COLOR-BLIND: THE STABILITY OF ATTITUDE

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COLOR-BLIND: THE STABILITY OF ATTITUDE

A Thesis

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Abstract

of

COLOR-BLIND: THE STABILITY OF ATTITUDE

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Kamilah Sharifa Holloway

Color-blind attitude indicates a lack of awareness of differences in societal experience because of ethnicity, impeding successful interaction between various ethnic groups. The racial awareness of a sample of undergraduate psychology students (N = 125) was determined using the Color-Blind Racial Awareness Scale. A racially charged vignette was administered to examine the effects of priming on participants’ belief in a just world, as assessed by the Just World Scale. The effects of ethnicity and racial awareness were also examined. There was a significant effect of vignette (p < .01) on participants’ belief in a just world. A significant effect of level of racial awareness (p < .01) was also found. The findings have positive implications for customized diversity training.

_______________________, Committee Chair
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Date

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Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

Literature Review

Pioneered in the 1930s, personality psychology was positioned in severe contrast with American Experimental Psychology of the early 20th century (McAdams, 1997). Before personality psychology, the field of psychology took the seemingly more practical approach of focusing on elements of psychology and cognition (elements that could be measured) rather than the whole person. The relationship between external stimulus and observed responses made sense, whereas concepts such as human motivations and emotions seemed immeasurable because they occur within the human psyche (McAdams, 1997). Experimental psychologists searched for universal laws, while personality focused on how people were different from one another and how they are alike. Personality psychology combined theories from psychoanalysis, mental testing, and abnormal psychology among others (McAdams, 1997). With its emphasis on the whole person, motivation and individual differences, personality psychology quickly achieved a contested status in American Psychology.

Before Gordon Allport began his influential works regarding human nature, researchers such as August Comte (1852) envisioned a new science dedicated to the examination of the individual as both “cause and consequence of society” (Allport, 1954, p. 8). Allport respected and admired Comte’s view that a person is more than a biological and a cultural being; people are uniquely patterned being shaped by both individual and
social perspectives. “What Comte was seeking was a science of personality – unfortunately some years before such a science was possible” (Allport, 1954, p. 8).

William James and Sigmund Freud supported the idea of a person’s constant striving for wholeness or unity. For James the objective self or self-concept encompassed all that individuals comprehend as their identity and personal traits whereas their concept of the subjective self or ego involved internal consciousness (James, 1890). Freud’s Id, Ego, and Superego were the conceptualization of the human struggle to find a balance between the conflicting forces of their psyche and their environment. According to Freud, the final goal of reaching a compromise between the forces of the psyche was to reduce anxiety and promote effective, reality based functioning. If wholeness was not achieved, Freud felt that a person is bound to suffer cognitive dissonance (Freud, 1923).

Gordon Allport’s (1937) vision for personality psychology was a humanistic alternative to the mechanistic approach to most of the stimulus-response psychology that dominated his time. In addition, it was a challenge to Freudian determinism and the growing emphasis on human pathology. In his autobiography, Allport (1968) stated his wish to create a field of study centered on an image of mankind “that would allow us to test in full whatever democratic and human potentialities he might possess” (p. 394). Allport was passionately focused on uncovering the underlying causes for mankind’s inability to create a truly egalitarian society. In so far as his works on the human propensity for prejudice and injustice, he explored the development of negative attitudes toward different racial groups as a result of both internal and external influences.
Allport suggested (in his book *The Nature of Prejudice*) that there are prejudices that can be positive as well as negative but in the case of ethnic prejudice it is overwhelmingly negative. For that reason, he focused most of his work on prejudice against ethnic groups. His theory based the formation of prejudice on a person’s belief that they have had all negative experiences with the ethnic group in question even when evidence points to the fact that they have not (Allport, 1937). Allport observed that in most cases selective sorting of memories, mixed up with hearsay and overgeneralization, is what leads to established attitudes toward an ethnic group. Allport defined prejudice as an aversive or hostile attitude toward a person who belongs to a group, simply because they belong to the group and are therefore presumed to have the objectionable qualities ascribed to the group. Thus, the prejudice is the result of an unwarranted idea concerning a group as a whole. Allport stated that “It required years of labor and billions of dollars to gain the secret of an atom. It will take a still greater investment to gain the secrets of man’s irrational nature” (Allport, 1937, p.xi).

In Allport’s opinion, overcategorization is perhaps the most common trick of the human mind. He stated that

“Given a thimbleful of facts we rush to make generalizations as large as a tub. Life is so short, and the demand upon us for practical judgments is so great that we cannot let our ignorance detain us in our daily transactions. Thus we decide whether objects are good or bad by organizing them into classes” (p.xi).
Not every generalization is prejudice. Some are simply misconceptions from organizing wrong information. For example, a child may pick up the wrong idea about a group of people from an adult role model but in later years determine, through personal education and experience, that the concept was erroneous thus terminating the attitude (Allport, 1937). If a person is capable of rectifying erroneous judgments in the light of new evidence, they are not prejudiced. Prejudgments become prejudices only if they are not reversible after exposure to a new knowledge.

Allport also focused on the human propensity to separate society into groups. The individual considers their group of friends and family as the in-group and others who fall outside of that comfort zone belong to the out-group. This mentality helps to support a prejudicial belief system that may ostracize another group. Categorization is used for ease of information processing. Our experience in life tends to form itself into clusters (e.g., concepts, categories) (Allport, 1937). A new experience must be placed into its correct category. Since categorization is used as a method for easy and rapid processing, fewer categories are more efficient. This means that a person will force a categorical fit for an experience before trying to create a new category, even if the information is contradictory to most of the things that reside in that category (Allport, 1937). In addition, emotion and ideations that are tied to a particular category permeate any new experiences. It is very rare to change a category but if one can find a reason that serves self-interest it can be done (Allport, 1937). For example, if a person has a category for mushrooms and feels that all mushrooms are delicious and enjoyable additions to a meal, they would have to adjust that category if they happen to ingest a poisonous mushroom or create a whole
new category for poisonous mushrooms because it is in their best interest. Another example would be a man who falls in love with an Italian woman but previously had a negative attitude towards Italians. He would have to change the negatively charged category he created for Italians in order to accommodate his relationship. These are examples of highly motivated change based upon the self-interest component.

Allport further defined motivations of human cognitive functioning as being a result of biological survival needs as well as expressions of the self. Cognitive functions that are biological and survival based are labeled opportunistic functioning. Cognitive functions that are self-expression based are called propriate functioning (Allport 1937). Opportunistic functioning was characterized as being reactive and past-oriented. However, Allport was mainly concerned with propriate functioning because he believed that most of what humans do is a matter reinforcing who they think they are. Propriate functioning is characterized as proactive, future-oriented, and psychological. He further defined Propriate functioning as having seven functions: Sense of body, self-identity, self-esteem, self-extension, self-image, rational coping, and propriate striving (Allport, 1937). Sense of body develops in the first two years of life; it is the understanding of the body in the sense that it encompasses feelings of pain, touch, movement, etc. Self identity also develops in the first two years of life and pertains to when an individual recognizes themselves as individual entities, different from others and unique. Self-esteem is the recognition of self value to others and to ones self and individual competencies. Self-extension pertains to the closeness and belongingness needs such as having parents, social networks (community, college, etc.) that are essential to existence. Self-extension
is further support for the self-identity function. Self-image is the perception of how others see oneself and the impression one makes in society. Rational coping is the ability to make sense of experiences and deal with them appropriately (Allport, 1937). Propriate striving refers to setting goals for one’s life and developing a life purpose (career, family, etc.). All of these functions are what Allport believed developed personal traits and dispositions. A person’s disposition is their general attitude towards others and society. He also felt that there are societal dispositions or common traits that are a part of a culture and that these work together with the seven functions to develop the individual disposition (Allport, 1937).

Allport created three levels of traits to comprise the theory of individual dispositions - cardinal, central, and secondary (Allport, 1937). The cardinal trait was the idea that a person (typically later in life) develops a theme to live their life by but Allport believed that this was rare and that people do not generally have a single theme. Central traits were thought to be the basic building blocks that shape most behavior such as being honest, fair, trustworthy, wild, shy, romantic, etc. Allport composed a list of over 3,000 personality defining traits and he believed that every person had about ten that composed who they are. Secondary traits are the traits that are seen in certain circumstances (thus they are primarily situational). Allport viewed prejudice in terms of 5 secondary trait actions: antilocution, avoidance, discrimination, physical attack, extermination (Allport, 1937). Antilocution refers to a majority group member speaking freely in a negative way about minority groups, expressing negative stereotypes, and setting the stage for more sever outlets for prejudice. Avoidance involves the isolation from minority group
members as a function of the discomfort a majority group member feels being around minority group members. Discrimination involves an individual’s participation in the denial of opportunities and services to a minority group member. Physical attack is an individual’s participation in the violation of a minority group member’s body or property. Extermination involves an individual’s participation in the annihilation of a minority group.

