

**Administration Without Consideration:
Public Administration's Oversight of Children**

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ABSTRACT: Every day American children encounter government through routine interactions with public administrators. Because of the unique nature of working with children, there is often a tension in these interactions that is different than in interactions with adults. Although the public administration literature focuses on implementation of public policy and the interactions between citizens and government, there is an absence of contemporary literature that contemplates children as different than adults in administrative contexts and thus inform the interactions between public administrators and children. In this paper, I argue that this oversight results in an absence of basic understanding of children within the context of public administration—who they are, how they think, and what they need—which not only creates a significant theoretical shortcoming within the literature, but also fails to inform the practice of public administration and generates real consequences for children.

Every day American children encounter government through routine interactions with public administrators. These civil servants work at the boundary between citizens and the State in order to implement the policy of government. At this boundary, children encounter these representatives of government in everyday ways: Teachers educate them through the public school system. They are protected and monitored by police officers. They have social workers and other caseworkers. They admire firefighters. They go before judges and have public attorneys.

In *Street Level Bureaucracy*, Lipskey (1980) describes these public administrators as “street level bureaucrats.” These individuals work at the front lines of government and are unique in how they make decisions, the limitations that guide their work, their motivations, and the resulting tensions of their work environment. Many of these distinctions emerge because they perform their jobs in environments saturated by rules and regulated by policy. The literature that exists to help us understand the interactions between street level bureaucrats and citizens primarily focuses on the fundamental dilemma of street-level work that occurs when “the needs of individual citizen-clients exist in tension with the demands and limits of [agency] rules” (Maynard-Moody & Musheno, 2003, p. 93). This tension means that workers rely on their autonomy and discretion when interacting directly with citizens—essentially creating policy decisions through their actions, rather than just implementing created policy.

Yet for frontline workers who regularly interact with children, there is an additional tension left largely unexplored in the public administration literature. This tension emerges from the

unique realities of working with children, because children are commonly understood to be different than adults and thus require special treatment because of their age and development. Yet street level bureaucrats are obligated, not to provide unique treatment to clients who are children, but instead to abide by the inflexible rules and expectations of their agency. Thus, in these jobs, there is often a disconnect between the unique needs and nature of children and the policies and procedures of a bureaucratic agency. Specifically, this occurs when frontline workers are limited by policies and expectations that fail to take into account a basic understanding of children: who they are, how they think, and what they need. As a result, street-level bureaucrats whose work involves children often find themselves oddly bound to rules, procedures, and policies that are in direct opposition with what is commonly held as necessary and appropriate for children.

In many cases, this disconnect yields very real consequences for children. Consider the following cases where children with age-appropriate behavior or situation-appropriate needs are handled with standard policy and rules, rather than a child-centered response:

- In Charlotte, North Carolina, nine-year-old Emanyee Lockett was suspended for two days for telling a fellow student that their teacher was “cute.” As explanation for the suspension, the Brookside Elementary principal informed his mother that Emanyee’s “inappropriate behavior” was considered “sexual harassment” (wsocvtv.com, 2011).
- In Boston, Massachusetts, first-grader Mark Curran was investigated for “sexual harassment” after he struck the groin of a classmate who was allegedly choking him and took his gloves. After trying to explain the event to school officials, Curran told his mom, “They didn’t believe me,” Mark said softly. “I didn’t get my gloves back” (Cramer, 2011, para. 17).
- In St. Louis, Missouri, honor roll student LaTresha Davis was handcuffed following a dispute about the high school’s new dress code. Davis’ sweatshirt violated the dress code because it did not match school colors. School officials reported they “they were following policy” (KMOV, 2011). Davis was suspended for five days.
- In Albuquerque, New Mexico, a thirteen-year-old was handcuffed and arrested for “interfering with public education” when he “burped audibly” (Solove, 2011).
- In Portland, Oregon, two little boys, four- and five-years-old, were separated from their “Daddy” (Cole, 2011). The boys knew him as their father; he cut their umbilical cords

and bought their first bikes. He cared for them when their mother struggled with addiction and went into treatment. But when Oregon's child welfare system discovered that Jesse Tarter was not the boy's biological father, they were removed from him. Although caseworkers agree that he has done nothing wrong, they are bound by policy to search for family members to adopt the boys. Even when Tarter went through the steps to adopt the boys, the agency denied him, saying a distant cousin had stepped up to raise the boys.

These are but a few of the many possible stories that reflect the encounters between children and their government as mediated by representatives of government who implement public policy, as well as the frequent disconnect between the unique needs and nature of children and the nature of bureaucratic organization. Without consideration of children within the public administration literature to contemplate and guide frontline workers to coordinate the nature of children, based on age and development, with the policy and expectations that public administrators are held to, children become the collateral damage of bureaucratic functioning.

