The role of managers within the welfare system: how race and negative stereotypes about clients affect managers' tolerance of caseworker discretion

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THE ROLE OF MANAGERS WITHIN THE WELFARE SYSTEM:
HOW RACE AND NEGATIVE STEREOTYPES ABOUT CLIENTS AFFECT
MANAGERS' TOLERANCE OF CASEWORKER DISCRETION

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ABSTRACT

Previous research studies found differences in social welfare policy implementation based on the racial and ethical differences of clients, workers, and managers. The public perception of welfare recipients being content with living on government money and unmotivated to become self-sufficient is a central theme throughout American culture. The current study examined whether parish-level managers' personal beliefs about their clients are associated with their tolerance of frontline staff's discretionary practices. Additionally, the author examined the role that the race of managers plays in the personal beliefs they hold about their clients as well as their tolerance of frontline discretion. This study used cross sectional research with secondary data from an internet survey. No statistically significant relationships between negative stereotypes, discretion tolerance, and race were found. However, this study revealed that the majority of parish-level managers within the Louisiana STEP program partially blame clients for their lack of success within the program despite managers' admission that STEP participants lacked sufficient education and transportation needed to succeed within the program. The current study also revealed that large variations, not intended in a centralized system, exist among Louisiana parishes in terms of STEP policy implementation regarding discretion.

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Statement of the Problem

Frontline worker discretion has been the primary focus of research studies on discretion within policy implementation. The role of management has been evaluated in regards to their control over staff's use of discretion. Conversely, there has been a good deal of research on the influence that management has on the culture of their organizations in ways that influence service delivery (Davis et al., 2011a; Evans, 2011; Riccucci, 2004).

The purpose of this study is two-fold. First, the author seeks to assess whether parish-level managers' personal beliefs about their clients are associated with their tolerance of frontline staff's discretionary practices. Secondly, the author seeks to examine the role that the race of managers plays in managers' personal beliefs about their clients as well as their tolerance of frontline discretion. The author's goal is to determine whether character judgments and negative stereotyping on the part of program managers are associated with implementation disparities among agencies within a centralized system. The author argues that managerial beliefs about the populations who are being served affect the degree to which they tolerate informal caseworker discretion.

Contributions to Current Research

This study is a continuation of a larger body of research conducted by Davis et al. (2011b) that established a connection between race and policy implementation within social service programs in Louisiana. Their study found that work activity programs with African American managers were more likely to provide both white and minority participants with vocational education, which suggests that minorities who are in positions of power within the welfare system are more generous across racial lines with regards to distribution of scarce

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resources (Davis et al., 2011a). This research confirmed that even in a centralized program, such as that found in Louisiana, significant differences in service delivery may exist based on the race of parish-level managers.

Davis et al.'s (2011b) study revealed that managers' individual characteristics influenced how their offices deliver services to clients. Regardless of whether this discretion works in favor or against clients, it creates inconsistencies throughout policy implementation that should be examined to increase the equitable distribution of resources.

CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF LITERATURE

This chapter begins with a review of research on discrimination within the welfare system in order to familiarize the reader with the racial disparities that exist there. The author then reviews literature on the effects of caseworker discretion on the welfare system. This section describes the ideological arguments about frontline worker autonomy versus managerial control. Finally, this discussion leads into a review of Taylor et al.'s (2011) study which speaks of national stereotypes against welfare recipients and the influences these beliefs have on managers' lack of accountability within the welfare system.

Discrimination within the Welfare System

According to the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWORA), service providers should use some discretion when determining eligibility requirements and delivery of service to welfare recipients (Berman et al., 2004; Gooden, 2006). Therefore, it is important for researchers to examine the variables influencing the use of discretion in order to ensure that policies are being implemented as intended (Gooden, 2006; Lipsky 1980; Riccucci, 2004). If a policy is implemented in a socially equitable way, the fairness of procedures, access to services, delivery of services, and goal attainment should be relatively the same regardless of race, ethnicity, or gender of the client (Gooden, 2006, p. 6). However, since the development of the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) programs under PRWORA, research has shown racial and ethnic disparities in policy outcomes for clients (Davis, Lim, & Livermore, 2011a; Davis, Livermore, & Lim, 2011b; Keiser, Mueser, & Choi, 2004; Gooden, 2006; Marchevsky & Theoharis, 2008).

These disparities are, unfortunately, not surprising due to the fact that the image of what Hancock (2003) calls "the welfare queen" is one that was alluded to in more than half of the US

congressional proceedings during the 1996 reformation of the welfare system into PRWORA (p. 31). The public perception of African-American women being content with living on government money and unmotivated to become self-sufficient shaped welfare reform and weakened this marginalized populations right to government resources in the eyes of policy makers (Hancock, 2003). According to Taylor, Samblanet, and Seale (2011), the image of the welfare queen gained national recognition when Ronald Reagan told the story of a women using welfare money to buy a Cadillac instead of supporting her family during his 1980 presidential campaign. White political thinking has been heavily influenced by this view of African-Americans as lazy and unmotivated and is related to negative attitudes about who should receive welfare (Gilens, 1995; Hancock, 2003; Taylor et al., 2011). The examples outlined below are research studies that found differences in social welfare policy implementation based on the racial and ethnical differences of clients, workers, and managers.

Marchevsky and Theoharis's (2008) research on the experiences of Mexican immigrants who were clients of a TANF program in Los Angeles Country revealed "unlawful reductions or termination of immigrant benefits; harassment and humiliation through Job Club; and the tracking of immigrants away from education and into low-wage jobs*"* (p. 71). The study also showed that at the end of the two-year study, none of the 14 Latina women in the sample who had participated in TANF had found employment that would raise them above the poverty line and few had permanent job placements (Marchevsky & Theoharis, 2008).

Keiser et al. (2004)'s evaluation of the sanctioning practices within TANF in Missouri showed a complex and significant relationship between race and sanctioning. Within every county in Missouri, minority individuals were more likely to be sanctioned than white individuals who shared the same demographic characteristics (Keiser et al., 2004). This means

that minorities were either being treated differently by front line workers or that there was a bureaucratic bias within the state policy that contributed to increased difficulties for minorities to meet requirements than for white TANF recipients (Keiser et al., 2004). This study also revealed the importance of county-level characteristics that impeded the prevalence of sanctioning for all TANF recipients in counties where minorities were in positions of political power, where more than half of the population voted for the Democratic Party, or where more than half the TANF recipients were minority individuals (Keiser et al., 2004).

Further research shows that political climate, community culture, and values influence policy implementation (Weissert, 1994). This study showed that agencies located in ideologically liberal counties were more generous with Medicaid funds. Managers were more willing to participate in outreach and more knowledgeable about other services available to their clients within the community than in conservative communities even though the implementation of Medicaid policy should have been uniformly implemented throughout the state (Weissert, 1994). Though Weissert (1994) was able to determine that discretion was widely used among case managers, her study did not reveal any relationship between the generosity of county agencies and the use of discretion among case managers. In fact, managers' political beliefs were more related to the generosity of agency spending than with case managers' use of discretion.

