Gabriela Szydlowski

The Good, the Bad and the Bureaucrat:

Investigating positive and negative public sector worker stereotypes

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The Good, the Bad en de Bureaucraat

Het onderzoeken van de positieve en negatieve stereotypen van werknemers in de publieke sector

(met een samenvatting in het Nederlands)

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Table of contents

Chapter 1

Introduction

"The lazy, bloated civil service is dragging Britain down – and we are all paying for it"

Telegraph (UK), 2022

There are many instances of negative public sector worker stereotypes in the media across the globe. This made looking for an illustrative case to start this thesis hard because there were too many to choose from. Let me illustrate.

The idea of the lazy and inefficient public sector worker is painted over newspaper headlines worldwide. In 2013, the Financial Post in Canada published an article titled 'Civil servants are not born lazy – they learn it at work'', insinuating that public sector workers learn to be lazy at work. In 2018, The Wall Street Journal (U.S.) published an article called ''My Lazy Summer as a Public Employee,'' where the author recounted how public employees loaf on the clock, do minimal daily work requirements and then waste most of their work time. In 2017, The Economic Times India ran the headline "It is time to stop shielding the inefficient public sector", arguing that public sector workers were inefficient. In 2022, the Sunday Observer (Sri Lanka) published an article titled ''Excess burden of public sector inefficiency'', which critiqued public sector workers for being unproductive, untrained, and with a negative attitude. In 2006, the Guardian (U.K.) published an article entitled ''Public sector inefficiency claimed to cost £58.4bn'', once again insinuating that public sector workers underperform.

And I am just getting started.

Similarly, we can also observe the stereotype of the mediocre, poorly performing public sector worker. In 2022, The Times (UK) published an article titled ''The Public sector is far too tolerant of mediocrity'', in which the author argued public sector workers' performance is subpar and inefficient. In 2018, Le monde en Espagnole (Spain) published an article titled ''Bureaucrats: They are the enemy'' implying that there are too many civil servants, who cost a lot and the costs are not proportionate to merit and performance.

Furthermore, we also find the stereotype of the undeservingly overpaid public sector worker. In 2010, the Atlantic newspaper (U.S.) ran a headline that read "Overpaid Public Employees: 'The Democratic Party's Epic Failure' ", insinuating that public sector workers were inefficient and overpaid. In 2017, The Times (UK)

published an article titled ''Philip Hammond says public sector is overpaid'', once again implying that public sector workers are overpaid for the amount of work they do. In 2010, The Daily Mail (UK) ran the headline ''Public sector staff really do work less for more pay'', arguing that public sector workers do not work a lot and still have high pay and benefits. In 2011, The Daily Mail published an article titled ''The six million public sector workers weighing down our economy'', in which public sector workers are criticized for being overstaffed and overpaid.

These news articles demonstrate that negative stereotypes of public sector workers exist loud and clear across cultures. The idea of the 'public employee' brings about a range of negative stereotypes. Examining the headlines above, an overall theme emerges: the lazy and inefficient public sector worker, undeserving of their pay. Yet, does this accurately reflect how *citizens* think of their public employees? While the accuracy of these stereotypes from the public's perspective remains uncertain based on current research, delving into the existing literature can provide valuable insights. It is important to know what stereotypes are out there since these can have consequences. The first step is to evaluate what stereotypes are out there. Then, I aim to understand what their consequences are and what factors contribute to them. This way, we can understand how to minimize the impact of negative stereotypes and cultivate positive stereotypes. Therefore, let's first have a look at what the literature has to say about what public sector worker stereotypes are.

1.1 Negative public sector worker stereotypes

Thinking of public sector workers evokes stereotypes in citizens (Bertram et al., 2022; de Boer, 2020; Doring & Willems, 2021; Willems, 2020). Stereotypes are beliefs about the characteristics, attributes, and behaviors of members of specific groups (Stallybrass, 1977). Thus, in our case, it would be public sector workers' characteristics, attributes, and behaviors. In this dissertation, public sector workers as a general category refers to all employees of all governmental organizations.

Public administration scholars have studied public sector worker stereotypes for several decades, although more implicitly (i.e., without directly using the word stereotype). For instance, classic public administration texts argue that citizens perceive public sector workers as lazy, incompetent, insensitive to needs, inefficient, power-hungry, and driven by job security (Baldwin, 1990; Goodsell, 2004; Hubbell, 1991; Wilson, 1989).

Negative public sector worker stereotyping goes even further back. As far back as in 1854 the Report on the Organization of the Permanent Civil Service to the British House of Commons illustrates the reality of public sector worker stereotyping. Among many excerpts demonstrating this reality is ''admission into the civil Service is indeed eagerly sought after, but it is for the unambitious, and the indolent or incapable, that it is chiefly desired'' (Northcote & Trevelyan, 1854, p.4).

In recent years, there has been a surge in studies about public sector worker stereotypes explicitly (de Boer, 2020; Doring & Willems, 2021; Willems, 2020). Many of these old negative stereotypes are pervasive still today such as incompetent, lazy, corrupt, boring, inflexible, and greedy (de Boer, 2020; Willems, 2020). Thus, negative stereotypes that formed several decades ago persist in an ever-changing society, while the symbol of the public sector worker is malleable (Hubbell, 1991).

Taking a closer look at negative public sector worker stereotyping, it appears that these stereotypes exist 'outside' of only human cognition, but also as societal norms (Augoustinos & Walker 1998). From a cognitive psychology perspective, stereotypes are mental schemas that people use to infer and interpret information about other people (Hilton & Von Hippel, 1996). Yet, it seems that stereotypes go beyond just mental schemas, and also manifest as a societal phenomenon (Van de Walle, 2004). One pervasive issue is that public sector worker stereotyping is not as 'taboo' or controversial as stereotyping other social groups. Below, I explain why it seems like a pervasive issue.

For instance, public sector workers' stereotypes are often openly negatively discussed and caricaturized (Van de Walle, 2004), as opposed to, for instance, stereotypes about gender, ethnicity, or sexuality. To illustrate, in a qualitative study of 220 frontline public servants in Canada in the 1990s, Carroll & Siegel (1999) remark that ''Not only it is acceptable to make jokes about public servants but people are allowed to discuss public servants in such sweeping terms and with such invective that if the same type of language were applied to another societal group, the speaker would be accused of fomenting hatred'' (p.181).

Furthermore, we turn to popular media. The "lazy bureaucrat" has become a common characterization in TV entertainment (Lichter, Lichter, & Amundson, 2000). A study review of top-10 box office-grossing movies from 2000 to 2009 revealed that 91 percent of movies featured at least one government worker character, with depictions tending on the negative side (Pautz & Warnement, 2013). For instance, in the movie Zootopia, the character Flash, a sloth working at

the Department of Mammal Vehicles (DMV), is a prominent example of negative stereotyping of public sector workers in popular culture. Flash is portrayed as exceptionally slow and inefficient, embodying the stereotype of government employees as lethargic and unproductive. This portrayal exemplifies the common negative stereotype that public sector workers, like Flash, are lazy and inefficient, and that government institutions are slow and bureaucratic. All in all, evidence points to the negative stereotyping of public sector workers as a social norm, as it is much more accepted to make fun openly of public sector workers compared to other social groups.

1.2 Consequences of negative public sector worker stereotyping

The persistence of negative public sector worker stereotypes can have severe consequences on two fronts: they can affect the public workforce generally in terms of quality and recruitment and they can affect the workers themselves. Direct effects can occur on the workers themselves, in terms of motivation and performance, and in terms of career development.

Firstly, negative stereotypes of public sector workers can affect the quality of its workforce in general. Stereotypes can bring about recruitment problems, with highly skilled workers being less attracted to the public sector. For instance, graduates from elite public policy schools increasingly chose consultancy and banking jobs instead of governmental positions (Piereson & Schaefer Riley, 2013). Anecdotal evidence from research also supports this, quoting a senior public manager noting ''What you get is second- and this- and fourth choice political appointees who are incompetent or totally believe everything they heard in the [political] campaign'' (Garrett et al., 2006, p.233). This could, in turn, create a feedback loop. Negative stereotypes can dissuade qualified candidates from joining the public sector, which can further fuel negative stereotypes. All in all, negative stereotypes can affect the government itself and its quality through retention and recruitment problems of highly skilled workers (Baldwin, 1990).

Secondly, negative stereotypes can have negative consequences for the workers themselves. Negative stereotypes that target one's profession can decrease work confidence and morale (Chen & Bozeman, 2014). Negative job stereotyping is also associated with performance anxiety, decreased motivation for successful task performance, work disengagement, lower perceived task significance, and negative approaches toward clients (Schmader & Hall, 2014;

Wright & Pandey, 2008). This can ultimately affect workers' performance, which in turn also affects the quality of governmental performance.

Lastly, negative stereotypes can harm one's career development. Findings demonstrate that negative public sector stereotypes decrease public sector workers' opportunities to transition from the public to the private sector (London Chamber of Commerce, 2010). The biases and misconceptions surrounding public sector employees create barriers, hindering their ability to pursue career advancements in alternative sectors. Consequently, individuals who are victims of such stereotypes can find themselves constrained within the confines of the public sector, limiting their professional growth and diversification of experiences. This restriction not only affects their career aspirations but also hampers their ability to explore diverse avenues, stifling innovation and potentially limiting the overall talent pool accessible to different sectors of the economy. Thus, the far-reaching implications of negative public sector stereotypes extend beyond mere perceptions, impacting the career trajectories and opportunities available to those affected.

Contrary to the prevailing notion that public sector worker stereotypes are solely negative, one might consider the possibility that they could encompass both positive and negative perceptions. Is there room for the good, the bad, and the bureaucrat? Could bureaucrats potentially be subject to both favorable and unfavorable stereotypes? This spectrum might include not only the challenges and criticisms of public sector workers but also the recognition of their positive traits. Therefore, it could be speculated that the narrative extends beyond the conventional understanding of the negative public sector worker stereotype, delving into the complexities of both favorable and unfavorable perceptions. This exploration of diverse perspectives is presented as a key aspect of the thesis, challenging the assumption that public sector workers are universally viewed in a negative light. In other words, it is a possibility that public sector worker stereotypes are not limited to negativity but may also encompass positive stereotypes. We will review the evidence below.

1.3 Positive public sector worker stereotypes

While the negative stereotypes of public sector workers is the dominant narrative, there is literature that showcases positive stereotypes of public sector workers. Several strains of literature, such as pro-social motivation and public service motivation literature showcase the positive image of a public sector worker. This

work, however, does not seem to be taken into account in the assumption by PA scholars that public sector workers' stereotypes are mostly negative.

Scholars in the field of pro-social motivation have consistently highlighted the distinct pro-social characteristics of public sector workers (see Vogel & Willems, 2020). They emphasize that individuals in public sector roles are motivated by a genuine desire to positively impact others' lives and contribute to society. This motivation for pro-social impact, as evidenced by various studies (Cowley & Smith, 2013; Gregg et al., 2011; Lewis & Frank, 2002), is a driving force behind people's choice to enter the public sector. Furthermore, the literature underscores that public service jobs offer a unique opportunity for individuals to make a difference in the lives of others and contribute to the betterment of society as a whole (Bolino & Grant, 2016; Vogel & Willems, 2020). These findings highlight the positive traits associated with public sector workers, portraying them as individuals motivated by altruism and a genuine commitment to social welfare.

Similarly, decades of research in public service motivation (PSM) unequivocally establish the presence of positive traits and stereotypes associated with public sector workers. The extensive body of research on PSM provides compelling evidence that public sector employees possess high levels of pro-social traits, including compassion, dedication to serving society and communities, and self-sacrifice (Perry & Wise, 1990; Grant, 2008). These intrinsic motivations are integral to individuals working in the public sector, reflecting their desire to contribute to the public interest and serve society at large. PSM differs from pro-social motivation based on their different types of altruism. PSM is directed at society at large, to serve the public interest, and is therefore based on societal altruism. In contrast, pro-social motivation is directed towards individuals and groups that one has direct contact with. It is based on interpersonal altruism (Schott et al., 2019).

Research consistently demonstrates that public employees are motivated by the opportunity to make significant contributions to society (Ritz et al., 2016; Vogel & Willems, 2020). Compared to the private sector, public sector workers are notably perceived to possess higher levels of pro-social traits such as helpfulness, empathy, and friendliness (Cowley & Smith, 2013; Houston, 2000; John & Johnson, 2008; Lewis & Frank, 2002). These positive characteristics are reflective of the favorable stereotypes that scholars explicitly identify when studying public sector worker stereotypes (de Boer, 2020; Willems, 2020). Pro-social behavior is characterized by actions intended to benefit others than oneself (Resh, Marvel, & Wen, 2018). Pro-social traits include being helpful, empathic, and having a

positive attitude, such as friendliness (Zhao et al., 2016). Thus, there are positive traits associated with public sector workers.

1.4 Limitations of literature

Research on public sector worker stereotyping faces several limitations that hinder a comprehensive understanding of the topic.

Firstly, most studies conducted in this area have been deductive (e.g., Frank & Lewis, 2004; Goodsell, 2004). Deductive methods can confirm common ideas about public sector workers, such as laziness, yet they might overlook stereotypes that scholars may not initially consider, such as public sector workers being caring. Moreover, a deductive approach risks reinforcing stereotypes that people are presumed to hold. Consequently, employing an inductive approach offers a crucial advantage in revealing stereotypes that scholars may not have anticipated, thereby opening up new avenues for theoretical and practical progress. Inductive methods allow researchers to explore beyond preconceived biased notions, enabling a more comprehensive examination of existing diverse and nuanced stereotypes (Thomas, 2006). Employing an inductive approach contributes to the advancement of stereotype research by broadening the scope of the investigation, challenging preconceptions, and generating fresh insights, as in so far, there have been no studies with an inductive approach to public sector worker stereotyping (with a notable exception of Willems, 2020).

Secondly, there are considerable gaps in the literature evaluating the positive side of public sector worker stereotypes. Research should explore how positive stereotypes about public sector workers can be leveraged to enhance their performance, improve citizen-state interactions, and contribute to more positive outcomes in the public sector. So far, little research examines whether positive stereotypes of public sector workers can influence behavior and decision-making for positive change. Studying the interplay between positive and negative stereotypes is crucial. Negative stereotypes may persist in certain contexts, even in the presence of positive ones. Understanding how positive stereotypes can counteract or mitigate the impact of negative stereotypes is crucial to promote a balanced and nuanced perspective.

In a similar light, the activation effects of professional stereotypes have received limited attention, both in social psychology and public administration research. So far, studies have been conducted within laboratory settings, raising questions about the extent to which these effects manifest in real-world situations

and their applicability to professional contexts (Dinhof, Neo, et al., 2023; Purdie-Vaughns et al., 2008; Roberson et al., 2003). The study of stereotype activation has a long-standing tradition in psychology (Allport, 1954; Fiske et al., 2002; Katz & Braly, 1933). According to stereotype activation theory, when relevant stereotypes are made cognitively accessible in a specific situation (i.e., stereotype activation), it influences the attitudes and behaviors of individuals who are the target of the stereotype (Marx, Brown, & Steele, 1999; Wheeler & Petty, 2001; Gupta et al., 2008).

However, when examining the effects of positive stereotypes specifically in the context of job stereotyping for public sector workers, the empirical evidence is limited. It is important to consider a key factor in stereotyping effects research: its focus on ascribed characteristics such as gender (Leach et al., 2017; Regner et al., 2019), age (Ashton & Esses, 1999; Levy et al., 2014), and race (Vomfell & Stewart, 2021). Thus, most research addresses characteristics that individuals do not necessarily choose, compared to job stereotyping where individuals have more agency in deciding their professional identity. This raises questions about whether stereotype activation effects hold when it comes to job-related stereotypes for public sector workers.

Furthermore, there is a lack of scholarship examining the behavioral effects of stereotypes. This gap not only hinders our comprehensive understanding of the dynamics at play but also limits our ability to develop effective strategies for addressing and mitigating the impact of stereotypes in public sector settings.

The significance of this limitation becomes evident when we consider the consequences stereotypes can have on performance at work and citizen-state interactions. While there is a notable exception in the work of Dinhof et al. (2023), the overall lack of experimental testing in this realm leaves a considerable void in our knowledge. The behavioral effects of stereotypes, particularly within the context of public sector workers, remain largely unexplored territory. Understanding how stereotypes influence the actions, decisions, and overall job performance of public sector workers is not merely an academic curiosity but holds practical implications for organizational effectiveness and citizen-state interactions.

By delving into this aspect, we gain insights into whether stereotypes trigger self-fulfilling prophecies, where workers internalize and conform to expectations, or if they prompt a defensive response, compelling workers to challenge and prove stereotypes wrong. This knowledge is pivotal for crafting targeted interventions and policies that address the root causes of behavioral

disparities linked to stereotypes. It is not just about identifying the existence of stereotypes but about comprehending their active role in shaping the daily experiences and responses of public sector workers.

Moreover, understanding the factors that contribute to these stereotypes is crucial for developing targeted interventions to mitigate their adverse effects. Identifying the factors that contribute to these stereotypes can help guide interventions to dismantle them and promote fairer perceptions of public sector workers. While we cannot explain the origin of negative public sector worker stereotypes, Goodsell (2004) emphasizes that the popular media and politicians focus on the negative performance of the public sector (see also Marvel, 2016; Roman, 2014). So far, very few studies examine factors contributing to job stereotyping in the public sector (Doring & Willems, 2021; Hansen, 2022).

Delving into the factors that sustain these stereotypes requires to look at different angles. One critical aspect to investigate is the role of societal and cultural influences. Prevailing social norms, media portrayals, and historical biases can shape and perpetuate stereotypes about public sector workers. Thus, examining the role of communication and information dissemination is vital. Misinformation or limited exposure to accurate and diverse portrayals of public sector workers can perpetuate negative stereotypes (Hubbel, 1991; Glasman & Albarracin, 2006). Studying the influence of media, social networks, and communication channels can inform strategies to promote more balanced and realistic representations.

Additionally, cognitive processes that underpin stereotype formation and maintenance must be studied. Psychological mechanisms such as categorization and confirmation bias can solidify stereotypes, making them resistant to change (Fiske, 2018; Friehs et al., 2022; Gray, 2010). Understanding these cognitive processes is essential to develop interventions that effectively challenge and dismantle job stereotyping. Finally, exploring individual-level factors is also crucial. Individuals' personal beliefs, experiences, and characteristics can influence the perpetuation of stereotypes (Bertram et al., 2022). Research should investigate how individual characteristics impact individuals' perceptions and attitudes, providing valuable insights for targeted interventions. Personal characteristics, such as geography and education, can provide context for experiences and interactions with public sector workers. By identifying the contributing factors and drivers of job stereotyping, we can lay the groundwork for targeted interventions that challenge these biases and foster positive citizen-state interactions.

In conclusion, by addressing these limitations and expanding the scope of research, we can gain a nuanced understanding of public sector worker

stereotyping and develop strategies to counteract its negative impact while harnessing the potential benefits of positive stereotypes. In the next section, we review the relevance of what it means to and why study stereotypes within the context of public administration.

1.5 Studying stereotypes from a public administration perspective

Stereotyping of public sector workers operates at micro, meso, and macro dimensions. At the micro level, individual behaviors and cognitive biases come into play. Micro-level research focuses on individual-level attributes such as characteristics and beliefs, cognitions, and interactions with others (Jilke et al., 2019). These attributes are the product of personal experiences, cultural influences, and cognitive processes within the minds of individual citizens. Micro-level analysis examines how these attributes shape specific interactions between citizens and public sector workers (Jilke et al., 2019). It delves into the prejudices that individuals hold, affecting how they perceive and interact with government employees on a personal level. It also involves examining how specific public employees experience and respond to stereotypes in their daily work or how citizens interactions with public sector workers are affected by stereotypes.

Understanding individual views is crucial as they serve as the foundation for stereotypical attitudes and behaviors (Augoustinos & Walker, 1998). An emphasis on the psychological processes involved underscores the importance of examining stereotypes at the micro-level. Micro-level research is essential for comprehending the nuanced psychological mechanisms associated with stereotyping (Jilke et al., 2019). This understanding extends to the impact of stereotypes on citizen-state interactions and their relevance to managerial practices (Jilke et al., 2019).

Given that behavioral public administration is often rooted in micro-level dynamics, exploring these processes helps uncover the micro-foundations that underpin meso and macro-level analyses (Jilke et al., 2019; Moynihan, 2019). Micro-foundations, encompassing observations and assumptions about individual-level behaviors, motivation, and cognition, contribute valuable insights into the how and why people behave (Jilke et al., 2019; Rockman, 2001; Stoker & Moseley, 2010).

In essence, delving into the micro-level aids in unraveling the intricate layers of meso and macro-level analyses, providing a comprehensive understanding of

the dynamics at play. This dissertation is largely embedded at the micro-level and within the framework of behavioral public administration. One example of micro-level research pertaining to stereotyping would the zooming into individual factors that influence stereotyping, such as trust, or investigating whether stereotypes affect specific citizen-state interactions, such as during public service delivery.

Shifting the focus to the meso level involves delving into the organizational context, where research concentrates on studying groups, including organizations (Jilke et al., 2019). The significance of meso-level research in public administration is underscored by the inherent group behavior embedded in many core governance activities (Jilke et al., 2019). That is, central questions driving scholarship at this level often revolve around organizational performance and the delivery of public services (Jilke et al., 2019). For instance, researchers might delve into the dynamics within the agency, studying how different teams or departments operate. An example could be investigating how the organizational structure influences the efficiency of public service delivery. Researchers at the meso level might analyze the collaboration and communication patterns among various units within the agency to understand how they impact overall performance in delivering public services. This approach allows for a nuanced examination of group behavior within the organizational setting, shedding light on factors that contribute to or hinder effective governance activities at this level.

When it comes to studying stereotyping at the meso-level, one could, for instance, explore the stereotypes associated with employees in a municipal government. Researchers might investigate how different departments within the municipality are stereotypically perceived, such as the finance department being seen as overly bureaucratic but highly reliable, or the customer service department being viewed as friendly but less efficient. By delving into the organizational context, meso-level research could uncover nuanced stereotypes that vary across different units or teams within the public sector. This approach allows for a more granular understanding of public sector worker stereotypes, moving beyond broad generalizations to capture the diversity of perceptions within specific organizational settings.

Within the meso level, the reputation of public sector organizations plays a pivotal role. This level of analysis delves into how stereotypes persist within specific organizations and how the organizational culture influences the behavior of both public sector workers and citizens. Examining organizational practices,

policies, and communication strategies becomes paramount in understanding the mechanisms that shape stereotypes within these institutions.

It's important to note that studying the meso level does not need to occur in isolation; insights from micro and macro levels can help to understand what happens at the level of an organization . Meso-level analysis serves as a crucial juncture where micro-level behavior are either reinforced or challenged. Scholars, particularly in the field of behavioral public administration, aim to forge connections between the micro and macro levels, enhancing our comprehension of the intricate and interconnected dynamics that influence organizational behavior and societal perceptions. In this dissertation, I do not study the meso-level directly. However, insights from the micro-level and macro-level shed light on potential meso-level practices.

At the macro level, societal stereotypes about public sector workers take center stage. Macro-level research focuses on the political-administrative environment, including national systems, regulation, history, and culture (Jilke et al., 2019). Stereotypes are part of the collective awareness of communities and societies. They often stem from historical, cultural, and social factors, becoming deeply rooted in the fabric of society (Van de Walle, 2004). Macro-level analysis involves studying societal attitudes, understanding their origins and contributing factors, and exploring their impact on public policies and practices. Macro-level factors can have an impact on the meso and micro-level outcomes (Jilke et al., 2019). Macro-level research can help understand the characteristics that act as moderating and direct factors at the organizational (meso) and individual (micro) levels (Jilke et al., 2019).

Moreover, the argument can be made that micro-level questions are also meso and macro-level questions (Moynihan, 2018). That is, micro-level questions can be 'big' questions as well. Micro, meso, and macro questions are interconnected in nature (Moynihan, 2018). Individual experiences (micro level) contribute to broader organizational patterns (meso level) which contribute to broader societal patterns (macro level). This could involve investigating how stereotypes influence organizational culture, policies, and overall public administration practices and citizen-state interactions. Understanding how micro-level phenomena aggregate into macro-level trends is crucial for comprehensive insights (Moynihan, 2018). Therefore, studying micro-level questions does not ignore macro-level problems. Findings at the micro-level can inform practices and future research at the meso and macro-level.

By comprehensively understanding the interconnections between these levels — micro, meso, and macro — policymakers and researchers can develop nuanced strategies (Jilke et al., 2019; Moynihan, 2018). These strategies can counteract negative stereotypes at the micro level by addressing individual biases, challenge and reform organizational practices at the meso level, and contribute to broader societal changes by challenging deeply ingrained stereotypes at the macro level.

In this dissertation, I address the macro-level of public sector worker stereotyping through one study, shedding light on societal stereotypes of public sector workers across four countries (Chapter 2). In chapters 3 to 5, I focus on micro-level research in public sector worker stereotyping. Nonetheless, as all these levels are interconnected, findings have implications for the meso-level as well.

1.6 Stereotyping and a Behavioral Public Administration approach

There has been a renewed interest among scholars in the field of public administration to study the individual attitudes and behaviors of civil servants and citizens (Grimmelikhuijsen et al., 2017). This shift has led to the integration of concepts, theoretical models, and methods from psychology and other behavioral sciences into the study of public administration (Tummers, 2020). This approach, known as behavioral public administration, has gained significant traction and is now considered a distinct approach within the discipline (Grimmelikhuijsen et al., 2017; Tummers, 2020). The study of public sector worker stereotyping at the micro-level is grounded in behavioral public administration. It combines insights from social psychology, public administration, and organizational sciences.

The idea behind behavioral public administration is that we acknowledge the cognitive limitations that citizens and public sector workers have, and use psychological insights to encourage desired behavior (Grimmelikhuijsen et al., 2017), such as more positive citizen-state interactions based on stereotyping. Behavioral public administration, which examines the impact of human behavior on public administration practices, sheds light on the cognitive biases and social dynamics underlying stereotyping. As mentioned earlier, BPA is grounded in micro-level analysis.

The collaboration between public administration and the behavioral sciences has proven valuable in understanding various issues in the public sector,

such as administrative burden, performance information, trust of civil servants, and citizen-state interactions (Baekgaard & Serritzlew, 2016; James et al., 2020; Olsen, 2015; Van Ryzin, 2011). Within this field, we also see the emergence of the scholarship of stereotypes of public sector workers (Bertram et al., 2022; de Boer, 2020; Willems, 2020).

However, the exploration of public sector worker stereotyping and its consequences is still in its early stages. While the behavioral sciences, particularly social psychology, have extensively investigated stereotyping and its effects (Pennington et al., 2016), there remains a gap in bridging social psychology and behavioral public administration regarding stereotyping of public sector workers. The mechanisms that sustain negative stereotypes of public sector workers and the impact of such stereotyping on workers' performance and citizen-state interactions are still largely unknown.

Social psychology aims to unravel "the nature and causes of individual behavior and thought in social situations" (Baron & Byrne, 1997, p.6). Stereotypes fall within the pillar of thought in the given definition. Transposing this definition to the study of stereotypes implies a research interest in how stereotypes form and change in the social context of the individual. It goes beyond studying public sector worker stereotypes within the political-administrative context. Therefore, integrating a social psychology perspective into the study of public sector worker stereotypes in the context of public administration will help understand the intricate dynamics at play, shed light on why stereotypes exist, and uncover behavioral implications for both the workforce and broader societal interactions.

One noteworthy aspect of stereotyping worth exploring is its impact on citizen-state interactions. Citizen-state interactions encompass all instances in which citizens engage with the state, and in the context of this research, the focus is on interactions between citizens and public sector workers (Christensen et al., 2019). One example is the process of citizens receiving government services, such as obtaining permits or accessing healthcare. The efficiency and quality of these interactions influence citizens' trust in the government and their overall satisfaction (Bell et al., 2022). In other words, specific citizen-state interactions have implications for citizen-state relations overall, such as satisfaction and trust in the government.

Citizen-state interactions are influenced by stereotypes, impacting the process of public service delivery, performance, and citizen-state relations (Hansen, 2022). Psychological insights and research methods can help assess and

address these influences. The findings and theories emerging from these studies inform policy-making, recruitment practices, and management techniques. Additionally, they shed light on bureaucratic reputations and the mechanisms underlying citizen-state interactions. Stereotypes can lead to biased perceptions, affecting trust, cooperation, civic engagement, and compliance with public policies (Hansen, 2022; Van Ryzin, 2011). Behavioral public administration can contribute to countering negative stereotypes and fostering positive citizen-state relations by giving the tools to understand the interplay between stereotypes, behavior, and administrative practices (Brown et al., 1998).

Studying citizen-state interactions is crucial for understanding how public governance relies on daily encounters between citizens and the state. It provides insights into the dynamics shaping government decisions and the role of citizens in the political process (Jakobsen et al., 2016). Understanding citizen-state interactions helps explore the complexities of administrative burden in these interactions (Halling & Baekgaard, 2023).

Citizen-state interactions during public service delivery are crucial aspects of governance, impacting individuals and society. Studying these interactions provides valuable insights into government effectiveness, accountability, and citizen satisfaction. Furthermore, public service workers, functioning as policy decision-makers during interactions, have a significant impact on policy outcomes. Studying these interactions is essential for understanding and improving the efficiency of public service delivery (Lipsky, 1980).

Furthermore, behavioral public administration prides itself on the use of methodologies influenced by developments in psychology and behavioral economics, such as by increasingly using experimental methods to understand the 'human' aspect of public administration (Grimmelikhuijsen et al., 2017). By drawing on theories from psychology and public administration, I investigate the behavioral foundations of public sector worker stereotyping relying on behavioral measures and experimental designs.

In summary, the stereotyping of public sector workers could impact the way citizens interact with the government . Negative stereotypes can erode trust, undermine confidence in public services, and hinder citizen engagement (Hansen, 2022; Van Ryzin, 2011). Understanding the psychological and social dynamics of stereotypes can inform strategies to mitigate their effects and promote positive interactions between citizens and the government. Through the lens of behavioral public administration, we gain insights into the complexity

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of human behavior. By fostering a more inclusive and compassionate approach to public administration, we can work towards building stronger and more effective citizen-state relationships.

1.7 Research question

To advance our scientific understanding of public sector worker stereotypes, I will tackle the limitations mentioned above. Specifically, I will address the absence of inductive studies on public sector worker stereotypes, the oversight regarding potential positive stereotypes associated with public sector workers, the lack of scholarship on the behavioral impacts of these stereotypes, and the insufficient research on the factors contributing to the stereotyping of public sector workers.

The research question is: *What are public sector worker stereotypes, which factors contribute to them, and to what extent do public sector stereotypes affect citizen-state interactions?*

The overarching research question is tackled through three focused questions:

1.   What stereotypes do citizens hold about public sector workers?
2.   What are the contributing factors to public sector worker stereotyping?
3.   Do positive and negative stereotypes affect citizen-state interactions?

In Chapter 2 I will tackle the first sub-question. I use an inductive approach to confront the limitations in deductive research methodologies concerning public sector worker stereotypes. Citizens generate themselves the stereotypes associated with public sector workers – rather than being given a list of preconceived notions to choose from. In this chapter I also adopt a comparative approach, by investigating public sector worker stereotypes in four countries: Canada, the Netherlands, South Korea, and the United States.

In Chapter 3, I address another specific research gap, namely the contributing factors involved in the stereotyping of public sector workers. This chapter answers our second sub-question. The body of literature on public sector worker stereotyping does not assess the contributing factors to public sector worker stereotyping (with notable exceptions of Doring & Willems 2021, and Hansen, 2022). To bridge this gap, Chapter 3 examines experimentally and cross-sectionally the role of trust in stereotyping and cognitive biases, personal characteristics of education and regional influences, and the effect of media information dissemination that contributes to stereotyping. This chapter provides a stepping stone and future research recommendation for building a more comprehensive model of the involved factors.

In Chapter 4, I aim to answer our third sub-question – does stereotyping impact citizen-state interactions? Applying a field experiment, I scrutinize whether activating public sector worker stereotypes affects their performance and interactions with clients during public service delivery. I study what happens when positive stereotypes are activated. This provides insights into the potential benefits of stereotypes. Hence, I shed light on the effects of positive stereotyping of public sector workers.

In Chapter 5, I further address the third sub-question about the effects of stereotyping on citizen-state interactions. Using a survey experiment I provide valuable insights into the effects of negative stereotyping on citizens' behavior and citizen-state interactions. Both Chapter 4 and Chapter 5 focus on the lack of scholarship about the behavioral effects of public sector worker stereotyping.

Lastly, I provide the conclusion and take-away messages from this dissertation in Chapter 6. I will discuss the empirical findings, answer the central research question, and examine the scientific and societal implications. I also discuss the limitations and recommendations for future research.

1.8 Societal relevance

Understanding the stereotyping of public sector workers has numerous practical implications. Firstly, the use of positive stereotypes can mitigate the effects of negative stereotypes on public sector workers themselves. Secondly, positive stereotypes can also be used to address issues in recruitment of high quality candidates and to address workforce shortages. Lastly, positive stereotypes can be used to support policy goals.

Firstly, positive stereotypes effects may counteract those of negative stereotypes. As negative stereotyping is associated with decreased performance, confidence, and motivation (Chen & Bozeman, 2014; Schmander & Hall, 2014; Wright & Pandey, 2008), positive stereotyping can bring about the opposite (Clark et al., 2017; Levy, 1996; Shih et al., 1999; Shih et al., 2012). Research has shown that reminding individuals of positive stereotypes of their social group can be used to improve task performance, especially among individuals who identify strongly with their group (Gupta, 2008; Shih et al., 1999). Given that one's work affiliation can be a powerful and meaningful social category that individuals identify with (Miscenko & Day, 2016), positive stereotypes of public sector workers such as hardworking, responsible, and helpful can be used to boost workers' confidence and performance which ultimately improve public service quality (Shih et al., 2002).

Secondly, positive stereotypes about public sector jobs, such as job security and stability, can be strategically emphasized in recruitment campaigns to attract qualified individuals. For instance, studies like the one conducted by Linos (2018) have shown that advertisements highlighting the career and personal benefits of working in the police force are highly effective. That is, advertisements that emphasize these benefits of working in the police are three times as effective at getting qualified individuals to apply in comparison to a neutral advertisement. More importantly, these messages are particularly effective for people of color and women and can therefore support policy goals in different countries to increase diversity within the public sector workforce. This strategic use of career benefits in job advertising attracts diverse talent and supports policy objectives aimed at increasing diversity within public sector workforces.

By leveraging positive stereotypes, public sector organizations can enhance their employer branding, making them more appealing to prospective employees. This advantage is valuable in the public sector, where stability and long-term employment are often crucial factors, making it an effective strategy to retain talent and build a diverse workforce.

Therefore, positive public sector worker stereotypes can be strategically used for talent recruitment and to help with employer branding of public organizations, which is often less feasible in the private sector which is more vulnerable to market pressures. Positive stereotypes can be of particular relevance for recruitment in sectors with important shortages of workforce. For instance, there are persistent heavy shortages of healthcare workers around the world (Dzakula et al., 2022; WHO, 2016), including the U.S. (Preston, 2023) and the Netherlands (Kuffel, 2022; NL Times, 2023). Similarly, there are important shortages of primary school teachers in the Netherlands (Aob, 2023; Dutch News, 2023). A potential strategy to help in these shortages, would be to investigate positive stereotypes associated with these sectors and strategically leverage them to attract new employees, such as in the study by Linos (2018).

Lastly, the use of positive stereotypes can directly support key policy goals of various governments such as those illustrated in the Biden-Harris President's Management Agenda (OMB 2021) and can inspire strategies for governments struggling to attract new employees. The 2023 Biden-Harris Management Agenda explicitly called for an investment in the United States public servants by empowering talented individuals who are well-suited and well-prepared to face the challenges the government faces.

Research documenting positive stereotypes of public sector workers can support policy goals of investing in public sector workers. Insights gained from studying positive stereotypes can inspire effective strategies for governments facing challenges in recruiting new employees. Policymakers can tailor initiatives to capitalize on positive perceptions, aligning with the agenda's call for strategic investments to address government needs. In this way, positive stereotypes can positively impact the public image of government institutions.

In summary, understanding public sector worker stereotyping holds crucial practical implications. Positive stereotypes can be effective in countering negative impacts on worker performance and motivation, and can also address recruitment challenges and workforce shortages. By strategically emphasizing positive perceptions in recruitment campaigns, public sector organizations can enhance their appeal and support diverse policy goals. This aligns with key policy objectives, such as the 2023 Biden-Harris Management Agenda, calling for investments in skilled individuals to meet government challenges. This approach not only empowers public sector workers but also improves the overall public image of government institutions.

1.9 Scientific relevance

I integrate concepts and theories from public administration and psychology to provide stepping stones in public sector worker stereotyping theory building. By integrating these concepts and theories, I aspire to provide building blocks for public sector worker stereotyping conceptual model, incorporating mechanisms, stereotypes, and behavioral consequences.

The scientific relevance of this dissertation is threefold. First, this dissertation makes an *empirical contribution* to the body of literature about public sector worker stereotyping by providing a detailed empirical account and testing often claimed expectations and assumptions in public sector worker stereotyping research. For instance, Chapter 2 shows what stereotypes citizens hold about public sector workers. The chapter further builds on understanding the commonalities and differences of public sector worker stereotyping cross-culturally, shedding light on the socio-cultural and 'universal' aspects of public sector worker stereotyping.

Consequently, I integrate positive and negative stereotypes of public sector workers and empirically test their consequences. Doing so, I answer the call towards a more positive public administration (Douglas et al., 2019)

by integrating positive stereotypes and their positive effects into the public sector worker stereotyping literature. As such, this dissertation provides a more nuanced empirical understanding of what are stereotypes, what contributes to them, and whether they affect public sector workers' and citizens' behavior, and subsequently, their interactions.

In this dissertation, I make further empirical contributions by assessing factors that are at play in public sector worker stereotyping. I demonstrate empirically the role of media, trust, and personal characteristics in public sector worker stereotyping (Chapter 3). This empirical investigation provides a nuanced understanding of the contextual elements that influence the formation and perpetuation of stereotypes, shedding light on the complex interplay between media representation, trust dynamics, and individual characteristics. These findings elevate the discourse by providing tangible evidence of the nuanced interplay between key variables contributing to our understanding of public sector worker stereotypes.

Furthermore, research in Chapters 4 and 5 provides significant empirical contribution by experimentally testing long-standing assumptions in public sector worker stereotyping research. That is, Chapter 4 tests the assumption that stereotyping of public sector workers affects performance, a topic that has been discussed in the literature by researchers such as Chen & Bozeman (2014), Schmander & Hall (2014), and Wright & Pandey (2008). By subjecting this assumption to empirical scrutiny, the dissertation adds a layer of precision and reliability to the understanding of the relationship between stereotypes and performance.

Similarly, in Chapter 5, I test the assumption that bureaucrat bashing has negative consequences on citizen-state interactions (Caillier, 2018; Garrett et al., 2006). This experimental approach goes beyond theoretical discussions, and provides empirical evidence on the real-world impact of negative portrayals of public sector workers on broader interactions between citizens and the state.

Second, this dissertation makes a *theoretical contribution* by expanding knowledge on causal factors in public sector worker stereotyping. Most of the literature on public sector worker stereotyping focuses on investigating what stereotypes of public sector workers are out there (de Boer, 2020; Willems, 2020). To expand beyond describing stereotypes, I provide causal evidence in chapters 3 to 5.

Causal testing of relationships is a necessary central feature in theory building. It is essential for theory building as it validates theoretical propositions,

enhances predictive power, informs policy interventions, elucidates underlying mechanisms, prompts refinement of theories, contributes to scientific progress, and ensures falsifiability (Bagozi, 1981).

By establishing cause-and-effect relationships through empirical evidence, researchers gain credibility, depth, and practical applicability in their theories. These tested causal relationships not only validate hypotheses but also offer insights into real-world phenomena, shaping policies, advancing scientific understanding, and fostering cumulative knowledge in various fields. By establishing causal relationships, researchers can refine, validate, and enhance theoretical frameworks, contributing significantly to the advancement of knowledge within the field (Bagozi, 1981).

Third, this dissertation makes a *methodological contribution* by utilizing various behavioral measures and experimental designs that contribute to a more nuanced empirical understanding of public sector worker stereotyping.

I answer the call to move beyond studying attitudes and perceptions and to instead study real behaviors (Hansen & Tummers, 2020; John, 2020; Lonati et al., 2018). In this dissertation, I embrace a methodological shift in the study of public sector worker stereotyping by adopting real behavioral measures, thereby advancing the empirical rigor and applicability of research in this field. Chapters 4 and 5 of this dissertation exclusively rely on behavioral measures. This departure from the conventional reliance on self-reported attitudes ensures a more direct and objective assessment of the consequences of public sector worker stereotyping (Hansen & Tummers, 2020).

By scrutinizing real behaviors, the research not only captures the essence of how stereotypes translate into actions but also unveils the tangible impact on public service performance and delivery, and citizen-state interactions. The significance of employing scalable behavioral measures cannot be overstated. By providing practical, scalable indicators for experimental designs, this dissertation not only contributes to the academic understanding of public sector worker stereotyping but also equips researchers, policymakers, and practitioners with tools for more precise measurement and intervention.

The behavioral measures introduced here offer a tangible way to assess public service performance and citizens' behavior towards public sector workers in a manner that is not only academically robust but also applicable in real-world scenarios. In essence, by emphasizing real behavioral measures, this dissertation not only refines scholarly methodologies but also empowers efforts to address

the tangible consequences of public sector worker stereotyping in the broader societal context.

Additionally, in Chapter 4 I answer another call within the field of public administration: a call for more field experiments (Hansen & Tummers, 2020). Answering this call is important for two reasons. Firstly, field experiments provide empirical evidence and real-world insights that can validate or challenge existing theories and policies in public administration. By conducting experiments in actual administrative settings, researchers can observe how interventions play out in practice, offering valuable data to inform decision-making processes (Hansen & Tummers, 2020).

Secondly, field experiments generate context-specific findings that are directly relevant to policymakers and practitioners. Understanding the practical implications of policies and interventions in real administrative environments helps in crafting more effective and tailored solutions to complex public administration challenges (Hansen & Tummers, 2020). Addressing the call for more field experiments in public administration, as highlighted in Chapter 4, is fundamental for advancing the field, improving public service delivery, and ensuring evidence-based policymaking.

Lastly, all studies in this dissertation have been pre-registered, adhering to the open and vigorous research approach that is becoming a standard in public administration research (Perry, 2017; Zhu, Witko, & Meier, 2018; Vogel & Willems, 2020). The practice of preregistration is vital for ensuring transparency, credibility, and rigor in research.

Preregistration involves documenting the research plan, including hypotheses, methods, and analyses, before conducting the study. This transparency ensures that researchers cannot manipulate or cherry-pick results post hoc, maintaining the integrity of the research process (Brodeur et al., 2022). By preregistering their research plans, scholars prevent outcome switching and data dredging, reducing the likelihood of biases affecting the results. This helps in presenting a more accurate and unbiased portrayal of the study findings (Nosek et al., 2018).

1.10 Outline of the thesis

In Table 1 I provide an overview of the remaining chapters of this dissertation, including the questions these chapters address, the research approach, and their publication status.

Table 1
Overview of the Dissertation

Chapter	Research question of the dissertation	Research approach	Publication status
Chapter 2	What stereotypes do citizens hold about public sector workers?	Mixed-method design with a survey with (1) n = 918 & (2) n = 3,042 from Canada, the Netherlands, South Korea, and the United States.	Published in *Public Management Review* (co-authored with Sheeling Neo, Isa Bertram, et al.). Shared first author.
Chapter 3	What are the contributing factors to public sector worker stereotypes?	Quantitative design of a cross-sectional and experimental survey with N = 3,535 citizens of Canada	Under review (co-authored with Etienne Charbonneau). First author.
Chapter 4	Do positive stereotypes affect citizen-state interactions during public service delivery?	Field experiment with n = 573 nursing homes in the Netherlands and Flemish Belgium.	Under review (co-authored with Noortje de Boer and Lars Tummers). First author.
Chapter 5	Do negative stereotypes affect citizens' behavior towards public sector workers during citizen-state interactions?	Experimental survey design with n = 985 citizens of Canada.	Published in *Public Administration Review* (co-authored with Noortje de Boer and Lars Tummers). First author.

2

Chapter 2

Measuring public sector worker stereotypes

Abstract

Public sector workers are often portrayed as lazy, incompetent, and even corrupt. Our understanding of public sector worker stereotypes is limited as most studies are deductive and focus on single countries. We present a cross-national, inductive, citizen-driven approach which uncovers new and different stereotypes across countries. We analyse public sector worker stereotypes across the United States, Canada, the Netherlands, and South Korea (Study 1: n = 918; Study 2: n = 3,042). We identify three shared stereotypes across countries, two of which are positive (having high job security, serving society) and one neutral/negative (going home on time). Furthermore, citizens in the United States and Canada view public sector workers more positively than the Netherlands and South Korea. We conclude by providing new future directions for theory development, such as studying positive public sector stereotypes and investigating how context influences public sector stereotypes.

