously used in Achterberg & Houtman, 2009), utilitarianism (previously used in Derks, 2006) and anomie (previously used in Achterberg & Houtman, 2009). See Appendix B for the questions and their exact phrasing. Factor analyses confirmed the uni-dimensionality of egalitarianism ($\lambda = 2.5$, $R^2 = 0.509$), utilitarianism ($\lambda = 2.0$, $R^2 = 0.389$) and anomie ($\lambda = 2.1$, $R^2 = 0.526$) with all indicators included. Subsequent reliability analysis confirmed that indicator correlations were high for both egalitarianism ($\alpha = 0.753$) and anomie ($\alpha = 0.698$). The reliability of the utilitarianism scale was somewhat lower ($\alpha = 0.578$) but was deemed sufficient for the purposes of the present study (Table 1).

Analytic strategy

Since people uphold numerous values simultaneously, we expected that individuals could be characterised by combinations of values, i.e., a shared cultural profile. In an effort to identify these profiles, we clustered respondents who had similar answer patterns across our three relevant value scales, using the dedicated software Latent Gold (Vermunt & Magidson, 2005). BIC and AIC3 indicated the corrected likelihood of observed response patterns given the model. In addition, entropy was assessed as a measure of cluster coherence. Lastly, cluster analysis assumes local independence. This was evaluated using bivariate residuals, which reflect the remaining chi-square association between indicators after controlling for the cluster solution.

An omnibus F-test based on R-square change was used to test the significance of different responses to deservingness conditions between profiles. A baseline OLS regression model included the deservingness conditions and cultural profiles as dummy variables. We added the interactions with dummy predictors for each deservingness consecutively and in a nested fashion. The increase in explained variance and associated significance test indicated whether the deservingness effect differed significantly between cultural profiles. This strategy is similar to an ANOVA, with the additional advantage of controlling for the effects of deservingness criteria in consecutive models.

The differences in the importance of deservingness criteria were estimated using OLS linear regression. A general linear model with two correlated outcome variables (social rights and social obligations) was estimated, separately for each of the cultural profiles. The six deservingness conditions were added as predictor variables. Since they were dummy variables, the value of these regression coefficients should be interpreted as the mean difference in policy support when this deservingness

Table 1. Descriptive statistics.

		Min.	Max.	Mean	s	(a)	(b)	(c)	(d)
(a)	Social rights	1	10	6.8	1.800				
(b)	Social obligations	1	10	6.7	2.230	-0.100			
(c)	Anomia	1	5	2.6	.655	-0.096	0.043		
(d)	Utilitarianism	1	5	2.3	.445	-0.113	0.012	0.159	
(e)	Egalitarianism	1	5	3.3	.744	0.140	-0.131	0.216	-0.113

characteristic is present in the vignette (as opposed to it being absent). Executing the analyses separately for each cultural profile allowed us to see the differences in the importance, i.e., the mean difference, of deservingness characteristics.

Results

Our analyses consist of three parts. First, we clustered people into cultural profiles, meaning that they share similar opinions on anomia, utilitarianism and egalitarianism. Next, we interpreted the differences in policy support between these cultural profiles. Lastly, we interacted the difference in support between profiles with deservingness criteria to see whether some profiles reacted stronger to particular deservingness characteristics than others.

Cultural profiles

We theorised that a combination of cultural attitudes forms a comprehensive attitude towards society, i.e., a cultural profile. To detect these cultural profiles we clustered respondents by answer patterns to see if meaningful groups could be formed based on a combination of attitudes on anomia, utilitarianism and egalitarianism. Model fit statistics used to evaluate the adequacy of the cluster solution are included in Appendix C. Latent class analysis showed that a 4-cluster model had the most optimal Akaike Information Criterion (AIC3), although the more parsimonious Bayesian Information Criterion (BIC) favoured the 3-cluster model. However, high bivariate residuals indicated that not all association between values was explained by the 3-cluster model, leading us to favour a 4-cluster solution. Here, bivariate residuals ranged from 0.65 to 2.35, indicating that no substantial correlation between attitude scales remained after accounting for the clusters. Combined, the four clusters explained 48.4% of the variance in the cultural attitude scales. Entropy was fairly low (0.52), but deflated

when reducing or increasing the number of clusters. Since we are dealing with attitudes, which are inherently fuzzy, we accepted this limitation and proceeded with the 4-cluster model. Average cultural attitudes of each cluster are presented in Table 2.

