7-17-2017

Colorblind Ideology and Perceptions of Minority Children During a Fictionalized Parent-Child Discipline Scene

Michelle R. Dunlap
Connecticut College, mrdunn@conncoll.edu

Tong-An Shueh
Miami University - Oxford

Christina Burrell

Penney Jade Beaubrun

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.conncoll.edu/humdevfacpub

Part of the Race and Ethnicity Commons

Colorblind Ideology and Perceptions of Minority Children During a

Fictionalized Parent-Child Discipline Scene

Michelle Dunlap, Ph.D., Dept. of Human Development, Connecticut College

(michelle.dunlap@conncoll.edu)

Tong-An "Fred" Shueh, Ph.D., Student Counseling Service, Miami University-Ohio

(tongan.shueh@gmail.com)

Christina Burrell, M.S.W., Connecticut College, Class of 2011

(Christina.burrell1@gmail.com)

Penney Jade Beaubrun, M.A., Connecticut College, Class of 2011

(pbeaubru@alumni.conncoll.edu)

Colorblind Ideology and Perceptions of Minority Children During a

Fictionalized Parent-Child Discipline Scene

Abstract

Belief in colorblind ideology among 200 social service providers and its associations with their evaluations of a fictionalized minority family were examined. Perceptions of the family in the first scenes of the movie *Crooklyn* included the mother's competency, abusiveness, supportiveness, and irresponsibility, as well as her children's respectfulness, obedience, lack of control, and aggressiveness. Colorblind ideology was operationalized as participants' reported degree of belief that differences should be ignored when encountering others. Significant associations were found between degree of belief in ignoring differences and perceptions of the children as aggressive and out-of-control. Therefore, as the tendency to believe in ignoring differences increased, the tendency to see the *Crooklyn* children as aggressive and out-of-control also increased. Imposing colorblind ideologies when evaluating minority children may be associated with increasingly negative perceptions, and therefore may not be in the children's best interest. Implications for improving social service-provision also are discussed.

Keywords: black youth, colorblindness, diversity, minority children, misperceptions of, multiculturalism, perceptions of, projective techniques, racial, racism, Spike Lee, stereotyping.

Introduction

Mirroring our society as a whole, social workers and other social service providers are sometimes guided by inaccurate, stereotypical perceptions, as well as inequitable procedures and policies toward youth and adults of color. Such tendencies often result in disparities in education, incarceration, health and mental health, housing, lifespan, and mortality (e.g., Alexander, 2012; Goff, Jackson, DiLeone, Culotta, & DeTomasso, 2014; Gomez, 2015; McNeil & Fincham, 2016; Thomas & Blackmon, 2015). In addition to this, social service providers may vary in a naïve belief that if people attempt to not notice differences and disparities concerning others, then stereotypes, racism, discrimination, and systemic inequities will not exist or will disappear (Apfelbaum, Sommers, & Norton, 2008; Atwater, 2008). This study is guided by the theoretical framework originally offered by Janet Schofield (1986), and many others since, who assert that believing that we do not see color and other differences in others— or that we do not even have need to nor should—is associated with punitive and discriminatory behavior toward those who hold race-related and other differences. Thus, it has been well established that colorblind ideologies—while often well-intentioned—tend to do more harm than good for minorities (e.g., Alexander, 2012; Apfelbaum et al., 2008; Atwater, 2008; Goff et al., 2014; Schofield, 1986). The current study offers the opportunity to observe colorblind ideology in a family evaluation context among social service providers, albeit a fictionalized family.

Past research has shown that belief in colorblindness may be held in spite of the tendency for humans to notice differences from an early age. Therefore many educators, social workers, and other practitioners have the well-intentioned goal of not seeing people differentially based

on color, culture, ethnicity, race, etc.. Many desire to embrace colorblind philosophies to guide

them in their work with children and families and hopefully overcome intergroup barriers. This

would be admirable if it resulted in appropriate, fair and equitable treatment of minority groups.

To the contrary, colorblindness has been associated with less cultural competence and more

discriminatory behavior, especially in colorblind whites toward minorities (Alexander, 2012;

Apfelbaum et al., 2008; Chao, Wei, Good, & Flores, 2011; Goff et al., 2014; Schofield, 1986).

Review of the Literature

Colorblindness is defined as the tendency to ignore or "minimize" cross-cultural

differences (Purdie-Vaughns, Steele, Davies, Ditlmann, & Crosby, 2008, p. 617) as a way of

"promot[ing] racial harmony" (Scruggs, 2009, p. 1). It also is associated with seeing "racial and

ethnic differences as irrelevant to education" and other areas of daily life (Rist, 1974, p.

62). This perspective asserts that race and related characteristics should be avoided in our

mental processing about others or should be invisible when we are relating to others or making

decisions about them (Atwater, 2008; see also Schofield, 1986). The colorblind perspective

may be driven in part by "fear of conflict or a fear of appearing prejudiced" (Atwater, 2008, p.

1). It also is associated with the idea that to see or acknowledge others' race or color runs

counter to seeing them as individuals and will result in discrimination against minority groups

or reverse-discrimination against the majority group (Rist, 1974). Colorblindness not only

requires us to attempt to ignore or to not acknowledge the race(s) or culture(s) of minorities, but

it also helps to make "invisible" the "benefits" of whiteness and white-privilege (Atwater, 2008,

p. 4; Scruggs, 2009, p. 1). Peggy McIntosh (1990) in her classic work on white privilege noted

that minorities are not provided the same privileges or daily benefits as their white counterparts

when it comes to activities such as engaging with law enforcement, in consumer marketplaces,

