On Interrogating Racism: How the Project Came About?

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Abstract:
This article reports findings that are part of a broader study exploring human service agencies' delivery efforts with "new immigrants" in a city in the North East of the United States. In this article, we specifically share our efforts to understand how human service agencies incorporate the concepts diversity and cultural competence in their everyday operations. We use a critical multicultural lens as a framework to approach the interrogation of the new racism- "colorblindness". This approach posits that client–provider relationships are embedded in broader racialization and societal power differences; and that, to work towards justice, it is essential to deconstruct the racialized codes which are found in public institutions. Our findings suggest that colorblindness is the frame that is used to incorporate diversity and cultural competence in the selected human service agencies and the "select" agencies confirmed that they had limited know how and/or frames to interrogate the "new racism". In view of these findings we argue that the teaching of social work, agency policies responses and service delivery should engage critical inductive learning that incorporates self-critique, self-evaluation to unlearn and to redress power imbalances, paternalistic and insensitive ways that contribute to everyday racism.

Keywords: *new immigrants, new racism, colorblind racism, micro aggression, cultural competence, diversity climates, human service delivery*

We came to embark on the project from which this paper is written after passionate class discussions, reflections and engaging a research project that looked at how human service agencies are incorporating diversity and cultural competence in their everyday practice, particularly within an environment that is largely racially homogenous, white.[1] The course was "*Social Work with Immigrants, Refugees and Asylum Seekers*". In our classroom, the initial line of reasoning was that as we live and work in a more racially homogenous state, there was no need to concern ourselves with diversity and cultural competence. Further, many students who are largely White worked from the assumption that the civil rights law and the equal opportunity law outlined the "tolerance of diversity" in the United States hence; the issue of racism was no longer a social problem, except it remained a problem with a few individuals who remain bigoted and racist. However, as our course progressed and students began to examine the ideological stance on multiculturalism in North America (Kincheloe & Steinberg, 2002), it became clear that "color blindness" was the frame from which many human service agencies were working. For example, many students in the course felt that although diversity and cultural competence as social constructs seem to be well developed in rhetoric at institutional levels, in academic circles and in the classrooms of the 'helping/caring professions' there appears to be very limited information on how diversity and cultural competence are operationalized on the frontlines of human service delivery, an assertion confirmed by (Dreher & MacNaughton, 2003).

In our classroom experience, social work students who are themselves service providers reported that diversity and cultural competence efforts in human service agencies tend to be 'empty shells' well

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[1] According to the United States Census figures (2009), Maine is the least racially diverse state in the United States, with 95.3 percent of Maine's population identifying as white in a nation where 66 percent of the population identifies as white. See US Census Bureau. www.census.gov.

developed on the "outside", in organizational brochures and welcome signs but very little done to undo the status quo. Although the claims of "empty shells" were anecdotal in our experience, many reasons were suggested for the 'empty shell' thesis. For example social work students and practitioners note that the current guiding principles for human services as business entities focus solely on effectiveness and efficiency. However, this focus has a propensity to overburden workers by increasing workloads, cutting back resources (all factors that cumulatively lead to sabotage of diversity initiatives) resulting in failure to engage inclusive community and critical dialogues about diversity and racism (Hyde & Hopkins 2004; Smith, Constantine, Graham & Dize 2008). The irony is that this "unintentional" sabotage is occurring at a time when professional standards and national service delivery agencies are increasingly advocating for the inclusion of diversity and cultural competence as integral part of practice and service delivery (Dreher & MacNaughton, 2002; Hyde & Hopkins, 2004). Also, considering the current changes in national demographics, where both human service sector clients and workers are likely to be people of color (Hyde & Hopkins, 2004), it is important to engage positive and proactive efforts that work against exclusion especially in human service (Markus, Steele & Steele, 2002:469). Moreover, social workers have a mandated ethical commitment to multiculturalism, as Hyde & Hopkins (2004:26) assert "social workers are expected to create and maintain human service agencies that promote cultural sensitivity, dignity and diversity" (p.26). Using interviews at agency level we were interested to explore organizational diversity climates (the activities that agencies actually report doing) and how human service agencies address racial and ethnic differences in an environment that is largely racially homogenous, but bounded by the ethos of multiculturalism.

The Problem: The discursive reproduction of "color blindness" as the new racism
Colorblindness: The Claims
Markus et.al. (2002:454) argues that the United States' struggle with inclusion particularly of new immigrants rests with *Color Blindness* as a model of inclusion, "the desire to remedy group prejudice (systemic/structural exclusions) by not seeing group difference, an essentially progressive norm of the post-civil rights era in American life" (p445). However, according to Markus et.al, and van Dijk (2000) this "colorblindness" is the *new racism*. The new racism is different from old slavery, Jim Crow laws, lynching, apartheid, systematic discrimination and white superiority feelings and derogation made explicit in public discourse in that the new racism is part of the everyday conversations, texts, policies, practices and encounters (van Dijk, 2000).

Alluding to prevalence and changing expressions of racism in the US, Smith, Costantine, Graham & Dize (2008:p337) quoting Bonilla-Silva (2003) succinctly point out that "Whereas pre civil-rights era racism was relatively overt and easy to identify (as in sending Black passengers to the back of the bus), contemporary racism is often buried deep within the worldviews and everyday narratives of well - intentioned people for instance in the prevailing rhetoric of color blindness and sameness "(p.337). van Dijk (2000, p34) asserts that because the new racism is often subtle, as it is expressed, enacted and confirmed through everyday conversations, organizational meetings, board meetings, in policies, therefore, it is critical to engage service providers in conversations that examine their worldviews about multiculturalism and everyday narratives to begin to examine oppression and engage actions that value diversity.