All of these studies reveal that race and ethnicity of both participants and workers are related to program outcomes. Regardless of how centralized policies are, the every day decisions that agencies make affect the way participants experience and perform within a program.

Caseworker Discretion

Street- level Bureaucracy and the Beginnings of Policy Research on Discretion

Michael Lipsky's book, *Street-Level Bureaucracy: Dilemmas of the Individual in Public Services*, began the discussion about the role of discretion within policy (Evans & Harris, 2004). Lipsky's (1980) work focuses on how direct service providers are pressured into making decisions about how to implement policies, and how these decisions change or modify the original objectives of the policies. Lipsky (1980) coined the term "street-level bureaucrat" in reference to "public service workers who interact directly with citizens in the course of their jobs, and who have substantial discretion in the execution of their work."

According to Lipsky (1980), clients' needs vary so greatly that it is impossible to have a policy that encompasses every possible course of action needed to respond to people's unique situations. Through these unpredictable circumstances, street-level bureaucrats are required to use professional judgment in ways that often modify policy regulations (Evans & Harris, 2004; Lipsky, 1980). However, Lipsky (1980) points out that like everyone else, street-level bureaucrats develop "personal standards of whether or not someone is deserving" based on their individual experiences (p. 23). Therefore, Lipsky (1980) stresses that the professional nature of a street-level bureaucrat requires a level of competency to provide services that are appropriate for clients' needs. The privilege to exercise professional judgment should be bound to an ethical code to ensure that the professional is acting in the individualized interest of his or her client and outside the pursuit of personal gain or preferences (Lipsky, 1980).

The complexity of the issues street-level bureaucrats face, the lack of resources they are given, and the ambiguous objectives within the policies they are asked to implement cause street-level bureaucrats to feel isolated and undervalued (Hudson & Lowe, 2009; Lipsky, 1980).

Problems arise when these obstacles appear so frequently that street-level bureaucrats are no longer exercising professional judgment in an individualized fashion but are ubiquitously changing regulations in attempts to correct policies that do not meet the needs of their clients (Lipsky, 1980). There is a tendency to stereotype their clients and routinize their work in a way that produces only a portion of the outcomes intended by policies based on their limited resources (Lipsky, 1980).

   The Bottom-Up Perspective. Lipsky (1980) believed that policy outcomes had more to do with decisions made between clients and street-level bureaucrats on the ground than with the actual policies made by bureaucrats at the top of the political chain of command. This view of policy implementation is called "the bottom-up perspective" (Hudson & Lowe, 2009, p. 208). Hudson and Lowe (2009) stated that this idea grew in reaction to the top-down perspective that a well-developed policy will yield the results intended by its writers. The problem with the top-down perspective is that it assumed rationality on the part of those who deliver services and uniformity within problem solutions (Hudson & Lowe, 2009).

   Lipsky's analysis of direct service clearly pointed to bottom-up implementation of policy (Ellis, 2011; Evans, 2011; Hudson & Lowe, 2009; Weissert, 1994). Evans (2009), however, adds that Lipsky's recommendation of better policy implementation is a balance between top-down and bottom-up perspectives. Although Lipsky believed that policy makers unavoidably create and modify policies based on data gathered from the way policy ideas are actually delivered (bottom-up), he also thought that discretion best meets the needs of individuals when it is rooted in "strategic policy intention" (top-down), which speaks to his thoughts about the importance of professional judgment and organizational standards (Evans, 2011, p. 370).

Variables Contributing to the Use of Discretion. Lipsky (1980) reasoned that two of the major variables contributing to street-level bureaucrats' need for the use of discretion were lack of resources available to accomplish policy objectives and the need to interpret vague policy objectives that often conflicts with agency objectives.

Rationing Resources. In order for street-level bureaucrats to provide clients with the individual attention required to use professional judgment, they need to be able to spend time with each client (Bloom, Hill, & Riccio 2003). Bloom et al. (2003) pointed out that this cannot happen if frontline staff is overloaded with clients.

In a study conducted by Ellis (2011) that measured the influence discretion played in the implementation of the National Health Service and Community Care Act, social workers stated that their lack of resources to fully implement all policy objectives universally contributed to stereotyping and deliberate changes in policy regulations to limit access to services in a manner that violated the rights of clients and conflicted with the social workers' code of ethics. This example demonstrates Lipsky's (1980) point that large caseloads and insufficient resources force street-level bureaucrats to make concessions about delivery of services in ways that are incongruous and outside the requirements of policies. Lipsky (1980) states that,

> "At best, street-level bureaucrats incent benign modes of mass processing that more or less permit them to deal with the public fairly, appropriately, and successfully. At worst, they give in to favoritism, stereotyping, and routinizing – all of which serve private or agency purposes." (p. xii)

Lipsky (1980) also stated that while street-level bureaucrats are under pressure to accomplish lofty outcomes with little resources, they must be careful not to appear to be denying people their human rights. Street-level bureaucrats are often asked by management to do away

with extraneous programing and focus on the most vital needs of clients (Lipsky, 1980).

Ambiguous Polices. Lipsky (1980) stated that the vague language used to describe goals within policies requires street-level bureaucrats to use discretion when interpreting these goals. Lipsky (1980) saw this space for interpretation as one way that street-level bureaucrats tailored policies to fit ideas about what services should be delivered. Discretion can either be used creatively to fit policies with the needs of clients or as a means of denying clients access to resources. Street-level bureaucrats can ignore their powers of discretion to make exceptions for fear of being held accountable (Lipsky, 1980). In this way, vague policies can be used by both street-level bureaucrats and policy makers to avoid responsibility should the policy fail to produce the desired outcomes (Lipsky, 1980).

With unclear objectives, progress can be difficult to measure and track (Evans & Harris, 2004). As stated earlier, street-level bureaucrats' work is autonomous due to the nature of individualized responses to their clients' needs. This limits managerial control over street-level bureaucrats (Lipsky, 1980). Furthermore, it is Lipsky's (1980) belief that managers' concerns with accomplishing agency objectives lead them to ignore the changes street-level bureaucrats make to policies with the idea that these changes will get things done (Lipsky, 1980).

Lack of Emphasis on Managerial Influence. Lipsky (1980) contributed an invaluable body of knowledge that expanded researchers' understanding about the vital role that frontline staff play in policy implementation. However, Lipsky underestimated the role the management plays in policy implementation. Evans (2011) pointed out that Lipsky made blanket assumptions about managers, viewing them as "policy lieutenants" who are fully committed to implementing policies and agency objectives with the highest fidelity possible (p. 372). Instead, Evans (2011) claimed that managers play a vital role in shaping the discretionary practices within policy.