with employers, etc., and many studies even in recent years confirm her assertions. For example, black children are seen by both law enforcement and lay people as older, less in control, more aggressive, and less human (Goff et al., 2014). Historically colorblind philosophies, per se, have been used as a means of asserting that individuals are equal and that people are imbedded within a fair meritocracy (Tatum, 1992). Yet research shows that not only do minorities not have equal access, but often they are not perceived accurately nor receive fair or equitable treatment (e.g., Alexander, 2012; Goff et al., 2014; Morris, 2007). Over the decades, institutions that adopted colorblindness overlooked the fact that individuals in these environments were not colorblind. For example, somewhat ahead of her time, Janet Schofield (1986, p. 237) gathered extensive data on a middle school that had as its mission embracing diversity, positive intergroup relations, and "equal status for its [diverse] members." They also specified colorblindness as part of their adopted mission, and promoted race as an "invisible" characteristic and "taboo topic" among both its staff and students (Schofield, 1986, p. 237 & 239). Schofield found that in spite of efforts to erase race and racism from their school, there still were many policies, practices, behaviors, perceptions, and statistical findings that indicated not only subtle and strong racist practices, but also a strong cognitive resistance to perceiving or acknowledging inequities in their "colorblind" policies and practices among those in power. In the decades following Schofield's study, many strides in the thinking about colorblindness have come not only from educational and psychological studies but also from the political arena, with continued debates centering on the theme of affirmative action. Research studies have continued to further validate that adoption of colorblind philosophies in scholastic or workplace settings is maladaptive (Apfelbaum et al., 2008; Plaut, Thomas, & Goren, 2009).

In the new millennium, awareness began returning to colorblindness even more as something to avoid—not that everyone listened. A diverse and multicultural curriculum inclusive of the appreciation of differences was reaffirmed as one of the best ways to favorably impact children, families and other individuals within schools, social service settings, and other environments (Sogunro, 2001; Richeson & Nussbuam, 2004; Atwater, 2008; Kwong, 2009 ; Wittenberg-Lyles, Villagran, & Hajek, 2008). Sogunro (2001) makes the point that to effectively provide education or support to a child, one must be sensitive to their cultural differences. In order to be sensitive to those differences, one must be willing to seek, perceive, and process the individual, cultural, historical, and institutional nuances that may accompany a person. This would include considering their approach to situations, problem solving, performing tasks and responsibilities, and/or otherwise engaging with the world (Abrams & Moio, 2009). Jenkins (2007) illustrates that while many would hope in this day and age that race is not still a factor, study after study points to the fact that differential treatment based on race is still prevalent because of the disproportionate rate of minorities living in conditions of poverty. In spite of many organizations and societal institutions operating with good intentions and supposed colorblindness, they still tend to behave in discriminatory ways. For example, Jenkins (2007) points out studies among real employers where resumes from fictitious white job applicants with criminal records yielded more potential job opportunities than did resumes of fictitious black job applicants *without* criminal records. Jenkins remarks that in our post-civil rights, post-desegregation society there are numerous significant disparities in income, education, housing, etc. that exist for minorities compared to whites. Hill-Jackson (2007, p. 30) illustrates that many white pre-service teachers embrace what may be interpreted as colorblindness or an "unaware[ness] of the multiple realities of other racial groups'

experiences." Responsive and critical pedagogy helps to move these teachers from a "naïve" understanding of their minority students to a "critical consciousness" that will allow them to acknowledge and embrace the different races and diversities of their students (Hill-Jackson, 2007, p. 32).

In spite of colorblindness being associated with naïve and maladaptive cross-cultural approaches, there has been a resurgence of it within the political, social, and educational arenas in the new millennium (Atwater, 2008). Numerous studies have illustrated the negative consequences of colorblindness and the difficulty that humans have in ignoring race in spite of idealistic intentions or efforts to do so. For example, it has been noted that elementary school teachers who operate from a colorblind perspective often unwittingly hold lower expectations for their black and Hispanic students, accompanied by a sense of white superiority in comparison to minority cultures (Atwater, 2008). Other studies have demonstrated that minorities are more trusting of environments that are low in colorblindness and high in the acknowledgement or valuation of diversity (Purdie-Vaughns, et al., 2008). Research studies also have indicated that whites are more likely to employ colorblind strategies when in racially-mixed situations, especially if they feel anxious about the norms or expectations for noticing race. Further, in such situations, whites' anxiety may cause them to appear less friendly and more uncomfortable to observers, with blacks also perceiving apparently colorblind whites as more prejudiced than non-colorblind ones (Apfelbaum et al., 2008).

Examining factors such as tendencies for colorblindness and their associations with perceptions of children and families is important given the disparities that have been evidenced in social services and criminal justice systems throughout the country. For example, Schollmeier & Wiatrak-Uhlenkott (2004) found that in Minnesota, "African American children are five times

more likely to be in out-of-home placement than the general population in Minnesota"

(Schollmeier &Wiatrak-Uhlenkott, 2004, p.9). They also found that 80% of African-American

children processed into the system are likely to be reported for neglect in comparison to 64% for

white children. During the stage of maltreatment determination, African-American children are

"7.8 times more likely to be determined victims of maltreatment" than white children and "16.3

times more likely than white children to be placed out of home during the assessment"

(Schollmeier & Wiatrak-Uhlenkott, 2004, p.10). Similar patterns of racial disparities also have

been found nationally, with Native-Americans and African-Americans experiencing the highest

disparities in investigation, substantiation, and foster care placement (Hill, 2007; Cooper, 2013;

see also Pabustan-Claar, 2007). Schollmeier & Wiatrak-Uhlenkott (2004) also reveal that even

when presented with hypothetical cases of children with identical scenarios with the only

difference being their race, child protective services (CPS) workers deem black families as

significantly higher risk families. Research by the National Coalition for Child Protection

Reform (NCCPR, 2011) as well as by legal analysts (e.g., Cooper, 2013), indicate that this is a

widespread national problem. While African-Americans make up roughly 13% of the U.S.

population, they make up 26-30% of all foster children (LaLiberte, Crudo, & Skallet, 2015;

NCCPR, 2011; see also Cooper, 2013). To contrast community differences, the NCCPR also

illustrates that during the first decade of the new millennium, one in ten children in the

predominately black neighborhood of Central Harlem were taken from their homes compared to

only one in 200 in the predominately white neighborhoods of Ridgewood and Glendale, New