Sue, Capodilupo & Holder (2008: 209) summarize with brevity the extent to which, racism is embedded in the US society: "…white Americans are socialized to internalize the biases, stereotypes and prejudices of society (quoting Sue, 2003); racism is likely to be manifested in explicit and implicit forms towards Black Americans (quoting Banaji, Hardin & Rothman, 1993; DeVos & Banaji, 2005) and black people in the US experience almost daily forms of racism (quoting Feagin & Skies, 1994; Williams, Neighors & Jackson, 2003). But, over the years, traditional overt/blatant forms of racism have changed to less obvious actions and behaviors, languages that are likely to occur outside the awareness of

"progressive" and well- meaning white individuals, micro aggressions" (Sue, Capodilupo & Holder, 2008: 329). Also, Bonilla –Silva (2001) informatively argues that mainstream sociological analysis has historically followed Whites' racial common sense, which often down plays the significance of racism in explaining minorities' plight. To the extent that human service organizations and human service providers' work is embedded in US society, the pertinent question for us: Are human service providers immune to the phenomenon of colorblindness as the expression of new racism?

Solórzano & Yasso (2000) in their study of campus diversity climates and its impact on Black students, suggest that understanding and analyzing organizational/institutional diversity climates is an important part to examining the persistent barriers in education and in our case, the utilization of services by new immigrants who are largely, persons of color. Our thesis here is that the general underrepresentation of people of color in human service agencies both as workers and clients in locales that are perceived as racially homogenous hides this 'new racism'. We argue that even for those service providers who have received prior training in multicultural engagement, unconscious racism can be manifested in the client – provider process and could have detrimental effects on service users. We argue that within the realm of cultural and racial politics it matters to understand which multiculturalism we speak to and of, since culture frames tend to reproduce power relations that often preserve privilege of white supremacy, patriarchy, class elitism and other oppressive forces (Capodilupo & Holder, 2008:329, Giroux, 2002).

Colorblindness and Human Service Agencies
We see *human service agencies* in the broad sense of the term, as those agencies that provide services to meet human needs, to resolve and/or mitigate social and individual problems, improve and maintain the general well- being of individuals, groups, communities and society in general. These agencies/organizations can be either non- profits and/or for profits. Hyde & Hopkins (2004) in their study of diversity climates found that larger bureaucracies had a more difficulty in creating robust organizational climates because large organizations are less flexible. Pertinent in the inflexible bureaucracies are current issues of underutilization, underrepresentation of people of color, particularly 'new' immigrants in human services (see Tripodi –Potcoky, 2008) such factors as lack of knowledge of the services, lack of experience with social services, language barriers etc., are associated with barriers to service scholarship. However, the troubling part about the "barriers" scholarship is that the often mentioned barriers are presented as if they have nothing to do with the agencies that are the context of barriers. Further, the "barriers" scholarship presumes the problem is with the new immigrants not with the human service agencies. Moreover, the "barriers" to human services have not been studied as part of expressions of "new racism", where problems are perceived to be with the prospective service user not the provider. The problem is with "them' yet, we are reminded too by scholars like Sue, Capodilupo & Holder (2008); Smith, Constantine, Graham and Dize (2008) and many others that human services are not immune to new forms of racism expressed as *aversive racism*, *implicit racism*, *micro aggression*, meaning the subtle insults/belittle (verbal, nonverbal and/or visual) directed toward people of color, often automatically or unconsciously and has cumulative negative impact on people of color (Solorzano & Yosso, 2000). If this "new racism" is embedded in the human service organizations as part of the social structure of society, it becomes critical to uncover how service providers are showing it and the bigger challenge, addressing it.

Further, Bonilla-Silva & Baiocchi (2001: 118 and Bonilla-Silva, 2003) point to the fact that critical social analysis means questioning White common sense –about the presumed colorblindness and insignificance of racism in American life. Bonilla – Silva (2003) argues further that we need to interrogate the new racism specifically the assertion that "… the plight of minoritized groups was their own doing and it (is) Whites who were suffering from "reverse discrimination"". This worldview has been galvanized into sociological writings hence, justifying color- blind racism, with its four identified central

frames; a) *abstract liberalism*, in which political liberal ideas such as individualism and equal opportunity are applied in an abstract way to create a reasonable, moral sounding opposition to antiracist ideas, yet in reality these ideas maintain racism; b) *naturalization*, or the rendering of racial phenomena such as real estate segregation and employment discrimination as natural and inevitable; c) *cultural racism*, or culturally based arguments regarding ethnic differences to explain inequities and d) *minimization*, or suggestion that race has no relevance. Characteristic linguistic and rhetorical styles include semantic moves such as "I" am not prejudiced, but …" and "Some of my best friends are…" the person of color – plays the race card. For this study, the pertinent question is: Do the presented organizational diversity climates in southern Maine reflect color blind racism? Can we study text/words and our everyday language to uncover how we are sculpting and bolstering racism?

