

Popular Criteria for the Welfare Deservingness of Disability Pensioners: The Influence of Structural and Cultural Factors

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Abstract Research has shown that several criteria underlie people's opinions about the welfare deservingness of benefit recipients. However, it remains unknown which factors are associated with the emphasis that people place on such criteria. Using a 2006 Dutch national survey on the welfare deservingness of disability pension recipients, we study the influence of structural and cultural factors on people's emphasis on three deservingness criteria: control, need, and reciprocity. OLS regression analyses show that people's emphasis on specific deservingness criteria is strengthened by structural factors that indicate the possibility of resource competition such as the following: age, lower levels of education, unemployment, and lower income. However, actual personal experience with receiving welfare benefits weakens criteria emphasis. Cultural factors such as the espousal of views from the political right and the possession of a strong work ethic are associated with a heightened emphasis on deservingness criteria.

Keywords Deservingness · Disability · Opinion · Welfare

1 Introduction

For centuries, welfare institutions and the general public have distinguished between the poor who deserve relief and those who do not. As defined by Gans (1995), the deserving poor are entitled to economic, social, and political redistribution of public resources that would help them out of their hardships, while the undeserving poor have no such entitlement. This distinction between deserving and undeserving poor is also made in social research (see, for example Coughlin 1980; Gans 1995; Golding and Middleton 1982; Kangas 2002; Katz 1989; Skocpol 1991), and it is among the standard concepts used in studies of the principles and practices of welfare rationing. Several formulations of 'deservingness criteria' have been expressed (Katz 1989; Stein 1971), and some empirical studies on the topic have been conducted (Cook 1979; Cook and Barrett 1992; Groskind

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1991; Knegt 1987; Sachweh et al. 2007; Van Oorschot 2000; Will 1993). These studies have resulted in knowledge about the criteria that people emphasize when confronted with questions of who should receive what and why in a welfare state context. Summarizing these (chiefly American) studies leads to the conclusion that people emphasize five types of deservingness criteria (see also Van Oorschot 2000):

- *need*: the level of need: the greater the level of need, the more deserving;
- *control*: poor people's control over their neediness, or their responsibility for it: the less control, the more deserving;
- *identity*: the identity of the poor: the closer to 'us', the more deserving;
- *attitude*: poor people's attitude towards support, or their docility or gratefulness: the more compliant, the more deserving;
- *reciprocity*: the degree of reciprocation by the poor (what have they done in return, or what will they do in return in the future) or having earned support: the more reciprocation, the more deserving.

Although agreement exists on which criteria can be identified, there is no uniform conclusion about which criteria are most important. This may be a consequence of the varied societal settings (times and places) in which respondents were surveyed (cf. Stein 1971). However, as we suggest here, it is also possible that there are differences in the emphasis that people place on various deservingness criteria and that previous findings concerning the relative importance of these criteria are inconsistent for this reason. Previous studies implicitly have assumed that all people place more or less the same weight on various criteria for deservingness. However, why should we expect this to be the case? Would the degree to which needy people can be blamed for their situations be as strong a deservingness criterion for a person with a personal experience of poverty compared with a person without such an experience? Would highly educated people feel as strongly as people with less education that a needy person's contribution to society should play a role in the allocation of welfare entitlements? In the literature, such individual differences in emphasis on deservingness criteria have not been studied. Nor does knowledge exist on which personal characteristics influence differences in people's emphasis on deservingness criteria. This study fills the apparent gap in the literature. It explores individual differences in—and determinants of—the emphasis that people place on deservingness criteria. An understanding of these differences in emphasis might, in turn, explain differences in the strength of deservingness opinions.

We formulate hypotheses about structural determinants that indicate the possibility of resource competition or the risk of welfare dependency, and about cultural determinants that indicate ideational orientations. The hypotheses are tested using data from a 2006 Dutch national survey on the welfare deservingness of disability pensioners. This survey contains questions that indicate the degree to which people emphasize more or less strongly the control, need and reciprocity criteria when forming perceptions about the allocation of entitlements to Dutch disability benefits. Disability beneficiaries are an interesting group to study because this set of welfare recipients generally is considered highly deserving of public support (Van Oorschot 2000). If we find variations in the emphasis that people place on the control, need, and reciprocity criteria when considering this welfare group, then it is likely that such differences also exist when individuals consider welfare groups viewed as less deserving of public support. Furthermore, because increased expenditure on disability benefits could come at the cost of recipients of other welfare benefits, the Dutch case of the disability pension system provides an opportunity to

test whether feelings of resource competition play a role in the emphasis on deservingness criteria.