Lipsky (1980) also conjectured that managers are only interested in outcome results, and they concern themselves with the methods of service delivery only in the areas that the agency will be evaluated. This viewpoint assumes that managers are not invested in creating an organizational culture that is pleasant and functional for both staff and clients.

Davis et al.'s (2011b) research findings negated Lipsky's grouping of managerial styles by establishing that even in a centralized policy, some managers went above and beyond their required tasks to voluntarily incorporate community networking as a valuable resource for the agency and its clients. When managers engaged in community networking, participants were more likely to be placed in work activity settings that yielded the probability of higher paying job placements (Davis et al., 2011b; Davis et al., 2011a), which confirmed that the discretionary actions of managers influences service delivery despite the lack of face-to-face encounters they have with clients.

Reactions to Lipsky's Work. The majority of research on discretion today is divided into two schools of thought: those who argue that discretion no longer exists within social services since the rise of managerial power and technological developments that helped track regulations and performance indicators within policies in attempts to standardize implementation practices (Howe, 1996; Jones, 2001); and those who expound Lipsky's continued relevance within policy implementation and develop the role of discretion within direct services further (Ellis, 2011; Evans, 2011; Evans & Harris, 2004; Halliday, Burns, Hutton, McNeil, & Tata, 2009). Regardless of researchers views on what is happening today, these scholars do not dispute the significance of Lipsky's work as an insightful look at the way that street-level bureaucrats cope with the demands of their jobs, and in the process, shape policies (Halliday et al., 2009).

Professionalism vs. Managerialism

The New Public Management (NPM), also known as managerialism, was a model of policy implementation that was popular post-WWII until the 1990s in which researchers attempted to accomplish social equity within policy implementation and globalize policy agendas (Hood, 1991). This was done by increasing managers' power over their frontline workers through defining goals and measuring competence of practice (Howe, 1996). Unlike Lipsky's skepticism for managers' ability to control frontline workers, NPM argued that managers alone should have the discretionary power to engineer agency procedures that respond to their frontline workers' bottom-up needs (Hood, 1991; Hudson & Lowe, 2009). More emphasis was placed on agency outcomes rather than methods of service delivery as a means of top-down quantitative outcome measurements (Hood, 1991; Hudson & Lower, 2009). In this way, NPM is a mixture of both top-down and bottom-up schools of thought with agency managers are the primary decision makers about implementation procedures (Hudson & Lowe, 2009).

In the 1990s, research showed that NPM was not as successful at standardizing practice as originally intended (Hood, 1995). Evans and Harris (2004) asserted that more rules and regulations disrupt progress by confusing frontline workers. Policy writers and frontline staff can also use intricate rules to blame one another by claiming that the rules were not followed correctly or that the rules did not service the needs of clients (Evans & Harris, 2004). Additionally, Lymbery (2011) pointed out that the assessment and evaluation processes that frontline workers perform on their clients require the application and synthesis of knowledge, which requires a level of creativity that is not measurable through quantitative benchmarks. He

stressed that competence measures do not convey the creativity needed to complete the complex tasks of frontline workers (Lymbery, 2011).

Lymbery's (2011) argument echoes Lipsky's (1980) claim that professional judgment is often required in order to respond to the unique needs of clients. Evans (2011) develops this idea further by stating that ethical codes influence the motivations of professionals' use of discretion by changing the culture of service agencies to regard equanimity and competence. Unlike Lipsky (1980), who saw managers as evaluating the discretionary practices of their staff in the interest of the organization, Evans (2011) saw managers as active participants in the implementation process who worked in collaboration with their staff to deliver services.

Evans (2011) claimed that the degree of professionalism exhibited by frontline staff influences managerial style and the nature of the discretion that is utilized. While Freidson (2001) agreed with Evans, he believed that the professional status of the manager in relation to his or her staff held more significance. When managers come from the same profession as their staff, they are bound by the same ethical codes, have similar motivations, and have the ability to create an organizational culture that promotes such professional standards (Freidson, 2001). Freidson (2001) also pointed to the professional's ability to control his or her own work as a necessity due to the very essence of a profession, which should be understood and respected by management. He emphasized the importance of peer reviews in establishing and enforcing standards that bind a profession to the ethical use of discretion while still allowing individual professionals the freedom to control their own work (Freidson, 2001). Freidson (2001) claimed that when managers are not only concerned with policy outcomes, but are also invested in upholding professional ethics, there is less divide between the intentions of staff and administration.

Where NPM seeks to rigidly define direct service outcomes for the sake of gaining confidence in policy, professionalism seeks to define the ethical codes of a profession for the sake of gaining trust and increasing competence of frontline staff (Smith, 2001). By creating a culture that is committed to professionalism, managers are able to trust the discretion of their staff (Evans, 2011; Freidson, 2001). In this way, managers should be actively engaged in training and supervision to support frontline staff for the purpose of maintaining ethical service delivery (Freidson, 2001).

Lack of Managerial Accountability vs. Lack of Client Motivation

Taylor et al. (2011) conducted a study that sought county managers' opinions about why welfare was failing in its goal to help clients become self-sufficient. Taylor et al.'s (2011) study consisted of a phone survey of county managers from a welfare-to-work program in North Carolina. Although they did not intent to measure managers' attitudes about clients and never mentioned client motivation in the interview questions, almost half of the managers cited a lack of client motivation as a barrier to the success of their program.

Taylor et al.'s (2011) study concluded that when failure occurred in the program, the clients were the ones blamed. Even though managers reported a number of structural deficiencies within the program, such as "a lack of funding, staff, daycare, job coaching, work, hours, volunteer sites, comprehensive evaluation assessment (to determine both clients' work and family needs), mentoring, parenting classes, mental health and substance abuse services, and transportation" (p. 178), the tendency among managers was to discuss a lack of motivation as one of the biggest variables in client failure (Taylor et al., 2011). One of the reasons managers are so quick to blame clients is that managers do not want to look at their own responsibilities and the ways in which they may be deficient in their role as a program manager (Taylor et al., 2011).

CHAPTER 3: CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Louisiana's Strategies To Empower People (STEP) Program

The focus of this thesis is on Strategies to Empower People (STEP), a centralized welfare program in Louisiana. STEP is a program administered by the Office of Family Support (OFS) with the goal of aiding clients in acquiring permanent employment as a means to self-sufficiency (Berman et al., 2004). Louisiana developed the STEP program in 2003 as a means of reforming the Family Independence Work Program (FIND Work) partly for the purpose of increasing standardized practices by working more closely with state agencies instead of private contractors (Berman et al., 2004). Other reasons for the change included requiring all participants to engage in job readiness activities, improving the outcomes of the job readiness program, identifying barriers to employment, and working with participants to eliminate those barriers (Berman et al., p. i).