York (NCCPR, 2011). Additionally, when observing babies born with positive cocaine tests,

"the child was more than 72% more likely to be taken away if the mother was black" (NCCPR,

2011). Highlighting this issue among medical professionals, Lane, Rubin, Monteith, & Christian

(2002, p. 1603) examined the rates of "substantiated maltreatment" for every 1000 white and black children presented in an emergency room over the course of a period of six years. The number of cases of suspected child abuse reported for white and black families were 10.0 and 25.2 per 1000 cases respectively—or 2-3 times higher for black families-- for identical injuries (Lane et al., 2002). They explain that the reasons for this large disparity by race are unknown, but they speculate that it can be the result of several factors including the possibility that minority children are more likely to be perceived as being abused more frequently than white children. Lane et al. (2002) also report that minority children who entered hospitals with injuries of unknown origins had more tests performed to rule out abuse than their white counterparts. This also might suggest that white children are being under-monitored for abuse. Such findings suggest that even in modern times, identical circumstances and information about a child or family can yield different perceptions and courses of action by social service providers.

Criminal justice statistics reveal even greater disparities. For example, some studies reveal that black youth make up 70% of school arrests and referrals to law enforcement (Civil Rights Data Collection (CRDC), 2012; Gilliam, Maupin, Reyes, Chin, & Shic, 2016). Similar statistics are revealed for adult minority men, with one of every 15 being imprisoned compared to one of every 106 white men, or worse (Alexander, 2012; DuVernay, 2016; Kruger, 2016; PEW Prison Center on the States Report, 2008). According to The Sentencing Project, "African Americans are incarcerated in state prisons across the country at more than five times the rate of whites, and at least ten times the rate in five states" (Nellis, 2016, p. 1). There is increasing speculation that the majority of these disparities are due not only to differential monitoring and punitive action by law enforcement, but also differential penalties with respect to "the war on drugs." (e.g. Alexander, 2012).

Given the many disparities faced among families of color within the social service, educational, law enforcement, and penal systems, our analysis is aimed at gaining greater insight into the role that the adoption of a colorblind ideology may play in the differential perception of black parents and children among social service providers. Examining observer perceptions of a family of color in relation to observer beliefs about colorblind ideologies may provide some insight into differential perceptions. Our analysis is aimed at examining whether reported belief in a colorblind ideology[1] is associated with positive and/or negative evaluations of a minority family in a communication and discipline situation using a motion picture as a projective stimulus for such an analysis. Therefore, the following analysis attempts to examine the associations between observers' articulated degree of belief in ignoring racial differences (or colorblind ideology) and their resulting perceptions and evaluations of a mother and her children in a fictionalized movie scene. A short excerpt of Spike Lee's *Crooklyn* was shown to observers who were instructed to treat the scenes as if they were reenactments of real-life events. The partially autobiographical scenes center on an urban black family's communications, child discipline, and interpersonal interactions. Of interest was whether observers' degree of believing that they should ignore cultural, racial, or ethnic background differences would or would not be associated with evaluations of the family's communication, discipline, and behavior.

Methods

Participants

At the beginning of an in-service diversity-training program, two hundred social service providers were recruited to participate in an optional survey provided by the lead author[2]. 50.5% of the survey participants were social workers, 16.5% were

supervisors/directors/administrators, 6.0% were investigative social workers, 6.0% were clerical

workers, 5.5% were educators, 3.0% reported other kind of jobs[3]. Their education ranged from

12-20 years with the average being 16.5, thus the vast majority were college graduates. Women

constituted 79.5%; and men, 18.5%[4]. Participants who identified as white made up 63.0%;

black participants, 14.5%; Latina participants, 11.5%; Asian participants, 2.0%; Native

Americans, 0.5%[5]. 77.5% self-identified as either democrats or independents, with the

remaining 6.5% self-identifying as republicans[6]. Ninety-four percent previously participated in a

training program or workshop on cultural diversity at some point, while 2% had not[7].

Materials

Film Excerpt. The first 15 (14:52) minutes of the movie *Crooklyn* (1994), produced by

Spike Lee, were shown. This excerpt included several consecutive scenes illustrating the daily

interactions of an African-American family, the Carmichaels, and the dynamics of their

predominantly black and quite diverse Brooklyn neighborhood. The scenes include the family

dining, the mother instructing her five children to do chores and later observing that they had

not, her firmly disciplining her children, and some of the children balking at her reaction.

Survey Questions. The questionnaire administered consisted of narrative questions

soliciting opinions about the family and their behavior, survey questions, a variety of personality

scales such as Crowne and Marlowe's Social Desirability Scale[8], and basic demographic

questions. Of particular focus in this analysis were the questions that asked (see Appendix) how

competent, abusive, supportive, and irresponsible the mother was; how obedient, out-of-control,

respectful, and aggressive the children were; and the observers' own reported degree of belief in

ignoring differences when encountering others. Thus, the belief in colorblind ideology question

was as follows, with part B being analyzed to test for associations with social service providers'

evaluations of the family.

    A. In your opinion, when you encounter people who are from different cultural,

    racial, or ethnic backgrounds than you, is it best to ignore differences? (check

    one) < > Yes   < > No

    B. Overall, to what *degree* is it best to ignore differences?

        The best thing to do   9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1   The worse thing to do

Procedure

Participants attended one of seven identical free workshop sessions that included

watching the 15-minute clip of *Crooklyn*, but the research survey component was optional.

Therefore, participants were invited prior to the training component to volunteer for the research

component, with no costs or benefits, and with the right to withdraw at any time. Instructions

were provided both in writing and verbally, and are excerpted from the Informed Consent as

follows:

    "Thank you for your participation in this workshop, which includes a voluntary

    research study aimed at understanding different ways that people make sense of

    children and families in communication and discipline situations. The workshop

    portion of this event will involve your watching a 15-minute segment of the

    movie *Crooklyn* as if it were a reenactment of a real-life situation, and later

    discussing it. But before discussing the scenes as part of our workshop, you will

    be given an opportunity to express your opinions about the scenes in a

    questionnaire, if you are willing to participate in an anonymous research

    survey…. The goal of the survey is to better understand how observers interpret

the same family interactions differently, especially when it involves communication and discipline…. Whether you participate in the survey or not, you will be able to discuss your reactions to the scenes as our workshop continues immediately after the survey."