2.1 Introduction

Public sector workers are often portrayed as lazy, incompetent, and even evil (Goodsell, 2004; Hubbell, 1991; Wilson, 2019). For instance, former U.S. president Ronald Reagan depicted federal bureaucrats as loafers, incompetent buffoons, and tyrants (Hubbell, 1991). The trend continues with Donald Trump using delegitimizing rhetoric and bureaucrat bashing, invoking conspiratorial theories of "deep state" plots or calls to "drain the swamp" (Moynihan, 2021). Examples of negative stereotypes of public sector workers are ubiquitous, and the public management literature has seen rapid development on this topic (e.g. De Boer, 2020; Döring & Willems, 2021; Van de Walle, 2004; Willems 2020).

This nascent body of work has already yielded important insights. For instance, Willems (2020) found that stereotypes of public sector workers are dependent on type of profession (i.e., police officer, nurse, teacher, public servant) and that, generally, they are quite positive. Additionally, De Boer (2020) examined perceived warmth and competence of various types of street-level bureaucrats among Dutch citizens and found that regulation-oriented civil servants – such as tax officials – are seen as less warm and less competent than those who are service-oriented, such as nurses.

Despite these important insights, there are still two important gaps limiting our understanding of public sector workers stereotypes. First, most studies are limited to the United States context (e.g. Caillier, 2018; Goodsell, 2004; Marvel, 2016; Willems, 2020) or single countries (De Boer, 2020; Gilad, Ben-Nun Bloom, & Assouline 2018; Willems, 2020). Nevertheless, Fiske (2017) shows that stereotypes can differ strongly across cultures – for example, stereotypes on ethnicity or religion differ based on intergroup relations shaped by the cultural and historical context of a region. Gender and age stereotypes are more universal (Fiske, 2017). Since the public sector context can differ greatly across countries, the study of public sector worker stereotypes warrants a cross-cultural investigation. Scholars have noted that cross-country research in public administration is highly valuable to build a more comprehensive body of knowledge, guided by the contextual realities of the systems and practices of different regions (Haque, 2013; Van der Wal, Van den Berg, & Haque, 2021).

A second gap lies in the deductive nature of most studies (e.g., Frank & Lewis, 2004; Goodsell, 2004). Deductive approaches can be helpful to identify relationships and test hypotheses but are less suitable to uncover unexpected stereotypes. In other words, while we can deductively confirm common ideas

about bureaucrats – such as laziness or rigidity, we may miss stereotypes that scholars may not think of – for instance that public sector workers are arrogant. Additionally, a deductive approach can reinforce stereotypes that people are presumed to harbor. Therefore, uncovering stereotypes inductively opens new avenues for theoretical progress.

Hence, we present a cross-national, inductive, citizen-driven approach to study citizens' stereotypes of public sector workers. Using a two-step approach of two studies, we use citizens' self-generated stereotypes to systematically assess people's ideas of public sector workers across four different countries: the United States, Canada, the Netherlands, and South-Korea. We specifically study (a) which public sector workers stereotypes citizens have (i.e., the content of the stereotypes) and (b) the extent to which these stereotypes are seen as positive or negative (i.e., the valence of the stereotypes). This enables us to answer two research questions. First, *what are the positive and negative stereotypes that citizens associate most frequently with public servants in their country*? And second, *to what extent do the stereotypes expressed in different national contexts overlap*?

2.2 Public sector worker stereotypes

Stereotypes are 'beliefs about the characteristics, attributes, and behaviors of members of certain groups' (Hilton & Von Hippel, 1996). Public sector worker stereotypes are beliefs about the characteristics, attributes, and behaviors of people working in the public sector. Such stereotypes can overlap with stereotypes about the public sector in general (Goodsell, 2004; Rainey & Bozeman, 2000). Stereotypes have been studied from different perspectives (Bordalo et al., 2016). From a cognitive psychology perspective, stereotypes are mental schemas that people use to infer and interpret information about other people (Hilton & Von Hippel, 1996). Alternatively, from a socio-cultural perspective, stereotypes are seen as cultural phenomenon, as ideas that exist in a society and are purported in media (Augoustinos & Walker, 1998). Both perspectives are relevant for public sector worker stereotypes as stereotypes may influence individual decision-making such as when individuals are considering a public sector job, but they are also the topic of jokes and negativity in popular media (Lichter, Lichter, & Amundson, 2000; Pautz & Warnement, 2013; Van de Walle, 2004).

Public management scholars have investigated public sector worker stereotypes for several decades, albeit not always using the same terminology.

Hubbell (1991) wrote about bureaucrat bashing, where politicians paint public sector workers and their performance in a negative light to attract voters (see also Caillier, 2018; Garrett et al., 2006). In his classic The Case for Bureaucracy, Goodsell (1983, 2000) argued that negative stereotypes about the public sector workers are undeserved and inaccurate. Similarly, Baldwin (1990) tested whether negative public sector worker stereotypes are valid and concluded that they are not (see also Frank & Lewis, 2004). However, the crux of stereotypes is not the degree of their accuracy. Some stereotypes may have aspects that accurately reflect certain elements of the empirical reality – also referred to as the 'kernel of truth' hypothesis. But with stereotyping, assumed trait prevalence within a group and differences to other groups are overblown (Bordalo et al., 2016). Stereotypes typically represent social groups in an unfavorable light (Hilton & Von Hippel, 1996) and as inherently homogenous (ibid, p.240).

Relatedly, public services and public sector workers are often referred to as a whole, even though specific public sector occupations can differ greatly. In research on the public sector, citizen perceptions are often measured in terms of public-private dichotomies: The public sector is seen to perform worse than the private sector (Hvidman, 2019; Hvidman & Andersen, 2016; Marvel, 2016; also referred to as public sector bias). Public sector workers are perceived as lazier, less hardworking, more boring, and less creative (Goodsell, 2004; Marvel, 2016) than private sector workers. Chen and Bozeman (2014) show that public managers, too, view public sector workers as less creative, less talented, and less autonomous than private sector employees. While some of these works study organizations rather than the individuals that work there, general images of the public sector may transfer to those of its workers (Hvidman & Andersen, 2016). Döring and Willems (2021) show that the public takes cues from the professional context into account when processing stereotypical information. Thus, the broad category of public sector workers may be particularly relevant. Indeed, research has shown that citizens perceive them as ethical, dedicated, and helpful, but also as unmotivated, lazy, inefficient, bureaucratic, and slow (Baldwin, 1990; Willems, 2020), reflecting a conflated aggregation of public sector workers.

Since negative stereotypes may have severe effects, they deserve scholarly attention. Negative stereotypes can result in recruitment problems for the government, with highly skilled workers being less attracted to start working as civil servants. To illustrate, graduates from elite public policy schools are increasingly becoming consultants and bankers instead of civil servants (Piereson

& Riley, 2013). Additionally, negative public sector worker stereotypes may affect work performance and employability of public sector workers. Negative stereotyping can reduce performance on various cognitive and social tasks across domains (Inzlicht & Schmader, 2011). For example, when women are reminded that performance in negotiations is predicted by stereotypically male characteristics such as assertiveness and rationality, they set lower goals for negotiations and perform worse (Kray, Thompson, & Galinsky, 2001). In public management, cross-sectional work shows that negative stereotyping is related to lower confidence, motivation, and morale of public sector workers (Chen & Bozeman, 2014).

Negative stereotypes can also have detrimental effects on a societal level, as they can erode perceived legitimacy of and trust in the public sector (Bouckaert & Van de Walle, 2003). Consequently, citizens may be less willing to participate or cooperate with policy activities (Lee & Schachter, 2019; Uslaner & Brown, 2005). This, too, could ultimately lead to poorer performance of the public sector, further reinforcing negative stereotypes. In this way, continuous and sustained negative stereotypes can lead to a self-fulfilling prophecy.

2.3 A socio-cultural perspective on public sector worker stereotypes

As noted, stereotype research shows that stereotypes can differ strongly across countries and cultures (Fiske, 2017). Yet, most of the work on public sector worker stereotypes focuses on the U.S. (e.g. Caillier, 2018; Goodsell, 2004; Marvel, 2016; Willems, 2020), and the few studies that look at other countries take a single-country approach (De Boer, 2020; Gilad et al., 2018). Over-reliance on Americentric and single-country research overlooks the role of culture and administrative traditions in shaping stereotypes.

A socio-cultural perspective assumes that stereotypes can exist 'outside' of human cognition, as a cultural phenomenon or social norm (Augoustinos & Walker, 1998). Public sector workers stereotypes are often openly discussed and laughed about (Van de Walle, 2004). Contrary to gender, ethnicity, or sexuality stereotypes, they are perceived as innocuous. A review of top-10 box office grossing movies from 2000 to 2009 revealed that 91% of movies featured at least one government worker character depicted negatively (Pautz & Warnement, 2013, see also Lichter, Lichter, & Amundson, 2000). This suggests that, at least in Western countries, stereotyping public sector workers may act as a social norm (Van de Walle, 2004).

Yet social norms can vary greatly across contexts. Across North America, the Netherlands, and South Korea, different administrative traditions influence citizens' expectations of public sector workers (Neo, Grimmelikhuijsen & Tummers, 2022). For example, the philosophy of governance in East Asian countries, such as South Korea, Singapore, and Japan, is influenced by Confucianism (Van der Wal et al., 2021). Governing rules are prescribed in moral codes rather than formal law and regulations (Yang & Rutgers, 2017). 'Good government' relies on ethical persons to maintain a 'natural order' – a harmonious social hierarchy – and public sector workers are seen as one of the most elite groups in society (Cho & Lee, 2001). This may contribute to different perceptions of public sector workers than in countries with other administrative traditions. For example, administrations rooted in Weberian traditions, such as the Netherlands, view the role of public sector workers as neutral, impersonal, and rational executioners of political rulings based on legality (Peters, 2021) – whereas those rooted in Anglo-American traditions see public sector workers as societal managers whose first and foremost goals are to be efficient and effective (Biesbroek et al., 2018; Peters, 2021). These different perceptions of the role of public sector workers could result in different stereotypes of public sector workers.

With the scant literature that exists, we cannot confidently predict potential differences in public sector worker stereotypes across countries, nor the country-level factors that would contribute to stereotypes. Yet, it is plausible that factors such as cultural context and administrative traditions play a role in public sector worker stereotypes (Meier et al., 2017; Peters, 2021). This lack of literature and the serious consequences of stereotyping highlight the need for reliable, systematic study of the universality of public sector worker stereotypes.

2.4 A multi-country, inductive approach

In this study, we take an inductive, cross-country approach to studying stereotypes, by basing ourselves on participants' own input rather than asking about specific characteristics such as skill or performance. We study stereotypes across four countries. Choosing countries involves trade-offs. We included Canada, the Netherlands, and South Korea – a selection which was, in part, based on the availability of research funds and collaboration partners, but with which we also aimed to create a diverse set of country contexts – in terms of continents, cultures (Hofstede, Hofstede, & Minkov, 2010), and administrative traditions (Peters, 2021). We further included the U.S. as a benchmark, to validate previous findings on stereotypes of public sector workers based mostly in the U.S.

In addition to culture, location, and administrative tradition, the countries differ in the level of confidence that their citizens have in the civil service and in government, as measured in the World Values Survey (Wave 7; Haerpfer et al., 2022). South Korea scores highest in confidence, with a little over half of the population stating that they have *quite a lot* or *a great deal* of confidence (51% in government, 56% in civil services; data from 2018), followed by Canada (46% in government, 56% in civil services; data from 2020). The U.S. score markedly lower (33% in government, 41% in civil services; data from 2017), as do the Netherlands (38% in government, 34% in civil services; data from 2022). Stereotypes are often reflective of peoples' general attitudes (Blair, 2016; Devine, 1989; Greenwald, 1995) and research suggests that confidence in government is closely tied to stereotypes (Lerman, 2019). As such, peoples' general confidence in civil service may provide an indication of potential differences in stereotypes across different countries.

We do not claim that the country selection is representative of all different cultures and traditions across the world. Yet, the U.S., Canada, South Korea, and the Netherlands vary enough on the dimensions of geography, culture, administrative tradition, and general attitude towards the public sector to allow for meaningful comparisons. As the current body of literature on public sector worker stereotypes and their antecedents is limited, we refrain from hypothesizing about specific country differences. Rather, we take an exploratory approach. As such, this study is a first step in assessing the influence of country context, enabling us to find commonalities and differences across countries using a common method.

Just as country selection involves trade-offs, so does choosing a methodological approach. While qualitative inductive research allows for exploration to a degree that quantitative research cannot offer, a criticism of this method is that findings cannot be extended to wider populations with the same degree of certainty as quantitative research (Atieno, 2009). However, as Atieno (2009) argues, 'The line between qualitative and quantitative is less distinct. All qualitative data can be quantitatively coded in an almost infinite variety of ways. This does not detract from the qualitative information. Recognizing the similarities between qualitative and quantitative information opens new possibilities for interpretation that might otherwise go unutilized.' (p. 5). To benefit from the qualitative inductive approach while also circumventing its pitfalls, we substantiate qualitative findings with quantitative information using a two-step approach. The section below describes the approach in further detail.

2.5 Empirical studies

To identify stereotypes, we use a method proposed by Katz and Braly in their now-classic study from 1933. Their two-step approach combines qualitative induction in the first step with quantitative methods in the second. This method is still being used in recent research (Madon et al., 2001; Schneider & Bos, 2014). The first step of this method inductively creates a list of potential stereotypes; the second step quantitatively assesses which of these stereotypes are most common. In the first step, participants are asked to list traits and characteristics they find typical of a specific social group of interest – in this case, public sector workers. These answers are coded, and the most frequently mentioned traits are used to compile a 'master list'. In the second step, this master list is used to identify the most common stereotypes among a new and larger sample, by asking participants to select from this list the traits they find most typical of that social group.

More recent studies often forego the first step of the method and use the list of traits generated in the original study by Katz and Braly (1933) to study racial stereotypes. However, researchers have highlighted that the list may be outdated, and that it should not be assumed to be applicable to all social groups (Devine & Elliot, 1995; Gilbert, 1951; Madon et al., 2001). To fit the public sector context and to avoid these limitations, we want to generate a master list catered to public sector workers specifically. Therefore, we performed both step 1 and step 2 as two separate studies in the four countries under study.

Two further additions were made to the original Katz and Braly method: First, the cross-cultural nature of this study calls for sensitivity to differences in normative interpretation and meaning. Certain words have different meanings in different cultures and could be interpreted differently across countries (Lee, 2012). We therefore added a question in Step 2, asking participants to rate how *desirable* they found the traits that they selected as most typical of public sector workers. This allows us to study (a) which public sector stereotypes participants mention across countries (the *content* of stereotypes) and (b) to what extent these stereotypes are seen as positive or negative across countries (the *valence* of the stereotypes). Second, stereotypes are now a more sensitive topic than in 1933. To ensure that participants felt comfortable and secure enough to give their honest opinions, we emphasized participant anonymity in the surveys, underscoring that participants' answers would not be judged for accuracy and that it was acceptable to generalize.

Figure 1 summarizes the procedures of the 2-step approach. In Study 1, we asked participants in the four countries to list the traits they associated with public sector workers (n = 918). Findings were used to construct a master list of traits commonly associated with public sector workers. In Study 2 (n = 3,042), we presented participants with the master list, from which they select up to five traits they found most typical of public sector workers (i.e., stereotype *contents*), and asked them to rate each selected trait in terms of desirability (i.e., whether they found these traits to be desirable for public sector workers; stereotype *valence*). To improve validity and generalizability of our study, we mirrored our samples to the population margins of all four countries in terms of age, gender, and level of education.

Figure 1
Overview of the Procedures of the 2-Step Approach
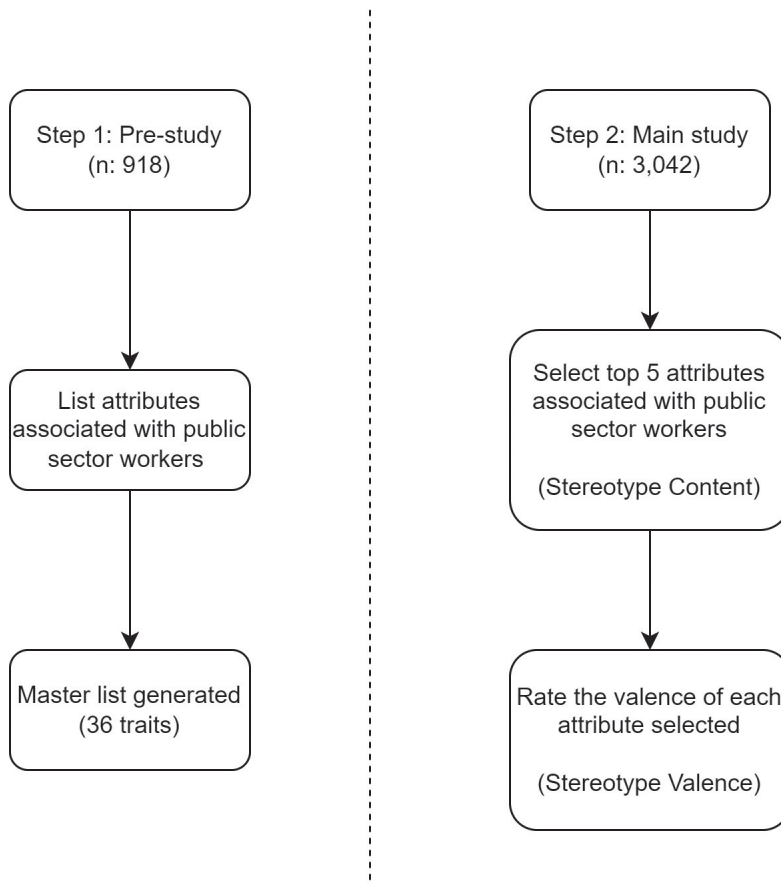
The project was pre-registered via the Open Science Framework (anonymized link: https://osf.io/uxk76/?view_only=f2fd057c79bf4870b3077b6df2c26961). Since our paper takes an exploratory approach, we did not pre-register hypotheses, but we included our research questions, methods, analysis plan, and materials. Ethical approval was granted by the ethical committee of the Faculty of Law, Economics, and Governance of Utrecht University.

We compiled the surveys in English, and translated these into Dutch, Korean, and French (for French-speaking Canada) using the TRAPD framework for translation (Harkness, Vijver, & Mohler, 2003). Bilingual translators for each of the languages produced a first draft of the translations, which was then discussed and refined with members of the research team. These translated surveys were tested using cognitive interviewing (Willis, 2008), leading to a few final edits. The final surveys used for Study 1 and 2 are shown in the online Supplementary Materials, Appendices A and B respectively.

Participants were recruited through panel platform Lucid – a survey firm based in New Orleans, Louisiana. Lucid employs numerous national and regional survey panel providers, and recruits survey respondents via these different panels. Samples recruited via the Lucid platform have been shown to be suitable for social science inquiries (Coppock & McClellan, 2019). For a fuller characterization of the value of samples acquired through Lucid, we suggest Hisler and Twenge (2021, p.2).

Both surveys took approximately 15 minutes to complete. All participants provided informed consent, and were compensated by the panel providers through various means, including financial compensation and online game spending points, depending on the specific panel through which they partook. Compensation for study participation was dependent on completing the questionnaire. We aimed to obtain representative samples of the population in terms of age, gender, and education for each of the four countries. Therefore, we used quotas to match the population margins on these variables, based on population data from OECD (David & Amey, 2020). Quotas refer to a predetermined portion of the sample that needs to fill certain criteria, in this case: age, gender, and education levels. To fill these quotas, participants first filled in a profiling questionnaire covering basic socio-demographic information.

It should be noted here that in the presentation of our data and results, we deviate from our pre-registration, as we initially intended to compare the stereotypes of the general category of public sector workers to four other occupational groups: police officers, tax officials, judges, and private sector

workers. In explaining the study procedures for both studies below, we therefore refer to randomizing participants to specific occupational groups. However, the data proved to be too rich for our aim of investigating public sector worker stereotypes. Therefore, in the presentation of results of Study 2, we focus only on the findings regarding public sector worker stereotypes. Data for the other occupational groups can be found in the online Supplementary Materials, Appendix C.

2.6 Study 1

The purpose of Study 1 was to construct a master list of public sector stereotypes to be used in Study 2. The goal was to create a citizen-driven, inductive list of traits most associated with public sector workers by asking participants to list the traits they find typical of public sector workers (Katz & Braly, 1933; Schneider & Bos 2014).

2.6.1 Sample

A total of 1,217 people participated in Study 1. Of these, 313 participants were excluded based on the quality of their answers (133 in the U.S.; 57 in Canada; 97 in the Netherlands, and 26 in South Korea): These participants provided gibberish or random answers (e.g., 'tyyyyh' or 'brara'); illogical or inconsistent responding (e.g., 'I like birds' or 'looking good bruh'), or repetitive responses (e.g., 'idk' to all questions; a list of exclusions can be found at https://osf.io/qsr7x/?view_only=83ffc7368c714c5c8d6b5ec3c1412a81). This led to a final sample of 918 participants: 215 in the U.S. (mean age = 49.92, SD age = 18.29; 119 females), 282 in Canada (mean age = 46.60, SD age = 18.21; 147 females), 216 in the Netherlands (mean age = 45.17, SD age = 16.51; 98 females), and 205 in South Korea (mean age = 40.87, SD age = 13.05; 91 females).

Table 1 shows sample descriptives, including how our sample compares to population margins in terms of age, sex, and level of education.

2.6.2 Survey procedures and analyses

Participants first gave their informed consent, followed by questions about their age, sex, and education level. Next, we asked participants: *Please list as many specific characteristics or traits as you think are typical of the following occupational group (max. 5): public sector workers*. Here, participants saw five form fields to fill in with a maximum of five traits. The survey ended with some questions about participants' own occupational history.

Table 1
Sample Demographics of Study 1

		U.S. (N=215)	Canada (N=282)	Netherlands (N=216)	South Korea (N=205)
		% of sample (% of population, OECD 2020)			
Sex	Female	55.35 (50.75)	52.13 (50.31)	45.37 (50.37)	44.39 (49.89)
	Male	44.65 (49.25)	47.52 (49.69)	54.63 (49.63)	54.15 (50.11)
	Prefer not to say	0.00	0.35	0.00	1.46
Age	16-24	12.56 (16.21)	16.67 (14.54)	15.74 (14.68)	15.61 (12.81)
	25-34	15.81 (17.03)	17.73 (16.56)	18.06 (14.97)	19.02 (15.30)
	35-44	12.56 (15.58)	14.18 (15.84)	13.89 (14.31)	22.44 (17.09)
	45-54	15.35 (15.62)	15.25 (15.52)	20.83 (17.68)	27.80 (19.23)
	55+	43.72 (35.56)	36.17 (37.54)	31.48 (38.36)	15.12 (35.57)
Level of Education	Low (No formal education, grade school)	7.44 (9.20)	7.80 (8.40)	19.44 (21.00)	2.44 (11.80)
	Mid (High school, vocational school, no college degree)	58.14 (43.40)	32.98 (33.70)	41.20 (40.70)	45.85 (39.20)
	High (With college degree)	34.42 (47.40)	59.22 (57.90)	38.89 (38.30)	50.73 (49.00)

Note. Sampling quotas were used to ensure the sample was comparable to population margins, in terms of age, sex, and level of education. Numbers between parentheses indicate population margins.

As per our pre-registered analysis plan, we compiled the master list as follows. First, all French, Dutch, and Korean answers were translated to English. We assessed sentences given as answers and where possible, replaced them with single words. For instance, when a participant wrote that a characteristic of public sector workers is that they *have a lot of knowledge*, we replaced this with *knowledgeable*. Next, we standardized entries by removing capitals and spaces. We then ran a frequency analysis and selected the top ten most frequently mentioned traits per country. In selecting the top ten words, we discarded words that do not reflect traits or attributes (for example, 'lawyer' and 'government'). We did include the characteristics of 'well paid', 'going home on time', and 'job security' – although these may not strictly be seen as personal traits, they do describe characteristics of the work and its workers.

When aggregating the top ten of the four countries, many traits were repeated because of overlap between the countries. To meet the targeted number of traits as specified in our pre-registered plan, we therefore selected the top fifteen for a more comprehensive master list. Lastly, we grouped together close synonyms like *smart* and *intelligent* (summarized as *intelligent*), *brave* and *courageous* (*courageous*), and *compassionate* and *empathetic* (*empathetic*), leading to a total of 36 traits.

2.6.3 Results

Table 2 shows the master list of 36 traits. Participants from all countries generated a mixture of positive traits – such as hardworking, intelligent, impartial, and honest – and negative traits – such as boring, corrupt, inflexible, and lazy. Some of the traits are consistent with the stereotypical image assumed by the literature and popular media, for example lazy, corrupt, and inflexible. However, some traits that frequently came up are unexpected and contrary to existing literature and popular media depictions, such as caring, empathetic, and hardworking.

Table 2
Master List of 36 Traits

Arrogant	Go home on time	Knowledgeable
Authoritative	Friendly	Lazy
Boring	Good	Loyal
Calm	Hardworking	Patient
Caring	Helpful	Responsible
Conservative	Honest	Serious
Corrupt	Impartial	Serving
Courageous	Independent	Stable
Difficult	Inflexible	Strict
Educated	Integrity	Strong
Empathetic	Intelligent	Trustworthy
Fair	Job security	Well paid

2.7 Study 2

In Study 2, we presented participants with the master list compiled in Study 1. The goal was to identify which traits from the list are most associated with

public sector workers, among a larger sample of citizens from each country (i.e., stereotype *content*). Additionally, we wanted to know how desirable participants found these traits for public sector workers, (i.e., how positive or negative they found the traits, stereotype *valence*).

2.7.1 Sample

A total of 4,588 participants were recruited across the four countries. As specified in our pre-registration, we used three attention checks to ensure data quality. Following survey platform policy and institutional review board requirements, participants had to successfully pass two out of three checks to be included in the study. 446 participants were excluded for failing to meet these criteria (U.S.= 139, Canada = 88, the Netherlands = 130, and South Korea = 89). Like Study 1, we excluded 89 participants for bad data quality (i.e., gibberish or nonsensical answers; 42 in the U.S.; 47 in South Korea). A list of exclusions can be found at https://osf.io/uxk76/?view_only=f2fd057c79bf4870b3077b6df2c26961.

Participants were further randomized to rate three (out of five) occupations. The total sample rating public sector workers was 3,042 (U.S.: n = 610; Canada: n = 632; the Netherlands: n = 1,176; South Korea: n = 633). We achieved broadly representative samples in terms of age, gender, and education, with a maximum difference of 8% between the observed and targeted proportions in all countries. An overview of sample descriptives and population margins is shown in Table 3.

2.7.2 Survey procedure and analysis

After giving their informed consent and answering questions about their age, sex, and level of education, participants answered questions based on the master list of traits about three occupational groups (as noted above, we diverged from the pre-registered analysis plan by focusing on one occupation, namely public sector workers, as the main group of interest). Throughout the questionnaire, they were presented with three attention check questions. They were also asked several questions for other studies that were included in this data collection – these studies were pre-registered separately (see https://osf.io/mv9fp/?view_only=a834ee0cce6045299d459036f0a29e64 and https://osf.io/fqn9a/?view_only=a47c628afc624c539d6986f2e779bea6). The survey ended with some additional socio-demographic questions.

Table 3
Sample Descriptives of Study 2

		U.S. (N=610)	Canada (N=632)	Netherlands (N=1176)	South Korea (N=633)
		% of sample (% of population, OECD 2020)			
Sex	Female	50.98 (50.75)	49.44 (50.31)	50.17 (50.37)	47.24 (49.89)
	Male	48.69 (49.25)	50.40 (49.69)	49.15 (49.63)	50.71 (50.11)
	Prefer not to say	0.33	0.16	0.68	2.05
Age	16-24	10.82 (16.21)	11.88 (14.54)	15.48 (14.68)	9.48 (12.81)
	25-34	15.90 (17.03)	17.34 (16.56)	17.09 (14.97)	16.27 (15.30)
	35-44	16.89 (15.58)	16.37 (15.84)	16.41 (14.31)	16.90 (17.09)
	45-54	17.70 (15.62)	15.73 (15.52)	12.5 (17.68)	19.27 (19.23)
	55+	38.69 (35.56)	38.68 (37.54)	38.52 (38.36)	38.07 (35.57)
Level of Education	Low (No formal education, grade school)	7.70 (9.20)	5.78 (8.40)	23.89 (21.00)	4.58 (11.80)
	Mid (High school, vocational school, no college degree)	41.48 (43.40)	33.39 (33.70)	36.56 (40.70)	45.97 (39.20)
	High (With college degree)	50.82 (47.40)	60.83 (57.90)	39.54 (38.30)	48.03 (49.00)

Note. Sampling quotas were used to ensure the sample was comparable to population margins, in terms of age, sex, and level of education. Numbers between parentheses indicate population margins.

To identify stereotype contents, participants were presented with the master list of 36 traits and read the following instructions: *Read through the following list of words and select those which you find typical of public sector workers. Choose as many words as you think are necessary to characterize this group adequately.* In case participants selected more than five traits, we then asked them to select their top five: *Now from the words which you have chosen above, select from the drop-down boxes below the top five words which you find the most typical of public sector workers.*

To assess stereotype valence, we then asked participants to rate the traits they selected as most typical in terms of desirability: *To what extent do you find these traits desirable for public sector workers?* Participants answered on a 5-point scale scale from 1 (*very undesirable*) to 5 (*very desirable*; Lee 2012).

Stereotype profiles

We identified stereotypes by examining the traits that people associated most with public sector workers, leading to a so-called stereotype profile. This profile consists of (1) the stereotype *content* based on the traits that were most frequently selected as one of the top five most typical, and (2) stereotype *valence*, based on mean desirability scores for those traits.

We compiled stereotypes profiles for each country, based on the top ten most frequently selected traits within each country, as well as one cross-country profile for the four countries combined. We selected ten traits because in comparing between different occupations, post-hoc pairwise odds-ratio analyses of the trait valence indicated that the largest differences between occupations lie in the first ten traits (odds-ratios: $\geq$ 1.5; see online Supplementary Material, Appendix D). We then calculated stereotype valence as the mean desirability score for each of the top ten traits within a country. An overall, weighted mean valence score for the full profile was also added, such that the mean valence scores for each of the top ten traits were weighted based on the frequency with which they were selected. A full report of frequencies and valence scores for all 36 traits, across all countries and per country, can be found in Appendix 2A.

2.7.3 Results

Overall stereotype profile

Figure 2 shows an overall stereotype profile, combining the data from all four countries (n = 3,042). The top three most frequently associated traits are *serving*, *going home on time*, and *job security*, and these are widely endorsed: More than 20 percent of all participants associated at least one of these three traits with public sector workers. These traits were chosen consistently across age, sex, and education levels (see online Supplementary Materials, Appendix E).

Most of the traits in the overall stereotype profile have a positive mean valence score, with *going home on time* (M = 2.91, SD = 1.13) and *inflexible* (M = 1.91, SD = 1.09) being the only negative traits. The weighted mean valence score

for the full profile is 3.71 (SD = 0.85), indicating that overall, public sector workers are regarded positively by participants. Taken together, these findings do not support the stereotypically negative image of public sector workers purported by some previous literature and popular media.[1]

Figure 2

Stereotype Profile of Public Sector Workers Across Countries.
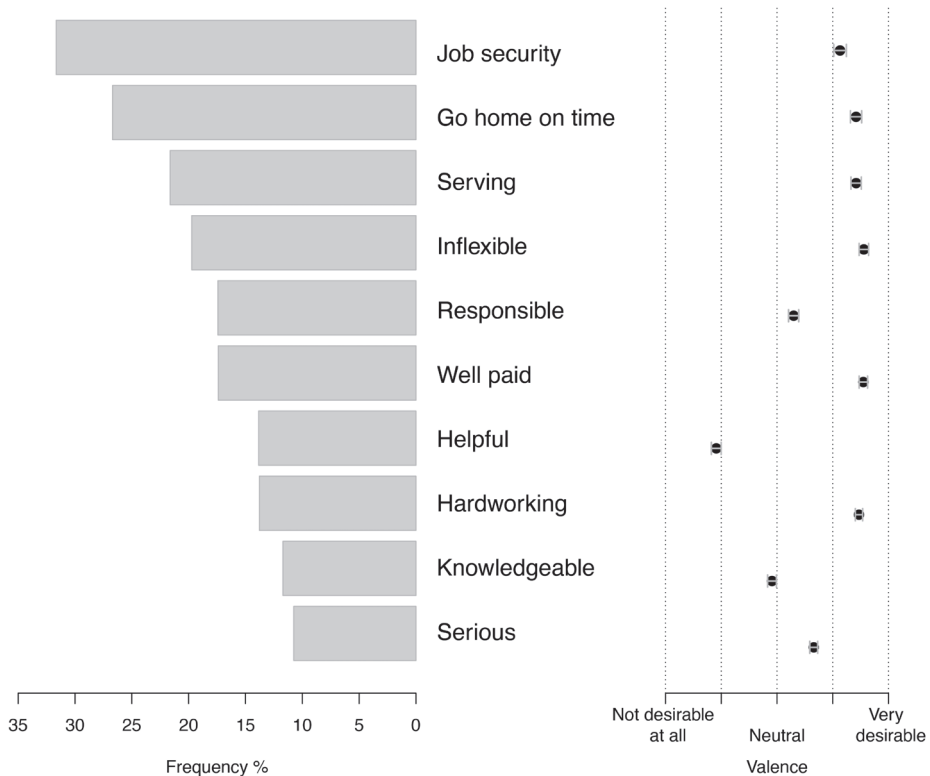
Note. The words show the top ten most frequently selected traits as typical of public sector workers. The grey bars in the left panel show the percentage of participants that selected the trait as one of their top five most typical of public sector workers. The right panel shows the mean valence scores for each trait.

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[1] Following our pre-registered procedure, we also asked participants to select attributes they associated with three specific public sector occupations: police officers (n = 2,449), tax officials (n = 2,508), and judges (n = 2,490). The results of the analyses of this data can be found in the online Supplementary Materials, Appendix C.

Cross-country comparisons

Figure 3 shows the stereotype profiles of public sector workers per country. Again, the same three traits are universally shared in the stereotype profiles of the four countries: *serving* (U.S.: 3rd most frequently mentioned, selected by 23.8%; Canada: 3rd, 21.2%; Netherlands: 5th, 22.5% South Korea: 4th, 18.3%), *going home on time* (U.S.: 7th, 15.4%; Canada: 1st, 23.1%; Netherlands: 1st, 40.3%; South Korea: 5th, 15.8%), and *job security* (U.S.: 5th, 17.7%; Canada: 6th, 17.8%; Netherlands: 2nd, 34.5%; South Korea: 1st, 53.4%).

Despite this overlap in traits, Figure 3 also shows some striking differences. First, the U.S. and Canada have highly similar profiles. They share eight out of the ten traits in their stereotype profiles, whereas they share no other traits with the Dutch and South Korean profiles beyond *serving*, *going home on time* and *job security*. Additionally, there are no negative traits in the profiles of the U.S. and Canada (with no valence scores below the neutral score of 3). Instead, participants from the U.S. and Canada selected mostly traits, such as *helpful*, *responsible*, *hardworking*, *knowledgeable*, and *educated*. In contrast, Dutch and South Korean participants associated more negative traits with public sector workers, with half of the valence scores in these countries falling below a neutral score of three. While these profiles do include positive traits, such as *serving*, *stable*, and *responsible*, they also include clearly negative traits such as *boring* and *lazy* (the Netherlands), *corrupt* (South Korea), *authoritative* and *inflexible* (both).

Furthermore, we see that participants valued some characteristics differently. For example, although *going home on time* appears in all profiles, it was rated differently in terms of valence: In the Netherlands, *going home on time* was rated more negatively (M = 2.60), while it was seen as neutral in the U.S. and Canada (U.S.: M = 3.10, Canada: M = 3.27) and quite positive in South-Korea (M = 3.69).

To assess whether the four countries differed statistically in terms of the valence of their stereotypes, we conducted a one-way, between-subjects ANOVA to compare participants' mean valence scores of their selected traits. Results revealed significant differences between the four countries, $F(3, 3038) = 33.36$, $p <$ $2e^{-16}$, $\eta^2 = 0.03$, 95% CI = [3.50, 3.57]. Table 4 shows the results of post-hoc pairwise t-tests with Bonferroni corrections between the four countries. Results show no significant differences between mean valence scores in the U.S. and Canada (U.S. M = 3.80, SD = 1.72, Canada M = 3.79, SD = 1.74, $t(1231) = -0.08$, $p = 1.0$, Cohen's $d = 0.01$, 95% CI = [-0.14, 0.13]). In contrast, comparing the United States to the Netherlands

Figure 3

Stereotype Profiles of Public Sector Workers in the United States, Canada, the Netherlands, and South Korea.
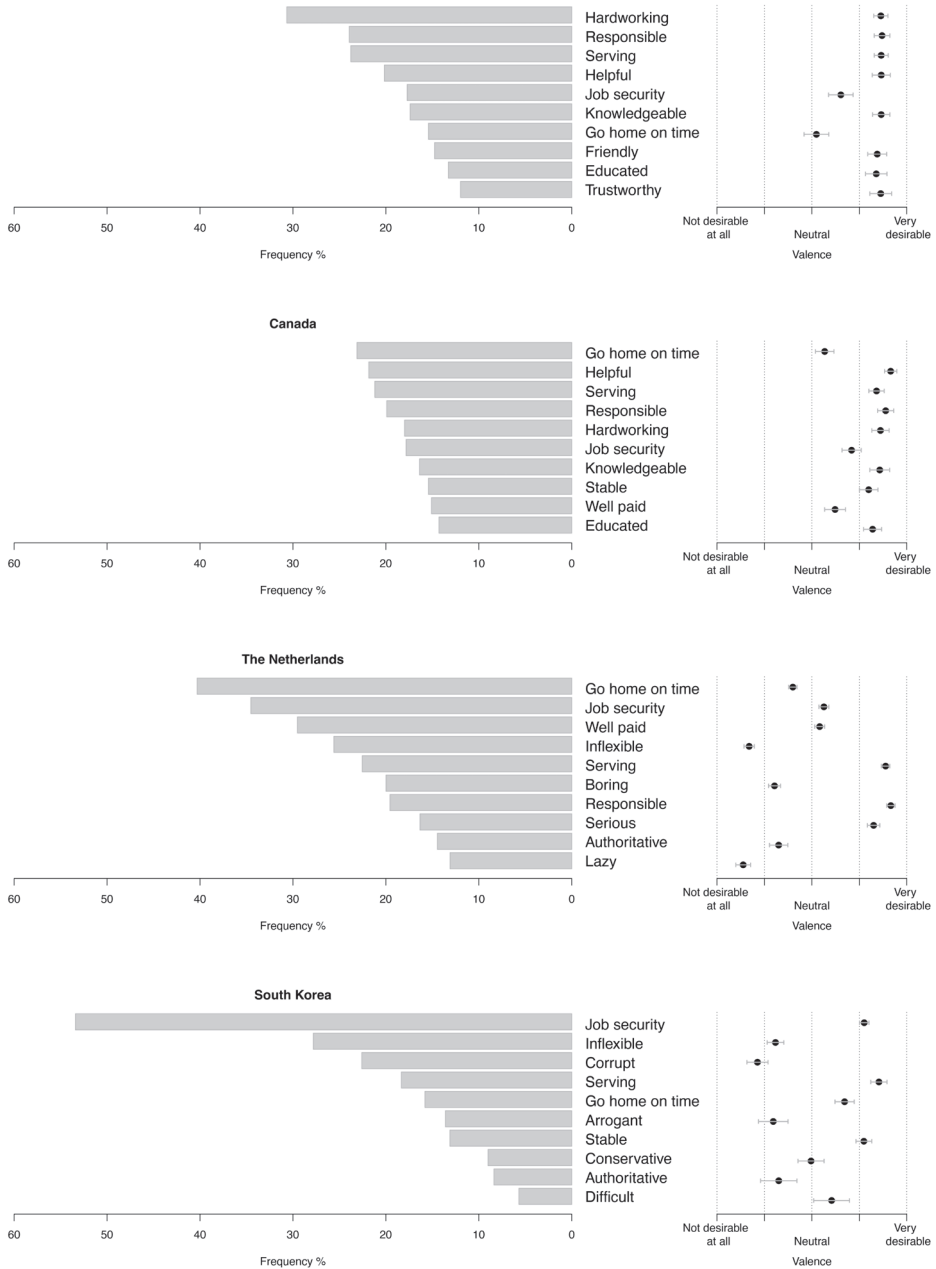
Note. The grey bars in the left panel show the percentage of participants that selected the trait as one of their top five most typical of public sector workers. The right panel shows the mean valence scores for each trait. Error bars represent 95% confidence intervals of the mean valence scores.

(Netherlands M = 3.31, SD = 2.07, t(1784) = -8.06, p = 7.99e^{-15}, d = 0.40, 95% CI = [-0.60, -0.37]) and South Korea (South Korea M = 3.46, SD = 1.75, t(1241) = -4.73, p = 1.48e^{-5}, d = 0.27, 95% CI = [-0.47, -0.20]), differences between means are significant. This indicates that the stereotypes are significantly more negative in the Netherlands and South Korea than in the U.S. The same applies to Canada: comparing Canada to the Netherlands: t(1797) = 8.26, p = 1.69e^{-15}, d = 0.41, 95% CI = [0.37, 0.59], and Canada versus South Korea: t(1254) = 4.86, p = 7.78e^{-6}, d = 0.27, 95% CI = [0.20, 0.46].

Finally, although the valence scores are similar in the Netherlands (M = 3.33, SD = 1.08) and South Korea (M = 3.41, SD = 0.77; t(1807) = -2.57, p = 0.06, d = 0.13, 95% CI = [-0.27, -0.04]), the Dutch and South Korean stereotype profiles differ in terms of contents, with participants associating different traits with public sector workers. For example, while Dutch participants associated public sector workers with being *well paid*, *boring*, and *lazy*, South Korean participants did not – conversely, South Koreans associated them with, amongst others, being *corrupt*, *arrogant*, and *stable*, while these did not appear in the top ten of the Netherlands.

Table 4
Post-Hoc Pairwise Comparisons

		Mean Difference	Std. Error	Significance		95% Confidence Interval for Difference	
				p-value	Adjusted *p*-value	Lower Bound	Upper Bound
United States	Canada	0.00	0.07	0.93	1.00	-0.14	0.13
	The Netherlands	0.49	0.06	1.33e^{-15}	7.99e^{-15}*	-0.60	-0.37
	South Korea	0.33	0.07	2.47e^{-6}	1.48e^{-5}*	-0.47	-0.20
Canada	The Netherlands	0.48	0.06	2.82e^{-16}	1.69e^{-15}*	0.37	0.59
	South Korea	0.33	0.07	1.30e^{-6}	7.78e^{-6}*	0.20	0.46
The Netherlands	South Korea	0.15	0.06	0.01	0.06	-0.27	-0.04

Note. Asterisks indicate a significant difference, after Bonferroni p-value adjustments, at α = .05. * = p < .05.

2.8 Discussion and conclusion

Using two pre-registered, large scale citizen surveys with representative samples (total n = 3,960), we mapped stereotypes of public sector workers in the U.S., Canada, the Netherlands, and South Korea. We find three stereotypes that are

universal across these countries: *having job security*, *going home on time*, and *serving*. These are largely universal across age, gender, and education levels. However, we find stark differences when comparing the stereotypes across countries. Public sector worker stereotypes in the U.S. and Canada are similar and remarkably positive: In both countries, there are no negative traits in the top ten stereotype profile, and the most frequently selected traits beyond the universal traits were *hardworking*, *responsible*, and *helpful*. In comparison, stereotypes in South Korea and the Netherlands are more negative, with associated traits like *inflexible* (in both countries), *boring* (in the Netherlands), and *corrupt* (in South Korea). This indicates that, although ideas about public sector workers may be universal to some extent, country differences should not be overlooked.

Our findings should be considered in light of some limitations. First, the translation of our survey may have suffered from a trade-off between literal accuracy and ease in comprehension of meaning. Even though we worked closely with bilingual translators to achieve a thorough contextual understanding of ambiguous words, some words may bear different connotations in different languages. For example, the Dutch word we chose to use for public sector worker ('ambtenaar') is most used, but it also carries a negative connotation, as the stereotype and the word itself seem to have become linguistically entwined.

Second, we assessed stereotype valence by asking participants how desirable they found traits for public sector workers, but this may be interpreted in different ways. While some might answer based on what is desirable from the viewpoint of the public, others may interpret the question as what is desirable from a public sector worker's point of view. For instance, going home on time may be desirable for workers, but not necessarily for their clients. Future studies could further explore perceived stereotype valence, and whether this depends on who the stereotype pertains to.

Lastly, we are limited in our interpretation of whether stereotypes are mentioned with reference to public sector jobs or public sector workers. For instance, stereotypes such as *job security*, *well paid*, and *going home on time* can characterize both the worker (i.e., motivated by pay, preference for job security) or the occupation (i.e., well paid job, having job security). Stereotypes are multidimensional and represent myriad beliefs about the characteristics, traits, and behaviors of members of certain groups. Without in-depth qualitative data, it is difficult to disentangle what stereotypes mean. For example, while *going home on time* can be taken to mean that public sector workers are lazy and do not work more than required, this interpretation would be in direct

opposition to the trait *hardworking* – which is also associated with public sector workers. The complexity in meaning of stereotypes becomes more evident when comparing across countries when they regard the same trait of going home on time differently – positive (South Korea), neutral (U.S. and Canada) and negative (the Netherlands). Our current methods do not allow us to make accurate inferences about what the stereotypes mean to respondents. Future studies should refine their study designs, using alternative qualitative research methods to disentangle the stereotypes associated with the job versus its workers, and the meanings behind the stereotypes.