2 Hypotheses

Because this is the first study conducted on the subject, we take a rather exploratory approach to formulating ideas about influencing factors. We assume that, as in many cases of opinions and preferences related to welfare, two types of factors play a role: the person's socio-structural position and the person's cultural or ideational orientation.¹

With these factors, we formulate more general hypotheses for all deservingness criteria under study and sub-hypotheses for individual criteria when relevant.

2.1 Socio-Structural Characteristics

The socio-structural characteristics that we examine are age, level of education, income, and employment situation. We formulate two contrasting hypotheses on the effects of these characteristics. Furthermore, we hypothesize about the effect of whether a person has been a welfare recipient.

Self-interest is a commonly used framework in welfare attitude research. In this framework, it is assumed that people form attitudes based on their own best interests (Kumlin 2004). In the context of deservingness criteria, self-interest reflects the extent to which people expect to win or lose by emphasizing or de-emphasizing various criteria. These expectations can go either way when it comes to socio-structural characteristics. On one hand, there is the *group risk perspective*, which states that a person in an unfavorable socio-structural position (on a pension, with a low income, unemployed, with a low level of education) will place less weight on *any* of the deservingness criteria than would a person in a more favorable position (*H1*). This expectation is based on considerations of self-interest; a person in an unfavorable structural position runs a greater risk of ever needing welfare support, and placing less weight on deservingness criteria would generally assure someone of easier access to welfare.

On the other hand, because welfare deservingness also involves competition with other welfare recipients for resources, self-interest may also imply that socio-structural factors increase the weight a person places on deservingness criteria. From the perspective of *resource competition* we predict that a person in a less favorable socio-structural position will place *more* emphasis on the deservingness criteria, not less (*H2*). That is, people in the lower strata of society may sense competition with one another for scarce and limited welfare support funds. In the case of the Netherlands, old age pensioners and unemployed people are particularly likely to sense welfare competition with disability pensioners. Although the country's disability pensions, national old age pensions and unemployment benefits serve separate risk categories, all three are financed mainly through payroll taxes. Because government policymakers, for economic reasons, strive to keep the payroll tax within limits, increased expenditure on one type of welfare beneficiary would likely reduce the amount available for the other categories.

¹ See for theoretical and empirical accounts of this, respectively, Elster (1990), Kangas (1997), Lindenberg (1990), Mansbridge (1990), Taylor-Gooby (1998), Therborn (1991), and Blekesaune and Quadagno (2003), Goul Andersen et al. (1999), Groskind (1994), Hasenfeld and Rafferty (1989), Pettersen (1995), and Van Oorschot (2006).

Golding and Middleton (1982) offer a similar argument about resource competition to account for why British people in unfavorable positions often have the same—and, at times, even stronger—perceptions of benefit abuse than people in better positions. Maassen and De Goede (1989), interpreting Dutch public opinion about the unemployed, suggest a theory of perceived competition: people at the greatest risk of reliance on public support are those who fear most strongly that social security benefits will decrease if too many people claim benefits.

In light of this competition for scarce resources, we would expect those in unfavorable socio-structural positions to especially emphasize the criteria that they themselves meet—a perspective that would give them a competitive advantage. We would expect the elderly to emphasize the control criterion, which they meet because no one is to blame for growing old, and the reciprocity criterion, which they meet because they have contributed to society for many years (*H2a*). We would expect the unemployed to emphasize the control criterion, assuming that in general, unemployed workers do not feel they are to blame for their situation and do not want to compete for resources with those who are to blame (*H2b*). Finally, low-income individuals know what it is like to live within limited means and would not want to lose out to people with other means of supporting themselves; for these reasons, we would expect them to put more emphasis on the need criterion (*H2c*).

We would also expect personal experience as a welfare recipient to make people more lenient in their views of who should receive welfare benefits (*H3*). The reason for this is self-interest. A history of welfare claims increases one's likelihood of future claims, and awareness of this elevated risk may make individuals more fearful. Considering their own past as a welfare recipient and possibly reduced contribution to society, people with experience receiving welfare benefits have a personal interest in placing less emphasis on the reciprocity criterion than would people who have never received welfare benefits (*H3a*). Another reason for leniency might be that former welfare recipients have a greater understanding of what it means to live on limited funds and the complexity of factors that caused the situation. We therefore would expect these individuals to place less emphasis on the need (*H3b*) and control (*H3c*) criteria as well.

