

# **Sanctions and Welfare Reform: The Florida Project**

**The presentations for this panel report research from  
a project on welfare-to-work in the state of Florida**

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**Deciding to Discipline:**

**A Multi-Method Study of  
Race, Choice, and Punishment at the  
Frontlines of Welfare Reform**

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The paper on which this talk is based is available as a NPC working paper (#07-33):

[http://www.npc.umich.edu/publications/u/working\\_paper07-33.pdf](http://www.npc.umich.edu/publications/u/working_paper07-33.pdf)

## Race and Sanctions

- Historically, race has been associated with disparities in treatment in welfare provision (Lieberman 1998; Quadagno 1994; Ward 2005).
- Race-coded appeals and racialized public responses played a key role in the national debates that led up to reform (Hancock 2004; Reese 2005).
- More recently, race has been associated with state decisions to adopt more punitive welfare policies (Soss et al. 2001).
- Most recently, race has been identified as a primary predictor of the likelihood of being sanctioned (Meyers et al. 2006).

## Race and Caseworker Profiling

- Part of our project has focused on the role of race in welfare reform from the national government down to the state and local levels.
- Caseworkers have long held discretion in dealing with their clients (Lipsky 1980), but they have been given a variety of new powers and responsibilities under welfare reform (Watkins-Hayes 2008).
- The specific research presented here examines whether race influences what goes on at the bottom of the chain of decisionmaking—i.e., frontline caseworkers' decisions to impose sanctions.

## Racial Classification Model (RCM)

1. Policy actors rely on salient social classifications and group reputations in designing social policies and applying policy tools to particular target groups.
2. When racial minorities are salient in a policy context, race will be more likely to provide a basis for social classification of targets and, hence, to signify target group differences perceived as relevant to the accomplishment of policy goals.
3. The likelihood of racially patterned policy outcomes will be positively associated with the degree of policy-relevant contrast in policy actors' perceptions of racial groups. The degree of contrast, in turn, will be a function of:
  - (a) the prevailing cultural stereotypes of racial groups;
  - (b) the extent to which policy actors hold relevant group stereotypes; and
  - (c) the presence or absence of stereotype-consistent cues.

## Race and Expectancy Confirmation

- Stereotype-consistent cues have been shown to activate pre-existing racial bias in a number of areas—
  - retail sales (Ayres and Siegelman 1995)
  - mortgage loans (Munnell et al. 1996) & insurance (Wissoker et al. 1998)
  - healthcare (Schulman et al. 1999) & housing (Yinger 1995)
  - labor markets (Bertrand and Mullainathan 2003; Pager 2007)
- The RCM might help us understand how stereotype-consistent markers can function as a source of what Darley and Gross (1983) call “expectancy confirmation.”
- The cue strengthens the effects of racial status on decision making by activating a pre-existing expectation about the racially marked person’s behavior.
- Importantly, these processes can emerge from cognitive biases in decision making *even in the absence* of conscious racial animus, out-group threat, or in-group favoritism (cf. Key 1949; Blalock 1967).

# Racial Cues and Profiling Clients

Caseworkers may be vulnerable to relying on racial cues for profiling clients just as citizens rely on racial cues in making voting decisions.

Valentino, Hutchings, and White (2002: 86):

“When the black racial cues are stereotype-inconsistent, the relationship between racial attitudes and the vote disappears....

[Likewise] the presence of black images alone... does not prime negative racial attitudes....

The effect emerges only when the pairing of the visuals with the narrative subtly reinforces negative stereotypes in the mind of the viewer.”

# Sanctioning on the Frontlines

## Data Sources:

- Web-based case manager survey
  - Embedded 2x2 randomly assigned experimental vignettes
- Administrative data on TANF adults
  - Longitudinal data on client characteristics, sanctioning history and earnings (2001-2004)

## Why Study Florida?

- Florida relies on immediate and full-family sanctions, the strictest (i.e., most disciplinary) combination of sanctioning choices (Pavetti et al. 2003).
- Our interviews suggest that caseworkers:
  - are for the most part committed to the overall goals of TANF and to the tools provided to them for goal achievement
  - are at times ambivalent about the effectiveness of sanctions
  - perceive a lack of alternative tools for bridging the gap between performance expectations and client situations

Within the high-pressure, frontline work of Welfare Transition case managers, does race intersect with stereotype-consistent cues to place clients in increased jeopardy of receiving a welfare sanction?