New Immigrants and Human Services:
We use *'new immigrants'* as a collective term that encompasses distinct legal and social status differences in people who are categorized as refugees, asylum seekers, migrants, immigrants documented and undocumented and parolees who are foreign born and arrived in the US in the 1965 and beyond.[2] The commonality is the presumed 'foreign born' status and new describes being newly arrival in a particular local. Within the "new immigrants" and human service utilization literature we are aware that underutilization of services by 'new immigrants" has been a common and persist theme (see Potocky-Tripodi, 2002, Chung-Muy & Congress, 2009). Potocky-Tripodi (2002) & Chung-Muy & Congress, (2009) link service underutilization problems to issues of cultural appropriateness of services to new immigrants. To this; Hyde & Hopkins (2004 p.27) notes that so far, the majority of work on cultural competence has focused primarily on helping practitioners develop multicultural awareness, knowledge and skills so that they can deliver appropriate services to an increasingly diversity clientele (Sue, Capodilupo & Holder, 2008). However, the question of diversity climates in human service agencies has not been thoroughly engaged (Hyde & Hopkins, 2004) specifically, in more relational ways addressing the question: how does color- blind racial ideologies contribute to the maintenance of a status quo, in human services, in which whites have more power than do people of color (Smith, Constantine, Graham & Dize, 2008: 338). As Davidio & Gaertner (2004) quoted by Smith; Constantine, Graham & Dize (2008:344) have suggested, " …that many of us are understandably averse to the idea that we are perpetuating racism…"

Further, when it comes to the question of immigrants and resources in the US, there are keen debates and documentation of immigration fiscal impact (McNeece, Falconer & Springer, 2002) but, the realities of who is benefiting from 'immigration and human service industry' does not become an empirical question. Moreover, concerns of fiscal impact of immigration are indifferent to realities of racism subjected to new immigrants through colorblind rhetoric and practices.

Diversity climates
Diversity as a social science concept means many things to different people. Within organizational literature, the general idea is that diversity at minimum must encompass different sexes, races, ethnicities, ages, classes etc., to reflect the population. To us diversity is a broad concept referring to the many "hot button markers" that make for people's similarities and differences. In social relations, difference markers are often contentious. The markers are vast, including culture, gender, ethnicity, race, language, age, national origin, physical and mental ability, sexual orientation, religion, spiritual beliefs, worldviews,

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[2] Contemporary United States immigration and refugee policies are presumed to have their roots in the 1965 legislation that radically changed prior laws (see Potocky-Tripodi (2002). Best Practices for Social Work with Refugees and Immigrants. New York: Columbia University Press, page 63.

education etc. To enhance an organizational diversity climate an agency tries to foster inclusivity of as many of the above markers because better institutions are the result of organizational culture that is more diverse and inclusive. Hyde & Hopkins (2004) assert that within organizational literature in varied disciplines, there are a myriad of interventions for fostering organizational diversity, including such concepts as *managing diversity*, *cross cultural competency*, *valuing differences*, *affirmative action/anti-discrimination*, and *anti-oppression* models. However, Hyde & Hopkins (2004:24) argue that much of the discussion concerning these approaches focuses on the reasons for, conceptual models of, and challenges to initiatives that promote and sustain organizational diversity, but there is relatively little empirical evidence regarding the how agencies engage diversity.

The Study: What We Did?
Again, the material presented on interrogating racism is part of a broader study undertaken by students and instructor as a course project to understand how human service agencies were incorporating diversity and cultural competence we used an interview guide with five major themes, each theme with sub themes. The course was an elective and cross listed for both graduate and undergraduates. Main themes in the interview guide were as follows: *1) human service agency ideation system around diversity and cultural competence; 2) service utilization by new immigrants; 3) perceived impact of new immigrants on human service provisioning, 4) organizational approaches to diversity and cultural competence 5) perceived role of social work and the agency in improving service delivery efforts with new immigrants.* This article focuses on *theme 4: organizational approaches to diversity and cultural competence.*

We engaged interviews in thirteen (13) "select" human services in southern Maine. Agencies were selected by students on the basis of interest and familiarity as a place of internship, where they work and/or where they knew someone. We recognize the bias of this approach but since this was a sensitive area and we had limited time class time to complete the project- it would be important to use those agencies that were more open to the study. The strength of interviewing "select" agencies is that we engage inductive learning- where the students as practitioners are knowledge builders (Lum, 2007:238) where students learn to unlearn cultural notions/attitudes, behaviors and actions that support racism.

For each agency interviews were held at three levels, frontline worker, program manager and director. Students in the course, worked together with instructor to develop the interview guide. The class room was used to both to develop and sharpen interviewing skills, preparation and logistics for interviewing. Students practiced and supported each other in assessing the questions and the interview process. There were thirteen students in the course hence, the thirteen agencies. A point of interest from the process of interviewing- researchers who were students pointed out that in most cases, the research project was welcomed more positively when the purpose was introduced as seeking to understand the strengths and challenges of working with "new immigrants", not to understand diversity and cultural competence in human service agencies. Within the class discussion about ethnic, cultural diversity issues this was a meaningful observation on its own as it spoke to the discomfort, sometimes fear and other times defensiveness of service providers when the issue of 'diversity imperative in human service agencies' is brought to discussion. Again noting Dovidio & Gaertner (2004) who argues; that many of us are averse to the idea that we are perpetuating racism. Also, researchers noted that service providers had negative feelings of being judged as racist; instead our interest to engage transformational scholarship to become more inclusive. Moreover, as noted earlier, in our class discussions the presumption was that the civil rights law and the equal opportunity law outlined the "tolerance of diversity" therefore; the issue of racism was no longer a problem in the US. There was no need to engage critical analysis of the presumed obvious. Excerpts from the interviews affirm the discomforts and ambivalence consider the following:

> "*I don't think we actively promote (diversity and cultural competence) it's just there.*"
> "*…our (personnel) policy manual states that everyone must have proficiency in that (diversity and cultural competence) and the other thing is our mission statement in itself pretty much clarifies that you have to understand diversity, pluralism… I signed on it*"
> "*We doesn't purpose (fully) recruit anyone from any ethnic/racial background or anything like that … but religiously speaking we certainly have everyone from Christian, Pagan and we have had Atheists…I think we have the diversity to cover this area to make enough people comfortable…*"
> "*As far as ethnicity …I think we parallel the state. If you were to walk around this building you will see white people, but we have some African American people working for us. We can go into diversity in terms of sexual preference. That is an area that the agency has quite a diverse workforce. So, are we diverse when you compare us to New York City? No way, no! But for the state of Maine, we are, because there is no restriction or requirement. We don't have it mandated that we have to have a certain amount of minorities…we just take people …whoever qualifies for the job. In the end, it does not make any difference what your culture, or religion or anything…*"

From the above excerpts there seems to be an awkward hesitance to talk about racial diversity in agencies. In the first excerpt, one gets the feeling that service providers fear the discord that may result from honest conversations about difference- therefore, they would rather keep things the same, diversity "*…its just there*" end of story. In the second excerpt diversity belongs to the mission statements and hiring procedures that one as an employee has to sign on to confirm it, as the law demands but in this regard there is hardly any debate about the 'new racism' (van Dijk 2000, p37). As such, our analysis of text was intentional to show words/text/ language that can be construed as colorblind therefore, the new racism. We analyzed the text/ language used by service providers to understand the discourses of colorblindness therefore, the new racism. Analysis was done by the instructor with assistance of the co-author who was a student in the course. We brought to the analysis an understanding that 'racism' occurs more in everyday interactions (Essed, 1991). Before we discuss the actual study, let us explore the discourses of multiculturalism as part of framing our analysis on texts/words and language.

Multiculturalism Discourses: Framing the Analysis
Today, many people recognize the United States as a multicultural society, but, given the history of racism and the powerful inequalities that shape life experiences for people who are minorities, it is critical to examine which multiculturalism are social workers committed to? Our understanding of multiculturalism as an ideological concept we borrow Kincheloe & Steinberg, (2002)'s *critical multicultural* framework that takes into account the socio political context in which definitions and ideologies of multiculturalism are embedded and emerge. See Table 1 for elaborations.

Table 1: Changing Multiculturalism – *Critical Multiculturalism is Different from (conservative, liberal, pluralist and essentialist definitions)*

Conservative multiculturalism
Focus on white western patriarchal culture
Manifest destiny
Economic imperialism
Deprivation models place blame on the individual; deflects awareness from "isms" of oppression
Differences are divisive emphasis on deficiency model and ignores analysis of access to power

Liberal multiculturalism
Focus on sameness, "color – blindness' makes racial minorities invisible
Takes position of neutrality, which ignores the intersectionality of gender, class, race etc.
"Ideal" remains white, male standards/values/culture
Assimilationist approach- one directional acculturation
Oppression and inequality remain as individual concerns, not as larger social issues.

Pluralist multiculturalism (prevalent in the US)
Focus on difference = separate but equal
People of color, those minoritized are not biologically inferior but are different, sometimes pathologized to correct the difference that is presumed to hold them down
Castrates difference transforming it into a 'safe diversity' that is "controllable", often exoticize difference
Pluralism becomes a supreme social value; imply that anyone can make it by 'working hard'
Confuses psychological affirmations with political empowerment
Does not address socio economic structure/structural inequality.
Often "superficial" differences become the place of emphasis but few deep discussions are forged about the deep structural components of culture i.e. values, attitudes and behavior.

Celebrates difference while ignoring powerlessness, violence and poverty

*All three of the above models rationalize the behavior of the privileged and conceal how hegemony protects ideology and privilege of the social order

Essentialist multiculturalism
Focus on difference as an essential identity and ignores intersectionality
Authenticity/transcends history, social context and power
Avoids acknowledging difference within identity groups
Identity is the basis of authority- only authentically oppressed people can possess moral authority / "oppression privilege"
Only one form of oppression is elemental (real) taking precedents over all other modes
Single identity groups work for themselves, in competition with other groups, and not in coalitions

Critical multiculturalism
Focus on emancipation, self, structural, systems and societal transformations
Identity formation is socially constructed and is constantly shifting
Promotes self reflection that results in changes of perspective
No pretence of neutrality
Works to expose processes of privilege that undermine people who have historical experienced dis -privileges
Focus on the intersectionality of race, class, sexual orientation, gender, and other axes of power in social relationships
Concerned with the contextualization of inequalities/how power has operated historically, how difference is used
Acknowledges that there are as many differences within cultural groups as they are between them
Acknowledges that ideological inscriptions become imprinted on our subjectivity and that culture reproduces power relations therefore it is critical to deconstruct experience that preserves: privilege of white supremacy, patriarchy, class elitism and other dominant forces, and posit the importance to understand the power of difference when conceptualized within the larger concern of social justice

Adapted from Kincheloe, J.L & Steinberg, S.R. (2002). Introduction: What is Multiculturalism? In *Changing Multiculturalism*. Philadelphia: Open University. The table was summarized and created by Elizabeth KimJin Traver Collardey for courses in Multicultural Social Work.

