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Preserving White Supremacy through the Use of Colorblind Racism in Policy Preference

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Abstract

Recent literature has brought attention to an avoidance of race-talk among Whites that not only attributes social inequalities to non-racial factors, but challenges the existence of racism at all, and reinforces the power of white supremacy in a way that is hard to detect. The paradigm shift from Jim Crow to colorblind racism simply demonstrates a practice of oppression that has been redefined and reshaped, but the foundation of our society that has been built on white supremacy and racial inequality has yet to change. In order to preserve this foundation, colorblind ideology has been used to implement coded language and race-neutral explanations in policy, reinforcing the existing racial hierarchy in a powerful, but discreet, manner. This study utilizes survey data to analyze the relationship between colorblind attitudes and policy preference. It is hypothesized that 1) higher levels of colorblindness will lead to less support for social policies that would benefit racial and ethnic minorities, and 2) Whites will present higher levels of colorblind attitudes than non-Whites. Results from an online survey indicate that Hypothesis 2 was not supported (Whites and non-Whites show similar levels of colorblindness), while Hypothesis 1 was supported (colorblindness and policy preference are significantly correlated). The study ultimately finds that, as levels of colorblindness increase, support for social policy that would benefit racial and ethnic minorities decreases, suggesting that racial considerations still serve as an influence in social policy despite how subtle they may seem.

Keywords

Race, colorblind racism, colorblindness, policy preference, policy, whiteness

Introduction

In 1865, the 13th Amendment was ratified, abolishing the use of slavery, or "involuntary servitude," in the United States (National Archives, 2016). In 1964, Jim Crow laws and practices of discrimination were outlawed through the Civil Rights Act, with the Fair Housing Act (1968) following soon after. Then, in 2008, the United States elected the country's first African-American president, Barack Obama. Today, some would argue that it is because of these very moments and interventions that the United States can now claim itself as a post-race nation in which people are equal and history can be left in the past. The American Dream, values of individualism and meritocracy, and claims of a post-race society have all served as a mask to cover up and justify the systems and ideologies that were built to create gaps in income, wealth, poverty, homeownership, incarceration, and educational achievement (Shelby, 2016). This post-

race narrative not only justifies and dismisses racial disparities, but it promotes the assumption that those who face disadvantages do so due to an individual lack of effort, hard-work, or ability.

Brown v Board of Education (1954) declared separate schools to be unequal, but they remain more segregated today than in the 1960's (Lopez & Buriaga, 2014). The Fair Housing Act deemed it illegal to discriminate in housing, but still, Blacks and Hispanics are more likely to encounter unfavorable treatment half of the time (Denton, 1996). The racist structures and systems that many in the United States view as remnants of the past are still being maintained and reformed today. The blatant and overt racism expressed in times of slavery or Jim Crow may not seem to be as prevalent now, but that does not dismiss the possibility for the root ideology to reform and present itself through new methods. New norms today have encouraged certain people, specifically Whites (Alexander, 2017), to avoid talking about or bringing up race. This transition from a blatant racism to an avoidance of race-talk has been labeled by scholars as *colorblind racism* (Bonilla-Silva, 2015), or *symbolic racism* (Tesler, 2012).

Colorblind racism has typically been used by Whites to avoid the uncomfortable conversations surrounding race, specifically the conversations that address unequal opportunity between Whites and people of color. Dismissing race as an important factor in social inequalities, like employment, education, and incarceration, allows Whites to conceal their privilege behind a "guise of assumed meritocracy" (Norris & Billings, 2016). In an effort to distance the historical legacies of racism from contemporary racial inequalities, politics have increasingly been used as an outlet to frame ideals of white supremacy into seemingly race-neutral policies. Although colorblind racism presents itself in a subtle and often hard-to-detect form, the consequences of it remain harsh for the racial and ethnic minorities in this country, serving as a tool to maintain economic, political, and social power for Whites. Understanding the

"new stylistic tools" (Bonilla-Silva, 2002) that people use to avoid claims of racism will expose the continuing significance of race in our institutions today, despite efforts to claim a post-race narrative as legitimate.

In an attempt to consider one of the many mechanisms of colorblind racism, the current study investigates the reinforcement of white supremacy through the use of colorblind racism in social policy. More specifically, by analyzing the ways in which race-coding and colorblind language are used in connection to social policies that have racialized consequences, the effect of colorblind attitudes on policy preference is examined.

Literature Review

Colorblind racism, in this context, refers to the adoption of a post-race ideology, in which social inequalities are labeled as issues of individualism and meritocracy in order to minimize the role that race continues to play in determining social outcomes. What may have been initiated as an attempt at progressiveness, the ideology of colorblindness has now become corrupted by those benefiting from the dismissal of race, because, as Ansell (2006) suggests, "to be blind to color, given our history and our social structure, may well mean that one must be blind to justice as well" (p. 337). Although the mechanisms of discrimination have changed, the ideology and feelings rooted in racism have placed themselves under the guise of colorblindness, making it hard to detect, yet successful in maintaining harsh consequences for racial and ethnic minorities.

Consequences of Colorblind Racism

Research beginning in the 1980's tends to show the early stages of a shift from overt to covert racism, with scholars noting the emergence of newly formed racist strategies that

presented as "more sanitized and coded" (Ansell, 2006). Ansell (2006) notes that what once started as a non-racial ideology in an effort to challenge white supremacy has, in recent decades, been taken and appropriated by Whites, and the right wing of the political spectrum, to use claims of being "beyond race" in an attempt to deny the existence of white privilege. Through the use of colorblindness, beliefs or actions in adherence to white supremacy are hidden, identifying those biases becomes difficult, and the experiences of racial/ethnic minorities facing discrimination based on race may be dismissed. Meanwhile, when a violation of race-neutrality exists (i.e. affirmative action), Whites may use this to claim acts of "reverse racism." Scholars suggest that the use of race-neutral discourse serves to reinforce the racial hierarchies; it allows Whites to see themselves as non-racist, and it "diminishes sensitivity to racism" (Plaut et al, 2018, p. 204).