## Table 6. Distribution of Responses by Region

<b>Region Name (Number)</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percent</b>
Workforce Central Florida (12)	27	26.0
First Coast Workforce Development, Inc. (8)	22	21.2
Hillsborough County Workforce Board (15)	16	15.4
Pinellas Workforce Development Board (14)	11	10.6
Pasco-Hernando Jobs & Education Partnership Regional Board, Inc. (16)	6	5.8
Brevard Workforce Development Board, Inc. (13)	5	4.8
Southwest Florida Workforce Development Board (24)	5	4.8
Big Bend Jobs and Education Council, Inc. (5)	3	2.9
Citrus Levy Marion Workforce Development Board (10)	2	1.9
Polk County Workforce Development Board, Inc. (17)	2	1.9
North Florida Workforce Development Board (6)	2	1.9
Gulf Coast Workforce Development Board (4)	1	0.96
Workforce Development Board of the Treasure Coast (20)	1	0.96
Palm Beach County Workforce Development Board (21)	1	0.96
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>104</b>	<b>100.0</b>

## Table 7. Characteristics of Caseworker Respondents

Respondent Characteristics	Percent of Sample
Sex (n=114)	
Male	21.1
Female	78.9
Race/Ethnicity (n=98)	
African American / Black	34.7
European American / White	44.9
Hispanic American / Latino	18.4
Other	2.0
Educational Level (n=115)	
High school diploma	7.8
Some college or trade school	33.0
4- year college degree	37.4
Some graduate school	13.0
Graduate degree	8.7
Marital Status (n=115)	
Married	57.4
Divorced/separated/widowed	20.9
Single, never married	15.7
Unmarried couple living together	6.1
Political Party Affiliation (n=103)	
Democrat or Independent Democrat	60.2
Independent	11.7
Republican or Independent Republican	24.3
Other	3.9
Religious Attendance (n=113)	
Weekly	33.6
At least once a month	23.9
A few times a year	31.0
Never	11.5
Mean years of welfare services experience (n=143)	6.97

# Experimental Vignettes

## Vignette 1

[Emily O'Brien/Sonya Perez] is a 28 year-old single mother with [one child aged 7 / four children who is currently in her fourth month of pregnancy]. She entered the Welfare Transition program six months ago, after leaving her job as a cashier at a neighborhood grocery store where she had worked for nine months. Emily was recently reported for being absent for a week from her assignment for community service work experience. Immediately after hearing that Emily had not shown up for a week of work, Emily's caseworker mailed a Notice of Failure to Participate (Form 2290) and phoned her to ask why she had missed her assignment. Emily was not home when the caseworker called. However, when she responded to the 2290 three days later, she said she no longer trusted the person who was looking after her child, and she did not want to go back to work until she found a new childcare provider. Emily returned to work the next day.

## Vignette 2

[Emily O'Brien/Lakisha Williams] is a 26 year-old single mother with two children. She has been in the Welfare Transition program for five months. Lakisha was recently reported for failing to show up for a job interview that had been scheduled for her with a local house-cleaning service. Immediately after hearing about the missed interview, Lakisha's caseworker mailed a Notice of Failure to Participate (2290) and phoned her to ask why she had not shown up. Lakisha said she had skipped the interview because she had heard that a better position might open up next month with a home health agency [She had been sanctioned two months earlier for failure to complete her hours for digital divide].