Considering Allport’s theories of categorization, appropriate functioning and more specifically the self-identity, self-esteem, and self-image components, it may be possible to reverse prejudicial emotions and actions. If these factors are pivotal to the development of central traits and central traits are the main components of an individual’s disposition, then it is reasonable to consider that the prejudiced actions that are reactive and situation based can be reversed if they are in contrast to the categories and central traits. For example, if a person’s central traits are fair, honest, loving, upstanding, etc. yet they are reacting to those who are different from themselves with prejudice and negativity, this contradiction to their self-image, esteem and identity could cause a state of cognitive dissonance (i.e., sense of inner turmoil, conflicted mindset, confusion) powerful enough to evoke change. In addition, if evidence is presented that is in contrast to the category an individual has created for an ethnic group and that person is highly motivated to change due to their ideation of self as the embodiment of an egalitarian image, this too may create a change in attitude. Central traits are most important to a person’s sense of self-image and self-esteem, thus they would be deemed most important and would highly motivate the individual to change prejudicial actions if that person recognized an extreme
contradiction. Considering this information, perhaps bringing attention to an unacknowledged majority group privilege as a primer for a stark contradiction to an egalitarian self-image would be an effective approach to achieve reversal in prejudicial attitude.

**Unacknowledged Majority Group Privilege**

Many majority group members are taught to see racism as individual acts of meanness acted out by specific racist groups (Corcoran & Thompson, 2004). Racism is seldom seen as an invisible system which continues to give preference and privileges to certain groups but not others. When topics of discussion shift from individual prejudice to challenging institutional power, the majority group is faced with noticeable discomfort. Majority group members are forced to acknowledge that they may be the recipient and beneficiary of such institutional power which is in conflict with good intentions and a positive self-image (Corcoran & Thompson, 2004). Considering the short history of this country, for minority group members such as Blacks the legacy and impact of slavery and segregation are still very painful reminders of the importance that race plays in our nation. The thought of such cruelty having occurred in our country is a hard thing to resolve within one’s emotions. This is why Black and White relationships and interactions remain one of the primary indicators (measurements) as to how far the nation has come in improving diversity and equality.

The legacy of racism remains evident on many college campuses across the country today. During the 1980s, there was an alarming rise in racial incidents on college campuses (Farrell & Jones, 1998). Studies suggest that much of this turmoil is fostered
by a propensity of majority group members to cling to denial of race as an issue (Fries, 1988). Denial alone is enough to support the covert and less obvious forms of racist pollution in a community. It offers no support to those who are experiencing daily inequalities and empowers those who choose to disregard the rights of others and their need for cultural identification (Fries, 1988). Many Whites, having never experienced oppression by virtue of their race, see themselves as having no racial identity. The fact that many Whites are located at the top of the power structure allows them to embody the “norm” of society (Lorde, 1984). Whites belong to the most powerful racial group and have access to and control more resources than other groups. Thus, they have the privilege of not paying attention to race or the perks that come with being a member of an advantaged racial group (Corcoran & Thompson, 2004). Minority group members are socialized at an early age to be more aware of race and the possibility of being a target of racism. Literature suggests that Whites tend to think of racism as blatant bigotry, things that are rare and violent in nature, whereas many minority group members think of racism as a persistent condition of institutional practices that result in oppression and must be dealt with on a daily basis.

If one considers college campuses it is reasonable to assume that Black versus White experiences are quite different. Students encounter and negotiate a radically different educational and social environment as a function of their race. For example, a minority student is typically the smallest percentage of the student body and typically must adapt to societal experiences of interacting with individuals that may have conflicting interests and societal perceptions. White students have the advantage of being
surrounded with familiar cultural experiences and interactions. This is true as well for other marginalized categories such as gender, class, sexual orientation, and physical ability. Black students and a comparable sample of Whites at a predominantly White college completed a survey to assess the racial climate on campus in 1988, 1998, and 2003 (Corcoran & Thompson, 2004). There were significant gaps in the percentages of Black versus White students who answered affirmatively to questions such as whether the racial climate was accepting of Black students, whether they felt accepted as a part of the college and whether there was racism present at the college (Corcoran & Thompson, 2004). White students overwhelmingly felt that the racial climate was pleasant and that there was a low level of racism present, whereas Black students were more inclined to say that there was a perceptible presence of racism and that negative racial experiences had occurred.

Several layers of denial protect and prevent awareness of majority group privileges. Many Whites understand the concept of “minorities” and “disadvantage” but have not been taught to think of themselves as “over-advantaged” (Corcoran & Thompson, 2004). Because of the hierarchical nature of power, for one group to be disadvantaged, another group must be over-advantaged. As long as many majority group members see racism as individual acts of meanness and remain unaware of the many privileges being a part of the dominant group affords, they are not forced to acknowledge whose interests are served by such a system thus leaving the system unchallenged and unchanged. This enables the benefactors of such a belief system to remain in the comfortable realm of denial, reaping the personal benefits. Becoming aware of the multi-
faceted nature of these privileges can serve as an eye opener for those who are sympathetic to minorities and truly desire a more equitable experience for the many ethnic groups within this country (Corcoran & Thompson, 2004). The realization that there is such a thing is a profound concept for many who reside in the majority group. The idea that rewards are given on the sole basis of merit is brought into serious question when considering the idea of the aforementioned privileges. Merit-based standards of selection operate in the absence of Affirmative Action but it is important to note that merit is always mediated by power (Corcoran & Thompson, 2004). Sometimes even the mere mention of this “power” elicits the response that the person mentioning it is playing the “race card.” It is in this frame of mind that aversive racism finds fertile ground to flourish.

Aversive Racism

Aversive racism is thought to describe the racial attitude of a large portion of well-educated and liberal Whites in the United States (Gaertner & Dovidio, 1986). Aversive racists sympathize with victims of past injustice, support the principle of racial equality, and regard themselves as non-prejudiced, but, at the same time, possess negative feelings and beliefs about minorities, which may be unconscious (Dovidio & Gaertner, 2005). Aversive racism is hypothesized to be qualitatively different from blatant, “old-fashioned,” racism (e.g, Klu Klux Klan rallies, cross burning, segregation). It is more subtle and is presumed to characterize the racial attitudes of most well-educated and liberal Whites in the United States. Nevertheless, the consequences of aversive racism
(e.g., the restriction of economic opportunity) are as significant and destructive as those of the traditional, overt form (Dovidio & Gaertner, 2005).

The attitudes of Whites toward minorities have become less negative and more accepting as minorities have steadily increased their presence in both professional and educational arenas. However, the increases in minority presence in previously White dominated arenas is a breeding place for internalized resentment and repressed emotion. There is evidence that a substantial portion of the White population expresses merely racial tolerance, not true openness to or enthusiasm for full racial equality (Eberhardt & Fiske, 1998). Aversive racism represents a subtle and often unintentional form of bias that characterizes many White Americans who possess strong egalitarian values and who believe that they are non-prejudiced (Eberhardt & Fiske, 1998). An aversive racist harbors negative racial feelings that they are unaware of and they are in a constant struggle to disassociate themselves from any overt representations of racial bias. It is important to note that the feeling an aversive racist has towards minorities is not hate or hostility but more feelings of discomfort, disgust, and sometimes fear (Eberhardt & Fiske, 1998). They find minorities aversive but at the same time find the idea of being prejudiced in any way just as distasteful.

It has been proposed that the negative feelings an aversive racist feels are rooted in three types of normal cognitive processes: categorization, motivation and societal processes (Eberhardt & Fiske, 1998). In terms of normal cognitive processes, people on average categorize themselves and others into groups. Group membership helps people to form a sense of identity (as previously discussed in Allport’s self-identity and self-
extension facets of proprium functioning). The mere forming of a group mentality often begins the process of mental segregation such as “us” versus “them.” Once people have categorized themselves, they begin to value their group more than other groups (Eberhardt & Fiske, 1998). This may often result in dehumanization or devaluing of groups that deviate from the norms of the primary group. Categorization is known to occur naturally and sometimes automatically (Eberhardt & Fiske, 1998). Race is amongst the first attributes noticed when people assess one another; thus, it is one of the first things that people use to categorize others (Eberhardt & Fiske, 1998). This process sets the first stage for internalized disgust and fear. The fear is of the unfamiliar attributes and external characteristics, either personality wise or physical (Eberhardt & Fiske, 1998).

