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Intersectionality and Social Welfare: Avoidance and Unequal Treatment among Transgender Women of Color

Abstract: *This research adds to the emergent literature on intersectionality and public administration through examining how transgender women of color (trans WOC) are interacting with U.S. social welfare offices. It is our contention that trans WOC, facing a compounded set of negative stereotypes derived from racial and gender identities, will be more likely than other transgender identifying persons to: (1) avoid seeking out public welfare benefits and (2) be more likely to report experiencing discriminatory treatment in social welfare offices. Using data from the 2015 U.S. Transgender Survey we uncover evidence that trans WOC are more likely to avoid social welfare offices and face discrimination in social welfare offices. Scholars and administrators of social welfare programs, including Social Security related benefits, should be aware of the potential for public benefit avoidance and administrative discrimination directed toward historically marginalized groups and prioritize social equity considerations among clients facing compounded intersectional barriers.*

Evidence for Practice

- This research offers evidence that persons with intersecting marginalized identities—identifying as both a transgender woman and a person of color—face compounded negative social constructions and prejudices around racial and gender identities, hereby influencing how these individuals will interact with U.S. social welfare offices, including social welfare avoidance and frontline administrative discrimination.
- Transgender women of color (trans WOC) are found to be significantly more likely, than other transgender identifying respondents, to both avoid seeking out social welfare benefits and more likely to report experiencing discriminatory treatment once engaged with social welfare offices. For instance, roughly 1 in 12 trans WOC report avoiding public assistance offices compared with 1 in 20 white transgender women.
- Due to disparities found in both social welfare avoidance and discriminatory treatment against trans WOC, administrators of social welfare programs should emphasize the application of an intersectional lens in social equity planning and action directed toward clients facing oppression due to the negative constructions associated with intersecting marginalized identities, such as transgender WOC.
- Practitioners could accomplish such actions through administrative efforts like inclusive outreach campaigns that include images or testimonials from trans WOC, the incorporation of implicit bias assessments to help identify organizational biases related to transgender identifying individuals, redesigned social welfare offices that emphasize inclusion, such as gender neutral restroom facilities, and increased usage of e-government benefit application tools that can reduce discriminatory face-to-face interactions.

The social construction of target populations shape policy design and administrative decisions in ways that determine who are and are not worthy of the benefits of policy outcomes (Schneider and Ingram 1993). Policy design and implementation processes send varying messages to different social groups. For those with negative social constructions, paternalistic policies are grounded in messages linked to value, virtue, and morality as social order and a desire to “better” individuals through public policy are embedded within its design (Soss 2005). This is perhaps no truer than for welfare policies (Gilens 1999; Hayat 2016; Monnat 2010;

Soss 2005; Soss, Fording, and Schram 2011; Watkins-Hayes 2009).

A voluminous literature examines the ways in which racial identity, especially Black identity, has been negatively constructed to be associated with stereotypes around sluggish work ethic and extravagant welfare usage, along with documented discriminatory challenges successfully navigating public administration systems and the U.S. social welfare system, specifically (Floyd-Thomas 2016; Gaynor 2018; Gilens 1999; Hardy, Samudra, and Davis 2019; Keiser, Mueser, and Choi 2004; Soss,

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[Correction added on 16 March 2022, after first online publication: the word ‘seeks’ in the first sentence of the Abstract section has been removed in this version.]

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Fording, and Schram 2011; Watkins-Hayes 2009). However, much less is known in the literature about how converging dimensions of identity influence social welfare outcomes. For instance, when racial identity intersects with gender nonconformity or transgender (trans) identity, how are individuals with multiple intersecting identities experiencing and engaging with the U.S. social welfare system? While lesser known, such explorations are critically important to equitable and democratic policy development and public administration as those individuals with multiple intersecting marginalized identities likely experience the brunt of inequitable effects of marginalizing and degenerative policies, in compounding ways (Hankivsky et al. 2014; Seng et al. 2012).

With the continuing documented prominence of both transgender and racial discrimination, the explicit oppression of Black and other transgender women of color (WOC), low-wage and unstable employment opportunities, and widening income and wealth inequality in the United States, transgender people of color are more likely to report experiencing unemployment and poverty spells than the general population, including the general transgender population (James et al. 2016). Yet, little is known regarding transgender experiences with the U.S. social welfare system, including the engagement (or not) with public social welfare offices. In this investigation, situated within the social welfare context, we choose to focus on trans WOC. Female-headed households in the United States, particularly those headed by a woman of color, are more at-risk for experiencing poverty spells and more likely to participate in means-tested social welfare programs (Tucker and Lowell 2016). For instance, a January 2018 report from the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics found that, “among all one-parent families receiving assistance, nearly 94 percent had a female household head” (Foster and Rojas 2018, 2). Similarly, a 2014 Urban Institute report found that approximately 90 percent of families receiving multiple means-tested benefits were one-parent families headed by a woman (Edelstein, Pergamit, and Ratcliffe 2014). Women and WOC, in particular, experience unique barriers and concerns around experiencing material hardship and a likely magnified need to participate in ameliorative social welfare programs (Anzaldúa and Moraga 1981; Richard 2014; Savas 2010). In turn, trans WOC are the intersectional focus of our study.

This research builds upon a growing literature that examines issues of intersectionality and social construction in public administration. Consequently, this article argues that the negative social constructions associated with intersecting marginalized identities, in particular, those associated with identifying as trans WOC, induces negative interactions with U.S. public social welfare offices. Further, we seek to understand if trans WOC choose to engage with public social welfare offices at all. In this article, we argue and find evidence that trans WOC, relative to other trans identifying persons like white trans women, are more likely to both avoid seeking out public social welfare offices and are also more likely to face discriminatory treatment or be denied services when engaging with social welfare offices.

Our investigation seeks to first understand the role of intersectionality and negative social constructions on social welfare outcomes for trans WOC. Second, we draw connections between the discriminatory treatment experienced by trans WOC and their

avoidance of social welfare offices. We then test these theories using data collected from the 2015 U.S. Transgender Survey. We find that trans WOC are more likely to report experiencing discrimination and thus, more likely to avoid interactions with social welfare offices, than their white and male transgender counterparts. Finally, we offer administrative and management insights for a path forward.

Intersectionality of Social Identity

Legal scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989) coined the theoretical concept of intersectionality and refers to the ways in which Black women experience race and gender in oppressive contexts. The application of an intersectional perspective, particularly in the context of policy design and implementation, allows for a more complex and critical analysis of the impact of said policy on these women—women who experience the compounded oppression associated with degenerative public policy (Blessett 2020; Gaynor 2018; Gaynor and Blessett 2021a, 2021b). Crenshaw (1989) argued,

Because the intersectional experience is greater than the sum of racism and sexism, any analysis that does not take intersectionality into account cannot sufficiently address the particular manner in which Black women are subordinated. Thus, for feminist theory and antiracist policy discourse to embrace the experiences and concerns of Black women, the entire framework that has been used as a basis for translating “women’s experience” or “the Black experience” into concrete policy demands must be rethought and recast (140).

Black feminist, critical race, and queer theories, among others, argue the application of an intersectional lens allows administrators to recognize the ways in which having multiple, marginalized identities force one to navigate multiple and interacting systems of oppression (Bearfield 2009; Butler 1990; Collins 2009; hooks 2000; Zuberi 2010). For trans WOC, in particular, they must navigate (at least) sexism, transphobia, racism, and depending on one’s (perceived) citizenship status, xenophobia simultaneously. The application of intersectionality within public decision-making processes and/or the implementation of public programs invites nuance and can reframe administrators’ practices to include a multi-axis perspective and approach.