In Kincheloe & Steinberg's *Changing Multiculturalism,* multiculturalism is viewed from a developmental approach and as a continuum. On one end is the *conservative/mono cultural ideas* of multiculturalism, characterized by the view that there is an established culture of the majority and the process of acquisition of that culture is one directional – people who are new and/or "othered" have to acculturate and assimilate to an established culture. This one directional assimilation is taken on by *liberal multiculturalism*, according to Markus, Steele & Steele (2002) liberal multiculturalism emphasizes sameness and *colorblind racial ideologies* were differences are celebrated and minimized. Markus et.al. (2002:460) trace the emerges of the colorblind model of multiculturalism from the Civil Rights era, for instance they argue that in 1954 Brown v. Board of Education desegregation decision of the Supreme Court, the great advantage of the one-way assimilation – color-blind-model was that it sought to overcome segregation and separate-but-equal laws that dominated the American race relations from the beginning of the century; but it was not a new model. Assimilation has always been the official model of inclusion in relation to American's European immigrant groups. Within the Civil Rights Act of 1964, assimilation was bolstered to include African Americans and other disenfranchised groups, thus becoming, at least as a governing ideal, American's fundamental model of community. Other views of multiculturalism according to Kincheloe & Steinberg (2002) include *pluralist multiculturalism, essentialist multiculturalism and critical multiculturalism.*

What is pluralist *multiculturalism*? According to Kincheloe & Steinberg (2002) the focus tends to be on the positive nature of difference yet, a resistance to address cumulative disadvantages caused by privilege. The *pluralist multiculturalism* holds that ethnic and racial variety is pleasing and important, both to the various groups themselves and to society as a whole. Indeed, diversity is so important that it can and should be celebrated. This idea, however, typically is coupled with the notion that despite the important diversity to be found in ethnic foods, consumes, customs, and festivals, in the most important respects, "people are really all the same". The tenets of pluralist multiculturalism are that differences found among people typically coded by race, ethnicity, gender, class, sexual orientation – although potentially significant and worthy of appreciation – do not and should not affect how society functions (Markus, Steele & Steele, 2002:460). See further elaborations on Table 1.

Then, there is the *essentialist multiculturalism* – Ferguson, Lavalette & Mooney (2002: 96) argue that "essentialist theories typically seek to explain (or justify) the existence of power and oppression in terms of a set of allegedly unchanging characteristics or essences possessed by one group of human beings which form the basis for their domination of another group (who in turn similarly possess unchanging, albeit different, characteristics). Ferguson et.al goes on to show that historically, essentialist theories have tended to be favored by conservative theoreticians and political groups. Examples include the use of intelligence tests in the form of IQ and arguing that it is innate and that differences in educational attainment between "races" could be explained in terms of these inherited differences (Ferguson, 2002:97). Several scholars have argued about the pseudo-scientific explanations behind these claims, the ahistorical nature of the claims that reduce all social problems to human nature- in the above example, hereditary intellectual factors.

The political right does not have a monopoly of essentialism – leftist have explained oppressions in a reductionist manner as well for example, feminist argument that all men are potential rapists on the basis that they have the biological equipment to carry out rape. Another example, all women are carers and men are aggressive. Leftist essentialism derives from lived experiences of oppression and their shared interest to fight it, i.e. *apartheid.* Not only do they share interest, but also have a will to defend themselves out of necessity. Standing together against the sources of oppression is critical. Ferguson, Lavalette & Mooney (2002) further argue that people who are experiencing oppression have the force to question of power. The shortcomings for leftist essentialist multiculturalism is the assumption that there is natural unity within and between oppressed groups, yet differential experiences of oppressions are meaningful and must be engaged for the collectives to be successful.

According to Kincheloe & Steinberg's *critical multiculturalism*, is the progressive framework that questions power and privilege and how the social constructs of race are used in society and how these concepts are changing contextually and historically (see table 1 for elaborations). We use critical multicultural theory because we are concerned that race continues to frame the fate of many people of color in the United States (Giroux, 2002) and it does so mostly on day-to-day operations like social services provisioning. Therefore, in order to deepen social work commitment to diversity and cultural competence social workers should address questions of power and privilege, within the culture of the organizations they work and ensure meaningful representations of people of color within these institutions as part of a broader discourse and action towards social justice. Within a critical multicultural approach, power becomes central to the study of practices within an organization and between relations of clients and service providers. Critical multiculturalism becomes that tool to encourage students and practitioners to interrogate, challenge, and transform those cultural practices that sustain racism (Giroux, 2002:238). The question we address in this article: Do the presented organizational diversity climates in the agencies we interviewed reflect color-blind racism? Using textual analysis of interviews with service providers we examine the words/text used to describe how human service agencies provide services. We assume Bonilla-Silva & Baiocchi (2001:120) comments about the need to examine the communicative interaction of people for racism since people express their ideological positions in talk and text.

Results of the Findings: Interrogating Colorblindness as the New Racism
Immersing ourselves in the transcripts we systematically analyzed the data for thematic patterns relating to questions: What is the agency's approach to diversity and cultural competence? In the following sections we share the findings of the interviews with "select" human service agencies about their organizational approach to diversity and cultural competence. First, we explore the agency approaches to human service delivery with new immigrants. Second, within the discussion of agency approaches and the presented agency worldview we pick excerpts to illustrate colorblindness therefore the existence of the new racism. Third, we provide a discussion centering on the contradictory nature of liberal multiculturalism and the effects of this ideology on human service delivery. Using excerpts we highlight how liberal multiculturalism as the foregrounding ideology in human services undermines service delivery efforts people of color, who are new immigrants, by not including them as workers and maintaining racial homogeneity in personnel where this could be diverse.