These pro “in-group” biases have been examined for their effect on spontaneous associations with Whites and Blacks. In a behavioral study (Gaertner & McLaughlin, 1983), White participants were paired with either a Black confederate or White confederate to accomplish a task, and then the participants were asked to describe their experience and how they perceived their partner. The participants exhibited stronger association of positive characteristics with Whites than with Blacks, but did not demonstrate stronger negative associations with Blacks than with Whites. This reflects pro-White rather than anti-Black sentiment. Rather than acting negatively toward Blacks in an open and obvious manner, which would be a more freely observed indication of racism, aversive racists would act more in favor of Whites at the expense of Blacks. This leaves Blacks at a serious disadvantage. For example, an aversive racist who has a positive interaction with someone who is White would be prone to making attribution
errors such as assumptions of high intelligence and high functionality. In that same note, an aversive racist who has a positive interaction with someone who is Black would just assume that they are friendly by nature but would not make any of the assumptions that were highly favorable about intelligence or functionality.

In the second form of cognitive process which involves motivation, aversive racism is a product of one’s desire to fulfill personal needs. The needs range from self-validation to professional and educational success. People have the need for power and control and this need is not only for themselves but also for their group. The aversive racist needs the validation of their group as the group in power (Eberhardt & Fiske, 1998). The feeling that minorities may jeopardize the status of their group or even their own personal pursuits of wealth and power becomes a repressed fear and resentment. Americans are in a state of limited resources and one of the ways that people adjust to the perceived threats to their own “piece of the American pie” is to resist the progress of competing groups.

The third type of cognitive process that fuels aversive racism involves societal influence. Every person has their own belief system based upon the sway of the culture we belong to (Eberhardt & Fiske, 1998). In American culture it is common to rely on the media, family, and friends to provide ideals and norms about what is valued and beautiful. Much of what is seen in the media reflects racist traditions. Despite the country’s commitment to equality, it took the United States over 200 years to grant Blacks the same rights as Whites. Yet, current statistics show Whites to possess an unequal proportion of the political, economic, and social power (Eberhardt & Fiske,
1998). This sends a strong message as to what is valued in American society. By the same token, it is the Nation’s pursuit of equality that also results in many White Americans’ conflicted feelings. On one hand, there are socially acceptable perceptions of equality while, on the other hand, there are underlying negative messages (seen in the media, justice system, political, and professional arenas) which are just as prevalent. There are most certainly many Whites that are truly non-prejudiced and experience none of this discomfort. However, this research is based on the proposition that a much larger portion of White Americans and perhaps Americans in general possess this overall discomfort stemming from their conflicted emotions.

It is from this foundation that the aversive racist, already harboring unconscious negative feelings toward minority group members, begins to display discriminatory behavior in subtle, indirect, and rationalized ways (Dovidio & Gaertner, 2005). This behavior also tends to occur in situations were the normative structure is weak, when the guidelines for appropriate behavior are vague, or when the basis for social judgment is ambiguous (Dovidio & Gaertner, 2005). If conflicted majority group members are in a position to help, interact with, or positively influence the career of a minority group member, they will be more reluctant to do so if they are not under direct scrutiny of others. In addition, discrimination will occur when an aversive racist can justify or rationalize negative responses on the basis of some factor other than race. Under these circumstances, aversive racists may engage in behaviors that ultimately harm minorities, but in a way that allows them to maintain their self-image as non-prejudiced (Dovidio & Gaertner, 2005). For example, in social interaction, an aversive racist will choose to
avoid any prolonged interaction and perhaps explain this avoidance in terms of feeling the person they avoided was too obnoxious or aggressive. An employer, for instance, may be inclined to reject a Black applicant in favor of a White applicant but instead of seeing the decision as having to do with race they will say that the applicant wasn’t “a good fit” or that “his education wasn’t in the right field” (Cose, 1997). In this way the employer maintains a good conscience because the decision was rationalized. In most cases the employer would truly believe that their decision was unbiased but the Black applicant will feel completely opposite. This causes many miscommunications in race relations, with one group feeling the constant presence of racism and the other group discounting those experiences and genuinely believing they are right to do so. An aversive racist is also in constant fear of appearing prejudiced or acting inappropriately so they will adhere to strict codes of conduct in the interracial interaction that they cannot avoid (Eberhardt & Fiske, 1998). The aversive racist strongly endorses the belief that they are color-blind so that no one can accuse them of being racist, but they don’t realize that the attitude they have is an admission of their own discomfort, ignorance, and dismissal of the societal experiences of minority group members. In this sense aversive racism allows discrimination without regret because the perpetrators are “blind” to their own race-based practices.

The impact of racial discrimination also extends to legal issues which involve decisions about personal freedom (incarceration) and life and death (capital punishment). Compared to Whites, Blacks in the United States are more likely to be pronounced guilty of crimes and are issued longer prison sentences (Fairchild & Cowan, 1997). Although
several factors can contribute to such findings, the subtle nature of prejudice is likely to blame for some of the discrepancy between the outcomes of White and Black defendants. In a study of the outcomes of jury decisions (Dovidio et al., 1997), it was found that aversive racists did not issue more death penalty verdicts for Black over White defendants. Instead, it was shown that when a confederate Black juror expressed their belief that the defendant was guilty, the White jurors returned a guilty verdict significantly more often than when the confederate was White. These results indicate support for the theory that an aversive racist will behave in a discriminatory fashion only when those actions can be explained or excused away being the result of something other than race. In this case, the guilty verdict presumably appears less racist in its origins because it was supported by an independent Black individual and thus the guilty verdict is more likely to be given under such conditions (Dovidio et al., 1997).

Research has also supported the idea of racial ambivalence developed over time, and from an early age, as equally responsible for maintaining an aversive racist belief system. Abundant literature shows that very young children have well-defined racial preferences from 3 years of age, with their evaluations of White targets being consistently more positive than their evaluations of Black targets (Aboud, 2003; Castelli, Carraro, Tomelleri, & Amari, 2007; Castelli & Nesdale, 2008). Personal attitudes are typically strongly correlated to those held by parents, peers or other significant persons. This shows how personal attitudes are shaped in childhood by social environment. In addition, further study showed that the impact that societal factors had on personal preference was much more powerful when the societal messages were implicit (Castelli,
Zogmaister, & Tomelleri, 2009). For example, an explicit positive interaction between Black and White individuals would be exemplified by cheerful discussion at close proximity whereas a negative interaction could be seen by angry discussion at close proximity. On the other hand negative implicit attitudes can be seen by avoiding contact, and appearing uneasy. The child will then internalize the nonverbal cues and make them a part of their own schema of how to behave around the aversive group.

As individuals mature they are exposed to further aversive stimulus regarding minorities and are more than likely also exposed to the egalitarian guidelines for behavior within our country. The subconscious negative affect is forced deeper inside their psyche and the aversive racist is born. Using this framework, the ambivalence stems from White Americans response to Blacks as driven by holding both anti and pro-Black attitudes that were developed at an early and impressionable socialization stage. Blacks are seen as disadvantaged by the system, thus eliciting sympathy and pro-Black sentiment; at the same time Blacks are seen as deviating from the dominant society’s values and norms, which elicits hostility and anti-Black sentiment (Seligman, Olson & Zanna, 1996). The feelings of both positive and negative affect such as aversion/hostility and sympathy/compassion creates a state of emotional vulnerability (Seligman, Olson & Zanna, 1996).

Understanding aversive racism is essential to comprehending the framework of a color-blind attitude as defined by Color-Blind Theory because it acts as an endorsement of racism by placing failures to achieve educational and professional success as the sole fault of the minority group (Frankenburg, 1993). An aversive racist can use this attitude
as the outward expression of their anxiety and negative feelings toward minorities. Color-blind attitude ignores or minimizes the fact that ethnicity continues to matter in our society. Color-blind attitude acts not as an equalizer but more as a way of silencing questions about the racial divide and justifying the inequality for which the attitude is supposed to be a cure.