Policy design and administrative practice continue to be rooted in white supremacist thinking (Crenshaw et al. 1995; Delgado and Stefancic 2000; hooks 2000). Consequently, this centers the experiences of those deemed “normal” in U.S. society while ignoring or diminishing the experiences of those who identify outside these norms. In challenging societal norms, queer theorists, for example, confront normative conceptions and binary definitions of gender and highlight how privilege is afforded to those who fit neatly into binaries and exclusion for those who do not (Butler 1990; McDonald 2015). For those outside the “norm,” the marginalization they experience from these experiences leads to grave injustice and oversight by government agencies. hooks (2013, 4) argues that intersectionality contextualizes marginalization within an “imperialist white supremacist capitalist patriarchy” while also unveiling the multiple manifestations of oppression across multiple identity axes. Therefore, using an intersectional lens

offers a counterperspective to dominate white supremacist policy design and program implementation (Crenshaw 1989; Crenshaw et al. 1995). Furthermore, an intersectional perspective illuminates experiences occurring within the overlapping matrices of oppression and understands the complexity of identity and how this complexity shapes one's interactions with public agencies and administrators.

Social Constructions and Intersectionality

Social constructions serve as conceptual maps or mental images that shape one's understanding of the world and its social problems (Gaynor 2018). In the context of policy development and implementation, they operate to determine who is and is not deserving of policy protections and benefits (Schneider and Ingram 1993). Sociologists have long studied the social construction of social problems and scholars in other fields like media studies, gender studies, health, social work, and others have explored the social construction of crime, reality, race, and gender. Perhaps one of the most salient examples illustrating variance in social construction relates to the consumption and sale of marijuana. As of this writing, recreational marijuana is legal in several countries and 15 U.S. states plus Washington, DC. The distribution, sale, and consumption of marijuana are therefore constructed differently, depending upon one's location. Even within the states where recreational use is legal, the dominant constructions of those incarcerated for marijuana related offenses and those who own dispensaries or grow cannabis are vastly different. Where the former, largely people of color, are negatively constructed as undeserving criminals and deviants and the latter, largely white people or white-led organizations, are seen as deserving entrepreneurs with legitimate business endeavors. The differences in the ways in which each group is constructed—suggesting one is criminal and the other is not—leads to, among other things, disproportionate and negative interactions with the criminal legal system, economic sanctions, a criminal record that drastically reduces employment options and economic mobility, and negatively impacts on the broader community, for the same behaviors.

Negative social constructions of crime, criminality, and deviance are often associated with Black people, those in the LGBTQ community, and the Black LGBTQ community (Gaynor and Blessett 2021a, 2021b). Black transwomen and trans WOC are regularly associated with crime and deviance, particularly, as there is often an innate association between these identities and engagement in sex work or survival sex (Amnesty International 2005; Mogul, Ritchie, and Whitlock 2011). In Louisiana, for instance, Black transwomen were disproportionately impacted by the Crimes Against Nature Statute (CANS). “While African American women are 30 percent of the population of Orleans parish, they comprised 80 percent of the registered sex offender list. Of all registered female sex offenders in Orleans Parish, 97.91 percent were registered only as a result of a Solicitation of Crimes Against Nature (SCAN) conviction” (Barlow 2017, 74). In New York, the Loitering for the Purpose of Prostitution law has overwhelmingly impacted Black, Latine, and immigrant women. In both cases, “walking while trans” and conviction under CANS have resulted in unjust interactions with police that include arrest, harassment and violence, and sex offender registry (Human Rights Campaign 2020). The administrative evils that weaponize unflattering constructions associated with intersecting racial and gender identities (and

oftentimes sexual orientation), within the context of policy and administration, continue to lead to negative and disproportionate interactions with social systems for trans WOC in particular (Alkadry and Blessett 2010).

According to the 2015 U.S. Transgender Survey, “the largest survey examining the experiences of transgender people in the United States” (James et al. 2016, 4), trans WOC experience the most marginalization of all survey respondents. While all transgender survey respondents report substantial levels of mistreatment across multiple areas of life, respondents of color (e.g., Black, Latine, American Indian and Alaska Native, Asian, Native Hawaiian, and Pacific Islander) almost always reported higher levels of disparity and discrimination than their white trans counterparts. These disparities are evident in policing practices and engagement with the healthcare, education, and other social systems in the United States. Understanding the ways in which social groups are positively and negatively constructed, how these constructions structure policy implications, and how to apply an intersectional lens when designing and implementing policies, including welfare policy initiatives, are imperative for meaningful social equity practices in public administration. A polity and an administration that not only ignore intersectionality but also attempt to apply a single axis framework to policy design and implementation—as can be seen with status quo public policy—risks perpetuating, or worse, deepening disparity and inequity for those with intersecting marginalized identities.

Research Context: Social Welfare

Sustained economic and material hardship disproportionately exist among trans WOC (see U.S. Transgender Survey 2015), yet little is known about social welfare engagement and outcomes occurring among this historically marginalized group. It is not clear whether vulnerable groups, like trans WOC, are choosing to engage with public social welfare offices, or what their experiences are in terms of welfare office functioning, including case manager decision-making and discrimination, and if the outcomes for trans WOC differ from those of other trans identifying individuals, such as white trans women. The potent and enduring negative social constructions associated with trans WOC are exhibited in disparities on most, if not all, quality of life indicators and likely lead to heightened barriers to accessing public services (James et al. 2016). Given the disparate impacts experienced by trans WOC in education, employment, police interactions, housing, among other areas, one can assert such disparities and difficulties are also likely to present themselves in achieving equitable social welfare outcomes.

There is a limited body of literature in public administration exploring issues related to transgender identity, broadly. Within the existing literature, discussions relate to the relationship between social construction and state violence (Gaynor 2018), federal workforce policies (Elias 2017; Federman and Elias 2017), local government protections (Sellers 2014), transgender competence in curriculum (Johnson 2011), experiences in gendered restrooms (Herman 2013), trans inclusive municipal laws (Colvin 2007), and equitable policy development (Taylor 2007). However, there is little to no research that explores access to, interactions with, or benefits of social welfare for those identifying as transgender. Furthermore, little to no research focuses on the lived experiences of trans WOC

and their street-level interactions with public administrators and public agencies. While other fields like public health, medical sciences (including nursing), and social work have examined, more extensively, the needs of people who identify as transgender, minimal research explores transgender perspectives in social welfare arenas and the experiences of transgender people in social welfare contexts that provide redistributive material benefits to citizen clients. In fact, scholarly conversations of social welfare and trans identity largely focus on the experiences of transgender youth and child welfare system with less attention on adults seeking public assistance programs and relief benefits (Fish et al. 2019; Irvine and Canfield 2015; Sellers 2018). There are a priori reasons that suggest trans WOC are less likely to choose to initially engage with social welfare offices. Thus, the intersection of racial and gender identity could work to form compounded barriers that limit successfully pursuing and acquiring public assistance from the U.S. social safety net.