Statistical Analyses

Correlations were conducted in order to ascertain associations between participants' reported belief in colorblind ideology and their judgments concerning the *Crooklyn* mother and her children. Regression analyses also were conducted to assess whether correlational associations among the variables still held even when controlling for basic demographic variables.

<div align="center">

Results

</div>

The possible scores of belief in colorblindness ranged from 1 (the *worst* thing is to ignore the difference) to 9 (the *best* thing is to ignore the difference). Among the 185 of the 200 participants who responded on this item, the minimum score was 1 and the maximum score was 8, with a mean of 3.04 and a standard deviation of 2.01. So, while these participants tended to score low in belief in colorblind ideology, they still possessed enough diversity in their colorblindness scores to yield noteworthy results.

Correlational Results

Analyses were conducted to explore whether there were any relationships between the belief in ignoring differences and demographic variables. Correlations (or point bi-serial correlations[10], where appropriate) were run to see if there were associations between reported belief in ignoring differences and demographic variables of gender, race, age, education, income, and having children or not. Only the variables of race and age were significant, with

white as well as increasingly older social service providers reporting greater tendencies toward believing that differences should be ignored (r=-.16, p<.05, and r=.25, p<.01, respectively). Also, there was no significant correlation between belief in ignoring differences and social desirability (r=-.082, p <.30), suggesting that participants were being honest about their degree of belief in ignoring differences.

Table 1 reveals that there were no significant correlations between perceptions of the mother and observers' reported belief in ignoring differences when meeting others. Although perceptions of the mother were not associated with reported belief in colorblind ideologies per se, the results concerning belief in ignoring differences were quite different when it came to perceptions of the children. Table 1 also reveals that in terms of assessing the obedience of the children, as reported belief in ignoring differences increased, perceptions of the children's obedience significantly decreased. In terms of assessments of the children as out-of-control, the greater the participants' tendency to believe in ignoring differences, the more out-of-control they perceived the children to be, and again significantly. And finally, in terms of how aggressive participants assessed the children, the more participants ascribed to the philosophy of ignoring differences, the more aggressive the participants perceived the children to be, and significantly. Unlike the previous three results, Table 1 also reveals there were no significant correlations between assessment of the children's respectfulness and reported belief in ignoring differences.

Regression Results

Four hierarchical multiple regression analyses were conducted to examine whether reported belief in ignoring differences would continue to relate to participants' evaluation of the children's respectfulness, obedience, degree of being out-of-control, and aggressiveness while

controlling for demographic variables. For the regression testing, conventional demographic variables such as age, gender, race/ethnicity, education as well as social desirability and having seen the film previously were entered altogether at step one, and degree of belief in ignoring differences was entered at step two, for the four hierarchical multiple regression analyses. In the first analysis, evaluation of the children's respectfulness was the dependent variable. This overall regression model associating children's respectfulness with degree of belief in ignoring differences (while controlling for the demographic variables, previously having seen the film, and the personality variable of social desirability) was not significant ($R^2 = .05$, $F [7, 155] = 1.28$, $p = .27$). The initial model with the demographic variables, having seen the film or not previously, and social desirability at the first step, was not significant ($R^2 = .05$, $F [6, 156] = 1.29$, $p = .27$) and only explained 4.7% of participants' evaluation on the children's respectfulness. The R^2 change with the added belief in ignoring differences at the second step was not significant either ($\Delta R^2 = .007$, $p = .28$). Therefore, like the non-significant correlation findings for observers' perceptions of the respectfulness of the children and the observers' own belief in ignoring differences, there also were no significant regression findings between these two variables.

In the second analysis, evaluation of the children's obedience was the dependent variable. This overall regression model associating children's obedience with degree of belief in ignoring differences, controlling the demographic variables, having seen the film previously, and the personality variable of social desirability, was not significant ($R^2 = .05$, $F [7, 155] = 1.15$, $p = .33$). The initial model with the demographic variables, having seen the film, and social desirability at the first step was not significant ($R^2 = .03$, $F [6, 156] = .87$, $p = .52$) and the R^2 change with the added belief in ignoring differences at the second step was not significant either

($\Delta R^2 = .017$, $p = .10$). Therefore, unlike the significant correlation findings for observers' perceptions of the obedience of the children and the observers' own belief in ignoring differences, there were no significant regression findings between these two variables when controlling for demographic variables.

In the third analysis (Table 2), evaluation of the children's degree of being out-of-control was the dependent variable. This overall regression model associating the children's degree of being out-of-control with degree of belief in ignoring differences, controlling the demographic variables, having seen the film previously, and social desirability, was not significant ($R^2 = .07$, $F[7, 155] = 1.71$, $p = .11$). The initial model with the demographic variables, having seen the film, and social desirability at the first step was not significant ($R^2 = .04$, $F[6, 156] = 1.05$, $p = .40$) and only explained 3.9% of the variance of participants' evaluation of the children's degree of being out-of-control. However, the R^2 change with the added degree of belief in ignoring differences at the second step was significant ($\Delta R^2 = .033$, $p < .05$). As shown in Table 2, there was a significant positive effect of degree of believing in ignoring differences ($\beta = .20$, $t = 2.35$, $p < .05$) on participants' evaluation of the children's degree of being out-of-control. This means that as participants' belief in ignoring differences or colorblind ideology increased, the more out-of-control they perceived the children to be. Therefore, like the significant correlation findings for observers' perceptions of how out-of-control the children were and the observers' own belief in ignoring differences, the regression findings also were significant between these two variables, even when controlling for demographic variables.