We distinguished four cultural profiles based on their combined cultural attitudes: the *trusting*, the *centre*, the *detached* and the *equalising*. The *trusting* strongly trust others in society, given their low score on anomie. They combine this faith with little concern for inequality, but they are also not particularly self-interested. The *centre* group, as the name implies, scores around average on all attitudinal scales. *Detached* individuals are a small group, highly sceptical towards society. They are strongly anomic and are 'in it' for themselves primarily (as indicated by their high scores on utilitarianism). Lastly, the *equalising* group is most concerned with equal treatment of everyone. They are somewhat sceptical towards society and strongly reject self-advancement in favour of equality.

Policy support

After establishing four cultural profiles, we inspected the average level of policy support in each profile. By virtue of random assignment – and manually checked – the distribution of vignette conditions was approximately equal between profiles. Since there are no differences in treatment frequency between profiles, the mean level of policy support per profile is unconditional of deservingness characteristics. These unconditional averages are presented in Table 3. Notably, on average, every group showed reasonably high support for the social policies. The differences in support are small but significant. Social rights are most strongly propagated by people holding the *equalising* and *trusting* profiles. The *centre* profile-group is again stuck in the middle. When it comes to social obligations, differences between the *trusting*, *centre* and *equalising* profiles are negligible. The *detached* distinguish themselves by being most strongly opposed to

Table 2. Average cultural attitude score per cluster.

	Trusting	Centre	Detached	Equalising	R ²
Anomia	2.1	2.6	3.4	2.9	0.30
Utilitarianism	2.2	2.3	2.8	1.9	0.46
Egalitarianism	2.6	3.4	3.3	4.2	0.19
N	569	610	325	298	

Table 3. Variation in policy support between cultural profiles.

	Rights	Obligations	<i>N</i>
Trusting	7.0	6.6	698
Centre	6.6***	6.7	711
Detached	6.2***	7.2**	193
Equalising	7.1 (ref.)	6.5 (ref.)	200

*** $p < 0.001$; ** $p < 0.01$.

policies promoting social rights, while simultaneously being strongly in favour of the introduction of social obligations.

Understanding policy support

To understand differences and similarities in policy support between profiles, we turned to the relative importance of deservingness criteria. First, we assessed whether the effect of deservingness criteria differed significantly between cultural profiles. The omnibus tests in Table 4 showed that, in their support for social rights, persons with cultural profiles differed significantly in the importance they attributed to the criteria of *identity*, *reciprocity*, *need* and *control*. Differences in effect were not significant for the *need/control* condition (being in debt) and the *attitude* criterion (willingness to move). Inversely, regarding support for social obligations, only the effect of recipients' attitude differed significantly between cultural profiles. Thus, support for social obligations seems to be less affected by one's cultural profile.

Next, we took a closer look at which deservingness criteria were more important for which cultural profile. Table 5 shows, per cultural profile, the differences in respondents' policy support when a deservingness criterion was present in the vignette. We first discuss the importance of cultural profiles in people's support for social rights, before continuing to discuss its effect on social obligations.

First, *reciprocity* was clearly the most important deservingness criterion for the *trusting* and *centre* profiles. These profiles reported average support for social rights with over 1 point on a 10-point scale higher when potential recipients intended to apply for a job ($b = 1.085$, $p < 0.001$; $b = 1.045$, $p < 0.001$). Second, as expected, welfare beneficiaries' *need* was most important to the *equalisers* in society. Respondents with an equalising profile found social rights most justified when it benefitted those in need, as illustrated by their granting much higher support for the construction worker than for the bank CEO ($b = 0.982$, $p < 0.001$). Additionally, in contrast to other profiles, policy support for *equalisers* did not depend on *control* (being a victim of the financial crisis) ($b = 0.014$, $p = 0.199$), fitting their more universal take on welfare benefits.

The *detached* were most critical of social rights policies, while being less influenced by deservingness

Table 4. Omnibus test for between-profile differences in deservingness effects.

		R^2	ΔR^2
Rights	Null	0.145	
	Identity (Jan)	0.149	0.004*
	Need (Construction worker)	0.154	0.005*
	Need/control (Debt)	0.155	0.001
	Control (Crisis)	0.159	0.004*
Obligations	Reciprocity (Apply)	0.163	0.004*
	Attitude (Move)	0.164	0.001
	Null	0.011	
	Identity (Jan)	0.016	0.005*
	Need (Construction worker)	0.017	0.001
	Need/control (Debt)	0.020	0.003
	Control (Crisis)	0.020	0.000
	Reciprocity (Apply)	0.022	0.002
	Attitude (Move)	0.022	0.000

* $p < 0.05$.

characteristics than were respondents with other profiles. The *detached* showed a comparatively low level of support for social rights for those regarded as being least deserving ($b = 5.2$). Moreover, comparing the coefficients in Table 4 between profile groups revealed that the effects of deservingness criteria were never largest for the *detached*⁴ and, correspondingly, the explanatory power of deservingness criteria was least for this profile.⁵ Since the *detached* are less supportive of social rights for the undeserving and less inclined to increase support when recipient deservingness improved, people with this profile could be expected to base their support for social rights relatively more on factors other than recipient deservingness.