Of course when it comes to the interaction between street level bureaucrats and adults, there is a systematic way of thinking about citizens. Adults have a specified relationship with government as provided through the Constitution, such that their interactions with other adults, including representatives of government, are protected by laws and civil rights. Additionally, adults have autonomy, voice, and access to information that enable them to protect themselves if and when their relationship with government breaks down. There is extensive literature that focuses on these issues as well as when these protections break down, including topics such as marginalization, social justice, equality, Constitutional law, and administrative evil. Even on the topic of interactions with street level bureaucrats, Lipskey (1980) and Maynard-Moody & Musheno (2003) provide stories from street-level bureaucracies as a way to understand the interactions between street level bureaucrats and adult citizens and to explore how these workers use their autonomy and discretion affects how they make decisions when working with adults. However, when it comes to the interactions of children and government, it is not enough to understand the interaction of civil servants and adults. Rather, these unique interactions require a systematic way of thinking about children that informs behavior in administrative contexts. Yet within the field that governs and studies interactions between government and citizens, there is

no literature that informs the interactions between public administrators and clients who are children in this way.

In this paper, I argue that the field of public administration has yet to undertake a systematic exploration of children within the contemporary literature. Rather, the field has failed to actively consider children in a way that contemplates the nature and needs of children and informs the interactions of public administrators with children. To do this, I briefly explore the extent to which children currently appear in American public administration literature, trace examples of other social science fields that have considered children within a unique field context, and contemplate possible ways we might understand public administration's oversight. My goal here is establish the field's oversight of children, propose ways that might help us understand this oversight, and briefly consider the implications of this to the field and to children. The subject of how the field should initiate and go about a field-specific consideration of children will be the topic of a future project.

Additionally, I argue that this oversight results in an absence of basic understanding of children within public administration—including who they are, how they think, and what they need—which not only creates a significant theoretical shortcomings within the literature, but also fails to inform the practice of public administration and generates real consequences for children. Specifically, I argue that this oversight allows for interactions between children and public administrators that communicate less-than-ideal messages to children about government and their role as citizens.

THE LITERATURE OF PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION

A great deal of the public administration literature is focused on implementation of public policy and the interactions between citizens and government. As might be expected, a general search of public administration databases yields many references to “children.” However, the mere inclusion of “children” across the literature does not indicate a contribution to a systematic way of thinking about children within administrative contexts. This becomes evident by drilling down into these references in search of a true consideration of who children are in the context of public administration, as well as what they need and how they are impacted in administrative contexts. First, there is a difference between the simple mention of “children” as a term anywhere in an article's text and a focus on children as the subject or title of the article. Thus, in

order to come closer to capturing publications that are focused on children specifically, rather than peripherally, it is necessary to narrow the search to “children” within either the title or subject.

Second, a general search for children will include many publications that are focused on non-American settings and on topic-specific issues. For instance, children often appear as a target or a category of policy, such as childcare, child welfare, child protection, child trafficking, child labor, child support, and more. These of course are not explorations of *children* within specific administrative contexts, but of the various contexts in which children appear. For instance, “children” appear in the literature on street-bureaucracy; yet these sources do not focus on children specifically. Rather than focusing on understanding children in these contexts, these stories are about understanding the workers. More specifically, they are about workers interacting with adult clients in a bureaucracy. In this literature, children only appear as secondary characters, or as categories of problems (e.g. a misbehaving student); they are mentioned in passing or lumped in with adults as clients. Taking into account the necessary steps to find quality references to children (as topic/subject or in title) and weeding out references to children as targets or categories, the high number of references to children from an uncritical search of the broad public administration literature disappears.

Similar results occur in a search of standard public administration journals such as *Public Administration Review*, *Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory*, *The American Review of Public Administration*, and *Administration & Society*. A cursory search reveals only a handful of articles that feature the word “children” in the title.¹ However even these few mentions with “children” in the title merely feature children as an affected group of public policy and applied public administration in the areas of education, juvenile justice, health care, and others. In each of these articles, children are not the focus of the article. This journal, *Administrative Theory & Praxis*, has published no articles on the subject of children.

So while there is no absence of mentions of “children” within the broad public administration literature or the full text of standard public administration journals, there is an absence of

¹ Although this is not an empirical article, it makes sense to include specifics on a very brief implementation of such a search. These results include: in *Administration & Society*, “children” there are 150 references in all text, 0 references in the subject, and 0 references in the title; in *JPART* there are 213 references in all text, 7 references in the subject, and 5 references in the title; in *Public Administration Review* there are 749 references in all text, 0 in the subject, and 0 in the title; and in *ARPA* there are 262 references in all text, 0 in subject, and 2 in the title. This is not meant to be an exhaustive search.

literature that focus primarily on children, such that they might be given adequate consideration as separate and unique from adults within the field's context. This concept of consideration includes two equally important ideas: 1) the contemplation of children within public administration's context, and 2) evidence that the resulting understanding of children is incorporated in order to inform the field's action. These must occur together such that children become a "reason considered" (New English Dictionary, 2011) within the field's literature. Thus, to satisfy true *consideration* of children within the public administration literature, there would be evidence of explicit, sustained contemplation of children that is then present in practice. Such an undertaking would reflect the attempt to understand children within the specific nature and context of the field, as well as to alter its behavior or approach to children in order to incorporate the discoveries about children.