Transgender WOC and Unequal Treatment in Social Welfare Offices

While prejudice toward trans WOC doubtless occurs across multiple levels of governance including macro-level institutions and office holders, public employees, and administrative organizations, this study focuses on understudied areas of street-level engagement and interactions between trans WOC and public social welfare offices. Flowing logically from our prior discussion, we assert that trans WOC will not only be more likely to avoid seeking out public welfare benefits but will also be more likely to experience discriminatory treatment after visiting social welfare offices. Scholars of public administration argue that frontline bureaucrats have “discretion” or flexibility in situational decision-making and selective enforcement of program rules (Lipsky 2010; Maynard-Moody and Portillo 2010; Tummers and Bekkers 2014; Vinzant, Denhardt, and Crothers 1998). Additionally, implementation scholars argue that client characteristics also shape administrative behavior and discretionary treatment toward certain clientele groups (Ingraham and Lynn 2004; Scott 1997; Soss 2005). For instance, Maynard-Moody and Musheno (2003, 156) state that “if street-level workers judge citizen-clients as unworthy—as ‘bad guys’—then rules are used to withhold or minimize services or at times to punish, even to be brutal.”

Transgender individuals face decidedly negative social constructions within society, including themes of deviance and undeservingness of public assistance. Sellers (2018) demonstrates that transgender youth face negative stigma and unflattering behavioral stereotypes, heightening conflict with child welfare providers leading to elevated levels of homelessness. Sellers (2020) also notes that President Trump’s rhetoric toward transgender individuals took a more negative and caustic tone than that of previous presidential administrations, including moving to ban transgender individuals from serving in the U.S. military. Transgender individuals in the United States are routinely associated with criminality and criminal behavior. Mogul, Ritchie, and Whitlock (2011) argue that the association between transgender identity and criminality is so pervasive that categorizing such claims as a stereotype does not properly convey its integration into society. Rather, the association of criminality with individuals of the transgender experience is more akin to an archetype than a stereotype. “It is the enduring product

of persistent melding of homosexuality and gender nonconformity with concepts of *danger, degeneracy, deception, disease, contagion, sexual predation, depravity, subversion, encroachment, treachery, and violence*” (Mogul, Ritchie, and Whitlock 2011, 23) that fosters an archetype of criminality and deviance. In turn, these negative stereotypes should matter to unequal or uncharitable caseworker treatment of trans individuals in social welfare offices that potentially denies services and benefits.

Next, people of color, especially Black individuals, also face a distinct negative social construction within society. Anti-Black attitudes around inferior work ethic and intelligence remain present and were inflamed during the Obama Administration (Yadon and Piston 2019) and explicitly advanced in the Trump administration. Public opinion research has demonstrated that the negative racial stereotype of Black people as lacking work ethic motivates white opposition to welfare spending more so than rival predictors like political ideology or economic self-interest (Dyck and Hussey 2008; Gilens 1999). Additionally, while overt Jim Crow biological racism has subsided among white people in U.S. society, scholars argue that a newer, “kinder, gentler” form of anti-Black racism has arisen known as *laissez faire racism*, blaming Black people for their continued inferior economic and social position due to cultural deficiencies, such as lack of work ethic or personal responsibility (Bobo, Kluegel, and Smith 1997). A similar attitudinal concept related but not exclusive to anti-Black sentiment, known as “racial resentment,” also taps into stereotypes around extravagant or unwarranted welfare usage and subsequent undeservingness of Black people to receive social welfare benefits and has been found to shape the policy preferences of white U.S. citizens (Smith, Kreitzer, and Suo 2020; Tuch and Hughes 2011).

Similar to transgender individuals, pervasive stereotypes around criminality and inherent deviance also exist for people of color, especially Black and Latine individuals (Alexander 2012; Peffley 2008). Such perceptions are not surprising as they are grounded within the same constructions that underlie degenerative policy development and implementation. Schneider and Ingram (1997) argue that target populations determined to be undeserving and lacking political power are negatively constructed as deviants or dependents, justifying policy and administrative decisions that impose burdens on program clients. Both transgender individuals and persons of color face decidedly negative social constructions within society, including themes of deviance and undeservingness that likely extend directly to public assistance programs (Hayat 2016; Soss, Fording, and Schram 2011; Watkins-Hayes 2009). For instance, numerous evaluation studies examining the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) cash assistance program find that punitive program outcomes, such as case sanctioning and removal of cash benefits, are more prevalent among female clients of color (Monnat 2010; Pipinis 2017; Soss, Fording, and Schram 2011). In short, negative social construction, negative stereotyping, and resulting unflattering mental images shaping frontline administrative practices should project stinginess and punishment in their discretionary behavior toward trans WOC vis-à-vis other trans identifying groups, such as white trans women. In turn, we expect trans WOC to report experiencing unequal treatment or refusal of service in public social welfare offices with higher frequency than other trans identifying persons.

This could manifest through outright refusal to provide service or benefits or potentially through punitive administrative tools like case sanctioning that functionally deprive benefits and could be perceived and reported as discriminatory action by trans WOC.

Moreover, core aspects of contemporary U.S. social welfare policy reforms passed in the 1990s, especially public assistance programs like TANF and the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) oftentimes, involve strict “workfare” rules that require continuous work participation in order to remain in program compliance and successfully receive welfare benefits (Butz 2016; Soss, Fording, and Schram 2011). Trans WOC are likely to disproportionately struggle to locate full-time employment opportunities and maintain consistency in welfare program compliance, most pointedly those official program rules related to demanding work requirements. The 2015 U.S. Transgender Survey reveals that one in five Black respondents (20 percent) were unemployed (compared to 15 percent in the overall survey sample) and 22 percent of trans WOC respondents were unemployed, much higher than levels for other demographic groups (James et al. 2016). Further, trans WOC are far more likely than their trans counterparts to report being fired from a job because of their gender identity. Forty-seven percent of trans WOC survey respondents indicated that they had been “fired, denied promotion, and/or not hired in the past year because of being transgender” (James, Brown, and Wilson 2017, 11). These discriminatory outcomes related to obtaining and maintaining employment for trans WOC highlight a potential relationship between program requirements and determinations of welfare program violation. These data also help to further illustrate the reasons why trans WOC are likely to be disproportionately subjected to negative discretionary treatment among frontline welfare providers and program case managers, who can choose to extend, withhold, or limit certain benefits, such as the decision to grant hardship exemptions to workfare requirements (Soss, Fording, and Schram 2011). In turn, trans WOC are expected to be more likely to report experiencing discriminatory treatment or refusal of benefits or service in social welfare offices.

Data and Methods

The data used in this study come from the 2015 U.S. Transgender Survey sponsored by the National Center for Transgender Equality. The survey stands alone in both its respondent size and breadth of questions. In total, there are 27,715 trans identifying survey respondents (U.S. Transgender Survey 2015) allowing for a unique investigation into an understudied marginalized population in the United States.¹ As discussed earlier in the article, issues of intersectionality and transgender identity have been largely ignored in the public administration and public affairs literatures. Thus, we seek to add to that limited body of knowledge and offer policy and administrative lessons for greater inclusion of trans WOC into U.S. social welfare services.