**Color-Blind Theory**

Color-Blind Theory suggests that majority groups think racism against minorities is a thing of the past, that minorities are too pushy and demanding of their rights, and that minority groups use unfair tactics (financial aid, government programs such as Affirmative Action) resulting in undeserved advancement and gain (McConahay, 1986). Sociologist Bonilla-Silva (2001) defined color-blindness as a complex set of shared beliefs or ideology “that has emerged to support the new racial structure in the United States.” (p. 3). Individuals, groups, and systems consciously or unconsciously use the color-blind ideology to justify racial status quo or to explain away racial inequalities in the United States. There are powerful social dynamics that create real differences in psychological experience (Markus, Steele, & Steele, 2002).

It has been theorized that the now defunct Affirmative Action laws of the 1990s had one huge, unfortunate, and unanticipated result; they made people insist that America is color-blind. The political and legal oppositions to Affirmative Action principles turned color-blind theory from a well-meant ideal into a widespread societal denial. To understand American racial denial it is important to examine some historical records that have helped to nurture the climate. America was founded on conflicting ideals, being a
nation that celebrated freedom and proclaimed equality of all human beings and at the same time condoned race-based slavery and offered naturalization only to people who were free and White (Cose, 1997). Even after the Civil War established the new-found principle of Blacks as equal human beings, the newly-found sentiments were being forced upon many Whites who were not ready to share the wealth and welcome the new competition for resources (Cose, 1997). There were White Americans at that time who insisted that even before the Civil War Blacks were able to pursue essential rights of life, liberty, and property (Cose, 1997). It was a reflection of the need, both legal and psychological, to justify the inequality within the argument for equality. As Constance Rice, an advocate for Affirmative Action stated (Cose, 1997)

“There is a widespread belief among many Whites that being Black in today’s United States has some substantial legal, educational, and financial advantages over being White. This is not saying that those people believe it is better to be Black in today’s society but more a reflection of the belief that racism is a thing of the past and that Blacks have it pretty good or at least better than most deserve” (p. 138).

When considering the human propensity to blame extrinsic factors for personal failures (Rotter, 1954), it would seem easier (in a college setting) for majority group members to blame Affirmative Action as a reason for being denied admittance and to attack the miniscule number of minority group members who were admitted to universities under its policies than to accept rejection. The widespread negative reaction to Affirmative Action can be attributed to the fact that many Whites used issues such as
procedural unfairness and relative competence as non-race related rationale for objecting to programs that would increase the likelihood that they would have to be subordinated to Blacks in the workforce. The belief that Blacks have it better than most Whites and that America provides Blacks with all the opportunities they need to succeed has been referred to as the “death of White guilt” or the idea that Whites have nothing to do with the plight of many poverty stricken minorities (Cose, 1997).

Color-blind attitude is supported by White Americans who believe that Blacks face little if any discrimination and that if anything it is now Whites who face the discrimination (Cose, 1997). In this frame of mind there is even the idea that Black racism affects Whites now more than White racism could ever affect minorities considering the Black demand for retribution using pushy and unfair retribution program tactics. Many individuals with this belief system find further support for their arguments regarding Black failures both professionally and educationally in comparing Blacks to Asians. They argue that Asians were also victims of the same White racism yet they are not disadvantaged and have successfully pursued the American dream in spite of the historical accounts of brutality (Cose, 1997). This argument is that too much emphasis is put on the inequality of education and professional pursuits and that too little emphasis is put on personal accountability. Many Whites are convinced that Blacks have equal opportunities to achieve education, obtain job skills, and get the same pay as well as to find decent housing, have equal justice under the law, obtain credit and mortgages, and achieve equal promotions (Cose, 1997). These arguments are common to many Whites; however, in a poll conducted in 1994 by the National Conference, 80% of Blacks, 60% of
Latinos, and 57% of Asians said they were not given equal opportunities in comparison to Whites (Cose, 1997).

The Color-Blind Theory thrives on the fact that there is a huge attitudinal gap. In the 1960s and 1970s Whites freely acknowledged that there were problems and disparities in racial relations and experiences. Today, there is an overwhelming attitude that the disparities minorities faced during the Civil Rights Era are in the past and that whatever needed to be done has been done. The overwhelming attitude is that minorities need to just get over the past and move on. What results from such an attitude is an insensitivity or dismissal as to what minorities think of Whites and the injustices minorities face in society. In contrast to what many Whites think minorities feel about societal experience, the previously mentioned poll revealed that 60% of minorities feel that Whites are not willing to share the good things in society with minorities and 70% feel that they are insensitive to the plight of minorities (Cose, 1997).

A 2001 Gallup poll of the general public revealed that nearly half of Black Americans (47%) felt that they were treated unfairly in their own community in at least one out of five common situations (while shopping, at work, in restaurants or other entertainment places, in dealing with the police, and using public transportation) during the prior month (Dovidio, Gaertner, Kawakami, & Hodson, 2002). The majority of Blacks have a significant distrust of the justice system and police, and about a third are extremely distrustful of Whites as well (Anderson, 1996). The attitudinal gap can also be caused by the fact that Whites are exposed to negative images of Blacks through the media and day to day societal experiences. This helps to develop a largely negative
viewpoint toward Blacks which makes it easier to see the complaints and distrust many Blacks have of Whites as unreasonable. Even with the development of egalitarian views and sympathy towards the plight of minority group members, the negative feelings persist and have lingering affects in the subconscious.

The very progress that minorities have made in achieving education and professional goals is the same vehicle that created the outlook of individuals who ascribe to the color-blind attitude. They feel that enough has been done to right the wrongs of the past. In a 1996 survey by the Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies, it was found that only 5.6% of Americans thought that race relations was among the three most important issues facing the country (Cose, 1997). *The Bell Curve* (1994), a best selling book aimed at pinpointing the reason for discrepancies in minority educational achievements, was written by the late Harvard psychologist Richard J. Herrnstein and American Enterprise Institute political scientist Charles Murray. As a result of its popularity, there were many damaging effects. The book provided further support for the belief in the fact that there must be some innate characteristic that minorities possess that keeps them from performing on the same educational level as Whites. Ideals that ranged from “they just aren’t smart enough” to “they just aren’t motivated enough” became commonplace after that particularly damaging book was published. Research into these ideals (Cose, 1997) has indicated that the very Civil Rights Era breakthroughs that enabled minorities to pursue their dreams have backfired into the more bigoted attitudes marked by statements such as “even when you people are given opportunities, most of you still fail”(Cose, 1997). Comments such as these allow an individual who ascribes to a
color-blind attitude to rationalize their negative thoughts towards minorities by avoiding any other possible explanation for the plight that many minority group members face in society. This is an understandable defense mechanism but the implications are dangerous or at the very least very inefficient in dealing with resolving a negative affect toward minorities.

The temptation with color-blind attitude is that it offers a way out of uncomfortable discussions of race where sensitive parties can quickly misinterpret what is said (Cose, 1997). The label of racist is so distasteful that many Americans avoid the topic of race entirely, thus shutting out opportunities for progress. Within the student community in particular, many students feel that voicing their opinions can be socially ostracizing or may create feelings of defensiveness and discomfort (Cose, 1997). This type of student may internalize their feelings and begin to foster an increasingly negative view of minorities as they mature. Ignoring differences in culture, ethnicity, and race can be compared to the feelings of discomfort a person may feel when encountering someone with a severe physical handicap (Cose, 1997). The effort an individual may take to treat a severely handicapped person equally so as not to offend them by recognizing and acknowledging the handicap causes more discomfort than encounters with a person who more closely resembles themselves would cause. Pretending not to notice in order to ease initial tensions and eliminate the chance of conflict dodges the acknowledgment of differences, laying a foundation for future avoidance and discriminatory practices. Just as some people are driven to avoid issues of race by claiming color-blindness, there is also a significant motivation for people to believe in a world that is just and that everyone
generally gets what they deserve (Lerner, 1980). This is the foundation for Just World Theory which purports the majority group ideology that everyone in the United States has equal opportunity, that American live in an egalitarian society and that societal members are treated fairly.

**Just World Theory**

The Just World Theory claims that an individual’s belief in a just world enables them to approach their physical and social environment as though it is always stable and orderly (Lerner & Miller, 1978). Believing in a just world serves important adaptive functions such as self efficacy, esteem, and motivation. For example, if a person believes that the world they live in is fair they are more likely to feel safe and protected by the system that governs them. In addition, if an individual believes that they will have an equal chance to pursue their goals they are more likely to have a higher self confidence and a more positive outlook towards life. Thus individuals are motivated to protect the ideology. The strength of the belief in a just world varies between individuals (Rubin & Peplau, 1973, 1975). Research has shown that a strong belief in a just world fosters the denial of observed injustice in situations with broad social and political unfairness (Furnham & Procter, 1989).