THE CONSIDERATION OF CHILDREN

When thinking about the lack of consideration of children in public administration, it is important to recognize that children are a relatively recent consideration in academic fields, as well as more generally. According to Aries (1965), the concept of childhood did not exist in medieval society in that there was a lacking awareness "of the particular nature of childhood, that particular nature which distinguishes the child from the adult, even the young adult" (1965, p. 128). During these times, young humans were not seen as children; rather, they were viewed as little adults and incorporated into adult society at a young age. By the 19th century, although there was a modern notion of children and childhood, children were still treated like adults (Mintz, 2004; West, 1996). They worked like adults: in factories, for low pay, over long hours, and in dangerous conditions (Coontz, 2000; West, 1996). Children ate like adults; mothers fed their babies beer (Grant, 1998; Hulbert, 2004; Weiss, 1977). Without special laws, children were punished and institutionalized like adults (Campbell, 1985). In these conditions, most children did not survive childhood, so each "individual child had to be seen as a possibly temporary visitor" (Ehrenreich & English, 2005, p. 203). Thus, children were thought of as a "mere incident in the preservation of the species" (2005, p. 208).

It was not until the beginning of the 20th century that American academic and professional fields began to explicitly study and think about children and their childhood such that they began to be viewed as "a unique and novel form of life" (Ehrenreich & English, 2005, p. 203). Starting

at the turn of the century and continuing until now, many fields have considered children, in that they have focused their energy and work on children in a way that has both provided explanations about childhood and laid the foundation for how those fields think about and interact with children. In their consideration, these fields have asked questions about the unique nature of children, as compared to adults, and improved their treatment of children within the practice of their fields.

In the following section, I offer examples of consideration taken by various social science fields as illustration of consideration of children and the impact it has had on those fields, as well as the understanding of children more generally. In these cases, “choices on the part of intellectuals ... about what is important or meaningful in the social dynamics around them set in motion patterns of thought that [became] important conceptual currency” (Stivers, 2000, p. 3) that then altered the course of the field’s literature and practice. Although the first few examples began at the turn of the century, at a critical juncture when both science and general opinion on children were evolving, this reflects the beginning of the consideration rather than the totality of it. The point here is not when other fields undertook a consideration of children, rather that they did indeed turn their attention and how they did it. More importantly for each of these undertakings is the inherent recognition that children are different from adults and thus need special consideration. Additionally, the outcome of the consideration of children undertaken by these social science fields have included the broadening of academic thinking and the creation of new sub-fields, laws, programs, policies, rules, and more.

Psychology

Psychology was the first field to turn its attention to children. As a field, psychology attempts to explain the behavior and mental processes of individuals. It is the “study of the nature, functions, and phenomena of behavior and mental experience” (Colman, 2009, para. 1) of humans. In its consideration of children, psychology began to explore how children are different from adults, exploring how they develop, what happens on the path to adulthood, and questioning whether there is a “normal” way to understand children. In the literature, psychology’s earliest consideration of children is evident in the work of Granville Stanley Hall, Sigmund Freud, and Jean Piaget.

As the first psychologist to scientifically study the mental development of children (Lomax et al., 1978), Hall initiated exploration around the idea that childhood consists of a series of stages, which have value separate from the value of adult life (Mennel, 1973). He “laid the basis for the modern belief that childhood, youth, and adolescence are separate stages of life with their own values, often different from or hostile to values of the adult world” (Mennel, 1973, p. 81). Freud was also concerned with the stages children pass through to become adults. Freud saw these stages as crucial and warned that “at each stage environmental factors can foster health and achievement or bring about lasting retardation and pathology” (Neubauer, 1961, para. 3). Thus, he saw that the primary goal of childhood was for children to make it to adulthood with minimal psychological damage (Cleverley & Phillips, 1986). Piaget was also interested in the stages of development in children, although his specific interest was in their learning stages. Relying on his background in biology, Piaget identified four specific periods of development, which primarily emphasized the cognitive development that is necessary for children.

Together, the contemplation of these psychologists gave birth to the sub-field of developmental psychology, which studies the ordered stages of development, including the psychological stages children go through on the way to adulthood. In their efforts to understand and account for the special nature of children, these psychologists fundamentally altered the direction of psychology and the interactions of the field with children. By demonstrating that children are not merely small adults, they formulated a theory of development to show that children are on a path of maturation, which is affected by their upbringing, experiences, and training.