Despite these limitations, we believe that our approach allowed for the identification of stereotypes that may have been overlooked by using deductive survey methodologies.

2.8.1 Theoretical implications

Our findings have important implications for the understanding of public perceptions of public sector workers. A first contribution of our findings is that they help us understand country differences by giving insight into plausible explanations and antecedents of stereotypes. More importantly, they show where existing theories fall short in explaining stereotypes.

While researchers have suggested a strong relationship between stereotypes and confidence in government and public services (Lerman, 2019), the patterns in our findings suggest otherwise. Data from the World Values Survey (Wave 7; Haerpfer et al., 2022) shows that in terms of confidence in the civil service, South Korea scores the highest, followed by Canada, the U.S., and the Netherlands. In contrast, our results show overwhelmingly positive stereotypes for the U.S. and Canada and more negative stereotypes for South Korea and the Netherlands.

Administrative tradition and prevailing sentiments towards the public sector in each country are also inadequate in explaining our findings: The United States' Jeffersonian vision of being fearful of technocracy and being suspicious of big government (Hubbell, 1991) does not match the positive stereotypes that we find. Administrative culture in the Netherlands has been characterized by New Public Management reforms since the 1980s, which have led to criticism of slow bureaucracy (Hood, 1991; Pollitt & Bouckaert, 2017). While this may explain the stereotypes found in the Netherlands such as lazy and inflexible, similar NPM reforms were taking place in the U.S., Canada, and South Korea (Brandsen & Kim, 2010). Yet, stereotypes there are greatly different from those in the Netherlands

– both in terms of content and valence. Confucian ideals in South Korea also fall short in explaining the predominantly negative stereotypes found there. According to Confucian ideas, public sector workers are seen as the most elite group in society (Cho & Lee, 2001), yet the stereotypes we find in South Korea do not reflect this perspective and are much more negative than those in North America.

Another factor that may have affected perceptions of public sector workers in our study is the types of occupations that people associate with the term 'public sector workers'. De Boer (2020) used the Stereotype Content Model to study public sector worker stereotypes and found that workers in service-oriented jobs are seen as warmer and more competent than those in regulation-oriented jobs. Willems (2020) also found that public sector workers in the U.S., when seen as similar to bankers, are regarded less positively than firefighters, police, teachers and nurses. Since we asked about public sector workers in general, respondents in different countries may have thought of different types of public sector occupations. This is partly substantiated by our presurvey data. In the presurvey, we asked participants which occupations came to mind when listing traits associated with public sector workers. A post-hoc coding of the occupations revealed that participants in the U.S. and Canada thought of interpersonal, service-oriented occupations such as nurses, social workers, and firefighters more readily than Dutch or South Korean participants. Dutch participants mentioned more organizational or technical occupations such as tax administrators and municipal workers.[2] Therefore, thinking of more interpersonal service-oriented occupations may have led to more positive stereotypes among U.S. and Canadian respondents in comparison to Dutch and South Korean respondents. However, participants also mentioned many occupations that do not fall readily into the service- versus regulation-oriented dichotomy, indicating that this dichotomy is too simplified to fully explain our results.

A promising alternative explanation for the differences in stereotypes may lie in the interplay between expectations and actual experience of public service. Research shows that the difference between how public sectors *are* and *should be* is an important determinant of citizen satisfaction (Van Ryzin, 2006). More specifically, the expectancy disconfirmation model (EDM) proposes that citizen satisfaction can be determined by a process in which actual performance is compared to prior expectations (van Ryzin, 2004; James, 2009). One way in

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[2] A complete list of codes can be found at: https://osf.io/qsr7x/?view_only=83ffc7368c714c5c8d6b5ec3c1412a81.

which prior expectations are formed is through establishing an ideal. Social psychologists have found that this is done by constructing a mental picture of what the ideal should look like, and comparing the qualities of a given target to the qualities believed to be embodied by the ideal benchmark (Miller, Wattenberg, & Malanchuk, 1986). The closer the perceptions match the expectations, the more satisfied a person should be with the target (Hall, 2012; Bonito, 2004). In the context of public services, citizens could use such a strategy in the evaluation of public sector workers by comparing them to an ideal benchmark. In short, a larger discrepancy between what citizens typically observe in depictions of, and encounters with public sector workers versus their expectations of how they *should be*, could affect stereotypical perceptions.

Additionally, research shows that the ideal traits and values that citizens believe public employees should embody differ across cultures and are influenced by administrative traditions (Neo et al., 2022). For example, Dutch citizens value responsiveness, serviceability, effectiveness, and efficiency while South Korean citizens valued honesty, incorruptibility, and accountability. Indeed, the values that one holds depend on the values that are prescribed and reinforced by the traditions of one's social environment (Leung & Cohen, 2011). As such, the influence of the administrative tradition of a country may be such that it affects the traits considered important for an *ideal* public sector worker, which *in turn* influences the stereotypes that are formed. Stereotypes such as lazy and inflexible may reflect public discontent in the Netherlands with regards to these ideal normative values; likewise, stereotypes of corruption may result from the discrepancy between ideal values and what is observed in recent high-profile political scandals in South Korea. While we believe this to be a promising hypothesis, it requires more in-depth research, and future research is needed to assess the extent to which the explanation holds.

Another important contribution of our work lies in recognizing the different components of a stereotype: content and valence. These two components can be differentially affected by the sociocultural context. For example, *serving*, *going home on time*, and *job security* are traits endorsed by participants across all four countries and demographic groups. Although these stereotypes are shared across countries, they are not perceived equally in terms of how positive they are. Therefore, focusing only on stereotype content in research may lead to blind spots and researcher bias, with researchers being bound by their own cultural context in assuming the valence associated with a specific stereotype.

These findings allude to the importance of context sensitivity in the theoretical understanding of public sector worker stereotypes.

Our results also illustrate challenges in the framing of language when studying public opinion regarding public sector workers. Our findings imply that word choice in survey tools may influence opinions and attitudes towards public sector workers, such as in the case of the use of 'ambtenaren' in the Dutch survey. A word with similar connotation in English is 'bureaucrat'. Given its negative connotation, a survey asking participants to select traits associated with 'bureaucrats' may yield different sets of stereotypes in comparison to one asking for traits associated with 'public sector workers'. Research has shown that word choice in surveys can lead to false conclusions as they bias respondents (Ashford, Brown & Curtis, 2018). This has important implications especially for research seeking to understand citizen attitudes and satisfaction towards public service providers.

Lastly, our data suggest that public perceptions of government institutions and services are different from perceptions of the people that provide these services. For example, while confidence in government in the United States is markedly low (WVS Wave 7), our data show that stereotypes about public sector workers are definitively positive there. Van de Walle (2004) argued that citizens' attitude towards the administration is dependent on the target of evaluation. For example, people have different attitudes towards local municipal administration than towards the general administration. Ideas that citizens have of the public sector are, apparently, not homogenous across the different components that make up the public sector. People could therefore have contrasting perceptions between government and its public sector workers. This calls for caution in research practices that assume attitudes towards governments can be generalizable to the different components of the public sector.

At the same time, our findings show that it is also meaningful to study perceptions of the general category of 'public sector workers', even if specific jobs within that sector differ greatly from each other. In an earlier study of public sector worker stereotypes, Willems (2020) found that respondents were able to associate more traits with specific occupations (such as nurses) than with public sector workers in general. They concluded that no single epithet of the public sector worker exists. Yet, our additional data (see Appendix C in the online Supplementary Materials) shows that the stereotypes of public sector workers in general were no more dispersed than those of the specific public sector occupations we asked about, namely police, judges, and tax officials. In the four

countries, the top ten stereotypes of public sector workers were shared by 12% to as much as 30% of participants. This suggests that the public sector worker, as a general cognitive entity, is just as clear and prone to stereotypes in citizens' minds as, for example, police officers, judges, and tax officials.

In sum, the findings call for future research into the factors that determine public sector worker stereotypes. The unexpected findings in our study, which run contrary to common negative depictions of public sector workers, warrant further research. The discrepancy between cultural stereotypes and individual ideas means that scholars should not assume cultural stereotypes – such as portrayals by newspapers, movies, or politicians – to be representative of individual citizen beliefs. Doing so would disregard the positive stereotypes of public sector workers that exist. Taking an inductive, rather than a deductive, approach allows scholars to see what people's beliefs are, beyond taken-for-granted assumptions about public sector stereotypes. Furthermore, scholars should not assume that stereotypes are homogeneous across the globe. Studying one phenomenon across multiple countries can lead to surprising findings, providing inspiration for follow-up questions and further research.

We hope this study helps to further develop and refine public sector worker stereotyping research. Here, we offer two concrete suggestions. First, future efforts should be targeted at conducting larger scale replications involving more countries. This allows for a more comprehensive understanding of public sector worker stereotypes and serves as a basis for theory building. Specifically, it allows us to identify and systematically study potential antecedents and causes of stereotyping public sector workers, such as administrative culture, corruption levels, or individual-level trust in government. Second, evidence from psychological research has pointed to the damaging consequences of negative stereotyping across a wide span of domains including work performance, motivation, and wellbeing (Kray & Shirako, 2012). It is, therefore, imperative to invest efforts in understanding the consequences of stereotyping public sector workers.

2.8.2. Practical implications

Finally, our findings have important practical implications, too. First, the positive stereotypes we find can be strategically leveraged to attract and retain talent in the public sector. For example, Linos (2018) found that advertisements that emphasize the personal or career benefits of joining the police force are three

times more effective than neutral advertisements at getting qualified individuals to apply. More importantly, these messages are particularly effective for people of colour and women and can therefore support policy goals in different countries to increase diversity within the public sector workforce. The stereotype of job security can be strategically used for talent recruitment and employer branding of public organizations; the stereotype of going home on time can be used to signal that careers in the public sector allow for a healthy work-life balance.

Second, positive stereotypes can also be used to improve the work of public sector workers. Research has shown that reminding individuals of positive stereotypes of their social group can be used to improve task performance, especially among individuals who identify strongly with their group. Given that one's work affiliation can be a powerful and meaningful social category that individuals identify with (Miscenko & Day, 2016), positive stereotypes of public sector workers such as hardworking, responsible, and helpful can be used to boost workers' confidence and performance, ultimately improving public service quality (Shih et al., 2002). Overall, positive stereotypes can be leveraged to attract, hire, develop, and empower talented individuals within the public sector. This directly supports key policy goals of various governments such as those illustrated in the Biden-Harris President's Management Agenda (OMB, 2021) and can inspire strategies for governments struggling to attract new employees.

2

Chapter 3

Contributing factors to public sector worker stereotypes

Abstract

Public sector workers often face pervasive negative stereotypes. Despite a growing body of research addressing these stereotypes, the factors contributing to such stereotypes remain underexplored. We present a pre-registered study with two population-based survey experiments with video vignettes; one about teachers and one with police officers. Both investigate the impact of mediatized events, role of trust, and personal characteristics on stereotyping (n = 3,502). Our experimental results show that positive and negative news reports affect stereotyping of both professions. Negative news event lead to more negative stereotyping. We found that high and low trust are related to positive and negative stereotyping of both professions, respectively. Lastly, the personal characteristics of urban or rural setting, and of level of education yield mixed effects on trust and stereotyping of both professions. Rural non-college educated participants stereotype police more positively. Our findings offer theoretical and practical implications for understanding the complex web of factors shaping public sector worker stereotyping.

3.1 Introduction

When asked to think about public sector workers, stereotypes come to citizens' minds (Neo et al. 2023; de Boer, 2020; Willems, 2020). As far back as 1854, the Report on the Organization of the Permanent Civil Service to the British House of Commons illustrates the reality of public sector worker stereotyping. Among many excerpts demonstrating this reality is that the "admission into the civil service is indeed eagerly sought after, but it is for the unambitious, and the indolent or incapable, that it is chiefly desired" (Northcote & Trevelyan 1854, 4). Public employees' have been stereotyped for decades as lazy, inefficient, boring, and incompetent (Baldwin, 1990; Goodsell, 2004).

There has been a surge of studies examining public sector worker stereotypes (de Boer, 2020; Bertram et al., 2022; Neo et al., 2023; Willems, 2020). Yet, what most of these studies have in common is that they examine what stereotypes exist out there. Little is known about how and why they exist, and what are their contributing factors (a notable exception is Doring & Willems, 2023). This article aims at assessing three potential factors contribute to shaping stereotyping of public sector workers: the role of media, trust, and subgroups in the population. Therefore, we aim to answer the following research questions: (a) *do mediatized events in a profession affect the stereotyping of the profession?*, (b) *is trust towards a profession associated with the stereotyping of the profession?*, and (c) *do trust and stereotyping differ among urban college-educated participants compared to rural non-college educated ones?*

Public sector worker stereotypes impact workers themselves and the public sector as a whole. Evidence from past research suggests damaging effects of stereotyping public sector workers on three fronts. Firstly, it can directly affect workers in terms of diminished work performance, motivation, and well-being (Chen & Bozeman, 2014). Secondly, stereotyping can harm an employee's career development. Findings show that negative public sector stereotypes may decrease public sector workers' opportunities to transition from the public to the private sector (London Chamber of Commerce, 2010). Lastly, it can affect the government itself and the quality of its workforce. That is, stereotypes can bring about recruitment problems, with highly skilled workers being less attracted to the public sector. For instance, a decade ago, graduates from elite public policy schools increasingly chose consultancy and banking jobs instead of governmental positions (Piereson & Schaefer Riley, 2013). By gaining a better understanding, we could improve not only citizen satisfaction, but also citizen-state interactions.

Furthermore, a more profound understanding can positively impact the public sector workers' performance and well-being, ultimately leading to more effective governments.

We extend and contribute to the body of literature about public sector stereotyping in several ways. Firstly, we contribute to the growing literature on stereotypes in the public sector. There is growing empirical evidence that stereotypes of clients/users affect their treatment by public sector workers (e.g. Andersen et al., 2019; de Boer, 2020; Harrits, 2019; Jilke et al., 2018). Far less is known about how citizens stereotype public sector workers, and most of the literature focuses on what stereotypes exist (de Boer, 2020; Willems, 2020). We study possible factors influencing public sector worker stereotyping.

Secondly, the public sector worker stereotyping literature is limited in terms of methodological approaches. Experimental studies on factors that impact citizens' stereotyping of public employees are rare, with few notable exceptions (Hansen, 2022; Doring & Willems, 2023). We experimentally tested the impact of mediatized events, in the form of real news reports, on stereotyping of public sector workers.

Thirdly, we follow two of Haaland and colleagues' (2020) suggestions for information provision survey experiments by including anecdotal information as a priming element –which is rarely done in research- in a video form, deemed more effective than lengthy paragraphs of paper vignettes (Ravid et al., 2023).

3.2 Public sector worker stereotypes

Stereotypes are beliefs about the characteristics, attributes, and behaviours of members of specific groups (Stallybrass, 1977). Scholars argued that citizens perceive public sector workers as lazy, incompetent, insensitive to needs, inefficient, evil, power-hungry, driven by job security and greedy (Baldwin, 1990; Goodsell, 2004; Hubbell, 1991; Wilson, 1989; Neo et al. 2023; Willems, 2020). In their qualitative study of 220 front line public servants in Canada in the 1990s, Wake Carroll and Siegel devote a full chapter about how public servants cope with negative stereotypes, especially in remote filed offices away from capitals. They start that chapter with the remark that:

*Not only is it acceptable to make jokes about public servants but people are allowed to discuss public servants in such sweeping terms and with such invective that if the same type of language were applied to another societal group, the speaker could be accused of fomenting hatred (*Wake Carroll and Siegel 1999, *181).*

One pervasive issue with negative public sector worker stereotyping is, that, it is not as 'taboo' or controversial as negatively stereotyping other social categories (such as race, gender, sexual orientation, age) (Bertram et al., 2022; Van de Walle, 2004). That is, public sector workers are openly joked about, caricaturized, and negatively depicted in society (Van de Walle, 2004). Negative stereotyping of public sector workers is an integrate norm of North American culture and media (McEldowney & Murray, 2000; Szydlowski et al., 2022). For instance, the perpetuated negative image of the "lazy bureaucrat" has become a common characterization in TV entertainment (Lichter et al., 2000). A study review of top-10 box-office grossing movies from 2000 to 2009 revealed that 91 percent of movies featured at least one government worker character, with depictions tending on the negative side (Pautz & Warnement, 2013).

Repeated negative framing of public sector workers contributes to a negative image of public employees (Hubbell, 1991), contributing an availability bias in assessing and stereotyping public sector workers. Availability bias refers to the tendency to overestimate the likelihood of something being true, because the events are more easily recalled in memory (Schwarz et al., 1991). Therefore, in societies where public sector workers are equated to negative stereotypes, repeated negative exposure about public sector workers may contribute to easily accessible, stable attitudes over time (Szydlowski et al., 2022).

In sum, the persistence of negative stereotypes surrounding public sector workers remains a concerning issue with far-reaching consequences. What makes this issue particularly challenging is the societal acceptance of such stereotypes.

3.3 Role of media and popular culture

Scandals happen 'everywhere' but do not always turn into negative stereotypes. For instance, the province of Quebec (Canada) saw a surge of cases concerning inappropriate high school teacher to student behaviors in the recent years. From 2019 to 2021, there was an average of ten teachers per year accused of inappropriate sexual conduct towards high school students. In 2022, this number reached 31 cases. In the first five months of 2023, there were already 20 cases of such (Dions-Viens, 2023) (including the first author's former geography high school teacher. True story!). However, this has not reflected as a negative stereotype towards high school teachers in Canada, as it did in the United States. To illustrate the matter, we present part of a 2023 Netflix comedy special by Mark

Normand. Normand presented the two stereotypes that will be tested later in this study. "All these absolutes now. (...) 'Cops are all bad.' No, some are bad, some are awesome. 'Teachers are heroes.' Some are heroes, some f*** their students. Right? [laughter from the crowd]'' (Normand, 2023). This excerpt exemplifies how these two stereotypes (cops are bad and teachers are heroes) are part of popular culture. Therefore, the question arises – do media reports affect stereotyping of public sector professions?

Media reports would act on confirmation bias, which refers to the tendency to seek information that supports, rather than rejects one's beliefs, typically by interpreting evidence to confirm existing beliefs while rejecting or ignoring information that goes against a belief (American Psychology Association, 2023). People's tendency to engage in confirmation bias has been evidenced many times through decades of research (Gray, 2010). Two subtypes of confirmation biases are of interest to this study.

Firstly, there is biased interpretation. It refers to interpreting evidence with respect to one's existing beliefs, by typically evaluating confirming evidence differently than evidence that challenges preconceptions (Gray, 2010). For instance, if one dislikes the police, they may interpret negative events in the profession as proof of their disdain, while discredit positive events as a rare incident. Experiments have demonstrated that people tend to not change their beliefs on complex issues even after being provided with proof, because of the way they interpret the evidence (Gray, 2010; Taber & Lodge, 2006). Additionally, people accept 'confirming' evidence more easily, and critically evaluate more the 'disconfirming' evidence (Taber & Lodge, 2006).

Secondly, there is biased memory. It states that to confirm current beliefs, people may remember/recall information selectively. Memory confirmation bias plays a role in stereotype maintenance. Experiments show that expectancy-confirming information strongly affects recall and recognition memory (Gray, 2010; Fyock & Stangor, 1994). Although one might not consider stereotypes about a social group to be true, people tend to remember stereotype-consistent information better than disconfirming evidence (Fyock & Stangor, 1994).

Confirmation biases and especially biased memory processes lead us to another relevant cognitive process, namely availability bias, that we touched upon earlier. The availability bias refers to the tendency to overestimate the likelihood of something being true, because the events are more easily recalled in memory (Schwarz et al., 1991). There is a potential for an availability bias about negative events in given professions. This could be affected through cultural

norms and regular popular media negative portrayals of public sector workers. Media coverage – or lack of – of events in professions may influence how we stereotype certain professions. For instance, incidents of excessive use of police force may receive more media coverage compared to cases of high school teachers acting as groomers.

These cognitive biases may help understand how people interpret the events that they see in the media. When do mediatized events are seen as an isolated incident or a proof of a larger trend? Based on the confirmation bias, people have a tendency to look for and remember information that aligns with their beliefs, while disregarding information that does not (Watson, 1960). One potential belief to align information is trust towards a profession. For instance, if someone has low trust towards the police, they may interpret negative mediatized events in the profession as a 'proof of a larger trend.' Similarly, if someone has high trust towards teachers, they may interpret negative mediatized events as an isolated event.

3.4 Trust and stereotyping

There is little scholarly attention to the relationship between trust and stereotyping of public sector workers. One notable exception is Hansen's (2021) investigation on whether impressions of workers' warmth and competence during a specific interaction with a public sector worker predicted trust towards public sector workers yielding mixed results. His evidence showed that competence impressions of the worker during a specific encounter were associated with trust towards public sector workers. Findings also suggest that high competence and warmth impressions during a specific encounter are positively associated with trust towards public sector workers. Yet, his focus was on the effect of warmth and competence during a specific encounter with a public sector worker, and not on the general perception of the profession. Furthermore, the study did not explore sub-group effects. It is possible that strong correlations existed between trust and stereotypes for some subgroups, and were absent in others, generating mixed results in a general model.

Citizens' trust towards the government and its employees can be defined as the extent to which citizens have confidence in public institutions and their employees to act upon the best interest of society and its members (Kim, 2010). By trusting a group or an institution, one is 'freed' from worry to monitor the other party's behavior. The public employees with whom citizens have the most

direct contact, street-level bureaucrats, are a target for citizen distrust and anger (Kramer, 1999; Houston & Harding, 2013).

There are two core aspects on which citizens evaluate trust in government: perceived competence and perceived benevolence (Grimmelikhuijsen & Knies, 2015; Porumbescu, 2015). Competence is the perception whether a public organization or institution has the skills and ability to fulfill its obligations to the public and includes traits such as capable, effective, skillful, and professional in decision-making (Grimmelikhuijsen & Meijer, 2014; Hetherington, 1998). Benevolence is the perception whether a public organization has good intentions, meaning to keep citizens' best interest in mind (Grimmelikhuijsen, 2011; Kim et al., 2019; Levi & Stoker, 2000).

Substantial evidence in social psychology advances that two dimensions underlie the judgement of groups (including the government and its employees): warmth and competence (Cuddy et al., 2008; Judd et al., 2005; Peeters, 2008). These two dimensions form a fundamental basis on which people form impressions of others, and are considered strong predictors in attitudes (Cuddy et al., 2012; Hansen, 2021; Fiske et al., 2002). These two dimensions are at the core of theoretical foundations of trust, and of stereotyping. One common method to measure stereotypes (de Boer, 2020; Hansen, 2021) is the Stereotype Content Model (SCM) (Fiske et al., 2002). Two scales of the SCM have been widely used in stereotype research (Crawford et al., 2013; Lin et al., 2005), namely the warmth and competence scales. The warmth dimension is associated with the other's intent, including traits such as friendliness and likeability. The competence dimension is associated with ability and includes traits such as skill, efficiency, and capability (Hansen, 2021). The resemblance between the SCM and core aspects of trust is striking. We expect to find a relationship between levels of trust towards a profession and how the given profession is stereotyped in terms of the SCM.

3.5 Subgroups in the population

In a chapter describing focus groups about men's health held in 2016 in a low-income housing project in Tennessee (Metzl, 2019), white men - who had just minutes earlier mentioned how public programs like Medicaid and Veterans' Affairs, along with repeated surgeries and interventions, had saved their lives - became critical when a question contained the word "government." This make Metzl (2019 p.107) remark that "for many white men in the South, the word government elicits an autonomic peptic response." Similarly, in her longitudinal

focus groups of 39 groups in 27 rural communities in Wisconsin diners and gas-station coffee spots, Cramer substantiates dim views of government from these residents. Public employees were discussed as "(1) lazy and undeserving, (2) inefficient bureaucrats, (3) recipients of exorbitant benefits and salaries paid with hard-earned taxpayer money, (4) guilty by association with the government, and (5) often represented by greedy unions" (Cramer, 2016, p.144). She adds that for rural Wisconsinites, public servants are seen as out of touch urbanites who are very much outsiders. These examples from Tennessee and Wisconsin illustrate that subgroups, rural non-college educated residents, can perceive negatively the government and its workers.

Examining the literature on public sector worker stereotypes, there is an assumption that public sector worker stereotyping happens in one public: the general population (notable exception, Bertram et al., 2022)). That is, studies examining public sector worker stereotypes do not investigate whether stereotyping differs between subgroups based on personal characteristics. However, as political scientists and opinion poll experts know, there is not one public. The general population is composed of a multitude of subgroups: rural, urban, college-educated, high-school educated, varying socioeconomical statuses, ethnicities, and so on. We should not assume that stereotypes are found equally in these subgroups in society in the same manner (Bertram et al., 2022). For instance, Bertram and colleagues (2022) show that citizens with a lower subjective income, and citizens working in the private sector stereotype public sector workers more negatively than their peers. Gaining a better understanding of how public sector worker stereotypes differ among subgroups will improve our understanding of how these stereotypes are formed, and even more consequentially, how they persist. It will also help mount targeted intervention that might move the needle on harmful perception. So far, little is known about which and whether personal characteristics, such as educational level and rural or urban setting, factor in public sector worker stereotyping.

The qualitative studies by Metlz (2019) and Cramer (2016) highlighted a pattern where people in rural towns harbor highly negative perceptions of the government and its employees. Our objective is to conduct a quantitative assessment of this phenomenon. Spatial selection refers to the phenomenon wherein young individuals who migrated to cities for university education choose to remain in urban areas or relocate to other cities, rather than returning to their smaller hometowns. This pattern results in the departure of educated citizens from rural areas, leading to a less educated population and a stagnant local

economy (De Ruyter et al., 2021). This issue is acute in Canada (Decoda Literacy Solutions, 2016) and has also led to a widening education and geographical gap in the U.S. (Williams, 2017; Florida 2017; Lind, 2020), as well as in the U.K. and France (Goodhart, 2021). Therefore, Case and Deaton assert that "geography is increasingly patterned by education (…)" highlighting the profound impact of educational choices on geographical patterns (Case and Deaton, 2020, 148).

Lastly, another misnomer is that also for trust, and not just stereotypes, there is no one public. There is evidence that different subgroups in the population trust in the government and public employees differently. Perceptions of trustworthiness in public employees are influenced by sociodemographic factors (Houston & Harding, 2013). Evidence shows that demographic variables such as age, gender, education, location, and political preference influence trust towards the government (Grimmelikhuijsen & Meijer, 2014; King, 1997; Putnam, 2000). Furthermore, levels of trust towards the police vary across different racial groups and neighborhoods (Kim et al., 2019; Lai & Zhao, 2010; Schuck et al., 2008). Demographic composition of neighborhoods, and one's minority status in a given neighborhood are also associated with varying levels of trust towards the police (Huebner et al., 2004; Kim et al., 2019; Kusow et al., 1997; Wu et al., 2009).

3.6 Hypotheses

Based on the theoretical framework and literature review presented above, we will test the following hypotheses:

Hypothesis 1: Public sector workers stereotypes will be affected by mediatized events, in such a way that negative events will be associated with more negative stereotypes, and positive events with more positive stereotypes.

Hypothesis 2a: People with prior low trust in a profession will interpret negative events as 'proofs of larger trends' (strengthen stereotypical beliefs), while people with prior high trust will be interpret the same negative event as 'isolated events' (not affect stereotypical beliefs);

Hypothesis 2b: People with prior low trust in a profession, especially for non-college educated rural habitants, will interpret negative events as 'proofs of larger trends' (strengthen stereotypical beliefs), while people with prior high trust, especially for non-college educated urban habitants, will be interpret the same negative event as 'isolated events' (not affect stereotypical beliefs).

Hypothesis 3a: Trust and stereotyping will be associated in such a way, that low trust will be associated with negative stereotyping, while high trust will be associated with positive stereotyping;

Hypothesis 3b: Trust will differ between urban participants and rural participants;

Hypothesis 3c: Trust will differ between college-educated urbanites and non-college educated rural participants.

Hypothesis 4a: Stereotyping will differ between urban participants and rural participants;

Hypothesis 4b: Stereotyping will differ between college-educated urbanites and non-college educated rural participants.

We will test these hypotheses with the two studies explained in the next section.

3.7 Design and procedure

This study uses a cross-sectional, between subjects, 2x3 population-based survey experiment conducted in Canada. Population-based survey experiment combine the external validity of surveys with representative samples with the internal validity of a researcher randomizing treatments (Mutz, 2011). Participants were randomized to one of six conditions: police treatment 1 (negative police behavior video), police treatment 2 (positive police behavior video), police control (no video), teacher treatment 1 (male high school teacher sexual misconduct video), teacher treatment 2 (female high school teacher sexual misconduct video), and control teacher (no video). The project's pre-registration, data, and all supplementary materials can be found at https://osf.io/9247w/?view_only=b98a736e0682495ca4d08e9b0077bb2f. Ethical approval for the study and its procedures was obtained through the ethical committee of the Faculty of Law, Economics, and Governance of Utrecht University.

We chose the option of pure or passive control. This means that our control conditions did not show any type of video. Choosing between a passive and an active control implies trade-offs. Firstly, passive controls make it easier to interpret results between pre-treatment beliefs and the outcome of interest as beliefs among control group respondents are not affected a treatment (Haaland et al., 2020). Furthermore, we are interested in the effect of a particular type of information compared to not providing any information (Haaland et al., 2020; Hager et al., 2019; Roth & Wohlfart, 2019).

The survey flow is illustrated in figure 1. Participants were first introduced to the study and asked for consent. Then they were presented with sociodemographic questions, randomized towards questions either on police officers or teachers, and presented with questions about general trust and experiences with the government and police or teachers. Participants were then randomized to either treatment 1, treatment 2, or control conditions within their occupation (police or teacher). Two thirds of participants in both occupations were shown a one-minute video vignette. The one third of participants randomized in the control condition were not shown any videos. This experimental part was followed by questions about stereotyping, interpersonal trust, and some final socio-demographic questions. All questions had forced responses. Participants who did not provide consent to the study were redirected to terminate the survey.

Figure 1
Survey Flow
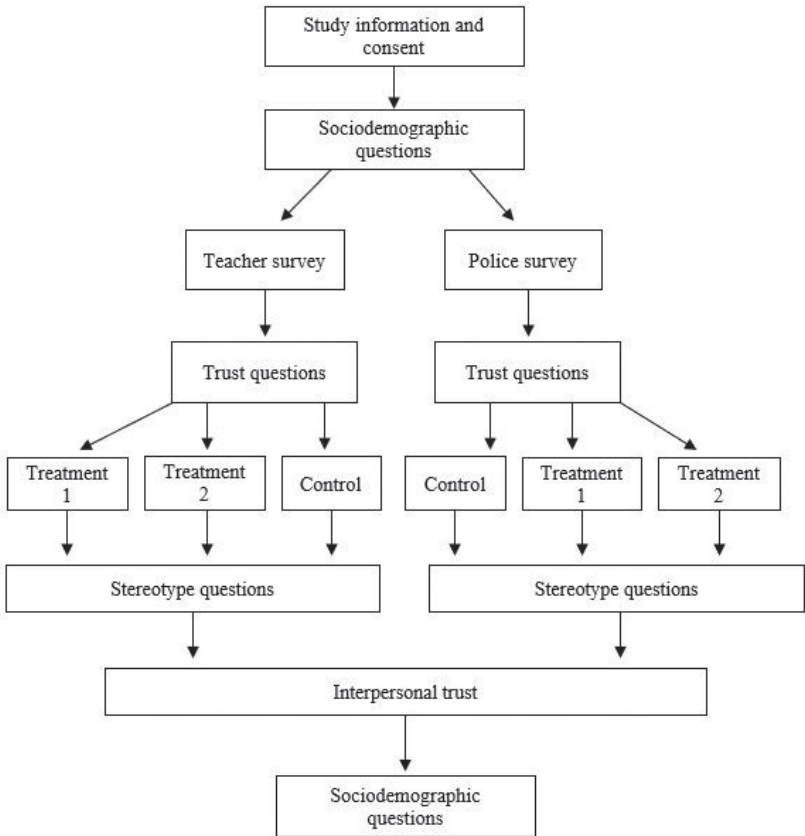
We ran two studies on two different public sector jobs and related stereotypes: police and teachers.

3.8 Sample

We had 3510 participants (teachers n = 1494, police n = 1516) from one Canadian province. Power calculations for sample size are in appendix 3A. All participants were above 18 years old. They all provided consent. The sample is composed of 49.7% women, the mean age is between 45 and 54. It matches population quotas as presented in table 1, appendix 3B. That is, the sample is representative in terms of age, gender, and region of population of Quebec (Canada). The data was collected by a Canadian survey firm - Léger. Data collection spanned from March 21st to April 9th 2023. The survey included a reCAPTCHA test to make sure that humans, and not bots, answered the survey.

We assessed the sample conditions for homogeneity among the demographic variables of sex with a chi-square test (Chi-square = 19.347, p = .080), age with a one-way ANOVA (F = .502, p = .775), and employment sector with a one-way ANOVA (F= .232, p = .959). We decided to include the employment sector as Bertram and colleagues (2022) find that it impacts stereotyping of public sector workers. The differences are all insignificant, showing that randomization was successful.

3.9 Measures

We measured a range of sociodemographic variables as demographic factors of interest. These sociodemographic variables included: age, sex, region of residency, highest education level completed, personal experiences with the government and teachers / police as positive or negative, trust towards the government, interpersonal trust, political views, employment sector, years of residency in Canada, ethnicity, and income.

Stereotyping. We assessed stereotypes with two scales of the Stereotype Content Model (SCM) (Fiske, 2002). The warmth dimension scale is associated with the other's intent, and includes the following traits: likeable, good-natured, friendly, warm, sincere, and caring. The competence dimension scale is associated with ability and includes the following traits: competent, confident, capable, efficient, intelligent, and qualified. Participants had to rate all 12 traits on a five-point Likert-scale (1- very bad to 5-very well). The scale and its French translation are in Appendix 3C. Stereotyping is our main dependent variable.

Trust. We used a one-item measure of trust for both occupations. The majority of large international surveys widely used in research (OECD, ISSP, Pew

research center) and a large body of literature about trust towards civil servants use only a one-item question to measure trust towards civil servants (Van Ryzin, 2011). Therefore, we have incorporated a direct measure of trust towards police officers and teachers, asking respondents to rate on a five-point Likert-scale (1-strongly agree and 5- strongly disagree): "How much do you trust [police officers/ high school teachers] to do the right thing?"

Mediatized events. We present the treatment of mediatized events in video form. That is, we present a one-minute excerpt from a real news report. In their meta-analysis, Ravid and colleagues (2023, 8) considered results for vignettes studies separately from other designs. The reason is that these studies are not immersive enough to reflect behavior that respondents would pursue, if it happens to them in real life (ibid, 8). Well into the age of shared video on platforms like YouTube, Vimeo, TikTok and others, video vignettes are important mediums that affect our everyday lives. We decided to opt for real stories from real news reports for ecological validity, compared to creating our own videos. This means a trade-off in comparability of video elements versus realism. We opted for realism. Mediatized events is an independent variable.

The negative police behavior video depicts a citizen explaining a police action that has just occurred involving police officers barging into someone's apartment and firing their guns. The positive police behavior video shows a burning car with a citizen trapped in it, with a police officer rescuing the citizen. In both police vignettes, the gender of the police officer is not known. Therefore, we do not expect a gender effect associated with perceptions of the police.

The teacher treatment 1 video features a news report about a high school female teacher arrested for inappropriate sexual relations with students. The teacher treatment 2 video features a news report, with the same reporter from the same channel, about a male high school teacher arrested for inappropriate sexual relations with students. In this case, randomizing participants to each video condition is important to account for potential gender effects on stereotyping. For instance, de Boer (2020) found that women in a given profession are stereotyped as warmer than men on the SCM scale. The links to the videos can be found in Appendix 3D.

Isolated event or proof of a larger trend. We measure whether participants categorize the video they are shown as an isolated event in the profession or as a proof of a larger trend with a one-item binary question: 'In the clip viewed, is this an isolated event or is it evidence of a larger trend within this profession?' Participants were given two choices of answer: (a) isolated event, (b) proof of larger trend. The interpretation of events as isolated event or proof of larger trend is a dependent variable.

3.10 Results

Hypothesis 1. Hypothesis 1 stated that public sector workers stereotypes will be affected by mediatized events, in such a way that negative events will be associated with more negative stereotypes, and positive events with more positive stereotypes. That is, mediatized events is the independent variable, and stereotyping is the dependent variable.

The hypothesis is partially supported. That is, participants that were shown negative news clips about teachers stereotyped them more negatively than their control counterparts. They were stereotyped as less competent (male video (β = -.25, SE = .05, p < .001) and female video (β = -.17, SE = .05, p < .001)), and less warm (male video (β = -.21, SE = .05, p < .001) and female video (β = -.17, SE = .05, p < .001)).

For police stereotyping, the negative news video had no effect on warmth compared to the control group (β = .11, SE = .21, p > .05), yet had an effect on competence – police officers were perceived as more competent (β = -.21, SE = .05, p < .001). Lastly, the participants exposed to the positive police behavior news clip stereotyped police as warmer (β = .32, SE = .05, p < .001) and more competent (β = .55, SE = .04, p < .001) than their control counterparts. Results are presented in table 1.

Table 1
Regression Results of Media Effects on Stereotyping

Predictors	Warmth				Competence			
	B(SE)	Lower CI	Upper CI	R²	B(SE)	Lower CI	Upper CI	R²
Teacher videos				.02				.02
Constant	3.78***(.03)	3.71	3.84		3.9***(.03)	3.83	3.96	
Female video	-.17***(.05)	-.27	-.08		-.17***(.05)	-.26	-.08	
Male video	-.21***(.05)	-.30	-.18		-.25***(.05)	-.35	-.16	
Police videos				.04				.10
Constant	3.46***(.04)	3.39	3.53		3.45***(.03)	3.39	3.50	
Negative behavior video	-.05 (.05)	-.15	.04		.32***(.04)	.23	.40	
Positive behavior video	.32***(.05)	.23	.43		.55***(.04)	.47	.64	

Note. * p < 0.05, ** p < 0.005, *** p < 0.001

Hypothesis 2a. stated that people with prior low trust in a profession will interpret negative events as 'proofs of larger trends', while people with prior high trust will interpret the same negative events as 'isolated events'. That is, trust is the independent variable and the interpretation of events is the dependent variable.

The hypothesis is partially supported. We find that citizens with high trust towards the police are more likely to interpret a negative event as an isolated event rather than a proof of larger trend, compared to positive events (β = -1.3, SE = .17, p < .001). In terms of odds, viewing a negative policing event, makes it 3.7 times more likely (z = 7.74) to interpret the events as an isolated event, compared to their peers who saw the positive policing event. However, we do not find such a relationship between trust and interpretation of event for teachers, nor low trust for police. Results are presented in table 2. Policing events seem to be more polarizing.

Table 2
Logistic Regression Results of the Interpretation of Media Events Based on Trust

Predictors	Low trust in profession					High trust in profession				
	B(SE)	Sig.	Lower CI	Upper CI	n	B(SE)	Sig.	Lower CI	Upper CI	n
Teacher videos										
Constant	-.46 (.18)	.009	-.80	-.12		-1.11 (.13)	<.001	-1.36	-.86	
Negative male video versus negative female video	.12(.25)	.618	-.36	.61	269	.17(.19)	.344	-.19	.54	591
Police videos										
Constant	.11(.15)	.456	-.18	.40		-.55 (.12)	<.001	-.78	-.32	
Negative behavior video versus positive behavior video	.11(.21)	.590	-.30	.53	358	-1.3 (.17)	<.001	.96	1.64	650

Hypothesis 2b. Hypothesis 2b stated that people with prior low trust in a profession, especially for non-college educated rural habitants, will interpret negative events as 'proofs of larger trends', while people with prior high trust, especially for college educated urban dwellers, will be interpret the same negative event as 'isolated events.' We performed a logistic regression. In this case, both trust and sociodemographic variables (education and location) are independent variables. The interpretation of events (isolated event or proof of larger trend) is the dependent variable.

The hypothesis is rejected. That is, non-college educated rural habitants with low or high trust in professions did not systematically interpret positive or negative events as either isolated events or proof of a larger trend. However, both non-college educated rural habitants and college-educated urban residents with prior high trust shown a negative policing event, rather than a positive one, are respectively 65.6% and 74.8% more likely to interpret it as an isolated event,

rather than a proof of a larger trend. Results are in table 3.

Table 3
Logistic Regression Results on the Interpretation of Media Events Based on Trust by Respondent Profile

Predictors	Low trust										High trust									
	Rural, no college					(Sub)urban, college					Rural, no college					(Sub)urban, college				
	B(SE)	Sig.	Lower CI	Upper CI	n	B(SE)	Sig.	Lower CI	Upper CI	n	B(SE)	Sig.	Lower CI	Upper CI	n	B(SE)	Sig.	Lower CI	Upper CI	n
Constant	-.34(.41)	.416	-1.15	.48		-.36(.33)	.265	-1.0	.28		-.94(.31)	.003	-1.56	-.33		-1.60(.27)	<.001	-2.12	-1.08	
Negative teacher male video versus negative teacher female video	.28(.56)	.631	-.82	1.36	53	-.33(.48)	.492	-1.27	.61	75	.25(.56)	.654	-.85	1.35	71	-.09(.39)	.811	-.87	.68	191
Constant	-.21(.37)	.578	-.94	.52		.27(.25)	.266	-.21	.77		.87(.33)	.009	.22	1.52		.48(.20)	.017	.09	.87	
Negative police behavior video versus positive police behavior video	.29(.56)	.599	-.80	1.39	52	-.42(.36)	.251	-1.13	.30	123	-1.38(.46)	.003	-2.29	-.47	84	-1.07(.29)	<.001	-1.63	-.50	208

Hypothesis 3a. Hypothesis 3a stated that trust and stereotyping will be associated, with trust being the independent variable and stereotyping the dependent variable. We performed a one-way ANOVA and the hypothesis is supported. Trust is positively associated with stereotyping teachers' competence (F [154, 671] = 27.59, p < .001) and warmth (F [113, 709] = 19.26, p < .001). Similar results are found for police's competence (F [155, 604] = 31.52, p < .001) and warmth (F [253, 740] = 42.06, p < .001). Results are in table 4.

Table 4
ANOVA Results on Trust and Stereotyping

Stereotyping	Model	Sum of squares	Degrees of freedom	Mean square	F statistic	*p* value
Warmth teachers	Between groups	113.27	12	9.44	19.26	<.001
	Within groups	709.09	1447	.49		
	Total	822.39	1459			
Competence teachers	Between groups	153.61	12	12.80	27.59	<.001
	Within groups	709.09	1447	.46		
	Total	824.92	1459			
Warmth police	Between groups	252.81	12	21.08	42.06	<.001
	Within groups	739.87	1477	.50		
	Total	992.68	1489			
Competence police	Between groups	154.63	12	12.86	31.52	<.001
	Within groups	603.81	1477	.41		
	Total	758.43	1489			

Hypothesis 3b. Hypothesis 3b stated that trust will differ between urban participants and rural participants. In this case, location is the independent variable, and trust is the dependent variable. We performed a regression analysis. The hypothesis is rejected. The level of trust for teachers does not vary among rural and urban (β = n.s., z = 0.49) and between rural and suburban respondents (β = n.s., z = 1.92). The level of trust for police officers does not vary between rural and urban (β = n.s., z = -0.15) nor between rural and suburban respondents (β = n.s., z = 0.79).

Hypothesis 3c. Hypothesis 3c stated that trust will differ between urban college-educated urbanites and rural non-college educated rural participants.

Here again, the sociodemographic variable (education and location) is the independent variable, while trust is the dependent variable. We performed a regression analysis. Results were partially significant, the aggregation of education and region does have an effect. Rural non-college educated participants had lower trust towards teachers compared to rural and educated participants (β = -.53, z = -3.41), with a decrease of 16% in odds in trusting teachers. No such effects were found for police.

Hypothesis 4a. Hypothesis 4a stated that stereotyping will differ between urban participants and rural participants. Location is the independent variable, and stereotyping is the dependent variable. We performed a regression analysis. The hypothesis is not supported. There was no difference in stereotypes regarding teachers' warmth and competence between rural and urban respondents. The stereotypes regarding police officers' warmth and competence were also similar between rural and urban respondents. However, urban respondents tended to perceive police officers as slightly less competent compared to rural respondents (β = -0.12, z = -2.42).

Hypothesis 4b. Hypothesis 4b stated that stereotyping will differ between college-educated urbanites and non-college educated rural participants. Here, the sociodemographic variable (education and location) is the independent variable, while stereotyping is the dependent variable. We performed a regression analysis. The hypothesis is partially supported: the aggregation of education and rural or urban setting has an effect on stereotyping. That is, compared to college-educated (sub)urbanites, non-college educated rural participants find police officers warmer (β = 0.26, z = 3.89) and more competent (β = 0.20, z = 3.41). However, the differences are small, at between a third and a quarter of a standard deviation, or at one fifth of an increment in the 5-point Likert scale. No effects were found for teachers.

3.11 Discussion and conclusion

This article has investigated (1) the effect of mediatized events on stereotyping, (2) whether trust influences how you interpret mediatized events of a profession, (3) whether trust and stereotyping are related, and (4) whether trust and stereotyping differ between different societal groups. We show that mediatized events affect stereotyping, regardless of education and location. We find that trust is related to stereotyping. Lastly, we find that subgroups based on education *and* rural or urban setting are partially associated with trust and stereotyping.

