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ORIGINAL PAPER

Helping the Homeless: The Role of Empathy, Race and Deservingness in Motivating Policy Support and Charitable Giving

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Abstract

What will motivate citizens to support efforts to help those in need? Charitable organizations seeking support for their cause will often use the story of a specific individual to illustrate the problem and generate support. We explore the effectiveness of this strategy using the issue of homelessness. Specifically, we examine the role that the race of beneficiaries featured in a message, and the inclusion of deservingness cues highlighting external attributions for an individual's homelessness have on willingness to donate to the homeless and support government efforts to address homelessness. Utilizing two experiments with a nationally representative probability sample and an online opt-in quota sample, we find significant effects of deservingness information on expressions of sympathy, and on support for government efforts to address homelessness when viewing individuals from one's own racial group. Direct effects on charitable giving are inconsistent across studies, with modest evidence that deservingness cues are associated with donation behavior in one. We also uncover interesting heterogeneity in how individuals react to a message about the homeless based on their predispositions. We discuss the implications for those utilizing this messaging strategy.

Keywords Emotion · Race · Deservingness

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Charitable organizations and advocacy groups assisting society's most vulnerable members often utilize messages that feature individual stories of those in need. For example, the Community Food Bank of New Jersey has a "Real Stories" section on their website that tells the stories of those served by food pantries in their network.[1] In February 2018, the Oxfam website featured the story of a Syrian refugee family's journey to the US which concluded by saying "Shehadeh's story underscores the precarious position many refugees face" and asking people to pledge to fight for refugees by providing their contact information and making a donation. In each case, these organizations use humanizing appeals to illustrate a problem and elicit support for their cause. This approach is not uncommon. Political actors utilize individual stories in campaign ads and speeches making appeals for a particular policy. Journalists use individual stories to illustrate complex policy issues in news coverage in order to draw readers and viewers in, what Iyengar (1994) calls episodic framing. Although journalists are not seeking to move opinion when they select an individual's story to illustrate a policy, charitable organizations and advocacy groups deliberately select humanizing stories that will appeal to emotion and facilitate their cause. Does this messaging approach—highlighting individual stories—work to increase support for assisting those in need? Does it move attitudes, and more importantly, does it motivate behavior?

Scholarly work has focused on understanding what leads individuals to support social welfare policy. Much of that research has explained support by focusing on individual level characteristics like social background, empathetic ability, ideology, and values like egalitarianism, humanitarianism and individualism (Batson et al. 2002; Feldman et al. forthcoming; Feldman and Steenbergen 2001; Gilens 1995; Newman et al. 2015). Other work notes how attitudes toward the groups seen as benefiting from a policy influence support (e.g., Gilens 1999; Peterson 2012).

Somewhat less attention has been given to specifically exploring how messages like those described above work to move attitudes and particularly behavior. Prior research has shown that news framing can influence opinion on social welfare policy, with episodic framing producing more individual attributions of responsibility and less support for government efforts than thematic framing (Iyengar 1994). News that shows welfare recipients as more or less deserving of benefits may be particularly important in generating support for or opposition to social welfare policies (Slothuus 2007). Work on episodic framing also suggests that the humanizing stories in these messages gain potency through their ability to elicit emotional response (Aaroe 2011; Gross 2008). While this extant research suggests how messages can influence attitudes and opinions, political science research has not given the same attention to whether such messages impact behavior such as charitable giving. Similarly, less attention has been paid to understanding the power of particular features of these stories.[2] We begin to fill these gaps.

[1] http://www.cfbnj.org/category/real-stories/.

[2] In other words, what are the effects of variation within episodic frames? Iyengar (1994) finds distinctions that hint at differences based on the nature of the individual story used. For example, people were twice as likely to attribute blame to the individual when viewing a story featuring a black criminal compared with one featuring a white criminal (see also Gross 2008). Brader et al. (2008) find lower levels

Our study extends existing research in three ways. First, we provide more attention to the impact of such messages on behavior. We examine how these messages influence monetary charitable giving as well as attitudes toward government assistance. Second we provide a systematic look at how specific elements in these stories matter. Based on existing research we expect the race of the individuals shown as potential beneficiaries, and the degree to which they are portrayed as deserving, will influence message effects. Finally, we contribute to work exploring the role of dispositional traits, particularly racial resentment and empathetic ability, in explaining message effects. Charitable organizations using this type of humanizing appeal seemingly believe it works because it engages empathetic responses to individuals in need. But is it possible that this appeal is only effective when it resonates with individuals' pre-existing racial biases and empathic capabilities?

We use the issue of homelessness to explore how message campaigns employing these humanizing stories work to enhance support for assisting those in need. Overall homelessness has decreased in recent years, yet it remains a widespread problem that threatens many low-income Americans. The 2018 Department of Housing and Urban Development's "Point in Time Count" found more than 552,000 individuals, a third of them families with children, experiencing homelessness in January 2018.[3] Often, media depictions of homelessness convey individual weaknesses and stigmatizing stereotypes, further perpetuating the problem (Shields 2001; Devereux 2015). For example, images of disgust associated with media portrayals of the homeless underscore support for exclusionary policies that effectively criminalize homelessness (Clifford and Piston 2017). Further, personal exposure to homeless individuals in affluent settings may actually decrease support for redistributive economic policies (Sands 2017).

To counter these negative perceptions and representations and to generate support, a homeless charity can utilize the kind of messaging campaign that is the focus of our interest—telling the story of specific homeless individuals depicted as deserving of assistance. To test whether this type of messaging campaign moves preferences, generates donations, and invokes sympathy for those in need, we administer two experiments with white Americans (a nationally representative probability sample and an online opt-in quota sample). Subjects were exposed to a video modeled on the campaign "Rethink Homelessness" (http://www.lifebuzz.com/rethink/) in which we vary the racial background of the homeless individuals portrayed and deservingness cues in the form of information regarding the situational and societal circumstances behind their homelessness. In each study participants were provided with additional compensation, and given the opportunity to split this endowment, via a dictator game, with a charity that serves homeless individuals in Washington, DC. The inclusion of a monetary behavioral measure helps us discern how

Footnote 2 (continued)
of support when news about the costs of immigration features Latino rather than European immigrants. Work showing that support for policies varies based on who is seen as benefitting (discussed below) also confirms the intuition that who is represented and the nature of their story matters.

[3] https://www.hudexchange.info/resources/documents/2018-AHAR-Part-1.pdf.

messaging factors and individual predispositions influence altruistic giving. Moreover, it allows us to explore whether there are differences in what motivates support for government policy and charitable behavior. Consistent with expectations, we find that deservingness cues produce increased expressions of sympathy and lead to support for government efforts to address homelessness when viewing a video featuring white homeless individuals across studies. Direct effects on charitable giving are inconsistent across studies. In contrast, the racial composition of the homeless shown in a message has little effect on government policy support and charitable giving. The pattern of results provides very modest evidence that the efficacy of deservingness cues may depend upon the race of the beneficiary. Further, individual predispositions condition these message effects in expected ways.

The Role of Racial and Deservingness Cues

Scholars have long recognized that attitudes toward groups structure public opinion (Converse 1964). When group cues are clear and salient, feelings about the social groups seen as implicated are important components of policy choice (Conover 1988; Nelson and Kinder 1996). For example, in the case of welfare, Gilens (1999) demonstrates that opposition is related to negative racial stereotypes and media coverage that portrays undeserving blacks as the main beneficiaries of welfare spending. More generally, there is strong evidence that whites' racial attitudes are associated with support for government redistribution on policies affecting African-Americans (e.g., Kinder and Sanders 1996). Such work suggests the racial identity of those featured in a story and the stereotypes linked to those groups will influence message effectiveness.

Yet the limited work taking up this question directly provides somewhat mixed evidence for this expectation. Iyengar's (1994) studies of the effects of episodic and thematic framing show differences in attributions based on whether crime and poverty stories featured blacks or whites. Using a student sample, Hannah and Cafferty (2006) do not find differences in causal attributions based on the race of the individuals featured in poverty stories, nor do they find differences in how subjects would assign charitable contributions to help the poor. However, those seeing stories dominated by poor whites were more likely to say too little was being spent on programs to help the poor and were more likely to take a flyer providing information on how to volunteer for an organization assisting the poor. Prior work on racial discrimination in dictator games, while indicating some in-group bias, is also mixed (Fershtman and Gneezy 2001; Whitt and Wilson 2007). Fong and Luttmer (2009, 2011) find no direct effect on charitable giving when manipulating the race of beneficiaries but do find that racial predispositions interact with the race of beneficiaries to influence decisions. Charitable giving outside the lab reveals in-group preferences, such that individuals donate more to organizations that share their religious (Margolis and Sances 2017) and racial composition (Hungerman 2008).