Law

The early consideration of children in the field of psychology provided a starting point for a similar consideration within the context of law. Specifically, psychology’s idea that childhood included various stages of development laid a foundation for “thinking about children as victims or perpetrators of crime” that was different from thinking about adult victims or perpetrators (Woodhouse, 2010, p. 27). The intellectual (rather than applied) field of law is concerned with a set of rules that are used to govern people, as well as with how these rules can best govern the people within specific groups and jurisdictions (C. Calhoun, 2002a). In its earliest consideration

of children, the field of law set out to understand why children, as perpetrators and victims of crimes, were different than adults.

In an attempt to understand how children became perpetrators of crime, early researchers looked to intelligence testing. Motivated to understand the gap between “normal” children and “deviant” ones, psychologist Alfred Binet turned to psychological measures of intelligence in order to understand juvenile delinquency. Intending “to abstract a child’s general potential with a single score” (1996, p. 179), Binet developed a scale of diverse activities to serve as a test of children’s abilities. The result was a testing scale, accompanied by descriptions of “normal” performance based on age.

Binet’s intelligence scales laid the foundation for intelligence quotient testing, or the measure known as IQ. In the United States, psychologist Henry H. Goddard saw the Binet scale as a way to understand juvenile delinquency. He viewed it as the tool to diagnose the “feeble-minded” before they become delinquent (Goddard, 1911). As he explained it:

We have too long attempted to treat all children alike...When we have learned to discriminate and recognize the ability of each child and place upon him such burdens and responsibilities only as he is able to bear, then we shall have largely solved the problem of delinquency. (Goddard, 1911, p. 64)

The focus on intelligence measurement generated empirical ways to identify deviant behavior and to predict and explain juvenile delinquency. These efforts, as evidence of law’s consideration of children, provided grounding for standards of behavior and intelligence for children.

As a result of this consideration, juvenile courts were designed to tailor the treatment of juvenile delinquents to their age and development (Tanenhaus, 2002). Additionally, the consideration of children within the literature of law has laid the foundation for new laws — informed by the knowledge of how children developed and their resulting special status—that acknowledge children’s vulnerability and protect them from others who might endanger their development. Thus, as a result of these considerations, legal systems and the overall field of law have prioritized the needs and interests of children in issues of abuse and neglect, as well as deviance and delinquency. This change in focus was a “radical departure from the common law tradition” (Rosenheim, 2002, p. xiii), which offered no special treatment for children and instead treated children as adults.

Political Science

In its early consideration of children, the field of political science was concerned with how to make sense of children within the larger political context. Through this perspective, the field focused on the average child and the broad concept of general welfare in order to take account of children's unique nature and needs within government regulation. As an intellectual field, political science is concerned with the study of the state, government, and politics (McLean & McMillan, 2009). Thus, on the subject of children, political science attempts to understand how children fit into the broader political landscape, how government regulation can bolster children's welfare, what political power they have, and how best to represent children through American governmental processes.

In order to understand children in the context of the state, government, and politics, political science considered how to protect children and promote their welfare through governmental action. This focus led early political science scholars to question child labor as appropriate for children, taking into account their age and developmental status. The resulting articles examined the issue of child labor by questioning what role government should play in regulating child labor and surveying how various states approached child labor regulation through policy and law (Whitten, 1906; Kenyon, 1907). The consideration of children's welfare as a political issue generated awareness about the conditions children worked in and demonstrated their need for protection from such conditions based on their age and development. In 1904, as an applied implication of this consideration, the National Child Labor Committee was created in order to fight for federal legislation that would recognize child labor as dangerous and immoral (Yarrow, 2009). Although it would not be until 1938 that the Fair Labor Standards Act would formally prohibit child labor, political science's consideration of working children successfully made childhood an issue of concern for state, government, and politics.

Political science's consideration of children expanded to further define and advocate for the general welfare of children. As a result of the field's consideration regarding the protection and general welfare of children within a political context, the field of political science contributed to a political definition of childhood that rested on the ideas of health, happiness, and innocence for children; thereby altering the common perception of childhood to include the idea that children should be free from labor, decisions, and participation in the adult sphere. The

scholarship has explored the idea that all children had a right to a set standard of childhood, and that this was in the best interest of the country. Political science was focused on the general welfare of children, including political benefits to them and to society overall. The applied implications of the field's consideration went beyond basic laws protecting children, extending to policy changes in the interest of children's welfare and the elevation of childhood as a political issue.

Sociology

Unlike other fields that began to consider children near the beginning of the 20th century, sociology was slow to develop a systematic way of think about children within the context of the field (Corsaro, 2005; Allison James & Prout, 1997). In fact, it was not until 1992, with a development by the American Sociology Association, that the scholars of sociology started to give explicit and systematic attention to the topic of childhood (Zelizer, 1994, p. xvii). As a field that studies society, “including patterns of social relationships, social action, and culture” (Scott & Marshall, 2009b, para. 1), explicit attention was not initially given to children because they were generally thought of only in terms of *future* adults. Thus, the initial exploration of children in the sociology literature focused on what needed to occur for children in order to lead to successful adulthood. The field became concerned with questions such as: How do children fit into the broader culture and social relationships? What socialization has to occur for children to become “normal” adults? Thus, sociology turned its attention to the ways in which patterns of relationships, actions, and culture contributed to the evolution of a child to a “normal” adult.