Participation in STEP is required for all individuals receiving cash assistance from the Family Independence Temporary Assistance Program (FITAP) who are deemed "work-eligible", which is defined as individuals who are not over the age of 60, permanently disabled or incapacitated, or caring for a family member who is disabled or incapacitated (Berman et al. 2004, p. 9). Therefore, whether an individual is required to participate in STEP requires some discretion on the part of the Intake Analyst. Determining what a family member is or how many hours a day a person needs to be attending to the family member are not straightforward and require a judgment call from the STEP worker.

Once an individual is deemed eligible for STEP, he or she attends an orientation, a 2-week job readiness training. After a client has completed job readiness training, a group staffing, which includes "the Intake Analyst, STEP Case Management Analyst, Job Readiness Facilitator,

and appropriate OFS supervisors" (p. 103), is required to review the client's assessment findings, previous job history, and special needs (Berman et al., 2004). Together, the group places the client in a work activity and provides additional services such as transportation and childcare as deemed necessary (Berman, et al., 2004). The case manager then takes over the case and meets with the client to complete a Family Success Agreement (FSA) (Berman et al., 2004).

The following list includes approved work activities with which single-parent STEP participants engaged in them from June 2003 to June 2004: unsubsidized employment, vocational education, work experience, job search and job readiness, school attendance, on-the-job training, education related to employment, subsidized public employment, and subsidized private employment (Berman et al.). If an individual is pregnant or has children under the age of one, he or she is assigned to the Parenting Skills Training in place of the Job Readiness program for his or her first work activity (Berman et al., 2004). Case managers continued to meet with participants throughout the duration of the program for counseling and monitoring as well as transportation, childcare assistance, and out-of-agency referrals (Berman et al., 2004).

Significance of Work Activities Placement

Assignment into particular work activities is determined by the OFS STEP Case Management Analyst with the help of information collected by a OFS Intake Analyst, a Louisiana Department of Labor Job Readiness Facilitator, and other relevant staff who discuss a participant's "test scores, assessments, case notes, career interests, educational needs, employment barriers, attitude and behavior" (Berman et al., p. 10).

Work activities are significantly unequal in terms of the work experience gained within the different activities, which in turn, translates into varying potential for job attainment upon completion of the activity (Davis et al., 2011b; Gooden, 2006). For example, Davis et al.'s

(2011a) study concluded that on-the-job training increased not only one's chances of attaining

employment, but it also increased average annual earning by $2,423. Vocational education

increased average annual earnings by $428, but it did not increase the probability of attaining

employment (Davis et al., 2011b). Therefore, individuals who are placed in an on-the-job

training work activity or vocational education will most likely more than those who are placed in

different work activities, those placed in an on-the-job training work activity will most likely

have higher earnings than an individual who was placed in a vocational education work activity.

Sanctions

Sanctions are meant to be used as a last resort for clients who are not in compliance with

requirements for the STEP program. A sanction can be enforced on a STEP participant if he or

she misses an appointment with a case manager or does not complete the required hours for

weekly work activities in a given month without "good cause" (Berman et al., 2004).

> "Good cause reasons include: lack of appropriate child care or transportation
>
> (within specified limits); situations related to domestic violence or to treating a
>
> mental or physical illness, including substance abuse; temporary, short-term
>
> illness, or the temporary care of a family member who is ill; or emergency crisis,
>
> such as homelessness, fire, accident, dislocation due to natural causes, hurricane,
>
> or flood" (Berman et al., 2004, p. 15).

The first sanction results in a denial of FITAP cash benefits for a minimum of one month, the

second sanction withholds a minimum of two month's benefits, and the third sanction withholds

a minimum of three month's benefits (Berman et al., 2004, p. 112). Adults with children over

six years old are required to participate in work activities for at least 30 hours per week; adults

with children under six must participate in their work activities for at least 20 hours per week

(Berman et al., 2004, p. 5).

Davis et al.'s (2011a) study showed that STEP participants who were sanctioned during their time in the program earned less on average than those who were not sanctioned. Wu (2008) found similar results showing that sanctions were related to the decrease in probability of job attainment, lower average earnings, and premature exiting of the program. These findings suggest that the intended purpose of the sanctions, which is to modify participants' behaviors toward job training and employment, is not being achieved (Davis et al., 2011b).

The Potential for Informal Discretion within Louisiana's STEP Program

Implementation of Louisiana's STEP policy allows frontline workers' use of discretion within the confines of predetermined criteria, thus operating under a hybrid of managerial control and professional judgment (Berman et al., 2004). Sanctions, eligibility, work activities placement should be determined using policy guidelines by ultimately decided at the discretion of frontline. Berman et al. (2004) outlined several areas where implementation could be improved to better match policy outcomes. The analysis was based on in-depth evaluations of 15 of 69 parish offices in Louisiana. The examples below show areas where informal discretion may be used and come from Berman et al.'s (2004) evaluation of the STEP implementation process based on data collected from all the OFS agencies in Louisiana. Berman et al. (2004) frame the use of discretion as a positive behavior that would increase the STEP program's effectiveness. However, it is important to note that discretion can also be negative or problematic for clients as Lipsky (1980) pointed out the discretion can be used to cut corners and stereotype clients when work becomes routinized.

Eligibility Confusion

Several STEP Intake Analysts stated that they did not feel confident in their knowledge of all the differing eligibility requirements for the various programs they were charged with assessing (Berman et al., 2004). This may lead to unintended discretion for the sake of expediting intakes, which would strengthen the claim that too many regulations cause confusion, and thus informal discretion (Hudson & Lowe, 2009; Lipsky, 1980).

Heavy Caseloads

Within the 15 parishes that Berman et al. (2004) visited, case Management Analysts reported having individual caseloads ranging from 30 to 120 cases per worker with an average of 69 cases per worker. As cited by Lipsky (1980) and Ellis (2011), large caseloads add to the probability of routinized work, stereotyping, and forced informal discretion due to the lack of individualized attention frontline workers need to exercise professional judgment.

Performance Indicator Confusion

OFS staff showed inconsistencies in understanding the role of performance indicators. Workers reported feeling pressure to maintain the rates of participation within the program despite being told to focus on the best work placement for the client as the priority. Workers saw these goals as conflicting, and thus were unsure how to proceed (Berman et al., 2004). With conflicting objectives, workers are free to decide for themselves which objective to prioritize regardless of the intended agency priority (Ellis, 2011; Lipsky, 1980).

Inconsistent Use of Assessment Tools

STEP facilitators reported using different assessment tools to determine the skill-level of clients (Berman et al., 2004). Within the 15 parishes visited by Berman et al., 2004, 70% reported using Pre-WorkKeys, and less than half reported using the other four assessment tools

designed to measure clients' occupational interests, skills, reasoning and thinking styles, behavioral traits, and basic reading, mathematics, and language skills. Additionally, these assessment tools were intended to be used in conjunction with previous work experience to place clients into work activities. However, facilitators used their own informal discretion to determine which assessment tool best evaluated their clients (Berman et al., 2004). The assessment tools did not change according to the individual need of each client, but rather was uniformly implemented based on the facilitator's judgment of the tool. Thirty-five percent of facilitators reported not evaluating their clients' previous work experience at all (Berman et al., 2004). This is an example of resource rationing in the sense that facilitators decide whether to provide their clients the resource of the varying assessment tools due to lack of time or confusion on how to use the tool.