Dependent Variables: Avoidance and Unequal Treatment in Social Welfare Offices

The 2015 Transgender Survey contains two particular survey items of interest that tap into different aspects of social welfare utilization and treatment experienced in public social welfare offices. As previously discussed, there are a priori reasons to assert that transgender WOC, more so than other trans identifying persons,

such as white trans women, are both more likely to avoid seeking public benefits and also be denied equal treatment when engaging with social welfare offices. An initial survey question asks about the *avoidance of public assistance/government benefit offices and Social Security offices in the past year* (Yes, avoided this place = 1; No, did not avoid this place = 0). An additional survey question asks those who have visited social welfare offices about being *denied equal treatment or denied service in a public assistance office or Social Security office in the past year* (Yes, denied equal treatment or service = 1; No, was not denied equal treatment or service = 0).²

These questions from the survey instrument are listed below and are used as dependent variables of interest throughout the empirical analysis. Because of the binary, event nature of the dependent variables (avoid social welfare = 1 or not = 0; experience unequal treatment = 1 or not = 0), we present the logistic regression analysis.

Question #1: “*In the past year, did you NOT visit or use services at these places because you thought you would be mistreated as a trans person?*”³

- a. Public assistance/government benefits office (such as SNAP, WIC)
- b. Social security office (such as for name or gender change, social security card, public benefits)⁴

Question #2: “*In the past year, when you visited or used services at these places [1. public assistance/government benefits office; 2. Social Security office], did any of these things happen to you because you are trans?*”

- a. Denied equal treatment or service⁵

Independent Variables

Our primary independent variable of interest in this study concerns identifying as a trans WOC (or not). First, we created an encompassing *transgender WOC* variable that combines: Black, Latine/Hispanic, Asian, Native American/Indigenous, Alaskan, Hawaiian, Middle Eastern, and multiracial transgender women into one umbrella category of transgender WOC.⁶ In order to be included in this measure, the survey respondent needed to affirmatively identify as both a trans woman and as a person of color in the survey. Identifying as a trans WOC = 1 (or not = 0) is the primary independent variable of interest in the statistical analysis presented below.

We also include 10 individual-level control variables in the logistic regression analysis: *age, employment status, education level, household income, partner status, poverty status, homelessness, disability status, citizenship status, and sexual orientation*. Our broad aim is to control for relevant markers of vulnerability that can potentially influence the likelihood of avoiding social welfare offices or experiencing unequal treatment in social welfare offices. First, age could potentially be an important determinant of avoiding social welfare as younger individuals would be less likely to have prior experiences with social welfare systems or potentially have negative experiences with child welfare providers and will be less likely to engage with social welfare offices and more likely to experience unequal treatment (McNeish 1999; Mawn et al. 2017). Respondents with lower levels of education are expected to endure inferior social welfare experiences and be more likely to avoid social welfare offices

and experience unequal treatment (Monnat 2010). Additionally, those experiencing homelessness, noncitizens, disabled, and those without a partner might lack necessary supportive structures and face unique barriers and potentially be less likely to successfully engage with social welfare offices (Nam 2011; Perreira, Yoshikawa, and Oberlander 2018; Weng and Clark 2018). Poverty status is an especially important control because lower income transgender respondents are likely among the most vulnerable populations, are more readily eligible for redistributive social welfare programs, and controlling directly for low-income status will better isolate the independent effects of the primary trans WOC variable. As a robustness check for the welfare office avoidance models, we performed the analysis with only lower income transgender respondents—those near or below poverty line. Unsurprisingly, the findings mirrored those found with the models in which poverty was controlled directly. Thus, we present the fully specified model that includes all trans respondents in the survey and controls for poverty, homelessness, disability, etc., as opposed to performing the analysis with only a subset of lower income trans respondents.

Lastly, in performing t-testing, there are statistically significant differences observed between trans WOC and other trans respondents across all 10 control variables (see Tables A1 and A2 in Appendix), suggesting potential threats to internal validity and accurate causal inference. For clarification, it might be other systematic differences in respondent characteristics like age, socioeconomic status, etc. that are driving avoidance and unequal treatment outcomes, not trans WOC identity directly or distinctly. Put another way, trans WOC respondents in the survey, relative to other transgender identifying respondents, might be younger in age on average or be more likely to experience homelessness, and it is those underlying systematic differences in treatment versus comparison groups that explain social welfare outcomes, not identifying as trans WOC as an independent social characteristic. That said, the differences observed across control variables are oftentimes relatively small, substantively. For instance, trans WOC are 28.25 years old on average, while all other trans respondents are 31.56 years on average, and all other trans women respondents are 32.57 years old on average. Differences in mean education and income levels between trans WOC and other trans identifying respondents are even smaller. We are of the mindset that controlling for relevant variables in well-specified regression models that include all survey respondents represents the approach that will produce efficient and accurate empirical results.

Findings

Transgender WOC and the Avoidance of Social Welfare Offices

The first stage of the empirical analysis centers on trans WOC and the avoidance of public social welfare offices, including public assistance/government benefits and Social Security offices. Additionally, due to unique histories of oppression and marginalization, we undertook a separate analysis of Black and Indigenous trans women. In a general sense, the findings for Black and Indigenous trans women mirror the findings for the more encompassing trans WOC variable and do not provide any particular deviations or insights from the baseline analysis for all trans WOC. Put another way, Black and Indigenous trans women are seemingly not experiencing especially distinctive or particularly deleterious social welfare–related outcomes relative to other trans

Table 1 Logistic Regression Analysis of Avoidance of Public Assistance Offices among Trans Women of Color (WOC)

Independent Variables	Comparison Groups			
	<i>All Trans Respondents</i>	Odds Ratio	<i>All Trans Women</i>	Odds Ratio
	Beta (SE)	Odds; sig.		
Trans WOC Probability (1) = Probability (0) =	.531 (0.125) .0682	1.700 (0.000)	0.547 (0.134) .0867	1.782 (0.000)
Age	0.006 (0.004)	1.006 (0.109)	0.007 (0.005)	1.007 (0.110)
Education	−0.303 (0.060)	0.738 (0.000)	−0.342 (0.075)	0.711 (0.000)
Partner	0.218 (0.092)	1.243 (0.018)	0.198 (0.116)	1.219 (0.088)
Employed	−0.040 (0.097)	0.960 (0.678)	0.028 (0.122)	1.029 (0.818)
Income	−0.125 (0.044)	0.882 (0.004)	−0.156 (0.056)	0.856 (0.005)
Poverty	0.385 (0.128)	1.470 (0.003)	0.230 (0.163)	1.259 (0.158)
Homeless	1.660 (0.104)	5.257 (0.000)	1.839 (0.129)	6.288 (0.000)
Disability	0.541 (0.095)	10.717 (0.000)	0.546 (0.120)	1.726 (0.000)
Noncitizen	−0.070 (0.082)	0.932 (0.395)	−0.072 (0.100)	0.931 (0.470)
LGB (gay)	0.019 (0.100)	1.019 (0.848)	−0.060 (0.127)	0.942 (0.638)
Log likelihood		4,512.67		2,782.59
Chi ²		432.81		310.65
Prob > Chi ²		<i>p</i> < .01		<i>p</i> < .01
Pseudo R ²		0.197		0.211
N		21,711		13,337

Table 2 Logistic Regression Analysis of Avoidance of Social Security Offices among Trans Women of Color (WOC)