# Variation within Vignettes

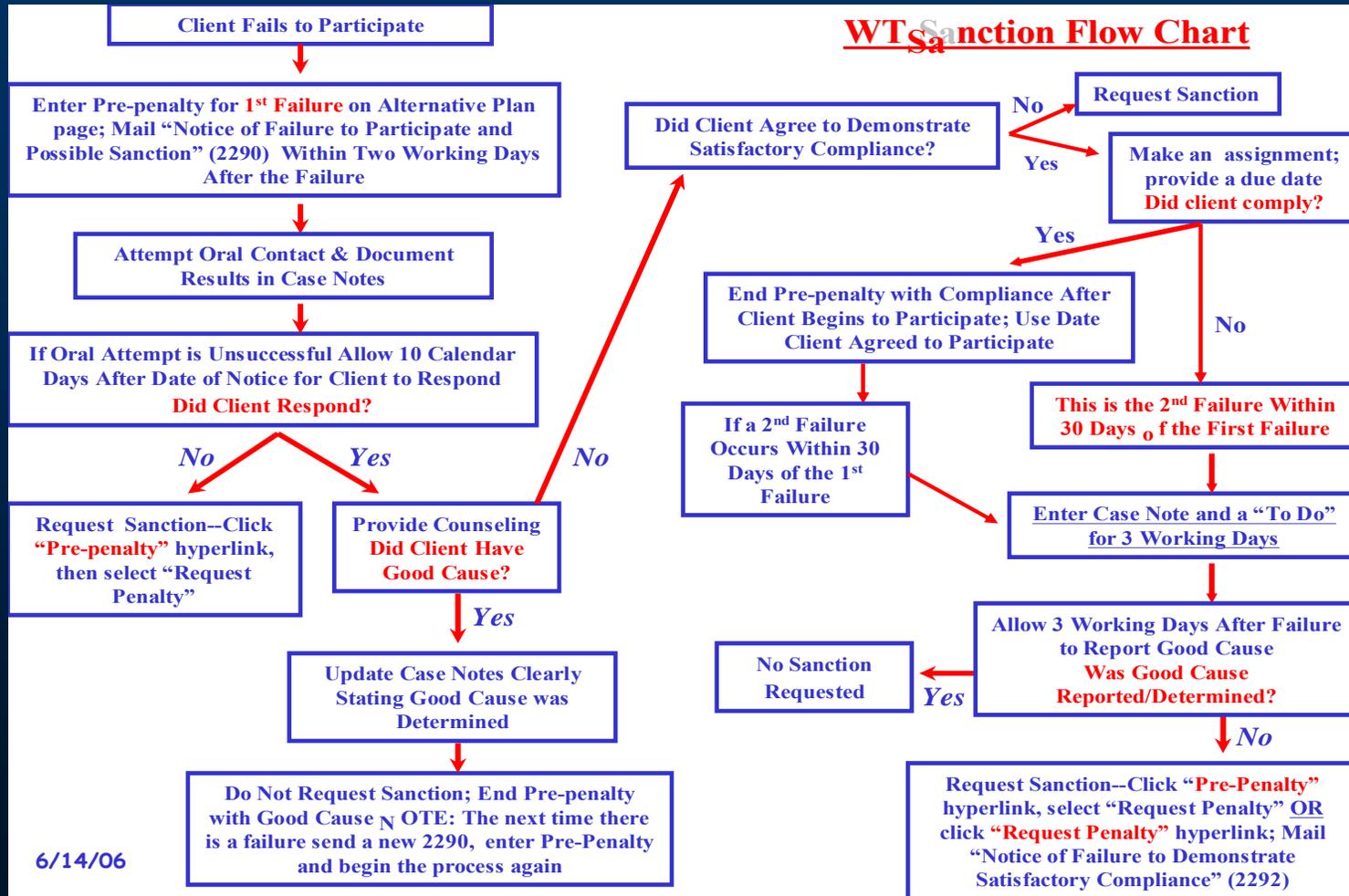
## RACE

- Vignette 1: Hispanic-sounding name vs. White-sounding name
- Vignette 2: Black-sounding name vs. White-sounding name