Sanctions

Berman et al. (2004) reported that only two parishes out of the 15 sites visited had an office policy that matched the STEP policy to only use sanctions as a last resort. Six parishes reported an increase in sanctioning since the implementation of STEP (Berman et al., 2004). Sanctioning can have serious consequences for a family in poverty because of the removal of benefits, thus uniformity of sanctioning practices throughout the state should be a priority.

Managerial Role in Informal Discretion

Nearly all of the recommendations made by Berman et al. (2004) were directed toward the administrative staff. This included more staff training, more communication between agency managers, and more mentoring between managers and staff. Specifically, Berman et al. (2004) recommended more collaboration between managers and frontline staff in order to eliminate confusion about eligibility, performance indicators, and assessment tools. Berman et al. (2004)

also suggested that managers take a more active role in helping case managers troubleshoot difficult cases. Additionally, Berman et al. (2004) advocated for a state-wide collaboration between parish-level managers to develop a strategy that would more equally distribute caseloads among caseworkers. Thus, all of the variables that increase the probability of informal discretion used by staff are issues that could be improved by the administration of STEP agencies.

Summary

Currently, STEP recipients experience disparities in service due to the demographic characteristics of both agency managers and clients (Davis et al., 2011a). This occurs as a result of day-to-day decisions that stray from policy intentions made by the people who deliver services (Lipsky, 1980). Because frontline staff have the ability to greatly affect the ways policies are implemented (Lipsky, 1980), a commitment to professional integrity is vital to the equitable distribution of resources (Evans, 2011; Freidson, 2001). Policy confusion, lack of resources, and inconsistent measurements are variables within the STEP program that increase the probability that frontline staff will deliver services in ways that were not intended by the STEP policy (Berman et al., 2004). All of these barriers can be remedied through administrative restructuring of policy implementation procedures (Berman et al., 2004). Therefore, the author argues that the beliefs that managers hold about the clients they serve impact the level of competence and equanimity with which an agency implements STEP policies.

Hypotheses

Exercising discretion when determining STEP participation, work activity placement, and sanction recipients requires more time and is a more lenient practice than uniformly categorizing STEP participants. Based on STEP policy, a FITAP recipient could have the STEP participation

requirement waved if he or she is caring for a family member who is disabled or incapacitated (Berman et al., 2004). The determination of who family members are and how much time an individual has to spend caring for the family member requires discretion. Because participation in STEP is the default requirement for FITAP recipients, caseworkers who use discretion in terming eligibility would have to take a more nuanced look into their clients' lives, which requires more time.

Additionally, Davis et al. (2011b) found that STEP participants who were placed in on-the-job training and vocational education for their work activity made more money upon leaving the program than those who did not. STEP workers should use discretion in determining which STEP participants are in need of the added instruction that on-the-job training and vocational education provide.

And finally, STEP policy clearly states that sanctions should only be given to participants as a last resort, yet many STEP workers are not aware of this (Berman et al., 2004). Due to the serious consequences that result from sanctions, STEP workers should sanction when it is truly the last option.

Based on these policy observations, using discretion with STEP participants works to the client's advantage. Therefore, the author hypothesizes that STEP managers who see STEP participants as largely responsible for their economic struggles, due to laziness, lack of motivation, etc., are less likely to tolerant caseworker discretion with STEP participants.

H1: Parish-level managers who have negative stereotypes about clients are less likely to tolerate caseworker discretion in determining:

a) Whether or not someone is required to participate in STEP.

b) What type of work activity in which a STEP participant should engage.

c) When a FITAP or STEP recipient should be sanctioned.

Another aim of this study is to determine if race plays a role in this dialog about the level of blame parish-level managers place on clients for economic struggle and if/how this affects policy implementation. Davis et al. (2011b) have already determined that non-White STEP managers are more generous with referrals and work placements for all STEP participants. This study seeks to examine whether non-White managers are more generous in implementation than white managers within a population that was 80.25% African American between October 1st, 2003 and September 30th, 2006 (Livermore et al., 2007, p. A-2).

H2: Non-White parish-level manager are less likely to have negative stereotypes about clients.

H3: Non-White parish-level managers are more likely to tolerant caseworker discretion in determining:

a) Whether or not someone is required to participate in STEP.

b) What type of work activity in which a STEP participant should engage.

c) When a FITAP or STEP recipient should be sanctioned.

CHAPTER 4: METHODS

Design

This study used cross-sectional research with secondary data from an internet survey. Bivariate analysis of the data was performed to investigate the interrelationships of managers' beliefs about clients, policy implementation, and the race of managers.

Sample

Parish-level managers from the STEP program in Louisiana were invited to participate in an internet survey; 60 out of 64 responded. IRB exemption was granted for the purpose of this study due to the secondary nature of the data and the fact that all subjects were anonymous.

Instrumentation

Davis et al., (2011b) constructed a 46-item survey to be self-administered by managers for the purpose of measuring agency implementation of the STEP policy in July 2007. The current study analyzed 7 items from the survey that tracked managerial attitudes about clients, policy implementation, and the race of managers.

Operationalization of Key Terms

Negative Stereotypes about Clients

Negative stereotypes about clients were measured based on the level of responsibility managers placed on clients' need for welfare. Managers were asked to pick three characteristics that they believed were clients' biggest barriers to self-sufficiency.

Managers from Taylor et al. (2011)'s study did not use blatant language such as calling clients "welfare queens" to describe clients. Instead, several managers mentioned lack of motivation and pointed to ways that clients were personally responsible for their need of government assistance. Taylor et al. (2011) attribute these claims to beliefs that class

inequalities in the United States are "justified with reference to individual ability, effort, and moral worth" (p. 185).

Therefore, for this study, negative stereotypes about clients are reflected in the following answers: lack a sense of personal responsibility, lack of motivation, too many children, started their families too young, belief that the effort is not rewarded, and believe that nothing is going to change. These answers were chosen to reflect negative stereotypes about clients because they point to problems that clients are responsible for and are unrelated to structural problems within the STEP program.

According to Taylor et al. (2011), managers who mentioned structural variables that contribute to client success within a program, such as lack of available jobs, lack of transportation, lack of childcare, lack of mental illness and substance abuse treatment, and lack of education, had an awareness of external variables that are largely outside of clients' control. These variables contribute to clients' difficulties in successfully completing welfare-to-work programs such as STEP (Taylor et al. 2011). Therefore, when managers stated answers such as lack of education, lack of job skills, lack of available jobs, suffer from mental illness, suffer from substance abuse issues, victims of domestic violence, lack of transportation, and lack reliable childcare as barriers of client success in STEP, they demonstrated an understanding about structural problems within the STEP program and society at large. Managers were given the opportunity to write another unmentioned variable as well.