2.2 Cultural Characteristics

To explore which cultural characteristics influence the weight that people give to deservingness criteria, we borrow insights from welfare opinion research. Likely candidates as explanatory variables are cultural factors that play roles in shaping people's attitudes toward welfare (for reviews, see e.g., Ploug 1996; Ullrich 2000) and that can be measured from our data. These factors are political stance, work ethic, and religious denomination, which is an important consideration in the context of Dutch society. More than the socio-structural factors mentioned above, these cultural factors shape people's ideas and preferences toward welfare redistribution.

In many welfare attitude studies, people's political stance has an influence. People on the left politically are generally more pro-welfare than people with views that place them on the right (see for example, Svallfors 2007). Generally, the person on the political left is more egalitarian, empathizing with the less fortunate in society and voicing support for redistributive interventions, while the person on the political right is more meritocratic and economically liberal, believing in a free market with little governmental interference. These ideological perspectives lead people on the left to believe in a more universal approach toward the welfare state and people on the right to believe in a more selective approach (Esping-Andersen 1990). For this reason, we hypothesize that people on the

political right will emphasize deservingness criteria more strongly when compared with people on the political left (*H4*). The stronger focus on personal responsibility by individuals on the right is associated with a stronger emphasis on the control criterion (*H4a*), while the wish for limited government interference is associated with only wanting to support the truly needy who do not have other means to support themselves (*H4b*). Finally, a focus on meritocracy by individuals on the political right makes them more likely to judge a person by their achievements and to emphasize reciprocity, i.e., whether a person has ‘earned’ welfare support through previous achievements (*H4c*).

We assume that there is a positive relationship between work ethic and emphasis on deservingness criteria (*H5*). People with strong work ethics generally believe that hard work is a moral duty and a virtue that strengthens one’s character. Such individuals would seem unlikely to consider poor people deserving of welfare support, unless it could be shown that they worked hard and yet failed to manage without welfare support, despite their best efforts. In other words, people with strong work ethics emphasize the control criterion (*H5a*). We also assume that generally, the higher one’s work ethic, the more one expects people to work their own way out of neediness and the less likely one is to regard situations as manifesting ‘real need’ (*H5b*). Furthermore, we assume that those who value work so highly also live up to their own moral standards, working hard themselves, and that they therefore have a stronger meritocratic and reciprocal perspective on benefit entitlements. This perspective would manifest itself in a stronger emphasis on the reciprocity criterion (*H5c*).

Finally, we will explore whether people emphasize the deservingness criteria to differing degrees depending on their religious denomination. Religious denomination (mainly Catholic versus Protestant) may be an important factor in the Dutch context because the Netherlands was a religiously sharply divided country (Lijphart 1968; Roebroek and Hertogh 1998) well into the formative period of the Dutch welfare state after World War II and remains religiously heterogeneous today. To derive hypotheses on the influence of religious denomination, we rely on distinct welfare studies. We find clues in Kahl’s (2005) study of how a country’s religious heritage influences the way it organizes its social assistance system, Stjerno’s (2005) account of solidarity perspectives in European Christian-democracy, and Geremek’s (1994) historical study of poverty. These studies all find that in Catholicism, the poor are regarded as ‘children of God’; they have a positive moral value because they present a way for the better-off in society to atone for their sins, through alms giving. In the Catholic tradition, all poor people are more or less seen as living in conditions that were chosen by Jesus Christ himself. Consequently, Catholicism places a stronger emphasis on helping all needy people, regardless of category. In contrast, the Protestant tradition differentiates more strongly between the following: a) the infirm and truly needy, and b) the able-bodied without work. The latter are met with distrust and moral disapproval. We therefore expect Catholics to emphasize the need criterion to a lesser extent than would people from Protestant denominations or people who are non-religious (*H6a*).

The Protestant belief in the divine predestination of individual fate, a strong element of the Protestant tradition (Kahl 2005), may have particular significance for the current study. Protestants, more than Catholics, may believe that what happens in life is predetermined by God and is thus beyond the control of the individual. We would expect, then, for Protestants to emphasize the control criterion less than would Catholics or people who are not religious (*H6b*). As for the reciprocity criterion, we do not have any specific hypothesis about the impact of religious denomination. We simply test if the extent that people emphasize this criterion differs among Catholics, Protestants, and people who are not religious.