In an analysis of non-response in social surveys, Alexander (2017) addresses the use of race-neutrality, finding that dominant groups, in this case Whites, tend to be the most likely groups to opt out of talking about racial issues. With Whites being twice as likely to claim colorblindness than people of color, they are also more likely than non-Whites to deny the existence of institutional discrimination and "adopt explanations for racial inequality that deny the role of discrimination" (Alexander, 2017, p. 420). In a sample of 657 interviews, Alexander (2017) concludes her research finding that Whites show nonresponse to race-related items at a rate that is more than 5 times higher than non-Whites. Similarly, in an effort to understand race-neutrality and colorblindness, Bonilla-Silva (2002), analyzed a 'Social Attitudes' study that was conducted among 600 college students. Bonilla-Silva (2002) found that the dominant strategy used to maintain a race-neutral dialogue was to use the "anything but race" explanation, with over half of the respondents relying on justifications of individualism, cultural differences, and

merit throughout their interviews. Further, he found that younger, educated, and middle-class people were more likely than older, less educated, and working-class people to make full use of the resources of colorblind racism (Bonilla-Silva, 2002).

Scholars have continuously found an avoidance of race-talk among Whites that not only attributes inequality to non-racial factors, but challenges the existence of racism at all and reinforces the power of white supremacy in a way that is hard to detect. While racial discourse today is more subtle, it still remains "as effective as Jim Crow in maintaining the status quo" (Douglas, Sáenz, & Murga, 2015, p. 1430). The paradigm shift from Jim Crow to colorblindness simply demonstrates a practice of oppression that has been redefined and reshaped, but the foundation of white supremacy and racial inequality has yet to change. The consequences of this are punitive for racial and ethnic minorities, as these inequalities have embedded themselves in a variety of institutions and systems such as criminal justice, education, immigration, and public policy.

Mechanisms of Colorblind Racism

Often referred to as "the new racism," "symbolic racism," or "covert racism," the ideology of colorblindness has been increasingly investigated by scholars in a variety of fields of sociology, as racial inequality embeds itself within our institutions. For example, sometimes being embraced as a method to create a welcoming and inclusive environment, colorblindness, as a reality within our education system, has proven to dismiss and individualize racial inequalities among students. In a study investigating teacher and student relationships within schools that embrace colorblind ideology, Plaut et al. (2018) found that teachers who demonstrated more colorblind orientations at school were less willing to adapt their teaching methods to the needs of

minority students. While some attempted to create a racially safe space for students, their language labeled these students as "academically inferior, unprepared, and disinterested" (pg. 202). Similarly, Kohli, Pizarro, & Nevárez (2017) found, in an examination of existing research, that much of our education system has implemented "the new racism" as a method of maintaining institutionalized power in a way that seems invisible, whether intentional or not. A common pattern is found in that students of color and their families are often blamed for a lack of academic success that could simply be fixed through behavioral solutions (e.g., parents should read more to their children), when structural shifts would provide better support to students who are failed by the system (e.g., limited resources and racial profiling) (Kohli, Pizarro, & Nevárez, 2017). This type of framing allows for methods of institutional discrimination, such as tracking, surveillance, and punishment, to be dismissed and replaced with individual justifications (i.e., students of color are lazy, behaviorally challenged, and/or intellectually deficient), often leading to an achievement gap, disproportionate rates of suspension, and an overrepresentation of Black and Latinx students in special education (Kohli, Pizarro, & Nevárez, 2017).

Similar patterns of discrimination that are justified by colorblind ideology can be seen within the criminal justice system, with an abundance of research claiming it to be the most severe mechanism of colorblind racism. The criminal justice system has been used for centuries to replace the explicit laws that once deprived people of color from basic rights. Today, racial and ethnic minorities are still subjected to an unequal protection of the law, but in the name of race-neutral crime control (Brewer & Heitzeg, 2008). In an analysis of the racialization of crime and punishment, Brewer & Heitzeg (2008) suggest that this shift from an explicitly racist to a colorblind set of legal mechanisms has not only continued the subordination of racial and ethnic minorities, but has been justified due to a colorblind rhetoric that has shifted the conversation

from racial inequality to disproportionate rates of crime. In their evaluation of the criminal

justice system and colorblind racism, Brewer & Hetizeg (2008) argue,

> The criminal justice system provides a convenient vehicle for physically maintaining the
> old legally enforced color lines as African Americans are disproportionately policed,
> prosecuted, convicted, disenfranchised, and imprisoned. The reliance on the criminal
> system provides the color-blind racist regime the perfect set of codes to describe
> racialized patterns of alleged crime and actual punishment without ever referring to race.
> There is no discussion of race and racism; there is only public discourse about crime,
> criminals, gangs, and drug-infested neighborhoods. (p. 633)

The use of colorblind justifications in a system that is greatly dependent on race allows for the

maintenance of white supremacist political and economic advantage, while remaining unchecked

by both law and public discourse under the guise of crime control (Brewer & Heitzeg, 2008).

The criminalization of racial and ethnic minorities continues to be a significant pattern

throughout the legal system, as well as public discourse, shaping discussions and public

perceptions of issues that, as a result, are now stereotypically associated with racial and ethnic

minorities.