Independent Variables	Comparison Groups			
	<i>All Trans Respondents</i>	Odds Ratio	<i>All Trans Women</i>	Odds Ratio
	Beta (SE)	Odds; sig.		
Trans WOC Probability (1) = Probability (0) =	0.271 (0.103) .1223	1.312 (0.008)	0.392 (0.110) .1265	1.480 (0.000)
Age	−0.015 (0.003)	0.985 (0.000)	−0.008 (0.004)	0.992 (0.066)
Education	−0.230 (0.047)	0.794 (0.000)	−0.271 (0.061)	0.762 (0.000)
Partner	0.094 (0.071)	1.098 (0.188)	0.094 (0.094)	1.099 (0.316)
Employed	−0.056 (0.076)	0.945 (0.457)	−0.108 (0.098)	0.898 (0.269)
Income	−0.085 (0.034)	0.921 (0.016)	−0.132 (0.045)	0.876 (0.003)
Poverty	0.064 (0.099)	1.066 (0.519)	−0.042 (0.131)	0.959 (0.750)
Homeless	1.101 (0.091)	3.009 (0.000)	1.149 (0.118)	3.156 (0.000)
Disability	0.545 (0.074)	1.725 (0.000)	0.612 (0.096)	1.844 (0.000)
Noncitizen	0.0347 (0.056)	1.037 (0.515)	0.052 (0.068)	1.053 (0.4502)
LGB (gay)	0.006 (0.078)	1.006 (0.941)	0.076 (0.104)	1.079 (0.464)
Log likelihood		6,802.12		4,000.53
Chi ²		368.34		248.34
Prob > Chi ²		<i>p</i> < .01		<i>p</i> < .01
Pseudo R ²		0.161		0.168
N		19,949		12,344

WOC, such as Latine, Asian, or Middle Eastern trans women. Thus, the findings presented below focus on the more encompassing trans WOC variable that includes all nonwhite racial groups.

Tables 1 and 2 display the findings of logistic regression analysis for both the avoidance of public assistance/government benefits offices in the past year (table 1) and the avoidance of Social Security offices in the past year (table 2). The analyses are performed with two data selections or comparison groups in mind. First, we compared the avoidance outcomes of trans WOC against *all* other trans

identifying survey respondents. Secondly, we compared trans WOC exclusively against only other trans women in the survey (i.e., trans WOC compared against white trans women). Thus, there are two model estimations for comparison presented for each dependent variable presented below: (1) all other trans respondents and (2) all other trans women respondents.

The one theme that immediately stands out in the avoidance logistic regression estimations is the consistent statistical significance of the trans WOC variable, even after controlling for several rival predictors of welfare office avoidance, including poverty status, experiencing homelessness in the past year, age, education level, and disability status. The trans WOC coefficient is positive and statistically significant in each estimation related to the avoidance of public assistance/government benefits office (table 1) and the avoidance of Social Security offices (table 2). The dominant and most important finding throughout these initial logistic regression estimations is that *trans WOC are more likely to report avoiding public assistance/government benefits offices and Social Security offices in the past year than other transgender identifying respondents, including when compared exclusively against white trans women*. These findings support our core theoretical expectations around intersectionality and social welfare avoidance—that due to compounded, intersecting marginalized identities, trans WOC are more likely to avoid seeking public welfare benefits than other trans identifying persons, especially relative to white trans women. This represents a significant and groundbreaking finding in the literatures of intersectionality, social equity, U.S. social welfare, and public administration. This also represents a call to action for public affairs scholars and practitioners that any efforts at enhancing social equity will need to be explicit in addressing issues of intersectionality, with a focus on how compounded marginalized identities shape social welfare outcomes.

To better understand the exact magnitudes of social welfare avoidance between trans WOC and other trans identifying groups, odds ratios can allow for more precise estimates of effects. For instance, examining the odds ratios in table 1, identifying as trans WOC is predicted to increase the odds of avoiding a public assistance/benefits office by 70 percent when compared with all other trans respondents, and 78.2 percent when compared against white trans women. While not as dramatic, this same pattern holds for reporting the avoidance of Social Security offices. Identifying as trans WOC is associated with 31.2 percent and 48.0 percent increased odds of avoiding a Social Security office when compared with all trans respondents and white trans women, respectively. Odds ratios provide an insightful initial view of statistical relationships but are ultimately somewhat difficult to interpret substantively. Therefore, we also generated predicted probabilities for the trans WOC variable. The predicted probabilities suggest that meaningful differences in welfare avoidance exist between trans WOC and other trans identifying respondents.⁷

For instance, in the initial avoidance model in table 1 that includes all trans respondents, trans WOC are predicted to have a modest 6.82 percent chance of avoiding a public assistance/government benefits office; however, this figure represents a 42.2 percent increased likelihood over all other trans respondents, who are predicted to have a 3.94 percent chance of reporting

welfare avoidance. In the comparative model with only trans women respondents, trans WOC are predicted to have an 8.67 percent chance of avoiding a public assistance/government benefit office, relative to a 4.79 percent chance for other trans women, representing a 44.75 percent increased likelihood of avoiding a public assistance/government benefits office. This suggests that roughly 1 in 12 trans WOC report avoiding public assistance offices, while roughly 1 in 20 white trans women report public assistance avoidance.

Interestingly, the Social Security office avoidance models (table 2) suggest an overall higher probability of reporting avoidance among survey respondents but smaller *comparative* differences between trans WOC and other trans identifying respondents. For instance, in table 2 estimations, trans WOC are predicted to have a 12.23 percent and 12.65 percent chance of reporting Social Security office avoidance. This represents a substantially higher overall expected likelihood of reporting avoidance than in the initial public assistance/government benefits office models; however, this only represents a 31.97 percent increased likelihood of avoidance relative to all other trans respondents (probability = .0832), and 31.3 percent increased likelihood of avoidance relative to white trans women (probability = .0869). Put another way, this suggests that roughly 1 in 8 trans WOC will report avoiding a Social Security office, while 1 in 12 respondents among other trans identifying groups report Social Security avoidance.

In a general sense, trans WOC are more likely to report avoiding all public social welfare offices more often than other trans respondents. Overall levels of Social Security office avoidance are larger; however, we do observe that the comparative likelihood of avoidance among trans WOC (i.e., probabilities of avoidance when compared with other trans respondents and trans women respondents) is notably smaller for Social Security offices than public assistance offices. Social Security office visits are likely multifaceted, involving potential name changes or official changes to gender identity, and do not necessarily entail only seeking public welfare-related benefits like Social Security retirement income, Supplemental Security Income (SSI), or Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI). This could be one reason that overall levels of avoidance are higher because there are more potential reasons to visit a Social Security office. However, because Social Security visits do not necessarily or exclusively entail seeking material benefits or sustained street-level case manager interactions like those in public assistance offices, there is potentially less pressure for trans WOC to avoid Social Security offices than public assistance offices (relative to other trans identifying individuals). Moreover, Social Security-related benefits like SSI or SSDI likely have reduced stigma as “welfare” usage than other public assistance programs like TANF, SNAP, and Medicaid. Thus, while we do observe trans WOC with heightened proclivity to avoid Social Security offices relative to other trans identifying respondents (see table 2), the findings overall do suggest reduced comparative differences between trans WOC and other trans respondents.