In the fourth analysis (Table 3), observers' evaluation of the children's degree of aggressiveness was the dependent variable. This overall regression model associating the children's degree of aggressiveness with degree of belief in ignoring differences, controlling

demographic variables, having seen the film previously, and social desirability, was significant ($R^2 = .30$, F [7, 150] = 2.09, $p < .05$). The initial model with the demographic variables, having seen the film, and social desirability at the first step was not significant ($R^2 = .21$, F [6, 151] = 1.17, $p = .32$) but the R^2 change with the added belief in ignoring differences in the second step was significant ($\Delta R^2 = .044$, $p < .01$). In the final model, there was a significant negative effect of having seen the film ($\beta = -.23$, $t = -2.65$, $p < .01$) on participants' evaluation of the children's aggressiveness, meaning that participants who had seen the film viewed the children as less aggressive. However, even considering that, as shown in Table 3, still there was a significant positive effect of degree of believing in ignoring differences ($\beta = .23$, $t = 2.71$, $p < .01$) on participants' evaluation of the children's aggressiveness. Thus, meaning that as observers' belief in ignoring differences or colorblind ideology increased, their perceptions of the children's aggressiveness also significantly increased. Therefore, like the significant correlation findings for observers' perceptions of how aggressive the children were and the observers' own belief in ignoring differences, the regression findings also were significant between these two variables, even when controlling for demographic variables.

In sum, the regression analyses revealed that when controlling for demographic variables, the observed correlation (Table 1) between the observers' assessment of the children's *obedience* and their belief in colorblind ideology was lost. However, concerning the significant association that was revealed by correlation (Table 1) with the children's *lack of control* and *aggressiveness* variables, the relationship with colorblind ideology remained significant (Tables 2 & 3). The results, taken together, show that there are strong and significant associations between observers' degree of believing in ignoring differences, and their degree of perceiving the minority children in the *Crooklyn* scenes as "aggressive" and "out-of-control."

Discussion

Although proponents of colorblindness have long argued that holding a colorblind attitude can help eliminate racial prejudice against racial minority members, the current analysis reveals results more in line with modern proponents in opposition of colorblindness. This was a data set of well-educated and predominantly politically liberal[9] social service providers, the vast majority of whom reported having previous diversity-training, and as a group they yielded a low mean score in belief in colorblind ideology. Yet, the colorblind ideology among them significantly was associated with negative and stereotypical views of black children as aggressive and out-of-control. In fact, the children were viewed as more aggressive and out-of-control even when demographic variables and other related variables were controlled. The results are consistent with Sleeter's (1991) theory that colorblindness is detrimental to the well-being of ethnic minorities, although in this case, they were fictionalized children. The results support previous findings that the adoption of colorblind attitudes and practices are maladaptive as shown in the field of education and in studies of workplace settings (Apfelbaum et al., 2008; Plaut, Thomas, & Goren, 2009). The current analysis supports the contention that the seemingly good intentions behind ignoring differences simply may not work among social service professionals. It also is interesting to note that these results were significant when evaluating a negative, more stereotypical aspect of the children (aggressive, out-of-control), but not when evaluating positive aspects of the children (respectful, obedient). This may suggest that the relationship between colorblind ideologies and judgments of children such as those in *Crooklyn* may be more applicable to negative, stereotypical behaviors that engender punitive action more so than positive ones that engender rewards. Therefore, colorblindness may assist in punishing children, while doing nothing for rewarding them. This adds to the evidence that colorblind ideologies

tend to do exactly the opposite of what the holder of it may intend— and it tends to negatively impact the intended recipients. Therefore, social service providers should ask themselves whether these disparate perceptions associated with colorblind ideology could negatively impact how they might respond to a family—and would that response be a supportive and constructive one, or an exclusively punitive one? The results of this study support and parallel Goff et al.'s (2014) findings mentioned earlier that reveal that lay people and law enforcement officers tend to see black youth as older, more aggressive, and less human—but in our case, social service providers' seeing the youth as aggressive and out of control was associated with greater degrees of colorblind ideology. So, while we know that people of color, and youth of color in particular, experience disparate perceptions and treatment, studies such as this help us to analyze perceptions for their corresponding observer associations-- and in this case, greater degrees of observer colorblind ideology are associated with negative perceptions of the *Crooklyn* children.

The correlational finding that white social service providers tended to have stronger tendencies to believe in ignoring differences is consistent with other research on colorblind ideologies (Apfelbaum, Sommers, & Norton, 2008; Atwater, 2008). The finding that increasingly older participants tended to have stronger tendencies to believe in ignoring differences suggest generational influences.

Limitations

One limitation of this analysis is that it derives from one item that makes up the independent variable— so most pressing should be examining social service observers' evaluations of children and families against the Color-Blind Racial Attitudes Scale (CoBRAS) which consist of more measures (Neville, Lilly, Duran, Lee, Browne, 2000). A second limitation of this analysis and results is that they were derived from a convenience sample rather than a

randomized sample of social service providers. It would be useful to randomly sample a larger population of social service providers from a variety of geographic regions in order to ensure a diverse, representative sample. This would enable greater generalizability to broader audiences who work with children and youth. Additionally, the participants were recruited from in-service diversity trainings. Having a sample that includes providers who are not attending diversity trainings may provide more holistic findings. Further, expanding the sample may reach individuals who are not as well exposed to cursory cultural diversity trainings. A third limitation is that minorities are not well represented among social service providers and educators in many parts of the country, hence, recruiting a diverse sample can be quite challenging which was somewhat the case here, where less than a fifth of participants were men, and only a third of the participants were racial minorities. To add to this challenge, when using a stimulus such as *Crooklyn*, the relatively fewer minorities were more likely to already have been exposed to it, whereas the white participants were not. Thus, the challenge of collecting a diverse data set was further complicated by the disparity in the proportions that had and had not previously seen the film. Although we controlled for previous exposure to the film in our analysis, we wondered whether in future studies it would be possible to use a stimulus of which no participants have been previously exposed, so that controlling for previous exposure would not be necessary.