In an analysis of immigration as a mechanism of colorblind racism, Douglas, Sáenz, &

Murga (2015) argue that, although the explicitly racialized language that once characterized

immigration policy in the United States has disappeared, race is still at the foundation of

immigration, with words like "immigrant," "illegal immigrant," and "undocumented immigrant"

serving as stand-ins for immigrants of color, and more specifically, Mexican and Latino

immigrants. Further, they argue that colorblind rhetoric and frames are used particularly to

dehumanize and criminalize immigrants of color, often associating them with taking away jobs

and resources and perpetuating crime. This study finds that, by framing immigration in a colorblind manner, public perception and legal enforcement tend to favor and ignore European immigration, while, in 2010, Mexicans accounted for 79.5% of all the "foreign nationals" apprehended by law enforcement officials (Douglas, Sáenz, & Murga, 2015).

The changes that have been made in policy and the adoption of colorblind ideology, although addressing the legalized subordination of racial and ethnic minorities, are solutions that fail to address the embeddedness of white supremacy within our institutions. Scholars continue to describe the prevalence of discrimination that people of color face within our education system, criminal justice system, and immigration system, suggesting that only the superficial symptoms of a long-lasting disease have been addressed (Kohlz, Pizarro, & Nevárez, 2017). The common finding among this research has been the misleading claims of progressive policy that has only shifted from using explicitly racialized language to a language that is coded yet still triggers attitudes of racial resentment.

Colorblind Racism and Policy

Historically, white supremacy and white privilege have been constructed through overtly racist policies such as the Indian Removal Act, slavery, or Jim Crow laws. These types of policies serve the economic and political interests of Whites, while contributing to the disenfranchisement and oppression of non-Whites (Jayakumar & Adamian, 2017). As racial ideology has shifted over time and policies such as the Civil Rights Act have been passed, Whites have had to adapt in their strategies of maintaining that established power. In order to preserve white supremacy, colorblind ideology has been used to implement coded language and race-neutral explanations to mask the discriminatory nature of policies today.

In an analysis of Whites' attitudes towards punitive and preventive crime policies, Green, Staerklé, & Sears (2006) use data from a Los Angeles County social survey to understand the influence that symbolic racism has on policy preference. They find that racial intolerance, both through antipathy and stereotyping, is greatly linked to Whites' support for the death penalty and "other harsh punishments" (Green, Staerklé, & Sears, 2006). As a consequence of racial stereotyping, research shows that Blacks are more likely to be falsely identified as perpetrators of violent crimes, Black perpetrators of crimes face harsher sentences than White perpetrators, and, in capital cases, defendants whose victims are White face a higher risk of receiving the death penalty than if their victims were non-White (Green, Staerklé, & Sears, 2006). Ultimately, this suggests that symbolic racism is a key factor in predicting support for crime policy, and is heavily influenced by both racial resentment and racial stereotypes.

Despite the use of race-neutral explanations such as individualism, political ideology, or merit, symbolic racism and racial resentment are increasingly showing to be strongly associated with policy preferences, and more specifically, Whites' opposition to racially targeted policies (Tarman & Sears, 2005). In a study of race coding and White opposition to welfare, Gilens (1996) investigates the importance of racial attitudes when evaluating race coded policies like welfare, ultimately finding that opposition to welfare depends more on racial resentment than on any other factor considered in the study. Through a randomized telephone survey, non-Black respondents were asked several questions with the intention of clarifying the following variables' influence on their welfare views: attitudes toward Black people, attitudes toward the poor, individualism, political party identification, and self-interest (Gilens, 1996). First, it was found that when respondents were asked, "What percent of all the poor people in this country would you say are black?," there was a large overestimation, with the median guess being 50.6%

(Gilens, 1996, p. 595). Then, based on the responses of the survey, and the overestimation of Black people in poverty, it was found that the highest predictor for welfare policy preference was racial attitude (i.e., viewing Blacks as lazy), with the second being attitudes toward the poor (i.e., viewing the poor as lazy) (Gilens, 1996). Despite the many race-neutral and colorblind claims that policy preference is guided by values of individualism and economic self-interest, this study found that the real determinant of welfare opposition is the belief that Black people are lazy and take advantage of the welfare system.

Theory/Hypotheses

Race, although technically a social construct that is often redefined, continues to shape the movements, beliefs, and structures within our society that result in real and substantial consequences. Colorblind ideology has allowed for people to simultaneously deny the effect that racial attitudes have on those movements, beliefs, and structures, while maintaining economic, political, and social power for Whites. The shift from overt to covert racism represents a root ideology that is simply adapting in order to produce an unequal distribution of power. Therefore, this system of racial inequality must be analyzed in a way that, first, considers the ideology and behavior of the oppressing group (Du Bois, 1920).

Whiteness

Scholars have continually suggested that Whiteness is both ideological and material, meaning that "Whiteness" is not just defined as a skin color, but as a social process. As noted by Nkomo & Ariss (2014), Whiteness is "the production and reproduction of dominance rather than subordination, normativity rather than marginality, and privilege rather than disadvantage" (p. 3).

White supremacy, typically defined as a belief that Whites should and do hold institutional power over others, also refers to a social system that provides structural advantages and privilege for Whites over other racial and ethnic minority groups despite laws of equality. The process of maintaining this privilege, power, and normativity may change over time, but, based on a possessive investment in whiteness (Lipsitz, 1995), people will adopt new strategies, such as colorblind racism, in order to produce these results.