Attributions of responsibility are also key elements shaping support for public charity and spending on social welfare programs. When welfare recipients are viewed as being responsible for their situation, assistance is typically withheld

(Kluegel and Smith 1986; Skitka and Tetlock 1993). In contrast, when beneficiaries are portrayed as victims of external factors beyond their control, individuals are more likely to view them as deserving of assistance. Utilizing this "deservingness heuristic," individuals support welfare benefits when recipients are perceived as hardworking, and reject benefits for recipients perceived as lazy (Peterson 2012; Petersen et al. 2011, 2012; Aaroe and Peterson 2014). This cue also impacts altruistic giving, where charitable donations are greater when beneficiaries appear to be needy through no fault of their own (Berkowitz 1972; Bendapudi et al. 1996). Donations in dictator games increase when the recipient is portrayed as deserving (Brañas-Garza 2006; Cherry and Shogren 2008) or as a reputable charity (Eckel and Grossman 1996).

Gilen's (1999) work suggests an important element in explaining the group centric nature of policy choice may be the ways in which racial stereotypes and media representations condition perceptions of deservingness. Indeed, Fong and Luttmer (2009, 2011) find that race of beneficiary influences perceptions of worthiness. This dynamic appears to reflect the ultimate attribution error (Pettigrew 1979)—the tendency to attribute negative behaviors and conditions to internal dispositional factors when viewing out-groups and to external situational factors when viewing a member of one's in-group (with the opposite pattern for positive behaviors and conditions). This pattern of misattribution is particularly likely among those with negative views of out-groups (e.g., high racial resentment). Therefore, information on deservingness may be particularly important when motivating help for members of a racial out-group, since absent such explicit messaging individuals are likely to see them as responsible for their situation.

The Role of Sympathy and Empathetic Ability

In understanding the potential influence of humanizing personal stories as a message strategy, we expect emotional responses—specifically sympathy and empathy—to play a critical role.[4] Prior work on framing and emotion suggests that emotional reactions are contingent upon how messages are framed, and that emotional responses to a message may mediate the effect of message content on opinion (Brewer 2001; Nabi 1999, 2003; Gross 2008; Aaroe 2011).

Empathy is the ability to take the perspective of another person and relate to the emotional state of that person in a context. It has a cognitive dimension in the ability to understand what someone else is feeling (de Waal 2008), and an affective, motivational dimension to express feelings of sympathy, compassion, or empathetic concern to that person (Baron-Cohen and Wheelwright 2004). Empathy has powerful

[4] Work by Clifford and Piston (2017) is also interested in the role of emotion in explaining support for homeless policy, however they focus on the role of disgust. Their results suggest that disgust responses are common with respect to homelessness. Disgust does not generate negative views regarding the homeless nor does it lead to lessened support for aid. Rather, those who are sensitive to disgust tend to support exclusionary policies that seek to exclude the homeless from public life, even as they support other programs to aid the homeless.

effects on attitudes toward others, and motivates altruistic behavior (Batson et al. 2002). Research has shown that messaging which utilizes perspective taking and empathetic appeals can be successful in reducing prejudice toward stigmatized groups (Broockman and Kalla 2016), though personalizing an issue does not always enhance persuasion (Harrison and Michelson 2012; Gross 2008).

The likely expectation of professional strategic communicators utilizing this humanizing strategy is that the individual's story will engender an empathetic response that will translate into support for addressing the problem. This is consistent with Peterson et al. (2012) who suggest that social emotions (anger and compassion) are the mechanism by which deservingness cues influence support for social welfare. In the case at hand, we expect empathetic reactions (e.g., expressions of sympathy) are connected to perceptions of deservingness (a message factor) as well as one's *ability* to empathize with the homeless individuals depicted (an individual level cognitive ability to perspective-take). Empathetic reactions may also vary in response to in-group and out-group members as shared group membership facilitates perspective taking (Turner et al. 1987). Thus, we may find more empathetic reactions when considering the experience of a homeless in-group member than out-group member. Empathetic reactions (expressions of sympathy) may also be an important psychological mechanism linking the depiction of homeless individuals with expressions of policy support and donation behavior (Weiner 1980).

Recent research has demonstrated the power of empathy in shaping support for social welfare policies, wherein individual level differences in empathetic capacity (i.e., the ability to infer the emotional and mental states of others) affect peoples' expressions of sympathy and support for government assistance when learning about a person in financial need (Feldman et al. forthcoming). Yet, empathetic ability does not always lead to increased sympathy or increased support for social welfare policies—the context matters. Feldman et al. (forthcoming) find the type of assistance offered and individuals' individualism values jointly shape support for helping a deserving person in need. Their work signals the import of individual predispositions such as empathetic ability, which may interact with message attributes. Thus, our study explores both the role of empathetic ability as a moderating factor, and expressed sympathy as an outcome of messaging that can undergird opinions and behavior.

Current Study and Hypotheses

How effective are messages utilizing humanizing appeals in generating support for helping those in need? Our experimental designs use an online video that featured white or black homeless individuals holding a sign that does (or does not) explain the circumstances that led to their homelessness, in order to assess the effects of this message strategy among white Americans. This design allows us to manipulate the individuals portrayed as likely beneficiaries by varying the race of those shown, as well as the inclusion of explicit deservingness cues emphasizing external locus of control, to look at how specific elements within this type of humanizing appeal matter. Although the prior literature is mixed, we expect the

race of the individuals who benefit will matter—with more expressed sympathy, policy support and giving when viewing a member of the in-group (i.e., whites). Deservingness cues are critical in motivating support for social welfare policy. Prior work shows that when welfare recipients are viewed as being responsible for their situation and thus undeserving, support for charity and spending on social welfare programs diminishes. Thus, we expect that deservingness cues will enhance expressions of sympathy, increase support for government efforts to address homelessness, and raise monetary contributions. Finally, we consider how deservingness cues interact with the race of potential beneficiaries. Patterns of misattribution based on stereotypes and a media environment that portrays poor blacks as undeserving would lead us to expect greater support when viewing in-group members (i.e., whites) absent any deservingness cues (as suggested by our main effect hypothesis). We expect deservingness cues will lead to greater support when paired with beneficiaries from one's in-group as this messaging will resonate with group based attributional tendencies. However, it is also possible that deservingness cues become particularly important when paired with members of an out-group because out-group members may be more likely to be seen as undeserving absent such information.

We also investigate the role of individual predispositions in moderating these message effects. Given our message focus, two dispositions should be especially important—individual empathetic ability and racial attitudes. Individuals vary in their empathetic *ability*, where some people are better able to put themselves into another's shoes. In one study, we employ the "Reading the Mind in the Eyes" test as a measure of empathetic ability. In the other study we include a measure of individual level racial resentment. This allows us to examine how group cues interact with individual dispositions to condition responses. Because effects related to race of beneficiary imply differences based on whether the beneficiary is a member of the in-group or an out-group, and due to the financial limitations associated with obtaining a large enough sample of African-Americans, we restrict our experiments to whites only.

Based on the extant research we offer the following hypotheses regarding the effects of message and individual receiver characteristics:

H1 *Beneficiary Race Matters.* Messages featuring homeless individuals from one's racial in-group (i.e., whites) will elicit more sympathy, policy support, and donations than homeless individuals belonging to one's racial out-group (i.e., blacks).

H2 *Deservingness Information Matters.* The inclusion of external attributions for an individual's homelessness (i.e., a deservingness cue) should increase expressions of sympathy, policy support, and donations relative to no such information.

H2a *Effects of Deservingness Information Conditioned on Race*. The effect of deservingness cues on sympathy, policy support, and donations should be greater when viewing homeless individuals from one's racial in-group (i.e., whites).

H3a *Racial Predispositions Matter*. Individuals high in racial resentment will be less likely to donate when the beneficiaries are African-American and deemed undeserving; racial resentment should not affect donation decisions when beneficiaries are white and deemed deserving.

H3b *Empathetic Predispositions Matter*. Individual empathetic ability will influence donation behavior; those low in empathetic ability will donate less to the homeless. Individuals with higher levels of empathetic ability will donate more money to the homeless, but only when the beneficiaries belong to their racial in-group (i.e., white) or are presented as deserving.

Methodology

To understand the role that race and deservingness information might play in explaining support for addressing homelessness we use two online survey experiments. The first, using a nationally representative random probability sample, was administered in the Summer of 2015 through GfK and funded by Time-Sharing Experiments in the Social Sciences (TESS). The second, using a nationally diverse online opt-in quota sample, was conducted in April 2017 through Qualtrics Panels. In both, we recruited only white respondents. The details of the design vary slightly across the two studies, but both include measures assessing participants' dispositional traits, the experimental treatment, measures of sympathy for individuals depicted in the treatment, attributions of responsibility for homelessness, support for government efforts to assist the homeless, and a behavioral measure of charitable giving. Online Appendix I provides added details for both studies.

Experimental Treatment

In both studies, participants were randomly assigned to watch one of four videos depicting homeless individuals in a wintery urban setting. Videos were approximately 1-min long. Each video showed four (black or white) individuals holding a sign, while each person says "I am homeless." There are two male and two female individuals in each video. We matched the actors on age and gender by race, and the paired individuals wore the same clothes.