Relatedly, a fourth limitation is there are no other racial or ethnic counterparts to the *Crooklyn* scene that could be used to examine cross-cultural stimulus comparisons. Therefore, we cannot compare how colorblind ideologies are associated with evaluations of white, Hispanic, Asian, Native American, etc. children. Perhaps a series of identical multicultural film scenarios could be developed that would allow colorblindness and other variable comparisons to be made in subsequent studies. This also would ameliorate the previous-exposure challenge

described in the previous limitation. A fifth limitation is that this analysis only considered colorblind ideology. Future research or analyses could further explore child-rearing, experiential, belief, personality, other demographic associations with perceptions of families. And lastly, it would be useful to assess colorblind beliefs and/or personality tendencies in relation to an extended experience or stimulus (beyond a quick 15-minute exposure) in order to understand how extended diverse experiences are associated with colorblind ideologies, personality traits, and/or evaluations of families.

Implications

There are several possible implications based on these results in terms of social service and educational practices. A first implication is that social workers, teachers, and others working with children and youth should consider whether a colorblind ideology may be associated with an unbalanced view of children and adolescents who fit the profile of the youth in the film (e.g., minority, lower or working socioeconomic class, large in number, rambunctious, and/or outspoken, etc.). In this analysis, colorblind ideology was associated with increasingly negative evaluations of the children as more aggressive and more out-of-control. The findings beg the question of whether social service providers who hold colorblind ideologies even to a small degree might be more likely to hold negatively biased views against actual minority children similar to the ones in the film. Further, these findings may help us to further understand findings such as Lane et al.'s (2002) analysis wherein black families who presented their children to emergency rooms with identical injuries as their white counterparts were three times more likely to be referred to investigative/protective services agencies. Could well-intentioned providers be contributing to such disparities? The current analysis also suggests that social service providers and educators should carefully consider their views with respect to colorblind ideologies, and

should think about how those views may or may not shape or influence their evaluations of the youths with whom they work (e.g., Goff et al., 2014; Morris, 2007).

Secondly, given that negative perceptions of the children, rather than positive ones, emerged significantly as belief in ignoring differences increased, it may be worth examining in future studies whether colorblind beliefs are more likely to be associated with negative, stereotypical evaluations than positive ones? In any case, the current findings speak to the need for additional experiential training of social service providers that allows them greater opportunities to view their work through a lens of critical consciousness. Ongoing self-reflection allows providers to better understand their clients on an individualized level while acknowledging and embracing cultural factors, including differences and similarities, which may influence how providers interpret their clients' behaviors, needs, and resources (Dunlap 2011 & 2013; Tatum, 1992).

A third implication involves the fact that due to time restrictions, this study was designed using only 15 minutes of *Crooklyn*. During this period of time there were several scenes that portrayed the daily interactions of the family; however, because participants viewed only a snippet of this family's life, the social service providers may have not been able to consider the family's functioning holistically, which is a challenge in the real world as well. Thus, social work educators who might like to use *Crooklyn* as an educational tool might do so in two phases—the first 15 minutes, and then the entire movie, which may give them a broader view of this family. A fourth implication is that this work also inspires the question of whether social service providers with colorblind ideologies may be more likely to perceive families with profiles similar to the movie as needing more extreme supervision and intervention? Could colorblind ideologies play some small or large role in the disparate rates of discipline and

placements outside of the home of minority youth revealed in the literature (e.g., Goff et al., 2014; Lane et al., 2002; Schollmeier & Wiatrak-Uhlenkott, 2004)? A fifth implication is that social work educators teaching courses and programs on diversity should incorporate ongoing reflection regarding race (and other diversity characteristics) in many humans' daily lives into their curriculum. The current results suggest that individuals who have a greater tendency to believe that they should embrace differences in their everyday lives viewed the *Crooklyn* children as less aggressive and less out-of-control. This could be a function not only of belief (or not) in colorblind ideologies, but again, also one's own racial identity development stage and process (Dunlap, 2011 & 2013; Tatum, 1992). If social service providers are trained to reflect on what stage they are in with regards to their own racial identity development, they likely may be more cognizant of how their own racial identity influences their views of the clients with whom they engage.

A sixth implication of these analyses is that they also reveal differing notions about what control and obedience look like, and indicate a possible need for social work educators to incorporate concrete explorations of cultural differences of these during their courses. Ideas such as responsibility, respect, obedience, discipline, and assertiveness are conceptualized differently across cultures. Therefore, social work educators should challenge themselves and their students through activities, discussions, and other engagement to truly understand their own values and expectations and how values and expectations could be manifest differently for individuals of different backgrounds. This is noteworthy because in many disciplines, diversity training consists of examining the "other" in quick, touristy workshops, with little work on what's inside the minds and hearts of the practitioners within the workshops. That is where a great deal of the learning is— among social service providers and educators examining their

23

own thoughts, perceptions, misperceptions, conceptions, beliefs, and ideas. Without the inclusion of self-examination components, there is no worthy diversity-training (Dunlap, 2000, 2011 & 2013). Additionally, social work educators should be tasked with imparting in their students the importance of recognizing cognitive resistance in practice. Social service educators, teacher educators, and administrators will undoubtedly be challenged by both students and clients on their views and values during their career and should be educated and encouraged continuously to remain open-minded so that they are able to acknowledge inequities in treatment and policies for the traditionally disenfranchised.

Consistent also with our findings here, minority youth within educational and criminal justice systems tend to be the most vulnerable in terms of being viewed as more aggressive and out-of-control. It has been well documented that severe and unjust disparities exist in educational and criminal justice systems with regard to minority youth discipline (Alexander, 2012; Atwater, 2008; Goff et al., 2014; Pew, 2008). Again, minority youth are perceived as older than they actually are, as well as less childlike, and more threatening, resulting in exponentially more severe punishments than their white counterparts (Goff et al., 2014). Could colorblind ideologies play a role in explaining why students of color tend to be punished more severely for the same behaviors as their white counterparts in educational systems? Furthermore, could colorblind ideologies play a role in unarmed children and youth of color being misperceived as dangerous to the degree of being perceived as needing to be mortally defended against[11]?