To explore these questions, the field initiated consideration of children through the lens of socialization, another theory that originated in psychology. The process of socialization is aimed at achieving and perpetuating the “normal” by focusing on how children learn to “become members of society, both by internalizing the norms and values of society, and also by learning to perform our social roles” (Scott & Marshall, 2009b, para. 1). As applied to children, socialization represents the processes through which children learn “to adapt to and internalize society” (Corsaro, 2005, p. 7), thus pursuing the traits of what sociology considered a normal child. These processes include learning appropriate behavior, acquiring social skills, and learning how to perceive the world.

Although late to the consideration of children, sociology has worked to retroactively apply its theory of socialization to children in order to understand the historical and contemporary sociology of children (for more on these efforts see: Corsaro, 2005; James & Prout, 1997; and Turmel, 2008). The applied implication of these efforts thus far has been a scientific picture of how children should develop and become socialized into a well-functioning adult. Sociology's consideration of children has focused on the maintenance and replication of social order through children's acquisition of normal behaviors, traits, beliefs, and actions (Allison James & Prout, 1997).

Consideration by Social Science Fields

Although the efforts in each of these fields has advanced thinking about children as separate from adults and altered the treatment of children within the individual fields as well as more generally, these considerations have not been enough. More specifically, the mere start of consideration within these fields does not mean that they have been successful in adequately incorporating increased understanding about the unique nature and needs of children into the individual dealings of each field. For example, psychology's consideration of children's unique development has generated strict categories for children and their development. Law's attempt to understand children and crime has become codified as a simplified intelligence score; political science's efforts to protect the general welfare of children has led to often uncritical overprotection. Similarly, sociology's aim to understand and create an understanding of "normal" has highlighted a systematic version of "abnormal." In these cases, limited consideration has resulted in codified thinking about children that often works against the very nature of childhood that it was intended to understand and account for.

Yet, for better or worse, these considerations by various social science fields have been notable and important as far as thinking about children in ways that reach beyond the specific field that initiated those advances. However the considerations of these fields are not sufficient for use by public administration for two reasons. One, as discussed above, these considerations have not always been ongoing but have instead stagnated in codified rules about dealing with children. Two, the interests and efforts of these fields may lay a foundation for public administration's consideration of children but cannot be substituted for a field specific contemplation of children within administrative contexts. This is because public administration's

needs and interests are different than other fields, based on the unique status of children within government and the unique nature of encounters between children and representatives of the government. For these reasons, the continued consideration of children in these fields, as well as the start of consideration in public administration's literature is crucial.

PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION AND THE ABSENCE OF CONSIDERATION

At this point, public administration has yet to join the ranks of fields that have considered children within their individual context. While psychology, law, political science, and sociology, as well as anthropology (Hardman, 2001) and history (DeMause, 1974; Mintz, 2004; West, 1996), have made efforts to understand children within the context of an adult world at various points since the beginning of the 20th century, there has been no sustained or comprehensive attempt to consider the relationship between children and public administration. How can we understand this oversight? In the following section, I propose a number of possible explanations that can perhaps shed some light on the absence of consideration of children with the field's literature.

Becoming a distinct field

Although administration was a topic of concern in discussions as early as the drafting of the Constitution (Sills, 1968) and with American Indians (Rockwell, 2010), the field of public administration's symbolic beginning is generally attributed to Woodrow Wilson's "The Study of Administration" (Wilson, 1887). According to Wilson, "There should be a science of administration which shall seek to straighten the paths of government, to make its business less unbusinesslike, to strengthen and purify its organization, and to crown its duties with dutifulness" (1887, p. 201). Although public administration began as "an ad hoc effort" (Stivers, 2000, p. 1), the later development of public administration has occurred as "a body of thought and techniques" (Sills, 1968, p. 146) in relation to developments in American life.

During the 1920s and 1930s, generally thought to be a period of orthodoxy, public administration "acquired certain distinctive characteristics" (1968, p. 146), including its core values and basic themes. These characteristics became the essential ingredients of the field, including: a movement for government reform, an interest in scientific management, and a desire to apply science to politics and government (Karl, 1976; Stivers, 2000). Leonard White (1926)

and William Willoughby (1927) wrote the first two textbooks of public administration. As a result of the publication of these books, the field emerged with valuing method, efficiency, principles, and expertise (Karl, 1976; Sills, 1968; Stivers, 2000).