In general, the *identity* of the recipient mattered little for policy support. Dutch Jan and Greek Tzanniss were seen as equally deserving of support by almost all profiles, suggesting that recipient identity is irrelevant for European or less stereotyped outgroups. The native Dutch (as opposed to Greek) identity was only somewhat valued by the *centre* profile ($b = 0.355$, $p < 0.05$), suggesting they represent the more conservative population. Additional analyses showed that the effect of Greek identity was not crowded out by other deservingness criteria; the total (i.e., uncontrolled)

⁴ *Identity* was more important to the *centre* profile ($b = 0.355$ vs. $b = 0.031$), *need* was more important to the *equalizing* profile (e.g., $b = 0.982$ vs. $b = 0.545$), *control* was slightly more important to the *trusting* profile ($b = 0.495$ vs. $b = 0.400$), the *reciprocity* condition was more important to the *trusting* and *centre* profiles ($b = 1.085$ and $b = 1.045$ vs. $b = 0.617$). Lastly, the *attitude* criterion was also more important to all other profiles ($b = 0.468$; $b = 0.380$).

⁵ Deservingness criteria explained 11% of the variance for the *detached* profile, compared with 14.8, 14.9 and 13.8% for the *trusting*, *centre* and *equalizing* profiles, respectively.

Table 5. Mean differences in support per deservingness condition for each cultural profile.

Cluster	Criterion		Rights	SE	Obligation	SE
Trusting	Intercept		5.388		6.941	
	Identity	(Jan)	0.037	0.145	-0.171	0.188
	Need	(Construction worker)	0.100	0.145	0.093	0.188
	Need/control	(Debt)	0.261*	0.145	0.529**	0.188
	Control	(Crisis)	0.495***	0.144	0.019	0.188
	Reciprocity	(Apply)	1.085***	0.144	-0.076	0.187
Centre	Attitude	(Move)	0.715***	0.144	0.395**	0.188
	Intercept		5.246		6.482	
	Identity	(Jan)	0.355**	0.121	-0.279	0.170
	Need	(Construction worker)	0.593***	0.120	-0.227	0.169
	Need/control	(Debt)	0.287**	0.120	0.246	0.169
	Control	(Crisis)	0.251**	0.120	-0.003	0.169
Detached	Reciprocity	(Apply)	1.045***	0.120	0.104	0.169
	Attitude	(Move)	0.410***	0.120	0.039	0.169
	Intercept		5.194		7.368	
	Identity	(Jan)	0.031	0.208	0.117	0.241
	Need	(Construction worker)	0.545**	0.208	0.028	0.241
	Need/control	(Debt)	0.415**	0.208	0.213	0.241
Equalising	Control	(Crisis)	0.400*	0.207	-0.393	0.240
	Reciprocity	(Apply)	0.617**	0.208	-0.435*	0.241
	Attitude	(Move)	0.335	0.207	-0.366	0.240
	Intercept		5.955		6.940	
	Identity	(Jan)	0.029	0.199	-0.188	0.288
	Need	(Construction worker)	0.982***	0.202	-0.426	0.291
Equalising	Need/control	(Debt)	0.469**	0.200	0.038	0.289
	Control	(Crisis)	0.014	0.199	-0.427	0.287
	Reciprocity	(Apply)	0.605**	0.198	-0.093	0.287
	Attitude	(Move)	0.489**	0.200	0.171	0.289

***p < 0.001; **p < 0.01; *p < 0.05.

difference in support between native and Greek identities was also insignificant. It is likely that groups who form a significant minority in the Netherlands and are generally negatively stereotyped by the majority elicit different reactions. The criterion of *identity* should thus be employed with some nuance, as not all outgroups are valued similarly.

It also mattered how the deservingness criteria were operationalised. Debts were less determining for deserving social rights compared with being a construction worker. This can be explained by the ambiguous interpretation of the debt criterion as either a matter of need or a matter of lifestyle choice, i.e., *control*.

Remarkably enough, recipient characteristics had little influence on the support for social obligations for any cultural profile. Trusting respondents found the obligation to volunteer more appropriate when the subject was in debt (*need/control*) and less appropriate when he/she was willing to move (*reciprocity*). *Reciprocity*, i.e., applying for a job, was also important for the detached, reporting that a recipient was less obliged to do voluntary work when he applied for work regularly. Thus, at least for *reciprocity*, support for social obligations was inverse to the effects for social rights, which to a limited extent confirms the idea that deservingness perceptions for social rights and benefit obligations are two sides of the same coin (Laenen &

Meuleman, 2017a). Note that although some effect was measured for the *detached* and *equalising* profiles, their smaller profile size increased the uncertainty of measurement.