Throughout life people gather experiences about themselves and the world in which they live. Those experiences result in the creation of personal theories about reality. The theories serve as individual filters for thoughts about the world and the way it is experienced for them and others, influencing how they evaluate future experiences as well as their memory of events (Cantor, 1990). The filtering of thoughts can be called
schema (a roadmap) for individual functioning. This schema rarely represents an exact
description of reality. In fact, for those who have the liberty of having the belief in a
perfect world, the schema more often consists of positive illusion. There is a dual
function within the schema as it applies to those who view themselves as having a
socially desirable egalitarian attitude; it serves as maintenance for positive mental health
while supporting denial of injustices suffered by many (Taylor & Brown, 1988).

According to Just World Theory, justice based objections to the concept that
minorities have a different experience than White Americans stem from the support of
two widely accepted ideas: Distributive justice and procedural justice (Awad, Cokely &
Ravitch, 2005). Distributive justice refers to an individual’s belief in the fairness of the
allocation of resources or outcomes (e.g., jobs, admission into college, promotions, etc.),
and procedural justice refers to an individual’s belief in fairness of procedures (e.g.,
courts, jails, preferential treatment policies). Individuals with a just world belief system
strongly endorse the merit principle which relates to distributive justice and procedural
justice in that an individual’s outcome under each is proportional to the person’s input or
effort. In the case of Regents of the University of California versus Bakke (1978), a
rejected university applicant objected to the Affirmative Action medical school admission
procedure in place because he felt it was a form of “reverse discrimination” that violated
his beliefs about fairness and justice (Binion, 1987). Many majority group members
agreed with the scorned student. They felt that the policy negated individual selection,
evaluation, and advancement based upon merit. According to the concept of procedural
justice, the perceived fairness affected the attitude toward the procedure. When weight is
given to categorical factors of an individual, such as race, age or sex, that weight is considered unfair to the people who are not going to benefit (Murrell, Diets-Uhler, Dovidio, Gaertner & Drout, 1994).

The belief in the world as a fair and just place with equal experiences for all may also be the result of the framework of immanent justice reasoning. Immanent justice reasoning develops from the decision to blame negative experiences of others on their prior misdeeds. Using this way of thinking, one can rationalize the negative experiences of an individual as punishment, even when plausible links are missing. In a study, a vignette was presented to University students that described a man who had fallen ill (Raman & Winer, 2002). At the same time the participants read that the man constantly lied, cheated, and robbed people of their money. Then the participants were asked if they believed that his misdeeds were linked to his misfortune in life. Many participants accepted the immanent justice attitude, that his misdeeds were linked to his illness. Immanent justice judgments arise from people’s need to see deservingness and justice in their view of life. For example, when a parent experiences the sudden death of their child from an illness, there is a need to find an explanation. In their grief they are prone to thinking that maybe it was something they did or something that they didn’t do that lead to the child’s death, instead of relying on more scientific explanations. Likewise it would seem reasonable to believe that when a co-worker who is known for abusing their sick leave availability is suddenly struck with a “real” illness, they are getting their “just deserts.” This can in turn be quickly related to negative attitudes toward minority group members and the dismissal of differing experiences of justice in that the individual that is
in denial can resolve feelings of discomfort by saying that minority group members are to blame for their own misfortune. This attitude is exacerbated by the fact that the media portrays minorities in such a negative light. The immanent justice reasoning is more palatable when it comes from a moral foundation such as bad deeds followed by bad consequences and the idea that people get what they deserve. The trend of majority group members ascribing to a color-blind attitude as a result of aversion and beliefs in just world principles can have notable negative affects for minority groups within this country. Considering the competitive job market and diverse workforce, it is important to acknowledge the impact race has on individual experiences within the workforce.

**Diversity in the Workforce**

The U.S. workforce is becoming increasingly diverse with ethnic minorities and women accounting for 90% of all labor force growth (U.S. Department of Labor, 1998) which can increase the likelihood of certain problems in the workplace. Perceived differential treatment on the job can negatively affect work attitudes, values, and behaviors, which in turn effects workplace environment and productivity (Lichter, 1988). Labor statistics in the United States continue to demonstrate fundamental disparities in the economic status of minority group members versus majority group members. Aversive racism or color-blind attitude may be contributing factors in maintaining this disparity. In a 2000 selection decision study, the clarity of applicants’ qualifications for a job were varied and recommendations for hiring were examined in relation to those variations (Dovidio & Gaertner, 2000). Specifically, White college students were presented with excerpts from an interview and were then asked to evaluate Black and
White candidates for a position as a peer counselor at their university. The materials were varied to represent very strong, moderate, or very weak qualifications for the position. As predicted by the aversive racism framework, when candidates’ credentials clearly qualified them for the position or when the credentials were clearly inappropriate, there was no discrimination against the Black candidate. However, when the candidates’ qualifications for the position were less obvious and the appropriate decision was more ambiguous (moderate qualifications), White participants recommended Black candidates significantly less often than a White candidate (Dovidio & Gaertner, 2000).

In a 2002 study of perceived racism in the workforce, a correlation with lower efficiency of interracial teams was found (Dovidio, Gaertner, Kawakami & Hodson, 2002). Interracial teams with Whites who were perceived by the minority group members as non-prejudiced completed assignments and solved problems more efficiently. Interracial teams with Whites who minority members perceived as prejudiced were the least efficient. The conflicting messages displayed by aversive racists and the impression upon the members’ interactions interfered with the task effectiveness of the team. Because aversive racists are unaware of the negative attitude they impress upon the minority group team members, their perception of the team interaction will be completely opposite and they will find themselves attributing the failure of the team to attribution flaws of individual team members. It is this logic that supports the rationale behind color-blind attitude, seeing as the person who ascribes to these ideals of equal treatment is able to use aversive methods of blaming the failure on non-race related aspects of the minority group members.
Error in ascribing to the idea of a just world can be shown by evidence of clear racial disparity across organizations as diverse as the armed forces, federal government, and Fortune 1000 companies. For example, within the Navy Blacks represent 13% of the force, but only 5% of the officers and 1.5% of the admirals (Eberhardt & Fiske, 1998). A study of the General Accounting Office (1995) found that over a 5 year period, the success rate of Blacks who qualified for promotions was systematically below the rate of Whites across all of the military services (Eberhardt & Fiske, 1998). The disparities in promotion rates tended to increase with higher ranks for enlisted personnel. A study of industry provides independent evidence of the “glass ceiling effect,” with representations of minorities consistently declining with higher occupational status (Eberhardt & Fiske, 1998). Fewer than 1% of top-level executives in Fortune 1000 industrial and Fortune 500 service firms are Black. A U.S. Bureau Census study (Bennett, 1992) showed that substantial income disparities existed between Black and White men. In 1990, Black men with a high school education earned $5,828 per year less than White men with a comparable education. The gap between college educated Black and White men was even larger with Black men’s average being $30,766 and White men’s average being $38,706 (Bennett, 1992).

Recent studies of the United States workforce have indicated that a key factor in determining the quality of supervisor-subordinate ties is relational demography or the degree to which individuals are similar in demographical attributes (race, gender, age; Tsui & O’Reilly, 1989). According to this similarity model of supervisor-subordinate relations, supervisors who perceive that their subordinate is similar are more prone to
feeling particularly comfortable in one another’s presence thus fostering more confidence (Gilbert & Hixon, 1991). When supervisors and subordinates have a common background, the way they communicate is more fluid. This is the opposite for supervisors who view subordinates to be dissimilar to them. Using this information it is proposed that aversive forms of treatment are not as obvious in decisions to hire and promote as in the assessment of attitudes toward work, employee potential and personality (Gilbert & Hixon, 1991). In employment situations, Whites are more likely to manifest subtle aversive attitudes towards Blacks using the context of competence, potential, emotional stability, seriousness about work, and demeanor (Gilbert & Hixon, 1991).