Overall, this evidence suggests that trans WOC are significantly more likely to avoid seeking out public social welfare offices than other trans identifying survey respondents, including or even especially relative to white trans women. We theorize that

this is due to the multiple intersecting marginalized identities of trans WOC, which likely leads trans WOC to internalize that they will be treated poorly in social welfare offices due to their combination of marginalized gender and racial identities—being both a trans woman *and* a person of color. The fear/anxiety of magnified compounded discrimination likely keeps trans WOC from engaging with social welfare offices to begin with, relative to other trans identifying individuals. This initial analysis of social welfare office avoidance is clear and compelling. Trans WOC are significantly more likely to report avoiding public assistance/government benefits offices and Social Security offices than other trans identifying persons. Compounded marginalized identities—identifying as both a trans woman *and* a person of color—seemingly play an important role in the likelihood of deciding to pursue public benefits and social insurance programs that reduce material hardship.

Transgender WOC and Equal Treatment in Social Welfare Offices

Tables 3 and 4 report the logistic regression estimations for reporting being denied equal treatment or services in social welfare offices (or not). The patterns observed for trans WOC are similar to those observed for the avoidance models. In the equal treatment logistic regression estimations reported in tables 3 and 4, we observe statistically significant coefficients for the trans WOC variable in a theorized positive direction. However, the predicted probabilities suggest an overall modest chance of reporting unequal treatment, especially within Social Security offices.

In table 3 that examines the denial of equal treatment or services in a public assistance/government benefits office, the trans WOC variable is positive and achieves statistical significance when compared against all trans respondents ($p = .034$) and similarly when compared against white trans women respondents, albeit only at the margins of statistical significance in the trans women model ($p = .084$). Considering the relatively small sample size included in the equal treatment models (i.e., only a relatively small percentage of respondents in the 2015 U.S. Transgender Survey report visiting and experiencing unequal treatment in social welfare offices), we are inclined to reject the null hypothesis at the $p < .10$ level in the trans women comparison model in table 3.

Examining the odds ratios in table 3, identifying as trans WOC is expected to increase the odds of experiencing unequal treatment in a public assistance/government benefits office by 67.1 percent and 56.6 percent when compared against all other trans respondents and white trans women respondents, respectively. Predicted probabilities suggest a similar pattern in overall magnitude and comparative differences than what was initially observed in the social welfare office avoidance models. For instance, trans WOC are predicted to have a 6.92 percent and 7.96 percent chance of reporting unequal treatment in a public assistance office, relative to 4.01 percent and 4.88 percent chance for other trans respondents and white trans women. This represents a 42.05 percent and 38.69 percent increased likelihood of trans WOC reporting unequal treatment, respectively. This suggests that roughly 1 in 13 trans WOC will report experiencing discrimination after visiting a public assistance office, whereas, the figure is roughly 1 in 20 for white trans women.

Table 3 Logistic Regression Analysis of Equal Treatment Outcomes in Public Assistance Offices among Trans Women of Color (WOC)

Independent Variables	Comparison Groups			
	<i>All Trans Respondents</i>	Odds Ratio	<i>All Trans Women</i>	Odds Ratio
	Beta (SE)	Odds; sig.		
Trans WOC Probability (1) = Probability (0) =	0.513 (0.242) .0692	1.671 (0.034)	0.448 (0.259) .0796	1.566 (0.084)
Age	0.003 (0.008)	1.003 (0.685)	0.001 (0.010)	1.001 (0.933)
Education	-0.089 (0.124)	0.915 (0.473)	0.028 (0.152)	1.028 (0.854)
Partner	-0.116 (0.190)	0.891 (0.542)	-0.124 (0.236)	0.883 (0.599)
Employed	-0.153 (0.202)	0.858 (0.450)	-0.256 (0.250)	0.774 (0.305)
Income	0.135 (0.097)	1.144 (0.166)	0.055 (0.123)	1.056 (0.658)
Poverty	-0.005 (0.234)	0.995 (0.981)	-0.334 (0.288)	0.716 (0.247)
Homeless	0.602 (0.200)	1.825 (0.003)	0.712 (0.244)	2.038 (0.003)
Disability	0.198 (0.196)	1.219 (0.312)	0.328 (0.241)	1.388 (0.174)
Noncitizen	0.173 (0.141)	1.189 (0.221)	0.275 (0.151)	1.316 (0.069)
LGB (gay)	-0.109 (0.205)	0.897 (0.597)	-0.346 (0.244)	0.708 (0.156)
Log likelihood		985.22		646.05
Chi ²		20.45		23.11
Prob > Chi ²		$p < .05$		$p < .05$
Pseudo R ²		0.124		0.141
N		2,694		1,701

Table 4 Logistic Regression Analysis of Equal Treatment Outcomes in Social Security Offices among Trans Women of Color (WOC)

Independent Variables	Comparison Groups			
	<i>All Trans Respondents</i>	Odds Ratio	<i>All Trans Women</i>	Odds Ratio
	Beta (SE)	Odds; sig.		
Trans WOC Probability (1) = Probability (0) =	0.469 (0.210) .0328	1.599 (0.025)	0.518 (0.224) .0605	1.679 (0.020)
Age	0.006 (0.006)	1.006 (0.257)	0.010 (0.007)	1.010 (0.130)
Education	-0.071 (0.099)	0.932 (0.475)	-0.240 (0.120)	0.787 (0.045)
Partner	-0.143 (0.146)	0.867 (0.326)	-0.073 (0.187)	0.930 (0.697)
Employed	0.293 (0.164)	1.341 (0.073)	0.359 (0.209)	1.432 (0.086)
Income	0.111 (0.069)	1.118 (0.108)	0.088 (0.090)	1.092 (0.325)
Poverty	0.406 (0.197)	1.502 (0.039)	0.341 (0.255)	1.407 (0.181)
Homeless	0.830 (0.176)	2.294 (0.000)	0.922 (0.216)	2.514 (0.000)
Disability	0.487 (0.156)	1.628 (0.002)	0.303 (0.201)	1.354 (0.132)
Noncitizen	0.142 (0.089)	1.153 (0.111)	0.109 (0.111)	1.116 (0.326)
LGB (gay)	0.081 (0.162)	1.084 (0.617)	0.119 (0.212)	1.126 (0.577)
Log likelihood		1,623.09		1,001.49
Chi ²		52.19		33.79
Prob > Chi ²		$p < .01$		$p < .01$
Pseudo R ²		0.137		0.139
N		4,460		2,689

These represent similar levels of magnitude and comparative difference as observed in the initial avoidance estimations.

Table 4 examines equal treatment outcomes reported in Social Security offices. The trans WOC variable is positive and statistically significant at the $p < .05$ level in both comparative models. Examining the odds ratios in table 4, identifying as trans WOC is predicted to increase the odds of reporting unequal treatment in a Social Security office by 59.9 percent and 67.9 percent, respectively. Predicted probabilities suggest an overall reduced magnitude of

Table 5 Logistic Regression Analysis of Equal Treatment Outcomes in all Social Welfare Offices Combined among Trans Women of Color (WOC)