The four signs constitute our deservingness manipulation and provided either no information beyond the person being homeless (e.g., "I Have No Where To Live") or four distinct reasons why the individual was homeless that suggested responsibility was beyond their locus of control (e.g., "Bank Foreclosed On Me. I am Homeless."). Though the no information treatments humanize the issue by visually depicting individual homeless persons, without explicit information participants in these conditions should bring their prior conceptions of the deservingness of the homeless to bear in their evaluations. By contrast, participants in the information conditions may positively update their views of deservingness based on the signs. Thus, in the no information conditions perceived deservingness of homeless individuals should

Table 1 Experimental treatment video conditions

Black homeless individuals, no information (TESS study: N = 169; Qualtrics study: N = 249)	*Black homeless individuals, deservingness information* (TESS study: N = 179; Qualtrics study: N = 242)
White homeless individuals, no information (TESS study: N = 174; Qualtrics study: N = 242)	*White homeless individuals, deservingness information* (TESS study N = 169; Qualtrics STUDY N = 243)

All reported N's are based on the number of participants who viewed enough of the video to be deemed "minimally treated." The Qualtrics Panels study also included a control condition where no video was shown (N = 250)

be at its mean, while in the information treatments perceived deservingness should be above its mean. It is of course possible that the depiction of specific individuals just saying they are homeless is consequential. For this reason, we include a control condition in the Qualtrics study.

Given this 2 × 2 factorial setup, participants viewed a single video that contained either four individuals who held signs that had no information about the circumstances of their homelessness, or four individuals who held signs that had information about the precipitating factors of their homelessness that should generate perceptions of deservingness. In the TESS study, respondents were exposed to one of four treatments corresponding with the 2 × 2 design, while in the Qualtrics study participants were exposed to one of five treatments corresponding with the 2 × 2 plus control design (Table 1). Though the video makes no specific request, it is clearly constructed as the type of appeal an organization might create to increase awareness of homelessness and generate support.[5]

While mimicking the types of video campaigns to end homelessness one encounters on the internet, our video treatments are inherently weak manipulations of deservingness and sympathy. First, information about the featured homeless individuals is brief—even in our "information" conditions. At most, one sentence is provided to detail the circumstances of an individual's life. Such limited information, especially in a one-shot treatment, may be insufficient for participants to feel a genuine connection with the homeless individuals in need. Next, portraying homelessness in an urban setting may be unfamiliar to participants living outside of metropolitan areas, thus placing the issue outside of their daily lives, and making the homeless individuals portrayed less relatable. Even among participants who reside in urban areas, those who do not live near Washington, DC are asked to consider the homeless outside of their local community, further dampening the empathetic appeal of the treatments. Furthermore, the homeless population tends to be a target of dehumanization (Harris and Fiske 2006) and disgust (Clifford and Piston 2017), such that participants may have more difficulty empathizing with members of this

[5] The video treatments can be viewed at: https://www.youtube.com/user/jewlesann. We do not provide a condition that suggests individuals are responsible for their situation (i.e. an undeserving cue) which seemingly would lead to even less support than the no information condition. This is a valuable extension for future research.

community. However, the nature of our humanizing messages likely involve less disgust than seeing actual homeless people living on the streets. Finally, we expect heterogeneous treatment effects across participants' levels of racial resentment and empathetic ability (H3a and H3b), which may reduce the main effects of our treatments. Taken together, our treatments pose a difficult test of our hypotheses, and any effects they exert on sympathy, policy support, and monetary donations for the homeless may be seen as conservative.

TESS Study Design and Sample

The TESS experiment was fielded between July 24 and August 4, 2015. We began the study by assessing participants' empathetic ability using the "Reading the Mind in the Eyes" test (RMET; Baron-Cohen et al. 2001). Subjects were then assigned to one of the four treatment conditions and viewed the video. After watching the video, participants were told about Miriam's Kitchen, a private charity that provides food and services to homeless individuals in Washington DC. They were given a $10 endowment as additional compensation for their participation, and informed that they could donate none, some, or all, of that amount directly to Miriam's Kitchen to help chronically homeless individuals. Following the donation question participants were asked how much sympathy they felt for the individuals in the video, whether they thought the homeless individuals were responsible for their own situation or whether economic factors like a recession were responsible, and how much effort they would like the federal government to devote to solving the problem of poverty, hunger, and homelessness.

The TESS experiment was administered by GfK whose online random probability sampling panel is representative of the US population. We had a total of 742 qualified completes. Because participants were not required to watch the entire video before moving to the next question, we had 51 individuals who moved to the donation question before they viewed enough of the video to be exposed to any of the deservingness treatment. Since we are interested in the effects of race *and* deservingness information, we restrict our analyses to individuals who viewed enough of the video to get minimally treated with both manipulations. Specifically, we focus on the 691 respondents who saw 26 s or more of the video (viewing at a minimum the first individual holding a sign).[6]

Qualtrics Study Design and Sample

We used Qualtrics' Panels service to field a second experiment April 7–20, 2017. The procedures were identical to those used in TESS with a few exceptions. We omitted the RMET, included a measure of racial resentment in order to assess the effect of racial predispositions, limited the endowment amount to $4, and included

[6] Our treatment conditions were balanced on empathetic ability, party identification, ideology, and basic demographics.

additional items measuring policy support. We included a control condition in order to assess support for the homeless in the absence of any messaging, and randomized the order of our expressed sympathy, government policy support, and charitable donation measures to avoid spillover effects.[7]

The Qualtrics Panel is an online opt-in panel that utilizes a quota sampling frame to produce a nationally diverse sample. We had 1251 qualified completes, but for the purposes of our analysis, we use the 1226 minimally treated respondents (those who saw 26 s or more of the video and did not report any technical issues, or were in the control condition). Restricting our samples to only those who saw the full video does not change the results. While, generally, both samples reflect the US population on a number of characteristics, the Qualtrics sample is particularly skewed towards women.[8] TESS respondents are wealthier than those in Qualtrics, and include few pure Independents. Online Appendix Table A1 reports the demographic characteristics of both samples.

Dependent Variables

Our dependent variables include empathetic responses to the homeless individuals depicted in the videos, support for government efforts to address homelessness, and the monetary donation made to a charitable organization that serves the homeless.[9] Our proxy for empathetic response, *sympathy for the homeless*, is measured by asking respondents "How much sympathy do you feel for the individuals in the video?" coded to range between 0 and 1 where 1 indicates greater sympathy. Respondents generally expressed sympathy for the homeless individuals in the video. To assess support for *government policy to assist the homeless* we ask participants: "How much effort would you like the federal government to devote to solving the problem of poverty, hunger, and homelessness?" with responses coded to range between 0 and 1 where 1 represents those who say "a great deal of effort." The Qualtrics study included two additional policy items: "Do you think the federal government spends too much or too little on programs to end homelessness, or is the level of spending about right?" and "Do you think it is a good or bad idea for the government to cut back substantially on social welfare programs and encourage private charities to take care of Americans in need of assistance, like homeless individuals?" We combine these three items item to create a scale of support for government assistance to the homeless coded to range between 0 and 1 where 1 indicates the most support for government efforts.

We assess willingness to *donate to a homeless charity* using a behavioral measure, the dictator game (Forsythe et al. 1994), where respondents are allowed to split

[7] Conditions were balanced on party identification, ideology, economic issues, racial resentment, and demographics.

[8] Qualtrics study analyses control for gender. There are no significant interactions between gender and our treatments.

[9] See Online Appendix I for additional measurement information including question wording, coding, scaling, and descriptive statistics for our key dependent variables and individual difference measures.

an endowment between themselves and an established charity that serves the homeless. Dictator games have been used previously to assess the effects of empathy on generosity (Zak et al. 2007) and charitable donations (Eckel and Grossman 1996; Fong and Luttmer 2009). After reading a description of Miriam's Kitchen, a private charity that provides food and services to the homeless in Washington, DC, participants were reminded that additional participation funding had been made available to them beyond their normal compensation, and were offered the opportunity to donate this additional compensation to Miriam's Kitchen or to keep it for themselves. In the TESS study, respondents could donate anywhere from $0 to $10, while in the Qualtrics study respondents could donate anywhere from $0 to $4, both in one-dollar increments. Across both studies more than 70% of participants donated something to the homeless charity (see Online Appendix I and Fig. A2).

Individual Difference Measures

Our other key independent variables include individuals' empathetic predispositions and racial attitudes. Individuals' *empathetic predispositions,* were measured using the RMET in the TESS study. This test measures respondents' ability to correctly label an emotion expressed by someone else by showing them a picture of a pair of eyes and asking them to choose, from four emotion words, the emotion being conveyed by the person. We create a scale coded 0–10 based on the number of correctly identified emotions, where higher values indicate greater empathetic ability. *Racial attitudes* were assessed in the Qualtrics study using a 4-item racial resentment scale coded 0–1, where higher values represent greater racial resentment. Each study also included measures of ideology and party identification, each using the standard 7-point self-placement scale, as well as demographic characteristics (see Online Appendix I and Table A1).

Manipulation Check

To discern whether our deservingness information worked as expected, we examined whether individuals in the information conditions (compared to the no information conditions) were less likely to perceive the individuals in the video as responsible for their own homelessness and more likely to say that external factors were responsible. In both studies, we assessed this with a single item (see Online Appendix I). Those in the deservingness information conditions are significantly more likely to say economic factors rather than personal factors are responsible for the homeless situation of the individuals in the video (TESS $t = 4.28$, $p < .01$; Qualtrics $t = 5.78$, $p < .01$).