3 Data and Methods

We analyzed data from the Welfare, Opinions Survey in the Netherlands, 2006 [*Arbeid, Bedrijf en Sociale Zekerheid in Nederland 2006*]. The data were collected during the last 7 weeks of 2006 from 2,682 members of a nationally representative panel run by CentERdata, a research institute at Tilburg University. The dataset consists of 1,972 respondents age 16–91 who completed all modules of the questionnaire. The respondents filled out the computer-based questionnaires online. For the descriptive statistics, we used a weighting factor to correct for a slight overrepresentation of older people,² higher incomes and higher levels of education. The final sample consists of 1,760 respondents and excludes respondents with missing values on relevant characteristics.³

3.1 Dependent Variables: Deservingness Criteria

Our data allow us to operationalize people's emphasis on three deservingness criteria: control, need and reciprocity. Items by which to measure the criteria of identity and attitude are not available in the data. The items that we draw upon all refer to the deservingness of disabled people.⁴ The data do not contain sufficient items referring to other groups of needy people such as old-age pensioners or unemployed people.

3.1.1 Control Criterion

Respondents were asked to rate, on a scale of 1–10, how strongly they feel that society should offer welfare support to two groups of people, given that welfare funds are limited. The two groups included the following: people who are disabled due to an illness or injury at work (no control over or responsibility for their situation), and people who are disabled due to their own behavior (control over or responsibility for their situation). The control criterion is measured as the difference between the scores on the two items (disabled due to work minus disabled due to own behavior). The value ranges from 0 to 9. The larger the difference, the stronger people emphasize the control criterion, i.e., the more poor people's responsibility for their neediness is emphasized when determining their deservingness.

3.1.2 Need Criterion

Respondents were asked whether they felt disability benefits should be lower (0 = 'no', 1 = 'yes', 2 = 'don't know') for those people who have (1) supplementary income versus no supplementary income, (2) a small household versus a large household, (3) a partner with income versus a partner without income, (4) working children at home versus no working children at home, (5) a large amount of savings versus little or no savings, and (6)

² The overrepresentation of older people in a computer-based survey may seem surprising. It should be mentioned that the Netherlands is among the highest ranked countries for Internet coverage in the world (Statistics Netherlands 2009a). The overrepresentation of older people may therefore have to do with cooperation factors (time availability) and the odds of contacting the respondent.

³ Extensive, unreported analyses of missing values show that these are not concentrated on any particular variable. Omission of missing cases therefore does not introduce much bias.

⁴ The respondents answering these questions thus are responding to the Dutch disability benefit system. This arrangement is meant for employees who, due to mental or physical impairment, suffer a loss in earnings capacity compared to someone with similar education and experience. The system does not distinguish between impairments suffered at the job and those suffered in private time.

rich parents versus no rich parents. These items indicate whether disability beneficiaries have means of existence in their households beyond their disability benefits and thus indicate degrees of neediness. The need criterion is measured as the mean score of answers to items 1–6, which results in a linear variable ranging from 0 to 1. The ‘don’t know’ answers (5.6% in total) were coded as missing values. The resulting scale is the average over items for which the responses were available and has a Cronbach α of 0.68. A higher score means that the respondent prefers that the disability pension benefit be lower for people who have additional means; that is, he or she more strongly emphasizes the need criterion.

3.1.3 Reciprocity Criterion

Respondents were asked whether they felt disability benefits should be higher (0 = ‘no’, 1 = ‘yes’, 2 = ‘don’t know’) for people who (1) are older, (2) have paid a larger contribution to the disability benefit system, and (3) who have worked longer before getting the benefit. In each question, the situation was compared to a reference group (people who are younger, people who have paid a lower contribution, and people who have worked fewer years, respectively). The reciprocity criterion is measured as the mean score of answers to items 1–3, resulting in a linear variable ranging from 0 to 1. The ‘don’t know’ answers (7% in total) were coded as missing values. The resulting scale (the average over items with available responses) has a Cronbach α of 0.68. A higher score means that the respondent prefers that people who have contributed more to society should receive higher benefits; that is, he or she stresses the reciprocity criterion more.