The first question was: how does your agency approach diversity and cultural competence? And, the following excerpts reflect oblivion:
 "We don't purpose (fully) recruit anyone from any ethnic/racial background or anything like that ... but religiously speaking we certainly have everyone from Christian, Pagan and we have had Atheists...I think we have the diversity to cover this area to make enough people comfortable..."
"As far as ethnicity ...I think we parallel the state. If you were to walk around this building you will see white people, but we have some African American people working for us. We can go into diversity in terms of sexual preference. That is an area that the agency has quite a diverse workforce. So, are we diverse when you compare us to New York City? No way, no! But for the state of Maine, we are, because there is no restriction or requirement. We don't have it mandated that we have to have a certain amount of minorities...we just take people ...whoever qualifies for the job. In the end, it does not make any difference what your culture, or religion or anything..."
In the above excerpts, one interviewee who is a director of a service agency is clearly aware of the minimal racial diversity in their agency, therefore mentions "*we have some African Americans working for us...*"but ignores a discussion on recruitment and retention and choses to call on other markers of diversity, for example sexual orientation, religious orientation never mind the intersect of these markers to each other, only to return to the avoided one racial diversity question to assert sameness with the state. For

example, the assertion, "*As far as ethnicity ...I think we parallel the state. If you were to walk around this building you will see white people, but we have some African American people working for us...* according to Bonilla-Silva (2003) people minimize the racial relevance by highlighting other diversities. This minimization of race as a hot button marker was so alive at least seven out of thirteen participants indicating:

"*Don't think we actively promote (diversity and cultural competence) it's just there.*"

In the excerpt below the service provider weighs- in on other diversity markers as a refusal to see the racial exclusions, the service provider pointed out:

"*It depends on what you're talking about by diversity. Do you mean ethnic diversity? Because we (as Whites) also live in the North East. There is a lot of diversity in Maine so percentage wise we are probably whatever Maine is. If you are talking about ethnicity, no. If you are talking about cultures, I think there is much more diversity. People's cultural backgrounds, how they are brought up, the economic status and education...there is a whole spectrum of culture at the agency.*"

In the above excerpts we can glean the pervasive and contradictory view of colorblindness and *new racism*, when talking about diversity, cultural diversity is important to the state of Maine- this diversity is a shift from the earlier biological notions to today's celebrations of diversity culture including whiteness, forgetting the fact that whiteness is the cultural yardstick in human services. We interpret this to mean that there is somewhat support for diversity but then a deep resistance to programs to implement goals related to racial diversity (Bonilla-Silva & Baiocchi, 2001:119). Also, the above minimalization of race as an issue confirms Smith, Constantine, Graham & Dize (2008:338)'s assertion of the existence of *aversive racism* in human service agencies, where White who consciously support equality and fairness also harbor negative beliefs about Blacks (and other people of color) that are expressed only subtly and in situations in which discrimination will not be obvious to others, or themselves.

Interrogating New Racism: Approaches to incorporating diversity and cultural with new immigrants
Basically two approaches to incorporating diversity and cultural competence were gleaned from the thirteen agencies interviewed; a) agencies that reported providing services to "all Americans", regardless of immigration status – we label these agencies as "***All American Way***" these agencies emphasize **Liberal Multiculturalism** - **colorblindness and sameness** 2) programs within agencies designed to specifically serve "new immigrants and refugees", we label these agencies "***Engaging Diversity Approach***" according to Kincheloe & Steinberg (2002) multicultural frame these agencies are practicing **Pluralist Multiculturalism**.

Of the thirteen agencies, seven (7) agencies reported that they provided services to "*all Americans*", without consideration of immigrant status, meaning that no programs were specifically, designed to meet 'new immigrants' needs. The seven agencies included four (4) in *home child behavioral support programs*; *a wrap around family support program*; a *cancer support program* and a *hospital*. The other six (6) agencies had programs designed to meet specific immigrant needs, for instance within the city's social services program was the *refugee program*; *the adult and lifelong learner's program* and within a counseling agency was the *mental health refugee and immigrant program*. Another interesting approach, a women's advocacy program had partnered with a 'new immigrant' association to provide services for survivors of domestic violence. Also, there was an *Elementary School Adjustment Program* and the *Youth Program*.

Let us examine the colorblindness within agencies that reported providing services in an "***all American way***" approach and highlight the new racism in the text.

All America Way – Liberal Multiculturalism Worldview: emphasize color-blindness "we are all the same". The excerpts below share text that spoke to liberal color-blindness and related ideological expressions, i.e. disease model as its approach to inclusion.