Results

Given our experimental design, we are interested the *mean* amount of expressed sympathy, support for government assistance, and charitable donation giving found in each of our control and treatment conditions. Our analyses focus on mean differences between key conditions. As such, we graphically present the mean responses

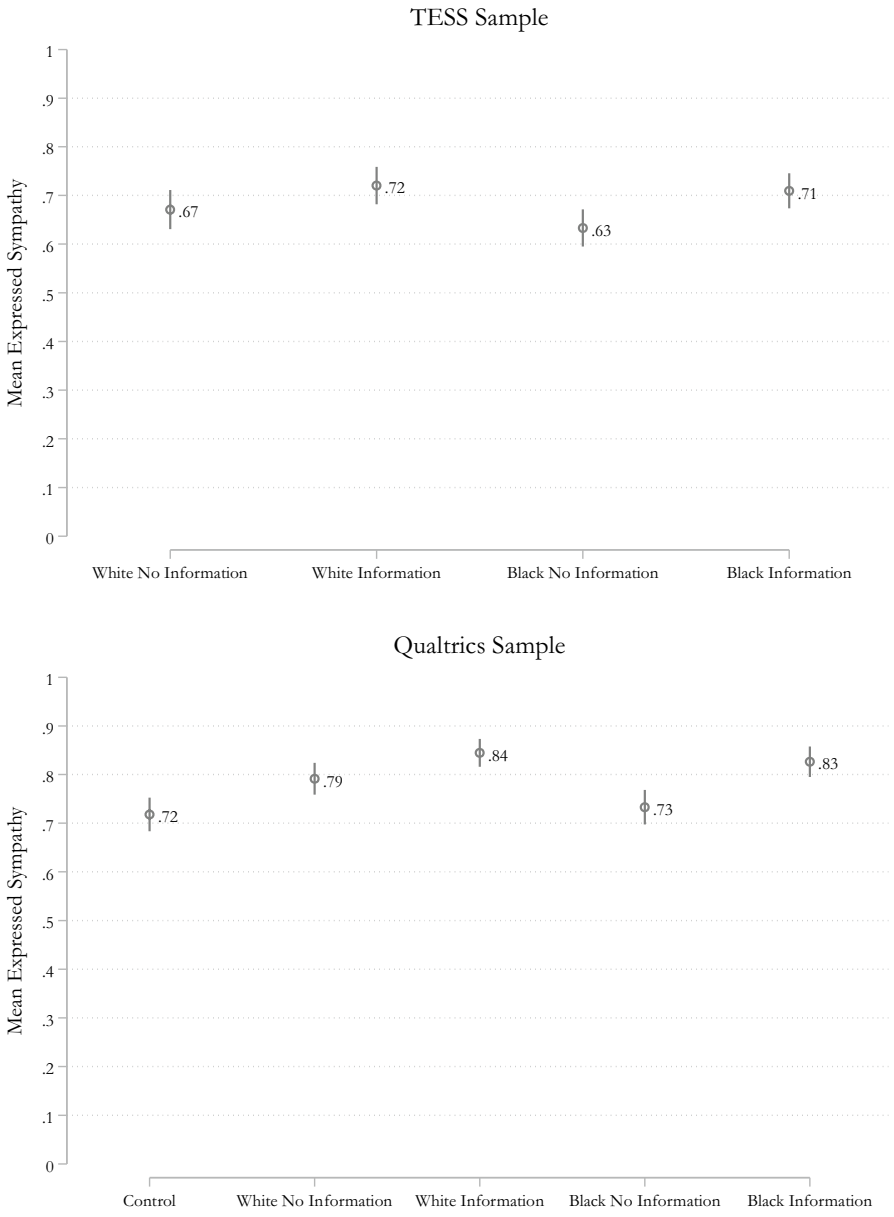

Fig. 1 Expressed sympathy for homeless individuals across treatments. Figures present mean sympathy by treatment condition, where the open circles represent the mean values and the bars reflect the 95% confidence intervals (Online Appendix II, Table A2 presents these values in tabular form). Sympathy ranges 0–1 where 1 represents those who say they feel "a great deal of sympathy". Tables A3 (TESS) and A4 (Qualtrics) assess significant differences across these treatment means, and are used to test hypotheses H1, H2, and H2a

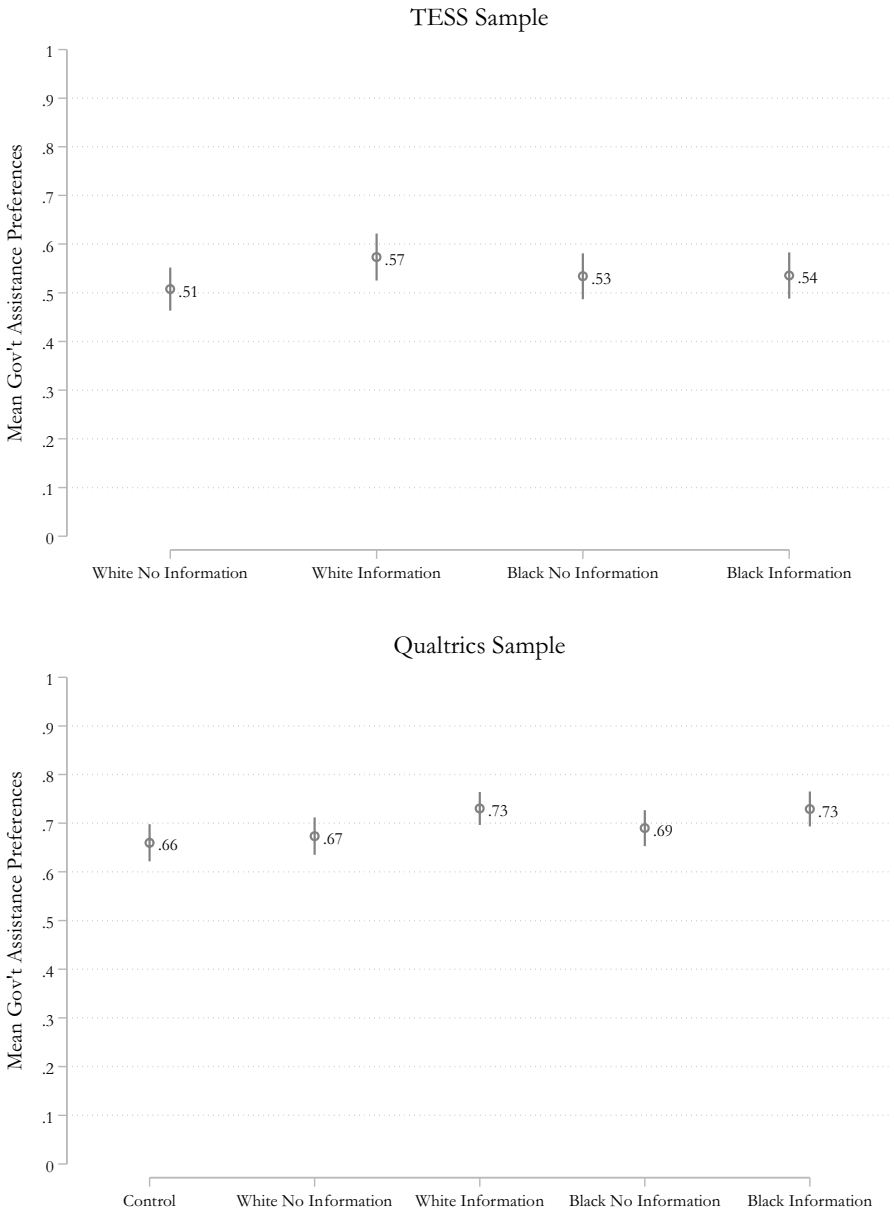

Fig. 2 Support for government assistance to homeless individuals across treatments. Figures present mean support for government efforts to help the homeless by treatment condition, where the open circles represent the mean values and the bars reflect the 95% confidence intervals (Online Appendix II, Table A2 presents these values in tabular form). Support for government assistance is a single item in TESS and a three item scale in Qualtrics. Measures range 0–1 where 1 represents those who most supportive of government efforts. Tables A5 (TESS) and A6 (Qualtrics) assess significant differences across these treatment means, and are used to test hypotheses H1, H2, and H2a