Independent Variables	Comparison Groups			
	<i>All Trans Respondents</i>	Odds Ratio	<i>All Trans Women</i>	Odds Ratio
	Beta (SE)	Odds; sig.		
Trans WOC	0.449 (0.164)	1.567 (0.006)	0.459 (0.175)	1.582 (0.009)
Probability (1) =	.0619		.0931	
Probability (0) =	.0378		.0565	
Age	0.008 (0.004)	1.008 (0.074)	0.09 (0.005)	1.009 (0.094)
Education	-0.068 (0.079)	0.935 (0.390)	-0.128 (0.096)	0.880 (0.185)
Partner	-0.108 (0.116)	0.898 (0.353)	-0.072 (0.148)	0.930 (0.624)
Employed	0.145 (0.127)	1.156 (0.255)	0.171 (0.160)	1.187 (0.283)
Income	0.031 (0.057)	1.031 (0.590)	0.001 (0.072)	1.001 (0.990)
Poverty	0.092 (0.154)	1.097 (0.550)	-0.060 (0.196)	0.942 (0.759)
Homeless	0.691 (0.137)	1.996 (0.000)	0.776 (0.169)	2.172 (0.000)
Disability	0.433 (0.122)	1.542 (0.000)	0.369 (0.155)	1.446 (0.017)
Noncitizen	0.136 (0.079)	1.145 (0.084)	0.129 (0.093)	1.138 (0.162)
LGB (gay)	-0.004 (0.128)	0.996 (0.975)	-0.111 (0.161)	0.942 (0.759)
Log likelihood	2,498.43		1,562.59	
Chi ²	57.67		42.31	
Prob > Chi ²	p < .01		p < .01	
Pseudo R ²	0.127		0.132	
N	6,105		3,729	

unequal treatment in Social Security offices relative to reporting unequal treatment claims in public assistance/government benefit offices. However, sizable comparative differences in the likelihood of reporting unequal treatment between trans WOC and other trans identifying respondents remain. For instance, in the general model, trans WOC are predicted to have a 3.28 percent chance of reporting unequal treatment in a Social Security office, while all other trans respondents are expected to have a 1.96 percent chance, representing a 40.24 percent increased likelihood of reporting discriminatory treatment for trans WOC. Similarly, in the exclusive trans women model in table 4, trans WOC are predicted to have a 6.05 percent chance of reporting unequal treatment, while white trans women are predicted to have a 3.55 percent chance of reporting unequal treatment, representing a 41.32 percent increased likelihood of trans WOC reporting being denied equal treatment or benefits. This translates to roughly 1 in 17 trans WOC reporting experiencing discrimination in a Social Security office, whereas, roughly 1 in 28 white trans women will report the same.

These connections between intersecting marginalized identities and reporting unequal treatment in social welfare offices are further confirmed in table 5, which combines both public assistance/government benefits and Social Security offices into one composite unequal treatment outcome variable—*denied equal treatment in a public social welfare office*. As observed in table 5, the trans WOC variable is, again, consistently in the theorized positive direction, achieves statistical significance, and reports an odds ratio of substantial magnitude, mirroring the findings reported in tables 3 and 4. In terms of predicted probabilities, in the general model, trans WOC are predicted to have a 6.2 percent chance of reporting unequal treatment in any social welfare office, while all other trans respondents are predicted to have a 3.78 percent chance, representing a 39.03 percent increased likelihood of trans WOC reporting discrimination. When examining trans women exclusively,

trans WOC are predicted to have a 9.31 percent chance of reporting unequal treatment in any social welfare office, while white trans women are predicted to have a 5.65 percent chance. This means that roughly 1 in 11 trans WOC will report experiencing discrimination in a public social welfare office, while that figure drops to roughly 1 in 18 white trans women.

Identifying as trans WOC seemingly matters for both welfare avoidance and equal treatment outcomes. Although the predicted probabilities suggest a modest overall or total magnitude of reporting avoidance or unequal treatment, this analysis suggests that trans WOC, relative to other trans identifying persons, are more likely to eschew public social welfare offices for fears of experiencing magnified discrimination, then in confirming those anxieties, more likely to experience magnified levels of street-level discrimination when engaging with social welfare offices. There are degenerative outcomes occurring on both ends of the social welfare equation for trans WOC relative to other trans identifying persons. Not only are trans WOC less likely to engage with social welfare offices in the first place, when they do choose to initiate claims on public benefits, they are more likely to report encountering discriminatory treatment and potentially be denied benefits and services. These findings have major implications for public service values and priorities of social equity, justice, and democracy in public service provision.

Important intersectional lessons for policymakers and administrators emerge from this research in that trans WOC are found to both disproportionately avoid social welfare offices and report being denied equal treatment or denied service after choosing to engage with public benefit offices. Thus, a mixture of avoidance and administrative discrimination likely contributes to heightened material hardship (e.g., food insecurity, income insecurity, etc.) among trans WOC than other trans identifying groups, such as white trans women or trans men. Compounded, intersecting marginalized identities—identifying as both a trans woman and a person of color—is found to be associated with both the avoidance of public benefits and likelihood of reporting discriminatory treatment once engaged with social welfare offices.⁸

Discussion and Conclusion

This study begins to illuminate the intersectional social welfare experiences of trans WOC relative to other trans identifying persons and answers Crenshaw's (1989) call for an intersectional analysis. By connecting to broader critical theories including, critical race theory, Black feminist theory, and queer theory, we challenge normative approaches to research by offering an intersectional examination of transgender identifying WOC. Critical race theory and Black feminist theory call for the centering of voice and interpretation. Black feminist theory is rooted in the notion that Black women are uniquely positioned to resist intersectional oppression and discrimination while offering empowering self-definitions related to their own experiences (Taylor 1998). Queer theory, at its core, challenges binary conceptions of gender and the privileges associated with traditional binary gender definitions. In this way, queer theorists question how power and privilege are allocated to cisgender men and women in ways that are evasive to individuals identifying outside constrained gender definitions. And, how these privileges coincide with interactions with certain

social and political institutions (McDonald 2015). As such, this study seeks to center the lived experiences of transgender WOC, particularly as they engage with agencies providing social welfare benefits. Employing data from the 2015 U.S. Transgender Survey, we uncover evidence that trans WOC are more likely to report both avoiding public social welfare offices, and more likely to report experiencing unequal treatment in social welfare offices. Our findings support calls for the inclusion of intersectionality in public affairs research and practice and offer clear insights for the need to better understand the experiences of trans WOC when interacting with public agencies, in this case social welfare offices. Furthermore, we offer empirical evidence that illustrates the deleterious effects of navigating multiple systems of oppression—in this case racism and gender normativity—as an individual with multiple and intersecting marginalized identities.

The immediate implications of this research for policymakers and social welfare administrators suggest potential value in outreach and engagement efforts with trans WOC, who might be eligible to receive public benefits but are choosing not to engage with social welfare offices. Initially engaging with social welfare offices is likely just as important, if not more important, than management and leadership training approaches for reducing discriminatory actions taking place among frontline social service administrators. Thus, policymakers, agency heads, and program managers should be devising ways to improve the attractiveness or inclusiveness of public social welfare benefits for trans WOC, along with improving social equity training and priorities among frontline social service professionals working with clientele in social welfare offices. This could potentially take the form of inclusion-based social welfare campaigns or literature that includes images and testimonials from trans WOC when promoting social welfare offices. Additionally, targeted inclusive efforts could be pursued in local venues catering to transgender identifying WOC. Agencies may also consider conducting internal assessments related to the organization's climate, staff biases (via implicit association tests), accountability structures, and gaps in staff's knowledge on equity, inclusion, and belonging as strategies to reduce discriminatory behaviors and policies.