By understanding some of the fundamental causes of the disparities, individuals and organizations will be better equipped to battle the biases and understand the resistance to programs designed to address the consequences of racism (Eberhardt & Fiske, 1998). In addition, corporate studies have indicated that the recognition of the value of diversity by top management and higher administration is the key factor for successfully achieving corporate equality. For example, in 1976 Allstate Insurance made corporate diversity a high priority. Allstate initiated a voluntary diversity program that exceeded federal affirmative action requirements and from 1975 to 1995, they increased their representation of Black white collar workers from 9.5% to 14.85%. This rate of increase was more than double the rate of other corporations (Eberhardt & Fiske, 1998). The increased representation of Blacks in the corporation was an attempt to engineer positive social norms for the employees by eliminating the presence of adverse impact in hiring practices.
Additional approaches to combating aversive racism have been aimed at reducing the “us” versus “them,” in-group mentality. The subconscious process that occurs among teams within the workplace requires three basic elements: shared meaning, common goal, and cooperative effort (Dozier, 2002). There must be a shared meaning between team members. The creation of meaning begins with each team member recognizing the complexities of the assignment and the proper procedures to complete the assignment. The desired outcome of this shared meaning would be achieving a common goal such as successful interaction amongst team members that results in a completed product. The cooperative effort includes different roles and responsibilities of each team member. By involving all team members equally in the process the “us” versus “them” cognitions against individuals of differing race, sex, or age is diminished (Dozier, 2002). This mechanism of diminishing “us-them” divisions is particularly important when it comes to color-blind attitudes and aversive racism in that it counteracts one of the aversive racist’s major characteristics: an obsession with avoidance of topics concerning past wrongs. Establishing commonality by means of establishing a common goal tends to pull the mind away from experiences and obsession with the past and moves it into the future.

A recent experiment examined the shared common identities in a natural setting at a University football game (Gaertner & Dovidio, 2000). White fans entering the stadium were approached by either a White or Black confederate who asked them to complete a short survey about their food preferences. The confederates were wearing either a home team hat or the opposing team’s hat. They were approaching White fans with either home team paraphernalia or opposing team paraphernalia so that it was possible to examine the
amount of help that was offered the Black versus White research assistant as a function of whether or not the assistant was perceived as a member of the in-group or out-group in terms of fan support. It was predicted that discrimination in terms of the amount of help given to the Black assistant wearing a matching hat versus the Black assistant wearing an opposite hat would be reduced. The results were in support of this hypothesis: Black assistants wearing the same hat as the White fans they asked to complete the survey were given more help (59 percent) than when they were wearing an opposing hat (36 percent). The effect of the same-team versus different team support did not significantly influence the amount of help that White assistants received (44 percent versus 37 percent) (Gaertner & Dovidio, 2000).

As previously discussed, aversive racists and those who ascribe to color blind racial attitude are generally unaware of their prejudice but are also motivated to remain unaware. Not recognizing their own biases insulates them from having to confront their belief systems (Eberhardt & Fiske, 1998). Research (Katz & Hass, 1988) has shown that the priming of egalitarian views increases pro-Black sentiment, whereas the priming of Protestant work ethic values increased anti-Black sentiment. Capitalizing on the good intentions of aversive racists and harnessing the intentions can create and sustain longer term reductions in bias (Dovidio, Smith, Donnella, & Gaertner, 1997). By counteracting their automatic associations with stereotypes at the unconscious level, rather than a more straightforward means of asking participants to suppress stereotypes, a researcher can activate personal egalitarian standards and guilt can successfully reduce discriminatory acts. In this same fashion it is possible that by priming individual’s egalitarian standards a
researcher may be able to produce a reduction in the individual’s biased (and indifferent) view of the differing social experiences minorities endure.

Demonstrating how bias operates by sensitizing an aversive racist to understanding their own race-related feelings and behaviors is an effective way to lead aversive racists to discover, without much external pressure, inconsistencies with their belief system. The sensitization results in cognitive dissonance or other negative emotional states (Eberhardt & Fiske, 1998). The experience of this dissonance arouses a state of dissatisfaction that motivates participants to increase the importance of equality and behave in ways that are more conducive to their conscious egalitarian views. The effect may not be enduring but the mere ability to cause the temporary effect can provide significant implications for a more prolonged training and educational effort in cultural diversity. Devine and Monteith (1993) provided an analogy regarding prejudice reduction and breaking a habit:

“Breaking any habit requires effort, practice and time. In breaking the prejudice habit, people must first make a decision to eliminate the habit. They must then learn to inhibit the habitual…responses and generate responses that are consistent with their beliefs and standards”

(p. 336).

Considering the aforementioned habit breaking analogy, aversive racism can be used as a foundation to build upon by manipulating conscious beliefs to be clearly reflected in their actions, thus reducing and perhaps eventually eliminating negative subconscious beliefs.
Considering the issues discussed such as unacknowledged majority privilege, the framework for color-blind theory (aversive racism), and the ideology of a just world, it is important to use this understanding of why majority and minority groups clash to institute change. An individual’s propensity for harboring negative affect toward another person based upon race is a maladaptive thought process. Once identified, the individual confronts the issue and can then work on trying to correct their way of thinking. In the workplace setting, identifying the root of problems between co-workers is critical to cohesiveness and productivity. The purpose of the study was to identify individual attitude by measuring the level of individual racial awareness and then exposing the person to a situation (by means of vignette) that would stir an affinity for egalitarian belief systems and thus elicit positive attitude change. The possibility of priming sensitivity as a means to change attitude can be used as a stepping-stone for more effective sensitivity training that is tailored to individual need.
Chapter 2

THE PRESENT STUDY

The objective of the proposed research was to examine the ideology of a color-blind racial attitude (the denial, distortion, or minimization of race and racism) as it relates to the development and sustenance of aversive racist behavior. In 2000, a group of researchers (Lilly, Duran, Lee, & Brown, 2000) constructed a scale called the Color-blind Racial Awareness Scale (CoBRAS) to measure the amount to which an individual ascribes to a color-blind racial attitude. In 1996, the Global Belief in a Just World Scale (JWS) was developed by Claudia Dalbert to assess overall belief in a just world. The scale is a combined version of Dalbert’s scale that assesses personal belief and the Global Belief in a Just World Scale developed by Lipkus (1991) that assesses global belief in a just world. The JWS was used in this research because low scores were closely correlated with high scores on the Color-blind Racial Awareness scale, thus it could be used to determine whether exposure to stimulus could have an effect on a subject’s overall attitude towards race and how it affects an individual’s social experiences (Lilly, Duran, Lee, & Brown, 2000).

Correlations between total CoBRAS scores and JWS scores were -.61. This provides the framework for the hypothesis that people who have a strong color-blind racial attitude (indicated by a high score on the CoBRAS) will have a higher belief in a just world which is indicated by a lower score on the JWS (Lilly, Duran, Lee, & Brown, 2000). An individual who ascribes to color-blind attitude is believed to be harboring a
conflicted psyche (the egalitarian versus discriminatory views discussed in the *Aversive Racism* segment). Thus, it is further hypothesized that a person who scores highly on the CoBRAS and is exposed to a racially charged vignette designed to prime egalitarian views will score higher on the JWS (indicating that they have a lower belief in a just world) than a person with a high score on the CoBRAS who is exposed to a neutral vignette. And it is further hypothesized that minority group members who are exposed to the racially charged vignette will have higher scores on the JWS than those who are given the neutral vignette because the vignettes will serve as a primer to their own feelings about negative experiences in society as a result of race. Considering the huge attitudinal gap that Whites and Blacks experience towards personal and professional experiences in America, it is hypothesized that Whites will score lower on the JWS than minority group members regardless of CoBRAS score.

**Method**

**Materials**

**Color-blind Racial Awareness Scale.** The scale consists of 20 items with three subscales determined using factor analysis. The subscales are Racial Privilege, Institutional Discrimination, and Blatant Racial Issues. The alpha coefficients of the three subscales and the total score were .83, .81, .76, and .91, respectively. The Cronbach’s Alpha coefficient for the CoBRAS in the present data set was .78 which is somewhat lower than the Cronbach’s Alpha in previous literature (α = .91). The scale consists of statements such as “White people in the U.S. have certain advantages because of their skin”, “English should be the only official language in the U.S.”, “Race plays an
important role who gets sent to prison”, etc. The items are answered according to a Likert Type Scale ranging from 1 “Strongly Agree” to 5 “Strongly Disagree” and 10 of the 20 items on the scale are reverse coded. The minimum to maximum score range is 20 to 100 points.

**Just World Scale.** The JWS contains 13-items that ascertain an individual’s belief in procedural and distributive justice. The alpha coefficient of the JWS scale was .90. The Cronbach’s Alpha coefficient of the JWS (the dependent variable) in the present data set was .85 which is comparable to the Cronbach’s alpha in literature regarding the JWS (α = .90). The JWS items consists of statements such as “I believe that, by and large, I deserve what happens to me”, “I believe that, by and large, I deserve what happens to me”, “I believe that, by and large, I deserve what happens to me”, “I believe that, by and large, I deserve what happens to me”, “Am convinced that in the long run people will be compensated for injustices”, and “I think that important decisions made concerning me are usually just”, etc. The items are answered according to a Likert Type scale from 1 “Strongly Agree to 6 “Strongly Disagree”. The minimum to maximum score range is 13 to 78 points.