Like W.E.B. Du Bois' concept of double-consciousness, DiAngelo (2011) suggests that people of color are almost always seen as "having a race" and are often described in racial terms ("the Black man"), while Whites are usually exempt from such processes, as their race is understood as the neutral and normalized one, often being described as such ("the man"). In the United States, it is rare that a White person does not belong, and, if a situation in which they are the minority occurs, it is "usually very temporary, and an easily avoidable situation" (DiAngelo, 2011). Although the process of Whites discovering their racial identity has become more common in recent times, it is often that they respond defensively to discussions addressing the power struggle between Whites and non-Whites in this country (DiAngelo, 2011). This defensiveness or resistance to accepting claims of inequality is described by DiAngelo as White Fragility. According to Lowery, Knowles, Unzueta & Chow (2004), Whites often resort to three coping mechanisms in an attempt to defend their identity. Two of the three, denial of their privilege and distancing oneself from Whiteness through colorblind ideology, reinforce and maintain their privileged status. Using policy as a mechanism of these coping strategies allows Whites to not only preserve their privilege, but distance themselves from claims of racism by using race-neutral justifications (i.e., political affiliation, individualism, and/or religion) for their support of those policies.

Overt to Covert Racism

In *The New Jim Crow*, Alexander (2010) argues that, despite a promise of racial equality, the 13th Amendment is one of the first examples in which racially coded language was used in order to continue the oppression of racial and ethnic minorities, specifically Blacks, in the United States. Slavery was abolished with one exception: "except as a punishment for crime" (Alexander, 2010). This exception marked the beginning of the ideological shift from overt to covert racism, serving as a blueprint for other "race-neutral" but oppressive policies like the War on Drugs and stop and frisk (Jayakumar & Adamian, 2017). As a result, "slave patrols and night watches are now coded as police officers; slave plantations are now coded as prisons; and slaves are now coded as inmates" (Jayakumar & Adamian, 2017, p. 915). Placing disproportionate numbers of racial and ethnic minorities in the prison system with claims of a colorblind or just process only serves to reinforce the false narratives surrounding individualism and the American Dream and dismiss the significance of race. Politicians have increasingly used race-coded terms like the War on Drugs or War on Crime in order to exploit systems of power without facing the punishment for racial discrimination or exploitation, with some even admitting to the use of these strategies. In a video clip from *13th* [Film], former Nixon domestic policy chief John Ehrlichman discusses the drug war, stating:

> The Nixon Campaign in 1968, and the Nixon White House after that had two enemies:
> the antiwar left and black people. You understand what I'm saying? We knew we
> couldn't make it illegal to be against the war or black, but by getting the public to
> associate blacks with heroin and then criminalizing it heavily, we could disrupt that
> community… and vilify them night after night on the evening news. (Duvernay, 2016).

Alexander (2016) suggests that this shift from overt to covert racism has been guided and paralleled by the shift from overtly discriminatory policies (for example, slavery and Jim Crow) to seemingly race-neutral ones that actually produce the same effects, but are able to avoid intervention based on the coded language used. The ideological shift from Jim Crow to colorblindness simply demonstrates a method of oppression that has been redefined and reshaped in order to contribute to the systems that preserve white supremacy. In preserving this privilege, new and adapting strategies were developed based on the concurrent desires to reinforce the racial hierarchy, and to maintain an egalitarian self-image (Plaut et al., 2018).

Frames of Colorblindness

Colorblind racism has typically been used by scholars as a blanket term to explain the avoidance of race-talk among people attempting to preserve privilege. Political sociologist Eduardo Bonilla-Silva dedicates much of his work to expanding on the concept of colorblind racism and, in doing so, has developed a four framed structure that specifies the several ways in which colorblind ideology is typically used. First, Bonilla-Silva & Dietrich (2011) identify several dimensions of colorblind ideology: "denial of white privilege, lack of awareness of the implications of institutional racism, rejection of social policies such as affirmative action, and denial of pervasive racial discrimination in the United States" (p. 194). In addition, Bonilla-Silva & Dietrich (2011) have identified four main frames in which these dimensions are conceptualized: *Abstract Liberalism, Cultural Racism, Minimization of Racism, and Naturalization*.

The first frame, *Abstract Liberalism*, is the most commonly used, providing Whites with the appearance of being "reasonable" and "moral" while opposing policies or interventions

intended to address racial inequality (Bonilla-Silva & Dietrich, 2011). Through this approach, Whites are able to use "language of liberalism" that is seemingly race-neutral in their justifications for avoiding race issues or participating in the systems that harm people of color (i.e., opposing affirmative action because discrimination is already illegal).

The second frame, *Cultural Racism,* is characterized by the shift from overt to covert racism. Instead of justifying racial inequality through claims of biological inferiority, it blames racial inequality on the cultural practices of minorities (Bonilla-Silva & Dietrich, 2011). This frame includes victim-blaming language that is intended to attribute minority standing to a lack of hard work, and a lack, or inappropriate set, of values, (i.e., "If they worked harder then they wouldn't be in that situation," or "If Jews, Irish, and Italians made it, how come Blacks have not?") (Bonilla-Silva & Dietrich, 2011, p. 193).

Third, *Minimization of Racism* is a frame that attributes racial inequality to "anything but" discrimination and racism in order to dismiss discrimination as an issue of the past. Instead of considering the effects of housing discrimination on racial segregation, for example, those that use this frame will argue that residential segregation is a "voluntary" pattern, or a pattern due to income differentials. Instead of considering the effects of discrimination in hiring, they will blame the lack of diversity within their place of employment on a "lack of minorities applying." Instead of considering the effects of racial profiling in policing, they will blame disproportionate incarceration rates on "higher levels of crime."