First and foremost, our results demonstrate that mediatized events do affect how we stereotype professions. Participants exposed to news clip excerpts depicting negative events related to teachers stereotyped them as less warm and less competent. For the police, the effects were mixed. Participants who viewed a positive video of police officers helping a citizen rated them as warmer and more competent than their control counterparts. Surprisingly, participants in the negative police behavior video rated police officers as more competent than controls.

There are potential explanations for our mixed effects. Firstly, it is possible that the effect lies in 'how bad' an event is perceived by citizens. A possibility is that the negative video showed about the police was not seen as the same level of negative event as the teacher videos, as a necessary police action, or did not provide enough context to evaluate the behavior. Future research should assess 'the intensity' of the negative events to better understand how they affect stereotyping. Moreover, the negative event for the police could be seen as a necessary or justified transgression of a utility norm, while as the negative event for teachers could be seen as a moral norm transgression (van Bavel et al., 2012). Evidence shows that people are punished and judged more harshly when they violate moral norms, especially ones that trigger disgust (van Bavel et al., 2012). This could, in part, explain the mixed effects for the mediatized event effect on stereotyping. Finally, a potential explanation also lies in the deservingness of the victim or the situation. It is safe to agree that most people would deem high school students undeserving of teacher sexual misconduct. However, there is not enough information provided in the negative police behavior video to judge the deservingness of the situation. For instance, one could interpret the police barging in an apartment and shooting because they were chasing a criminal. The judgement of one's deservingness of a situation has been demonstrated to affect views, attitudes, and behaviors (Feather, 2005). Future research should measure and discern the effects of norms and deservingness in how mediatized events impact stereotyping.

Additionally, trust does not explain whether participants interpret an event as an isolated incident or a proof of a larger trend. However, we do find that participants with high trust towards the police tend to interpret the negative police behavior video as an isolated event. This could, once again, relate to the types of norms violated and deservingness. A possibility is that the moral norm that is violated in the teacher videos is too strong to be able to interpret the event via a simple cognitive process related to trust. Similarly, it is possible that the

cognitive process of judging deservingness plays a bigger role than anticipated. While one can argue about the utility of police shootings, no one can argue that sexual misconduct is a good thing. Future research should examine the role of the types of norms violated and deservingness in the cognitive interpretation of mediatized events within professions.

Furthermore, our results show a significant relationship between trust and stereotyping. This finding is not surprising, considering the substantial overlap between the theoretical frameworks of trust and stereotyping. They both share similar underlying mechanisms, namely the evaluation of intention and the capability to pursue that intention, making them closely intertwined. Hence, we can argue that warmth and competence are vital components influencing both trust and how we perceive public sector workers. However, the correlation and size effect for such overlapping concepts is smaller than expected (0.3 – 0.4). This means that despite the overlap in theoretical concepts, there is more difference than similarity between the concepts. One possible explanation is that, trust essentially acts as a form of expectation (Mollering, 2001/2012; Hosmer, 1995; Kramer, 1999; Burt & Knez, 1996; Ross, 2004). It embodies the anticipation that institutions and their professionals will act in our best interest (Mechanic 1998). This brings us to the expectancy-disconfirmation model (EDM) (Van Ryzin, 2004; Zhang et al., 2021). The model states that citizens' satisfaction with the public sector results from their expectations compared to the experience they have. In our case, trust can be interpreted as a predictive expectation about the characteristics that members of a certain group will have and how they will behave (Allport, 1954). Therefore, one possibility is that high levels of trust could lead to positive expectations (and consequently, stereotyping) from individuals or groups (Mollering, 2005). Research shows that trust does impact perception (Lankton et al., 2014).

Lastly, our study identifies specific personal characteristics that influence citizen stereotyping of public sector workers. However, the results in this regard are mixed. We found that rural non-college educated participants have lower trust than educated urban participants, but this difference was observed only when it comes to teachers. Surprisingly, there was no variation between these groups in terms of trust towards the police. Similarly, regarding stereotyping, there was no disparity between the groups concerning teachers, but there was a difference in how they perceived the police. Rural non-college educated participants viewed police officers as warmer and more competent compared to college-educated urban participants. These findings contrast with those of

Bertram and colleagues (2022), who suggested that education is not linked to stereotyping. Instead, our study indicates that a combination of education and region can influence the stereotyping of public sector workers.

One key potential factor at play is previous experience with the given profession. Expectations (and therefore trust) can be shaped by past experience (Van Ryzin, 2004). It is possible that characteristics such as rural or urban setting and education can provide different contexts and experiences for interactions with and exposure to public sector workers. For instance, participants who live in urban areas are exposed to more police, more crime, and more negative events, than participants located in less populated, rural areas. Similarly, participants who are highly educated, even if they are currently living in rural areas, have spent a few years in an urban area for their education, therefore also influencing past experiences with public sector workers. College educated participants, compared to non-college educated ones, have been exposed to more teachers (and professors), may have had the funds to go to better schools, may have had a bigger variety of schools to choose from. Here are just a few examples on how previous experience may have played a role in our results. However, these are only speculation and future research should investigate the role of past experience and its relation to personal characteristics in shaping trust and stereotyping. Positive experiences can lead to increased trust and positive stereotypes, while negative experiences can lead to decreased trust and negative stereotypes (Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006). The role of experience can be explained though the contact hypothesis and the intergroup theory of threat and uncertainty (Allport, 1954; Stephan et al., 2009; Rast et al., 2018).

The contact hypothesis states that positive intergroup contact and interactions reduce prejudice and negative stereotyping, while negative intergroup contact exacerbates prejudice and negative stereotyping (Amir, 1976; Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006). The intergroup threat theory (Stephan et al., 2009; Rast et al., 2018) explains the emotional and cognitive processes associated with intergroup interactions. Negative experiences can create feelings of intergroup threat and anxiety, and ultimately negative intergroup attitudes and behaviors. The perception of threat often depends on the content of the stereotypes that group members attribute to an outgroup (Cottrell & Neuberg, 2005; Rast et al., 2018). Differing dimensions of the stereotype content model may impact intergroup threat perceptions (Riek et al., 2006; Rast et al., 2018). This also closely relates to intergroup theory of uncertainty. High or low trust can be associated with feelings of certainty and uncertainty about an outgroup's intentions and

behavior. Feelings of uncertainty can shape expectations and perceptions of the members of that given group (Shelton & Richeson, 2005; Rast et al., 2018; Tropp, 2003). Positive of negative contact can decrease or increase anxiety and uncertainty about the other group (Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006; Rast et al., 2018).

Our results should be considered in light of our limitations. Firstly, a limitation is that we used a one-minute intervention for a short-term effect. Our experimental setup involves a simplified treatment presented in a survey environment in a less complex setting than real-life situations. Thus, the limited applicability of our findings to the complexities and dynamics of real-world interactions, and long-lasting effects of media reports should be acknowledged. Another limitation to be mindful of relates to self-selection bias, which can be a concern in survey experiments. Participants in online panels may not fully represent the general public -despite weighting efforts and recruiting a well-regarded polling firm- as not everyone is willing to participate in such panels. To mitigate this, we used quotas based on sex, age, and region to ensure that our sample approximated the population distribution for these factors. Furthermore, our news reports vignettes are not equal. The intensity of the negative event, types of norms transgressed, and deservingness of the victim were not measured made equal. Thus, the interpretation of results should be treated with caution. Lastly, parts of our study are cross-sectional, and the effect sizes observed are modest.

It is also important to exercise caution while interpreting our findings, as the effects observed are relatively small. This outcome was expected, as we specifically examined the isolated influences of only a few cues. In reality, citizens rely on a multitude of cues to form judgments about public sector workers. The subtle nature of these effects is in line with existing research on stereotyping, which emphasizes that cues operate in nuanced ways (Raaphorst et al., 2018). Despite their modest size, these effects can have significant implications for the everyday interactions between citizens and public sector workers (de Boer, 2020). Even subtle cues can exert considerable influence, shaping the dynamics of these encounters and impacting the perceptions and behaviors of both citizens and public sector workers (de Boer, 2020). It emphasizes the importance of recognizing the subtleties and complexities involved in these interactions, as seemingly minor cues can contribute to broader perceptions and responses.

3.11.1 Conclusion

This article has made the first steps in understanding the factors influencing public sector worker stereotyping. Furthermore, it informs future research about

the more complex causal relationships between factors that affect stereotyping. We found that media coverage does have an effect on stereotyping, that trust is related to stereotyping, and that the personal characteristics of region and education are associated with stereotyping. We now call researchers alike to expand on the cognitive processes of professional stereotyping, expand on the role of past experiences that influence stereotyping, and on the role of media coverage on stereotype formation.

In terms of practical implications, public leaders can enhance citizens' interactions with public sector workers by focusing not only on their competence but also on promoting friendliness and warmth towards clients during their interactions. This approach has the potential to foster higher trust towards the professions. While we cannot definitively claim whether trust causes stereotyping or vice versa, emphasizing positive attributes in employees can contribute to positive stereotypes of public sector workers. Additionally, scholarly perspectives regarding the ability of public sector workers and their organizations to influence citizens towards more positive perceptions vary (Baekgaard & Serritzlew, 2016; James, 2010; Olsen, 2015/2017; Piotrowski et al., 2017). Our results demonstrate that news reporting impacts how we stereotype public sector workers. Therefore, the media reports do contribute to stereotyping – which has inherent practical implications for influencing the image of public sector workers within citizens. Our findings suggest that highlighting positive media events related to these professions could be a potential solution to address negative stereotyping.

In terms of theoretical implications, while the precise origin of negative stereotypes about public sector workers remains somewhat unclear, Goodsell (2004) highlights that the media and politicians often emphasize the negative aspects of the public sector's performance, a trend similarly observed in other studies (Marvel, 2016; Roman, 2014). Our results add to this understanding by demonstrating that positive or negative reporting can indeed influence stereotyping, even in a short-term intervention without relying on aggregated media narratives. Future research should expand on this finding, and test several types of news reporting about professions to better understand the role of the media in stereotyping. Additionally, our study design incorporated two types of public sector workers, which highlights the intricate nature of occupational stereotyping. The factors associated with stereotyping of teachers are not precisely replicated when it comes to the stereotyping of police officers, for instance rural or urban setting and education. Had our design solely focused on teachers or police officers, the narrative of our results would have been less

mixed and more straightforward. This underscores the significance of examining various occupational groups to gain a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon. Evaluating different professions provides valuable insights into the complexities and nuances of stereotyping within different contexts. Future research on occupational stereotyping should take these complexities into account.

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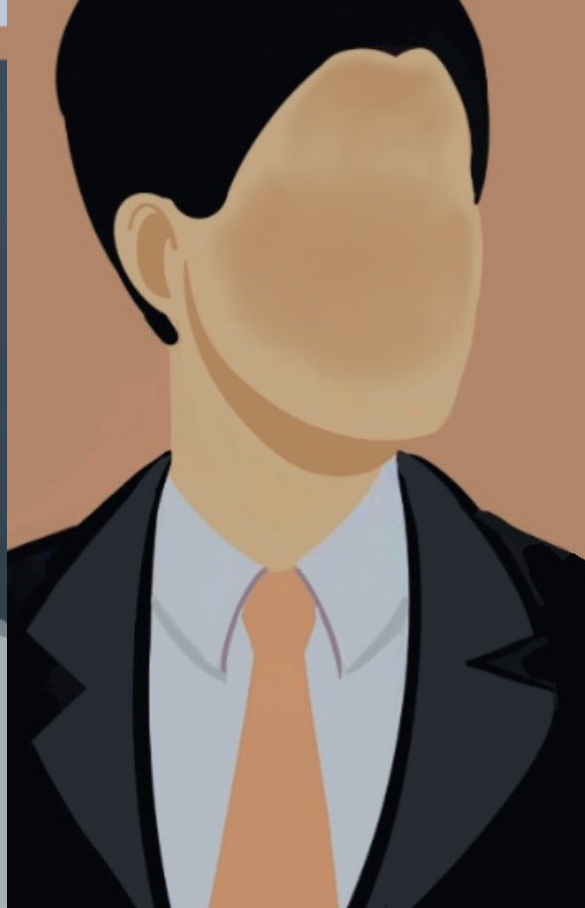
Chapter 4

Positive stereotypes and citizen-state interactions

Abstract

Public sector workers are often assumed to be lazy 9-to-5 workers. However, recent studies have indicated that public sector workers are positively stereotyped: they are seen as caring and helpful. We test the effects of positive stereotypes on the quality of public service delivery. Using a pre-registered audit experiment in elderly care in the Netherlands and Belgium, we find that activating a pro-social stereotype does not affect the outcome of public service quality in terms of response rate and information provision. However, it does improve the bureaucratic process: public sector workers are friendlier towards citizens. They say around 12 percent more 'thank you' in their replies. Moreover, the citizens' sex affects response rate: female citizens receive around 10 percent more replies from public sector workers. Concluding, we show that positive stereotyping can improve parts of the quality of public service delivery but not all.

4.1 Introduction

Public sector workers are the 'face' of bureaucracies when they deliver public services to citizens. In turn, the citizens that they meet form stereotypical beliefs about them. Public sector workers are often assumed to be lazy 9-to-5 workers (Hays, 2011). Scholars have started to empirically investigate what stereotypes exist of public sector workers. Contrary to traditional beliefs, this literature shows that citizens do not only hold negative stereotypes such as lazy, corrupt, and inefficient, yet also positively stereotype public sector workers. Public sector workers are seen as warm, competent, caring, helpful and dedicated (de Boer, 2020; Willems 2020). There is some variation in the degree of positivity based on characteristics of the public sector workers, such as occupation, or characteristics of the citizens themselves such as subjective level of income (de Boer, 2020; Bertram et al., 2022). While this literature is valuable for mapping what stereotypes exist, it does not help us understand possible effects of these positive stereotypes.

Within the stereotype activation literature, empirical evidence shows that activating positive stereotypes, also known as stereotype boost, can improve performance (Clark et al., 2017; Levy, 1996; Shih et al., 1999; Shih et al., 2012). In other words, people perform better in situations in which positive stereotypes of their group are activated (Shih et al., 2012). For instance, reminding men that they are stereotypically better at sports than women lead them to perform better (Chalabaev et al., 2008). This study sets out to investigate the positive effects of stereotypes by focusing on positive stereotypes of public sector workers: *What is the effect of positive stereotypes of public sector workers on their public service delivery*? A pre-registered audit experiment is used in The Netherlands and Belgium to answer this research question.

We make three theoretical contributions. First, we contribute to the literature on public sector stereotypes. Most of the literature focuses on public sector workers describes what stereotypes exist (Bertram et al., 2022; de Boer, 2020; Willems, 2020; with a notable exception of Szydlowski et al., 2022). We move this debate forward by studying the consequences of public sector stereotypes. Second, we expand the limited literature on positive stereotyping, and specifically of job stereotyping by testing how it affects public sector workers (Shih et al., 2012). Finally, the stereotype literature is focused almost exclusively on negative effects. We answer a call towards a positive public administration (Douglas et al., 2019) by focusing on the positive effects of positive stereotyping theory we are answering a call towards a positive public administration (Douglas et al., 2019).

Practically, we know little about how concrete managerial actions can influence desired employee outcomes (Vogel & Willems, 2020). A practical implication of our study is that applying pro-social stereotypes to workers would be used by managers to influence public service delivery. Hence it is potential micro-intervention (Vogel & Willems, 2020). Thus, if activating a positive stereotype is associated with work can affect public service delivery quality in a positive manner, it would be a concrete, low-cost managerial action to implement which can foster positive interaction between citizens and the state.

Methodologically, we are answering a call for more field experiments within public administration (Hansen & Tummers, 2020). We conducted an audit experiment. Covert field experiments as such, that record subjects' behavior without their knowledge, allow researchers to make strong causal claims that cannot be made with observational data and provide much less social desirability bias (Gaddis et al., 2021). Field experiments have high value for public administration scholars and practitioners, as they may allow for causal inference in real-world settings (Hansen & Tummers, 2020). Moreover, using a preregistered study, we adhere to the open and rigorous research approach which is becoming standard in our field (Perry, 2017; Vogel & Willems, 2020).

4.2 Public sector worker stereotypes

Stereotypes are beliefs about the characteristics, attributes, and behaviors of members of specific groups (Stallybrass, 1977). For instance, the idea that public sector workers as a group are lazy is a stereotype. There is a long tradition of studying stereotypes, often regarding race (Vomfell & Stewart, 2021), gender (Régner et al., 2019), nationality (Rad & Ginges, 2018), and age (Levy et al., 2014). When it comes to stereotypes in the workplace, studies have been focusing mostly on ethnic and minority characteristics, age, and gender-specific characteristics (Ashton & Esses, 1999; Leach et al., 2017; Willems, 2020). Yet, studies rarely explicitly examine how job stereotypes affect workers.

There are some public sector worker stereotypes – positive and negative (Chen & Bozeman, 2014; Goodsell, 2004; Wilson, 1989). On the positive side, these studies demonstrate that public sector workers are stereotyped with pro-social traits including warm, caring, and helpful (de Boer, 2020; Willems, 2020; Bertram et al., 2022). Related to this, there has been a long tradition in our field that studies job stereotypes *implicitly*. To illustrate, within the field of organizational behavior, scholars agree that public sector workers have distinct pro-social traits (see

Vogel & Willems, 2020). Public sector work is based on the opportunity to make a positive difference in other people's lives (Bolino & Grant, 2016; Vogel & Willems, 2020). Thus, it is believed that individuals who enter the public sector do so due to a motivation for pro-social impact such as helping others (Cowley & Smith, 2014; Gregg et al., 2011; Lewis & Frank, 2002). Pro-social behavior is characterized by actions intended to benefit others than oneself (Resh, Marvel & Wen, 2018). Pro-social traits include being helpful, empathic, and positive attitudes such as friendliness (Zhao et al., 2016).

In addition, the public service motivation (PSM) literature provides substantial evidence for public sector workers having high pro-social traits. PSM refers to the intrinsic motivation and individual pro-social pre-dispositions associated with working in the public sector such as compassion, dedication to serve society and communities, self-sacrifice (Perry & Wise, 1990; Grant 2008). A large body of empirical research demonstrates that public sector workers – compared to the private sector – are seen to possess higher levels of pro-social traits (Houston, 2000; Lewis & Frank, 2002; John & Johnson, 2008; Cowley & Smith, 2013).

4.3 Stereotype activation

Studying the effects - and activation of stereotypes – has a long tradition in the field of psychology (Shih et al., 2012). Stereotype activation theory posits that making relevant stereotypes cognitively accessible in a particular situation (activating the stereotype) influences attitudes and behaviors of the stereotyped individual(s) (Marx, Brown, & Steele, 1999; Wheeler & Petty, 2001; Gupta et al., 2008). Stereotype activation increases the cognitive accessibility of characteristics ascribed to members of the stereotyped group (Wheeler & Petty, 2001), which influences people's attitudes toward and behaviors on the stereotyped task (Gupta et al., 2008). Notably, stereotype activation is believed to influence attitudes and behaviors even when people may not regard the stereotype as true for themselves or their group (Gupta et al., 2008). Thus, we expect that utilizing a pro-social stereotype about public sector workers serves as a trigger for pro-social behavior, by activating the cognitive accessibility of the characteristic of the worker, which in turn increases the confidence and motivation to follow the given characteristic.

4.4 Positive stereotyping effects

Positive stereotype activation and performance studies show mixed results. On the one hand, positive stereotypes are shown to decrease performance. Positive

stereotypes are argued to lead to unrealistically high expectations (Ho et al., 1998) and worsen performance on tests (Cheryan & Bodenhausen, 2016). Yet, scholars have suggested that negative effects of positive stereotyping stem from imposing higher expectations that create stress (Cheryan & Bodenhausen, 2000). The extent to which the stereotype heightens stress levels could influence whether the effects of positive stereotyping are positive or negative (Shih et al., 2012).

On the other hand, positive stereotyping is also shown to increase performance. It is associated with self-fulfilling prophecies and confirmation bias (Madon et al., 2001). In other words, activating a positive stereotype can lead individuals to act accordingly to the stereotype. Clark, Thiem and Kang (2017) found that activating positive stereotypes can act as a bolster to a person's belief regarding their abilities and task performance. They found that Asian-Americans performed better in a math test after their ethnic identity was activated with positive traits associated with their group. Levy (1996) has shown that activation of negative terms associated with the elderly (e.g., senile, dementia) produced deficits in the memory abilities of elderly participants. Meanwhile, the activation of positive terms associated with the elderly (e.g., wise, experienced) produced an enhancement of the elderly participants' memory abilities. Shih et al. (1999) found that Asian American women performed better on a mathematics test when their Asian identity was cued, but worse when their gender identity was cued.

The mixed empirical evidence on activating positive stereotypes raises the question, do positive stereotype effects hold when it comes to job stereotyping for public sector workers? One key difference to consider is that studies about gender, age, and race stereotypes are addressing characteristics that an individual does not necessarily choose. An individual will have much more ease in deciding which group to join in terms of professional identity, compared to which group one belongs to on the aforementioned characteristics.

4.5 Positive stereotype activation and public service delivery

We hypothesize that activating positive stereotypes of public sector workers will lead to *better quality* during public service delivery. Before we delve into why, we must explain what we mean by public service delivery.

In the recent decades, governmental reforms have undergone profound changes in terms of public service delivery, often under the banner of New Public Management (Perez et al., 2007; Haddad et al., 2020). The quality of public

service delivery has become a prominent criterion within public administration and became a standard means to evaluating public service delivery (Andrews & Van de Walle, 2013; Perez et al., 2007). Additionally, public service delivery quality is a criterion by which citizens judge the government (Bouckaert & Van de Walle, 2003).

Public service quality has been defined as meeting the expectations of citizens (Haddad et al., 2020; Wisniewski, 1996). Service quality can also be defined as the difference between citizen's expectations of service and the perceptions of the service after it is received (Paul et al., 2016). For instance, did a civil servant reply to me in one week, as I expected s/he would have? Service quality is recognized as a major factor responsible for citizen satisfaction with public administration (Paul et al., 2016). Furthermore, public service quality is strongly linked to the personnel delivering that service (Haddad et al., 2020).

A key theme in bureaucratic encounters in service delivery pertains to public sector workers' *responsiveness* (Thunman, Ekstrom, & Bruhn, 2020). Taxpaying citizens expect value for money, which is why responsiveness and efficiency are important aspects of public service delivery quality (Bourgon, 2007). Public service delivery quality is indeed characterized by efficiency, responsiveness, and equity (Andrews & Van de Walle, 2013). Parasuraman et al., (1988) conceptualized a five-dimensional model for service quality: reliability, responsiveness, empathy, assurance, and tangibility. Today, their quality measuring instrument is a standard for service quality (Paul et al., 2016). Responsiveness in public service delivery is the desire of the organization to efficiently deliver service, to help customers, and to offer a prompt service (Parasuraman et al., 1988). Similarly, outcome – did you get what you needed – is one of the main drivers of service satisfaction among citizens (Daniels, 2016). Receiving an answer to an inquiry, for instance about a public-school program or healthcare is an example of responsiveness, and in turn, public service delivery quality. We therefore define public service delivery quality in terms of responsiveness: (a) whether we received a response, and (b) whether information was provided for all questions asked (Jilke et al., 2018; Van Doreen & Jilke, 2022).

4.6 Hypotheses

Public service delivery is a representation of the government and its bureaucracy, as it deals directly with a core function of governments: providing services (Bouckaert, 2002; Besley & Ghatak, 2007; Hadian, 2017). Good quality of public

service delivery is crucial for a well-functioning public administration, affecting citizen trust and relations with the public sector (Bouckaert, 2002; Hadian, 2017; Jilke et al., 2018; Van de Walle & Bouckaert, 2003). Public distrust towards the government is often associated with the functioning of public services (Van de Walle & Bouckaert, 2003). Bad performance and quality of public service delivery can fuel negative stereotypes of governments in general and low trust (Van de Walle & Bouckaert, 2003). Similarly, good quality services foster trust and positive stereotypes of government (Van de Walle & Bouckaert, 2003). High public service delivery quality can lead to higher satisfaction in citizens (Hung et al., 2003; Mbassi et al., 2019). Thus, a major consequence of public service delivery of poor quality is the impact it has on citizens' trust towards the government which ultimately affects citizen-state relations (Bouckaert & Van de Walle, 2003).

The impact of public service delivery quality can be explained by micro-performance theory. It refers to how the functioning of public administrators influence citizen perceptions of the government (Van de Walle & Bouckaert, 2003;). Citizens' stereotypes of government are largely influenced by the quality of the service delivery from a given administrator. Put simply, good quality of public service delivery by administrators during service delivery leads to satisfied customers (citizens) which, in turn, positively influences their attitude and trust towards the government. This is done not only by the macro functioning of the government, but also through the micro – such as individual experiences. Improving the quality of public service delivery is a key goal for governments as public services are a key determinant of quality of life (Besley & Ghatak, 2007).

Substantial evidence from organizational and social psychology literature demonstrates that the opportunity to make a meaningful difference in the lives of others has a large motivational potential (Grant, 2008) and it increases performance (Hackman & Oldham, 1980; Vogel & Willems, 2020). A meta-analysis shows that the opportunity to help others through one's job positively affects performance (Humphrey, Nahrgang, & Morgenson, 2007). Thus, employees' opportunity to affect and help the lives of others (i.e., task significance) enhances employees' perception of job meaningfulness and leads to better performance (Hackman & Oldham, 1980; Vogel & Willems, 2020).

Grant's theory (2008) posits that connecting people to their 'pro-social' motivation and impact enhances employee performance. A core purpose of public service work is to make a positive difference in the health, safety, and well-being of individuals, groups, and communities (Perry, 1996/1997/2000; Grant, 2008). The individuals, groups, and communities that benefit from these

jobs depend on pro-socially motivated employees to perform them effectively (Grant, 2008). Indeed, public sector workers are demonstrated to have pro-social traits and motivation (Cowley & Smith, 2014; Gregg et al., 2011; Lewis & Frank, 2002). As presented earlier, empirical evidence shows they are also stereotyped accordingly.

Since public sector workers are demonstrated to have higher levels of pro-social traits, and that making the pro-social aspect of work salient (i.e., reconnecting them to pro-social aspects of their work) is associated with better performance, we expect that activating pro-social stereotypes will remind the workers of their pro-social impact and lead to better performance quality during public service delivery compared to a control group. Thus, based on Grant's theory (2008) we hypothesize that:

H1: Activating pro-social public sector workers stereotypes will lead to better quality of public service delivery in terms of response rate.

H2: Activating pro-social public sector stereotypes will lead to better quality of public service delivery in terms of information provision.

4.7 Methods

To test our hypotheses, we developed a scalable audit experiment. First, we tested our manipulation checks - via a survey - to assess whether our e-mails successfully activated the positive public sector pro-social stereotype of a 'helpful worker' (Bertram et al., 2022; Willems, 2020). Then, we tested the effect of the positive stereotype on public service delivery. Our design can be replicated across sectors, stereotypes, and countries. Ethical concerns when it comes to audit experiments are often raised. We therefore obtained ethical approval for the study and its procedures through the ethical committee of the Faculty of Laws, Economics, and Governance of Utrecht University. For more detailed discussions about ethics of audit studies please refer to Gaddis & Crabtree (2021), Crabtree (2018), and Lahey & Beasley (2018).

Our design follows state-of-the-art practices of other audit experiments (Crabtree, 2018; Gaddis & Crabtree, 2021; Lahey & Beasley, 2018). The experimental design of the audit study methodology relies on sending identical information requests that differ by one attribute (in this case, stereotype activation) of the sender. The behavior (in this case, public service delivery) of the audited agents will be assessed by comparing response rates and the information provision across randomly assigned e-mails (Jilke et al., 2018; Van Dooren & Jilke, 2022).

The email itself was kept short to decrease the burden for employees. Each organization received one e-mail only to keep the administrative burden low (Jilke et al., 2018).

To test our manipulation, we tested seven e-mails (appendix 4A). We based our text on e-mails used in other audit studies (Jilke & Van Dooren, 2018; Van Dooren & Jilke, 2022). For details about the design and procedure, measures, sample, and results, please refer to appendix 4B. The manipulation check for stereotype activation was successful. Based on the results, we selected two emails: the control email (email 1, M=1.92) and the highest scoring email (email 5, M = 4.22) (see table 1).

Table 1
Selected E-mails

Condition	E-mail
Neutral (e-mail #1)	Hello, I am contacting you because I am looking for a place in a rest home for my father. We are interested in your facility. Can you help me answer the following questions: Do you have a place available at this moment? How can I subscribe my father for this? I also heard there is a waiting list. Do you have one and how long is it? Thanks, [Name]
Strong activation (e-mail #5)	Hello, I am contacting you because I am looking for a place in a rest home for my father. We are interested in your facility. Elderly care workers like yourself are known to be very helpful. Actually, I was reading an article the other day that reported that people think very positively of elderly care workers. So, the stereotype of your profession is very positive in terms of helpfulness. Can you help me answer the following questions: Do you have a place available at this moment? How can I subscribe my father for this? I also heard there is a waiting list. Do you have one and how long is it? Thanks, [Name]

4.8 Design and procedure

The purpose of this study was to test the effect of activating a pro-social stereotype on public service delivery. Our study was pre-registered at https://osf.io/wm8j3/?view_only=71135b7ecdbe44f5a61fe49edca06cd9 and supplementary materials, syntax, and data are available at https://osf.io/txejk/?view_only=6751981ff1ef4489920396f12d23faf8. We chose nursing homes as the context for our audit study. In the Netherlands, every citizen in need of long-term care

(i.e., nursing home) can rely on public funding, as the government finances and safeguards the functioning of the long-term care market (Bos et al., 2020). Similarly, in Belgium, the nursing home sector is a regulated public service market by the central government (Jilke et al., 2018; Van Dooren & Jilke, 2022). Based on residents' care needs, the government allocates daily amounts to pay for facilities, where the compulsory national health insurance scheme bears the medical and nursing expenses (Van Dooren & Jilke, 2022). Thus, in both cases, non-profit and public nursing homes are funded by the government, count as a public market, and have been entrusted by the government to carry-out public services (Van Doreen & Jilke, 2022).

We found through public records online access to e-mails of nursing homes in the Netherlands and Belgium. We compiled all e-mails and randomized them into one of the two conditions: no stereotype activation (control, email 1) and strong stereotype activation (email 5, three sentences). Each nursing home received one e-mail inquiring about their services and was given two weeks to reply (Jilke et al., 2018).

4.9 Measures

Pro-social stereotype activation. We activated the pro-social stereotype of a 'helpful worker' (table 1, e-mail 5). Our e-mails were randomized between male and female senders to minimize any sex effects of the sender (Grohs et al., 2016). We picked the most common female and male names culturally common to both the Netherlands (https://forebears.io/netherlands/forenames) and Belgium (https://forebears.io/belgium/forenames) to minimize any SES connotations for discrimination (Jilke et al., 2018). This resulted in Monique (most popular name in the Netherlands, fourth in Belgium) for females, and Jan (most popular male name in the Netherlands, sixth in Belgium). We also picked the most common surname in both countries (de Jong for the Netherlands and Peeters for Belgium).

Public service delivery. We chose two outcome variables that represent core aspects of responsiveness in public service delivery: response rate and information provision (Jilke et al., 2018). Both outcomes were binary (coded as 0 or 1).

Response rate. We evaluated whether the response rate differs between groups (0 – no response, 1 – response). Automatic replies were excluded (such as thank you for your message, we will get back to you in X working days), and we only included actual replies from employees.

Information provision. We asked in the e-mail three questions about the organization's services. Adequate public service delivery will be defined as having answered all three questions (coded as 1). If not all questions were answered, the public service delivery performance will be coded as 0.

4.10 Exploratory measures

We have pre-registered exploratory variables to deepen the understanding of our results. We investigated friendliness as a dependent variable, and sex of the sender as predictors on all three dependent variables. We have also explored the effect of country as an exploratory independent variable on our dependent variables. Country exploratory effects are in appendix 4C. We have included these exploratory variables for different facets of public service delivery. Friendliness relates to administrative burden as psychological costs of the procedure. Sex and country of the sender as characteristics of the worker[3].

Friendliness. We investigated friendliness as a third dependent variable. We operationalized friendliness as saying 'thank you' in the response back. Examples would include 'thank you for your e-mail/contacting us' and 'thank you for your interest in our facility'. We did not include using 'thank you' in the signature of the e-mail. We coded e-mails as 0 if there was no in-text 'thank you', and 1 if there was. Automatic replies were excluded (such as 'thank you for your e-mail we will get back to you in X working days').

Sex. We have coded for the sex of the sender, male (0) and female (1) to investigate sex effects.

4.11 Sample

We used the G*Power program for our power calculation, based on a Cohen's d of 0.2 (f^2 = 0.02 in G*Power). The calculation estimated 636 participants required for a power of 0.9 and an alpha of 0.05. We chose a small effect size as the literature does not provide enough evidence for a medium or large effect size.

We e-mailed 849 homes and received 573 replies, with a reply rate of 67.5%. A sample of 573 allows for a power of 0.85 instead of 0.9. We aimed to contact all nursing homes in the Netherlands and Flemish Belgium. However, certain

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[3] We have conducted two more exploratory analyses that yielded null-results, namely on friendliness of the greeting and on the number of questions asked back to the client. The results and syntax are found in the online Supplementary Materials. No other exploratory analyses were conducted.

nursing homes are part of larger chains, and while offering many locations, provide only one general e-mail for inquiries about placement. Thus, we excluded all nursing homes that provided the same contact e-mail address while keeping the one general address. By doing so, we limit spill-over between our conditions. Larger chains are more common in the Netherlands, leaving us with a sample with a majority nursing homes located in Flemish Belgium. We also removed all homes that had a private for-profit component in both countries, leaving us with a sample of public and non-profit nursing homes.

Table 2 shows our sample demographics in term of sex and country and the randomization check. We assessed the sample conditions for homogeneity with a chi-square test on sex of the sender and country of the experiment. The differences are all insignificant showing that randomization was successful – our treatment and control groups do not significantly differ on both demographic variables.

Table 2
Demographic Comparison Across Groups and Randomization Test for Sex and Country

Conditions	Female Senders (%)	Netherlands (%)
Treatment	48.4	37.3
Control	47.9	35.5
Total Sample	48.2	36.4
Difference tests	Chi-square = .022, p = .882	Chi-Square = .319, p = .572

Table 3
Summary Statistics for Results

Conditions	Response Rate (%)	Information Provision (%)	Friendliness (%)
Treatment	68.2	41.3	47.0
Control	66.8	45.5	34.8
Total Sample	67.5	43.5	40.8

We had two exclusion criteria. Firstly, e-mails not successfully delivered due to invalid addresses have been excluded (Jilke et al., 2018). Second, responses were considered invalid if they are received two weeks after the e-mail has been sent out (Jilke et al., 2018). We have excluded 10 replies in total for answering after two weeks (six in Belgium, and four in the Netherlands). We had 15 invalid e-mail addresses in total.

4.12 Statistical analysis

We have conducted an ordinary least square (OLS) regression on each main outcome variable: (a) response rate, and (b) information provision. We opted for an OLS over a logistic regression based on experimentalist recommendations (Angrist & Pischke, 2008). We have conducted the same regression on our exploratory dependent variable of friendliness. Therefore, we have two pre-registered main outcome variables, and one exploratory outcome variable. We have also performed OLS regressions with our exploratory independent variable of sex. All of our (exploratory) analyses were pre-registered.

4.13 Results

Hypothesis 1. Hypothesis 1 stated that a pro-social stereotype activation would lead to a better quality of public service delivery in terms of response rate. Activating a pro-social stereotype did not affect reply rate (B = .014, SE = .032, R^2 = .000, p = .670). In the stereotype activation condition, the reply rate was 68.2%. In the control condition, the reply rate was 66.8%. Hypothesis 1 is rejected.

Hypothesis 2. Hypothesis 2 stated that a pro-social stereotype activation would lead to a better quality of public service delivery in terms of information provision. Activating a pro-social stereotype did not affect information provision (B = -.042, SE = .041, R^2 = .002, p = .314). In the stereotype activation condition, 41.3% of responses provided answers to all three questions, similarly as in the control condition with 45.5% of full answers. Hypothesis 2 is rejected (see table 4 and figure 1).

Table 4
Ordinary Least Square Regression of Stereotype Activation

	B (*SE*)	Sig.	*t*	R2	Lower CI	Upper CI
Response Rate						
Constant	.668 (.023)	.000	29.697	.000	.624	.712
Condition	.014 (.032)	.670	.426		-.049	.077
Information Provision						
Constant	.455 (.029)	.000	15.624	.002	.398	.512
Condition	-.042 (.041)	.314	-1.007		-.123	.040
Friendliness						
Constant	.348 (.029)	.000	12.138	.015	.292	.405
Condition	.122 (.041)	.003	2.981		.003	.202

Figure 1

Stereotype Activation Effects on Response Rate, Information Provision, and Friendliness
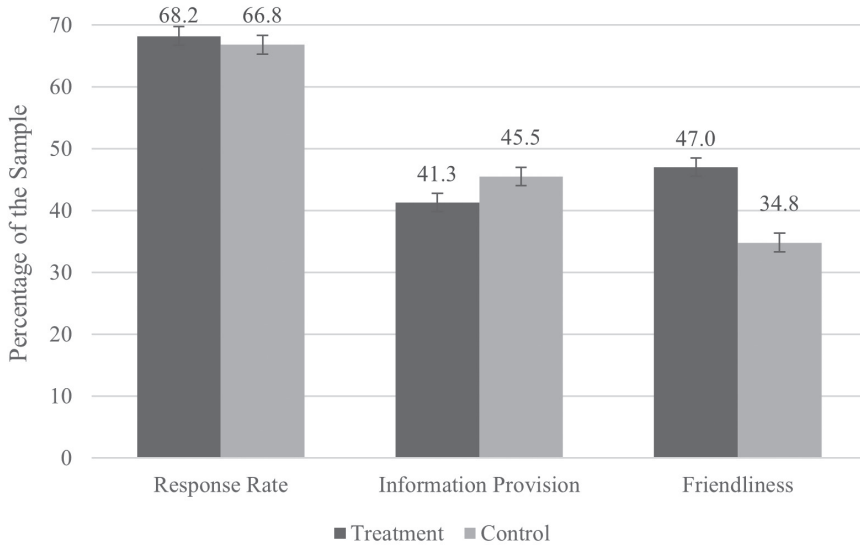
Note. The Y axis, ranging from 0 to 70, shows the percentage of the sample. Each condition shows 95 percent error bars.

4.14 Exploratory analysis results

Stereotype Activation on Friendliness. We investigated whether a pro-social stereotype activation affected the friendliness of the reply. We find that activating a pro-social stereotype leads to *more* friendliness in the replies from the workers towards the clients (B = .122, SE = .041, R^2 = .015, p = .003). In the stereotype activation condition, 47.0% of answers were friendly compared to 34.8% in the control condition.

Sex Effects. For all three dependent variables, we included sex of the sender and stereotype activation as predictors in an OLS (see table 5).

Response Rate. We explored whether the sex of the sender affected reply rate. We find that sex affects reply rate (B = .226, SE = .031, R^2 = .058, p < .001). Senders who are women receive more replies than men, roughly 10% more consistently in both conditions. In the total sample, 56.5% of replies (324 emails) were for female senders, while 43.5% (248 emails) were for male senders on a total of 573 replies.

Information Provision. We investigated whether the sex of the sender affected information provision. We find that sex does not affect information provision, although significant at the .10-level (B = .079, SE = .042, R^2 = .008, p =

.059). That is, women received 22% more of complete replies than men. In total, 249 emails provided complete information provision, in which 97 were for males (39%) and 152 were for females (61%).

     Friendliness. We examined whether sex of the sender affected friendliness of the reply. We find that sex has no effect on friendliness (B = -.022, SE = .041, R^2 = .016, p = .597).

Table 5
Exploratory OLS Regression Results – Effects of Sex

	B (SE)	Sig.	t	R2	Lower CI	Upper CI
Response Rate Model 1				.058		
Constant	.560 (.027)	.000	21.123		.508	.612
Stereotype activation	.013 (.031)	.688	.402		-.049	.074
Sex	.226 (.031)	.000	7.233		.165	.288
Information Provision Model 1				.008		
Constant	.410 (.038)	.000	10.897		.336	.484
Stereotype activation	-.041 (.041)	.326	-.982		-.122	.041
Sex	.079 (.042)	.059	1.893		-.003	.161
Friendliness Model 1				.016		
Constant	.361 (.037)	.000	9.709		.288	.434
Stereotype activation	.121 (.041)	.003	2.971		.041	.202
Sex	-.022 (.041)	.597	-.529		-.103	.059

Figure 2
Sex Effects on Response Rate, Information Provision, and Friendliness.
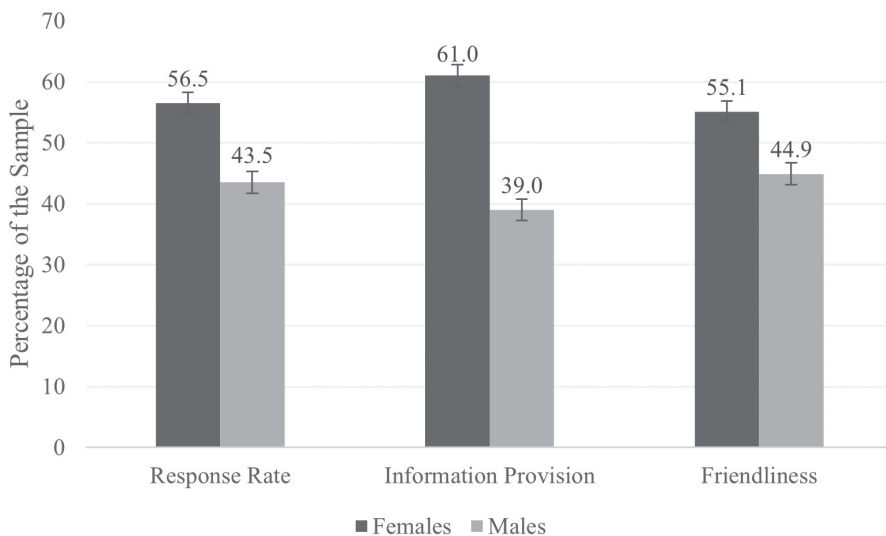
4.15 Discussion and conclusion

We investigated whether activating a pro-social stereotype improves the quality of public service delivery. We have conducted a field experiment on two aspects of responsiveness of public service delivery: response rate and information provision. We find that a pro-social stereotype activation does not affect *bureaucratic outcome* of response rate and information provision. However, in our exploratory analyses, we find that a pro-social stereotype activation does affect the *bureaucratic process*. Activating a pro-social stereotype led public sector workers to be friendlier towards citizens in the form of gratitude (saying thank you) in their replies, by around 12%. Additionally, in our exploratory analyses, we find that the personal characteristic of sex does affect bureaucratic outcome: women receive *roughly 10%* more replies than men.

Why did stereotype activation affect process and not outcome? A first explanation may be found in the task concordance between the stereotype activation and the effect of the activation on our outcome variable. Our stereotype activation was not about employee performance per se, but about the process with the client (being helpful). Looking at stereotype activation literature, the evaluated outcome task is often straightforwardly connected to the stereotype being induced. To illustrate, stereotyping to be good/bad at math would be tested by math tests (Shih et al., 1999; Thiem & Kang, 2007), stereotyping being good/bad in a sport would be tested with sport performance (Chalabaev et al., 2008), stereotyping memory would be tested with memory tests (Levy, 1996). It is possible that the stereotype of being helpful in our study was not as directly related to our outcome (reply rate and information provision), but more related with the process with the client. Future research is needed to dissect the relation between task concordance and the stereotype being activated.

A second explanation may be found in identity mechanisms. Stereotype activation literature emphasizes that for a stereotype to have an effect, the stereotyped person must identify with the stereotype-domain (Smith & Johnson, 2006). For instance, if one stereotypes women as bad drivers, then for the stereotype to have an effect, one must identify as a woman. It is possible that our stereotype did *not* activate the professional identity of nursing home workers that would affect our professional outcome measure (i.e. reply rate and information provision) but solely activated a pro-social identity and in turn affected the process outcome measure of being helpful. Pro-social behavior is characterized by actions intended to benefit others than oneself (Resh, Marvel,

& Wen, 2018). Friendliness falls under the umbrella of pro-social behaviors (Malti & Dys, 2018). Future research is needed to identify underlying mechanisms when activating stereotypes such as identity based on professional group belonging. A fruitful start could be to measure the distinctive roles of public service motivation (Perry, 1996) and pro-social motivation (Francois & Vlassopoulos, 2008) when developing and testing stereotype activation interventions.

Our findings make important contributions to our field. First, most of the current literature investigating public sector worker stereotypes focuses on describing what stereotypes exist (Bertram et al., 2022; de Boer, 2020; Willems, 2020). We show that public sector stereotypes can have effects on citizen-state interactions. Our results demonstrate that positive stereotypes do not alter the outcome of public services (i.e. information provision and response rate remain the same) but do affect the process of public services (i.e. public sector workers are friendly when stereotyped). This is in line with recent work of Szydlowski et al. (2022) who demonstrated that showing vulnerability by public sector workers makes citizens behave more compassionately. More research is needed that investigates the consequences of different types of stereotypes for the process of citizen-state interactions.