**Vignettes.** There are two types of vignettes. The vignettes included a hypothetical scenario in which the participants pretend that they are the protagonists in an experience at their neighborhood park. The experience is either positive or negative based on the utterance of a “ethnic slur” versus an “excuse me”. One of the lead characters is David and he is described as an “ethnic minority” to reduce the amount of bias attributed to any distinct minority group. The words “appeared to be of European descent” were used to describe the other lead character to reduce the bias an individual
might feel if the “ethnic minority” character immediately assumes the character they are interacting with is White. See Appendix A for a copy of each vignette condition.

**Participants**

One hundred-forty participants (50 males and 90 females) volunteered for this study. The racial demographic of the participants can be found in Table 1. The age of the participants ranged from 18 to 56 years of age ($M = 22.58$, $SD = 5.34$), and all participants were from the student population enrolled in introductory studies of psychology at California State University, Sacramento.

Table 1

*Demographics*

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Ethnicity</th>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
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<td>90</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note/ CSUS introductory psychology students*
Procedure

For each session of this study participants were randomly assigned to the control group condition or experimental group condition. Participants were given a questionnaire packet containing the Color-blind Race Awareness Scale (CoBRAS), a vignette with neutral or racial undertones (Packet A and B respectively), the Just World Scale (JWS), and a demographic sheet. Participants were asked to first complete the CoBRAS assessment and then to read the vignette silently. As previously discussed, there were two vignette conditions: a negative interaction between the two lead characters and a neutral interaction between the two lead characters. After participants finished reading the vignette, they were asked to complete the second segment of the questionnaire packet which contained the JWS assessment from the perspective of the protagonist in the vignette. After the participants completed the JWS they were asked to complete the demographic sheet and return the entire packet to the researcher to receive the debriefing script and ½ hour of participation credit.
Chapter 3

RESULTS

In order to conceptualize the CoBRAS in a way that allowed for a comparison of means, a preliminary analysis was conducted to divide CoBRAS scores into three distinct groups indicating a low, medium, or high racial awareness level. In addition, a preliminary analysis of the effect of ethnicity on CoBRAS scores was conducted to compare with the literature on previous CoBRAS administrations. Following these preliminary analyses, the following univariate analyses were conducted: effect of level of CoBRAS and type of vignette; effect of ethnicity and level of CoBRAS; ethnicity and type of vignette.

Preliminary Analyses

The color-blind racial awareness scale (CoBRAS) was a between subjects variable and was measured with lower scores indicating better overall understanding of racial matters as they pertain to minorities. The summated scores of the CoBRAS ranged from a low of 35 to a high of 94. The resulting 59 point distribution of JWS scores was divided into three levels after reviewing the frequency at which participants fell within each possible score (Table 2). The goal was to assign a comparable grouping of subjects to each level of the variable (low, medium, or high).
Table 2

Frequencies

<table>
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<tr>
<th>CoBRAS</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>Range</th>
<th>n</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Low</td>
<td>56.14</td>
<td>6.12</td>
<td>35-62</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medium</td>
<td>66.76</td>
<td>2.61</td>
<td>63-70</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High</td>
<td>77.31</td>
<td>5.54</td>
<td>71-94</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* p < .01
Note: CSUS introductory psychology students

An analysis of variance revealed a significance difference, $F(2, 122) = 184.01, p < .01$, between groups scores. A Tukey test revealed that participants with low racial awareness scores had significantly lower scores than participants with moderate (medium) racial awareness high racial awareness. Participants with moderate racial awareness scores had significantly higher scores than participants with low racial awareness and significantly lower scores than participants with high racial awareness. Participants with high racial awareness scores had significantly higher scores than both the lower racial awareness group and moderate racial awareness group.

An exploratory one way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was performed to examine the effect of ethnicity (White, Black, Asian, and Hispanic) on total CoBRAS scores (as the dependent variable). The ANOVA revealed a significant effect, $F(3, 121) = 6.11, p < .01, \eta^2 = .13$. A Tukey test revealed that Whites had significantly lower race awareness ($M = 62.92, SD = 9.55$) than Blacks ($M = 70.47, SD = 10.08$) and Hispanics ($M$
= 70.44, \(SD = 7.76\); the mean race awareness values between Whites and Asians (\(M = 69.00, SD = 9.32\)) approached significance.

**Primary Analyses**

Sample size restrictions would not support a three-way design; therefore, this study was structured as a 3 x 2 between subjects design investigating the effects of the level of CoBRAS (High, Moderate, and Low) and type of vignette (racial undertones or neutral) on JWS scores. A univariate analysis revealed no significant interaction between CoBRAS and type of vignette, \(F(2, 119) = 1.44, p = .24\). There was a significant main effect of CoBRAS, \(F(2, 119) = 6.98, p < .01, \eta^2 = .10\). A post hoc Tukey test of that main effect revealed that participants with lower racial awareness reported a significantly higher belief in a just world (\(M = 40.38, SD = 10.31\)) than participants who had higher racial awareness (\(M = 47.58, SD = 10.56\)) (See Figure 1). Participants with moderate racial awareness (\(M = 43.93, SD = 7.63\)) did not differ from those in the other two groups. There was also a significant main effect of type of vignette, \(F(1, 119) = 6.95, p < .01, \eta^2 = .05\). Participants who received the neutral vignette reported a higher belief in a just world (\(M = 41.93, SD = 7.90\)) than participants who received the racially charged vignette (\(M = 45.56, SD = 11.13\)) (See Figure 2).
Figure 1. Effect of CoBRAS on mean JWS Scores.
A 4 x 2 between subjects design was structured to investigate the effect of ethnicity (White, Black, Asian, and Hispanic) and type of vignette (racial undertones or neutral) on JWS scores. A univariate analysis did not reveal a significant interaction between ethnicity and type of vignette, $F(3, 117) = .43, p = .73$.

Although the sample size of Blacks, Hispanics and Asians was small in comparison to Whites, an additional 3 x 4 between subjects design was structured to investigate the effects of ethnicity (White, Black, Asian, and Hispanic) and level of CoBRAS (High, Moderate, and Low) on JWS scores. A univariate analysis did not reveal a significant interaction between ethnicity and CoBRAS, $F(6, 113) = 1.35, p = .24$. The analysis did not reveal a significant main effect of ethnicity, $F(3, 113) = 1.44, p = .24$;
however, the means of the groups were examined for exploratory and descriptive purposes to determine the magnitude of the mean differences. Whites had a generally higher belief in a just world ($M = 42.06, SD = 10.12$) than Blacks ($M = 49.40, SD = 9.79$); Asians ($M = 45.04, SD = 8.11$) and Hispanics ($M = 43.96, SD = 9.81$) had mean values on the just world scale that fell between those of the other two groups.
Chapter 4

DISCUSSION

The results of this study provided further support for the correlation between racial awareness and belief in a just world as evidenced in previous research (Lilly, Duran, Lee, & Brown, 2000). For example, participants with lower racial awareness reported a significantly higher belief in a just world. The degree to which an individual acknowledges the differences in societal experiences as a consequence of ethnicity (racial awareness) has a direct effect on how they perceive distributive and procedural justice. In addition, the hypothesis that a person can be swayed to believe that the world is unjust by the priming of egalitarian views (in this case by the use of a racially charged vignette) was confirmed. Both of these main effects have far reaching implications for diversity training. Prior research suggests that racial awareness can be advanced by increasing coursework, small group discussions, self-awareness of biases, retention and recruitment of individuals from underrepresented groups (Thaler-Carter, 2001; Daniel, Ryosircar, Abeles, & Boyd, 2004).

Considering that research and the findings of this study, the CoBRAS and vignettes would be better used individually as tools to identify and recognize existing biases. Once an organization has determined the level of the racial awareness (as assessed with the CoBRAS) within its staff and primed them (utilizing vignettes) towards feelings of empathy for minority group experiences, training (e.g., small group discussions, seminars, team building activities) can be developed to address the specific diversity
training needs for staff within that organization. In addition, it would be helpful to use the CoBRAS and JWS as stable variables that assesses the individual’s racial awareness and belief in a just world before exposure to the vignette followed by a second administration to see if the belief systems have changed. The results would have stronger implications for the effects of personalized diversity training rather than just implications from correlated scales.