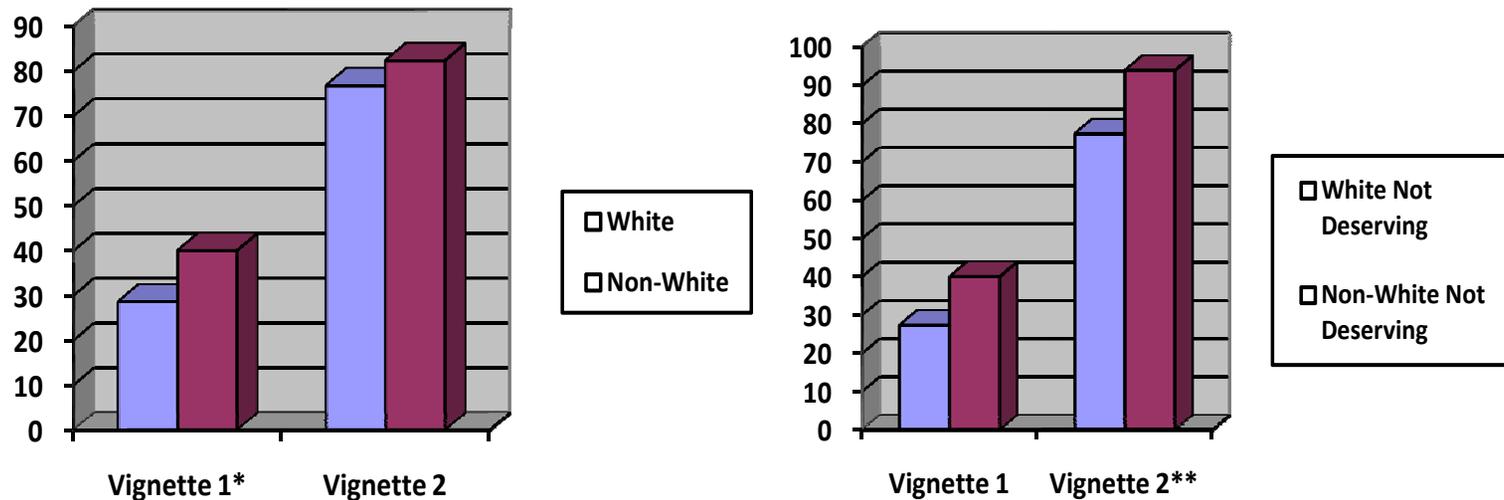
## REPUTATIONAL DIFFERENCE

- Vignette 1: Young mother with multiple children who is also pregnant
- Vignette 2: Repeat welfare recipient who is not only returning to TANF but also was previously sanctioned

# Figure 11. Florida Sanction Flow Chart



## Figure 12. Sanction Rate by Client Name Condition



\* $p \leq .10$ ; \*\* $p \leq .05$ ; and \*\*\* $p \leq .01$ .

NOTE: Sanctioning rates include all caseworkers who responded to the sanctioning vignette, regardless of whether or not they answered all items included in our multivariate models. For vignette 1, the racial minority is Hispanic and the less deserving condition is “four children and pregnant” as opposed to one child. For vignette 2, the racial minority is Black and the less deserving condition is possession of a prior WT sanction as opposed to no mention of a prior participation spell at all.

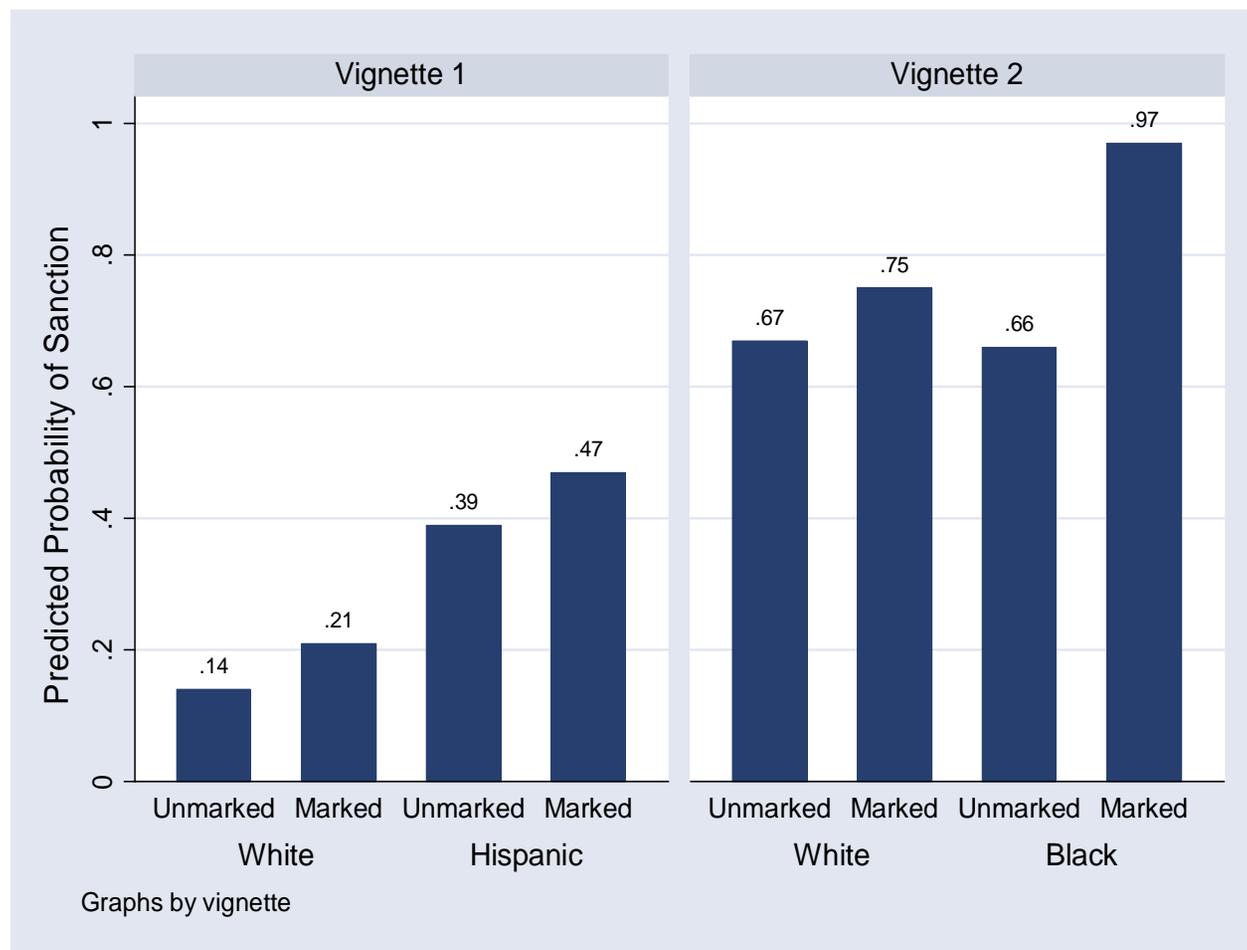
## Table 8. Analysis of Vignette Experiments