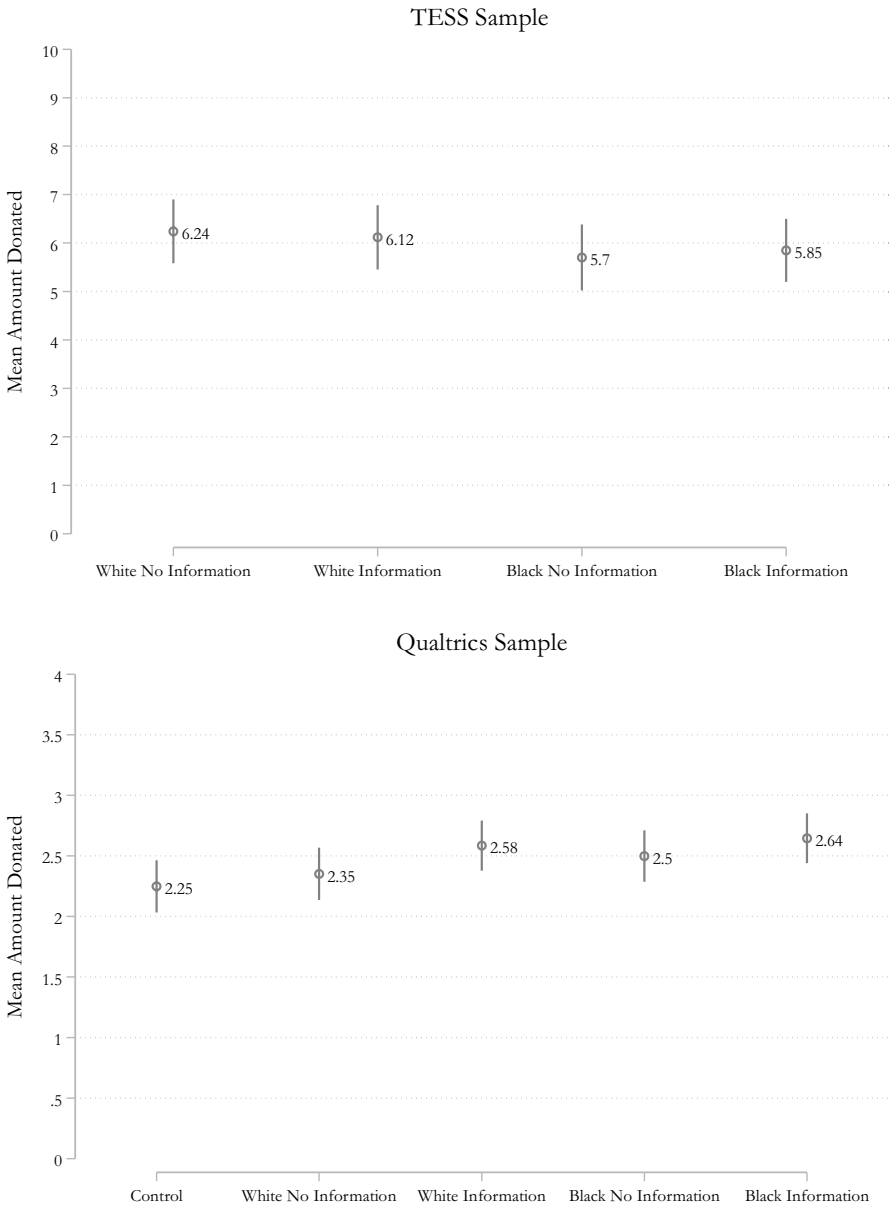

Fig. 3 Mean amount donated to homeless charity across treatments. Figures present mean donation by treatment condition, where the open circles represent the mean values and the bars reflect the 95% confidence intervals (Online Appendix II, Table A2 presents these values in tabular form). In TESS maximum donation is $10 in Qualtrics maximum donation is $4. Tables A7 (TESS) and A8 (Qualtrics), columns 1–4 in each, assess significant differences across these treatment means, and are used to test hypotheses H1, H2, and H2a

with 95% confidence intervals on our key dependent variables across conditions in Figs. 1, 2, and 3 (see also Online Appendix II, Table A2). We assess the effects of our treatments on these mean amounts through a series of OLS regression models, with the coefficients and marginal effects derived from these models referenced in text.[10]

Sympathy and Government Support for the Homeless

We begin by examining the extent to which our experimental manipulations affect individuals' emotional reactions to homeless individuals. We find significant effects of the deservingness information conditions on expressed sympathy in both studies (see Fig. 1). People are more sympathetic when provided with reasons for homelessness that draw attention to situational factors (e.g., breast cancer, lost job, bank foreclosure, and domestic abuse). However, these significant main effects are quite modest, only increasing sympathy by approximately 6% and 7% of the 0–1 scale, in TESS and Qualtrics studies, respectively. While the effect of this information on sympathy appears slightly larger in the black conditions ($B = 0.076$, $p < .01$ in TESS; $B = 0.089$, $p < .01$ in Qualtrics) than in the white conditions ($B = 0.049$, $p < .1$ in TESS; $B = 0.054$, $p < .05$ in Qualtrics) the effect of deservingness does not differ significantly by race.[11]

By contrast, there is no consistent main effect of race across the two studies. In Qualtrics, people are more likely to express sympathy for homeless individuals who share their racial identity than those who do not ($B = -0.036$, $p < .05$), but we do not see this in the TESS study (see Online Appendix II, Tables A2, A3 and A4, columns 3 and 4). Our data does suggest that the white no information condition

[10] Our analyses focus on the means by condition as represented in Figs. 1, 2, and 3 and Online Appendix II Table A2. In Online Appendix II, Tables A3 through A8, we present OLS regressions with robust standard errors estimating the effects of the individual treatment conditions (columns 1 and 2), as well as OLS regressions with robust standard errors estimating the effect of deservingness cues (collapsed across race), race cues (collapsed across deservingness information), and their interaction (columns 3 through 6 in Tables A3 through A6, and columns 3 and 4 in Tables A7 and A8). We run our models with and without controls to ensure our results are robust to modeling choice. We use OLS for ease of interpretation, however when we re-estimate the models using ordered logistic regression (Appendix III, Tables A11 through A14) the patterns remain the same. Tables A7 and A8 also present logistic regression models examining the probability of any donation (columns 5 through 8 in Tables A7 and A8) allowing us to look at effects on donation behavior in two ways. Data and replication information are available at https://doi.org/10.7910/DVN/PURXWF.

[11] See Online Appendix II, Tables A3 and A4. OLS coefficients from column 5 used to produce estimates of the effect of deservingness information within black conditions and within white conditions. The main effect of deservingness information (e.g., collapsing across race conditions) is shown in columns 3 and 4 ($B = 0.063$, $p < .01$ in TESS; $B = 0.071$, $p < .01$ in Qualtrics). This main effect does not differ significantly by race (n.s. interaction in column 5). A similar pattern emerges in the Qualtrics study when we look at the combined positive emotions of sympathy, caring, and empathizing (results in replication files). Empathetic appeals significantly increase these positive emotions by about 5% of the scale, regardless of the race condition, while significantly fewer positive emotions are expressed in the black no information condition compared to the white no information condition ($B = 0.03$, $p < .1$). Race has no impact among those receiving the deservingness information. Further, respondents report significantly more emotional reactions, relative to the control group, in all conditions except for black no information.

elicits more sympathy than the black no information condition in the Qualtrics sample (B = −0.038, p = .181 in TESS; B = and 0.054, p < .05 in Qualtrics, see Tables A3 and A4, column 5 and Fig. 1). In the absence of information that induces perceptions of deservingness, individuals may sympathize more with homeless individuals who share their racial background. That African-American homeless individuals are seen in a less sympathetic light absent additional information may help explain why deservingness cues appeared somewhat, though not significantly, more consequential for inducing sympathy in the black conditions.

Looking at support for government assistance, the race of the homeless individuals in the video has no main effect on support in either study. Deservingness information modestly but significantly increases support for government policies to address homelessness compared to treatments that provide no deservingness information when viewing homeless individuals who are white (B = 0.066 p < .05 in TESS, B = 0.06, p < .05 in Qualtrics, see Tables A5 and A6, column 5 and Fig. 2). We do not see a significant effect of deservingness appeals relative to the no information condition when viewing black homeless individuals in either study.[12] Although this would appear to signal that race serves as a context in which deservingness appeals are more or less effective, we find no significant differences in the effect of deservingness by race. Indeed, we find a main effect of deservingness in the Qualtrics study (see Table A6, column 3).

The results suggest information that signals deservingness can impact emotional and attitudinal responses to homelessness while the race of the homeless individuals themselves has little effect. We find little evidence of main effects of beneficiary race (H1). Messages highlighting external reasons for homelessness do increase sympathy (consistent with H2). These messages also produce increased support for government efforts targeting the homeless, but only in the Qualtrics study (partial support for H2). Across both studies, we find a significant marginal effect of deservingness in the white conditions wherein such information produces significantly more support for government efforts when potential beneficiaries are members of the in-group (see Tables A5 and A6, column 5). When viewing members of the outgroup, deservingness information does not significantly increase support. That said, we find no significant interactive effect, suggesting this pattern signals at best weak support for H2a.

[12] As seen in Online Appendix II Table A2, the means for white no information and white information conditions have non-overlapping confidence intervals in each study but this is not the case for the black conditions. OLS coefficients from Tables A5 and A6 column 5 are used to produce the estimates for deservingness information within white and within black conditions; column 5 demonstrates the significant marginal effect of the information condition when viewing white homeless individuals. A similar pattern emerges in the Qualtrics study for the single government effort to end homelessness item that replicates the TESS study (results in replication file), where the effect of the deservingness appeal on support for government efforts is marginally significant only among the white conditions (B = 0.057, p = 0.054), and there is no main effect of the race treatment on policy support. Further, Qualtrics study respondents report significantly more support for government efforts in each of the deservingness conditions relative to the control condition (Tables A2 and column 1 of A6).

