



Written by [Raven Clabough](#) on July 22, 2015

Govt. Funds \$125,000 Study on Racist/Sexist Adjectives

The federal government has underscored its indifference towards taxpayer dollars once more by funding a study on “sexist adjectives.” According to the *Washington Free Beacon*, the National Science Foundation (NSF) will spend \$125,000 for the University of Kansas to study adjectives perceived as sexist or racist.



The study is being led by Dr. Monica Biernat, a psychology professor at the University of Kansas, who has engaged in similar studies for the NSF in the past. She contends that the use of certain words during an evaluation process points to underlying stereotypes and encourages men to begin reconsidering their use of certain words when describing a woman.

“This practice may be less practical in the kinds of social judgments we render as part of everyday social discourse — judging a female driver as ‘aggressive,’ a mediocre Black student as ‘really smart,’ or a father who walks his kids to school as a ‘great’ parent,” she wrote.

“But in these cases, awareness, education, and conscious self-correction may be important tools (‘I called her aggressive; would I have used the same label for a man?’),” Biernat continued. “This would of course require ability and motivation to correct on the part of the evaluator.”

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The study will involve examination of letters of recommendation to see whether racism or sexism has a significant impact.

The grant for the study outlines the objectives:

The proposed research predicts that stereotypes activate different standards of judgments for members of different groups; therefore, evaluations (adjectives) mean different things depending on the person described.

For example, in a masculine work domain where women are stereotyped as less competent, “good” for a woman may mean something objectively less good than “good” for a man.

Aside from the adjective “good,” Biernat indicates there are other subtle examples of stereotypes impacting behaviors that she has found through her research.

“Because of shifting standards, a female chief of staff may be described as highly competent, a hit from a female softball player may generate more enthusiasm than the same hit from a male, and a Black student may receive more praise than a White student for an identical transcript,” she [wrote](#) in Volume 45 of *Advances in Experimental Social Psychology*. “In each case, the target is being judged relative to lower expectations or standards for their group.”



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The NSF has justified this project as one that will offer a true understanding of “bias in real world, evaluative settings.”

“In everyday life, we often are asked to provide assessments or evaluations of others’ abilities,” the grant said. “Stereotypes can subtly shape these evaluations and judgments, even among those who view themselves as non-prejudiced.”

“This can be very consequential in certain contexts; for example, hiring and admissions decisions can be based in part on the evaluative language used in letters of recommendation, and the language used may be influenced by gender and racial stereotypes,” the grant continued. “Further, audiences may also interpret this language with reference to those negative stereotypes about women and ethnic minorities.”

The project appears to be the latest example of wasteful government spending on frivolous studies, though not the most absurd.

Last year, the NSF spent \$856,000 for a study wherein mountain lions were taught to use a treadmill. The lions were able to walk on treadmills after a whopping eight months of training, though the research concluded that they “do not have the aerobic capacity for sustained high-energy activity.” That study is not to be confused with a previous \$560,000 study in which the metabolisms of sick shrimp were tested by having the shrimp exercise on a treadmill.

In fact, the absurdity of the studies prompted then-Senator Tom Coburn (R-Okla.) to release a 2011 report wherein he identified more than \$3 billion in mismanagement at the NSF.

“There is little, if any, obvious scientific benefit to some NSF projects, such as a YouTube rap video, a review of event ticket prices on stubhub.com, a ‘robot hoedown and rodeo,’ or a virtual recreation of the 1964/65 New York World’s Fair,” [Coburn](#) wrote to taxpayers in the introduction for the 73-page report.

The report revealed a number of other ridiculous NSF expenditures, including an \$80,000 study on why the same teams always dominate March Madness, a \$315,000 study suggesting playing FarmVille on Facebook helps adults develop and maintain relationships, and a \$1 million analysis of how quickly parents respond to trendy baby names.

Interestingly, the NSF also funded a \$581,000 study on whether online dating site users are racist.

In response to Coburn’s report, an [NSF](#) spokeswoman said they have a “gold-standard approach to peer review” for the projects they spend money on.

“We believe that no other funding agency in the world comes close to NSF for giving taxpayers the best return on their investment,” she said.

Still, the best way to eliminate this sort of wasteful funding is to look to the Constitution, where there exists no clause that allows for federal expenditures on health research outside the scope of preparing a military defense of the country’s citizens. If Americans really want such research to be done (which is doubtful), they can either fund it at the state or local level (the closer the funding gets to the people, the more likely it is that it will be scrutinized and scrubbed of waste) or through increased tuition fees to colleges where such research is done.



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