3.2 Independent Variables

The socio-structural variable *educational level* is measured using two dummy variables: one for low education (primary and lower secondary) and one for middle education (higher secondary). The highest educational level attained (tertiary education) is the reference category. Although there were more educational levels represented in the sample, we identified these three because they are at stake in our self-interest and resource competition theory. This rationale also applies to coding of *income*. There are four categories of the net monthly income of the household, which we modeled with three dummy variables: low income, low middle income, and high middle income. High income is the reference category. For *work-status*, people were asked about their most important daily task. We distinguish three categories: employed (for pay), unemployed, and persons not belonging to the work force (e.g., students, pensioners and homemakers). We model this with two dummy variables (employed, out of labor force). We choose unemployed as the reference group because this group (may) receive(s) welfare benefits and may consequently differ in its relative emphasis on deservingness criteria. To evaluate *personal experience* receiving disability benefits, respondents were asked to indicate whether they are currently receiving a disability benefit or have received one in the past. We also looked at more indirect personal experiences with receiving public support by including the present *support experience of household members*.

To measure the cultural characteristic *political stance*, respondents were asked to place themselves on a scale from 1 to 11, with 1 meaning highly left-wing and 11 meaning highly right-wing. *Work ethic* is measured by a means scale (Cronbach $\alpha = 0.70$) constructed from three items: (1) ‘Work is a duty towards society’, (2) ‘You can do as you please after having done your duties’, (3) ‘Work has to come first always, even if it means

less free time'. Each of the three items has five response categories ranging from 1 ('totally disagree') to 5 ('totally agree'). A higher scale value represents a higher work ethic. *Religious denomination* is captured through a single question and consists of four categories: no religion, Protestant, Catholic, and other (including Humanistic, Islamic and other). Catholic is the reference category because we expect this group to be most lenient with deservingness criteria. The other three groups are included with dummy variables.

Table 1 provides descriptive statistics. Correlations between the independent variables are low (below 0.30). Correlations between our dependent variables do not exceed 0.20, which indicates—interestingly—that they measure different things and therefore cannot be aggregated into one summary measure of welfare deservingness.

4 Results

We apply OLS regression to test effects of structural and cultural characteristics on our three dependent variables (control, need and reciprocity). The results of our analyses of the three dependent variables are shown in Table 2. We estimate two models for each dependent variable: the first (the 'a'-models) estimates the effects of socio-structural background characteristics, and the second (the 'b'-models) adds effects of cultural background characteristics. We do this to see whether the effects of structural characteristics can be interpreted as cultural effects. To compare effect sizes of independent variables across the three distinct dependent variables, we standardized the dependent variables.

The regressions in Table 2 show three more general outcomes. First, there are substantive differences in the emphasis on deservingness criteria across groups, as indicated by the significant effects of some socio-structural and cultural characteristics. For example, older people place greater weight on the control and reciprocity criterion, people with less education place greater weight on the control criterion, and people on the political right give greater weight to the control and reciprocity criteria. In other words, different people emphasize criteria differently. Second, Table 2 shows considerable variation in effects depending on the deservingness criterion studied. It seems that each criterion has its own set of influencing factors. For instance, work status matters for determining the emphasis one places on the control criterion, but not for determining the emphasis one places on the need criterion and the reciprocity criterion. Third, socio-structural and cultural characteristics both matter for deservingness criteria. The structural and the cultural factors add significantly to the explained variance for all three deservingness criteria (as judged by the change in the *F* statistics between the 'a'- and 'b'- models), and the introduction of the cultural factors in the 'b'-models on the whole does not change the effects of the socio-structural factors. Below, we will discuss how these factors relate to each criterion.

4.1 Control

Table 2 shows that people who are older, less educated, and unemployed emphasize the control criterion more than their reference groups do. These people make a greater distinction between people whose welfare situation is 'beyond their control' and people whose situation is due to own behavior, with the first group considered more deserving of welfare. From the perspective of group risk, this is surprising. People who are older, less educated and unemployed may find themselves dependent on welfare more often than their counterparts and consequently may have an incentive to be more lenient in their views of

Table 1 Descriptive statistics of dependent and independent variables ($N = 1760$)