Second, most of the work on stereotypes focuses on ascribed characteristics such as gender, age, and race (Levy et al., 2014; Regner et al., 2019; Vomfell & Stewart, 2021). Our field is no exception and is almost exclusively focused on studying stereotypes of citizens that they were born into (e.g. Harrits, 2019; Jilke et al., 2018; Keiser, 2010; Raaphorst et al., 2018). We show that stereotypes of professional identity also matter. Thus, our results demonstrate that job stereotype effects exist in the public work setting. It is worthwhile to continue to study the effects of stereotypes related to characteristics that people are not born into. Observational and experimental methods may be a useful combination.

Finally, we showed that positive public sector stereotypes do not affect bureaucratic outcome in terms of response rate and information provision which may be reassuring. However, we showed that the citizens' sex *does* affect the outcome of bureaucratic procedure. We showed that women received more replies than men, around 10%. It could be interpreted that men are discriminated in terms of outcome when receiving elderly care services based on their name. However, this interpretation seems too simple when we delve into the discrimination literature in our field. In general, this literature is almost exclusively studies name-based discrimination when it comes to racial or ethnic minorities (e.g. Guul et al., 2019; Jilke et al., 2018). A notable exception is Grohs et

al. (2016) who also studied sex effects on service provision. Contrary to our results, men received more replies than women in their study across two domains: childcare and mobile home requests. Yet, they did not find a clear pattern of sex-based discrimination. They did, however, find indication that the policy context of the service being provided sometimes favors men and sometimes favors women. More specifically, men received more complete information and higher service when requesting for childcare, whereas women received more complete information and higher service orientation when requesting for mobile homes. Our study was conducted only in the context of nursing home requests.

These two studies together show the relevance of the call for a heterogeneity revolution in behavioral sciences and theory (Bryan et al., 2021). Both field experiments investigating responsiveness in public service provision find different results in terms of outcome and process based on clients' personal characteristic of sex. Both field experiments test different domains of public service access: nursing home requests, childcare requests, and mobile home requests. Depending on the domain, women or men received more answers and more complete answers. Therefore, the personal characteristic of sex *does* affect bureaucratic outcome in public service provision, we just cannot explain yet *how* exactly and *why*. Theoretically, it is worthwhile to dissect if policy context explains why sometimes men and sometimes women receive better quality services when interacting with the state. It may also be fruitful to test if the sex of the public sector worker themselves offers insights into these mixed results on name-based discrimination. The representative bureaucracy literature may be helpful here because there is evidence that shared values (e.g. based on gender or race) improves outcomes for citizens which could explain differences in service delivery (Guul et al., 2018; Wright & Headly, 2020).

Our findings have implications for practice. First of all, the bureaucratic process is associated with several costs for the client, including psychological costs (Moynihan et al., 2014). Psychological costs refer to frustrations and stresses that arise from interacting with the state (Moynihan et al., 2014). When individuals depend upon the state for vital resources - such as the provision of health services - uncertainty about the receipt of those benefits, as well as frustrations in the process of seeking those may increase stress. There is evidence that individuals that care for an old relative have higher stress (Pinquart & Sörensen, 2003), yet little is known about how interactions with public sector workers to obtain benefits of caregiving (such as healthcare for nursing homes) affect that stress (Moynihan et al., 2014). Psychological costs have been addressed in terms

4

of friendliness from the worker in research (Olsen et al., 2022). Our findings show that we are able to activate a pro-social stereotype in workers that may reduce psychological costs for the clients, in terms of friendliness. Public sector workers in the stereotype activation condition were friendlier to the clients, which can make them feel more welcomed (Olsen et al., 2022).

Secondly, our findings contribute to practice in terms of the importance of the micro-interactions between the state and citizens (Van de Walle & Bouckaert, 2003). The functioning of public administrators influences citizen perceptions of the government (Van de Walle & Bouckaert, 2003;). Thus, citizens' stereotypes, attitude, and trust of the government are influenced by the interactions and quality of the service delivery from a given administrator. Positive interactions between public sector workers and citizens is therefore a key goal. Our finding suggest a low-cost way to do so: activating a pro-social stereotype of public sector workers. Future research should test this effect more closely to grasp a better understanding on how we can potentially implement this. One way is to investigate which mechanisms are at play. Practically, there is quite a research gap in how concrete managerial actions can influence desired employee outcomes (Vogel & Willems, 2020). Thus, applying pro-social stereotypes to workers would be used by managers to influence public service delivery process – as a sort of micro-intervention (Vogel & Willems, 2020).

Finally, our findings must be considered in the light of some limitations. Our limitations pertain to generalizability and context, measures, and design. In terms of generalizability, we are limited in generalizing to the public sector as a whole, as our sample was composed of public and of non-profit organizations. That is, our population may not have fully identified as public sector workers. We are also limited to our context of testing. We cannot claim that our effect would generalize in other areas of the public sector (i.e., teaching, police, tax officials). Future studies should investigate stereotype activation effects on public sector specific stereotypes and organizations.

Additionally, we are limited in our measures. We cannot know whether our stereotype activation worked because it activated the stereotype of a helpful worker, or the personal value of helping. Future research should examine which stereotype-relevant domain was at play. We are also limited in our measure of friendliness, and cannot claim how the effect would transfer to face-to-face interactions or tones of interactions. Finally, we are also limited in our measures for public service delivery, and thus cannot completely rule out the potential effects of stereotype activation on bureaucratic outcomes. Future research

should examine other aspects of outcome, such as efficiency, response time, and time invested in a client with stereotypes more in line with the outcome.

Lastly, we are also limited in terms of our design. To gain a comprehensive understanding of the causal effects of activating public sector worker stereotypes, further investigation into information equivalence of conditions is necessary. Currently, we face limitations in drawing definitive conclusions about the effects of our emails, as we lack insight into the underlying cognitive processes associated with reading them. In order to address this limitation, future studies should focus on assessing participants' perceptions of the various stereotype-activating materials, for instance, in terms of warmth, friendliness, and openness. This evaluation of information equivalence, its constructs, and its effects would provide valuable insights on the process of stereotype activation. Moreover, it is important to acknowledge that our study was conducted as a field experiment, which inherently lacks the high level of control typically found in laboratory settings. Consequently, we are limited in making exclusive claims that our results are solely attributed to stereotype activation. Alternative interpretations, such as the possibility that the observed effects stem from general politeness rather than stereotyping, should be considered. Future studies should investigate this nuance in depth.

4.15.1 Conclusion

We demonstrate that activating the positive stereotype of a helpful worker does affect the bureaucrat process, by increasing the friendliness of the employee towards the client. Our results suggest that a positive attitude of citizens towards the public sector worker (I.e. activating a positive stereotype) will generate a positive attitude from the public sector workers towards the client (I.e. being friendly). Positive stereotypes, however, do not affect bureaucratic outcome in terms of responsiveness in public service delivery. Our findings demonstrate that not positive stereotypes, but citizens' sex affects the outcome of the bureaucratic process. Women receive more answers to requests for nursing home placement than men.

Chapter 5

Negative stereotypes and citizen-state interactions

Abstract

How citizens behave towards street-level bureaucrats is crucial for the wellbeing and performance of bureaucrats. Scholars have mainly focus on understanding negative citizen behavior, such as aggression. We study a positive behavior, namely compassionate behavior. We study real compassionate behavior in the form of writing a positive encouragement letter that are distributed to social workers in the field. We test if showing difficulties faced by bureaucrat results in citizens writing more encouragement messages. We also test if bureaucrat bashing results in less encouragement messages. Using a pre-registered survey experiment among a representative sample of Canadian citizens (n = 1,264), we find that showing bureaucrats' struggles and imperfections makes citizens almost twice as likely to write a positive encouragement letter. Bureaucrat bashing, however, has no effect. Our results show that citizens can be stimulated to act more positively towards the bureaucrats they meet and challenges the negative consequences of bureaucrat bashing.

5.1 Introduction

If citizens want to access public services, they must interact with street-level bureaucrats such as teachers, nurses, and social workers. During these encounters, citizens behave in various ways towards bureaucrats. Citizens can be patient, but they can also be aggressive or patronizing. How citizens behave towards bureaucrats is crucial for the wellbeing and performance of street-level bureaucrats (Lipsky, 2010; Dubois, 2010). For instance, when citizens are aggressive towards bureaucrats, this increases the risk of burnout of bureaucrats (Hershcovis & Barling, 2010; Tummers et al., 2016). However, a positive behavior would be that citizens are compassionate towards bureaucrats. Compassionate behaviors happen when someone acts on another's pain or suffering in order to alleviate it (Bloom, 2017; Goetz et al., 2010; Singer & Lamm, 2009). When a person shows you compassion, it reduces your stress (Eldor, 2018). A parent can, for instance, show that s/he understands the severe workloads of a primary school teacher by helping the teacher in class, or just saying to the teacher that she understands how hard it can be to be a teacher. Thus, compassionate behavior of citizens is beneficial for street-level bureaucrats, as it reduces their stress and risk of burnout. It is ultimately is also beneficial for the citizens, as they encounter less stressed street-level bureaucrats (Eldor, 2018).

Studies have shown that experiencing compassion at work has clear benefits, such as that workers have less stress, are more client-oriented, have higher job satisfaction, higher commitment, less burnout and better overall performance (Choudhary et al., 2017; Dutton et al., 2014; Eldor, 2018; Lilius et al., 2008). However, can we promote compassion in the workplace, and if so, how? The answer to this question is not self-evident. Despite compassion being increasingly researched in public administration (for instance Eldor, 2018), scholars have neglected how compassionate behavior can be stimulated.

We study two factors that can impact compassionate behavior. First, we analyze whether showing how difficult it is to be street-level bureaucrat could trigger compassionate behavior in citizens. Many street-level bureaucrats encounter problems in their work, such as high workloads, role conflicts, and severe red tape (Lipsky, 2010; Scott & Pandey, 2000). Reading about the problems someone has could trigger compassionate feelings, and hence compassionate behavior (Kanov et al., 2004; Strauss et al., 2016). Eliciting a feeling of compassion in citizens would, then, result in these citizens acting more compassionate towards street-level bureaucrats. However, citizens' compassionate behavior

towards bureaucrats can also be discouraged. We study an important topic in this regard: bureaucrat bashing. Street-level bureaucrats are often bashed in the public debate (Goodsell, 2004; Marvel, 2015; Rölle, 2017). Bureaucrat bashing is especially prominent at the moment given the anti-public sector rhetoric, especially among some populists (Moynihan & Roberts, 2021).

The goal of this study is to investigate whether citizens can be stimulated to act compassionately towards bureaucrats and test if bureaucracy bashing behavior harms this compassionate behavior. We answer the following research question: *To which extent does bureaucrat bashing and eliciting compassion influence citizens' compassionate behavior towards street-level bureaucrats, and does eliciting compassion reduce the effects of bureaucrat bashing?* To answer this question, we conducted a pre-registered two-step experiment among nationally representative large samples of Canadian citizens. We analyze whether citizens write encouragement messages to social workers. Writing an encouragement message shows a real willingness to help, making it a compassionate behavior (Bloom, 2017; Goetz et al., 2010; Singer & Lamm, 2009). All positive messages were shared with social workers.

This study provides theoretical and methodological contributions to the literature. Regarding theoretical contributions, it is firstly unclear whether eliciting compassion leads to actually behaving more compassionately (Reynolds et al., 2019; Welp & Brown, 2013). We show that stimulating feelings of compassion among citizens does result in real compassionate behavior, as they write more encouraging messages for bureaucrats to lift up their spirits. Similarly, much literature about bureaucrat bashing is available (e.g., Garrett et al., 2006; Goodsell, 2004; Hubbell, 1991), but scholars do not study the often assumed negative effects impact on bureaucrats. Our second contribution is that we show that the negative effects of bureaucrat bashing are not always found. In our study bureaucrat bashing had no effect on whether citizens wrote encouragement messages. Methodologically, both the bureaucrat bashing and compassion literature consists primarily of research investigating perceptions and attitudes towards the public sector or hypothetical behavior, yet includes no studies on how it affects real citizen behavior (Caillier, 2018; Caillier, 2020; Garret et al., 2006). We study actual behavior of citizens in the field, thereby adhering to the call to move beyond studying only attitudes or intended behavior (John, 2020; Lonati et al., 2018; Hansen & Tummers, 2020).

5.2 Eliciting compassion

Compassionate behavior is a specific type of behavior that falls under the umbrella of pro-social behaviors. Pro-social behavior is characterized by actions intended to benefit others than oneself (Resh, Marvel, & Wen, 2018). Compassionate behavior is defined through helping behavior (Goetz et al., 2010) and is associated with pro-social behavior (Runyan et al., 2019).

Compassionate behavior is conceptually distinct from feeling compassion because it refers the behavioral response motivated to act on another's pain or suffering in order to alleviate it, rather than the emotion of the state of experienced compassion (Bloom, 2017; Goetz et al., 2010; Singer & Lamm, 2009). Compassionate behavior refers to acting compassionately. This means doing something to help someone else (Goetz et al., 2010; Singer & Lamm, 2009). For instance, acknowledging to a social worker that you understand that she is overworked and that you will wait patiently to be seen. Eliciting compassion is the act of trying to make people feel compassion, such as by pointing out that the worker or profession has a problem (i.e., high burnout rate of social workers). Stimulating compassionate behavior works if people feel compassion (Goetz et al., 2010; Kanov, 2004; Lazarus, 1991).

How compassion can be elicited can be explained using cognitive appraisal theory. Cognitive appraisal theory states that compassion will be successfully elicited and, in turn, translate into acting compassionately, based on three cognitive appraisal processes, namely (1) someone's deservingness of help; (2) self-relevance of the situation and, (3) self-efficacy (Lazarus, 1991; Atkins & Parker, 2012). First, deservingness of help refers to which extent a person is responsible for their situation. A citizen could feel compassion towards a police officer being assaulted. However, if the citizen deems that the police officer was responsible for the assault as he used unnecessary force, then the citizen will not feel compassionate. Second, self-relevance refers to how much the situation is in line with your personal norms and values (Atkins & Parker, 2012). Going back to the police officer example, self-relevance would entail questioning whether the citizen finds assault morally OK or not. Third, self-efficacy refers to the costs and benefits of helping. A person would wonder if he can help, at what personal costs, and whether these actions are going to help the other. For instance, the citizen can decide to help the assaulted police officer by being a witness if the citizen thinks this does not cost him too much time or harms his privacy. In short, when you see that someone is in a situation where you deem

that person is not responsible, when this problem goes against your values, and when you think the benefits of helping are higher than the costs, you will decide to act compassionately. Drawing on these three cognitive appraisal processes, we expect that situations triggering these processes will elicit compassion in citizens and, in turn, make citizens behave more compassionately towards the street-level bureaucrats they meet. Our first hypothesis, therefore, is:

Hypothesis 1: Eliciting compassion will increase compassionate behaviors by citizens towards street-level bureaucrats.

5.3 Bureaucrat bashing

We also expect that bureaucrat bashing affects compassionate behavior. One source of negativity towards street-level bureaucrats is bureaucrat bashing (Goodsell, 2004). Bureaucrat bashing is often intertwined with bureaucracy bashing. Bureaucrat bashing refers to the bashing of individual public sector workers, while bureaucracy bashing refers to bashing public organizations (Goodsell, 2004). Scholars distinguish two forms of bureaucrat bashing, namely (1) meaningless bashing and (2) substantive bashing (Caillier, 2018; Caillier, 2020; Garret et al., 2006). Meaningless bashing entails generalized criticisms that offer no solutions and that are used to denigrate street-level bureaucrats (Caillier, 2018/2020). An example is a statement like *social workers are inefficient and wasteful of resources*. Substantive bashing entails specific criticisms and solutions, such as *social workers are underperforming because their case load is too high*. We need more resources for social work programs in schools and increase the number of social workers.

Repeated negative framing of street-level bureaucrats contributes to a negative image of bureaucrats in society (Hubbell, 1991). Bureaucrat bashing statements have even become an integrated of, amongst others, American culture (McEldowney & Murray, 2000). Street-level bureaucrats have become a symbol of incompetence within society, and this symbol has been internalized by the public as a stereotype (Hubbell, 1991; Van de Walle, 2004). Besides, the perpetuated negative image and bashing statement of the 'lazy bureaucrat' has become a common characterization in TV entertainment (Lichter, Lichter, & Anderson, 2000). A study review of top-10 box office grossing movies from 2000 until 2009 revealed that 91% of movies featured at least one government worker character, with depictions tending on the negative side (Pautz & Warnement, 2013).

Repeated exposure of bureaucrat bashing could reduce citizens' compassionate behavior towards bureaucrats by increasing easy to recall instances of failures over successes as well as relating to a stable negative attitude over time. A meta-analysis indicates the two strongest predictors in attitude to behavior translations are when the attitude was easy to recall and stable over time (Glasman & Albarracin, 2006). Being exposed to mainly one-sided information that shapes our attitudes makes instances of it easier to recall and stable over time and thus stronger predictors of behavior (Glasman & Albarracin, 2006). For instance, in societies where bureaucrat bashing is accepted (Van de Walle, 2004), negative exposure of bureaucrat bashing may contribute to easily accessible, stable attitudes over-time.

Additionally, bureaucrat bashing could go against all cognitive appraisal processes (Atkins & Parker, 2012) that need to be activated for compassionate behavior. Bureaucrat bashing may mainly affect the first mechanism, which is someone's deservingness to help. Bashing may successfully convince the person that the street-level bureaucrat is responsible for their situation and thus not deserving of help (i.e., lazy or incompetent). As bashing is a repeated common rhetoric in society, it can affect the perception of deservingness of help of bureaucrats. Furthermore, bashing bureaucrats may affect the second cognitive appraisal process of self-relevance of the situation because meaningless bureaucrat bashing can use societal norms and values to devalue and blame street-level bureaucrats. For instance, if one is bashing social workers for a child not saved, the loss of the life of a child is intuitively against societal and personal norms and values. By attacking workers on societal values and norms (other example, wasting tax payers money), bashing can create a rhetoric of blaming the workers by going against societal norms and values. This can be especially used during political campaigns (Garrett et al., 2006; Caillier, 2018). Finally, if the first two mechanisms are not met, chances are very slim for the person to decide to invest efforts into being compassionate, as the cost/benefit would not be worth it (i.e. the third mechanism of self-efficacy). Hence, we expect that bureaucrat bashing negatively affects citizens' compassionate behavior towards street-level bureaucrats. Thus, our second hypothesis is then:

Hypothesis 2: Bureaucrat bashing will decrease compassionate behaviors by citizens towards street-level bureaucrats.

5.4 The interaction between eliciting compassion and bureaucrat bashing

We expect that eliciting compassion will reduce the effects of bureaucrat bashing. Scholars believe that the negative consequences of bureaucrat bashing stem from constantly showing one incomplete side of the story, perpetuating misinformation about job realities (Caillier, 2018; Garrett et al., 2006). In other words, bureaucrat bashing creates an incomplete and inaccurate profile of the street-level bureaucrat (Garrett et al., 2006; Goodsell, 2014). To counteract this, in this study we elicit compassion by providing information on the daily challenges and difficulties street-level bureaucrats face. People exposed to both bureaucrat bashing and eliciting compassion will have more balanced information about street-level bureaucrats to process their actions during the cognitive appraisal processes when deciding whether to act compassionately. Thus we expect that eliciting compassion will decrease the detrimental effects of bureaucrat bashing, leading us to our third study hypothesis.

Hypothesis 3: Eliciting compassion will moderate the effects of bureaucrat bashing on compassionate behavior, in such a way that the negative effects of bureaucrat bashing on compassionate behaviors will become weaker when compassion is elicited.

These three hypotheses lead to our theoretical model, which is shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1
The Hypothesized Effects of Eliciting Compassion and Bureaucrat Bashing on Compassionate Behavior.
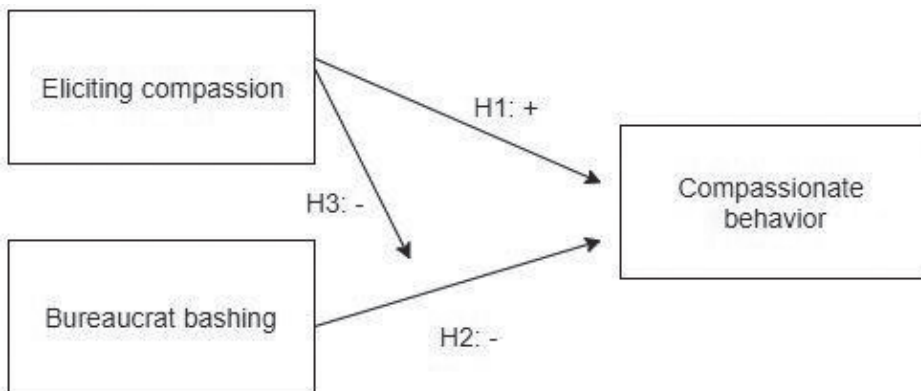
5.5 Methods

To test our hypotheses, we used a two-step survey experiment, with (1) a pilot survey (Study 1) to test our manipulations and find those that worked best for eliciting compassion and bureaucrat bashing and (2) an experiment to test the three hypotheses (Study 2). We tested our manipulations in a separate study because although including manipulation checks in experiments is common practice, it raises concerns. Respondents may, for instance, react based on the manipulation check itself instead of the manipulation (Ejelov & Luke, 2020). Therefore, study 2 did not include manipulation checks, but used the tested manipulations from study 1. We pre-registered our study on OSF, and our data, analyses syntax, and supplementary materials are available online at https://osf.io/vef6d/?view_only=93fb149d179145938c410f9b7c516e77. Ethical approval for the study and its procedures was obtained through the ethical committee of the Faculty of Law, Economics, and Governance of Utrecht University.

5.6 Case

We test our hypotheses by studying Canadian social workers. Social workers are relevant street-level bureaucrats to study. First, many instances of bashing have been documented over the past decades (Peters & Savoie, 1995; Stanfield & Beddoe, 2013). Second, social workers deal directly with citizens and thus experience both negative and positive behaviors from citizens towards them, such as aggression or politeness. In other words, social workers can experience (un)compassionate behaviors from citizens. Third, negative citizen behaviors towards social workers are prevalent in the form of aggression (Gately & Stabb, 2005; Lowe & Korr, 2007; Van Heugten, 2011).

Experiencing workplace aggression has numerous negative effects such as lower job satisfaction, performance, organizational commitment, psychological and physical well-being, as well as increased stress, fatigue, burnout, and turnover (Hershcovis & Barling, 2010; Tummers et al., 2016; Van Heugten, 2011). Large numbers of social workers from different domains report experiencing citizen aggression, including verbal aggression, intimidation, property damage, physical assault, and harassment (Gately & Stabb, 2005; Lowe & Korr, 2007; Van Heugten, 2011). In Canada, 44 percent of child welfare social workers reported to have experienced threats or violence on the job (Hallberg & Smith, 2018). Even though these experiences are not uncommon, we do not imply that the majority of clients act like this. Many clients may behave more positively towards social workers. Receiving acts of compassion in the workplace is associated with an array of

positive outcomes such as increased job satisfaction, performance, organizational commitment, and positive emotions at work, with decreased stress, anxiety, and burnout (Choudhary et al., 2017; Dutton et al., 2014; Lilius et al., 2008). Thus, studying compassionate behavior towards social workers is especially relevant because if we can elicit more compassionate behavior, it may even counterbalance negative behavior such as workplace aggression which they experience very regularly.

5.7 Study 1

5.7.1. 5.7.1 Design and procedure

In order to test our manipulation, we developed sixteen vignettes using stories from Canadian social workers. These are shown in appendix 5A. We interviewed five social workers and they provided us with real situations they encountered with clients. Based on these stories, we firstly developed four vignettes that elicit compassion and four control vignettes. These vignettes presented a narrative of a social worker that explained daily work of social work. We also constructed four vignettes that display bureaucrat bashing and four control vignettes. Scholars suggest that bashing may function, in part, through a lack of information on job realities or tasks at work (Garrett et al., 2006; Caillier, 2018). Therefore, the compassion vignettes and control vignettes contained the same job description to control for a gap of knowledge of job-related tasks in the effect. Control conditions are suitable because – as opposed to developing positive and negative vignettes – they provide a true effect of bureaucrat bashing and compassion (Lonati et al., 2018). In order to not fatigue, bore or reveal our manipulation to our respondents, the respondents were randomized to rate four vignettes.

We intentionally differed the narration and emotional intensity between the vignettes of our bashing and compassion. There are no personal stories in the bureaucrat bashing vignettes, since the purpose was to create meaningless bashing vignettes as encountered in political campaigns or popular media. Our goal was not to create conditions equal in emotional response or emotional stimulation. Our research question does not test high negative emotions of bashing compared to emotions of compassion, but rather the effects of meaningless bashing on compassionate behavior.

5.7.2 Measures

Eliciting compassion. We asked people to rate the extent to which they experience four feelings used in the literature to assess elicited compassion

(compassion, sympathy, concern, and moved) (Cronbach α = .89) (Galanakis et al., 2016; Reynolds et al., 2019). Participants had to answer a five-point Likert scale on each emotion after reading a text (0 = not at all, 1 = a little bit, 2 = fairly, 3 = quite a bit, 4 = very much). The scale items are in appendix 5B.

Bureaucrat bashing. We asked participants to rate on the same five-point Likert-scale seven questions based on the definition of meaningless bureaucrat bashing (Garrett et al. 2006). Participants rated the degree to which they felt the vignettes criticized social workers, generalized criticism of social workers, and provided concrete solutions (Cronbach α = .90). For the full scale, refer to appendix 5B.

5.7.3 Sample

We used the G*Power program for the calculation of our power, based on a Cohen's d of 0.5. This led us to an estimation of 176 participants with a power of 0.8. As shown in Table 1, we collected a representative sample of 283 Canadian citizens in terms of sex, age, and education.

We chose a moderate effect size in our power calculation as we were testing our manipulation check as we wanted a strong manipulation. Our analyses involved the means' comparison between treatment and control, where we expected a strong difference between the conditions. The standard effect size to choose in this case is a Cohen's d of 0.5 (Perugini et al., 2018).

Table 1
Sample Demographics for Study 1 (n = 283)

Category	Pilot Sample (%)	General Population (%)
Sex		
Female	52.1	50.3
Male	47.5	49.7
Education		
Low	7.8	8.4
Mid	33.0	33.7
High	59.2	57.9
Age		
18-24	16.7	14.6
25-34	17.7	16.6
35-44	14.2	15.8
45-54	15.2	15.5
55+	36.2	37.5

Note. Education level low = no formal education, primary school, some High School; mid = finished High School, College/CEGEP/Technical; high = some university, completed university, graduate studies.

5.7.4 Results

We conducted a factor analysis for eliciting compassion and for bureaucrat bashing to analyze the factor structure of our measures. For eliciting compassion, one factor explained 75.3 percent of the variance (compassion = .896, sympathy = .912, moved = .866, concern = .793). For bureaucrat bashing, two factors were revealed: generalized criticisms and lack of concrete solution. Generalized criticisms explains 62.6 percent on the variance whereas lack of concrete solution explains 16.8 percent of the variance (criticized = .865, attacked = .883, blamed = .868, generalized = .897, meaningless criticism = .825, concrete solutions = .944, resolving problem = .940). Together, both factors explain 79.4 percent of the variance. Details on the scales and factor analyses are in appendix 5B.

In each condition, there was at least one pair of vignettes (treatment and control) that was statistically significantly different in mean scores. We conducted a two-group ANOVA between vignettes to determine statistically significant different pairs. This ensured that our treatment did, indeed, trigger compassion or bashing and the control condition did not. In the compassion conditions, four pairs were statistically significantly different. We selected the pair of eliciting compassion (M = 3.09, SD = 0.85) and control compassion (M = 2.37, SD = 0.90) with the biggest difference in means (F [7, 562] = 4.12, p < 0.001). Our results suggest that participants were not primed by choices, as there are statistically significant differences in means in our manipulation check items between our control and treatment conditions. Our rating in our control condition suggests that participants did not just choose the available option . In the bashing conditions, we also selected the pair of bashing (M = 2.45, SD = 0.76) and control (M = 1.71, SD = 1.07) with the biggest mean range (F [7, 548] = 4.70, p < 0.001). Additional details on the analyses regarding ANOVA are in appendix 5C. Table 2 demonstrates the vignettes that were selected from study 1 and that will be used in study 2.

Table 2
Vignettes Selected From Study 1

Condition	Vignette
Eliciting compassion	I am a governmental social worker that works with children between the age of 6 and 17. I provide interventions and accompaniment with children whose parents are at risk to lose custody. Time and time again we must work outside of normal hours, for which we are never paid. I received a call in the middle of the night, because one child from a case I was working, a 10-year-old girl, attempted suicide. The drug addicted parents were not available, and I gained that child's trust and support to help her, so I had to show up. But I am not paid for this, it is my own decision to either go along with my values or not. I had worked so hard to get this child to open to me, how can I not be there for an attempted suicide when I know no one else would show up to comfort her?
Control compassion	I am a governmental social worker that works with individuals with drug addiction. I provide referrals for crisis intervention, create interventions, and link our patients with other organizations for interventions. Overall, I assess and evaluate new clients, monitor the recovery progress, and provide counselling and support during needed moments of treatment period. When someone is referred to us for services, I meet with and interview them, and if possible, interview close people to the individual and go through their medical files. After assessment, I aid in coming up with a treatment plan and link the client with treatment centers if necessary (treatments are also offered by us, but the type of treatment depends on severity of addiction. All treatment plans are based on individual needs, ability, type and severity of substance abuse problems. I also support clients in creating small realistic goals, how to carry them through, and aid in monitoring progress of these goals.
Bureaucrat bashing	We need to reimagine our current political economy to keep our country's well-being safe. To do this, we must have meaningful structural and staff change to address core societal issues. Governmental social workers and our system are failing vulnerable children in foster care. Our social workers lack capabilities, confidence, and common sense in good judgement. We must have zero tolerance of state failure. In the upcoming elections, we vow to restore citizens' trust in social work and services to keep our population's well-being safe.
Control bureaucrat bashing	Current social work educational programs for governmental social workers currently focus on in-class time studying thousands of pages of guidance, and not enough time in real-life, on-the-job training. We should reform the educational program to focus more on experience and daily practice outside of a sole focus on theory. Social work is a demanding vocation which requires a level of professionalism every bit as great as that of doctors or barristers, teachers or lecturers. Social work is characterized by professional association, altruism, and knowledge building.

5

5.8 Study 2

5.8.1 Design

Study 2 tested our hypotheses about the effects of eliciting compassion and bureaucrat bashing on compassionate behavior from citizens towards street-level bureaucrats. This study uses the treatment and control conditions identified in study 1 and in a 2*2 between-subject experiment. We randomized participants in one of the four treatment groups. Participants were instructed to read the vignettes and then fill in a questionnaire. All responses were forced responses, except the open question to leave a message. If participants chose 'yes' to leave a message, they were not forced to do so. See Figure 2 for the randomization flow and Figure 3 for random assignment of participants.

> *'We are looking to help social workers with their work-related well-being. We, therefore, want to ask you if you want to write an encouragement message for social workers in Canada to lift up their spirits. This encouragement message may help social workers in their working life. No messages are too big or too small. We will gather the messages we receive and share them with social workers via an online platform. Leaving a message is voluntary and up to your discretion'.*

Figure 2
Randomization of Projects in Study 2
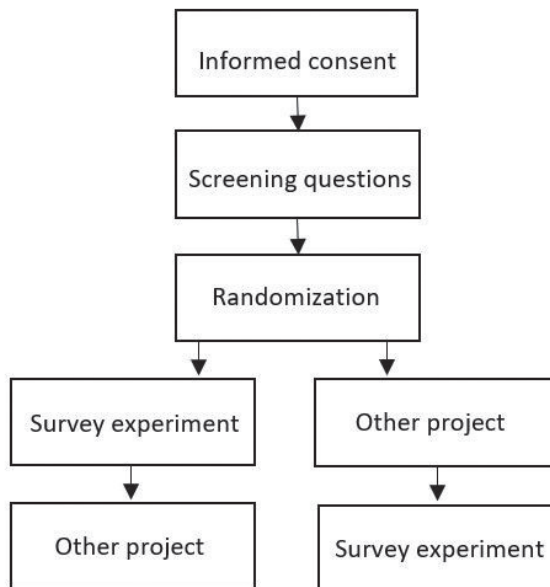
Figure 3

Randomization of Participants and Forced Responses in Study 2
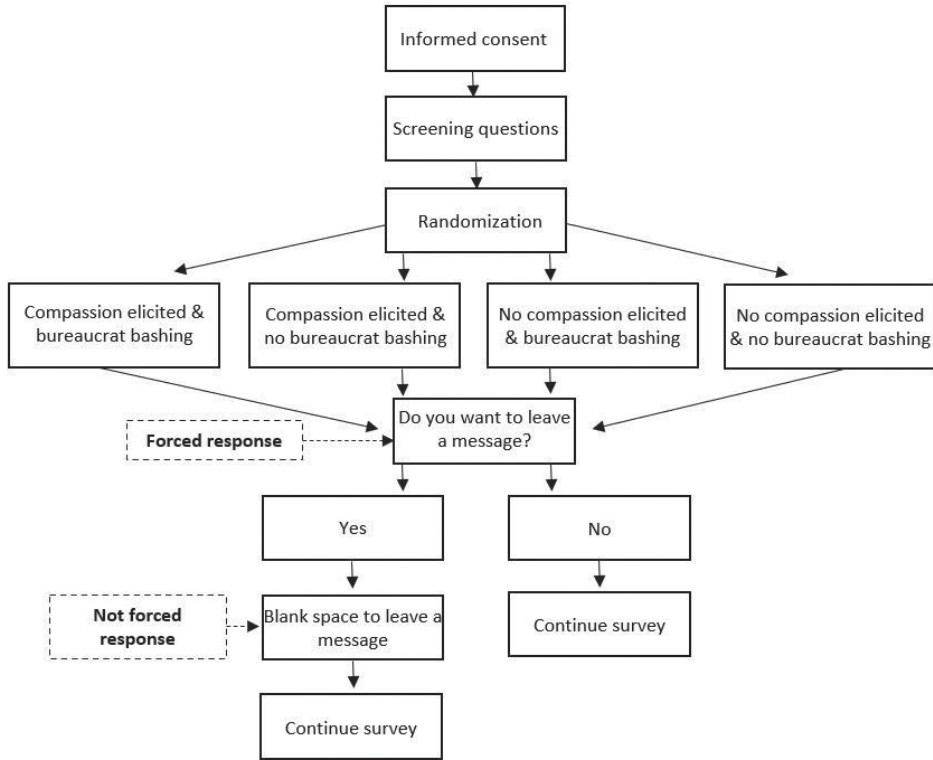
5.8.2 Measures

Compassionate behavior. We asked participants if they would write an encouragement message for social workers to help decrease work-related stress and lift up their spirits. Instructions were as follows (wording inspired by Blasco et al., 2016): Compassion is defined as acting on another's pain in order to alleviate it (Goetz et al., 2010). Participants who choose to write a message were counted as having acted compassionately – as they decided to take extra time to help a stranger boost up their morale. Thus, the outcome variable is binary (yes/no). We chose to ask participants to write a message, as opposed to how they feel generally about social workers because we study actual behavior rather than a sentiment. We did not want to assess whether participants only felt compassion towards social workers, but rather if they would really act compassionately. Focusing on actual behavior is a real contribution, as it allows us to move beyond discussions surrounding the intention-behavior gap (Webb & Sheeran, 2006).

We uploaded the messages for social workers ourselves and they were distributed to real social workers. You can find the website with the messages here: https://compassionforsocialworkers.tumblr.com/. We chose Tumblr because of its user-friendliness (easy to distribute, read and access) compared to other social media where an account is needed . A total of 444 messages were left where nine were not shared with social workers because they were negative or gibberish. A document with all non-posted messages and file with all raw messages are available in the supplementary materials on OSF.

5.8.3 Sample

We used G*Power for the power calculation, based on a Cohen's d of 0.2. The calculation estimated 787 participants required for a power of 0.8. We outsourced participants recruitment to an online panel (Lucid). We used a representative sample of 985 Canadian citizens in terms of sex, age, and education. We sampled from all over Canada. We did not stratify regions except for Quebec and the rest of Canada. We stratified our sampling in terms of age, gender, and education level. Table 3 shows that our sample is comparable to the general population.

Cohen's d differs from study 1 because their designs and analyses differ (Perugini et al., 2018). In this study, we chose a small effect size. Firstly, this design is comparing four different conditions in a survey experiment. Examining survey experiment literature in the domains of compassion and bashing – we did not find enough information to base our expected effect size on previous studies. Additionally, we wanted enough power to detect small effect sizes. Finally, we did not expect to find such salient differences between the conditions of the experiment – compared to our manipulation check. Thus, we decided on a small effect size (Perugini et al., 2018).

We ensured our respondents provided quality data and excluded those participants clearly just 'in it for the money'. We excluded the participants who failed 2 out of 3 attention checks, and most of those left gibberish in the messages. We also excluded speeders. In other words, we did our best to exclude participants who skim through surveys for payments. The full list of excluded participants can be found in the supplementary materials on OSF.

Table 3

Sample Demographics Study 2 (n = 985)

Category	Experiment Sample (%)	General Population (%)
Sex		
Female	51.5	50.3
Male	47.9	49.7
Education		
Low	8.1	8.4
Mid	33.7	33.7
High	56.8	57.9
Age		
18-24	12.1	14.6
25-34	15	16.6
35-44	15.2	15.8
45-54	17.3	15.5
55+	40.3	37.5

Note. Education level low = no formal education, primary school, some High School; mid = finished High School, College/CEGEP/Technical; high = some university, completed university, graduate studies.

Randomization check. We assessed the sample conditions for homogeneity among the demographic variables sex, age, and educational level. Table 4 shows the differences between the four conditions. The differences are all insignificant showing that randomization was successful.

Table 4

Demographic Comparison Across Groups

Conditions	% Female	Median Age	Educational Level (*M*)
1. Eliciting compassion, control bureaucrat bashing	45.7 (116/254)	49	4.91
2. Eliciting compassion, bureaucrat bashing	53.8 (127/236)	48	4.80
3. Control compassion, bureaucrat bashing	57 (143/251)	51	4.66
4. Control compassion, control bureaucrat bashing	50.4 (121/240)	48	4.96
Total Sample	52.1 (507/981)	49	4.83
Difference tests	Chi-square = 5.488, p = .064	ANOVA F = .359, p = .698	ANOVA F = 2.407, p = .091

Note. Education level: 0 = no formal education, 1 = primary school, 2 = some High School, 3 = finished High School, 4 = College/CEGEP/Technical, 5 = some university, 6 = completed university, 7 = graduate studies.

5.8.4 Results

Hypothesis 1. Hypothesis 1 stated that eliciting compassion would increase compassionate behaviors from citizens to social workers. Eliciting compassion indeed increased compassionate behavior (β = .68, SE = .19, OR = 1.98 p < .001). People who read the compassion vignette were almost twice as willing to write an encouragement message than people who read the control vignette. An odds ratio of 1.98 is equivalent to a 1.1 in Cohen's D (Chin, 2000). Of all participants exposed to the eliciting compassion condition, 50.8 percent left a message. Of all participants who read the control condition, 39.7 percent left a message. Hypothesis 1 is supported. Below we show two examples of encouragement messages that were written by participants:

> *'The work you are doing is very important and you can not only help your clients but our entire society. It may be difficult at time but keep at it because you are doing much more good than you realize at the time.'*

> *'Social work is indeed demanding but it's necessary service in society. I applaud all of you on your hard work, dedication and contribution to society. Without you, many would be unable to persevere and survive as worthy individuals. I thank you sincerely!'*

Hypothesis 2. Hypothesis 2 stated that bureaucrat bashing would decrease compassionate behaviors from citizens to social workers. The bureaucrat bashing condition did not significantly affect compassionate behavior (β = .35, SE = .19, OR = 1.43, p = 0.057). Of all participants exposed to the bureaucrat bashing condition, 46.6 percent left a message. Of all participants who read the control bureaucrat bashing condition, 43.9 percent left a message. Hypothesis 2 is rejected.

Hypothesis 3. Hypothesis 3 stated that eliciting compassion will moderate the effects of bureaucrat bashing on compassionate behavior, in such a way that the negative effects of bureaucrat bashing on compassionate behaviors will become weaker when compassion is elicited. Our experiment did not find this relationship (β = -.48, SE = .26, OR = .64, p = .084). Hypothesis 3 is rejected.

The results are shown in Table 5 and Figure 4.

Table 5
Logistic Regression Results (n = 981)

Variables	β (*SE*)	Sig.	Lower CI	Odds Ratio	Upper CI
Eliciting compassion	.68 (.19)	<.001	1.38	1.98	2.82
Bureaucrat Bashing	.35 (.19)	.057	.99	1.43	2.05
Interaction	-.45 (.26)	.084	.39	0.64	1.06
Constant	-.60 (.14)	<.001		.55	

Figure 4

Experimental Evidence That Eliciting Compassion Increases Compassionate Behavior
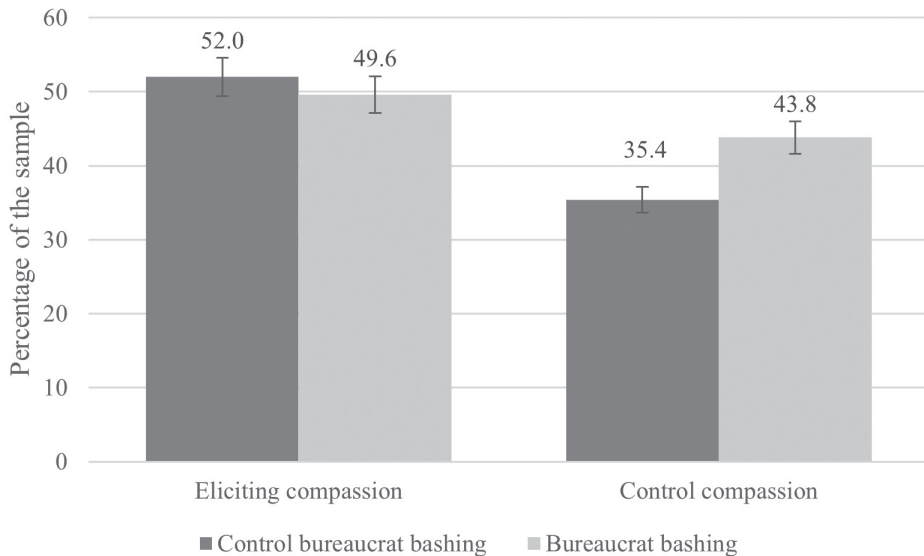
Note. The Y axis, ranging from 0 – 60, shows the percentage of the citizens that left a message. Each condition shows 95% error bars.

5.9 Discussion and conclusion

We have shown that eliciting compassion among citizens results in more compassionate behaviors of citizens towards street-level bureaucrats. Citizens who were provided with a story about difficulties bureaucrats face, were almost twice as likely to write actual encouraging messages to them. We also found that that bureaucrat bashing does not decrease citizens' compassionate behavior. Our findings contribute to the literature in three ways.

First , we show that citizens can be stimulated to act compassionately towards street-level bureaucrats. This finding contributes to the street-level bureaucracy literature. This literature shows that many bureaucrats aim to act compassionate towards citizens, which is related to the citizen-agent narrative (Maynard-Moody & Musheno, 2003). Our result indicates that if street-level bureaucrats show the difficulties of their jobs, citizens will also put compassion at the center of their decisions. They are more likely to help bureaucrats. This finding also contributes to the literature on bureaucratic reputation. In this literature, the focus is often on how to boost the overall reputation of a public organization by showing how well it is performing and avoiding blame by 'hiding imperfections' (Lee & Van

Ryzin, 2020). We elicited compassion by displaying a 'vulnerable' side of public organizations, namely narratives about the problems bureaucrats encounter. Our result indicates that the image of public organizations could be improved by showing that bureaucrats sometimes struggle in their jobs: they are faced with aggression or high workloads. When citizens read about this, they experience compassion towards those bureaucrats and behave more positive towards them when they interact with them. Future studies should investigate to which extent this 'vulnerable' side of public organization can positively contribute to bureaucratic reputation.

Our second contribution is that, despite the common assumption that bureaucrat bashing has primarily negative effects, our findings do not demonstrate negative effects of bashing on citizens' compassionate behavior towards street-level bureaucrats. There are various - mostly normative – studies that highlight that bureaucrat bashing is unfounded (Goodsell, 2004/2014). Yet, bureaucrat bashing is rarely studied empirically (Caillier, 2018). To the best of our knowledge, there are only two experimental studies, which yielded mixed findings on bashing's effect on the public (Callier, 2018/2020). Caillier (2018) found that bashing leads to more negative attitudes of the public. Callier (2018) suggested that bureaucrat bashing is common and thus, creates memories of it in the minds of citizens, which can be reactivated by other bashing cues. Our results challenge this claim, as bureaucrat bashing has been a prominent part in the Canadian media discourse history, but we find no effect (Campbell & Peters, 1988; Peters & Savoie, 1995). Caillier's subsequent study (2020) also did not replicate his initial results and did not find any effect for bashing. In line with Callier (2020), our results raise questions about the effects of bureaucrat bashing on the public and their attitudes and behavior towards bureaucrats.