Negative stereotypes about clients were measured at the ratio level from 0-3 based on the number of answers managers selected that indicated beliefs that clients' were personally responsible for their success or failure within STEP. For example, if a manager were to report a lack a sense of personal responsibility, belief that the effort is not rewarded, and lack of

education as the three biggest barriers to success, that manager would receive a score of 2. Note that a score of "0" is meaningful in that it indicates the manager did not select any negative stereotypes about clients. This was an independent variable in the analysis of discretion tolerance and staff assignments, and it was treated as a dependent variable in relation to managerial race.

Discretion Tolerance

According to Berman et al. (2004), work activity placement does rely on the discretion of the case manager as well as the Intake Analysis, Job Readiness Facilitator, and appropriate supervisors (Berman et al., 2004). The decision to sanction a client is at the discretion of the case manager and should be used as a last resort (Berman et al., 2004). Therefore, managers were asked if eligibility, work activity placement, and sanctioning were straightforward (0) or required the discretion of the case manager based on his/her experience and knowledge of a client (1). For this binary measure, a 1 indicates discretion. These variables were treated as dependent variables in relation to negative stereotypes about clients and managers' race.

Managers' Race

The survey asked each manager for his/her race. Data was collected nominally to measure race (White = 1; Non-white = 0). This was an independent variable in relation to discretion tolerance and negative stereotypes about clients.

Data Analysis

Hypothesis testing as well as descriptive statistics and bivariate correlations were analyzed using Statistical Package for the Social Sciences™ (SPSS). Discretion tolerance and minority variables were dichotomous. Negative stereotypes about clients were ordinal. Descriptive statistics for all variables were reported using frequency and percentages.

Chi-squared tests (x^2) were used to analyze the relationships between parish managers'

race and the following measures of discretion: tolerance of discretion in determining if a client is

required to participate in STEP, tolerance of discretion in determining placement in work

activities, and tolerance of discretion in determining sanctions.

Table 4.1 H1 Variables, Level of Measurement, Coding, and Statistical Analysis

Independent Variable	Level of Measurement/Coding	Dependent Variable	Level of Measurement/Coding	Statistical Analysis
Manager Race	Nominal (1=white; 0= non-white)	Discretion with Eligibility	Nominal (1= no discretion; 2= discretion)	Chi-squared (x^2)
Manager Race	Nominal (1=white; 0= non-white)	Discretion with work activities	Nominal (1= no discretion; 2= discretion)	Chi-squared (x^2)
Manager Race	Nominal (1=white; 0= non-white)	Discretion with sanctions	Nominal (1= no discretion; 2= discretion)	Chi-squared (x^2)

The researcher performed Spearman's rho (β) to evaluate the relationship that negative

stereotypes have with discretion tolerance and the minority status of managers. The researcher

also reported the p-value. The significance threshold was set as 0.05.

Table 4.2 H2 Variables, Level of Measurement, Coding, and Statistical Analysis

Independent Variable	Level of Measurement/Coding	Dependent Variable	Level of Measurement/Coding	Statistical Analysis
Manager Race	Nominal (0=white; 1= non-white)	Negative Stereotypes	Interval (0-3)	Spearman's rho (β) Correlation

And finally, spearman's rho (β) was also used to determine if bivariate correlations existed between negative stereotypes about clients and the above-mentioned measures of discretion. Chi-squared (x^2) was also used to determine if negative stereotypes about clients were related to the minority status of managers.

Table 4.3 H3 Variables, Level of Measurement, Coding, and Statistical Analysis

Independent Variable	Level of Measurement/Coding	Dependent Variable	Level of Measurement/Coding	Statistical Analysis
Negative Stereotypes	Interval (0-3)	Discretion with eligibility	Nominal (1= no discretion; 2= discretion)	Spearman's rho (β) Correlation
Negative Stereotypes	Interval (0-3)	Discretion with work activities	Nominal (1= no discretion; 2= discretion)	Spearman's rho (β) Correlation
Negative Stereotypes	Interval (0-3)	Discretion with sanctions	Nominal (1= no discretion; 2= discretion)	Spearman's rho (β) Correlation

CHAPTER 5: RESULTS

This research examined the relationships between race, negative stereotypes about clients, and tolerance of caseworker discretion by managers. Of the 60 parish managers from Louisiana's STEP program that were surveyed, four were eliminated from the entire study because of missing information regarding their tolerance of discretion; and list-wise deletion was performed for three additional survey participates who did not select their race in analyses where race was a variable. Therefore, 57 parish managers were included in descriptive statistics and in analyses involving negative stereotypes about clients and tolerance of discretion, and 53 parish managers were included in analyses involving race, negative stereotypes about clients, and tolerance of discretion.

Descriptive Statistics

Negative Stereotypes about Clients

As shown in Table 5.1, two-thirds (66.7%) of parish managers selected at least one negative stereotype about clients as one of the top three barriers to success within the STEP program. Only one manager (1.8%) of 57 selected all three of his/her choices as a negative stereotype about clients; 29.3% selected two negative stereotypes as barriers to success in the STEP program; 35.1% selected one negative stereotype about clients as a barrier to success. The mean value was 1 with a standard deviation of 0.85. The minimum value was 0, and the maximum value was 3.

Table 5.1 Frequency Distribution of Negative Stereotypes

Number of Negative Stereotypes about Clients	n	Percent
0	19	33.3
1	20	35.1
2	17	29.8
3	1	1.8

n = 57, 3 sample units were deleted based on missing information

The most common negative stereotype selected by parish managers was a belief that clients lacked personal responsibility (48.3%). This was the second most common response listed as a barrier to success within the STEP program behind lack of education (65%). The second most common negative stereotype was lack of motivation (38.5%). The belief that the effort is not rewarded and started their families too young was selected by very few (5% and 3.3%, respectively). No one selected too many children as a barrier to success. Table 5.2 lists barriers to success identified by parish managers in order of the frequency with which responses were selected.

Table 5.2 Frequency Distribution of Barriers to Success within the STEP Program

Rank	Variable	n	Percent
1	Lack of Education	39	68.9

2	*Lack of Personal Responsibility	29	50.9
3	Lack of Job Skills	27	47.4
4	Lack of Transportation	25	43.9
5	*Lack of Motivation	23	40.4
6	Lack of Available Jobs	13	22.8
7	Other	4	7
8	*Belief that the Effort is not Rewarded	3	5.3
9	*Started Their Families Too Young	2	3.5
10	Suffer from Mental Illness	1	1.8
10	Suffer from Domestic Violence	1	1.8
10	Lack of Available Childcare	1	1.8
11	*Have Too Many Children	0	0
11	Suffer from Substance Abuse	0	0

*Indicates that the variable is a negative stereotype about clients; n = 57

Discretion Tolerance

When determining whether someone is required to participate in STEP, over 50% of managers said that the decision was straightforward (see Table 5.3). Approximately one-third stated that the requirement to participate in STEP merited a decision by the caseworker based on

his/her knowledge of the client, indicating discretion. A small number of managers (6.7%) did

not respond to this question.