	Range	Mean	SD
Control criterion (not standardized)	0–9	3.54	2.16
Need criterion (not standardized)	0–1	0.37	0.27
Reciprocity criterion (not standardized)	0–1	0.45	0.39
Woman	0–1	0.48	
Age (years)			
<31	0–1	0.19	
31–45	0–1	0.30	
46–64	0–1	0.33	
>64	0–1	0.19	
Educational level			
Low	0–1	0.33	
Middle	0–1	0.43	
High	0–1	0.24	
Work status			
Employed	0–1	0.52	
Unemployed	0–1	0.07	
Other	0–1	0.41	
Income level			
Low	0–1	0.15	
Low middle	0–1	0.26	
High middle	0–1	0.26	
High	0–1	0.33	
Personal experience disability benefit	0–1	0.14	
Housemates experience disability benefit	0–1	0.06	
Political stance (left–right)	1–11	5.69	2.03
Work ethic	1–5	3.65	0.84
Religious denomination (ref. Catholic)			
None	0–1	0.43	
Catholic	0–1	0.28	
Protestant	0–1	0.21	
Other	0–1	0.8	

Source Welfare opinions survey in the Netherlands 2006 (own calculations)

welfare participation. The findings give support to the competing theoretical view of resource competition. Model 2b of Table 2 shows that the emphasis on the control criterion among older, less educated, and unemployed people is only to a small extent due to cultural factors; the corresponding effect parameters decrease in size only slightly when these cultural factors are added.

The results support our hypothesis regarding people with personal experiences receiving welfare benefits: those who have received benefits emphasize the control criterion less than those who have not. They may believe, more so than others, that becoming disabled is a function of uncontrollable and/or complex circumstances and that, therefore, the control criterion should be emphasized less. We furthermore see, as expected, that people with a higher work ethic more strongly emphasize the control criterion, as do people on the

Table 2 OLS regression analyses of the relative emphasis on deservingness criteria (unstandardized regression coefficients, $N = 1760$)

	Control		Need		Reciprocity	
	Model 1a	Model 1b	Model 2a	Model 2b	Model 3a	Model 3b
Intercept	-0.044	-0.598***	-0.124	-0.592***	-0.194	-0.936***
Woman	0.026	0.061	0.130**	0.150***	0.066	0.108**
Age (ref <31 years)						
31-45	-0.023	-0.034	0.009	0.012	-0.021	-0.015
46-64	0.109	0.105	-0.132**	-0.139*	-0.027	0.027
>64	0.462***	0.398***	0.063	0.021	0.298***	0.217**
Educational level (ref = high)						
Low	0.316***	0.272***	0.049	0.032	0.059	0.012
Middle	0.055	0.030	-0.060	-0.067	0.046	0.020
Work status (ref = unemployed)						
Employed	-0.197*	-0.273***	0.061	0.030	0.171	0.098
Other	-0.259**	-0.336***	-0.007	-0.046	-0.030	-0.104
Income level (ref = high)						
Low	-0.005	0.030	0.199**	0.220***	-0.012	0.010
Low middle	0.050	0.083	0.326***	0.335***	0.088	0.116*
High middle	0.000	0.009	0.011	0.007	-0.016	-0.004
Personal experience disability benefit	-0.166**	-0.155**	-0.201***	-0.191***	-0.161**	-0.158**
Housemates experience disability benefit	0.130	0.120	-0.324***	-0.329***	-0.097	-0.093
Political stance (left-right)		0.055***		0.009		0.060***
Work ethic		0.090***		0.098***		0.131***
Religious denomination (ref. Catholic)						
No religion		0.058		0.162***		0.046
Protestant		-0.047		0.147**		-0.084
Other		-0.298***		-0.034		-0.078
R^2	0.055	0.081	0.042	0.054	0.019	0.048
F change	7.838***	9.674***	5.892***	4.500***	2.599***	10.585***

Source Welfare opinions survey in the Netherlands 2006 (own calculations)

*** $P < .01$; ** $P < .05$; * $P < .10$; ref = reference group

political right. We also find that Protestants tend to emphasize the control criterion less strongly than Catholics do, but the difference is not statistically significant. The finding that people with the religious denomination 'other' emphasize the control criterion less strongly is difficult to interpret because of the generic character of this category, which includes people who are Humanistic, Islamic, or other. However, the finding might make sense if people from these—in the Dutch context—smaller religious communities experience their religions more intensely and, as a result, have a less individualistic and victim-blaming perspective on life. Other characteristics such as gender, income, and housemates' experience with disability benefits do not influence the control criterion.