Charitable Donation Behavior for the Homeless

Do these patterns of expressed sympathy and support for homeless policy extend to personal behaviors that will help the homeless—specifically, donating money to a homeless charity? Interestingly, in the TESS study, neither the deservingness information nor race manipulations have significant main effects on the amount of money individuals donate to the homeless charity (Fig. 3, top panel; see also Online Appendix II, Table A7). Compared to the other treatment groups, individuals in the white no information condition gave, on average, the most money to charity ($6.24 out of $10), despite expressing less support for government assistance to the homeless and generally less sympathy. In contrast, the pattern of mean donations in the Qualtrics study approximates the expressed sympathy and government support results (Fig. 3, lower panel). Here, those in the white no information condition and the control condition gave the least money to charity. Deservingness information slightly increases the mean amount donated (by about 18 cents when comparing the information conditions to the no information conditions which is about 5% of the possible $4 donation, $p < .10$, see Online Appendix II, Table A8, column 3).[13] Again, the race of the homeless individuals depicted had no significant main effect on the amount donated.

Of course, our behavioral measure of homelessness support is comprised of two decisions: (1) should the respondent contribute *any* portion of their endowment to the homeless charity, and if so (2) how much should they contribute? By looking at mean donation amounts, these two tasks are conflated. By examining the dichotomous choice to contribute any amount of their endowment to the homeless charity, we can discern whether our treatments affected the propensity to donate.[14] Propensity to donate across experimental conditions reflects the same pattern as the mean amount donated in both studies (see Fig. 4). Using a logistic regression model (see Online Appendix II, Table A7, columns 5 through 8), we find no significant differences in the predicted probability of donating across treatment groups in the TESS sample. In Qualtrics, deservingness information significantly increases the propensity to donate relative to the no information conditions (a main effect of deservingness information), but the race of the individual depicted has no effect. Specifically, the information conditions significantly increase the probability of donating at all

[13] We find a marginally significant *main* effect of deservingness information. Looking at the effects separately for those who saw white and black homeless individuals suggests deservingness cues have a somewhat larger influence when the homeless individuals in the video are white, though these effects are not significantly different by race. Here deservingness information increases mean donations by about 25 cents, an effect that approaches significance ($p = .109$). The increase in donations in the face of deservingness information when homeless individuals in the video are black, approximately 12 cents, is not statistically significant, nor is it significantly different from the effect of information in the white conditions (see Table A8, column 4). The pattern of results also suggests that there may be some small effect of simply showing individuals regardless of providing deservingness cues, as all conditions except the white no information condition had significantly higher donation levels than the control condition. See Online Appendix II, Tables A2 and A8 for more information.

[14] Given the skew in the donation variable, we also modeled three alternative versions of the donation variable beyond the two approaches (mean donation and propensity to donate at all) featured here. These are available in Online Appendix III, Tables A15 through A20, and substantively mirror the results here.

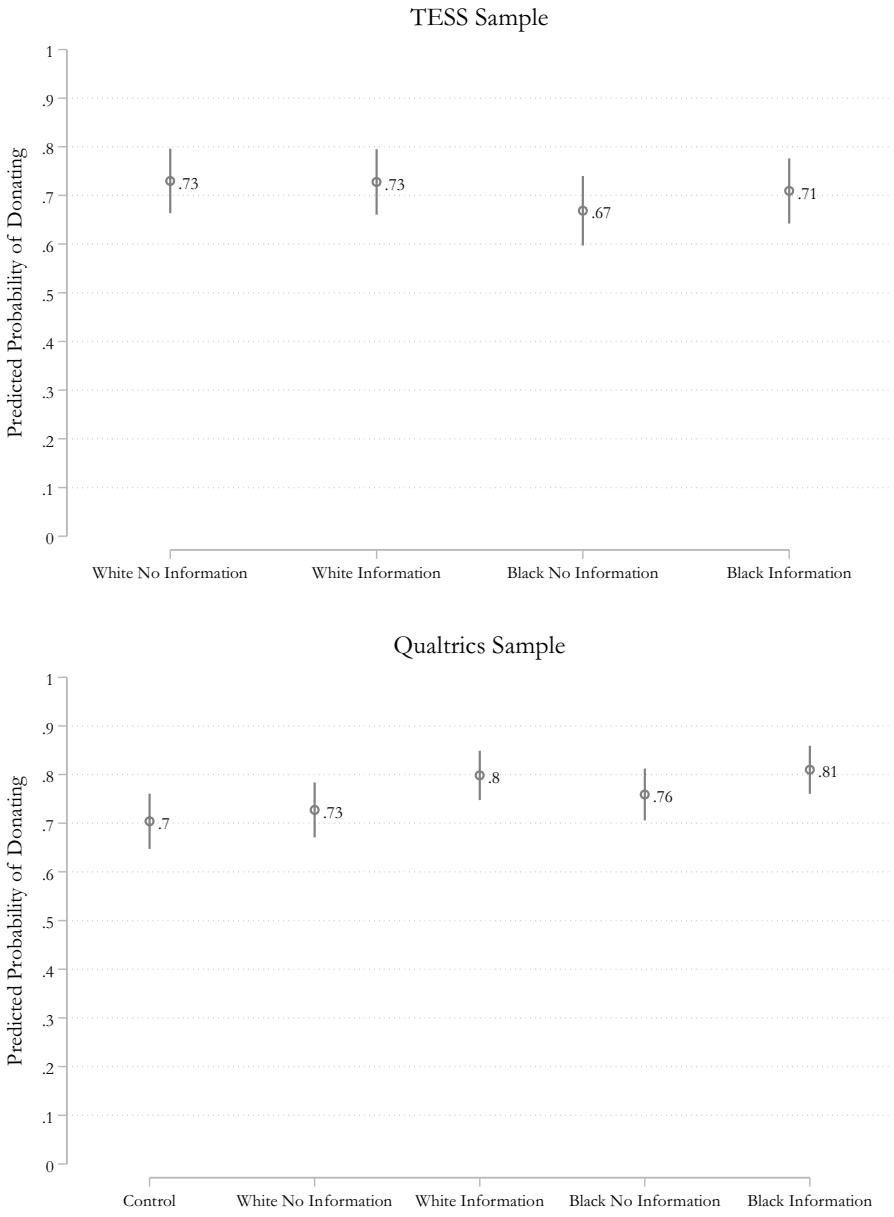

Fig. 4 Probability of donating to homeless charity across treatments. Figures present predicted probability of donating any amount by treatment condition, where the open circles represent the predicted probabilities and the bars reflect the 95% confidence intervals (Online Appendix II, Table A2 presents these values in tabular form). Tables A7 (TESS) and A8 (Qualtrics), columns 5–8 in each, assess significant differences across these treatment probabilities, and are used to test hypotheses H1, H2, and H2a

relative to the white no information condition (7.5% increase in the white information condition, $p < .1$, and 8% increase in the black information condition, $p < .05$, marginal changes in predicted probabilities based upon the logistic regression coefficients in Online Appendix II, Table A8 column 5). However, among those viewing black homeless individuals, deservingness information does not significantly increase the propensity to donate money (and this is not significantly different from the effect of information in the white conditions, see Table A8, column 8).

Taken together, these results suggest that messages which employ deservingness appeals can shape emotional response and public opinion, and can also influence behavioral monetary choices.[15] We find evidence that deservingness appeals increase one's propensity to donate as well as the mean donation amount in the Qualtrics study—results that are consistent with H2. However, this finding is not robust across samples (our treatments have no effect on donating behavior in the TESS sample). The patterns here also suggest deservingness information has a slightly larger effect when viewing the in-group (see Fig. 4 and Table A2), however there is no significant difference in the effects of deservingness based on the race of the individuals shown (i.e., no support for H2a). We find very little evidence of in-group favoritism at the aggregate level whether we are looking at donations or policy preferences (i.e., no support for H1). However, we might expect in-group bias to emerge when focusing on a measure that more directly assesses attitudes toward the target group, as we do below with the role of racial predispositions.

The Roles of Racial Attitudes and Empathetic Predispositions

We now turn to the moderating role of individual predispositions. We anticipated that the messages in our experimental treatments would resonate with respondents based upon their pre-existing racial attitudes (Qualtrics), or their latent ability to empathize with those in need (TESS). We investigate this possibility with respect to donation behavior using OLS regression models with robust standard errors for the amount donated dependent variable, and logistic regression models for the dichotomous donation choice dependent variable (see Online Appendix II, Tables A9, A9a, A10, and A10a). Each of these models regresses the dependent variable of interest on experimental condition, racial resentment (Tables A9 and A9a) or empathetic ability (Tables A10 and A10a), and their interaction, either without (columns 1 and 3) or with controls (columns 2 and 4).

The overall null pattern of treatment effects with respect to the race of the target homeless individuals on donation behaviors may reflect heterogeneous treatment effects. The extent to which one donates money to a homeless charity, when

[15] Our findings also point to some interesting differences in the antecedents of policy support and charitable giving with respect to homelessness (see Online Appendix II, Tables A5–A8). While ideology and partisanship are significant predictors of support for government efforts (with Conservatives and Republicans significantly less likely to support increased government efforts on behalf of the homeless), ideology and partisanship do not distinguish individuals in terms of their propensity for charitable giving with respect to the homeless.

presented with black homeless individuals who will benefit from that donation, should be conditional upon one's level of racial resentment. As one exhibits more racial resentment, they should donate less money when viewing black homeless individuals, but these views should not impact donating when viewing white homeless individuals.