Lastly, *Naturalization* is a method in which the segregation or separation of races is deemed to be a natural occurrence, absent of any structural influence (Bonilla-Silva & Dietrich, 2011). Separate neighborhoods, separate schools, and the disadvantages that minorities face in other areas are "just the way it is." It is unlikely that a person will adhere to the use of only one

of these frames. In fact, it is not uncommon for all of these frames to be used together in order to maximize the use of colorblind racism. And, as Bonilla-Silva (2002) argues, the use of these frames does not mean a person is "any less racist" than an overtly prejudiced person; it simply means that they are better at "navigating the dangerous waters of America's contemporary racial landscape" (p. 62) and know how to use a race-neutral language to "save face."

Jayakumar & Adamian (2017) confirm the use of different strategies, or frames, of colorblindness within their study of racism among White students at Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs), ultimately concluding that, not only did the sample exhaust all of Bonilla-Silva's *Four Frames of Colorblindness,* but they began to use a new strategy. This new strategy, what Jayakumar & Adamian (2017) deem as the *Fifth Frame* of colorblind racism, is dominantly used by Whites who express an acknowledgment of institutional racism, yet use this knowledge to their advantage. For example, respondents would acknowledge themselves as racist or as having privilege, but the researchers found that this was a "preemptive strike that protects him from being called out by others as racist," as well as a way to mitigate feelings of guilt (Jayakumar & Adamian, 2017, pg. 925). Other respondents using this *Fifth Frame* would refer to other White people as "they" in order to remove themselves from the associations of Whiteness while preserving their own privilege (Jayakumar & Adamian, 2017). This new frame allows for people to use their knowledge about systemic and institutional racism in order to preserve white privilege in an extremely discrete way that not only maintains comfort, but removes accountability.

Hypotheses

Based on research suggesting that there has recently been a shift from blatant to colorblind racism that is characterized by Whites benefitting from seemingly race-neutral policies that, in fact, have a racialized effect, the following hypotheses have been developed:

Hypothesis 1: A higher degree of colorblindness will lead to less support for social policies that would benefit racial and ethnic minorities.

Hypothesis 2: Whites will demonstrate a higher degree of colorblindness than non-Whites.

Methods

Data and Sample

Data were collected through an online survey. The survey link was posted on the Facebook pages of a random selection of county community groups in Washington, Oregon, and California from March 18, 2022 through April 18, 2022. Respondents self-selected to participate in the survey.

The sample contained 152 participants (aged 18-65+). Approximately 70% were women (n=106), 28% were men (n=43), and 2% identified as genderqueer (n=3). Approximately 72% of the participants were White, and the remaining participants, 28%, were categorized as non-White. The non-White category consisted of respondents identifying as Hispanic or Latino, Black or African American, American Indian or Alaska Native, Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander, and Asian or Asian American (see Table 1). Just over one percent of the sample identified as Multiracial or Multiethnic and 2.6% identified as Other.

Table 1. Frequencies of Race and Ethnicity within Non-White Category

	Demographic	N	Percent
Race			
	Whites	110	72.4%
	Non-Whites	42	27.6%
Non-Whites			
	Hispanic or Latino	27	17.8%
	Black or African American	4	2.6%
	Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander	1	0.7%
	Asian or Asian American	1	0.7%
	American Indian or Alaska Native	2	1.3%
	Multiracial or Multiethnic	3	2.0%
	Other	4	2.6%

The most frequently identified political affiliation within the sample was Democrat (45%), while the least common political affiliation was Republican (17.1%). Nearly 30% of respondents identified as Independent, and the remainder of the sample identified as Other. Education level among participants varied, with the most frequent levels of education being High School (26.3%) or a Bachelor's Degree (28.3%). Other respondents indicated that they had earned either an Associate's Degree (17%) or a Master's Degree (17.2%). Only a small percentage of respondents indicated that they had received some high school (0.7%), attended trade school (7.9%), or earned a Ph.D. or Higher (2.6%).

Variables

The primary variables in the analyses were degree of support for social policy (or policy preference), race/ethnicity, and degree of colorblindness. Degree of support for social policy (or policy preference) was measured by a five-point Likert scale for a series of seven items. Each item included a policy proposal (see Table 2), in which respondents indicated their degree of support, ranging from 'Strongly Support' (=5) to Strongly Oppose' (=1). Degree of support for social policy refers to the level that subjects supported or opposed social policies that would benefit racial and ethnic minorities. This variable was computed by averaging a respondent's Likert responses for the seven policy proposal items. The policy proposal items were guided by polls previously conducted by CNN news (2020), CBS (2015), and Monmouth University (2019), and served as appropriate measures of social policy preference within this study based on the use of racially coded language.

Race/ethnicity was measured based on a multiple choice response in which respondents indicated the race or ethnicity with which they identified with. Response options included Hispanic or Latino, Black or African American, American Indian or Alaska Native, Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander, Asian or Asian American, Middle Eastern or North African, Multiracial or Mutli-ethnic, and Other. A dummy variable was computed for use in the quantitative analyses (Whites=1, Non-Whites=0).

Degree of colorblindness was measured by a five-point Likert scale for a series of seven items. Each item included a social attitude statement (see Table 3) in which respondents indicated their degree of agreement, ranging from 'Strongly Agree' (=5) to 'Strongly Disagree' (=1). Degree of colorblindness refers to the level that subjects agreed or disagreed with statements that promoted a post-race ideology. This variable was computed by averaging

Table 2. Policy Proposal Items

Item	Policy Proposal
1	Affirmative action in college admissions in order to increase diversity.
2	The federal government providing health insurance coverage for undocumented immigrants living in the United States.
3	Increasing federal spending on social welfare programs.
4	Convicted felons receiving automatic restoration of voting rights upon release.
5	A higher tax rate for those who have an income above one million dollars.
6	One set of standardized tests across the country to measure student performance and progress.
7	Increasing government spending on security at the U.S. borders.

a respondent's Likert responses for the seven statement items. The statement items were guided

by CoBRAS (Neville et al. 2000). This scale is designed to measure a subject's degree of

colorblindness based on their agreement/disagreement with a series of statements that endorse

colorblind attitude, individualism, meritocracy, and post-race ideology.