Discussion and conclusion

In this study, we investigated what role recipients' deservingness characteristics play in determining support for different types of activation policies, and whether cultural profiles interpret recipient deservingness characteristics differently. Our results imply that, although support for social benefits and benefit obligations is fairly similar across cultural profiles, these profiles interpret deservingness cues differently.

This conclusion complements the idea that support for activation policies is widespread (Albrekt Larsen, 2008; Buss et al., 2017; Houtman, 1997; Roosma & Jeene, 2017), elucidating the cultural-cognitive mechanism through which policy support arises. Different social segments focus on different characteristics of deservingness, nonetheless leading to similar levels of policy support. Our results show that deservingness criteria are weighed differently by individuals with different cultural profiles. The majority supports activation policies because they feel that such policies

ensure that welfare recipients contribute to society. Yet, *equalisers* support activating social rights because they feel it helps combat poverty among the most needy in society. The *detached* are less influenced by deservingness criteria, showing lower levels of support for social rights due to other factors, possibly distrust towards the efficacy of the welfare system. So, although policy support is generally high, not everyone feels quite the same about activation policies; there are nuanced cultural differences in the reasons for support. This contradicts earlier research on the universal order in deservingness criteria (e.g., Van Oorschot, 2006) by suggesting that the importance of the criteria depends on cultural worldviews.

Reciprocity is a central characteristic of welfare recipients for a majority of people in society, especially considering that mandatory volunteering (a form of repaying your 'welfare debt' by contributing to society) is supported with little regard for any recipient deservingness characteristics. Most recipient characteristics are irrelevant when supporting obliged volunteering, although the direction of the effects found in the sample often mirror the direction of the effect on social rights, which tentatively confirms the idea that perceived deservingness in social rights and benefit obligations are two sides of the same coin. However, these results mostly challenge the results of Laenen and Meuleman (2017a) and Roosma and Jeene (2017) who argued that the logic of deservingness theory could as well be applied to benefit obligations as to social rights. Considering the results of Laenen and Meuleman (2017a), this could be explained by the fact that they measured deservingness criteria in an abstract way, whereas we translated the criteria to the situation of a concrete unemployed individual. Also, Roosma and Jeene (2017) found that the deservingness logic could be *less* well applied to unemployed individuals (compared with other primary targeted groups). They argued that this might be the case because in the public debate obligations for unemployed (such as doing voluntary work) are also seen as a favourable aspect of activation policies as it helps the unemployed to regain employability and get out of poverty. It is thus not so much a punishment as a way of helping the unemployed. This idea might have become stronger in the Netherlands after 2006 (the time of data collection for the data used in the survey study of Roosma and Jeene), which might be the reason for a policy adaptation in 2015. From that year onwards in the Netherlands, doing voluntary work is an obligation for people on social assistance under the new Participation Law. If this is the case, differences in deservingness of unemployed individuals matter less in the Netherlands nowadays, because obligations are seen as being both a favourable and a necessary aspect for those who are unemployed.

This study also has some limitations. First, some deservingness conditions used in the vignette can be interpreted in several ways. The 'debt' condition can conceptually be interpreted as a matter of *need* (being low on funds) but also as a matter of *control* (being in debt due to careless spending). The impact of this deservingness condition on support is positive but small for all groups, suggesting that need is the dominant interpretation (although a varying interpretation between respondents would distort the average effect of the criterion). A second drawback concerns the high entropy of the identified cultural profiles, reflecting the difficulty of the algorithm to classify respondents into cultural profiles. Consequently, the value patterns are not exactly the same within profiles. This difficulty is due to the abstract nature of values, on the one hand, and the (quasi) continuous scale of measurement, on the other. Another limitation concerns the choice of a Greek outgroup for the *identity* criterion. As this study was conducted in the aftermath of the 2008 financial crisis, it is very likely that the response to a Greek outgroup has become conflated with unrelated national stereotypes. Media coverage of the Greek national bankruptcy could make Tzannis a very particular outgroup. At the same time, this media attention makes the Greek outgroup salient and likely to be negative in the mind of the general public, which might make it especially suitable as an intra-European outgroup.

Despite these drawbacks, it is clear that the eye of the beholder affects deservingness perceptions. The differing response to deservingness characteristics shows that people differ in their reasons for supporting social rights and, more broadly, implies that people differ in their general conception of welfare recipients. Opinions on welfare beneficiaries' obligations are contrastingly characterised by a surprising unity, regardless of recipient deservingness. It remains to be seen whether this unity can stand the test of time. Future research will undoubtedly shed more light on this intriguing issue.

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