Independent Variables	Vignette 1	Vignette 2
Vignette Condition:		
White Client, Marked	.501 (.60)	.367 (.51)
Minority Client, Unmarked	1.383* (1.50)	-.075 (-.11)
Minority Client, Marked	1.693** (1.96)	2.599*** (2.28)
Caseworker Characteristics:		
Experience	-1.573*** (-2.73)	-1.632** (-1.98)
Religiosity	-.314 (-.56)	.018 (.03)
College Education	.134 (.24)	.424 (.73)
Democrat	.567 (.99)	-.127 (-.22)
Married	.903 (1.48)	-.152 (-.25)
Black or Hispanic	.301 (.48)	.405 (.63)
<b>LR <math>\chi^2</math></b>	<b>16.90**</b>	<b>16.90**</b>
<b>Log likelihood</b>	<b>-46.304</b>	<b>-41.482</b>
<b>Pseudo R<sup>2</sup></b>	<b>.154</b>	<b>.169</b>
<b>N</b>	<b>95</b>	<b>94</b>

\* $p \leq .10$ ; \*\* $p \leq .05$ ; and \*\*\* $p \leq .01$ .

*Note:* Entries are coefficients followed by z-scores in parentheses. For vignette 1, the racial minority is Hispanic and the marked condition is “four children and pregnant” as opposed to one child. For vignette 2, the racial minority is Black and the marked condition is possession of a prior WT sanction as opposed to no mention of a prior participation spell at all. The number of cases for each model is lower than the overall sample due to missing data for selected covariates.

# Figure 13. Predicted Probabilities by Race and Condition



Note: Each panel of Figure 1 contains predicted probabilities of sanction for each experimental condition, holding all other variables at their median value, based on the regression results presented in the previous table.

# Strengths, Limitations & Triangulation

Confidence in results based on...

- Random assignment of case narratives
- Consistency of results from two very different vignettes

Limitations include...