When considering the fact that the interaction of CoBRAS and type of vignette was not significant, it is important to note that many factors convolute the effects. The participant pool was comprised of a student population enrolled in introductory studies of psychology at California State University, Sacramento. Being in college, the sample automatically has more in common (e.g., level of education, socioeconomic status) than a truly random sample of society. Thus, the demographic is less likely to replicate societal phenomenon that occurs outside of college boundaries. In future studies it would be prudent to conduct research within an occupational setting. The lack of a significant interaction between CoBRAS and type of vignette may also lie within the construct of the vignette, not in the experimental design itself. For instance if the vignettes had mentioned the actual race of the protagonist rather than the generic term “ethnic minority” it may have had stronger effects for those who have aversive reactions to that particular ethnic group. Further, the “ethnic” protagonist in the vignette was male and the interaction was between him and a female. The male to female interaction may have stirred an emotional response in participants that was not entirely related to the fact that the protagonist was a
male. It would also have been helpful to have designed a positive interaction vignette rather than just the two scenarios of negativity or neutrality.

Ethnicity and level of racial awareness did not have a significant effect on participant’s belief in a just world; however, Whites generally had a higher belief in a just world which supports the previously stated research regarding the attitudinal gap between Whites and minority group members. Negative images of minorities through the media and day to day societal experiences help to develop negative viewpoints toward minority groups, making it easier to see the complaints and distrust many minorities feel as unreasonable. Regardless of egalitarian views and sympathy towards the plight of minority group members, negative feelings can persist and have lingering affects in the subconscious. Many Whites, having never experienced oppression by virtue of their race, see the world as a just place where an individual obtains what they desire because of drive and determination alone. The fact that many Whites are located at the top of the power structure allows them to embody the “norm” of society (Lorde, 1984). Because Majority group members have access to and control over more resources, they have the privilege of not paying attention to race or the perks that come with being a member of an advantaged racial group (Corcoran & Thompson, 2004).

The effect of ethnicity (White, Black, Asian, and Hispanic) and type of vignette (racial undertones or neutral) was not significant however, as mentioned before, design flaw issues may have contributed to the ineffectiveness of the vignettes. In this instance, perhaps the fact that the vignettes were designed to explore the experience of a minority group member in a park had unintended effects. The protagonist was carrying a dog and
was a member of an exclusive park. In retrospect, it would have been advantageous to use a more common background such as a grocery store, department store, bank, or restaurant. Each is an ideal sample setting for interactions that the average person experiences on a daily basis and would have inspired a larger level of identification for the participants in the study. A previously mentioned 2001 Gallup poll of the general public revealed that 47% of Black Americans felt that they were treated unfairly in their own community in at least one out of five common situations (i.e., while shopping, at work, in restaurants or other entertainment places, in dealing with the police, and using public transportation). Thus, it would be methodologically sound to introduce vignettes that take place in these settings as a means to prime stronger feelings of injustice.

The ethnicity of participants had a significant effect on Color-blind Racial Awareness scale scores. Whites had significantly higher scores on the Co-BRAS than minority group members, indicating lower racial awareness. The sample was comprised of college students, thus the finding supports the previous study mentioned regarding the subconscious prevalence of aversive attitudes towards minorities in college settings (Fries, 1988). Being in college implies a certain level of socio-economic status and resource availability, it would be reasonable to assume that the majority group would be more resistant to the idea of a prevalence of inequality for minority group members. Occupational settings may provide more evidence for participants of the differences in experience because of ethnicity; hence, Whites would be likely to display higher racial awareness.
Approximately one third of the population of the United States identifies as a member of a racial minority group, 18% speak a language other than English, 12% are at least 65 years of age, and 19% of the “non-institutionalized population” have a disability (U.S. Census Bureau, 2001, 2007). Considering these statistics, it is widely known that the effect of increased diversity within organizations can be positive, negative, or neutral, depending on a vast spectrum of conditions (McLeod, Lobel, & Cox, 1996; Richard, Murthi, & Ismail, 2008; Watson, Kumar, & Michaelsen, 1993). Organizations must be aware that while diversity can provide competitive advantages, it can also present potential problems such as lowered attachment for resistant workers (Tsui, Egan, & O’Reilly, 1992), and increased risk for discrimination and harassment (Stauffer & Buckley, 2005). Efforts to eliminate these problems are critical; this is why diversity education is such a hot topic for our times.

Research has proposed that within the area of diversity education, a research–practice gap exists between scholastic/research findings regarding diversity training and the application of that training in the workplace (Bell & Kravitz, 2008). For this reason, is important to consider the proper way to measure criteria with bottom-line implications (e.g., employee competencies and behaviors, performance results, and organizational outcomes) as well as to determine whether progress in diversity training is limited to the period immediately following the training or if it can be maintained for longer periods (Bell & Kravitz, 2008). This was a concern with the finding that the vignettes and CoBRAS had individually significant effects on participant’s belief in a just world. If those tools were used to design training, how long would the effects last? Longevity of
effects is critical to achieve results such as decreased turnover, higher morale, job satisfaction, and fewer claims of discrimination.

Other important considerations for diversity training are whether it should be mandatory or voluntary. Perhaps the fact that the sample in this study was required to obtain research participation credits in order to successfully pass their introductory courses affected their scores on the assessments. For example, the requirement may have had a negative effect on participant attitude going into the study which in turn may have altered their scores. In which case, organizations attempting to affect change may do well to consider the implication for negative effects should that training be mandatory. Another consideration is whether information about psychological theory such as aversive racism should precede or follow small group discussions. Emphasizing the fact that most individuals have engaged in stereotyping may have a positive effect on change by way of participants being more accepting of their own tendencies and decreasing possible defensiveness. Conversely, the emphasis of propensity to stereotype may inspire negative affect because of feelings of hopelessness. Perhaps the effect of priming is directly related to each individuals affect, meaning that a positive effect would occur for participants who have internal locus of control and believe that the power to change lies within them. If that is true, a negative effect would occur for people who believe that the power to change is out of their hands and that whatever happens is dependent on outside factors (e.g., society, government, media). Perhaps a locus of control assessment should have been used in this study to provide implications for more effective diversity training.
The subject of diversity training and how to design superior training modules will undoubtedly continue to evolve and dominate organizational discussions.
APPENDIX A

Negative Vignette

It was a bright sunny day which prompted David to take his dog for a walk in the neighborhood park. The park was developed and managed by the Home Owner’s Association (HOA) of David’s neighborhood. David is a paying member of the HOA and this has rights to use the park. The neighborhood surrounding the dog park is made up of homes in the upper middle class price range so it is a very calm and pleasant environment. David stopped his truck in the parking lot adjoining the park and let his dog out of the truck bed. He started up the walkway of the gated entrance to the dog park and noticed that there was a lady with a small dog approaching the gate at the same time. In order to enter the gate, each HOA member with rights to use the park must enter a code into the security box above the door handle. However, when members are exiting the park they can simply open the door. The security box was installed to reduce the amount of unauthorized people in the park. As David approached the gate, he waited for the lady to open the door so that he could enter with his dog. The lady abruptly stepped to the side and waited for David to enter the code. He was a little frustrated but remained calm and entered the code. The lady picked up her small dog, mumbled an ethnic slur and held the dog closely to her body as David entered the gate and passed by her. David noticed this and smiled at her before he continued on his way.
Neutral Vignette

It was a bright sunny day which prompted David to take his dog for a walk in the neighborhood park. The park was developed and managed by the Home Owner’s Association (HOA) of David’s neighborhood. David is a paying member of the HOA and this has rights to use the park. The neighborhood surrounding the dog park is made up of homes in the upper middle class price range so it is a very calm and pleasant environment. David stopped his truck in the parking lot adjoining the park and let his dog out of the truck bed. He started up the walkway of the gated entrance to the dog park and noticed that there was a lady with a small dog approaching the gate at the same time. In order to enter the gate, each HOA member with rights to use the park must enter a code into the security box above the door handle. However, when members are exiting the park they can simply open the door. The security box was installed to reduce the amount of unauthorized people in the park. As David approached the gate, he waited for the lady to open the door so that he could enter with his dog. The lady abruptly stepped to the side and waited for David to enter the code. He was a little frustrated but remained calm and entered the code. The lady picked up her small dog, mumbled “excuse me” and held the dog closely to her body as David entered the gate and passed by her. David noticed this and smiled at her before he continued on his way.
REFERENCES