4.2 Need

Personal experience receiving disability benefits makes people not only more lenient with respect to the control criterion, but also with respect to the need criterion, as evidenced by the significant negative effect shown in Table 2 (model 2a and 2b). That is, people who have received disability benefits make less of a distinction between needy and less needy groups in the granting of disability benefits. Table 2 shows, in addition, that having housemates who have received disability benefits also reduces the respondent's emphasis on the need criterion.

In contrast to the findings for the control criterion, regression results for the need criterion do not display significant effects of education, work status, or political stance, but they do show a significant effect of income. The results show that people with lower incomes emphasize the need criterion more strongly than do people with higher incomes. Given that we have controlled for past and present disability status, this negative income effect could be interpreted as resource competition. That is, people with lower incomes might be concerned about making access to welfare benefits too easy, given that the Dutch disability benefit is wage-based and paid to people with middle to high incomes, as well. The results for the need criterion also differ from those for the control criterion in that one age group, respondents age 46–64, is significantly more lenient in its emphasis on the need criterion. This may be interpreted as self-interest: this age group has the highest share in disability pensions (Statistics Netherlands 2009b). Having a strong work ethic and being Protestant (or having no religion) also have positive effects on one's emphasis on the need criterion. These effects are as expected from theory.

4.3 Reciprocity

The analyses of the reciprocity criterion in Table 2 show yet another pattern of determinants. As with the control criterion and the need criterion, people who have received a disability benefit emphasize the reciprocity criterion less than do people who have not received benefits. This finding does not hold true for housemates' experience with disability benefits. The positive effect of age—respondents 65 and older place more emphasis on the reciprocity criterion—could be interpreted as a manifestation of resource competition, as was the case with the control criterion. As a group, older respondents may feel that they have made their contribution to society and that the contributions of others should now be carefully considered as well. Moreover, older people tend to have a higher work ethic (Cherrington 1980; Furnham 1990), which could also explain their elevated emphasis on deservingness criteria. This last interpretation is tested with the introduction of the cultural factors in model 3b. We find that people with a stronger work ethic stress the reciprocity principle more strongly than others. The effect of work ethic also indeed mediates part of the mentioned effect of age, both for the reciprocity criterion as well as for the control criterion. We find that the effect of old age decreases when cultural factors are included and that this decrease is due mostly to the inclusion of the work ethic variable (additional analyses not shown). The effect of the other cultural factor is also positive: people from the political right put more emphasis on the reciprocity criterion than others do.

We did not have expectations regarding the effect of religious denomination on the reciprocity criterion, and the effects do not appear to be statistically significant. It is worth noting that we find cultural factors have a larger effect than socio-structural factors in determining a person's emphasis on the reciprocity criterion, based on the beta coefficients

(coefficients not shown) and change in F statistics. Regression results for the control criterion and the need criterion showed the opposite pattern.

We offer one final remark about the results in Table 2 concerning the effect of gender. Although the effect of gender on the control criterion is insignificant, we find that women tend to place greater emphasis than men do on the need and reciprocity criteria for deservingness. We included gender as a control variable without prior expectations. The reason we would observe heightened welfare selectivity among women is not self-evident, but the observation might be explained by resource competition: women (and children who depend on them) are more often in economically precarious situations than men are (OECD 2008).

5 Conclusions and Discussion

Earlier research has clearly shown that people generally emphasize a variety of criteria when distinguishing between people who are deserving and undeserving of welfare support: control, need, reciprocity, identity and attitude. In this article, we addressed a new question in the field, asking whether people differ in the emphasis they place on individual deservingness criteria and whether such variations are associated with differences in personal characteristics. We analyzed people's emphasis on the deservingness criteria of control, need and reciprocity in forming opinions about the allocation of entitlements from the Dutch disability pension system. In addition, we investigated the influence of cultural factors and socio-structural characteristics—social-economic position and past experience as a welfare beneficiary—based on a 2006 national survey conducted in the Netherlands.