Despite our null effects, our findings are relevant to understand bashing especially in this era of rising populism (Moynihan & Roberts, 2021). Politicians using bureaucrat bashing engage in what is known as 'attack politics' with an aggressive emphasis on failures over successes and the exploitation of organizational vulnerabilities (Flinders, 2011). For instance, politicians exploit the vulnerabilities of the child foster care system by bashing the failed cases by social workers rather than highlighting the multitude of successful cases (Stanfield & Beddoe, 2013). This is where our finding becomes relevant. We demonstrate that by showing organizational vulnerabilities (i.e. difficulties of street-level bureaucrats) prompts compassionate behavior from citizens. A danger associated with attack politics is the politicization and amplification of

'bad accountability', which in turn decreases public's confidence in government, services and workers (Flinders, 2011). Showing organizational vulnerabilities based on daily difficulties workers face could combat bad accountability. Future research is needed, however, to distinguish whether our bureaucrat bashing findings apply to 'elite' or career bureaucrats as well (Moynihan & Roberts, 2021).

A possible explanation for why showing vulnerabilities does increase compassionate behavior towards bureaucrats but bashing does not reduce compassionate behavior can be found in the literature on public sector stereotypes (de Boer, 2020; Willems, 2020) and public service motivation (Schott al., 2019). Willems (2020) demonstrates that different public sector professions have both positive or negative stereotypes in society, and some of the positive stereotypes include caring, helpful, and dedicated. Social workers are associated with high levels public service motivation (Vinzant, 1998). It is, thus, possible that social workers also resonate within stereotypes of caring, helpful, and dedicated partly because public service motivation refers to the pro-social motivation for a job, such as opportunities to serve society and to aid the population, while simultaneously being less motivated by higher salaries (Lewis & Frank, 2002; Wright & Pandey, 2008). Bureaucrat bashing effects could, thus, be limited for professions considered high in public service motivation (e.g., social workers) because it carries positive stereotypes. Since we did not measure public perceptions of social workers, we cannot conclude that our results were not driven by positive bias towards social workers. I However, the neutral vignettes about social workers did not lead to an increase of compassionate behavior – suggesting a possible positive bias is unlikely. To test this, future research should assess the effects of eliciting compassion and bureaucrat bashing on different types of street-level bureaucrats.

The third contribution of our study is that our study provides methodological contributions to public administration research. We measured actual behavior through an experimental approach. We demonstrate a simple, scalable way to measure behavior using written encouragement messages, instead of a attitudes or intended behavior (John, 2020; Hansen & Tummers, 2020). In addition, to the best of our knowledge, we are also the first to develop a scale to measure meaningless bureaucrat bashing.

This study has important generalizability limitations we must acknowledge. First, despite having conducted an experiment, we think it is likely that our results generalize to social workers in other countries where they are also exposed to aggression by citizens. We theorize that for bureaucrats in similar service-

5

oriented professions, such as case workers or rehabilitation officers our findings would generalize because the nature of the profession is highly similar, but we would be hesitant to generalize tor more regulation-oriented professions, such as tax officials (see de Boer, 2020; Maynard-Moody & Musheno, 2003). Future research is needed to test if our findings translate beyond social workers to other sub-groups and beyond the North American cultural context.

Second, we focused on a specific type of compassionate behavior, namely writing encouragement messages. We have argued that writing an encouragement message is an example of compassionate behavior. Compassionate behavior is defined as an act to help alleviate the situation of another person (Goetz et al., 2010). We stressed this clearly in the instructions for our encouragement messages. It required citizens to take their own time to help out a total stranger, making it an act of compassion. Writing encouragement messages is, however, only one type of compassionate behavior. Future research is needed to test if our results generalize to other forms of compassionate behaviors, such as being patient, understanding and not showing frustration. Theoretically if, like in our study, the three cognitive appraisal mechanisms (i.e. deservingness to help, self-relevance and self-efficacy) are met (Atkins & Parker, 2012) we expect our findings to have similar effects for other compassionate behaviors.

Third, our survey experiment was conducted online there was no 'real' interaction with the worker. It could be that face-to-face interactions affect citizens' compassionate behavior. In our study, we do not think the lack of face-to-face interaction impacted our findings since it is not a prerequisite for our type of compassionate behavior. It may, however, be for other types of compassionate behavior such as being understanding and patient. Future research is needed to understand the role of face-to-face interactions and compassionate behavior. Using field experiments can be helpful. It is important to note, however, that our aim was not to create a fix-for-all solution that would eliminate negative behaviors from citizens towards street-level bureaucrats in all situations. Rather, our aim was to see if compassionate behavior can be elicited, with the idea that on average citizens could show more compassion to workers.

Our study also has methodological limitations. First, we choose to measure compassionate behavior as typing out an encouragement message. This is an action that our participants decided to part-take in or not. They could decide for themselves if they wanted to write a message to help and boost up morale of workers or not. Measuring 'real' encouragement messages like we did has merit since it helps combat the intention-behavior gap (Webb & Sheeran

2006). As opposed to an intention during a hypothetical situation, intention does not predict behavior well (Rhodes & Dickau, 2012; Webb & Sheeran, 2006). As a consequence, our dependent variable is limited in terms of mirroring compassionate behaviors when citizen and bureaucrats meet face-to-face. There are other types of compassionate behaviors that are more realistic in real-life settings that need to be investigated.

Second, we did not examine different dimensions of stimulated compassionate behaviors. We settled to pre-register a dichotomous measure over a qualitative one, as a binary measure provides researchers with less degrees of freedom (Wicherts et al., 2016). We did, however, investigate the whether the content of messages was supportive or not (i.e., gibberish or non-supportive), only 9 were not positive. We did not investigate the content of messages in terms of length – as it was not directly relevant to answer our research question. We did not intend to investigate how much effort one puts in, but whether they put effort at all. We acknowledge that our measure of compassionate behavior is limited and future research should adopt a qualitative strategy in understanding the effects of compassionate messages on workers.

Third, social desirability is a serious concern when designing experiments. Overall, we ensured that respondents were guaranteed anonymity, not under direct observation of the researcher, and received a small compensation. All these design choices help combat social desirability (Levitt & List, 2007). Moreover, we have conducted our manipulation checks separately, as a way to combat respondents finding out what the experiment is about (Ejelov & Luke, 2020). Regardless, like any study, we cannot be completely sure that social desirability was not at play. We think it is, however, unlikely that our results were affected by it as we only found effects in the compassion condition, and not the other conditions. If social desirability affected leaving a message, we would see significant effects in all experimental conditions. However, in terms of payment, we indicated in our instructions that leaving a message was voluntary but we did not explicitly specify leaving an encouragement message would not increase payment . Future research can test payment effects more closely.

Finally, we cannot be sure that our results were not affected by the presence of other prominent emotions. In our manipulation check, we assessed whether compassion was significantly elicited and whether meaningless bureaucrat bashing was perceived. However, future research could investigating how the intensity and interaction of a range of emotions affect (un)compassionate behavior of citizens.

5.9.1 Conclusion

To conclude, our findings urge scholars to re-think the conceptualization of negative consequences of bureaucrat bashing. Our results also emphasize the importance of showing the vulnerable side of street-level bureaucrats. We demonstrate that by showing one's struggles and imperfections, we can stimulate citizens to act compassionately towards street-level bureaucrats. Zooming into practical implications, our results suggest to re-think the emphasis on the high performance side of bureaucratic reputations to stimulate more positive citizens to street-level bureaucrat interactions (Lee & Van Ryzin, 2020). We encourage to build a more 'compassionate public administration' and developed the first steps towards it: how to encourage it and strengthen interactions with the public and street-level bureaucrats through eliciting compassion in citizens. An important next step is to test the effects of compassion from citizens on street-level bureaucrats in their daily working lives, such as their well-being and performance.

5

Chapter 6

Conclusion

6.1 Answering the research questions

This dissertation seeks to answer the central research question: *What are the stereotypes of public sector workers, which factors contribute to them and to what extent do they affect citizen-state interactions?* I tackled this central research question through three sub questions.

The first sub question I ask in this dissertation is: ''*What stereotypes do citizens hold about public sector workers?*'' (see Chapter 2). This question is important in order to clarify the commonly held assumption by scholars in public administration that citizens negatively stereotype public sector workers (Goodsell, 2004). To answer this question, we conducted a mixed-method survey across four countries: Canada, the Netherlands, South Korea, and the U.S. with 3,042 citizens.

Firstly, we found that we also observe positive stereotypes next to known negative stereotypes. These include traits such as serving, hardworking, and responsible.

Secondly, we find that a universal idea of the public sector worker exists. We find three stereotypes that are present in the top stereotypes of each country. These are job security, going home on time, and serving society.

Thirdly, despite this shared image of a public sector worker across countries, we also find that stereotypes differ across countries. For instance, even if we find three universal stereotypes, their valence is different. That is, they are not perceived equally across countries in terms of how positive they are. For example, going home on time is perceived positively in South Korea, yet negatively in the Netherlands.

Countries differences are not only in terms of valence, but also in terms of content. Public sector worker stereotypes in the U.S. and Canada are similar and remarkably positive: In both countries, there are no negative traits in the top ten stereotypes profile, and the most frequently selected traits beyond the universal traits were hardworking, responsible, and helpful. In comparison, stereotypes in South Korea and the Netherlands are more negative, and include traits such as inflexible (in both countries), boring and lazy (in the Netherlands), arrogant and corrupt (in South Korea).

The second sub question I investigate is: ''*What are contributing factors to public sector worker stereotyping?*'' (see Chapter 3). Based on a survey conducted in Canada (n = 3,510), we found that media, trust, and geography patterned by education are related to stereotyping.

We show that media reporting affects how citizens stereotype public sector workers. Positive media portrayals of police officers led to stereotyping the police as warmer and more competent. Negative media portrayals of teachers led to stereotyping teachers as less warm and less competent.

Furthermore, we demonstrate that high trust towards a profession is associated with positive stereotyping (warmer and more competent) while low trust towards a profession is associated with negative stereotyping (less warm and less competent).

Lastly, the chapter evidences that rural non-college educated participants stereotype police more positively than urban college-educated participants.

These findings show that, firstly, narratives in the media impact stereotyping. Secondly, individual factors, such as trust and geography patterned by education, provide context to understand stereotyping. Levels of trust and geography patterned by education may provide context for past experiences and exposure with public sector workers. In all, this chapter sheds light on some of the factors that contribute to public sector worker stereotypes.

In Chapter 4, I answer the third sub question, namely: *''Do positive and negative stereotypes affect citizen-state interactions?''* By using a field experiment, this study uncovers the effects of positive stereotyping on public service delivery and performance.

We opted for an audit design where we emailed all public and non-profit nursing homes in the Netherlands and Flemish Belgium (n = 849). Half of the nursing homes received a short email inquiring about their services. The second half received the same email, and additionally included three sentences stereotyping the nursing home workers as helpful.

The use of the stereotype did not affect the outcome of the service, in terms of reply rate and quality of responses. However, workers stereotyped as helpful were friendlier during the process of service delivery. Their replies included more gratitude towards the client, in the form of saying 'thank you' for the interest in their home and services (47% of replies in the stereotyped condition included gratitude, versus 34.8% in the control group – thereby increasing friendliness during encounters by 12%). Taken together, these findings underline the potential benefits that there are to harness from positive public sector worker stereotypes and their impact on workers' behavior.

To further understand the role of public sector worker stereotyping on citizen-state interactions, in Chapter 5 I further investigate *"Do positive and negative*

6

stereotypes affect citizen-state interactions?" To answer this question, we have conducted a survey experiment in Canada (n = 985). In this study, we tested the consequences of negative stereotyping in the form of bureaucrat bashing. We assessed whether bureaucrat bashing affects citizens' compassionate behavior towards public sector workers. It did not.

We have also tested whether sharing a narrative from a public sector worker, namely sharing difficulties and realities of their work, affected citizens' compassion towards public sector workers. It did. That is, sharing vulnerable job difficulties increased compassionate behavior from citizens to public sector workers in the form of encouragement and support messages. Building on the findings of chapter 2, the evidence presented in these chapters suggests that there is power in available narratives. That is, the presented narratives in both studies did influence citizens in terms of stereotyping and behavior.

Taking these findings together, we can answer our central research question: "*What are the stereotypes of public sector workers, which factors contribute to them and to what extent do they affect citizen-state interactions?*". Firstly, public sector worker stereotypes are both positive and negative. Therefore, there is the good, the bad, and the bureaucrat. Findings also showcase cross-national stereotypes of public sector workers, namely going home on time, serving society, and having job security as cross-national stereotypes. Furthermore, the content and appreciation of traits vary across countries.

Secondly, factors that contribute to stereotypes include the media, trust, and personal characteristics. Negative media coverage leads to more negative stereotyping, while positive media coverage to more positive stereotyping. High levels of trust towards a professions are associated with positive stereotyping, while low levels of trust with negative stereotyping. Geography patterned by education is related to how public sector worker are stereotyped. That is, rural non-college educated participants stereotype police more positively.

Lastly, citizen-state interactions can be affected by stereotypes to some extent. Positive stereotyping of public sector workers impacts the *process* of public service delivery, by increasing friendliness of the interaction with the client by 12%. However, negative stereotyping, in the form of bureaucrat bashing, does not affect citizens' behavior towards public sector workers.

In Table 1 I provide an overview of the questions and findings of the empirical chapters of this dissertation.

Table 1

Overview of Questions and Findings of the Dissertation

Research questions	Method	Findings
What stereotypes do citizens hold about public sector workers?	Mixed-method survey (n = 3,042) with citizens in Canada, the Netherlands, South Korea, and the U.S.	Public sector worker stereotypes include both positive and negative traits. A cross-national stereotypical image of the public sector emerges: serving society, going home on time, and with job security. Yet, stereotypes varied in content and perception between countries.
What are some the contributing factors to public sector worker stereotyping?	Cross-sectional and experimental survey with n = 3510 Canadian citizens.	Three factors influencing public sector worker stereotyping are identified: mediatized events, level of trust towards a profession, and personal characteristics of educational level and urban/rural setting.
Do positive and negative stereotypes affect citizen-state interactions?	Audit experiment on nursing homes in the Netherlands (n = 849).	Positive public sector worker stereotyping does not affect bureaucratic outcome, such as response rate and quality. It does affect the bureaucrat process; providing a friendlier service.
Do positive and negative stereotypes affect citizen-state interactions?	Survey experiment with n = 985 Canadian citizens	Negative stereotyping, in the form of bureaucrat bashing, does not affect citizens' behavior towards public sector workers.

6.2 Take home messages

Based on the findings, I present *two take home messages*. First, stereotypes are not all negative and there is power in positive stereotypes as they improve citizen-state interactions. Second, narratives about public sector workers, including those in the media, are significant factors in stereotyping by citizens and these narratives affect citizen-state interactions.

Message #1: Stereotypes are not all negative and there is power in positive stereotypes as they improve citizen-state interactions.

While public sector workers are commonly negatively portrayed in the media and often assumed by scholars to be reflected in society (Goodsell, 2004; Hubbell, 1991; Wilson, 1989), we find that there are, in fact, many positive stereotypes associated with public sector workers, as exemplified in Chapter 2. These stereotypes include serving society, hardworking, responsible, and helpful.

Although we also do identify negative stereotypes, this dissertation challenges the common assumption of negative public sector worker stereotypes. Therefore, it posits that public sector worker stereotyping is not all that negative, presenting a more nuanced account to the narrative of what stereotypes of public sector workers citizens do hold, than typically observed in the media and the literature.

Secondly, by finding out what positive stereotypes are out there, we also find out that there is *power to positive stereotypes* (see Chapter 4). Empirical findings show that positively stereotyping public sector workers with pro-social traits, such as helping, can positively affect the process of public service delivery. This affects citizen-state interactions.

In the context of citizen-state interactions, the bureaucratic process imposes various costs on individuals, particularly psychological costs (Moynihan et al., 2014). These psychological costs encompass the frustrations and stresses that people experience when engaging with the state, especially within bureaucratic frameworks that involve public service delivery. Navigating bureaucratic procedures often leads to feelings of anxiety and discomfort due to the complexities involved in dealing with government agencies.

However, research suggests that the approach of public service providers influences these psychological costs (Moynihan et al., 2014). When you receive a friendlier and more accommodating service, it can reduce frustration (Olsen et al., 2022). A courteous and helpful demeanor from government employees can create a positive atmosphere, making people feel more at ease during bureaucratic processes. This friendlier service not only enhances the overall experience for individuals but also reduces the psychological costs associated with engaging with the state (Olsen et al., 2022). The use of positive stereotypes can mitigate the psychological burdens placed on citizens, fostering smoother and more positive citizen-state interactions.

These findings are in line with the stereotype boost literature (Shih et al., 2012), which showcases that there is power to positive stereotypes. Empirical evidence shows that making positive stereotypes salient (also known as stereotype activation) can improve performance on the stereotyped tasks (Clark et al., 2017; Levy, 1996; Shih et al., 1999; Shih et al., 2012). Research on stereotype boost effects is largely limited to ascribed characteristics, such as age, gender, and race (Clark et al., 2017; Levy, 1996; Shih et al., 1999). What we find is that the effect does also hold in professional stereotyping – activating pro-social traits boosts the pro-social approach towards clients. In all, our research findings add to the empirical body showing the potential power of positive stereotypes.

Message #2: Narratives about public sector workers, including those in the media, impact stereotyping by citizens and their interactions with the state.

In chapter 2, I underscore the pivotal role of the media in shaping public perceptions. The contrast between positive portrayals, such as police officers aiding citizens in distress, and negative depictions, like instances of teacher misconduct, demonstrates the influence of media narratives on how public sector workers are stereotyped. That is, positive media portrayals led participants to stereotype police more positively. Negative media portrayals of teachers led participants to stereotype teachers more negatively. These findings emphasize the importance of responsible media representation, advocating for a more balanced and accurate portrayal of public sector professionals.

Chapter 5 further adds to this notion and shows that available narratives not only affect stereotyping, but also citizen-state interactions. Empirical evidence shows that when public sector workers share their narrative, show their vulnerabilities and share their work difficulties, citizens' act more compassionately towards them. In other words, the provided narrative by the public sector worker had a positive impact on citizen-state interactions. This could have implication for a positive spiral. Street-level bureaucracy literature shows that many public sector workers aim to act compassionately towards citizens, which is related to the citizen-agent narrative (Maynard-Moody, Musheno, & Musheno, 2003). Our results show that if public sector workers share the struggles of their work, such as being faced with aggression or high workloads, citizens will also put compassion at the center of their decisions.

While our study did not uncover any discernible effects of the negative narrative surrounding bureaucrat bashing on citizen-state interactions, it's essential to highlight the distinctions in our methodology. We presented authentic narratives of public sector workers and showcased real news clips. However, the instances of bureaucrat bashing were depicted through crafted vignettes authored by our team. Consequently, for the purpose of our study, bureaucrat bashing, as portrayed in our vignettes, is not incorporated into our definition of media portrayals or available narratives – as it was not a real narrative compared to our other narratives. To advance our understanding, future research endeavors should focus on examining the impact of real-life instances of bureaucrat bashing.

These findings emphasize the need for open dialogue and authentic storytelling within the public sector. By humanizing their experiences, workers can dismantle stereotypes, fostering understanding and compassion among

6

citizens. Ultimately, this research advocates for a paradigm shift towards empathy-driven narratives, reshaping public sector worker perceptions and interactions. Research in this dissertation shows that, one powerful tool to help craft and circulate these narratives is the media.

Communication scholars agree that there is little doubt that media plays a significant role in stereotype maintenance and formation (Appel & Weber, 2021; Behm-Morawitz & Ortiz, 2013; Ramasubramanian & Murphy, 2014). Stereotyping in the media has been documented to contribute to societal stereotypes when it comes to gender, ethnicity, and age (Appel & Weber, 2021; Behm-Morawitz & Ortiz, 2013; Ramasubramanian & Murphy, 2014).

The question of whether counter-stereotypes or atypical exemplars shift attitudes in the positive direction or lead to more modern prejudice has been an important debate within the field (Bodenhausen et al., 1995; Holt, 2013; Ramasubramanian, 2007). Bodenhausen and colleagues found evidence that the activation of positive media exemplars can lead to positive shifts. Nathanson Wilson, McGee, and Sebastian (2002) found that focusing on counter stereotypical gender information, children reported lesser acceptance of gender stereotypes. Research also shows that the types of portrayal in the media (positive or negative) also affect how citizens endorse policies. That is, exposure to positive, counterstereotypical portrayals of minorities led participants to be pro-minority policies (Ramasubramanian, 2010). This relates back to our findings in Chapter 5. Participants who were exposed to counter-stories of media portrayals (social workers sharing difficulties and vulnerabilities) were more compassionate towards social workers.

The implications of these findings are far-reaching. Recognizing the power of narratives, policymakers and media professionals can collaborate to promote positive stories about public sector workers, fostering a more empathetic understanding among citizens. In essence, this research not only contributes valuable insights to academic discourse but also offers actionable pathways for societal change. By harnessing the power of narratives and promoting accurate representations, society can work towards dismantling harmful stereotypes, fostering understanding, and building more harmonious citizen-state relations.

6.3 Reflection about the findings from a public administration perspective

In the introductory chapter of this dissertation, we explored the rationale behind studying stereotypes from a public administration (PA) perspective, which

includes the micro, meso, and macro levels of understanding public sector worker stereotypes. Now, we will delve into how the insights gathered in this book can enhance our comprehension of public sector worker stereotypes at each of these levels.

Chapters 3 to 5 delve into the dimensions of micro-level analysis. Specifically, Chapter 3 examines the influence of individual characteristics of trust, geography, and education on the stereotyping of public sector workers. These insights on how individual characteristics influence the stereotyping of public sector workers can help design interventions to address these stereotypes. For example, since trust is found to be a significant factor, trust-building measures can be implemented.

Future research could explore the influence of other individual characteristics on the stereotyping of public sector workers, such as political beliefs or past experience, broadening the scope of our understanding. For instance, one key potential factor at play is previous experience with the given profession. The contact hypothesis states that positive intergroup contact and interactions reduce prejudice and negative stereotyping, while negative intergroup contact exacerbates prejudice and negative stereotyping (Amir 1976; Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006).

Chapters 4 and 5 explore the interaction between public sector workers and citizens during public service delivery. These insights on how citizen-state interactions during public service delivery can be enhanced with the use of positive stereotypes can help in managerial techniques – such as prompting positive stereotypes.

Future research could explore how the use of positive stereotypes affects different types of public service delivery. For instance, do positive stereotypes have the same impact in healthcare, education, and law enforcement? This could help in tailoring managerial techniques to specific sectors. Indeed, the work by Maynard-Moody and Musheno (2022) underscores the diversity within bureaucratic roles. Bureaucrats are not homogenous entities; instead, they encompass a spectrum of individuals with varied backgrounds, experiences, and perspectives. This diversity becomes particularly significant when considering the influence of positive stereotypes on public service delivery.

Each public sector involves distinct challenges, relationships, and expectations. For instance, positive stereotypes in healthcare might affect patient interactions, shaping how practitioners approach their roles. In the realm of education, positive stereotypes could influence teacher-student dynamics, classroom management, and student outcomes. For law enforcement, positive

6

stereotypes may impact community interactions, trust-building, and the application of justice. In all, future research should explore how the use of positive stereotypes in these different types of role affect the public service delivery specific to that role, and consequently, citizen-state interactions.

The meso level shifts the focus to the organizational context, concentrating on the study of groups, including organizations (Jilke et al., 2019). Although we did not investigate the meso level directly, our findings bear implications for this level. Chapter 3 shows that media can influence the stereotyping of public sector workers, while Chapter 4 demonstrates that positive stereotypes can affect organizations' interactions with citizens. Chapter 5 shows that a strategy of communicating organizational limitations and struggles can foster positive citizen-state interactions.

Our findings imply that organizations need to be aware of how they are portrayed in the media, as this can impact their reputation and the way they are perceived by the public. Findings suggest that fostering positive stereotypes can enhance the quality of citizen-state interactions and improve public perceptions of the organization. Consequently, further research is required to assess how these findings operate at the meso level. This could involve investigating the impact of media portrayals on organizational reputation, the role of positive stereotypes in shaping organizational interactions with the public, and the effectiveness of different communication strategies.

The macro level centers on the political-administrative environment, encompassing national systems, regulation, history, and culture (Jilke et al., 2019). Chapter 2 tackles the macro-level of stereotype research by identifying the most prevalent public sector worker stereotypes across four countries. This chapter underscores the importance of the macro level of stereotypes, as the content and valence of stereotypes varied significantly between countries.

Further research is necessary to gain a deeper understanding of macro-level factors such as the role of political systems, history, and culture in the formation and perpetuation of stereotypes. For example, a country with a history of corruption in the public sector might foster negative stereotypes. Moreover, in a democratic system where public sector workers are seen as serving the citizens, the stereotypes might be more positive compared to an autocratic system where public sector workers might be seen as oppressive. Furthermore, the regulatory environment can also impact stereotypes. Countries with strong regulations and accountability systems may foster more positive stereotypes about their public sector workers.

These possibilities underscore the need for further research to understand better how macro-level factors influence the formation and perpetuation of stereotypes. This could lead to more effective strategies for improving public sector image and performance. Understanding these stereotypes and their origins at the macro-level can help policymakers and public sector leaders design interventions to combat negative stereotypes and improve public sector performance and citizen satisfaction.

A comprehensive understanding of the interconnectedness among these levels—micro, meso, and macro—enables policymakers and researchers to develop nuanced strategies (Jilke et al., 2019; Moynihan, 2018). These strategies can address individual biases to counteract negative stereotypes at the micro level, reform organizational practices at the meso level, and contribute to broader societal changes by challenging deeply ingrained stereotypes at the macro level.

6.4 Reflecting on the Behavioral Public Administration approach

While Behavioral Public Administration (BPA) has gained popularity and has developed vastly in the recent years, the field is not without its criticisms. As the field evolves, scholars are taking a moment to critically reflect on some of the current caveats within BPA research. Below, I will reflect on some of the criticism associated with BPA and how this dissertation addresses or falls short on these.

The criticism aimed at BPA primarily revolves around its narrow scope. BPA has a limited integration with other disciplines and is predominantly centered on psychology, emphasizing experimental methodologies and micro-level research (Bhanot & Linos, 2019; Hassan & Wright, 2019; Moynihan, 2018). Critics argue that this singular focus neglects valuable contributions from disciplines such as management, sociology, economics, and political science, hindering a comprehensive understanding of public administration (Hassan & Wright, 2019).

This narrow perspective restricts the types of questions explored and problem scopes investigated, favoring easily answerable questions achievable through experimental designs, while neglecting other methodologies, such as descriptive qualitative research or ethnographic research (Bhanot & Linos, 2019; Hassan & Wright, 2019; Moynihan, 2018). Consequently, BPA often overlooks macro-level, complex, and enduring issues in public administration (Bhanot & Linos, 2019). As a result, BPA tends to neglect macro-level questions (Hassan & Wright, 2019; Moynihan, 2018).

Similarly, critics point out that BPA's preference for 'quick win' interventions, particularly nudges addressing specific problems, leads to a neglect of broader, systemic issues in public administration (Bhanot & Linos, 2019). This preference for smaller scope specific problems sidelines comprehensive, long-lasting policy changes essential for tackling deeply rooted challenges.

Moreover, BPA's heavy reliance on experimental methods raises concerns about the validity of its findings. Many studies within BPA resort to proxies to behavior, such as attitudes, perceptions, and intentions instead of observing actual behavior, limiting the generalizability of the identified mechanisms to real-life situations (Hassan & Wright, 2019).

Additionally, BPA's research focuses heavily on cognitive biases in policy makers and frontline workers, constituting 80% of primary studies in BPA, detracting from the crucial task of devising effective solutions tailored to the public sector context (Battaglio et al., 2019; Bhanot & Linos, 2019).

In summary, the key critique of BPA lies in its focus on psychology and experimental methodologies, excluding valuable insights from diverse disciplines and overlooking macro-level problems. This limitation hampers the development of holistic solutions, impedes the study of genuine behavioral patterns, and undermines the potential for transformative change in public administration.

This dissertation acknowledges the criticisms associated with BPA and recognizes that it is not immune to these limitations. For instance, I take a predominantly psychological approach, limiting the scope to PA-related subfields and psychology without integrating other disciplines. The research primarily employs experimental designs, with only one out of four studies adopting a descriptive and mixed-method approach.

Despite these limitations, this dissertation also addresses several key criticisms towards BPA. The approach in this dissertation (1) moves beyond micro-level research questions and tackles a macro-level research question, (2) integrates real behavior measures, and (3) focuses on potential solutions rather than cognitive biases.

Firstly, it transcends micro-level inquiries by delving into macro-level research questions. I specifically examine stereotypes concerning public sector workers across diverse nations. Instead of narrowly focusing on specific public sector roles in isolated contexts, the study in Chapter 2 addresses a pervasive societal problem on a broad scale. By studying stereotypes across diverse nations, the research aims to uncover overarching societal patterns in how public sector

workers are perceived. Therefore, in this dissertation I do not only focus on the micro-level issues.

Secondly, the research distinguishes itself by employing real behavioral measures rather than relying on proxies, ensuring a more authentic representation of human actions. By directly observing and measuring behavior, I seek to capture real reactions and responses, providing a nuanced and more accurate representation of how stereotypes consequences on citizen-state interactions manifest in real-world interactions.

Lastly, in this dissertation I shift the focus from cognitive biases and take a more proactive stances by exploring to potential solutions. It goes beyond identifying the problem and delves into strategies for positive change. It explores strategies such as leveraging positive stereotypes to enhance citizen-state interactions, utilizing media as a tool for reshaping stereotypes, and harnessing public sector worker narratives to foster positive citizen-state interactions. By emphasizing these solutions, I aim to contribute actionable insights for mitigating the impact of negative stereotypes and fostering positive citizen-state interactions.

In essence, in this research I do not only analyze the problem of public sector worker stereotypes but also seeks to provide a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon on a global scale, incorporate real-world behavioral measures, and propose practical solutions for positive change in citizen-state interactions.

6.5 Limitations and future research

Inevitably, this dissertation also come with its limitations. Below, I reflect on some of the caveats and I present potential avenues for further research.

In the first place, a challenge reflects the integration of research findings based on a diversity of methods, cases, and samples. That is, by using different methods, measures, and samples, it is difficult to integrate the findings together into a comprehensible model. Public sector worker stereotyping is a broad term, that encompasses a multitude of sectors and types of workers.

The multi-method and multi-focused approach of this dissertation highlights a range of public sector workers, contexts related to public sector workers, and measures. For example, in Chapter 2 stereotypes are measured deductively using the Katz and Braly (1933) method, while in Chapter 3 they are measured inductively using the Stereotype Content Model (Fiske, 2002). An empirical questions remains whether we would have found the same results in

Chapter 3 having used the Katz and Braly method. Therefore, caution should be exercised when comparing and generalizing results.

Future research could systematically compare different methods of measuring stereotypes, such as deductive methods and inductive methods. Researchers should investigate whether varying measurement techniques yields significantly different results. This comparative analysis could provide insights into the robustness and reliability of different methods, helping future studies choose appropriate measurement tools for studying public sector worker stereotyping.

The second issue centers around the generalizability of the findings in this dissertation. That is, Chapter 3 – 5 have been conducted on specific types of public sector workers. Chapter 3 investigated high school teachers and police officers, Chapter 4 investigated nursing home workers, while Chapter 5 focused on social workers. As we can observe, there is a skew towards service-oriented public sector workers. De Boer (2020) finds that regulation-oriented public sector workers are stereotyped less positively than service-oriented ones. Questions arise, then, on whether these effects would hold for other types of public sector workers, which are, regulation-oriented such as tax officials. Would be obtain the same compassion results towards tax officials or police officers? Future research should investigate to which extent our behavioral effects are context-specific (i.e., limited to a specific type of public sector worker) or hold across types of public sector workers.

It is also hard to asses to which extent our experimental results can be generalized to in-person settings and interactions. That is, Chapter 4 examined public service delivery in e-mail interactions, while Chapter 5 used a survey experiment where citizens' behavior was to leave a support message. However, face-to-face settings involve more stimuli, more emotions, and more factors come at play. Therefore, a question arises for future research, would the friendliness and compassion effects hold in real life encounters? Or even more generally, can stereotypes and available narratives have effects on behaviors during real-life encounters? Therefore, future research should examine the transferability of these results onto different kinds of public sector workers, and onto real-life encounters.

Thirdly, it is also important to exercise caution while interpreting our findings, as the effects observed are relatively small throughout the chapters. This outcome was expected, as we examined the isolated influences of only a few cues in Chapter 3 - 5. In reality, we rely on multiple cues to form judgements

and guide behavior. The subtle nature of these effects is in line with existing research on stereotyping, which emphasizes that cues operate in nuanced ways (Raaphorst, Groeneveld, & Van de Walle, 2018). Despite their modest size, these effects can have significant implications for the everyday interactions between citizens and public sector workers (de Boer, 2020). Even subtle cues can exert considerable influence, shaping the dynamics of these encounters and impacting the perceptions and behaviors of both citizens and public sector workers (de Boer, 2020). It emphasizes the importance of recognizing the subtleties and complexities involved in these interactions, as seemingly minor cues can contribute to broader perceptions and responses.

Future research could investigate the cumulative impact of multiple cues on stereotyping and behavior in the context of citizens' interactions with public sector workers. Rather than focusing on isolated cues, studies could explore how various cues interact and influence perceptions collectively. This approach could shed light on the nuanced ways in which individuals form judgments based on a combination of cues, leading to a deeper understanding of the subtleties in citizen-public sector worker interactions.

Additionally, future research should assess a contextual analysis of subtle cues. Researchers could conduct in-depth contextual analyses to identify specific cues that are particularly influential in the consequences of public sector worker stereotyping. By examining real-life scenarios and diverse contexts within the public sector, studies could pinpoint the subtle cues that significantly impact perceptions and behaviors. This targeted approach would allow for a nuanced exploration of the contextual factors amplifying the effects of these cues.

Another noteworthy limitation of the studies conducted in this dissertation lies in their focus on short-term effects. Short-term malleability in implicit preferences does not necessarily lead to long-term change (Lai et al., 2014; Lai et al., 2016). This creates a gap in our understanding of the enduring impact of the phenomena explored in this study. Specifically, the effects observed, such as compassionate behavior towards public sector workers and friendliness during public service delivery were measured shortly after the intervention.

Nonetheless, short term effects should not be dismissed. For instance, in terms of public service delivery, short terms effects still indicate that in a period of time, clients received a more positive experience during their interaction with the state (such as being more friendly in the email). In this case, studying short-term effects make sense as with interactions – such as email – replies is a behavior we are interested in. However, the effect of eliciting compassion could fade away.

6

Moreover, the impact of stereotype activation on public service delivery and the complex interplay between media effects and stereotyping require in-depth longitudinal analysis to uncover their true potency over time.

To bridge this knowledge gap, researchers can adopt longitudinal research designs. These designs are essential as they enable researchers to meticulously track the attitudes and behaviors of participants over an extended period. Longitudinal studies are instrumental in unraveling the true power of these effects, shedding light on their longevity and the nuanced ways in which they shape societal perceptions and behaviors over time. Longitudinal analysis can provide valuable insights into the long-term consequences of these phenomena on citizens' attitudes, behaviors, perceptions of public service delivery, and citizen-state interactions.

Lastly, another drawback of this dissertation is its sole use of quantitative methods. Studying public sector worker stereotyping exclusively through quantitative methods without incorporating qualitative approaches can pose limitations.

Quantitative methods, while valuable for numerical analysis, often lack the depth required to capture the nuances and context of social phenomena such as stereotypes (Almaki, 2016). Relying solely on quantitative data might overlook qualitative aspects, such as personal experiences and emotions, which are essential in understanding the complexity of stereotypes.

Additionally, quantitative surveys might not explore the underlying reasons behind stereotypical beliefs held by individuals, hindering a comprehensive understanding of the issue. Qualitative methods, including interviews, focus groups, and ethnographic studies, allow researchers to delve into the qualitative richness of individuals' perceptions and experiences, providing a more holistic view of public sector worker stereotyping (Almaki, 2016).

By neglecting qualitative methods, studies risk oversimplifying the phenomenon and missing vital sociocultural insights (Bauer, 2021; Willems, 2020). Therefore, scholars should incorporate qualitative methods in the study of public sector worker stereotypes. They can explore how stereotypes affect public sector worker themselves, such as how their emotions and their approach to citizens. Secondly, they can incorporate qualitative methods to understand how stereotypes are formed, such as by exploring individuals' experiences with public sector workers.

6.7 Scientific contributions and implications

In this dissertation I contribute empirically, theoretically, and methodologically to the literature on public sector worker stereotyping. Empirically, I challenge the assumption that public sector worker stereotypes are only negative and that they negatively affect citizen-state interactions. Theoretically, I underscore the importance of considering context at both macro and micro levels when analyzing public sector worker stereotyping. Methodologically, I show the benefits of a mixed-methods approach and of the incorporation of behavioral measures. The method pluralism employed in this dissertation helps improve our understanding of contributing factors and consequences of public sector worker stereotyping.

The first contribution is empirically challenging the common assumption that stereotypes of public sector workers are negative (Goodsell, 2004; Hubbel, 1991; Wilson, 1989), and that they negatively affect citizen-state relations (Caillier, 2018; Garrett et al., 2006; Goodsell, 2004). Our findings do not support these common assumptions.

For instance, Goodsell (2004) remarks: ''Our media and politicians tell us that public bureaucracy is bloated in size, inefficient compared to business, a stifling place to work, indifferent to ordinary citizens, the problem rather than the solution. Bureaucrats—with the word uttered in contempt—are alleged in all quarters to be lazy, incompetent, devious, and even dangerous.'' Additionally, public administration literature commonly focused on the negative stereotypes of public sector workers (Baldwin, 1990; Hubbel, 1991; Wilson, 1989). This literature was, however, mostly based in the U.S.

The findings in this dissertation, however, challenge this common assumption in public administration. We uncover that citizens hold many positive stereotypes, such as serving society, hardworking, and responsible. This finding is particularly relevant in the case of the United States, as most of the literature addressing these negative stereotypes stems from there. The United States' Jeffersonian vision of being fearful of technocracy and being suspicious of big government (Hubbell, 1991) does not match the positive stereotypes that we find.

The discrepancy between cultural stereotypes and individual ideas means that scholars should not assume cultural stereotypes - such as portrayals by newspapers, movies, or politicians - to be representative of individual beliefs.

Taking an inductive, rather than a deductive approach, allowed us to see what people's beliefs are, beyond taken-for-granted assumptions about public sector worker stereotypes.

Our findings further challenge assumptions about negative stereotypes and that they affect citizen-state interactions. Our findings do not demonstrate negative effects of negative stereotyping, in the form of bureaucrat bashing on citizens' compassionate behavior toward public sector workers.

There are various—mostly normative—studies that highlight that bureaucrat bashing is unfounded (Goodsell 2004/2014). Yet, negative stereotyping in the form of bureaucrat bashing is rarely studied empirically (Caillier, 2018). Caillier (2018) found that bashing leads to more negative attitudes of the public. He suggested that bureaucrat bashing is common and thus, creates memories of it in the minds of citizens, which can be reactivated by other bashing cues. Our results challenge this claim. Our design moved beyond studying attitudes, and instead evaluated the impact of bureaucrat bashing on behavior. Caillier's subsequent study (Caillier, 2020) also did not replicate his initial results and did not find any effect for bashing on attitudes. In line with Caillier (2020), our results raise questions about the damaging effects of bureaucrat bashing on the public and their attitudes and behavior toward public sector workers.

These findings about bureaucrat bashing are relevant, especially in this era of rising populism (Moynihan and Roberts, 2021). Politicians use bureaucrat bashing to engage in what is known as ''attack politics'', with an aggressive emphasis on failures over successes and the exploitation of organization vulnerabilities (Flinders, 2011). For instance, politicians exploit the vulnerabilities of the child foster care system by bashing the failed cases by social workers rather than highlighting the multitude of successful cases (Stanfield & Beddoe, 2013). Despite our null findings that challenge the detrimental effects of bureaucrat bashing, future research is needed to distinguish whether our findings also apply to 'elite' or career public sector workers as well (Moynihan & Roberts, 2021).

What we rather do find, empirically, is a nuanced landscape where positivity intricately coexists with negativity. That is, we find the good, the bad, and the bureaucrat. The positive stereotypes we find can transform not just perceptions but entire interactions between public sector workers and citizens. Consequently, my contribution to the literature also lies in illuminating the positive facets of public sector worker stereotypes and their consequential impact on citizen-state dynamics.

By challenging the prevailing assumption of predominantly negative stereotypes through robust empirical evidence, I offer a foundational reevaluation

of the prevailing assumptions surrounding public sector worker stereotyping. The research underscores the untapped potential benefits embedded in these positive stereotypes, such as influencing worker behavior and, consequently, fostering more positive citizen-state interactions.

It is noteworthy to also point out that we find a cross-national positive stereotype of public sector workers – serving society. Therefore, positive stereotypes transcend cultural boundaries, prevailing across diverse national contexts. Other positive stereotypes that we find include hardworking, responsible, and helpful. This study strives to present a more nuanced perspective on the intricate tapestry of public sector worker stereotypes. These positive perceptions and stereotypes are not only observable but also cultivable, prompting a call for further exploration of their potential benefits on citizen-state interactions in future research.

Secondly, this dissertation makes a theoretical contribution by emphasizing the critical role of context in comprehending public sector worker stereotyping, both at the macro and micro levels. At the macro level, country context matters in understating the content and perception of public sector worker stereotypes. This means that the prevailing cultural norms, historical background, and societal expectations within a particular nation impact the perceptions people hold about public sector employees. For instance, the stereotype of public sector workers "going home on time" may be seen positively in a society emphasizing work-life balance, but negatively in a culture that values long working hours and dedication to the job. These results are line with the stereotyping literature in general. Fiske (2017) shows that stereotypes can differ strongly across cultures – for example, stereotypes on ethnicity or religion differ based on intergroup relations shaped by the cultural and historical context of a region.

At the micro level, research shows various factors that affect public sector worker stereotyping, such as the gender of the public sector worker, the sector of employment of the citizen, and citizens' low subjective income (de Boer, 2020; Bertram et al., 2022; Willems, 2020). This dissertation further adds to this body of knowledge, by demonstrating that trust towards a profession and geography patterned by education also affect stereotyping. Bertram et al. (2022) find that citizens' educational level is not associated with public sector worker stereotyping. This dissertation shows that education aggregated with geographical setting (rural or urban) can affect stereotyping. Such personal characteristics may provide context to understand stereotyping, with different experiences and exposure to public sector workers (Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006). For

instance, urban residents may be exposed to more police, more crime, and more negative events than residents in rural areas.

Ultimately, stereotyping is made of a complex web of factors, and this dissertation posits that context matters to understand stereotyping. By recognizing the influence of both macro and micro contexts, this dissertation enriches our understanding how societal and individual factors intersect to shape the complex tapestry of public sector worker perceptions, providing a more nuanced framework for future studies.

Lastly, this study makes a methodological contribution through the incorporation of method-pluralism (Dow & Dow, 2012). By employing a diverse array of methods, such as a mixed-method design, paper vignette experiment, field experiment, and video vignette experiments, coupled with behavioral measures assessing public service delivery and compassionate behavior, this research methodology offers a multifaceted exploration of public sector worker stereotyping.

There is a lack of systematic direct observations and rigorous testing when it comes to public sector worker stereotyping research. One of the key strengths of employing method-pluralism lies in its ability to provide more comprehensive insights into the phenomenon. By leveraging various methods and behavioral measures, this approach ensures a thorough examination of public sector worker stereotyping from multiple angles (Dow & Dow, 2012; Luwig & Ruphy, 2021). Each method illuminates different facets of the phenomenon, resulting in a holistic understanding that would be challenging to achieve with a single research approach.

Furthermore, incorporating diverse methods also enables to capture complex phenomena associated with public sector worker stereotyping. Recognizing that this phenomenon is influenced by a myriad of factors, the study's multifaceted approach allows for a nuanced exploration (Dow & Dow, 2012; Luwig & Ruphy, 2021). Controlled experimental settings offer insights into specific aspects, while behavioral measures provide real-world context, which ultimately aids in the analysis of the intricate dynamics at play (Dow & Dow, 2012; Luwig & Ruphy, 2021).

In summary, the method-pluralism embraced in this study not only provides a more comprehensive and innovative exploration of public sector worker stereotyping but also lays the groundwork for a deeper understanding of this complex phenomenon.

6.8 Societal contributions and implications

First of all, in this dissertation I demonstrate the value of positive stereotypes. The benefits of positive stereotypes can be harnessed on three fronts. The first societal contribution to come out of the findings is the potential benefits that positive stereotypes can have, namely on (1) workers' career development, (2) government recruitment problems of quality candidates, (3) on fostering positive citizen-state interactions. I provide further societal contributions on the topic of positive citizen-state interactions by demonstrating that available narratives can also foster positive citizen-state interactions. Lastly, I discuss the societal contribution of understanding how the use of media can shape public sector worker stereotypes.

Firstly, positive public sector worker stereotypes may be a potential tool to counteract the effects of negative stereotyping on public sector workers' career development. Findings demonstrate that negative public sector worker stereotypes decrease public sector workers' opportunities to transition from the public to the private sector (London Chamber of Commerce, 2010). In contrast, the positive stereotypes of public sector workers that we find could be a potential avenue to negate this consequence. That is, positive stereotypes associated with public sector workers, such as hardworking and responsible, can be leverage to aid career development and sector transition opportunities.

This is demonstrated in a message from Ian Watmore (2011), the former secretary of the Cabinet Office in the U.K. He urges to disregard negative stereotypes associated with public sector workers – advocating instead on the myriad of skills cultivated working in the public sector – such as managing complex projects and large budgets. The account emphasizes how public sector workers use the skills acquired in the public sector to market themselves to transition to other sectors (Watmore, 2011). By increasing our knowledge and empirical data about what stereotypes are out there, it becomes clear that these stereotypes can be leveraged to aid career development and sector transition opportunities.