To summarize, the current analyses reveal a tendency where belief in a colorblind ideology is negatively associated with service providers' evaluations of minority children and their behavior. The findings suggest that colorblind ideologies and self-reflection still-- or even

24

more-- are important topics to include in multicultural education and training of social service and educational professionals. Therefore, because our analyses revealed a significant relationship between ascribing to colorblind ideologies and harshly judging youth characters as aggressive and out-of-control, we suggest that those working with youth should consider the role that their degree of belief in colorblind ideology, even if it's very mild, may or may not play in their evaluations and assessments of children, youth, and their families. Moreover, it is important that self-examination and discussion of colorblind ideologies be introduced and included in social service providers' educational and preparatory curricula. Our findings suggest that those working in social service and educational systems may benefit from deeply considering to what degree colorblind practices, ideologies, and policies possibly influence work with minority youth and perhaps hinder some youth and families from being appropriately supported and protected with an equitable and fair balance of intervention. At the minimum, the findings should encourage social service providers to take note, pause, and consider one's own beliefs with respect to ignoring or embracing differences. And further, to consider how those beliefs may or may not influence how one perceives and/or responds to the children and youth who are from backgrounds different from one's own. By doing this, we can seek to take our own biases into account as we continue to better shape them and strive to arrive at accurate judgments and decisions concerning children and families.

References

Abrams, L.S. & Moio, J.A. (2009). Critical race theory and the cultural competence dilemma in social work education. *Journal of Social Work Education, 45(2),* 245-258.

Alexander, M. (2012). *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness.* NY: New Press.

Apfelbaum, E.P., Sommers, S.R., & Norton, M. (2008). Seeing race and seeming racist? Evaluating strategic colorblindness in social interaction. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 95(4),* 918-932.

Atwater, S.C. (2008). Waking up to differences: teachers, color-blindness, and the effects on students of color. *Journal of Instructional Psychology, 35(3),* 246-251.

Chao, R., Wei, M., Good, G., & Flores, L., (2011). Race/ethnicity, color-blind racial attitudes, and multicultural counseling competence: The moderating effects of multicultural counseling training. *Journal of Counseling Psychology,* 58 (1), 72-82.

Civil Rights Data Collection (CRDC), (2012). *Revealing New Truths About Our Nation's Schools.* Washington, DC: United States Dept. of Education.

Cooper, T. (2013). Racial bias in American Foster Care: The national debate. *Marquette Law Review, 97 (2),* Article 3, 1-64.

Dunlap, M. (2013). Cross-cultural community engagement, Elizabeth Kubler Ross's model of death & dying, and racial identity development. In H. Fitzgerald, J. Primavera, and C. Burack's (Eds.) *Going Public: Civic Engagement & the Scholarship of Practice.* E. Lansing, MI: Michigan State University Press.

Dunlap, M. (2011). Thriving in a multicultural classroom. In C.P. Harvey & M.J. Allard (Eds.), *Understanding and Managing Diversity.* Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson/Prentice Hall.

Dunlap, M. (2000). *Reaching Out to Children & Families: Students Model Effective Community Service.* Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield.

DuVernay, Ava, Director (2016). 13th (film documentary), Netflix Original (Producer).

Gilliam, Walter; Maupin, Angela; Reyes, Chin; Accavitti, Maria, & Shic, Frederick (2016). "Do Early Educators' Implicit Biases Regarding Sex and Race Relate to Behavior Expectations and

Recommendations of Preschool Expulsions and Suspensions?" *Yale Child Study Center: A Research Brief*, September 28, 2016.

Goff, P., Jackson, M., DiLeone, B., Culotta, C., DiTomasso, N. (2014). The Essence of Innocence: Consequences of Dehumanizing Black Children. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology,* 106 (4), 526-545.

Gomez, J. (2015). Microaggressions and the enduring mental health disparity: Black Americans at risk for institutional betrayal. *Journal of Black Psychology, 41 (Apr.)*, 121-143.

Hill, R. B. (2007). An analysis of racial/ethnic disproportionality and disparity at the national, state, and county levels (Report by the Casey-CSSP Alliance for Racial Equity in Child Welfare). http://www.aecf.org/~/media/Pubs/

Hill-Jackson, V. (2007). Wrestling whiteness: Three stages of shifting multicultural perspectives among white pre-service teachers. *Multicultural Perspectives, 9(2),* 29-35.

Jenkins, A. (2007). Inequality, race, and remedy. *The American Prospect, 18(5),* 8-11.

Kruger, P. 2016 (2016). Netflix's '13th' explores 'modern slavery' in incendiary new documentary. Fortune, October 6, 2016. http://fortune.com/2016/10/06/13th-netflix-documentary-ava-duvernay/

Kwong, M.H. (2009). Applying cultural competency in clinical practice: Findings from multicultural experts. *Journal of Ethnic & Cultural* Diversity, 18 (1), 146-165.

LaLiberte, T., Crudo, T., Skallet, H. (2015). "CW 360: A comprehensive look at a prevalent child welfare issue. *Culturally Responsive Child Welfare Practice*, Center for Advanced Studies in Child Welfare, School of Social Work, University of Minnesota, Winter, 2015. http://cascw.umn.edu/wp-content/uploads/2015/03/CW360-Winter2015.pdf

Lane, W.G., Rubin, D.M., Monteith, R., & Christian, C.W. (2002). Racial differences in the evaluation of pediatric fractures for physical abuse. *JAMA, 288(3),* 1603-1609

McIntosh, P. (1990). White Privilege: Unpacking the invisible knapsack. *Peace and Freedom, July/August*.

McNeil, S. & Fincham, F. (2016). Racial discrimination experiences among Black youth: A person centered approach. *Journal of Black Psychology*, *42 (Aug.),* 300-319.