Yet although public administration has been accumulating academic legitimacy since the 1920s, the field's formation into an academic discipline is a debated topic (Henry, 1975). As a notorious "borrowing discipline," it has borrowed heavily from "economics, business administration, sociology, psychology, and political science" (Fry, 1998, p. 12). Perhaps the field borrowed from no field more than political science, as it operated as a branch/subset of political science until the second half of the 20th century (Shafritz, Hyde & Parkes; Henry, 1975). As the field began to accumulate academic legitimacy, the number of journals that were focused on the unique study and concerns of the field increased, especially in the 1950s and 1960s. Thus, it is more likely that the timing of public administration's consideration would have occurred more similar to sociology rather than to psychology or law.

However, when it did emerge as its own field, public administration existed with questions and topics that were wholly separate from political science. The field of public administration "draws what cohesiveness it possess more from its object of analysis than its intellectual parentage" (Fry, 1998, p.12). But, in the same way that public administration emerged as a distinct field from political science as its "house of youth" (Waldo, as cited in Henry, 1975), the consideration of children would be different in the two fields. Yet, even as the field's scholarship began to expand and solidify with the creation of academic journals, attention did not turn to children.

Historical development

In *Bureau Men, Settlement Women: Constructing Public Administration in the Progressive Era*, Stivers (2000) puts the development of public administration into a historical context that "calls into question the field's rather taken-for-granted methodological quality" (2000, p. 2). Here she questions the events that "put in place conceptual boundaries and set in motion intellectual dynamics that persist in the field to this day" (2000, p. 3) by highlighting an alternative efforts that were opposed to the movement that ultimately shaped the contemporary field of public administration.

Specifically, Stivers contrasts two groups that implemented different reform strategies during the Progressive Era. These groups, as Stivers identified them, included the women involved with settlements and reform clubs who sought to improve the living conditions for people, and the men of municipal research bureaus who saw the solution as improved structural reforms. Between these two groups lay the difference of perspectives: “one in the direction of social justice and improving the lives of the unfortunate, and the other toward rationalizing and regulating organizational, institutional and societal processes” (Stivers, 2000, p. 5). The bureau reformers were focused on the procedure of reform, while settlement reformers were focused on the substance of reform. Thus, to the women of the settlement movement, children were a general concern because they were included in the substance of reform (Addams, 1905; 1921).

Yet, as the dynamics of professionalization began to institutionalize these reform efforts, the work of the bureau men formed into public administration and the settlement efforts contributed to the formation of social work (Stivers, 2000). Thus the field of public administration emerged with certain values and priorities that have come to be considered “traditional,” and the early potential for a consideration of children was not incorporated.

Not the only oversight

Certainly, children are not the first topic public administration has failed to contemplate. The field has not necessarily been a pioneer in thinking about groups but has instead been criticized as falling short, especially in comparison to other social science fields (J. D. White & Adams, 1994, p. xii). According to Stallings & Ferris, “it is persistence rather than change” that characterizes the scholarship of public administration (Stallings & Ferris, 1994, p. 121). Karl points out that public administration has been “a user of social science, rather than a formulator of it” (Karl, 1976, p. 490). Indeed, multiple scholars have documented the slowness with which the field’s scholarship has considered issues such as race, gender, and social equity (Frederickson, 2005; Stivers, 2000, 2002; Witt, 2006). Still others claim the field has yet to address other matters, such as animals within administrative decision-making (Catlaw & Holland, 2012), the intellectual history of the Great Society, the administrative history of presidencies (S. Newbold, 2011), and various other topics.

Despite these potential explanations, the oversight of children and the context for that oversight require further exploration. Why did the field, which oversees and implements the

actions of government to all citizens, regardless of age, overlook the youngest citizens? How did this happen? And perhaps most importantly, what is the impact—to both public administration and to children—of this oversight? These are certainly questions for further research. Additionally, this revelation uncovers more reasons to explore the work and importance of street level bureaucrats.

THE CONSEQUENCES OF PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION'S OVERSIGHT

The oversight of children in the public administration literature creates significant implications for both the applied and theoretical fields of public administration, as well as for children and their interactions with government. Without the benefit of exploration of children as separate and unique from adults, the field's literature has not explored how administrators interact with children, what impact the field has or can have on children, or who children are within the confines of the field's boundaries. Rather, children and the concerns of children are absent from the broad discourse around public administration topics. Additionally, children have been wholly left out of the development and maturation of public administration. Yet at the same time, public administration serves and impacts children. By not explicitly exploring this unique relationship and how it plays out in administrative setting, the field operates with a blind spot that is both theoretical and real.