Other variables included in the analyses were gender, political party, age, income, and

education. Each demographic variable was measured based on responses to multiple choice

items. Dummy variables were created for gender and political party. Gender was coded 1 if the

respondent identified as male, and 0 if the respondent identified otherwise (female or

genderqueer/non-binary). Political party was coded as 1 if the respondent identified as

Republican, and 0 if the respondent identified as either Democrat or Independent. The remainder

Table 3. Statement Items

Item	Colorblind Statement
1	Everyone who works hard has an equal chance of becoming wealthy.
2	The majority of people receiving welfare are taking advantage of the system.
3	Talking about racial issues causes unnecessary tension.
4	Affirmative action policies take away opportunities from more qualified people in college admissions.
5	Affirmative action policies take away opportunities from more qualified people in employment.
6	Our society focuses too much on race.
7	Immigrants should try harder to fit into the U.S culture and society.

of the measures—age, income and education—were ranked categorical variables, with the value increasing by one point as the age, income, and education of the respondent increased.

Procedures

Quantitative data analyses were used to test the hypotheses. In order to test both hypotheses, correlation coefficients were examined. Although the primary focus was to explore a potential correlation between degree of colorblindness and degree of support for policy, as well as a potential correlation between race/ethnicity and degree of colorblindness, it was recognized that separate relationships may exist between these variables and the variables of age, income, education, gender, and political party. To further examine the degree of colorblindness and

degree of support for policy among these variables, a series of descriptives were examined in order to compare means of colorblindness and policy preference across demographics. These descriptive analyses provided further examination of Hypothesis 2 as well.

Previous research has suggested a more frequent use of non-response or neutral responses within surveys among Whites (Alexander, 2017). Based on this finding, and the avoidance of race-talk illustrated in colorblind racism, the analysis of "Neutral" responses within the current study were used to examine the relationship between colorblindness and race/ethnicity. A separate set of frequencies were examined in order to explore the relationship between degree of colorblindness and degree of support for policy.

In a study conducted by Jayakumar & Adamian (2017), a fifth frame of colorblindness is explored. This fifth frame is characterized by Whites who express an acknowledgment of institutional racism, yet use this knowledge to their advantage in order to preserve white privilege or maintain comfort in racialized discourse. In order to explore this frame further, a series of frequencies were examined within the current study. The responses to statements and policy proposals were examined in order to analyze any cases in which respondents had a low degree of colorblindness (disagreement with statements), and a low degree of support for social policy (opposition to policy proposals). Respondents who disagreed with post-race ideology, yet opposed the policies that would benefit racial and ethnic minorities may be reflecting the fifth frame of colorblindness.

Results:

Correlation coefficients were computed among all demographic variables (race/ethnicity, gender, political party, income, age, and education), colorblindness, and policy preference. The

results of the correlational analyses showed that four out of seven correlations between

demographic variables and colorblindness were statistically significant, and four out of seven

correlations between those same demographic variables and policy preference were statistically

significant as well (see Table 4). These demographic variables included political party

(Republicans and Democrats), gender (Males) and education.

Table 4. Significant Correlations of Colorblindness and Policy Preference.

Variables		Colorblind Average	Policy Preference Average
Policy Preference Average	Pearson Correlation	-.799**	1
	Sig (2 -tailed)	<.001	
Colorblind Average	Pearson Correlation	1	-.799**
	Sig (2 -tailed)		<.001
Democrats	Pearson Correlation	-.542**	.561**
	Sig (2 -tailed)	<.001	<.001
Republicans	Pearson Correlation	.458**	-.522**
	Sig (2 -tailed)	<.001	<.001
Males	Pearson Correlation	.293**	-.325**
	Sig (2 -tailed)	<.001	<.001
Education	Pearson Correlation	-.280**	.201**
	Sig (2 -tailed)	<.001	<.001

In order to test Hypothesis 1, a correlation coefficient was computed between levels of

colorblindness and levels of support for policy, ultimately demonstrating a strong correlation, r=-

.799**, at a significance level of p=.001. When testing all items measuring colorblind attitude (7

items) and policy preference (7 items) for individual correlations, it was found that all 49

correlations were strong and significant at either the p= < .01 or p= <.05, level. Numerous

correlations between variables of age, income, education, and political party were found to be significant, but are excluded, as they go beyond the scope of this specific study.

Hypothesis 2 remains unsupported, as the correlation between race/ethnicity and degree of colorblindness is not significant. In general, the results suggest that a higher level of colorblindness is correlated with less support for social policies that could benefit racial/ethnic minorities. Males and Republicans, when compared to females and Democrats, tend to have higher degrees of colorblindness and indicate less support for social policies that could benefit racial/ethnic minorities.

To further explore Hypothesis 2 (that Whites present a higher degree of colorblind attitudes than non-Whites), a series of descriptives were examined (see Table 5). When comparing the average degree of colorblindness and the average degree of policy support between Whites (n= 110) and Non-Whites (n =140), it was found that they countered the expectations of Hypothesis 2, with non-Whites ($M = 2.69$), demonstrating a similar, but slightly higher, degree of colorblindness as Whites ($M = 2.41$). Additionally, when comparing the degree of policy support between both groups, Whites ($M= 3.55$) and non-Whites ($M= 3.52$) presented similar policy preference.