- Scenarios are, in the final reckoning, hypothetical
- Sanctioning can occur without a face, story, or detailed file
- Sanctioning can occur (or not) with no concern about performance numbers

Therefore, we triangulate our findings with administrative data provided by the Florida Department of Children and Families (DCF)

# Table 9. Cox Proportional Hazard Models of Effects of Minority Status and Number of Children on Sanction Initiation

<b>Independent Variables</b>	<b>I</b>	<b>II</b>
<u>Individual Characteristics</u>		
Hispanic Client	.960	---
White Client & 1 Child	---	[Reference]
White Client & 4 Children	---	.981
Hispanic Client & 1 Child	---	.955
Hispanic Client & 4 Children	---	.982
Age of Client	.980**	.980**
Age of Youngest Child	1.013	1.013
Citizenship Status (1=citizen)	1.276	1.274
Education (reference = >H.S.)		
Less than H.S. Education	1.371**	1.370**
H.S. Education	1.068	1.068
Income (in 1000s)	1.067**	1.067**
<u>Community Characteristics</u>		
Local Conservatism	1.085	1.085
Percent Black	.997	.997
Percent Hispanic	.987**	.987**
Annual Wage -		
Food Service/Drinking Places	.976	.976
Unemployment Rate <sub>t-1</sub>	1.029	1.029
Poverty Rate	1.017	1.017
Population (in millions)	1.281**	1.281**
TANF Caseload <sub>t-1</sub>	.911	.911
<b>Number of Subjects</b>	6,214	6,214
<b>Number of Failures</b>	1,792	1,792
<b>Time at Risk (Person-Months)</b>	19,798	19,798

*Note:* The sample for this analysis consists of all new TANF clients (single-parent, female, Hispanic or white) who entered TANF from January 2001 through December 2002. All clients are observed for a maximum of twelve months (clients who exit without being sanctioned, or who were sanctioned after twelve months, are treated as censored). Cell entries are hazard ratios, with p-values based on robust standard errors (adjusted for error clustering at the county level).

# Table 10. Weibull Selection Model of Effects of Minority Status and Sanction History on Sanction Initiation during Second TANF Spell

Independent Variables	I	II
<u>Individual Characteristics</u>		
Black Client	1.190**	---
Prior Sanction	1.091*	---
White Client & No Prior Sanction	---	[Reference]
White Client & Prior Sanction	---	
Black Client & No Prior Sanction	---	
Black Client & Prior Sanction	---	1.032
Age of Client	.968**	1.145* .968**
Age of Youngest Child	1.012	
Education (in years)	.979**	1.012 .979**
Income (in 1000s)	.975	
<u>Community Characteristics</u>		
Local Conservatism	1.029	.976
Percent Black	.992*	1.028
Annual Wage - Food Service/Drinking Places	.973	.992*
Poverty Rate	1.002	
TANF Caseload	.887*	.973 1.002
<b>Rho (error correlation)</b>	-0.223**	.887* -.223**
<b>Total N</b>	40,891	40,891
<b>Uncensored N (Returning for 2<sup>nd</sup> Spell)</b>	18,827	18,827

*Note:* The sample for this model consists of all TANF clients (single-parent, female, black or white) who entered TANF from January 2001 through December 2002 and returned for a second TANF spell during this same observation period. All clients are observed during the 2<sup>nd</sup> spell until they are sanctioned or they exit TANF for other reasons. Clients who exited TANF without being sanctioned, or whose second spell continued beyond the close of our observation window (April 2004), were treated as right-censored observations in the Weibull model. The model was estimated in Stata 10.0 using the dursel procedure (Boehmke 2005). Cell entries are hazard ratios, with p-values based on robust standard errors (adjusted for error clustering at the county level).

\*p<.05, \*\*p<.01

## Key Findings: Experiment

1. White clients suffer no statistically discernible negative effects when linked to characteristics that hold negative meanings in the welfare-to-work context.
2. Minority clients, by contrast, are vulnerable to the attachment of discrediting, stereotype-consistent markers, such as having multiple children and having received a prior sanction.
3. More experienced case managers (i.e., those with more than two years experience) are significantly less likely to impose sanctions in either case.
4. White case managers were no more likely than nonwhite case managers to sanction clients overall nor were they more likely than nonwhite case managers to sanction nonwhite clients.

## Key Findings: Administrative Data

5. Hispanic clients do not emerge as more likely than white clients to be sanctioned, and this null finding holds regardless of number of children.
6. Among second-spell participants, black clients with a prior sanction are more likely than their white counterparts to be sanctioned again.

Our findings suggest that, while TANF is ostensibly a race-neutral public policy, it is carried out today in a way that allows pre-existing racial stereotypes and race-based disadvantages to produce large cumulative disadvantages  
(Schram 2005, 2006).