Morris, E. (2007). "Ladies" or "loudies"?: Perception and experiences of Black girls in classrooms. *Youth & Society*, 38 (4), 490-515.

National Coalition for Child Protection Reform (NCCPR) (2011). Child Welfare and Race. www.nccpr.org/reports/7Race.pdf

Nellis, A. (2016). The color of justice: Racial and ethnic disparity in state prisons. The Sentencing Project, June 14, 2016. http://www.sentencingproject.org/publications/color-of-justice-racial-and-ethnic-disparity-in-state-prisons/

Neville, H.; Lilly, R.L.; Duran, G.; Lee, R.M.; Browne, L. (2000). Construction and initial validation of the Color-Blind Racial Attitudes Scale (CoBRAS). *Journal of Counseling Psychology*, Vol 47(1), 59-70. http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/0022-0167.47.1.59

Pew Center on the States Prison Report (2008). One in 100: Behind bars in America 2008. http://cdpsweb.state.co.us/cccjj/pdf/PEW%20Report%20One%20in%20100.pdf

Pabustan-Claar, J. (2007). Achieving permanence in foster care for young children: A comparison of kinship & non-kinship placements. *Journal of Ethnic & Cultural Diversity in Social Work*, 16 (1/2), 61-94.

Plaut,V., Thomas, K. & Goren, M. (2009). Is multiculturalism or color blindness better for minorities? *Psychological Science*, 20 (4) 444-446.

Purdie-Vaughns, V., Steele, C.M., Davies, P.G., Ditlmann, R., & Crosby, J.R. (2008). Social identity

  contingencies: How diversity cues signal threat or safety for African-Americans in mainstream

  institutions. *Journal of Personality & Social Psychology, 94(4), 615-630.*

Richeson, J.A., Nussbaum, R.J., (2004). The impact of multiculturalism versus color-blindness on racial

  bias. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology, 40(3),* 417-423.

Rist, R.C. (1974). Race, policy, and schooling. *Society, 12(1),* 59-64.

Schofield, J.W. (1986). Causes & consequences of the colorblind perspective. In J. Dovidio & S.

  Gaertner (Eds.), Prejudice, discrimination, & racism (231-253): San Diego: Academic.

Schollmeier, B. &Wiatrak-Uhlenkott, M. (Spring, 2004). Race disparity and child

  protection. Minnesota Justice Foundation Seminar,

  http://www.lsej.org/documents/118871LSEJ-Child%20Prot%205-04.pdf

Scruggs, A.E. (2009). Colorblindness: the new racism? *Teaching Tolerance.*

  http://www.tolerance.org/magazine/number-36-fall-2009/colorblindness-new-racism.

Sleeter, C. (1991) Introduction: Multicultural education and empowerment, in: C. Sleeter (Ed.),

     Empowerment through multicultural education (pp.1-23). Albany, NY: State University

     of New York Press.

Sogunro, O. (2001). Toward multiculturalism: Implications of multicultural education for schools.

  Multicultural Perspectives, 3(3), 19-33.

Tatum, B. (1992). Talking about Race: The Application of Racial Identity Development Theory in the

  Classroom. *Harvard Educational Review,* Vol. 62 (1), 1-24.

Thomas, A.J., Blackmon, S.M. (2015). The influence of of the Trayvon Martin shooting on racial

  socialization practices of African American parents. *Journal of Black Psychology,* 41 (Feb.),

  75-89.

Wittenberg-Lyles, E., Villagran, M. & Hajek , C. (2008). The impact of communication, attitudes, and

acculturation on advanced directives decision-making. *Journal of Ethnic and Cultural Diversity*

in Social Work, 17(4), 349-364.

Endnotes

[1]Degree of colorblind ideology was operationalized for the purpose of this analysis via the questionnaire item on a 9-point Likert-type scale, "In your opinion, when you encounter people who are from different cultural, racial, or ethnic backgrounds than you, is it best to ignore differences?"
[2]An average of 30.6 participants were invited to participate across the 7 sessions (a total of 214), with an average of 28.6 agreeing to participate (a total of 200).
[3]12.5% did not respond to the occupation question.
[4]Two percent did not respond to the gender question.
[5]Eight and a half percent of participants did not respond to the race/ethnicity question.
[6]Ten percent of participants did not respond to the political affiliation question.
[7]Four percent of participants did not respond to the diversity training question.
[8]The Crowne and Marlowe's Social Desirability Scale is a conventional survey item that allowing correlations to detect whether the group tended to not answer honestly to survey items.
[9]The liberal orientation of the participants was indicated by 77.5% self-identifying as either democrats or independents, and only 6.5% self-identifying as republican. Their education was indicated by the 12-20 years range and 16.5 average years of schooling reported.
[10]A point bi-serial correlation is one conducted on variables with 0 and 1 options only, and is theoretically similar to a t-test.
[11]Googling reveals many of the numerous cases of unarmed children and youth being killed.

Appendix

The following items were part of a larger, comprehensive study and questionnaire that that focused on various perceptions of the *Crooklyn* family, and observer characteristics.

Questions Regarding the Mother

1.   Overall, to what *degree* was the mother competent in her parenting?

Extremely competent   9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1   Not competent at all

2.   To what *degree* was the mother abusive toward her children at any time?

Extremely abusive   9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1   Not abusive at all

3.   To what *degree* was the mother supportive of her children's healthy development?

Extremely supportive 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1 Not supportive at all

4.   To what *degree* was the mother irresponsible or neglectful regarding her children at any

time?

Extremely irresponsible 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1 Not irresponsible at all

Questions Regarding the Children

1.   Overall, to what *degree* were the children obedient?

Extremely obedient   9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1   Not obedient at all

2.   Overall, to what *degree* were the children out-of-control?

Extremely out-of-control   9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1   Not out-of-control at all

3.   Overall, to what *degree* were the children respectful?

Extremely respectful   9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1   Not respectful at all

4.   To what *degree* did the children behave aggressively at any given time?

Extremely aggressively 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1 Not aggressively at all