Mean scores on degree of colorblindness and support for social policies that could benefit racial/ethnic minorities were also examined by political party and gender. In comparing these variables between gender categories, males demonstrated a higher degree of colorblindness ($M= 2.92$) than both females ($M=2.3$) and genderqueer/non-binary participants ($M=2.86$). When examining the degree of policy support, the opposite effect was found, with males showing less support for policy ($M= 3.06$) than both females ($M=3.74$) and genderqueer/non-binary participants ($M=3.48$). Political party categories demonstrated the most variance in averages,

Table 5. Colorblindness and Policy Preference by Demographic.

Demographic	N	Colorblind Level Mean	Policy Preference Mean
Race			
Whites	110	2.41	3.55
Non-Whites	42	2.69	3.52
Gender			
Males	43	2.92	3.06
Females	106	2.3	3.74
Genderqueer, Non-Binary	3	2.86	3.48
Political Party			
Republicans	26	3.42	2.47
Democrats	71	1.95	4.11
Independents	45	2.76	3.26
Other	10	2.64	3.63

with Republicans scoring the highest degree of colorblindness (*M*= 3.42) but the lowest degree of support for policy (*M*= 2.47), Democrats scoring the lowest degree of colorblindness (*M*= 1.95) but the highest support for policy (*M*= 4.11), and Independents scoring somewhere in the middle on both degree of colorblindness (*M*= 2.76) and degree of policy support (*M*= 3.26). Consistent with the correlation coefficient for education, respondents with higher levels of education (Bachelor's, Master's, and Ph.D. or Higher) scored a lower degree of colorblindness (*M*=2.2) while respondents with lower levels of education (Some High School, High School, and Trade School) scored a higher degree of colorblindness (*M*= 2.7). Although no significant correlation exists, it was found that both lower income and higher income respondents scored a higher degree of colorblindness (*M*= 2.55) than middle income respondents (*M*=2.29).

The main findings found here support those found in the computed correlation coefficients. Although Whites and non-Whites did not differ significantly in degree of colorblindness or degree of support for policy, males, Republicans, and those with lower levels of education tended to have higher degrees of colorblindness and lower levels of support for social policy. Conversely, women, Democrats, and those with higher levels of education tended to have lower degrees of colorblindness and higher degrees of support for social policy.

Finally, frequencies of "Neutral" responses were examined in order to analyze a potential relationship between an avoidance of race-talk and race/ethnicity. A separate set of frequencies were computed for individual items on the survey in order to identify any discrepancies found between policy support and colorblindness in items that were similar (i.e., immigration policy and immigration attitude, or affirmative action policy and affirmative action attitude). For the majority of these items, the rate of "Neutral" responses between Whites and non-Whites were very similar. However, two items presented differing rates of "Neutral" responses. For the policy item, "*Affirmative action in college admissions in order to increase diversity,*" sixteen percent of Whites responded "Neutral," compared to 0.05% of non-Whites. Similarly, for the policy item, "*The federal government providing health insurance coverage for undocumented immigrants living in the United States,*" eleven percent of Whites responded "Neutral," while 0.04% of non-Whites responded as so.

When identifying any discrepancies between statement agreeance and policy support, it was found that, in some cases, Whites responded more favorably toward a statement than toward the policy that reflected that statement. For example, in the statement item regarding welfare, seventy-two percent of Whites disagreed that "*the majority welfare recipients take advantage of the system,*" but only sixty-four percent of Whites supported the policy proposed to increase

funding for welfare. Again, in the statement item regarding immigrant assimilation, sixty-four

percent of Whites disagreed that immigrants should "*try harder to fit into the U.S culture and*

society," but only 51% of Whites supported health insurance for immigrants. Although these

items do not exactly reflect one another, this may be an important pattern to note.

Discussion

      This study demonstrates, first, that the relationship between colorblind attitudes and

policy preference is strongly supported, with all 49 items testing colorblind attitude and policy

preference presenting a strong and significant correlation. This finding is consistent with

previous research, and specifically the findings of Gilens' (1996) welfare opposition study,

suggesting that policy preference is heavily dependent on racial attitudes, despite the common

use of race-neutral explanations such as individualism, self-interest, meritocracy, or partisan

loyalty. Similarly, despite the strong correlations found between gender and political party and

degree of policy support, the main determinant of policy preference found in this study is the

degree of colorblindness, showing consistency with previous research that has found racial

attitudes to be more influential on policy preference than both gender and political affiliation

(Gilens', 1996; Green, Staerklé, & Sears, 2006). In addition to reflecting the empirical findings

of Gilens (1996) and Green, Staerklé, & Sears (2006), the relationship between colorblind

attitudes and policy preference found in this study support Alexander (2010) and Bonilla-Silva's

(2015) concepts of race-coding in public policy and policy preference, suggesting that colorblind

racism, though not as blatant as other forms of racism, is real in its consequences. The language

used in the policies and statements listed ("welfare," "immigration," and "affirmative action")

were not explicitly race-based, but have been shown in previous research to be associated with race and evoke racially charged emotions.

When analyzing the correlation between the variables of education, gender, and political party and the measures of colorblindness and policy support, it was found that males, Republicans, and respondents with less education were more likely to have a higher degree of colorblindness and less likely to support social policy, while gender minorities (females, genderqueer/non-binary), Democrats, and respondents with higher levels of education were more likely to have a lower degree of colorblindness and more likely to support social policy. These findings are very consistent with previous research on specific demographics and policy support, as many of the survey items represented partisan issues. With regard to colorblindness, it seems that there is a gendered effect happening, possibly due to the fact that males tend to benefit from the social hierarchies that are in place, therefore differing in their level of support for policies that would benefit minorities. Although not correlated, when looking at income in connection to colorblindness, it was found that the middle categories of income tended to have a lower degree of colorblindness than the lower and upper categories of income. Those with both higher levels of education and middle-class income status are described by Bonilla Silva as populations that are more adept to the use of colorblindness (Bonilla-Silva, 2002). This may suggest that these populations within the sample do hold colorblind attitudes, but have a better capability of hiding it, or this may simply suggest that these populations have lower levels of colorblind attitudes.