Indeed, in the Qualtrics sample, we find patterns consistent with these expectations. In all conditions—except when viewing a deserving in-group member—we find a negative relationship between racial resentment and mean donations and probability of donating as anticipated in H3a (see Fig. 5). The relationship between resentment and donation behavior differs significantly when the homeless targets are black compared to the white information condition as anticipated in H3a (see Fig. 5 and Table A9a). This relationship appears on both ends of the racial resentment scale. Those at the low end tend to donate significantly more, and with a greater propensity, in the black information condition relative to the white information ($0.67, $p < .05$ and 14% increased probability, $p < .05$, see Table A9a) and control ($0.60, $p < .1$ and 12% increased probability, $p < .05$, see Table A9) conditions. Contrastingly, those high in racial resentment appear to donate less in the black conditions, and have a higher probability of donating at all in the white information condition (approximately an 18% increase compared to the control and both black conditions, $p < .05$, see Table A9a).[16] These results are consistent with H3a. Interestingly, racial resentment also relates to significant decreases in donation amount and propensity when no information about the race of homeless individuals is provided (i.e., control), and in the white no information condition. But, as expected, racial predispositions hold no bearing on donations when shown whites providing reasons for their homelessness. These findings reveal an asymmetry in the effectiveness of empathetic appeal messages. Such messages motivate support for blacks more so than whites among those low in racial resentment, while they motivate more support for whites than blacks among those on the upper end of the scale.

Given that our treatments specifically manipulated the attribution of homelessness to external factors in order to elicit perceptions of deservingness, and subsequently empathetic responses, empathetic ability should moderate donation decisions. Put simply, we should expect our empathy-inducing messages to increase charitable donations, but only among those who are innately capable of psychologically putting themselves into other people's shoes. In line with this expectation, individuals in our TESS study who possess greater empathetic ability (as measured by the RMET) are significantly more likely to donate in the information conditions, and donate more in all but the black no information condition compared with those low

[16] The significant negative relationship between resentment and donation behavior in all *but* the white information condition can be seen in Fig. 5 where the predicted mean donation and probability of donating at the highest level of resentment differ significantly from mean donation and probability of donating at lowest level of resentment, and by the non-significant effect of racial resentment in Table A9a. Marginal effects of the treatments relative to the white information condition were generated based upon the models in Online Appendix II, Table A9a. We find a similar pattern of effects when we substitute an alternative measure of racial affect (white feeling thermometer minus black feeling thermometer scores) for racial resentment.

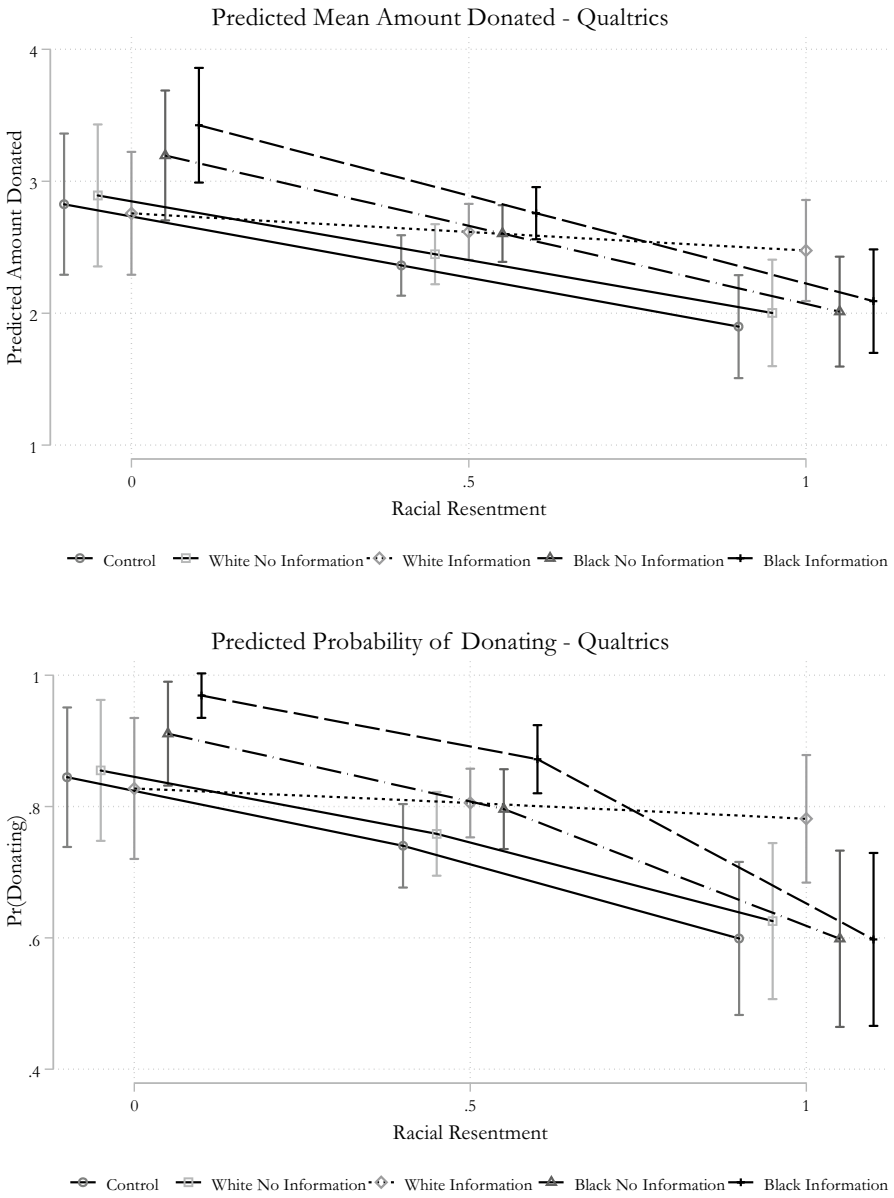

Fig. 5 Effects of racial resentment on donation behavior across treatments. Predicted values generated based on regression models in Online Appendix II, Table A9, columns 1 (top panel) and 3 (bottom panel), and are used to test hypothesis H3a. See also Table A9a. Markers with connecting lines represent predicted donation amount and predicted probability of donating by condition at the low, mid-point, and high ends of the racial resentment scale, bars show 95% confidence intervals

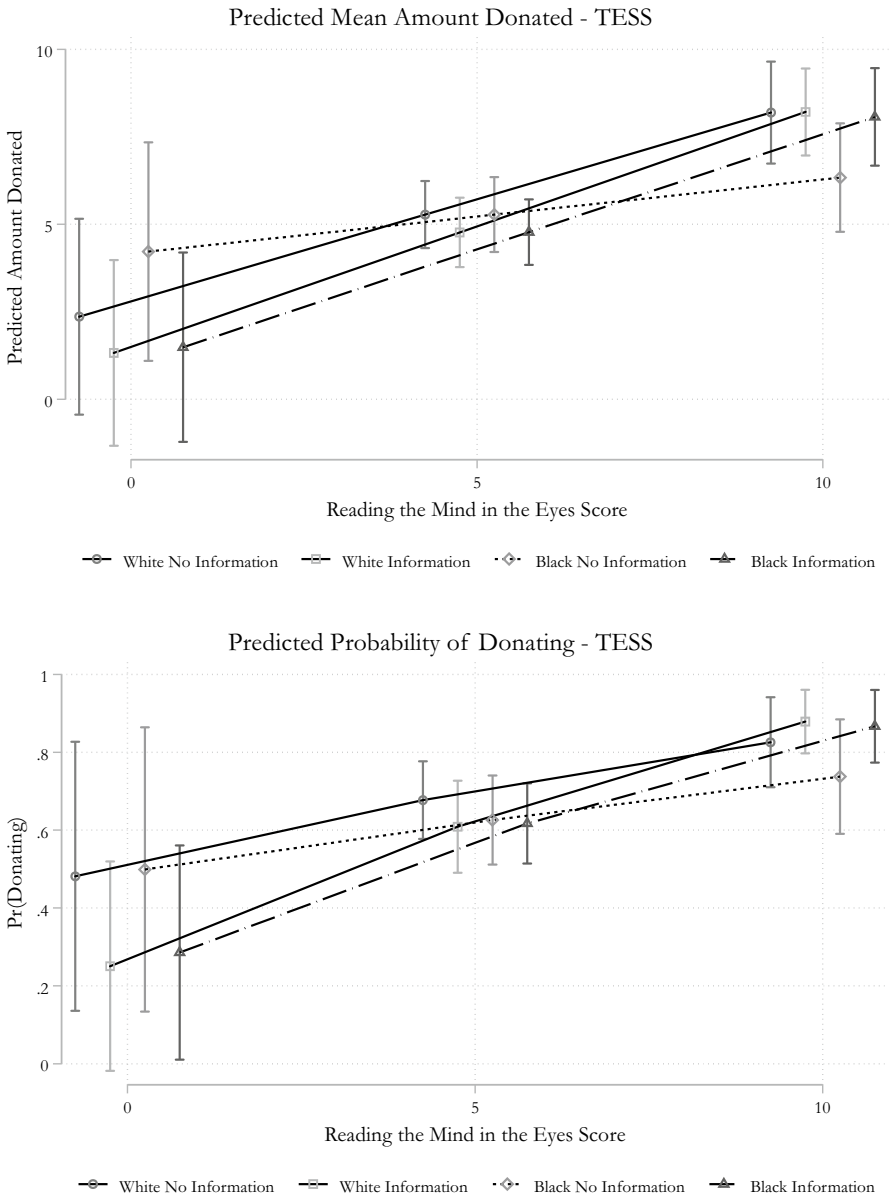

Fig. 6 Effects of empathetic ability on donation behavior across treatments. Predicted values generated based on regression models in Online Appendix II, Table A10, columns 1 (top panel) and 3 (bottom panel), and are used to test hypothesis H3b. See also Table A10a. Markers with connecting lines represent predicted donation amount and predicted probability of donating, by treatment condition at the low, mid-point, and high ends of the empathetic ability scale. Bars show 95% confidence intervals