When determining the type of work activity in which STEP participants should engage,

the majority of managers (n =51, 85%) said that the decision required discretion based on the

caseworker's knowledge of the client (see Table 5.3). Two managers did not respond to this

question.

When determining whether to sanction a client, nearly one-third of managers (31.7%)

stated that no discretion was necessary. Sixty-three percent said that discretion was required in

order to make the decision to sanction a client. Three managers (5%) did not respond of this

question.

Table 5.3 Frequency Distribution of Discretion Tolerance

	n	Percent
Requiring STEP		
Participation (H1a)		
Straightforward	35	58.3
Requires Caseworker Decision	21	35.0
No Response	4	6.7
Work Activity Assignment		
(H1b)		
Straightforward	6	10.0

Requires Caseworker Decision	51	85.0
No Response	2	5.0
Sanction decision (H1c)		
Straightforward	19	31.7
Requires Caseworker Decision	38	63.3
No Response	3	5.0

n = 57

Race

Most parish managers of the STEP program were white (61.7%). Just over a quarter listed one of five minority categories as their race. Ten percent did not respond to the question.

Table 5.4 Frequency Distribution for Parish Manager Race

Race	*n*	Percent
White	37	61.7
Non-White	17	27.8
No Response	6	10.5

n = 54

Table 5.5 Parish Manager Demographics

	Percentage
Gender[a]	
Female	80.8
Male	19.2
Ethnicity[b]	
White	61.7
African American	26.7
Hispanic	0.0
Native American	1.7
Asian	0.0
Other	0.0
Level of Education[c]	
School/GED	1.7
Some college	18.3
College graduate	55.0

Note. Values represent percentages of survey respondent selecting each response. [a]n = 52. [b]n = 60. [c]n = 53. Table taken from Livermore et al. (2007, p. D-1).

Bivariate Results

None of the hypothesis produced statistically significant results in this study.

For H1a, a one-tailed Spearman's rho (β) correlation revealed no statistically significant relationship between negative stereotypes about clients and tolerance of discretion in determining whether someone is required to participate in STEP (Correlation Coefficient = -.05, p = .34)(see Table 5.6).

For H1b, a one-tailed Spearman's rho (β) correlation revealed no statistically significant relationship between negative stereotypes about clients and tolerance of discretion in determining the type of work activity in which a STEP participant should engage (Correlation Coefficient = -.11, p = .21)(see Table 5.6).

For H1c, a one-tailed Spearman's rho (β) correlation revealed no statistically significant relationship between negative stereotypes about clients and tolerance of discretion in determining when a FITAP or STEP recipient should be sanctioned, however this weak positive relationship did approach significance (Correlation Coefficient = .19, p = .07)(see Table 5.6).

Table 5.6 Correlations Between Negative Stereotypes and Discretion Tolerance

Hypothesis	Correlation Coefficient	p

H1a: Requiring STEP Participation	-.06	.34
H1b: Work Activities Assignment	-.11	.21
H1c: Sanctioning	.19	.07

n = 57

For H2, a one-tailed Spearman's rho (β) correlation revealed no statistically significant relationship between negative stereotypes about clients and the race of parish managers (Correlation Coefficient = .02, p = .44).

Six parish managers were not included in the chi-squared (x^2) analysis due to missing information regarding the race of parish managers. While the majority of managers reported that no discretion was required to determine whether someone is required to participate in STEP, 41.7% of white managers and 37.5% of non-white managers reported tolerating discretion in this instance (see Figure 1). For H3a, a chi-squared (x^2) analysis revealed no statistically significant relationship between the race of parish managers and tolerance of discretion in determining whether someone is required to participate in STEP (x^2 = .08, p = .77).

When determining the type of work activity in which a STEP participant should engage, 94.6% of white parish managers reported tolerating discretion, while 81.3% of non-white parish managers reported tolerating discretion (see Figure 1). For H3b, a chi-squared (x^2) analysis revealed no statistically significant relationship between the race of managers and tolerance of discretion in determining the type of work activity in which a STEP participant should engage (x^2 = 2.328, p = .127).

With regards to determining when a FITAP or STEP recipient should be sanctioned, white and non-white parish managers tolerated discretion at nearly the same rate. Sixty-eight percent of white managers tolerated discretion, while 69% of non-white managers tolerated discretion (see Figure 1). For H3c, a chi-squared (x^2) analysis revealed no statistically significant relationship between the race of parish managers and tolerance of discretion in determining when a FITAP or STEP recipient should be sanctioned ($x^2 = .007$, $p = .93$).
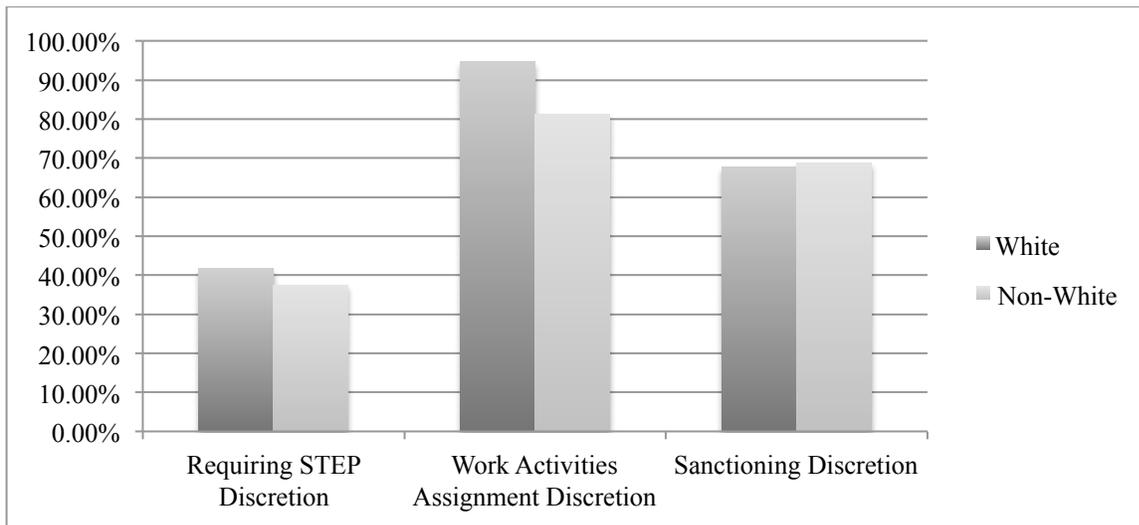

Figure 1 Cross Tabulation of Race and Discretion Tolerance

n = 54

CHAPTER 6: DISCUSSION

Client Motivation vs. Structural Barriers

Although none of the hypothesized relationships posed in this study proved to be significant, one important finding revealed that 66.7% of managers reported that at least one barrier to success within STEP was due to a lack of client motivation for change. The fact that the second most common barrier that managers selected was a lack of personal responsibility (-50.9%) should also be noted. This means that the majority of managers partially blame clients for their lack of success in STEP even though lack of education was the most noted cause and a substantial minority also noted that job skills, transportation, and available jobs play a role in clients' struggles to achieve and maintain employment. This echoes the findings of Taylor et al. (2011) in that even in the face of large structural challenges, many managers still cite client motivation as one of the main reasons clients are not successful in welfare-to-work programs.