In instances of differing rates of "Neutral" responses, it was found that Whites were more likely than non-Whites to respond neutrally, illustrating a potential avoidance of race-talk, an avoidance of intervention, and/or a desire to remain neutral. Although not as extreme, this nonresponse pattern is similar to what was found by Alexander (2017). This finding suggests that

some Whites may prefer to opt out of taking a stance on racial issues; they are aware that opposing social policy can be interpreted as racist, but supporting it would be compromising the racial hierarchy from which they benefit, so they may choose to avoid this conflict by remaining neutral and avoiding the discussion of race. In a country that has built white supremacy into the "fabrics of our society" (DiAngelo, 2011), simply doing nothing, or remaining neutral on racialized issues, is enough to maintain ownership of that power (Du Bois, 1920).

In some cases, it was found that Whites were more likely to disagree with a colorblind statement yet oppose social policies that would benefit racial and ethnic minorities. For example, while 72% of White respondents disagreed that "*the majority of welfare recipients take advantage of the system*", only 62% of White respondents demonstrated support for increasing welfare funding. Similarly, it was found that 64% of White respondents disagreed that immigrants should "*try harder to fit into U.S. culture and society,*" but only 51% of Whites supported the policy that would provide health insurance for immigrants. Although these deviations are not extreme and the parallels between statement and policy are not exact, this pattern in responses shows that some Whites were able to disagree with racial stereotypes, but not all supported the policies that are intended to intervene in institutional and systemic racism. Despite acknowledgments of racism, some Whites are continuing to oppose social policies that are intended to disrupt racial inequality in order to preserve their privilege and power. Jayakumar & Adamian (2017) suggest this process of awareness and appropriation as the *5th Frame of Colorblind Racism*, characterized by Whites presenting themselves as having racial awareness, but using this knowledge to better mask their use of colorblind racism and opposition to policies that are intended to intervene in the oppression of racial and ethnic minorities.

Finally, regarding the lack of support for Hypothesis 2, it is crucial to note that the majority of the non-White population within this study identified as Hispanic or Latino, and with very few respondents from other racial and ethnic minority categories, this very well may have influenced the correlation between race and degree of colorblindness. Colorblind racism is not exclusively used by Whites. Research suggests that some racial and ethnic minorities, specifically Hispanic and Latino groups, resort to the use of colorblind ideology as well (Bonilla-Silva, 2015). Research shows that Latinos are increasingly likely to adopt colorblind attitudes in an attempt to distance themselves from Blacks in the racial hierarchy (Bonilla-Silva, 2015). For example, in a poll conducted by ABC News/Washington Post (2014), when asked "How confident are you that the police in this country are adequately trained to avoid the use of excessive force?", twenty-three percent of Whites and 22% of Hispanics responded with "very confident," while only 4% of Blacks responded this way. Similarly, in a poll conducted by Pew Research (2013), when asked "Compared with five years ago, do you think the situation of Black people in this country today is better?", thirty-five percent of Whites and 37% of Hispanics responded with "better," while only 26% of Blacks responded similarly. Given these findings, further research could investigate whether a more diverse sample of non-Whites would impact the degree of colorblindness found in this study.

When conducting further research, an investigation into racial generalizations and assumptions may be useful, as Gilens (1996) discovered when linking the overestimation of Blacks in poverty to opposition to welfare. Considering these assumptions may be beneficial to understanding the specific beliefs behind the use of colorblind racism. For example, are people opposed to immigration because they believe that immigrants commit more crime, or because they assume the majority of immigrants are Hispanic and believe Hispanics commit more crime?

These assumptions should be considered when analyzing the use of colorblind racism in policy preference. In addition, previous research has benefitted from the use of interviews when analyzing the use of colorblind racism. Hearing race-neutral and colorblind language firsthand could allow for a more in-depth analysis of the types of colorblind racism that are being used, whereas a survey, and this study specifically, is limited to simply determining whether or not the ideology is being used. Lastly, the inclusion of overt strategies of racism may allow for a deeper analysis of the ideological shift that has occurred throughout living generations. Understanding the relationship between age and racism, whether its overt or covert, would allow for a comparison between younger generations who are more adept to colorblind language and older generations who have had to adjust between different methods of racism.

Conclusion

The findings of this study confirm that colorblind racism is a main determinant of policy preference, despite the common race-neutral explanations of partisan loyalty, individualism, or merit. Now requiring that claims of racism have tangible proof, a perpetrator, or an act of hate (Lopez, 2003), politics have become a safety valve for the overwhelming desire to maintain white privilege in a non-explicitly racist way. Affirmative action, welfare, crime, and immigration policies have been, and continue to be, manipulated in a way that benefits Whites, but removes marks of racism. Although this method of racism presents itself in a subtle, and often hard-to-detect, form, the consequences of it remain punitive for the racial and ethnic minorities in this country. The paradigm shift from blatant racism to colorblind racism simply demonstrates a practice of oppression that has been redefined and reshaped, but the foundation of white supremacy and racial inequality has yet to change. As W.E.B. Du Bois' (1920) notes,

although having no biological importance, race has now become a construct too embedded in our

society to one day decide that it can be ignored.

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