Theoretical shortcomings

Without contemplation in the literature, there is limited understanding of the unique position of children within American governance and democracy, as well as in public administration. This understanding is important because children, as compared to adult American citizens, have a unique relationship with their government. Rather than possessing a clear citizenship status, children exist somewhere between aliens and full citizens (Cohen, 2005). We generally think of them as citizens; after all, children born on U.S. soil are technically citizens by birthright through the Fourteenth Amendment. The fact that we can secure a U.S. passport for even the youngest of children seemingly proves that American children are in fact citizens. However, at the same time that these facts are true, children are routinely deemed “incapable of citizenship in that they cannot make the rational and informed decisions that characterize self- governance” (Cohen, 2005, p. 221). As a result, children are only partial members of our American democracy; they

are only semi-citizens, dependent on adults to govern them. In addition, unlike adults who benefit from a clear relationship with their government, including explicit rights and responsibilities, the relationship for children is convoluted and at times uncertain. The lack of consideration of children thus ignores this unique relationship that children have with government, as well as the need to consider where and how children fit into public administration, given their unique relationship with government.

Thus, without a field-specific consideration of children, public administration has no option but to rely on the findings of other fields regarding children. This again ignores the necessarily unique relationship between children and public administration, and assumes that the relationship between children and other academic fields is an adequate substitute for administrative contexts. However, this contributes to the theoretical blind spots and yields its own consequences for the scholars and practitioners of public administration. Without the appropriate consideration in scholarship, public administration cannot make changes in applied administrative settings in order to account for the unique nature of children. Rather, the field must rely on other fields for understanding about children, including who they are, how they should be treated, and what affects them. But the findings of other fields cannot take into account the values, history, goals, and purpose of public administration. The context of public administration's scholarship and practice are unique. Which means that the potential impacts of consideration are very different. As a result, public administration can only approach children in ways uncorrected by intellectual exploration and intention.

The result of these theoretical shortcomings is a body of literature that includes children only as a target of public policy, essentially ignoring the unique nature and presence of children within the field. Rather than to separate children from adults because of the age and development, this means that children are merely lumped in with adults within the field's intellectual efforts. This leaves a limited understanding of the unique nature and development of children as it plays out in administrative settings. These theoretical shortcomings lay a foundation for the interactions between actual children and representatives of the government.

Interactions between children and government

In addition to the theoretical shortcomings, public administration's oversight of children impacts the lived experiences of children as they interact with government services. These

interactions are routine and in most cases, children are subordinate to the street level bureaucrats who make decisions to implement public policy and deliver services. In each interaction, how public administrators interpret rules and policies, how they talk with children, and how they think about children affect both the “substance and quality” of their interactions (Handler, 2010). In this way, street level bureaucrats have a significant impact on the lives of children through the immediacy of their interactions. Without an understanding of who children are in these contexts or how workers should work in relation to them, the theoretical shortcomings that result from this oversight generate real implications to children in administrative settings.

Street level bureaucrats often work in less-than-ideal conditions (Lipsky, 1980). In their organizations, there are often inadequate resources available; higher demands for service than supply; as well as unclear and incompatible expectations of them. Additionally, their jobs are complicated in ways that make it impossible to routinize or simplify the work they do. This is because they interact directly with people: dealing with situations, making decisions, and serving as the primary point of contact for their agency. Due to the nature of the organizations and the details of their work, street level bureaucrats have both autonomy from organizational authority and “considerable discretion in determining the nature, amount, and quality of benefits and sanctions provided by their agencies” (Lipsky, 1980, p. 13). As they process people, encounter problems, and create solutions to them, street level bureaucrats essentially make their own policies regarding children’s lives.

Public administration’s oversight of children leaves the field with a significant blind spot, as it is unable to understand or account for the youngest citizens. This blind spot ultimately obscures who children are as citizens, because of the lack of information around interactions with children, their unique nature within administrative settings, and the general lumping of children in as equal with adults.

Manifestations of government

The brief stories outlined in the Introduction reflect encounters between children and frontline workers who implement public policy, and highlights the disconnect between the nature and needs of children and the rules and policies of bureaucratic organizations. At first glance of these stories, it is easy to see representatives of government merely doing their job: maintaining order, enforcing rules, and relying on systems that were designed to create order. Yet, from the

perspective of the children in each story, there may be something entirely different going on. For children, these interactions are immediate and personal manifestations of government. These interactions matter to children; they have an impact on children's lives and on their development as citizens. In each interaction, how public administrators interpret rules and policies and how they interact with children affect the messages children receive about government and their role as citizens.

In addition to delivering services and developing policy, street level bureaucrats mediate children's relationship with government and communicate messages to children about government, democracy, and citizenship. These messages are often inconsistent with democracy. These frontline workers, in their expectations of clients in general but even more so with children, expect deference and respect. They are in positions of authority over children, giving them a coercive power. In almost all cases, children are required by law to obey these representatives of the government. Street level bureaucrats control children's behaviors and experience through their decisions, as well as through the rules, expectations, and punishments they establish. They determine normative values and, overall, teach children how to function in a bureaucratic, and often authoritarian, system.