What this current study added to Taylor et al.'s (2011) findings is that both white and non-white managers engaged in stereotyping clients negatively. This finding is in contrast to Taylor et al.'s (2011) claim that these negative stereotypes are a product of white managers discriminating against a largely African-American population. One reason for this finding may be that only seventeen managers were not white whereas there were thirty-seven white managers. If managers more evenly distributed across race or if the sample size were larger, the results may have reflected more nuanced outcomes.

Another possible explanation for the fact that no significant relationship was found neither between discretion and negative stereotyping nor between discretion and race is that discretion may not necessarily be good intentioned within the STEP program. As stated earlier, Berman et al. (2004) speculate that more discretion on the part of STEP workers would create

better outcomes for STEP clients even though previous research on frontline discretion showed

that discretion could be either positive or negative depending on the ethical nature of its use

(Lipsky, 1980). In fact, Lipsky's (1980) research explicitly linked stereotyping to negative

outcomes for clients in cases where case managers were over-worked or under trained.

Variance within a Centralized System

Another important finding in this study is that the implementation of the STEP program

varies greatly among parishes despite its intent to be a centralized state system. This conclusion

is based on the evidence that manager opinions differed greatly in terms of when caseworkers

should use discretion. For example, STEP policy clearly states that job placements should be

determined by a group staffing in which STEP workers discuss the information obtained by each

client during the assessment process and make an individualized decision based on the groups'

judgment (Berman et al., 2004). The fact that 10% of managers stated that no decision was

required demonstrates either a lack of understanding or a disregard of policy procedures in

relation to the job placement process. Also, under STEP policy, clients should only be

sanctioned as a last resort (Berman et al., 2004), and yet 19% of managers stated that sanctioning

did not require a decision based on the caseworkers' knowledge of the client.

If parish managers, who are charged with the task of ensuring program fidelity, do not

adhere to STEP policies, uniformity of services throughout the state will mostly certainly not be

accomplished. These variances in the delivery of services are in line with Evans' (2011) claim

that managers contribute to the changes that occur within policy implementation. Therefore,

Evans (2011) was correct in saying that managers are not a homogenous group whose sole

intention is to implement policies as Lipsky (1980) claimed. These findings further emphasize

the need for more examination of the role that managers play within the welfare system, even thought the reasons for this discretion have not been identified in this research.

Differences in Managers vs. Clients' Perceptions of Barriers to Success

Livermore et al. (2007) conducted telephone surveys and in-person interviews with STEP participants as part of a larger evaluation of the STEP program. During the evaluation process, clients were asked about the barriers to their success within the program. The findings of Livermore et al.'s (2007) study hold relevance to the current study as it allows for comparison between client perceptions of their barriers to success versus managers perceptions of clients' barriers to success.

While both clients and managers agreed that lack of transportation greatly affected clients ability to work, several clients also spoke of problems with mental health issues and finding childcare (Livermore et al., 2007) whereas only one manager listed these variables as barriers to employment. In Livermore et al.'s (2007) study, 17.6% of parents stated that childcare was a major problem in their search for employment, and 5.15% of parents said that it was somewhat of a problem. Additionally, 19% of parents said that they had to miss work or school in the last month because of a lack of available childcare (Livermore et al., 2007).

While only 14% of STEP participants who participated in the telephone survey noted that their mental health was either not very good, poor or very poor overall, many who participated in the face-to-face interviews spoke more candidly about their struggles with emotional and mental health (Livermore et al., 2007). During the interviews, clients "reported feelings of depression, anger, moodiness, helplessness and hopelessness, and some even reported thoughts of suicide or a need to 'escape' from their situation for a while" (Livermore et al., 2007, p. 4-10).

The disparities between managers and clients views of barriers to employment point to a disconnection in understanding for policy administrators and the populations they serve. This further supports Taylor et al.'s (2011) claim that welfare workers' views of clients as lazy and unmotivated may have more to do with underestimating the mental health and structural barriers their clients face than they realize.

Limitations and Considerations for Future Research

This study was limited due to the nature of bivariate analysis and the fact that the entire population of Louisiana STEP managers consisted of a small sample. Ultimately, this study did not accomplish its goal of gaining insight into the correlates of discretion. Uncovering the causes and consequences of discretion requires a more complex study that takes into account all the possible variables contributing to this process. This bivariate analysis only took into account managers' perceptions. Future research should compare managers' perceptions about how caseworkers made decisions about their clients with what caseworker actually did.

Further research should employ multivariate analyses that takes into account some of the variables outlined in the literature review such as the size of caseloads and confusion among caseworkers about eligibility, sanctioning, assessment tools, and performance indicators. Elements of Wiessert's (1994) study, including variables such as local job prospects, education and work experience of managers and staff, race of clients, local resources, and political ideology, many also be of value to compare among the various STEP offices. A more complex study such as this would hopefully paint a better picture of the roles that discretion, negative stereotyping of clients, and race play within the program than the current study did. Also, further research could be done to determine if client outcomes - such as program completion, job attainment, and salary - are related to managers' negative stereotypes about clients.

The findings of this study highlight the need for more research into the managerial role within welfare policy in hopes of better educating managers on the effects their actions have for their clients. The STEP program has the important task of expanding their clients' capacity for self-sufficiency within Louisiana's welfare system. Therefore, by looking at the managerial styles of the parishes with the best and worst outcomes for clients could be invaluable in creating more effective welfare program throughout the state of Louisiana and the United States.

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VITA

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Being deeply affected by her experiences in post-Hurricane Katrina New Orleans, Alethia decided put aside a career in journalism for one in which she could focus primarily on advocating for vulnerable populations. During her time spent at Louisiana State University's School of Social Work, Alethia discovered and developed her interest in social science research as a means of advocating for policies and programs that promote social equality. Upon graduating with her master's degree is social work, Alethia looks forward to marrying her loving partner and pursuing a career in social science research.