Our analyses have shown differences among groups of people in the emphasis they place on various criteria for deservingness. Some people's support for welfare is contingent on whether beneficiaries are people with no control over their situations or people disabled due to their own behavior; others make no such distinction. Some people would prefer a lower disability pension benefit for people who have additional means; others do not. Some people believe that people who have contributed more to society should receive higher benefits; for others, reciprocity makes no difference. Discovering the existence of such individual differences in emphasis on deservingness criteria adds to our knowledge of welfare deservingness. In addition, our results may offer an explanation for the inconsistency in findings from welfare studies concerning the relative importance of individual deservingness criteria. It is possible that earlier studies rendered divergent results because they studied different groups of people.

Our analysis has shown furthermore that individual differences in emphasis on deservingness criteria are connected to socio-structural and cultural factors, indicating that opinions about deservingness are reflections both of people's socio-structural positions and of their ideas. Yet the effects of socio-structural and cultural factors are not consistent across all deservingness criteria. The emphasis that a person places on the control criterion is influenced by (among other factors) one's education, work status, and political stance, yet these factors do not appear to affect the emphasis that one places, for example, on the need criterion. Apparently, how people come to emphasize one criterion can be quite different from how they come to emphasize another criterion. The diversity of effects also implies that it is overly simplistic—for the group of disability claimants studied—to distinguish between selectivity (those who emphasize all deservingness criteria more strongly than other people) and universalists (those who place less emphasis on all criteria than others do).

Although the determinants of people's views differed for each criterion of deservingness, some general findings hold true across all criteria studied. First, it appears that groups with a higher chance of being in need of welfare support generally (the elderly, people with less education, the unemployed, people with lower incomes, women) tend to place greater weight on deservingness criteria. We interpreted this as a manifestation of resource competition, whereby stronger distributive selectivity is a strategy to avoid resource scarcity in times when one would need support oneself. However, this is not always the case. For example, the second-oldest group of respondents was less concerned with the need criterion than other groups. This situation may indicate self-interest in the sense that members of this group are aware they are at greater risk of becoming dependent on disability benefits, as opposed to self-interest in the sense of resource competition. Second, it appears that people who have received welfare benefits placed a lower emphasis on all three deservingness criteria. Our interpretation was that this tendency to support broader welfare participation stems from self-interest and from a higher level of empathy for welfare beneficiaries. Third, we find that cultural factors—in addition socio-structural positions that determine one's self interest—influence a person's perspective on deservingness. Being from the political right has a positive effect on two out of three criteria, while having a strong work ethic has a positive effect on all three criteria for welfare deservingness. In the Dutch context, religious denomination is also important. Protestants and non-religious individuals appear to place greater emphasis on the need criterion than Catholics. The weaker emphasis on need by Catholics may be explained by the fact that traditional Catholic social thinking places a stronger emphasis on helping all categories of people in need. The Protestant tradition, by contrast, traditionally differentiates more strongly between truly needy and the infirm on one hand, and the able bodied who are out of work on the other. People from (in a Dutch context) smaller, more orthodox religious denominations, meanwhile, place less emphasis on the control criterion.

Because this study is the first to analyze factors that influence perceptions of deservingness criteria among the general public, future research will need to determine how far our findings can be generalized. In our analysis, we did not measure variations in attitudes across categories of welfare benefits. We focused instead on how people emphasize various deservingness criteria when forming opinions about recipients of disability benefits. This group of beneficiaries is generally considered to be highly deserving of public support. Because we find significant variations in how people perceive the granting of benefits to this 'high-deserving' group, it is likely that there are differences in how the deservingness criteria influence people's opinions about groups that are considered less deserving.

The determining factors may be more consistent when applied to less-deserving groups than when applied to the group we studied, implying a stronger divide between people with selective and universalistic approaches to the rationing of welfare. Analyses conducted on other groups of welfare recipients may reveal other determinants to be important as well. Additionally, data restrictions limited us to analyzing three of the five common criteria for welfare deservingness. The identity and attitude criteria, which we did not examine, might not be the most important determinant of perceptions about recipients of disability benefits, but these criteria could be important influences on people's opinions of other groups of welfare recipients. For instance, the 'identity' criteria could matter more in perceptions about the welfare deservingness of immigrants because the cultural legitimization for collective welfare arrangements is based mainly on national group identity (Offe 1988).

Future research should also extend our analysis of the determinants of deservingness criteria to other times and places. For instance, analyses for countries with less comprehensive welfare systems or other benefits structures (in terms of financing, entitlement

levels, etc.) might reveal even sharper resource competition among social groups. Such a finding would imply that people's institutional settings also shape their emphasis on deservingness criteria and its determinants.

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