Lastly, this research suggests potential value in pursuing e-government approaches to benefit determination and enrollment in social welfare services. Allowing for more e-government opportunities for engagement with social welfare benefits could reduce the need for face-to-face meetings with case managers and other frontline personnel, potentially increasing the attractiveness of public benefits while reducing discriminatory street-level interactions. The probability of reporting discrimination in public assistance/benefit offices was found to be substantially higher than for Social Security offices, meaning that redistributive welfare benefits conditioned upon more intensive case manager monitoring and supervision like TANF and SNAP could be more susceptible to discriminatory interactions amidst rising unemployment and hardship. One potential benefit of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic is that more social welfare services are moving online and less documentation (e.g., payroll stubs) and face-to-face contact with case managers is being required to access benefits and maintain eligibility.

Research findings also highlight the continued pervasiveness of trans WOC experiencing discrimination, even when seeking public

assistance from government actors tasked with helping citizens. This study uses data collected while President Obama was in office. This is particularly important because, at the federal level, the Obama administration had implemented many policies and programs that advanced equity for the LGBTQ+ community. However, even within a time and under a presidential administration that actively worked to advance the rights of LGBTQ+ identifying people, trans WOC still experienced magnified discrimination and injustice. This context illustrates the systemic nature of marginalization and discrimination against transgender WOC and how pervasive these issues remain in the United States, and with government agencies, in particular.

In short, this research represents a broad call to action among public affairs scholars and practitioners who claim to value pillars of social equity and justice in theory and practice. Study findings suggest that racism and transphobia exist within federal social welfare systems and operate to discriminate and disenfranchise trans WOC, especially. Trans WOC, thus, oftentimes must choose between experiencing discrimination and receipt of benefits, and as we find, many trans WOC forego accessing the benefits for which they are eligible, likely, in order to not experience such discrimination. This study further suggests that trans WOC are facing substantial barriers both in the initial decision to pursue public benefits, and then more likely to experience unequal treatment after engaging with social welfare offices. The exact implications of welfare avoidance and unequal treatment on material hardship of trans WOC, such as levels of food or income insecurity, are not explored directly in this study, but the concerns for scholars and practitioners should be at the forefront. This research suggests that intersectionality and negative social constructions matter to experiences and outcomes in the U.S. social welfare system and deserve more scholarly attention in all areas of public affairs research. Future research should continue exploring issues of intersectionality, social equity, and compounded discrimination in other policy and administrative contexts, such as public education, health, and transportation. Furthermore, additional research efforts seeking to elevate the lived experiences of trans WOC in their interactions with public agencies is needed. Public administration must develop a comprehensive framework of theories centered within truth, as experienced by those who are most impacted, as the lived experience does not operate outside PA theory development and science (Ricucci 2010). In fact, qualitative researchers and critical race theorists offer the lived experience as a valued way of knowing (Zuberi 2010).

The pursuit of social equity has been rhetorically placed as a core pillar of public administration (Frederickson 2015), thus additional attention is required for the facilitation of research that examines how individuals with intersecting and marginalized identities experience public services, along multiple service areas (e.g., social welfare, education, housing, transportation, etc.). Future research efforts should also seek to incorporate mixed methodologies including qualitative observation that include but are not limited to focus groups, open-ended interviews, storytelling opportunities, and other avenues to better illuminate the lived experiences of trans WOC. In-depth interviews and focus groups highlighting lived experiences can offer additional insight into specific interactions with social welfare and other public agencies as well as the material consequences of such interactions for trans WOC.

Notes

1. The 2015 U.S. Transgender Survey was conducted in late 2008 and early 2009 using targeted outreach efforts with a confidential website that allowed for online survey completion on PCs or smartphones. All survey respondents had to be at least 18 years old, and affirmatively identify as transgender or genderqueer. Survey administrators then undertook extensive data cleaning efforts, such as removing respondents with multiple irrational or erroneous responses. Ultimately, 10,304 respondents were removed from the initial dataset, leaving 27,715 respondents in the final dataset (U.S. Transgender Survey 2015).
2. The equal treatment survey question was only asked selectively to those respondents who had reported visiting a public assistance or Social Security office in the past year.
3. NOT is presented in all caps in the survey instrument.
4. Other response options include items like “gym/health club,” “court/courthouse,” “public transportation,” and “retail store, theater, restaurant, hotel, theater.”
5. Other response options beyond equal treatment include “verbally harassed,” “physically attacked,” and “none of these things happened to me at these places.”
6. Multi-racial survey respondents were asked a follow-up question asking about their primary racial identity. If the survey respondent chose a racial category (Black, Latine, Asian, etc.), they were added to that primary group in the disaggregated analysis of Black and Indigenous trans WOC.
7. Pseudo R^2 figures reported in both the avoidance and equal treatment models are relatively modest in the 0.12–0.21 range. While pseudo R^2 figures in maximum likelihood estimations of cross-sectional survey data are generally lower than R^2 figures in linear OLS models, we are somewhat uncertain of overall model fit and the exact precision of the predicted probabilities. Nonetheless, we are relatively confident that the model estimations produce accurate insights into statistically significant relationships between trans WOC and social welfare outcomes, along with comparative differences between trans WOC and other trans identifying respondents.
8. It should be noted that the analysis and findings related to being denied equal treatment might be encountering small-N analytical issues. Only 106 total survey respondents (out of 27,715 total respondents) report being denied equal treatment within a public assistance office. Once you disaggregate that to transgender WOC being denied equal treatment the numbers are relatively small.

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Appendix

Table A1 T-Testing Control Variables (Comparison: All Trans Respondents)

	Trans WOC (=1.00)	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Age	0.00	24,972	31.56	13.72	0.087
	1.00	2,743	28.25	11.032	0.211
Disability	0.00	24,917	0.276	0.447	0.003
	1.00	2,736	0.323	0.468	0.009
Employed	0.00	24,850	0.661	0.473	0.003
	1.00	2,728	0.577	0.494	0.009
Homeless (past year)	0.00	24,810	0.079	0.269	0.002
	1.00	2,718	0.114	0.318	0.006
LGB	0.00	24,972	0.706	0.455	0.003
	1.00	2,743	0.682	0.466	0.009
Poverty	0.00	23,689	0.32	0.467	0.003
	1.00	2,596	0.40	0.489	0.010
Partner status	0.00	24,972	0.51	0.500	0.003
	1.00	2,743	0.43	0.495	0.009
Household income	0.00	22,813	3.04	1.39	0.009
	1.00	2,483	2.79	1.47	0.025
Education	0.00	24,972	3.20	0.771	0.005
	1.00	2,743	3.07	0.797	0.015

Table A2 T-Testing Control Variables (Comparison: All Trans Women)

	Trans WOC (=1.00)	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Age	0.00	14,339	32.57	14.46	0.121
	1.00	2,743	28.25	11.032	0.211
Disability	0.00	14,310	0.297	0.457	0.004
	1.00	2,736	0.323	0.468	0.009
Employed	0.00	14,266	0.644	0.479	0.004
	1.00	2,728	0.577	0.494	0.009
Homeless (past year)	0.00	14,241	0.077	0.266	0.002
	1.00	2,718	0.114	0.318	0.006
LGB	0.00	14,339	0.732	0.443	0.004
	1.00	2,743	0.682	0.466	0.009
Poverty	0.00	13,603	0.32	0.466	0.004
	1.00	2,596	0.40	0.489	0.010
Partner status	0.00	14,339	0.50	0.500	0.004
	1.00	2,743	0.43	0.495	0.009
Household income	0.00	13,100	3.06	1.39	0.012
	1.00	2,483	2.79	1.47	0.025
Education	0.00	14,339	3.21	0.766	0.006
	1.00	2,743	3.07	0.797	0.015