Secondly, positive stereotyping can be a tool for governments to counter problems associated with recruitment. Negative stereotypes can dissuade highly skills workers from entering the sector (Piereson & Schaefer Riley, 2013). In contrast, positive stereotypes can be strategically leveraged to attract and retain talent in the public sector. For instance, the stereotype of 'going home on time' can be leveraged to emphasize the opportunities for a healthy work-life balance.

For instance, the police forces in the U.S. face significant challenges in recruiting officers (The Economist, 2017). Linos (2018) found that job advertisements that emphasize the ability to develop a career attracted more applicants to the police. In a similar light, positive stereotypes can be utilized to promote positive aspects of a public sector career, such as job stability and a healthy work-life balance.

Thirdly, positive stereotypes can foster more positive citizen-state interactions. In line with the stereotype boost (Shih et al., 2002) literature, positive stereotypes can have a positive effect on performed tasks. Research findings of Chapter 4 demonstrate that positive stereotyping leads to friendlier interactions with clients, highlighting the impact of these stereotypes on the bureaucratic process. That is, public sector workers stereotyped pro-socially had a more positive approach towards their client. When public sector workers are stereotyped positively, such as being seen as friendly, they are more likely to engage in positive interactions with the people they serve. Friendlier interactions can foster a sense of trust and rapport between workers and clients, leading to more open communication and effective problem-solving (Moynihan et al., 2014; Olsen et al., 2022). This enhanced communication can result in a smoother bureaucratic process, improving the overall service delivery and customer satisfaction.

Additionally, findings show that available narratives can foster more positive citizen-state interactions. These insights hold practical significance for public sector organizations themselves. Understanding the impact of stereotypes on citizen-state interactions, these organizations can implement targeted communication strategies (Behm-Morawitz & Ortiz, 2013; Ramasubramanian, 2010; Ramasubramanian & Murphy, 2014). By proactively sharing authentic stories of dedication, professionalism, vulnerability, and community service, public sector entities can foster positive relationships with citizens – as shown in Chapter 5.

The implications of these findings are far-reaching. Recognizing the power of narratives, policymakers and media professionals can collaborate to promote positive stories about public sector workers, fostering a more empathetic understanding among citizens. For instance, public sector workers can collaborate with newspapers to communicate the common hardships of their everyday work. An example of this strategy can be found amongst child protection services social workers in Quebec. Amidst criticisms towards social workers in Quebec and cases of children that the system 'failed to protect', social workers turned to newspaper outlets to outline the realities of their work

(Bournival, 2021; Touzin & Duchaine, 2021; Touzin & Jean, 2022). These accounts showcase the horrors of the lives of the children that come their way and the complexity of the cases they encounter. By sharing some of the heavy cases and realities they deal with, they emphasize the limits to their power in those situations and the toll it can take on them. Cases are complex and there is limited time that can be allocated to each. Based on our results in Chapter 5, this strategy is a promising one to foster more positive citizen-state interactions.

Lastly, the findings in this dissertation draw our attention to the important role of media in shaping public sector worker stereotypes. That is, understanding the media's role as a malleable force in shaping public sector worker stereotypes is essential for both academic inquiry and practical application. Out of the complex web of factors shaping stereotyping, the malleability of media influence stands out. Unlike other factors influencing stereotyping, such as personal characteristics or trust, media portrayal is a factor that can be manipulated, managed, and leveraged.

Our findings show that the focus of media narratives has a potential to shape public sector worker stereotyping, either in a constructive or detrimental manner. This is in line with communication scholarship on the role media in stereotype formation (Appel & Weber, 2021). Public sector organizations, policymakers, and media professionals possess the capacity to craft narratives that challenge negative stereotypes and promote positive perceptions – such as the strategies employed by social workers in Quebec, as presented above. By strategically employing also positive media portrayals and not only negative ones, it becomes possible to provide a fairer view to the public about what happens in public organization, which can influence public sector worker stereotyping (Appel & Webber, 2021).

A number of studies over the last decades examined how stereotypical portrayals in the media influence recipients' attitudes, beliefs, and behavior (Appel & Weber, 2021; Behm-Morawitz & Ortiz, 2013; Mastro, 2009; Smith & Granados, 2009). Findings consistently show that stereotypes in the media can activate and shape stereotypes for outgroup members. Findings from a meta-analysis on how media impacts stereotyping show that negative media stereotyping impair the perceptions of the members of the devalued group, irrespective of the group investigated (women, elderly, racial minorities), and irrespective of the sample's age and the world region the studies were conducted (Appel & Weber, 2021).

Long-term exposure to media content, especially television, can have cumulative effects that distort social reality perceptions and increase stereotypical

6

beliefs (for a review, see Gerbner, Gross, Morgan, Signorielli, & Shanahan, 2002). Research supporting this hypothesis shows that heavy as compared to light television viewers have more stereotypical perceptions about racial minorities, sexist beliefs about women, and negative attitudes toward those with mental illnesses (Busselle & Crandall, 2002; Diefenbach & West, 2007; Gerbner et al., 2002; Ward, 2002). These real-world estimates (first-order effects) can also affect beliefs, values, and policy preferences (second-order effects).

In essence, this research not only contributes valuable insights to academic discourse but also offers actionable pathways for societal change. By recognizing the power of media narratives, society can work toward dismantling harmful stereotypes, fostering understanding, and building more harmonious relationships between public sector workers and the communities they serve (Appel & Weber, 2021; Gerbner et al., 2002; Ramasubramanian & Murphy, 2014). This knowledge emphasizes the importance of responsible media representation, urging for a balanced and accurate portrayal of public sector professionals to foster positive public perceptions and enhance citizen-state relations (Appel & Weber, 2021; Gerbner et al., 2002; Ramasubramanian & Murphy, 2014).

6.9 Concluding remarks

In conclusion, this thesis navigated the landscape of public sector worker stereotypes, confronting initial negative headlines, such as ''Civil servants are not born lazy – they learn it at work'', or ''Public sector staff really do work less for more pay''.

It became evident that public sector worker stereotypes are not unilaterally bleak; positive perceptions exist and can be cultivated. There is the good, the bad, and the bureaucrat. By understanding the duality of stereotypes — both positive and negative — and acknowledging the interplay of macro and micro-level factors, this study dismantled common assumptions and called for a profound reevaluation of how public sector worker stereotyping is perceived.

Crucially, this research emphasizes the pivotal role these stereotypes play in citizen-state interactions. Positive stereotypes can transform not just perceptions but entire interactions between public sector workers and citizens. In an era of rising populism (Moynihan & Roberts, 2021), constructive dialogue between the public and the government is paramount, fostering these positive citizen-state interactions benefits not only the individuals involved but also the wider society. Positive citizen-state interactions lie at the heart of effective governance,

creating a society where trust, collaboration, and progress thrive, benefiting both the public and the government in equal measure.

This dissertation delves deep into the intricate world of public sector worker stereotyping and stands as a testament to the complexity of the subject matter — a multifaceted realm where positivity intertwines with negativity. This dissertation is a testament to the multifaceted nature of these stereotypes, challenging conventional wisdom and paving the way for transformative change. Ultimately, this nuanced reflection is not just a call for reevaluation of common assumptions held in public sector worker stereotyping but this work champions a paradigm shift. By recognizing the potential for positive change, both within the public sector and in citizen-state interactions, this study advocates for a more nuanced and thoughtful approach, reshaping policy-making and public discourse in the realm of public sector worker stereotyping and perceptions.

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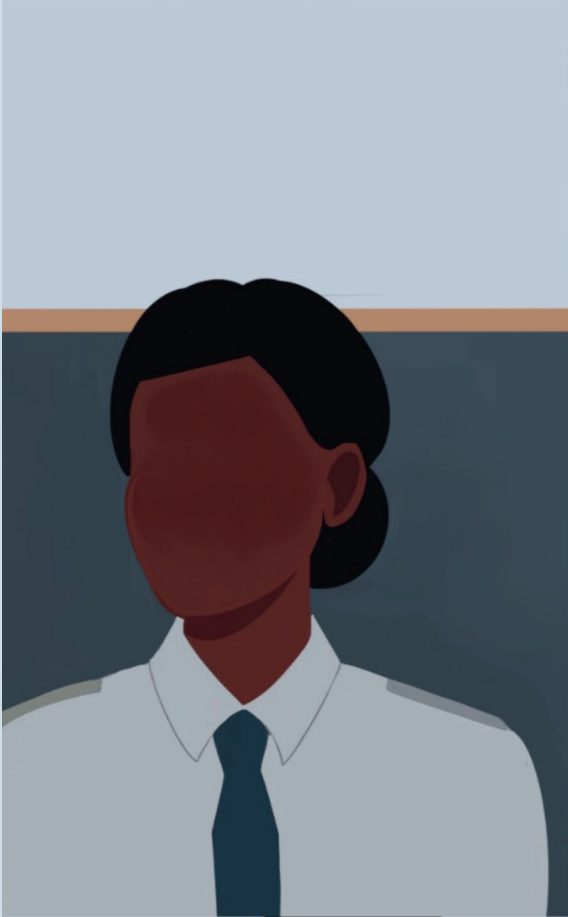
Appendices

Appendix Chapter 2

2.A. Full stereotype profiles

Tables S1-S5 below show which traits the participants in Study 2 selected as typical of public sector workers. We show how often they were selected as typical of public sector workers, the corresponding percentage of participants that selected the trait, the mean valence of the trait, and 95% confidence intervals. Table 1 shows the public sector worker stereotypes across countries, Tables 2-Ss5 show the stereotypes in the United States, Canada, the Netherlands, and South Korea, respectively.

Table 1
Stereotypes for Public Sector Workers in All Countries Combined (n = 3,042)

	Trait	Selection frequency	% of participants	Mean stereotype valence	Lower 95% CI	Upper 95% CI
1	Job security	963	31.66	3.66	3.59	3.73
2	Go home on time	812	26.69	2.91	2.83	2.99
3	Serving	658	21.63	4.47	4.41	4.54
4	Inflexible	600	19.72	1.91	1.82	2.00
5	Responsible	530	17.42	4.55	4.47	4.63
6	Well paid	529	17.39	3.30	3.21	3.39
7	Helpful	421	13.84	4.56	4.47	4.64
8	Hardworking	419	13.77	4.42	4.33	4.51
9	Knowledgeable	356	11.70	4.42	4.32	4.52
10	Serious	327	10.75	4.13	4.02	4.24
	Weighted mean valence of stereotype profile (top 10 traits only)					3.71 (SD=0.85)
	Unweighted mean valence of stereotype profile (top 10 traits only)					3.83 (SD=0.84)
11	Boring	325	10.68	2.20	2.09	2.32
12	Authoritative	322	10.59	2.50	2.36	2.65
13	Stable	321	10.55	4.19	4.09	4.28
14	Arrogant	320	10.52	1.78	1.64	1.91
15	Friendly	301	9.89	4.39	4.28	4.49
16	Corrupt	295	9.70	1.69	1.55	1.83
17	Lazy	292	9.60	1.61	1.49	1.73
18	Conservative	280	9.20	2.87	2.72	3.02
19	Educated	280	9.20	4.23	4.12	4.35

Table 1 *(Continued)*

	Trait	Selection frequency	% of participants	Mean stereotype valence	Lower 95% CI	Upper 95% CI
20	Trustworthy	261	8.58	4.63	4.53	4.73
21	Difficult	223	7.33	2.11	1.94	2.28
22	Intelligent	213	7.00	4.32	4.19	4.45
23	Patient	204	6.71	4.14	4.00	4.28
24	Good	203	6.67	4.12	3.98	4.27
25	Loyal	184	6.05	4.24	4.10	4.39
26	Fair	183	6.02	4.20	4.04	4.36
27	Caring	178	5.85	4.17	4.00	4.35
28	Honest	178	5.85	4.34	4.18	4.49
29	Integrity	178	5.85	4.46	4.31	4.60
30	Calm	163	5.36	4.17	4.01	4.32
31	Strong	136	4.47	3.83	3.63	4.04
32	Strict	135	4.44	2.73	2.53	2.94
33	Impartial	117	3.85	4.16	3.96	4.36
34	Independent	106	3.48	3.85	3.64	4.06
35	Empathetic	103	3.39	4.04	3.80	4.28
36	Courageous	96	3.16	4.07	3.88	4.27
Weighted mean valence of stereotype profile (all 36 traits)						3.56 (SD=0.95)
Unweighted mean valence of stereotype profile (all 36 traits)						3.65 (SD=0.95)

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Table 2

Stereotypes for Public Sector Workers in the United States (n = 610)

	Trait	Selection frequency	% of participants	Mean stereotype valence	Lower 95% CI	Upper 95% CI
1	Hardworking	187	30.66	4.45	4.31	4.60
2	Responsible	146	23.93	4.48	4.31	4.64
3	Serving	145	23.77	4.46	4.31	4.61
4	Helpful	123	20.16	4.46	4.27	4.65
5	Job security	108	17.70	3.61	3.35	3.87
6	Knowledgeable	106	17.38	4.46	4.28	4.64
7	Go home on time	94	15.41	3.10	2.84	3.36
8	Friendly	90	14.75	4.38	4.18	4.58
9	Educated	81	13.28	4.36	4.13	4.58
10	Trustworthy	73	11.97	4.45	4.22	4.68
	Weighted mean valence of stereotype profile (top 10 traits only)					4.26 (SD=0.45)
	Unweighted mean valence of stereotype profile (top 10 traits only)					4.22 (SD=0.45)
11	Caring	72	11.80	4.28	4.02	4.54
12	Good	72	11.80	4.06	3.76	4.36
13	Serious	70	11.48	3.81	3.52	4.11
14	Stable	62	10.16	4.34	4.10	4.58
15	Honest	61	10.00	4.26	3.97	4.56
16	Well paid	61	10.00	3.48	3.14	3.81
17	Intelligent	58	9.51	4.33	4.05	4.61
18	Strong	58	9.51	4.03	3.73	4.34
19	Lazy	56	9.18	1.77	1.44	2.10
20	Inflexible	55	9.02	2.05	1.74	2.37
21	Loyal	54	8.85	4.07	3.76	4.39
22	Authoritative	53	8.69	3.02	2.65	3.39
23	Arrogant	48	7.87	1.60	1.31	1.90
24	Patient	48	7.87	3.98	3.67	4.29
25	Fair	44	7.21	3.77	3.40	4.14
26	Integrity	44	7.21	4.43	4.12	4.74
27	Difficult	40	6.56	2.05	1.63	2.47
28	Independent	40	6.56	3.83	3.47	4.18
29	Corrupt	39	6.39	1.49	1.17	1.80
30	Conservative	38	6.23	3.76	3.36	4.16

Table 2 *(Continued)*

	Trait	Selection frequency	% of participants	Mean stereotype valence	Lower 95% CI	Upper 95% CI
31	Strict	38	6.23	3.03	2.60	3.45
32	Boring	34	5.57	2.15	1.74	2.55
33	Calm	32	5.25	4.25	3.91	4.59
34	Courageous	29	4.75	4.34	4.05	4.64
35	Empathetic	26	4.26	3.85	3.25	4.44
36	Impartial	19	3.11	3.74	3.12	4.35
	Weighted mean valence of stereotype profile (all 36 traits)					3.86 (SD=0.93)
	Unweighted mean valence of stereotype profile (all 36 traits)					3.67 (SD=0.91)

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Table 3
Stereotypes for Public Sector Workers in Canada (n = 623)

	Trait	Selection frequency	% of participants	Mean stereotype valence	Lower 95% CI	Upper 95% CI
1	Go home on time	144	23.11	3.27	3.08	3.47
2	Helpful	136	21.83	4.66	4.53	4.79
3	Serving	132	21.19	4.36	4.20	4.52
4	Responsible	124	19.90	4.56	4.39	4.73
5	Hardworking	112	17.98	4.45	4.26	4.63
6	Job security	111	17.82	3.84	3.64	4.04
7	Knowledgeable	102	16.37	4.43	4.22	4.64
8	Stable	96	15.41	4.20	4.00	4.39
9	Well paid	94	15.09	3.49	3.27	3.71
10	Educated	89	14.29	4.28	4.09	4.47
	Weighted mean valence of stereotype profile (top 10 traits only)				4.15 (SD=0.44)	
	Unweighted mean valence of stereotype profile (top 10 traits only)				4.15 (SD=0.44)	
11	Friendly	82	13.16	4.51	4.33	4.70
12	Patient	71	11.40	4.42	4.20	4.64
13	Inflexible	68	10.91	1.99	1.72	2.25
14	Caring	63	10.11	4.27	3.98	4.56
15	Lazy	61	9.79	1.43	1.22	1.63
16	Serious	59	9.47	4.02	3.76	4.28
17	Good	57	9.15	4.23	3.98	4.48
18	Intelligent	55	8.83	4.27	3.99	4.56
19	Authoritative	46	7.38	2.89	2.52	3.26
20	Calm	46	7.38	4.20	3.90	4.49
21	Trustworthy	46	7.38	4.78	4.63	4.93
22	Integrity	44	7.06	4.45	4.13	4.78
23	Arrogant	42	6.74	1.90	1.52	2.29
24	Loyal	42	6.74	4.07	3.73	4.41
25	Fair	41	6.58	4.00	3.60	4.40
26	Conservative	38	6.10	3.26	2.85	3.67
27	Empathetic	37	5.94	4.27	3.94	4.60
28	Difficult	34	5.46	1.56	1.25	1.87
29	Boring	33	5.30	1.88	1.54	2.22
30	Corrupt	31	4.98	1.58	1.20	1.96

Table 3 *(Continued)*

	Trait	Selection frequency	% of participants	Mean stereotype valence	Lower 95% CI	Upper 95% CI
31	Strong	30	4.82	3.90	3.42	4.38
32	Courageous	29	4.65	4.21	3.81	4.60
33	Honest	28	4.49	4.50	4.09	4.91
34	Impartial	24	3.85	3.88	3.32	4.43
35	Independent	23	3.69	3.52	2.99	4.06
36	Strict	20	3.21	2.65	2.27	3.03
	Weighted mean valence of stereotype profile (all 36 traits)					3.85 (SD=1.01)
	Unweighted mean valence of stereotype profile (all 36 traits)					3.67 (SD=0.99)

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Table 4
Stereotypes for Public Sector Workers in the Netherlands (n = 1,176)

	Trait	Selection frequency	% of participants	Mean stereotype valence	Lower 95% CI	Upper 95% CI
1	Go home on time	474	40.31	2.60	2.51	2.69
2	Job security	406	34.52	3.25	3.15	3.36
3	Well paid	347	29.51	3.16	3.06	3.27
4	Inflexible	301	25.60	1.68	1.57	1.79
5	Serving	265	22.53	4.55	4.47	4.64
6	Boring	235	19.98	2.21	2.09	2.34
7	Responsible	230	19.56	4.67	4.58	4.75
8	Serious	192	16.33	4.30	4.17	4.43
9	Authoritative	170	14.46	2.30	2.11	2.49
10	Lazy	154	13.10	1.55	1.40	1.71
	Weighted mean valence of stereotype profile (top 10 traits only)					3.03 (SD=1.10)
	Unweighted mean valence of stereotype profile (top 10 traits only)					3.03 (SD=1.10)
11	Conservative	147	12.50	2.50	2.30	2.69
12	Arrogant	144	12.24	1.55	1.39	1.70
13	Helpful	134	11.39	4.60	4.47	4.73
14	Trustworthy	131	11.14	4.71	4.58	4.84
15	Knowledgeable	124	10.54	4.45	4.30	4.60
16	Difficult	113	9.61	1.88	1.67	2.09
17	Friendly	107	9.10	4.31	4.13	4.49
18	Hardworking	97	8.25	4.35	4.18	4.52
19	Educated	95	8.08	4.05	3.86	4.25
20	Corrupt	82	6.97	1.55	1.31	1.78
21	Honest	82	6.97	4.35	4.14	4.57
22	Stable	80	6.80	4.15	3.98	4.32
23	Intelligent	79	6.72	4.37	4.19	4.54
24	Fair	77	6.55	4.60	4.42	4.77
25	Loyal	75	6.38	4.47	4.27	4.66
26	Calm	73	6.21	4.14	3.90	4.37
27	Integrity	73	6.21	4.58	4.41	4.74
28	Patient	71	6.04	4.00	3.77	4.23
29	Impartial	68	5.78	4.38	4.17	4.60
30	Strict	64	5.44	2.48	2.21	2.76

Table 4 *(Continued)*

	Trait	Selection frequency	% of participants	Mean stereotype valence	Lower 95% CI	Upper 95% CI
31	Good	59	5.02	4.12	3.91	4.33
32	Independent	39	3.32	4.05	3.75	4.35
33	Caring	38	3.23	3.82	3.37	4.26
34	Strong	37	3.15	3.59	3.24	3.95
35	Empathetic	35	2.98	4.06	3.66	4.46
36	Courageous	32	2.72	3.88	3.56	4.19
	Weighted mean valence of stereotype profile (all 36 traits)					3.33 (SD=1.08)
	Unweighted mean valence of stereotype profile (all 36 traits)					3.59 (SD=1.05)

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Table 5
Stereotypes for Public Sector Workers in South Korea (n = 633)

	Trait	Selection frequency	% of participants	Mean stereotype valence	Lower 95% CI	Upper 95% CI
1	Job security	338	53.40	4.10	4.00	4.20
2	Inflexible	176	27.80	2.23	2.06	2.41
3	Corrupt	143	22.59	1.85	1.63	2.08
4	Serving	116	18.33	4.41	4.24	4.59
5	Go home on time	100	15.80	3.69	3.49	3.89
6	Arrogant	86	13.59	2.19	1.88	2.50
7	Stable	83	13.11	4.10	3.93	4.26
8	Conservative	57	9.00	2.98	2.71	3.26
9	Authoritative	53	8.37	2.30	1.92	2.68
10	Difficult	36	5.69	3.42	3.04	3.79
	Weighted mean valence of stereotype profile (top 10 traits only)					3.26 (SD=0.90)
	Unweighted mean valence of stereotype profile (top 10 traits only)					3.13 (SD=0.89)
11	Responsible	30	4.74	3.97	3.57	4.36
12	Helpful	28	4.42	4.29	3.91	4.66
13	Well paid	27	4.27	3.96	3.64	4.29
14	Knowledgeable	24	3.79	4.00	3.59	4.41
15	Boring	23	3.63	2.65	2.14	3.17
16	Hardworking	23	3.63	4.30	4.08	4.53
17	Friendly	22	3.48	4.36	4.01	4.72
18	Fair	21	3.32	4.05	3.59	4.51
19	Intelligent	21	3.32	4.24	3.88	4.59
20	Lazy	21	3.32	2.19	1.61	2.77
21	Integrity	17	2.69	4.00	3.39	4.61
22	Educated	15	2.37	4.40	4.08	4.72
23	Good	15	2.37	4.07	3.45	4.69
24	Patient	14	2.21	4.00	3.35	4.65
25	Loyal	13	2.05	4.23	3.84	4.62
26	Strict	13	2.05	3.23	2.46	4.00
27	Calm	12	1.90	4.00	3.46	4.54
28	Strong	11	1.74	3.36	2.52	4.21
29	Trustworthy	11	1.74	4.18	3.67	4.70
30	Honest	7	1.11	4.14	3.63	4.65

Table 5 *(Continued)*

	Trait	Selection frequency	% of participants	Mean stereotype valence	Lower 95% CI	Upper 95% CI
31	Courageous	6	0.95	3.17	2.23	4.10
32	Impartial	6	0.95	4.17	3.56	4.77
33	Serious	6	0.95	3.50	2.66	4.34
34	Caring	5	0.79	4.20	3.47	4.93
35	Empathetic	5	0.79	3.20	1.90	4.50
36	Independent	4	0.63	4.00	2.87	5.13
	Weighted mean valence of stereotype profile (all 36 traits)					3.41 (SD=0.77)
	Unweighted mean valence of stereotype profile (all 36 traits)					3.64 (SD=0.73)

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Appendix Chapter 3

3.A. Power calculations

We performed four power calculations and used the G*Power program. We performed power calculations in G*Power for the sample size rationale. Each power calculation is for teacher or police only. This means our total sample size has to be the double of these numbers. Since the biggest sample for appropriate power is 1269, we aimed to recruit 1500 people per profession to account for attrition rate.

For hypothesis 1, we calculated for a one-way ANOVA (f = 0.1, alpha = 0.05, power = 0.9, number of groups = 3) a sample of 1269 participants. For hypotheses 2, we calculated a regression with interaction terms for education and region (f^2 = 0.02, alpha = 0.05, power = 0.9, predictors = 3) a sample of 713 participants. For hypothesis 3, we calculated for a one-way ANOVA (f = 0.1, alpha = 0.05, power = 0.9, number of groups = 3) a sample of 1269 participants. For hypothesis 4, we calculated an Ordinary Least Square Regression (effect size = 0.1, alpha = 0.05, power = 0.9, predictors = 2) a sample of 1269.

3.B. Sample representativeness

Table 1
Sample Representativeness

Category	Sample (%)	General Population (%)
Sex		
Female	49.7	49.7
Male	50.3	50.3
Age		
18-24	9.1	14.6
25-34	14.8	16.6
35-44	15.1	15.8
45-54	14.4	15.5
55+	46.5	37.5
Region		
Abitibi	1.1	1.71
Bas Saint-Laurent	1.9	2.3
Capitale nationale	8.6	8.9
Centre du Quebec	2.7	3
Chaudiere-Appalaches	4.3	5.11
Cote Nord	0.6	1.1
Estrie	5.7	5.8
Gaspesie	0.8	1.1
Lanaudiere	5.8	6.3
Laurentide	5.9	7.6

Table 1 *(Continued)*

Category	Sample (%)	General Population (%)
Laval	4.3	5.2
Mauricie	2.9	3.3
Monteregie	14.9	17
Montreal	9.3	23.5
Nord du Quebec	0.2	0.54
Outaouais	4.1	4.7
Saguenay Lac Saint-Jean	2.6	3.3

3.C. Materials

Table 1
Stereotype Content Model (Fiske, 2002)

Likeable
Good-natured
Friendly
Warm
Sincere
Caring
Competent
Confident
Capable
Efficient
Intelligent
Qualified

Table 2
Stereotype Content Model – French translation (Fiske, 2002)

Sympathique
Aimable
Amical
Chaleureux
Sincère
Bienveillant
Compétent
Confiant
Capable
Efficace
Intelligent
Qualifié

3.D. Video links for video vignette experiment

Link to negative teacher male video
https://etiennecharbonneau.files.wordpress.com/2023/01/enseignant-1.mp4

Link to negative teacher female video
https://etiennecharbonneau.files.wordpress.com/2023/01/enseignante-2.mp4

Link to positive police video
https://etiennecharbonneau.files.wordpress.com/2023/01/police-2.mp4

Link to negative police video
https://etiennecharbonneau.files.wordpress.com/2023/01/police-1.mp4

Appendix Chapter 4

4.A. Materials Study 1

Table 1
All Tested E-mails

Condition	E-mail
Control (email #1)	Hello, I am contacting you because I am looking for a place in a rest home for my father. We are interested in your facility. Can you help me answer the following questions: - Do you have a place available at this moment? - How can I subscribe my father for this? - I also heard there is a waiting list. Do you have one and how long is it? Thanks, Alexis
Light activation 1 (e-mail #2)	Hello, I am contacting you because I am looking for a place in a rest home for my father. We are interested in your facility. Everyone tells me that workers in elderly care are very helpful. Can you help me answer the following questions: - Do you have a place available at this moment? - How can I subscribe my father for this? - I also heard there is a waiting list. Do you have one and how long is it? Thanks, Alexis
Light activation 2 (e-mail #3)	Hello, I am contacting you because I am looking for a place in a rest home for my father. We are interested in your facility. I am often told that elderly care workers like you are very helpful. Can you help me answer the following questions: - Do you have a place available at this moment? - How can I subscribe my father for this? - I also heard there is a waiting list. Do you have one and how long is it? Thanks, Alexis
Light activation 3 (e-mail #4)	Hello, I am contacting you because I am looking for a place in a rest home for my father. We are interested in your facility. Elderly care workers like yourself are known to be very helpful. Can you help me answer the following questions: - Do you have a place available at this moment? - How can I subscribe my father for this? - I also heard there is a waiting list. Do you have one and how long is it? Thanks, Alexis

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Condition	E-mail
Strong activation 1 (e-mail #5)	Hello, I am contacting you because I am looking for a place in a rest home for my father. We are interested in your facility. Elderly care workers like yourself are known to be very helpful. Actually, I was reading an article the other day that reported that people think very positively of elderly care workers. So, the stereotype of your profession is very positive in terms of helpfulness. Can you help me answer the following questions: - Do you have a place available at this moment? - How can I subscribe my father for this? - I also heard there is a waiting list. Do you have one and how long is it? Thanks, Alexis
Strong activation 2 (e-mail #6)	Hello, I am contacting you because I am looking for a place in a rest home for my father. We are interested in your facility. Everyone tells me that workers in elderly care are very helpful. It seems like a popular opinion as more and more people that I know had to put a parent in a home. It seems to me you have a very positive perception by the public. Can you help me answer the following questions: - Do you have a place available at this moment? - How can I subscribe my father for this? - I also heard there is a waiting list. Do you have one and how long is it? Thanks, Alexis
Strong activation 3 (e-mail #7)	Hello, I am contacting you because I am looking for a place in a rest home for my father. We are interested in your facility. Elderly care workers like yourself are known to be very helpful. I also hear that very often lately. I read recently a study that showed that many people think of elderly care workers as one of the most helpful professions. Can you help me answer the following questions: - Do you have a place available at this moment? - How can I subscribe my father for this? - I also heard there is a waiting list. Do you have one and how long is it? Thanks, Alexis

4.B. Manipulation check

Design and Procedure

In order to test our manipulation, we developed seven e-mails: one neutral (control), three with a light stereotype activation (one stereotype activation sentence), and three with a strong stereotype activation (three stereotype activation sentences). These are shown in Appendix 4A. All e-mails ask the same questions, and vary solely whether none, one, or three stereotype sentences of a helpful worker were integrated. The control condition is suitable because – as opposed to developing positive and negative e-mails – it provides a true baseline. In this way, we can assess the stereotype activation (Lonati et al. 2018). We based our e-mails on e-mails used in other audit studies (Jilke & Van Dooren, 2018; Van Dooren & Jilke, 2022). Our e-mails had the sole purpose of activating stereotypes. It was not possible to establish if this mimicked an everyday e-mail the workers receive. We are, however, unable to verify this since it would require access to e-mail accounts of elderly care home workers. To not fatigue, bore, or reveal our manipulation to our respondents, the respondents were randomized to rate three e-mails. In sum, we tested whether our pro-social stereotype of a helpful worker was indeed activated, and if there was a difference in strength of activation between the conditions. Our study was pre-registered at https://aspredicted.org/BLO_RPI and supplementary materials, syntax, and data are available at https://osf.io/txejk/?view_only=6751981ff1ef4489920396f12d23faf8 .

Measures

This data collection was integrated as a part of a larger survey experiment. Additionally to our main measures, we also have demographics: age, sex, and years of experience in the public sector.

Pro-social stereotype activation. We assessed whether the pro-social stereotype of a helpful worker was activated, and the extent to which the activation varied across conditions. We asked participants: ''To what extent is the worker being stereotyped as 'very helpful'?''. Participant rated this question on a 5-point Likert scale (from 1- not at all to 5 – very much). We chose a popular, unisex name (Alexis) to avoid possible sex and discrimination effects (Bilan et al., 2020).

Sample

Participants were recruited in the United Kingdom through an online survey panel (Prolific). We did a power calculation for seven groups and a MANOVA (for two independent variables). We pre-registered two independent variables. As only one variable is of interest for this paper, we report only one. The second variable attempted to foreshadow our experimental results to aid in the study design. We asked participants their willingness respond to the client in the email and to answer all questions. The analyses on our second variable are available in the Supplementary Materials on OSF https://osf.io/txejk/?view_only=6751981ff1ef4489920396f12d23faf8. Our sample consisted of 57% females with a median age of 38 years. Table 1 provides the details.

We used the G*Power program with a small effect size (f = 0.02). This led us to an estimation of 658 participants with a power of 0.95 and an alpha of 0.05. All participants are workers in the public sector. Participants who did not pass two out of three attention checks were excluded from the analysis. No participants were excluded for failing attention checks. In the end, our sample consists of 718 participants.

Table 1
Study 1 Sample Demographics (n = 718)

Characteristics	Sample
Sex	
Female	57.4%
Male	42.6%
Years working in the public sector	
< 1 years	6.3%
1-3 years	17.3%
3-5 years	13.3%
5-10 years	20.2%
10+ years	42.3%
Age (median)	38

Results

To analyze the results, we performed a MANOVA on the mean scores of each item.

Stereotype activation. The manipulation check for stereotype activation and strength of stereotype activation was successful. That is, there was a significant statistical difference between the neutral condition, the light activation conditions and the strong activation conditions: ($F_{(24, 7480.73)}$ = 29.91, $p < 0.001$; Wilk's Lambda = .726, partial Eta^2 = .08). Please refer to table 2 for the e-mails' descriptives and table 3 and table 4 for the MANOVA results. The post-hoc Tukey HSD showed statistical difference in stereotype activation between the control e-mail and the light activation condition [Mean difference = -1.79, 95% CI = (-2.07, -1.51)], the light activation condition and the strong activation condition [Mean difference = -.50, 95% CI = (-.79, -.22)], and between the control condition and the strong activation condition [Mean difference = -2.29, 95% CI = (-2.57, -2.01)]. Table 5 shows the post-hoc tests results of the e-mails' comparison.

For the main study, we selected e-mails number one – control - (M = 1.92, SD = 1.19) and five – strong activation - (M = 4.22, SD = 1.01). Based on the results, we deemed that the differences between the strength of activation of the light and strong conditions were too small, even though significant. Thus, we have decide to only select two e-mails instead of three for the main study: the control email (email 1, M=1.92) and the highest scoring email (email 5, M = 4.22). This also helped to increase the power for the main study.

Table 2
E-mail Descriptives on Stereotype Activation

Email	Condition	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
1	Control	1.92	1.187	303
2	Light activation	3.56	1.155	319
3	Light activation	3.71	1.186	297
4	Light activation	3.68	1.228	326
5	Strong activation	4.22	1.012	282
6	Strong activation	3.87	1.202	321
7	Strong activation	4.07	1.098	306

Table 3
MANOVA Results - Multivariate Tests

Effect		Value	F	Hypothesis df	Error df	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared	Noncent. Parameter	Observed Power
Intercept	Pillai's Trace	.98	29370.42	4	2144.00	<.01	.98	117481.69	1.00
	Wilks' Lambda	.02	29370.42	4	2144.00	<.01	.98	117481.69	1.00
	Hotelling's Trace	54.80	29370.42	4	2144.00	<.01	.98	117481.69	1.00
	Roy's Largest Root	54.80	29370.42	4	2144.00	<.01	.98	117481.69	1.00
Email	Pillai's Trace	.28	26.39	24	8588.00	<.01	.07	633.29	1.00
	Wilks' Lambda	.73	29.91	24	7480.73	<.01	.08	622.22	1.00
	Hotelling's Trace	.38	33.45	24	8570.00	<.01	.09	803.38	1.00
	Roy's Largest Root	.37	132.65	6	2147.00	<.01	.27	795.91	1.00

Note. df = degrees of freedom, Sig. = significance, Noncent. Parameter = non centrality parameter.

Table 4
MANOVA – Tests of Between-Subjects Effects

Source	Dependent Variable	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Partial ETA Squared	Noncent. Parameter	Observed Power
Corrected Model	Stereotyped	1053.81	6	175.63	131.17	.000	.27	787.01	1.00
	Help	1.08	6	.18	.30	.938	.00	1.79	.13
	Answer	1.02	6	.18	.35	.911	.00	2.09	.15
	Service	1.32	6	.22	.48	.826	.00	2.86	.20
	Mean_Email	68.50	6	11.42	31.95	.000	.08	191.71	1.00
Intercept	Stereotyped	27495.13	1	27495.13	20534.23	.000	.91	20534.23	1.00
	Help	41992.79	1	41992.79	70006.95	.000	.97	70006.95	1.00
	Answer	44780.65	1	44780.65	92234.71	.000	.98	92234.71	1.00
	Service	45130.86	1	45130.86	98025.87	.000	.98	98025.87	1.00
	Mean_Email	39480.95	1	39480.95	110503.77	.000	.98	110503.78	1.00
Email	Stereotyped	1053.81	6	175.63	131.17	.000	.27	787.01	1.00
	Help	1.07	6	.18	.30	.938	.00	1.79	.13
	Answer	1.02	6	.17	.35	.911	.00	2.09	.15
	Service	1.32	6	.22	.48	.826	.00	2.86	.20
	Mean_Email	68.50	6	11.42	31.95	.000	.08	191.71	1.00
Error	Stereotyped	2874.81	2147	1.34					
	Help	1287.85	2147	.60					
	Answer	1042.39	2147	.49					
	Service	988.47	2147	.46					
	Mean_Email	767.08	2147	.36					

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Table 4 *(Continued)*

Source	Dependent Variable	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Partial ETA Squared	Noncent. Parameter	Observed Power
Total	Stereotyped	31447.00	2154						
	Help	43382.00	2154						
	Answer	45931.00	2154						
	Service	46225.00	2154						
	Mean_email	40397.31	2154						
Corrected Total	Stereotyped	3928.62	2153						
	Help	1288.93	2153						
	Answer	1043.40	2153						
	Service	989.79	2153						
	Mean_Email	835.58	2153						

Note. Df = degrees of freedom, F = F statistic, Sig. = Significance, Noncent. = non centrality parameter.

Table 5
Post Hoc Tests (Tukey HSD) For E-mail Means Comparison

Dependent Variable	(I) Email	(J) Email	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig.	95% Confidence Interval	
						Lower Bound	Upper Bound
Stereotyped	1	2	-1.64*	.093	.000	-1.91	-1.36
		3	-1.79*	.094	.000	-2.07	-1.51
		4	-1.76*	.092	.000	-2.03	-1.49
		5	-2.29*	.096	.000	-2.57	-2.01
		6	-1.95*	.093	.000	-2.22	-1.67
		7	-2.14*	.094	.000	-2.42	-1.87
	2	1	1.64*	.093	.000	1.36	1.91
		3	-.15	.093	.659	-.43	.12
		4	-.12	.091	.829	-.39	.15
		5	-.66*	.095	.000	-.93	-.38
		6	-.31*	.091	.014	-.58	-.04
		7	-.51*	.093	.000	-.78	-.23
	3	1	1.79*	.094	.000	1.51	2.07
		2	.15	.093	.659	-.12	.43
		4	.03	.093	1.000	-.24	.30
		5	-.50*	.096	.000	-.79	-.22
		6	-.16	.093	.638	-.43	.12
		7	-.35*	.094	.003	-.63	-.08
	4	1	1.76*	.092	.000	1.49	2.03
		2	.12	.091	.829	-.15	.39
		3	-.03	.093	1.000	-.30	.24
		5	-.53*	.094	.000	-.81	-.25
		6	-.19	.091	.393	-.45	.08
		7	-.38*	.092	.001	-.66	-.11
	5	1	2.29*	.096	.000	2.01	2.57
		2	.66*	.095	.000	.38	.93
		3	.50*	.096	.000	.22	.79
		4	.53*	.094	.000	.25	.81
		6	.35*	.094	.005	.07	.63
		7	.15	.096	.717	-.13	.43
	6	1	1.95*	.093	.000	1.67	2.22
		2	.31*	.091	.014	.04	.58
		3	.16	.093	.638	-.12	.43
		4	.19	.091	.393	-.08	.45
		5	-.35*	.094	.005	-.63	-.07
		7	-.20	.092	.319	-.47	.07

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Table 5 *(Continued)*

Dependent Variable	(I) Email	(J) Email	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig.	95% Confidence Interval	
						Lower Bound	Upper Bound
	7	1	2.14*	.094	.000	1.87	2.42
		2	.51*	.093	.000	.23	.78
		3	.35*	.094	.003	.08	.63
		4	.38*	.092	.001	.11	.66
		5	-.15	.096	.717	-.43	.13
		6	.20	.092	.319	-.07	.47

Note. Based on observed means. The error term is Mean Square(Error) = .357.

4.C. Exploratory analyses

Exploratory Analyses – Country Effects

For all three dependent variables, we included country and stereotype activation as predictors in an OLS. Results are presented in table 1.

Response Rate. We explored whether there was a difference in response rate between countries. We find that country affects reply rate (B = .102, SE = .047, R^2 = .013, p = .03). We find that there is a higher reply rate in the Netherlands (74.4%) than in Flemish Belgium (63.5%).

Information Provision. We investigated whether the country of the sender affected information provision. We find that the country affects information provision (B = -.398, SE = .056, R^2 = .141, p < .001). Our results show that fewer replies in the Netherlands provided an answer to all three questions (20.1%) compared to Belgium (58.6%).

Friendliness. We examined whether the country of the sender had an effect on the friendliness of the reply back. We do not find any effects to suggest differences in effects based on country (B = -.020, SE = .059, R^2 = .018, p = .739).

Table 1
Exploratory OLS Regression Results – Country Effects

	B (SE)	Sig.	t	Lower CI	R2	Upper CI
Response Rate					.013	
Constant	.630 (.025)	.000	24.882	.580		.679
STA	.012 (.040)	.715	.365	-.051		.075
Country	.109 (.033)	.001	3.274	.044		.174
Information Provision					.140	
Constant	.602 (.031)	.000	19.359	.541		.663
STA	-.033 (.039)	.395	-.851	-.108		.043
Country	-.376 (.039)	.000	-9.584	-.454		-.299
Friendliness					.017	
Constant	.366 (.033)	.000	11.112	.301		.431
STA	.123 (.041)	.003	3.007	.043		.203
Country	-.046 (.042)	.269	-1.107	-.128		.036

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Appendix Chapter 5

5.A. All tested vignettes

Table 1
Vignettes per Condition

Condition	Vignette
Eliciting compassion 1	I am a governmental social worker that works with children between the age of 6 and 17. I provide interventions and accompany children whose parents are at risk to lose custody. We are faced with trying to meet the need for hunger among young people with little financial means. Often, we must spend our own money as there is not enough funding for projects to improve well-being. Being understaffed we often work outside of normal hours. So, when a child finally starts to confide in us, we can't say "sorry it's 6:00 PM we have to stop". However, we are not paid for these extra hours. So, if you're working hours are 9-5 and a suicidal teenager comes to your workplace for help, are you going to send her home because you are off the clock? These situations usually go against our values, and we offer our own time and resources to keep helping.
Eliciting compassion 2	I am a governmental social worker that works with individuals with drug addiction. I provide referrals for crisis intervention, create interventions, and link our patients with other organizations for interventions. We are constantly working overtime (up to 12h daily) because of high levels of staff burnout because we are understaffed. We have extremely high caseloads and lack of resources to answer our clients. Unfortunately, just last week, we had to mourn through the death of a client due to overdose. We didn't have enough resources to provide him with the extent of mental care he needed. He was suffering of severe depression linked to traumatic past experiences. Our center only had the means to offer basic therapies for depression, and limited staff to answer calls. How do you deal with the death of a close patient for whom you tried everything possible to help?
Eliciting compassion 3	I am a governmental social worker that works with the James Bay Cree community in the North. I meet with patients and community officers, coordinate support groups, provide counselling, and evaluate cases. Being in a community in the 'North', resources are limited for the special needs of our patients, and I am the only social worker there. I had a teenager in mental health who was looking to get out of his home and go to supervised housing to get better and stand on his own two feet. However, the only place for mental health accommodation required that the patient speak French. Being in a Cree community, my patient speaks English and Cree. The worker refused to take the patient because of the language barrier. A big difficulty of this job is being faced with situations where the person needs help, and you want to help, but a small bureaucratic rule prevents it, and it is incongruent with our values.
Eliciting compassion 4	I am a governmental social worker that works with children between the age of 6 and 17. I provide interventions and accompaniment with children whose parents are at risk to lose custody. Time and time again we must work outside of normal hours, for which we are never paid. I received a call in the middle of the night, because one child from a case I was working, a 10-year-old girl, attempted suicide. The drug addicted parents were not available, and I gained that child's trust and support to help her, so I had to show up. But I am not paid for this, it is my own decision to either go along with my values or not. I had worked so hard to get this child to open to me, how can I not be there for an attempted suicide when I know no one else would show up to comfort her?