in empathetic ability (see Fig. 6 and Table A10a).[17] Among those most in tune to other's emotional states, donations are approximately $1.85 more (at $p<.1$) in the two white conditions, and $1.73 more in the black information condition ($p=.104$) relative to the black no information condition.[18] We treat these donation patterns as weak support for H3b. Thus, one's ability to put themselves in the shoes of homeless individuals only relates to greater donations when presented with a relatable factor, such as a shared racial in-group or external reasons for being homeless.

Discussion

Do message campaigns employing humanizing appeals work to enhance support for assisting those in need? Taken together (see Table 2), our results suggest that appeals designed to enhance the perceived deservingness of homeless individuals increase support for the homeless (in support of H2). Messages that feature deservingness cues lead to increased expressions of sympathy (across two separate studies), to greater support for government efforts to help the homeless (in one study) and to increased donations and propensity to donate (in one study[19]). These results are consistent with work showing that support for spending on social welfare programs diminishes when individuals are seen as responsible for their own problems (Kluegel and Smith 1986; Skitka and Tetlock 1993) and with work highlighting the importance of deservingness cues on social welfare support (Peterson 2012; Petersen et al. 2011, 2012; Aaroe and Peterson 2014). We extend existing work highlighting the importance of deservingness in structuring opinion on social welfare by also exploring its role in motivating behavior in the form of monetary charitable giving. We also show that individual level predispositions condition message effects in expected ways (H3a and H3b). Our examination of the role of empathetic ability (as measured by RMET) also highlights the import of emotion. Those high in empathetic ability are (modestly) more likely to donate when they have a relatable factor, such as a shared racial in-group or external reasons for being homeless.

[17] These patterns are consistent with H3b, though tests offer only weak support for whether the effects are significantly different when messages include a relatable feature. The differences in donation amounts looking only among those high in empathetic ability are marginally significant; the interactive effects testing whether empathetic ability effects vary across conditions miss conventional levels of significance (see Supplemental Appendix II, Table A10a).

[18] These marginal effects of the treatments relative to the black no information condition were generated based upon the model in Online Appendix II, Table A10a, column 1.

[19] What might explain this inconsistency with respect to donations? The studies took place in two distinctly different time periods, used different sample recruitment strategies resulting in demographic distinctions between the two samples, and varied the donation amount across studies ($10 vs. $4) resulting in qualitatively distinct behavioral decisions. The pattern for donations across the two studies varies in particular with respect to the behavior of those in the white no information condition. In subsequent analyses, not shown, we weighted the two samples to make them equivalent across pretreatment covariates and re-examined the models. The overall pattern of treatment effects replicate those found with the un-weighted data.

Table 2 Summary of results across hypotheses

	DV: expressed sympathy	DV: Gov't policy support	DV: charitable donations
H1: beneficiary race matters	No TESS; yes Qualtrics	No both studies	No both studies
H2: deservingness information matters	Yes both studies	No TESS; yes Qualtrics	No TESS; yes Qualtrics
H2a: effects of deservingness information conditioned on race	No both studies[a]	Weak support both studies[b]	No both studies[c]
H3a: racial predispositions matter	N/A	N/A	Yes Qualtrics
H3b: empathetic predispositions matter	N/A	N/A	Weak support TESS

[a]The effect of deservingness cues appeared slightly larger when the depicted individuals were black as noted in the text, a pattern inconsistent with our expectation that deservingness information would have larger effects when depicted individuals were white. However, the effect of deservingness does not significantly differ based on the race of the individual depicted

[b]In both studies, when viewing white homeless individuals, deservingness information significantly increases support for government policies relative to the no deservingness information condition, whereas the effect of deservingness information is not significant when viewing black homeless individuals. However, there is no significant interaction effect. We consider the significant effect of deservingness when viewing white but not black homeless individuals across two studies weak support for H2a even though the effects of deservingness do not differ significantly by race

[c]In the Qualtrics study we see a similar pattern as we saw with policy opinion. When viewing white homeless individuals, deservingness has a marginally significant effect, whereas the deservingness effect is not significant when viewing black homeless individuals. This pattern is not replicated across studies. Furthermore, there is no significant interaction

We did not find consistent in-group preference effects, failing to support H1. Perhaps this is not all that surprising. Our inconsistencies reflect earlier work exploring the role of race in charitable giving decisions. When faced with the choice to donate money that will assist individuals in need, whether the need stems from homelessness or a national disaster (see Fong and Luttmer 2009), the race of the victims has no effect on average giving. That said, failing to support H1 does not mean that the race of the individuals featured is irrelevant. We also see important heterogeneous effects based on individual racial attitudes, and some weak support for H2a, suggesting that the race of the individuals featured can serve to contextualize deservingness messages.

Similarly, our small effects and weak support for the hypotheses may be unsurprising given the nature of our samples, experimental treatments, and set-up of the studies as a whole. We created videos designed to mimic the kind of appeal that an organization might use to raise awareness of the issue of homelessness. Yet, the nature of our deservingness information treatment (a brief statement about homeless individuals on cardboard signs) and a setting far from most participants' local communities may limit the degree to which respondents felt a genuine connection. Further, the homeless tend to be a target of dehumanization such that study participants may have more difficulty empathizing than we would find for other social welfare issues. This could easily dampen in-group preference effects. While we find effects of deservingness information on sympathy across studies (consistent with the expectation that these appeals seek to generate empathetic responses that will lead to action), this sympathy may not always translate into policy support as prior work has shown (see Gross 2008).

That said, our results suggest ways in which group and deservingness cues may nonetheless matter. First, it is reassuring that we do not find main effects of our race manipulation such that there is a systematic advantage when the beneficiaries are members of the in-group. Yet, similar to Fong and Luttmer (2009), we also find that individuals' racial biases, in this case racial resentment, condition white's donation choices. Appeals citing the external causes of homelessness, and therefore the deservingness of those needing assistance, work when the recipients come from a racial group an individual is biased towards (e.g., blacks for low racial resentment whites, and whites for high racial resentment whites). In contrast, such appeals do not change donation patterns when homeless individuals are members of a racial group people are biased against (resentful whites favor donations to deserving whites over undeserving whites, but are no more likely to donate to deserving blacks than undeserving blacks). Thus, information that provides deservingness cues may be relevant when viewing homeless individuals who do not share your racial group, but that information may not be enough to overcome bias against the group.

While our findings come from experiments with a nationally representative probability sample and an online opt-in quota sample, and include behavioral as well as attitudinal measures, they also face limitations. More should be done to closely examine the nature of deservingness cues and whether explicit undeserving cues (such as an individual story which places responsibility on the poor choices of the homeless individual) would lead to reduced support for those in need. Finally, work might explore the role of other emotions in inducing responses to messages about

those in need, and future research should examine these dynamics in the context of other issues.

Many charitable organizations use humanizing appeals to elicit sympathy and support for their cause. Our findings confirm such messages can work to engender support for assisting those in need—both in terms of enhancing support for policy and generating charitable contributions. By providing a better understanding of the types of messages that motivate support, and the role of individual characteristics in predicting responsiveness, our research has important implications for those engaged in strategic messaging. As we know from work on the effects of episodic and thematic framing, using an individual story to illustrate a problem can increase dispositional attributions and undermine support for government efforts to address problems (Iyengar 1994). By contrast, our work shows that it is the characteristics of an episodic story that may be particularly consequential. Using humanizing stories can motivate support for helping those in need but these messages must contain information that will induce sympathy rather than engage other emotional responses, like disgust. Information highlighting reasons for homelessness that suggest responsibility does not lie with the person in need appear to be key in motivating support, most likely because these messages tap into the deservingness heuristic. Organizations utilizing this strategy to induce support will do well to feature stories where the individual is not seen as responsible for their adverse circumstances. Recent work by Lausten et al. (2017) show deservingness frames are effective at moving opinion and that emotional response is the mechanism by which such frames work. Our results are consistent with theirs while also demonstrating how the effects of such messaging extend to charitable giving.

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Compliance with Ethical Standards

Ethical Approval Our studies were approved by the George Washington University Office of Human Research (TESS IRB#021510, Qualtrics IRB#021721) and all procedures were in accordance with the ethical standards of the 1964 Helsinki declaration and its later amendments or comparable ethical standards.

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