These lessons occur as a result of how policy—as originally designed or as created by street level bureaucrats—creates “feedback” for those who are impacted by the policy (Pierson, 1993; Schneider & Ingram, 2005; J. Soss, 1999; Joe Soss, 2002). As Schneider and Ingram explain, this feedback occurs when :

motivations of elected officials are linked to the types of policy designs they construct, which affect people's experiences with the policy and the lessons and messages they take from it. These, in turn, influence people's values and attitudes (including their group identities), their orientations toward government, and their political participation patterns (Schneider & Ingram, 1995, p. 442).

Through the messages imparted to them, children learn about their value and worth as participants and citizens. They learn about how they are likely to be treated based on they and others like them are treated. This “information becomes internalized” in such a way that they understand “whether they are viewed as active participates in government and bureaucracy or whether they are passive recipients in the process (Schneider & Ingram, 1995, p. 442). Thus, these encounters with representatives of government, unassisted by consideration of children

within the context of administration, are important because they represent the state to our youngest citizens during the time they are learning about democracy and government, as well as how they fit into it all.

Rather than being limited to specific groups of children or specific policy areas, these interactions and their implications for children and their families are wide-reaching. Through education, they extend to almost all children and parents. This includes public schools, as well as private, and all levels of students, even at the college level. In the child welfare system, these implications reach children through the numerous groups that work to protect them. Here the implications may affect children because of their parents' behavior, rather than their own. These implications also reach young people in the juvenile justice system. Unlike child welfare situations, the implications of interactions between youth and representatives of juvenile justice may occur because of the youth's behavior. No matter the location, these implications are increasingly important, not only because of our broad dependence on the modern state (Handler, 2010, p. 3), but specifically for children, because of their dependence on adults and their developing knowledge about democracy.

The earlier stories of young people interacting with government touch at the heart of this project: the field of public administration has not considered children, yet must still interact with children. It is not enough that field's such as law, education, and social work train individuals in issues related to children. Public administration requires a *unique* consideration of children within the context of administrative environments because frontline workers—no matter their original training—represent the government.

Together the theoretical shortcomings, the impact of the interactions between children and public administration, and the lessons children learn as a result of these interactions leave both children and the field of public administration at a disadvantage. Much as Stivers argued with the development of the field, the absence of children within the literature “contributes to our sense of the place of [children] in American governance and political life, the questions and issues that are the substance of the scholarly dialogue, the conventional wisdom in administrative agencies, the substance of the latest cutting-edge reform and our sense of what it might be possible to think, say, and do about administrative governance in the future” (Stivers, 2000, p. 3).

CONCLUSION

Historically, there has been an absence of acknowledged systematic differences between children and adults. Yet this changed when social science fields and others turned their focus to contemplating the unique nature and needs of children. Because of these considerations, children are now seen in most arenas as set apart from adults and the adult world and as an extension, are treated and viewed differently. However, in all the changes and developments in thinking about children, public administration has not considered children in the same way that other fields have during the last century.

Public administration scholars have been challenged to “establish working relationship with every major province in the realm of human learning” (Waldo, 1984, p. 204). However, the field’s lack of consideration of children highlights a significant failure to do this. This oversight leaves the field with a significant blind spot, as it is unable to understand or account for the youngest citizens. However, beyond a mere theoretical blind spot, the field is responsible for the children who serve as collateral damage in their interactions with public administrators and the lessons they learn about their government. These consequences affect all children who encounter representatives of the government, who are held to administrative rules and policy that remain uninformed by the consideration of children as unique from adults.

As other fields turned to consider children, and as general thinking about children shifted, public administration might have initiated explicit inquiry into understanding children. Such inquiry would have recognized that children are different from adults and thus need special consideration. Given the field’s main themes and values, the field might have asked: Who are children in an administrative context? What are the needs of children in this context, based on their unique nature? What is the potential impact of public administration on children? The answers to these questions could lay a foundation for thinking about and interacting with children that accounts for their unique needs and nature while avoiding codified categories and general standards of practice. Although such a consideration has yet to occur, it is not too late. Scholars of public administration must turn their attention to our youngest citizens, with the goal of generating understanding of children in administrative contexts. This should include questions such as who children are, how they think, and what they need, as well as questions about the field’s interactions with children.

Although other fields have considered children within the context of their field, these considerations cannot be merely swapped into the administrative context. Public administration requires its own exploration into children because it is a distinct field, with unique interests and concerns. Because of this, public administration's consideration of children would be guided by different motivations and questions. The context of focus and the potential for application would be different than that of other fields. It would also yield different implications to children because of the unique relationship between children and their government.

As scholars, we can no longer assume "that [other disciplines] will show any sustained interest in questions relevant to the core concerns of public administration" (Stallings & Ferris, 1994, p. 122). Rather, we must recognize children as "inhabitants of the realm of public administration," as well as our failure to consider not only them, but also their experiences and needs (Stivers, 2002, p. 23). Within the scholarship of public administration, we can no longer move forward without appropriate consideration of the youngest citizens. We must consider them, or continue to risk "the danger[s] of administering any human situation upon theory uncorrected by constant experience" (Addams, 1935, p. 70).

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