Table 1 *(Continued)*

Condition	Vignette
Control compassion 1	I am a governmental social worker that works with children between the age of 6 and 17. I provide interventions and accompany children whose parents are at risk to lose custody. We work in disadvantaged areas, with families on the lower end of the socio-economic spectrum. Our usual working hours are from 9 - 5, but these are subjected to change depending on how the cases are going (for example, if any emergencies happen in the one of the followed families, understaffing). We organize weekly meetings with the parents and the children, regularly visit the family house, and evaluate when loss of custody may be needed due to child mistreatment. We also provide links with other organizations. Sometimes, parents are looking for help but we cannot response to their request, as they do not fully fit with the mandate of the organization so we try to link them with other organizations that may help.
Control compassion 2	I am a governmental social worker that works with individuals with drug addiction. I provide referrals for crisis intervention, create interventions, and link our patients with other organizations for interventions. Overall, I assess and evaluate new clients, monitor the recovery progress, and provide counselling and support during needed moments of treatment period. When someone is referred to us for services, I meet with and interview them, and if possible, interview close people to the individual and go through their medical files. After assessment, I aid in coming up with a treatment plan and link the client with treatment centers if necessary (treatments are also offered by us, but the type of treatment depends on severity of addiction. All treatment plans are based on individual needs, ability, type and severity of substance abuse problems. I also support clients in creating small realistic goals, how to carry them through, and aid in monitoring progress of these goals.
Control compassion 3	I am a governmental social worker that works with the James Bay Cree community in the North. I meet with patients and community officers, coordinate support groups, provide counselling, and evaluate cases. Since I do not cover a specific target group, I work with children with behavioral problems to addiction problems in teenagers and adults, to the elderly population. I meet with clients, meet with other community officers, facilitate and coordinate support groups (grief, addiction, coping with loss of autonomy). I link community members with various health services officers, assess social functioning and needs of community members. Since substance abuse is a common problem within the community, I also provide information and referrals for crisis interventions and link with necessary agents and institutions for intervention plans. I assess accommodation requests for individual with mental health issues for supervised housing accommodations (social centers that house individuals to help with mental disorders).
Control compassion 4	I am a governmental social worker that engages with the elderly population (60 years of age and more). My main tasks consist of assessing clients' social functioning needs, process accommodation requests, aid in coping with loss of autonomy, and provide interventions for grievance. Outside of my general job description, I also have to conduct multidisciplinary meetings to tackle the wide range of issues our clients are facing (physical, emotional, financial, mental aspects of well-being), organize family meetings, write many reports about every case and details of every decision taken. When a family suffers the loss of an elderly person in our care, we accompany them in mourning and provide coping interventions, information, and referrals. When a client loses too much autonomy or his condition deteriorates too much, we arrange the transfer into specialized care. We work with individuals still living in their home (but that still need assistance) and with individuals in nursing homes.

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Table 1 *(Continued)*

Condition	Vignette
Bureaucrat bashing 1	Policy is developed at federal, regional and local levels. To implement social programs and policies in Canada for target population groups specific guidelines must be met. In the past years, social service policies have not been working and governmental social workers have been inefficient and incompetent! In over 100,000 calls received last year in child social service alone, less than half was answered. Social workers work with the most vulnerable people in our society, don't they deserve government services that they can trust?
Bureaucrat bashing 2	We need to reimagine our current political economy to keep our country's well-being safe. To do this, we must have meaningful structural and staff change to address core societal issues. Governmental social workers and our system are failing vulnerable children in foster care. Our social workers lack capabilities, confidence, and common sense in good judgement. We must have zero tolerance of state failure. In the upcoming elections, we vow to restore citizens' trust in social work and services to keep our population's well-being safe.
Bureaucrat bashing 3	The number of social work vacancies is falling. The number of agency workers in local authorities is dropping. Local elected officials frequently describe social work profession as now at its all-time low ''rock bottom''. They argue that that social work is a failing, demoralized, low-status profession. The misguided nonsense of bureaucratic rules within social work punishes those who need the most help. Too often governmental social workers are poorly trained and not ready for frontline practice when they leave social work education.
Bureaucrat bashing 4	Social work educational programs for governmental social workers focus on in-class time studying thousands of pages of textbooks and no practice. The profession is filled with idealistic students and young professionals told that the people they work with have been disempowered by society. They see these people as victims of social injustice whose fate depends on economic forces and inherent inequalities scaring our society. It robs people of the power of agency and breaks the link between individual actions and consequences. It risks explaining away substance abuse and domestic violence rather than doing away with them.
Control bureaucrat bashing 1	Policy is developed at federal, regional and local levels. To implement social programs in Canada for target population groups, certain guidelines must be met and followed by governmental social workers. There is a mix of social welfare mechanisms utilized to reach those considered to be vulnerable in Canadian society. These mechanisms include income security, tax relief measures, and social services (and consequently, social workers). These mechanisms have not been implemented consistently over time, depending often on the political orientation of the government and their assessment of the worthiness of potential recipients.
Control bureaucrat bashing 2	We need to address the deep structural inequities that exist in our country and re-imagine our current political economy to keep our country's well-being safe. To do this, we must have meaningful structural and staff change to address core societal issues such as mental illness, socio-economic disparity in the population, investments towards housing, and tackle poverty. To achieve this, we need the help of our government social workers. The estimated price of poverty in Toronto ranges from $4.5 to $5.5 billion per year in health, criminal justice and productivity deficits.

Table 1 *(Continued)*

Condition	Vignette
Control bureaucrat bashing 3	Current social work educational programs for governmental social workers currently focus on in-class time studying thousands of pages of guidance, and not enough time in real-life, on-the-job training. We should reform the educational program to focus more on experience and daily practice outside of a sole focus on theory. Social work is a demanding vocation which requires a level of professionalism every bit as great as that of doctors or barristers, teachers or lecturers. Social work is characterized by professional association, altruism, and knowledge building.
Control bureaucrat bashing 4	When the next federal budget drops, politicians, pundits and the Twitter-sphere will be abuzz about federal spending because Canadians care about how the feds spend our money. Part of this sum will be transferred to provincial budgets. These dollars include (but are not limited to) funding for education and schools, health care and hospitals, libraries, parks and playgrounds, roads and bridges, wildlife conservation, garbage and recycling collection, and social programs such as employment insurance, social assistance, and governmental social workers.

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5.B. Materials

Eliciting Compassion Scale

Could you please rate to which extent did you feel the following emotions when thinking of the story you just read?

Table 1
Eliciting Compassion Scale Items and Factor Loadings

Items	Factor Loadings
Compassion	.896
Sympathy	.912
Moved	.866
Concern	.793

We based this measure on previous studies. 'Compassion', 'sympathy' and 'moved' are based on Oveis et al. (2010) and Reynolds et al., (2019) to measure whether compassion has been successfully elicited. We added the word 'concern' based on the differential emotions scale, that also measures elicited compassion (Galanakis et al., 2016).

Meaningless Bureaucrat Bashing Scale

Could you please rate the extent to which you feel each statement applies to this text

Table 2
Meaningless Bureaucrat Bashing Scale Items and Factor Loadings

Items	Factor 1 Loadings	Factor 2 Loadings
Extent to which social workers are criticized	**.879**	-.029
Extent to which social workers are attacked	**.872**	.022
Extent to which social workers are blamed	**.910**	-.088
Extent to which social workers are generalized	**.869**	.059
Extent to which social workers are criticized in meaningless way	**.790**	.074
Extent to which text offers concrete solutions	-.005	**.947**
Extent to which text offers ways to resolve the problem	.016	**.932**

5.C. ANOVA results study 1

Eliciting Compassion Vignettes

Table 1
ANOVA Results

	Sum of Square	Degrees of Freedom	Mean Square	*F* Statistic	*p*-value
Between groups	29.28	7	4.19	4.12	.000
Within groups	570.83	562	1.02		
Total	600.11	569			

Table 2
Post Hoc Tests (Tukey HSD) for Compassion Vignette Means Comparison

Vignette	Vignettes	Mean Difference	Std. Error	Sig.	Lower CI	Upper CI
C1	2	.21136	.17010	.919	-.3061	.7289
	3	.46725	.17415	.130	-.0626	.9971
	4	-.07891	.17175	1.000	-.6014	.4436
	5	.45215	.16957	.135	-.0637	.9681
	6	.64004*	.17415	.006	.1102	1.1699
	7	.33599	.17478	.536	-.1958	.8678
	8	.40239	.16856	.250	-.1104	.9152
C2	1	-.21136	.17010	.919	-.7289	.3061
	3	.25588	.16876	.799	-.2575	.7693
	4	-.29028	.16628	.657	-.7962	.2156
	5	.24079	.16403	.824	-.2583	.7398
	6	.42868	.16876	.181	-.0848	.9421
	7	.12463	.16942	.996	-.3908	.6401
	8	.19103	.16299	.940	-.3048	.6869
C3	C1	-.46725	.17415	.130	-.9971	.0626
	C2	-.25588	.16876	.799	-.7693	.2575
	C4	-.54616*	.17042	.031	-1.0647	-.0277
	C5	-.01509	.16823	1.000	-.5269	.4967
	C6	.17279	.17284	.974	-.3531	.6986
	C7	-.13126	.17348	.995	-.6591	.3965
	C8	-.06486	.16721	1.000	-.5736	.4439
C4	C1	.07891	.17175	1.000	-.4436	.6014
	C2	.29028	.16628	.657	-.2156	.7962
	C3	.54616*	.17042	.031	.0277	1.0647
	C5	.53107*	.16575	.031	.0268	1.0353
	C6	.71895*	.17042	.001	.2005	1.2374
	C7	.41490	.17108	.231	-.1056	.9354
	C8	.48130	.16471	.070	-.0198	.9824

Table 2 *(Continued)*

Vignette	Vignettes	Mean Difference	Std. Error	Sig.	Lower CI	Upper CI
C5	C1	-.45215	.16957	.135	-.9681	.0637
	C2	-.24079	.16403	.824	-.7398	.2583
	C3	.01509	.16823	1.000	-.4967	.5269
	C4	-.53107*	.16575	.031	-1.0353	-.0268
	C6	.18789	.16823	.953	-.3239	.6997
	C7	-.11616	.16889	.997	-.6300	.3977
	C8	-.04976	.16244	1.000	-.5440	.4444
C6	C1	-.64004*	.17415	.006	-1.1699	-.1102
	C2	-.42868	.16876	.181	-.9421	.0848
	C3	-.17279	.17284	.974	-.6986	.3531
	C4	-.71895*	.17042	.001	-1.2374	-.2005
	C5	-.18789	.16823	.953	-.6997	.3239
	C7	-.30405	.17348	.652	-.8319	.2238
	C8	-.23765	.16721	.847	-.7464	.2711
C7	C1	-.33599	.17478	.536	-.8678	.1958
	C2	-.12463	.16942	.996	-.6401	.3908
	C3	.13126	.17348	.995	-.3965	.6591
	C4	-.41490	.17108	.231	-.9354	.1056
	C5	.11616	.16889	.997	-.3977	.6300
	C6	.30405	.17348	.652	-.2238	.8319
	C8	.06640	.16787	1.000	-.4443	.5771
C8	C1	-.40239	.16856	.250	-.9152	.1104
	C2	-.19103	.16299	.940	-.6869	.3048
	C3	.06486	.16721	1.000	-.4439	.5736
	C4	-.48130	.16471	.070	-.9824	.0198
	C5	.04976	.16244	1.000	-.4444	.5440
	C6	.23765	.16721	.847	-.2711	.7464
	C7	-.06640	.16787	1.000	-.5771	.4443

Note. * = The mean difference is significant at the 0.05 level. The vignettes labelled C1 to C4 correspond to eliciting compassion vignettes 1 to 4 and C5 to C8 correspond to control compassion 1 to 4 – respectively (order presented in appendix A).

Bureaucrat Bashing Vignettes

Table 3
ANOVA Results

	Sum of Square	Degrees of Freedom	Mean Square	*F* Statistic	*p*-value
Between groups	28.09	7	4.02	4.70	.000
Within groups	468.58	548	.86		
Total	496.68	555			

Table 4
Post Hoc Tests (Tukey HSD) for Bureaucrat Bashing Vignette Means Comparison

Vignette	Vignettes	Mean Difference	Std. Error	Sig.	Lower CI	Upper CI
B1	B2	-.28650	.15921	.621	-.7709	.1979
	B3	-.17499	.15607	.952	-.6498	.2999
	B4	-.10307	.15706	.998	-.5810	.3748
	B5	.14383	.16097	.987	-.3459	.6336
	B6	.22190	.16097	.867	-.2679	.7117
	B7	.33897	.15921	.397	-.1455	.8234
	B8	.34708	.15758	.352	-.1324	.8265
B2	B1	.28650	.15921	.621	-.1979	.7709
	B3	.11151	.15425	.996	-.3578	.5808
	B4	.18342	.15526	.937	-.2890	.6558
	B5	.43033	.15921	.124	-.0541	.9148
	B6	.50839*	.15921	.032	.0240	.9928
	B7	.62547*	.15743	.002	.1465	1.1045
	B8	.63357*	.15578	.001	.1596	1.1076
B3	B1	.17499	.15607	.952	-.2999	.6498
	B2	-.11151	.15425	.996	-.5808	.3578
	B4	.07191	.15203	1.000	-.3907	.5345
	B5	.31882	.15607	.454	-.1560	.7937
	B6	.39688	.15607	.180	-.0780	.8717
	B7	.51395*	.15425	.021	.0446	.9833
	B8	.52206*	.15257	.015	.0578	.9863
B4	B1	.10307	.15706	.998	-.3748	.5810
	B2	-.18342	.15526	.937	-.6558	.2890
	B3	-.07191	.15203	1.000	-.5345	.3907
	B5	.24691	.15706	.767	-.2310	.7248
	B6	.32497	.15706	.436	-.1529	.8029
	B7	.44204	.15526	.086	-.0304	.9144
	B8	.45015	.15359	.069	-.0172	.9175
B5	B1	-.14383	.16097	.987	-.6336	.3459
	B2	-.43033	.15921	.124	-.9148	.0541
	B3	-.31882	.15607	.454	-.7937	.1560
	B4	-.24691	.15706	.767	-.7248	.2310
	B6	.07807	.16097	1.000	-.4117	.5678
	B7	.19514	.15921	.924	-.2893	.6796
	B8	.20325	.15758	.903	-.2762	.6827

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Table 4 *(Continued)*

Vignette	Vignettes	Mean Difference	Std. Error	Sig.	Lower CI	Upper CI
B6	B1	-.22190	.16097	.867	-.7117	.2679
	B2	-.50839*	.15921	.032	-.9928	-.0240
	B3	-.39688	.15607	.180	-.8717	.0780
	B4	-.32497	.15706	.436	-.8029	.1529
	B5	-.07807	.16097	1.000	-.5678	.4117
	B7	.11707	.15921	.996	-.3674	.6015
	B8	.12518	.15758	.993	-.3543	.6046
B7	B1	-.33897	.15921	.397	-.8234	.1455
	B2	-.62547*	.15743	.002	-1.1045	-.1465
	B3	-.51395*	.15425	.021	-.9833	-.0446
	B4	-.44204	.15526	.086	-.9144	.0304
	B5	-.19514	.15921	.924	-.6796	.2893
	B6	-.11707	.15921	.996	-.6015	.3674
	B8	.00811	.15578	1.000	-.4659	.4821
B8	B1	-.34708	.15758	.352	-.8265	.1324
	B2	-.63357*	.15578	.001	-1.1076	-.1596
	B3	-.52206*	.15257	.015	-.9863	-.0578
	B4	-.45015	.15359	.069	-.9175	.0172
	B5	-.20325	.15758	.903	-.6827	.2762
	B6	-.12518	.15758	.993	-.6046	.3543
	B7	-.00811	.15578	1.000	-.4821	.4659

Note. * = The mean difference is significant at the 0.05 level. The vignettes labelled B1 to B4 correspond to 1 to 4 bureaucrat bashing vignettes and B5 to B8 correspond to control bureaucrat bashing 1 to 4 – respectively (order presented in appendix A).

A

Declaration of Authorship

1.A. Author roles and contributions for Chapter 2

Neo, S., Bertram, I., Szydlowski, G., Bouwman, R., de Boer, N., Grimmelikhuijsen, S., ... & Tummers, L. (2023). Working 9 to 5? A cross-national analysis of public sector worker stereotypes. *Public Management Review*, 1-30.

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Research design	✓	✓	✓						
Privacy and ethics approval	✓	✓	✓						✓
Translation of survey materials							✓	✓	
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Data curation		✓	✓						
Data analysis		✓	✓	✓					
Writing - original draft	✓	✓	✓						
Writing - review & editing	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Other: Supervision and Feedback				✓	✓	✓			✓

Additional remarks:

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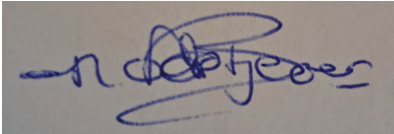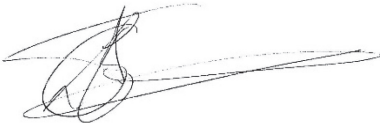
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Data analysis	√		
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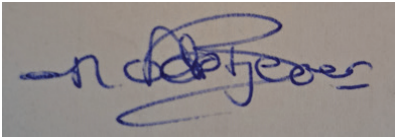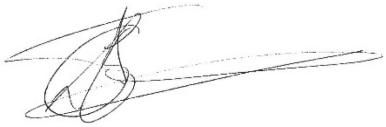| Date	Name	Signature
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D

Summary

Overview

This dissertation explores stereotypes of public sector workers and their impact on citizen-state interactions. The central research question asks *what are the stereotypes of public sector workers, which factors contribute to them and to what extent do they affect citizen-state interactions?*

In Chapter 1, I provide an overview of the topic of public sector worker stereotyping. In Chapter 2, I explore what are public sector worker stereotypes across four countries, namely Canada, the Netherlands, South Korea, and the U.S. In Chapter 3, I explore contributing factors to public sector worker stereotypes. In Chapter 4, I investigates the effect of positive stereotypes on citizen-state interactions in the form of public service delivery, while in Chapter 5, I test the effect of negative stereotypes on citizen-state interactions in the form of citizen compassionate behavior. Lastly, in Chapter 6, I include a discussion of the results, their implications and conclusions.

Answering the research question

This dissertation explores stereotypes of public sector workers and their impact on citizen-state interactions. The central research question asks *what are the stereotypes of public sector workers, which factors contribute to them and to what extent do they affect citizen-state interactions?*

The findings reveal that public sector worker stereotypes encompass both positive and negative traits, such as serving, lazy, hardworking, and responsible. While universal stereotypes exist across four countries (Canada, the Netherlands, South Korea, the U.S.) —such as job security, going home on time, and serving society—their valence and content vary. For instance, the perception of traits like "going home on time" differs in positivity between South Korea and the Netherlands.

Contributing factors to these stereotypes include media portrayal, trust levels, and geographic patterns influenced by education. Positive media coverage leads to positive stereotypes, while negative coverage results in negative stereotypes. High trust in a profession correlates with positive stereotyping, and geographic patterns based on education impact how public sector workers are stereotyped.

Regarding the impact on citizen-state interactions, positive stereotypes influence public service delivery by making interactions friendlier without affecting the service outcome. A field experiment involving nursing homes demonstrates that stereotyping workers as helpful leads to friendlier behavior during service delivery. However, negative stereotypes, like bureaucrat bashing, do not significantly impact

citizens' behavior. Additionally, sharing narratives about the challenges of public sector work increases compassionate behavior from citizens.

In conclusion, the research underscores the dual nature of public sector worker stereotypes, shaped by media, trust, and individual characteristics. These stereotypes can influence citizen-state interactions, with positive stereotypes enhancing friendliness in service delivery, while negative stereotypes have a limited impact on citizen behavior.

Take-home messages

Based on the research findings, two key messages emerge. Firstly, stereotypes are not all negative and there is power in positive stereotypes as they improve citizen-state interactions. Contrary to common assumptions and media portrayals, positive stereotypes, such as being hardworking and helpful, coexist with negative ones. The study challenges the prevailing narrative, asserting that public sector worker stereotyping is nuanced and not uniformly negative. Positive stereotypes, as revealed in Chapter 4, have the power to enhance the process of public service delivery, making interactions friendlier and reducing psychological costs associated with bureaucratic procedures.

Secondly, narratives about public sector workers, including those in the media, are significant factors in stereotyping by citizens and these narratives affect citizen-state interactions. Positive media portrayals lead to more positive stereotypes, while negative portrayals contribute to negative stereotypes. Chapter 5 demonstrates that sharing narratives about public sector workers' challenges positively affects citizens' compassion towards them, revealing the potential for a positive spiral in citizen-state relations. The research underscores the importance of responsible media representation, emphasizing the need for balanced and accurate portrayals of public sector professionals.

A public administration perspective

In the introductory chapter of this dissertation, the rationale for studying public sector worker stereotypes from a public administration (PA) perspective is explored, encompassing micro, meso, and macro levels of understanding. Chapters 3 to 5 delve into the micro-level analysis, examining the influence of individual characteristics on stereotyping and exploring citizen-state interactions during public service delivery. The study suggests that interventions targeting trust-building measures and the use of positive stereotypes can enhance these

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interactions. Future research could expand the scope to explore how political beliefs or past experiences influence stereotypes and how positive stereotypes impact different types of public service delivery.

The meso level, focused on organizational context, is indirectly addressed, indicating that media portrayal can influence stereotypes, positive stereotypes affect organizational interactions, and communication strategies impact citizen-state interactions. Further research is suggested to assess these findings at the meso level, exploring media's impact on organizational reputation and the role of positive stereotypes in shaping organizational interactions with the public.

The macro level, centered on the national context, is covered in Chapter 2, identifying prevalent stereotypes across four countries. The study emphasizes the need for further research to understand macro-level factors such as political systems, history, and culture in the formation and perpetuation of stereotypes. Understanding these macro-level factors can inform interventions to combat negative stereotypes and improve public sector performance and citizen satisfaction.

A behavioral public administration approach

The field of Behavioral Public Administration (BPA) has garnered attention in recent years, but it is not without criticism. Critics argue that BPA's narrow focus on psychology and experimental methodologies limits its integration with other disciplines, hindering a comprehensive understanding of public administration. The preference for 'quick win' interventions and the neglect of macro-level issues are also pointed out as drawbacks. Additionally, concerns are raised about the validity of findings due to the heavy reliance on proxies for behavior.

This dissertation acknowledges these criticisms and recognizes its own limitations, such as a predominantly psychological approach and a focus on experimental designs. However, it addresses several key criticisms by (1) exploring macro-level research questions, specifically examining stereotypes across diverse nations; (2) employing real behavioral measures to capture authentic reactions; and (3) shifting focus from cognitive biases to proposing practical solutions for positive change.

The research goes beyond mere analysis of public sector worker stereotypes, seeking a comprehensive understanding on a global scale. By incorporating real-world behavioral measures, the dissertation provides nuanced insights into the manifestation of stereotypes in citizen-state interactions. Moreover, it emphasizes proactive strategies for positive change, including leveraging

positive stereotypes, utilizing media for reshaping stereotypes, and harnessing public sector worker narratives to foster positive interactions. In essence, this research aims not only to identify problems but also to contribute actionable insights for improving citizen-state interactions.

Limitations and future research

This dissertation acknowledges several limitations and suggests potential areas for further research. One challenge is the integration of diverse research findings due to the use of different methods, measures, and samples. Caution is advised when comparing results, and future research could systematically compare different methods of measuring stereotypes to assess their robustness and reliability.

The second issue pertains to the generalizability of findings, as chapters focused on specific types of public sector workers, predominantly service-oriented ones. Future research should explore whether these effects hold for other types of workers, such as regulation-oriented ones like tax officials, and investigate the transferability of results to different settings.

The dissertation also emphasizes the small observed effects, in line with existing research on stereotyping, which underscores the importance of recognizing subtle cues in shaping citizen-public sector worker interactions. Future research could explore the cumulative impact of multiple cues on stereotyping and behavior, considering a contextual analysis of subtle cues in real-life scenarios.

Another limitation lies in the focus on short-term effects, requiring further investigation into the enduring impact of the explored phenomena. Longitudinal research designs can provide insights into the long-term consequences of compassionate behavior, friendliness, and stereotype activation on citizen attitudes, behaviors, and perceptions.

The dissertation's reliance on quantitative methods is acknowledged as a drawback, as it may overlook qualitative aspects of public sector worker stereotyping. Future research can benefit from incorporating qualitative methods, such as interviews and focus groups, to delve into individuals' perceptions, experiences, and the underlying reasons behind stereotypical beliefs.

Scientific relevance

This dissertation makes significant contributions on empirical, theoretical, and methodological fronts to the understanding of public sector worker stereotyping. Empirically, it challenges the prevalent assumption of predominantly negative

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stereotypes by revealing a nuanced landscape where positive stereotypes coexist. The study disputes the notion that negative stereotypes necessarily lead to adverse effects on citizen-state interactions, particularly in the form of bureaucrat bashing.

Theoretical contributions include emphasizing the crucial role of context, both at macro and micro levels, in comprehending public sector worker stereotyping. The macro level highlights the influence of country context on the content and perception of stereotypes, considering cultural norms and societal expectations. At the micro level, factors such as gender, citizen sector of employment, subjective income, trust, and geography patterned by education are identified as contributors to stereotyping. The study enriches the theoretical framework by recognizing the intersection of societal and individual factors in shaping public sector worker perceptions.

Methodologically, the dissertation introduces method-pluralism by employing a diverse array of research methods, including a mixed-method design, paper vignette experiment, field experiment, and video vignette experiments. This approach, coupled with behavioral measures assessing public service delivery and compassionate behavior, provides a more comprehrensive exploration of public sector worker stereotyping. The study's multifaceted methodology allows for a nuanced understanding of the phenomenon, capturing its complexity and providing insights from various perspectives.

In essence, this research challenges prevailing assumptions, offers a more nuanced perspective on public sector worker stereotypes, and contributes to the literature through a holistic exploration that integrates diverse methods and contextual considerations.

Societal relevance

In this dissertation, the value of positive stereotypes is demonstrated, leading to significant societal contributions. Firstly, positive stereotypes are identified as potential tools to counteract the career development challenges faced by public sector workers due to negative stereotyping. Positive perceptions, such as being hardworking and responsible, can be leveraged to enhance career development and transition opportunities. This finding challenges the prevailing assumption that public sector worker stereotypes are predominantly negative.

Secondly, positive stereotyping is recognized as a strategic tool for governments to address recruitment problems. By emphasizing positive aspects of public sector careers, such as job stability and a healthy work-life balance,

positive stereotypes can attract and retain high-quality candidates. This approach contrasts with the impact of negative stereotypes, which can discourage skilled workers from entering the public sector.

Thirdly, positive stereotypes are found to foster more positive citizen-state interactions. The research highlights that positive stereotyping leads to friendlier interactions with clients, positively influencing the bureaucratic process. Friendlier interactions contribute to building trust, rapport, and effective communication between public sector workers and citizens, ultimately improving service delivery and customer satisfaction.

Moreover, the study emphasizes the role of available narratives in shaping citizen-state interactions positively. By sharing authentic stories of dedication, professionalism, vulnerability, and community service, public sector organizations can enhance their relationships with citizens.

Lastly, the dissertation draws attention to the significant role of media in shaping public sector worker stereotypes. Understanding media's malleable influence is crucial, as it can either reinforce negative stereotypes or challenge them. The research suggests that public sector organizations, policymakers, and media professionals can strategically use positive media portrayals to provide a fairer view of public organizations, influencing public sector worker stereotyping positively.

In conclusion, this research not only contributes valuable insights to academic discourse but also offers actionable pathways for societal change. By recognizing the power of positive stereotypes and media narratives, society can work towards dismantling harmful stereotypes, fostering understanding, and building more harmonious relationships between public sector workers and the communities they serve. This knowledge emphasizes the importance of responsible media representation for positive public perceptions and enhanced citizen-state relations.

Concluding remarks

In conclusion, this book navigates the realm of public sector worker stereotypes, challenging initial negative headlines and revealing the dual nature of these stereotypes—both positive and negative. By acknowledging the interplay of macro and micro-level factors, the study calls for a profound reevaluation of public sector worker stereotyping.

Importantly, the research highlights the pivotal role these stereotypes play in citizen-state interactions. Positive stereotypes have the potential to transform not only perceptions but entire interactions between public sector workers and citizens.

Samenvatting in het Nederlands

Overzicht

In deze dissertatie onderzoek ik stereotypen van overheidsmedewerkers en hun impact op interacties tussen burgers en de overheid. De centrale onderzoeksvraag is wat de stereotypen van overheidsmedewerkers zijn, welke factoren eraan bijdragen, en in hoeverre ze de interacties tussen burgers en de overheid beïnvloeden.

In Hoofdstuk 1 geef ik een overzicht van het onderwerp stereotypering van werknemers in de publieke sector. In Hoofdstuk 2 onderzoek ik wat de stereotypen zijn van werknemers in de publieke sector in vier landen, namelijk Canada, Nederland, Zuid-Korea en de Verenigde Staten. In Hoofdstuk 3 onderzoek ik de factoren die bijdragen aan stereotypering van werknemers in de publieke sector. In Hoofdstuk 4 onderzoek ik het effect van positieve stereotypen op interacties tussen burgers en de staat in de vorm van dienstverlening aan het publiek, terwijl ik in Hoofdstuk 5 het effect van negatieve stereotypen test op interacties tussen burgers en de staat in de vorm van medelevend gedrag van burgers. Ten slotte bespreek ik in Hoofdstuk 6 de resultaten, hun implicaties en conclusies.

Beantwoording van de onderzoeksvragen

De bevindingen tonen aan dat stereotypen van overheidsmedewerkers zowel positieve als negatieve kenmerken omvatten, zoals dienstbaar, lui, hardwerkend en verantwoordelijk. Hoewel er universele stereotypen bestaan in alle vier landen (Canada, Nederland, Zuid-Korea, de VS) — zoals baanzekerheid, op tijd naar huis gaan en dienstbaarheid aan de samenleving — variëren hun waardering en inhoud. De perceptie van kenmerken zoals "op tijd naar huis gaan" verschilt bijvoorbeeld in positiviteit tussen Zuid-Korea en Nederland.

Factoren die bijdragen aan deze stereotypen omvatten mediaberichtgeving vertrouwensniveaus en geografische patronen beïnvloed door onderwijsniveaus. Positieve mediaberichtgeving leidt tot positieve stereotypen, terwijl negatieve berichtgeving resulteert in negatieve stereotypen. Veel vertrouwen in een beroep correleert met positieve stereotypering, en ook geografische patronen gebaseerd op onderwijsniveaus beïnvloeden hoe overheidsmedewerkers worden gestereotypeerd.

Wat betreft de impact op interacties tussen burgers en de overheid beïnvloeden positieve stereotypen de dienstverlening door de overheid door interacties vriendelijker van aard te maken zonder de uitkomst van de dienst

te beïnvloeden. Een veldexperiment bij verpleeghuizen toont aan dat het stereotyperen van werknemers als behulpzaam leidt tot vriendelijker gedrag tijdens de dienstverlening. Negatieve stereotypen, zoals het bekritiseren van ambtenaren, hebben echter geen significante invloed op het gedrag van burgers. Bovendien leidt het delen van verhalen over de uitdagingen van het werk in de publieke sector tot meer meelevend gedrag van burgers.

Samengevat benadrukt deze dissertatie de dubbele aard van stereotypen van overheidsmedewerkers, gevormd door media, vertrouwen en individuele kenmerken. Deze stereotypen kunnen de interacties tussen burgers en de overheid beïnvloeden, waarbij positieve stereotypen vriendelijkheid bevorderen in de dienstverlening, terwijl negatieve stereotypen een beperkte invloed hebben op het gedrag van burgers.

Belangrijkste boodschappen

Op basis van de onderzoeksresultaten komen er twee kernboodschappen naar voren. Ten eerste zijn stereotypen niet uitsluitend negatief, en er schuilt kracht in positieve stereotypen omdat ze de interacties tussen burgers en de overheid verbeteren. In tegenstelling tot gangbare aannames en mediabeelden bestaan er positieve stereotypen, zoals hardwerkend en behulpzaam, naast de negatieve. Deze dissertatie daagt het gangbare verhaal uit en stelt dat stereotypering van overheidsmedewerkers genuanceerd is en niet eenduidig negatief. Positieve stereotypen, zoals onthuld in Hoofdstuk 4, hebben de kracht om het proces van dienstverlening door de overheid te verbeteren, waardoor interacties vriendelijker worden en psychologische kosten verbonden aan bureaucratische procedures verminderen.

Ten tweede zijn verhalen over overheidsmedewerkers, inclusief die in de media, significante factoren in stereotypering door burgers, en deze verhalen beïnvloeden de interacties tussen burgers en de overheid. Positieve mediabeelden leiden tot positievere stereotypen, terwijl negatieve beelden bijdragen aan negatieve stereotypen. Hoofdstuk 5 toont aan dat het delen van verhalen over de uitdagingen van overheidsmedewerkers een positief effect heeft op het medeleven van burgers richting hen, wat het potentieel laat zien voor een positieve spiraal in de betrekkingen tussen burgers en de overheid. Deze dissertatie benadrukt het belang van verantwoorde media vertegenwoordiging en legt de nadruk op de noodzaak van evenwichtige en nauwkeurige portretten van professionals in de publieke sector.

Een perspectief vanuit de bestuurskunde

In het inleidende hoofdstuk van deze dissertatie wordt de rechtvaardiging voor het bestuderen van stereotypen van overheidsmedewerkers vanuit een perspectief van bestuurskunde onderzocht, met inzichten op micro-, meso- en macroniveau. Hoofdstukken 3 tot 5 gaan dieper in op de micro-level analyse, waarbij de invloed van individuele kenmerken op stereotypering wordt onderzocht en interacties tussen burgers en de overheid tijdens de dienstverlening van de overheid worden verkend. De studie suggereert dat interventies gericht op vertrouwen opbouwende maatregelen en het gebruik van positieve stereotypen deze interacties kunnen verbeteren. Toekomstig onderzoek zou de reikwijdte kunnen uitbreiden om te onderzoeken hoe politieke overtuigingen of eerdere ervaringen stereotypen beïnvloeden en hoe positieve stereotypen verschillende soorten dienstverlening door de overheid beïnvloeden.

Het mesoniveau, gericht op de organisatorische context, wordt indirect bestudeerd, waarbij wordt aangegeven dat mediavertolking stereotypen kan beïnvloeden, positieve stereotypen de organisatorische interacties beïnvloeden, en communicatiestrategieën van invloed zijn op interacties tussen burgers en de overheid. Verder onderzoek wordt voorgesteld om deze bevindingen op mesoniveau te beoordelen, waarbij de impact van media op de reputatie van organisaties en de rol van positieve stereotypen in het vormgeven van organisatorische interacties met het publiek worden onderzocht.

Het macroniveau, gericht op de nationale context, komt aan bod in Hoofdstuk 2, waarbij prevalente stereotypen worden geïdentificeerd in vier landen. De studie benadrukt de noodzaak van verder onderzoek om macroniveau factoren zoals politieke systemen, geschiedenis en cultuur te begrijpen bij de vorming en instandhouding van stereotypen. Het begrijpen van deze factoren op macroniveau kan interventies informeren om negatieve stereotypen te bestrijden en de prestaties van de publieke sector en de tevredenheid van burgers te verbeteren.

De benadering van gedragsbestuurskunde

Het veld van de gedragsbestuurskunde heeft de afgelopen jaren meer aandacht gekregen, maar is niet zonder kritiek gebleven. Critici betogen dat de smalle focus van gedragsbestuurskunde op psychologie en experimentele methodologie de integratie met andere disciplines beperkt, waardoor begrip van het openbaar bestuur wordt belemmerd. De voorkeur voor 'quick win'-interventies en de

verwaarlozing van macroniveau kwesties worden ook als tekortkomingen genoemd. Daarnaast worden zorgen geuit over de geldigheid van bevindingen vanwege de grote afhankelijkheid van proxy-variabelen voor gedrag.

Deze dissertatie erkent deze kritieken en erkent haar eigen beperkingen, zoals een overwegend psychologische benadering en een focus op experimentele ontwerpen. Het adresseert echter verschillende belangrijke kritieken door (1) op macroniveau onderzoeksvragen te verkennen, specifiek het onderzoeken van stereotypen over diverse landen; (2) het gebruik van echte gedragsmatige variabelen om authentieke reacties vast te leggen; en (3) de focus te verleggen van cognitieve vooroordelen naar het voorstellen van praktische oplossingen voor positieve verandering.

Deze dissertatie gaat verder dan alleen de analyse van stereotypen van overheidsmedewerkers en streeft naar een alomvattend begrip op wereldwijde schaal. Door echte gedragsmatige variabelen op te nemen, biedt de dissertatie genuanceerde inzichten in de manifestatie van stereotypen in de interacties tussen burgers en de overheid. Bovendien benadrukt het proactieve strategieën voor positieve verandering, waaronder het benutten van positieve stereotypen, het gebruiken van media om stereotypen te herstructureren, en het benutten van verhalen van overheidsmedewerkers om positieve interacties te bevorderen. In wezen heeft dit onderzoek tot doel niet alleen problemen te identificeren, maar ook bruikbare inzichten te bieden ter verbetering van interacties tussen burgers en de overheid.

Beperkingen en toekomstig onderzoek

Deze dissertatie erkent verschillende beperkingen en suggereert potentiële gebieden voor verder onderzoek. Een uitdaging is de integratie van diverse onderzoeksbevindingen vanwege het gebruik van verschillende methoden, variabelen en steekproeven. Voorzichtigheid is geboden bij het vergelijken van de resultaten, en toekomstig onderzoek zou systematisch verschillende methoden van het meten van stereotypen kunnen vergelijken om hun robuustheid en betrouwbaarheid te beoordelen.

Het tweede probleem heeft betrekking op de generaliseerbaarheid van de bevindingen, aangezien de hoofdstukken gericht waren op specifieke soorten overheidsmedewerkers, voornamelijk in de publieke dienstverlening. Toekomstig onderzoek zou moeten onderzoeken of deze effecten ook gelden voor andere soorten werknemers, zoals werknemers die zich bezighouden met regelgeving,

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zoals belastingambtenaren, en de overdraagbaarheid van resultaten naar verschillende omgevingen onderzoeken.

De dissertatie benadrukt ook dat de waargenomen effecten klein zijn, in lijn met bestaand onderzoek naar stereotypering, wat het belang benadrukt van het herkennen van subtiele signalen bij het vormgeven van interacties tussen burgers en overheidsmedewerkers. Toekomstig onderzoek zou de cumulatieve impact van meerdere signalen op stereotypering en gedrag kunnen onderzoeken, rekening houdend met een contextuele analyse van subtiele signalen in real-life scenario's.

Een andere beperking ligt in de focus op korte-termijneffecten, wat verder onderzoek vereist naar de blijvende impact van de onderzochte fenomenen. Longitudinale onderzoeksontwerpen kunnen inzicht bieden in de langetermijngevolgen van compassievol gedrag, vriendelijkheid en de activering van stereotypen op burgerattitudes, -gedragingen en -percepties.

Het gebruik van kwantitatieve methoden in de dissertatie wordt erkend als een tekortkoming, omdat het mogelijk geen rekening houdt met kwalitatieve aspecten van stereotypering van overheidsmedewerkers. Toekomstig onderzoek kan profiteren van het opnemen van kwalitatieve methoden, zoals interviews en focusgroepen, om dieper in te gaan op individuele percepties, ervaringen en de onderliggende redenen achter stereotiepe overtuigingen.

Wetenschappelijke relevantie

Deze dissertatie levert aanzienlijke bijdragen op empirisch, theoretisch en methodologisch gebied aan het begrip van stereotypering van overheidsmedewerkers. Empirisch gezien daagt het de gangbare veronderstelling van overwegend negatieve stereotypen uit door een genuanceerd landschap te onthullen waarin positieve stereotypen naast elkaar bestaan. De studie betwist de notie dat negatieve stereotypen noodzakelijkerwijs leiden tot nadelige effecten op interacties tussen burgers en de overheid, met name in de vorm van kritiek op ambtenaren.

Theoretische bijdragen omvatten het benadrukken van de cruciale rol van context, zowel op macro- als microniveau, bij het begrijpen van stereotypering van overheidsmedewerkers. Het macroniveau benadrukt de invloed van de landelijke context op de inhoud en perceptie van stereotypen, rekening houdend met culturele normen en maatschappelijke verwachtingen. Op microniveau worden factoren zoals geslacht, de werksector van de burger, subjectief

inkomen, vertrouwen en geografie, beïnvloed door onderwijs, geïdentificeerd als bijdragers aan stereotypering. De studie verrijkt het theoretisch kader door de intersectie van maatschappelijke en individuele factoren te erkennen bij het vormgeven van percepties van overheidsmedewerkers.

Methodologisch introduceert de dissertatie methode pluralisme door gebruik te maken van een divers scala aan onderzoeksmethoden, waaronder een mixed-method ontwerp, een vignetexperiment, een veldexperiment en video-vignetexperimenten. Deze benadering, samen met gedragsmaatregelen die de dienstverlening door de overheid en medelevend gedrag beoordelen, biedt een meer uitgebreide verkenning van stereotypering van overheidsmedewerkers. De veelzijdige methodologie van de studie maakt een genuanceerd begrip van het fenomeen mogelijk, waarbij de complexiteit wordt vastgelegd en inzichten worden geboden vanuit verschillende perspectieven.

In essentie daagt dit onderzoek heersende aannames uit, biedt het een meer genuanceerd perspectief op stereotypen van overheidsmedewerkers en draagt het bij aan de literatuur door middel van een holistische verkenning die diverse methoden en contextuele overwegingen integreert.

Maatschappelijke relevantie

In deze dissertatie wordt de waarde van positieve stereotypen gedemonstreerd, wat leidt tot aanzienlijke maatschappelijke bijdragen. Ten eerste worden positieve stereotypen geïdentificeerd als potentiële instrumenten om de carrièreontwikkelingsuitdagingen van ambtenaren in de publieke sector als gevolg van negatieve stereotypering tegen te gaan. Positieve percepties, zoals ijverig en verantwoordelijk zijn, kunnen worden benut om carrièreontwikkeling en overgangsmogelijkheden te verbeteren. Deze bevinding daagt de gangbare veronderstelling uit dat stereotypen van overheidsmedewerkers overwegend negatief zijn.

Ten tweede wordt positieve stereotypering erkend als een strategisch instrument voor overheden om wervingsproblemen aan te pakken. Door de positieve aspecten van een carrière in de publieke sector, zoals baanzekerheid en een gezonde balans tussen werk en privé, te benadrukken, kunnen positieve stereotypen hoogwaardige kandidaten aantrekken en behouden. Deze benadering staat in contrast met de impact van negatieve stereotypen, die bekwame werknemers kunnen ontmoedigen om de publieke sector te betreden.

Ten derde blijkt dat positieve stereotypen leiden tot meer positieve interacties tussen burgers en de overheid. Het onderzoek benadrukt dat positieve stereotypering leidt tot vriendelijkere interacties met cliënten, wat een positieve invloed heeft op het bureaucratische proces. Vriendelijkere interacties dragen bij aan het opbouwen van vertrouwen, een goede verstandhouding en effectieve communicatie tussen ambtenaren en burgers, wat uiteindelijk leidt tot een betere dienstverlening en klanttevredenheid.

Bovendien benadrukt de studie de rol van beschikbare verhalen bij het positief vormgeven van interacties tussen burgers en de overheid. Door authentieke verhalen te delen over toewijding, professionaliteit, kwetsbaarheid en gemeenschapsdienst kunnen organisaties in de publieke sector hun relaties met burgers versterken.

Tot slot vestigt de dissertatie de aandacht op de significante rol van media bij het vormgeven van stereotypen van overheidsmedewerkers. Het begrijpen van de beïnvloedbare invloed van media is cruciaal, aangezien het zowel negatieve stereotypen kan versterken als uitdagen. Het onderzoek suggereert dat organisaties in de publieke sector, beleidsmakers en mediaprofessionals positieve mediabeelden strategisch kunnen gebruiken om een eerlijker beeld van publieke organisaties te geven, wat een positieve invloed kan hebben op de stereotypering van overheidsmedewerkers.

Samenvattend draagt dit onderzoek niet alleen waardevolle inzichten bij aan academische discussies, maar biedt het ook concrete wegen voor maatschappelijke verandering. Door de kracht van positieve stereotypen en mediaverhalen te erkennen, kan de samenleving werken aan het ontmantelen van schadelijke stereotypen, het bevorderen van begrip en het opbouwen van meer harmonieuze relaties tussen ambtenaren en de gemeenschappen die ze bedienen. Deze kennis benadrukt het belang van verantwoorde mediavertegenwoordiging voor positieve publieke percepties en verbeterde relaties tussen burgers en de overheid.

Afsluitende opmerkingen

Samenvattend navigeert dit boek door het domein van stereotypen van overheidsmedewerkers, waarbij het aanvankelijke negatieve beeld wordt betwist en de dubbele aard van deze stereotypen – zowel positief als negatief – wordt onthuld. Door de wisselwerking van macro- en microniveau factoren

te erkennen, roept de studie op tot een diepgaande heroverweging van de stereotypering van overheidsmedewerkers.

Belangrijk is dat het onderzoek de cruciale rol benadrukt die deze stereotypen spelen in interacties tussen burgers en de overheid. Positieve stereotypen hebben het potentieel om niet alleen percepties maar ook interacties tussen overheidsmedewerkers en burgers volledig te transformeren.

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Gabriela Szydlowski was born in 1994 in Montreal, Canada. She went to McGill University for her bachelor, where she majored in Psychology and Anthropology and minored in Behavioral Sciences. During this time, she did her Erasmus at Leiden University and fell in love with the Netherlands. In 2017, she started a two year research master program in Clinical and Developmental Psychopathology at Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam. In 2019, she graduated from her masters' program.

Afterwards, she began her PhD at the Utrecht School of Governance (USG), at Utrecht University, with the NWO VIDI funded project ''Lazy Bureaucrats? Studying stereotypes of civil servants and its effects across countries.'' During her PhD, she participated in various international conferences (EGPA, IRSPM, PMRC, NIG), led the implementation of an online talk series to connect junior researchers with scholars in the field during the COVID-19 pandemic, gave lectures, and completed a research stay at the Ecole Nationale d'Administration Publique (ENAP) in Montreal. She published her work in journals such as *Public Administration Review* and *Public Management Review.*