> "*All programs welcome everybody. We haven't tried a specific group. We are all the same, we provide services to all*"
>
> "*Our programs encompass everyone.*"
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> Yet another service provider commented:
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> "We *only extend ourselves to the normal services that are available to all residences of this county. We do not specialize in minorities or contacting any specific groups...we haven't the minority population in terms of requests or need for services. Statistically, it hasn't happened yet, but when it does we will have to modify and be creative and change our approach.*
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> "*We accept all people ...it's not like any other different circumstance. If we have someone that comes into a residential program that is diabetic we would make sure that people working with them have the knowledge that they need in order to make sure that the diabetic could be monitored properly. So, you could just take that same ideas that if we have somebody that comes from a different culture...we need to do what we need to do as long its reasonable accommodation.*"
>
> "*We do have our policy on cultural diversity. It basically says that we provide services to all people that are in need regardless of race, religion, culture or whatever and if there are things that we need to be aware of, we will help people become aware of that…* "

To us the above excerpts represent the challenges of working within the 'sameness' frame within human service delivery. As Shweder, Minow & Markus (2002) attest that the "sameness model" is inherently tied to the concept of *aversive racism*, the racism that surfaces in subtle ways not as direct hostilities and hate. *"All programs welcome everyone", "our programs encompass everyone"* presumes openness and inclusivity defined by law-also, the abstract liberalism suggested by Bonilla-Silva, in which politically liberal ideas about equal opportunity are applied abstractly to create reasonable measures to antiracism yet the outcomes remain not an area of interest and or analysis about the experiences of people who are minoritized. Moreover, the quote *"we provide services to all people that are in need...*; presents colorblindness based on equality opportunity. In this study service providers in the *all American approach* ignore and thought irrelevant the racial and ethnic membership mix of their agency composition- the only thing that mattered was 'professionalism'- how to manage the diversity of others (we will return to this idea in the discussion below). The critical point is advanced by Markus, Steele & Steele (2002:253), that " *we provide services to all"* speak to the "ongoing struggle with difference, how to bring the powerful American ideal of equality and equality of opportunity together with reality of difference in psychological and social experience that derives from differential status in society".

Another challenge posed by the sameness ideology, is how to come to terms with difference. In a racialized society the fact that different ethnic, cultural and racial groups occupy different positions within the societal matrix is forgotten when service providers say: *"They all have to fit in..."* this assimilationist view becomes strong in human service delivery never mind what they have "to fit into" is not homogenous culture- but fitting in to the already established becomes so important in service delivery. Here color blindness serves to limit the service provider's ability to see social dynamics and experiences of "others" as critical to the process of service delivery. Moreover, what is normalized is white as one of the excerpts above show: *we provide the "normal services"* presumes services for "others"/ designed by new immigrants and/or for new immigrants may not be "normal".

Another way we glean colorblindness as new racism is the way service providers see people of color through the lens of disease- diabetic. Like the disease model "professionals" are in charge, they have to manage the diversity of 'others'. Leads us to discussions of those 'othered' as problems, what is white is normalized and the 'other' becomes a problem. As professionals human service workers through their certified expertise manage service user's autonomy i.e. choosing the "presumed cultural artifacts to

include while services continue to secure the status quo. Management of diversity becomes the focus of professionals, how many can we handle before our society is maxed?

Next, we will discuss service delivery within "***engaging diversity approach***" beginning with the worldview. ***Engaging Diversity – Essentialist Pluralist Multiculturalism*** – six out of thirteen agencies efforts were more of a pluralistic frame (see Kincheloe and Steinberg, 2002) where difference in people are recognized. But, differences seem to be too pronounced and profound that the service providers need to understand these differences and appreciate them in service. The most interesting part about the agencies that where '*engaging diversity approach'* is that there was a mix about the appreciation of difference, for instance, difference was important and was appreciated and integrated in the agency's practices i.e. the Refugee Program, the Adult Life Long learning program and the Women's Advocacy program. However, the story line was different for agencies that focused on mental health and school adjustment for children, the youth program- here the focus is on one directional assimilation. In these agencies people's difference were seen more as a problem – a similar outlook to the "*all American approach*" above.

The agencies that reported doing specific work i.e. refugee – expressed more sensitivity to refugee experience and were frustrated that some of the agencies, i.e. Department of Health and Human Services and Dirigo Health Agency (DHA) were not sensitive to the experience of refugees. Hyde and Hopkins (2004) suggest that big bureaucracies have a difficult time transforming the culture, we found that the agencies that were progressive, like refugee services were frustrated by larger bureaucratic agencies, whose personnel was racially homogenous, whose focus was on the service they provided not the people whose needs were unmet, and will provide service if they feel sorry for you.

One service provider from the Refugee Program pointed out that:

> "*Social services. It's a struggle. I mean, I show this film to DHHS and DHA workers, cause I was like, you know what…there's just no sensitivity…I am not asking you to have somebody come into your office and you give them everything that you can possible give them because you feel sorry for them. That is not what I am asking…I am asking for you to clearly understand where they actually come from and how you can sit there and to do an intake and have them understand everything you are saying to them. And, have they signed a form that is this long and a font that is about size 8 and you're holding them accountable. It's a struggle every day.*"

However, even within the 'more sensitive' agencies the embeddedness of racism in US society is so perverse too, particularly, in the agencies where cultural differences are so emphasized to the point that service providers fail to see how differences function and are being used in an organization. Even within ethnically diverse agencies such statements emerge:

"Child protective can be very overwhelming, scary, people are frightened, even American families…there's no child protective over in Africa…"

Here we see Bonilla Silva's idea of cultural racism explaining inequities. The stereotypes about Africa, that there is no child protective over in Africa… Never mind that African is a diverse continent. Also, many people in the United States would use the African adage "it takes a village to raise a child" but, when it comes to actual inclusion of these concepts within an American agency the adage goes out of the window and child protection is only seen within the US frame where protection is assured and ensured through child protection services. Even for the agencies engaging diversity - White mainstream is the standard norm of child protection so that providers language that which is different as 'they don't have child protection". Similar language is observed talking about African immigrants and their expectations of the United States. Again, we see the justifications of "the way we do it over here", which directly speak to assimilationist –mono cultural frame according to Kincheloe & Steinberg's multicultural framework. The

frustrating part about the "more sensitive" agencies is the presumption of doing it RIGHT! Below is a monologue by one of the service providers from a multi-ethnic, multi lingual, and culturally diverse agency talking about African immigrants:

> *Once they are in the United States...they say, "I'm in the US, I am fine, I'm done, everything is over...I'm gonna get everything. I will get an apartment, I will get money, and I will get a car. I will get this and that. The reality sets in soon enough that they have to work to keep themselves going. They have to be financial independent. And, they come to know that people work here. Oh, I thought this was the US. All gold and the like, you get to let them know the reality ...you don't get things for free. You have to work hard, you have to educate yourself before you can be what you want be. It takes time to redirect them and then they to get the real picture than the expectations they came with. Some understand easily, others it's not understood."*

To us, the above monologue is part of the workings of *aversive racism*, working to reproduce the myth of "black laziness", of the expectation to be given – learned helplessness and presumed inferiority "*it takes time to redirect them and then they get the real picture than the expectation they came with*". The question of resources, of equity, why someone has to seek help in the first place is not engaged. The service provider in the above excerpt is already enjoying privilege of separating the new immigrants; the good ones and the disposable ones! The ones that don't get it! The above excerpts not only show myth making within an 'agency that is presumed more sensitive' yet, the belittling language may become cumulative to hurt the very people this agency is trying to help. Therefore, people of color who are new immigrants may not want anything to do with such agencies in their lives. People go to agencies with such tokenistic diversity climates out of desperation. The point here is that even in the multi ethnic, multilingual and multi culturally diverse agencies there are no guarantees for robust diversity climates therefore, a critical multicultural lens is crucial. Being persons of color in an organization is no warranty that sensitivity, dignity and respect will prevail in service provisioning. Moreover, Bonilla-Silva & Baiocchi (2001: 122) caution studies that equate physical contact with substantive integration, the intra dynamics may speak more. Whilst a racial heterogeneous work environment is desirable it is critical to look at how the color line is being shifted and for what purpose it is being used.

Concluding Remarks: What does it all mean?
In terms of ideological leanings of the agencies interviewed, most agencies are steeped in the conservative, liberal with a flare of pluralist multiculturalism as defined by Kincheloe & Steinberg (2002). There are two story lines about incorporating diversity and this relates to how they view difference. Story line #1, where difference is seen as divisive service providers minimize different by evoking equal opportunity, therefore, the prevalent sentiments '*we provide services for all'…yet the reality "not all"* receive services. "*We provide the same for everyone*". What is not perceived here is how sameness makes people of color invisible and the particularly troubling part is the cumulative effects of micro aggressive sentiments, aversive racism produced daily within the protection of the civil rights laws.

In terms of human service agency approaches to service provisioning, to us the agencies that said we provide services to "***all Americans***" work under the assumption that diversity is problematic, it (diversity) adds problems to already cash strapped agencies. Therefore, the use of the rhetoric "*we provide services to all Americans*" justifies the gap between egalitarian rhetoric on one hand and unwillingness to serve all. This we believe is part of the dilemma to bring equality and equal opportunity in an already differentiated society. In the agencies, that we interviewed practices become discriminatory in the sense that where people, by the virtue of who they are; are deemed as having "contemptible conditions" therefore, unworthy of service. This is institutional racism and is reproduced by within and by agencies that presume to meet people's needs. Our overall comment hinge on the first observation -the reluctance of human service agencies to share how they incorporate diversity and cultural competence, this

reluctance stems from the fact that human service providers have few guidelines and very few opportunities to learn with each other how they incorporate diversity and cultural competence. This lack of experience in providing positive intergroup interactions means that many human service agencies therefore never try to engage diversity beyond the broad catch all stipulations of the civil rights laws. The contribution of this work is that it offers that learning from experience; on how to engage human service providers on critical question about racial diversity in the work and service delivery efforts. The study provides a lens through which students; agency policy makers and service delivery people can work with to keep questioning themselves as service providers to the efficacy of their work in building robust diversity climates.

We conclude that given the historic embeddedness of racism in the US society, the overarching liberal multiculturalism foundations of colorblindness human service providers are not immune to the new expressions of racism. As we have seen in this discussion racism is alive and well in human service agencies. Let us confront it through critical analysis and dialogue about power and privilege, and use the critical multicultural frame as a way of empowering and transforming how we deliver services to diverse populations. Further, on several occasions we witness the play on words – "my diversity characteristics against your diversity characteristics" as a way to avoid talking about race and racism issues. This assertion of 'a single dimension of difference over others' serves to maintain the status quo around racism, for example, we have religious diversity; we have sexual diversity etc., we have income diversity; minimizes and ignores the exploitations and oppressions through all 'isms'.

What do the findings mean to teaching social work students?
This study enables students to use inductive learning (Lum, 2007) to ask questions about concepts that have been come entrenched in their vocabulary as students – but to ask deep questions about what they actually "DO" when they are working to improve diversity and cultural competency. The critical training for social workers is within human service agencies because it is in these agencies that they will practice. Learning how agencies "DO" means that students have frames to work towards advocacy and changing policies, systems and structures that perpetuate oppression. Engaging students in inductive learning in agencies means skill building in self- critique and establishes that this skill is structured into their professional training and provides and avenue of how 'TO DO'. Moving beyond the self to "critique" students learn to extend 'institutional critique' to their work as a way of improving services. Moreover, this study provides a way for students to 'learn to unlearn' the everyday practices that foster racism.

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