



# Addressing disproportionality and disparity in child welfare: Evaluation of an anti-racism training for community service providers<sup>☆</sup>

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## ABSTRACT

Concerns persist about the overrepresentation and differential treatment of children and families of color within the child welfare system. Although many researchers and practitioners have considered ways to combat these problems, there continues to be a shortage of empirical support for proposed interventions. This article describes the evaluation of an anti-racism training designed to address disproportionality and disparity by educating members of the child welfare community about issues of race, power, and oppression. Pre- and post-training evaluation questionnaires were completed by 462 training participants between June 2007 and June 2008. Questionnaires measured changes in participants' attitudes toward race and knowledge of key concepts regarding race and racism, as well as their satisfaction with the training, and expected practice changes. Preliminary findings indicate that participants were very satisfied with the training, increased their knowledge of issues pertaining to race and racism, and became more aware of racial dynamics.

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## 1. Introduction

Within the child welfare system, there exists an issue that has been identified as a social problem for over thirty years (see Billingsley & Giovannoni, 1972), differences in treatment among children and families of different races (Hill, 2006). Terms commonly used in the literature to describe such differences are *disproportionality* and *disparity*. Disproportionality refers to the difference in the percentage of a group of children in the child welfare system as compared to that group's percentage in the general population (Hill, 2006). This is illustrated by the fact that in 2006, 15% of children in this country were Black, while 32% of the children in foster care were Black (United States Government Accountability Office [U.S. GAO], 2008). Disparity means that one group of children experiences inequitable treatment or outcomes as compared to another group of children (Hill, 2006). Such disparity is present throughout the child welfare system, including key decision points (reporting, investigation, substantiation, out-of-home placement, and exit), treatment, services, and resources. Research in this area indicates that children of color and their families who are involved with the child welfare system often experience different treatment and more negative trajectories than White children and families (for example, Garland & Besinger, 1997; Derezotes, 2002; Harris & Courtney, 2003; Rodenborg, 2004).

## 2. Bias as a cause of disproportionality

The key issues discussed in the literature regarding disproportionality and disparate outcomes in child welfare are race/ethnicity, cultural awareness/competence, inherent systemic bias, and bias that impacts individuals who make decisions about families and children (see Smith & Devore, 2004; Derezotes, Poertner, & Testa, 2005; Elliott & Urquiza, 2006). Decision-makers in child welfare include social workers, teachers, healthcare staff, law enforcement, judges, mental health providers, and even community members who report suspected maltreatment to child protective services. This plethora of decision-makers from a variety of fields supports the idea that the child welfare system, which is often envisioned as child protective services, actually encompasses many other fields serving children and families such as healthcare, mental health, education, law enforcement, and the courts.

In 2003, the top three reporters to child protective services (CPS) hotlines were law enforcement officials, educators, and social service personnel (Hill, 2006). The understandings of race and culture on which these professionals base their decisions are very important. In a review of research in the area of disproportionality, Hill (2006) found that race was a significant factor in decisions made by professionals at all points of transition in the child welfare system. Therefore, in decisions to report, investigate, substantiate, place in foster care, and reunify with biological family, race was the only common factor.

The dual effects of Black parents' distrust of the child welfare system and racial bias or cultural misunderstanding among decision makers, such as mandated reporters, child welfare caseworkers,

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and family court judges, may both contribute to disproportionality and disparity (U.S. GAO, 2007). Although, as Hill (2006) pointed out, there is very little empirical evidence indicating that disproportionality and disparity are caused by bias, the U.S. GAO (2007) found that nearly half of the state child welfare directors surveyed reported that they considered racial bias or cultural misunderstanding among those reporting abuse or neglect to have at least a moderate influence on disproportionality. For example, in a retrospective chart file review, Lane, Rubin, Monteith, and Christian (2002) found a significant difference in evaluation of skull and long-bone fractures for abusive injury between children of color and White children, even after adjustment for likelihood of abuse. When the researchers controlled for socioeconomic status, there remained a statistically significant difference in ordering skeletal surveys and reporting to CPS among children of color and White children with accidental or indeterminate injuries. Specifically, more than 65% of children of color had skeletal surveys performed, while only 31% of White children underwent this same test. Furthermore, CPS reports were filed for 22.5% of White children versus 52.9% of children of color.

Berger, McDaniel, and Paxon (2006) explored the presence of racial bias in judgments about parenting. In observations of home visits by professional human service providers, the researchers found that Black parents were judged more harshly by the professionals on subjective measures of parenting such as annoyance, criticism, and hostility. There was no racial bias found, however, in judgments of more objective measures such as spanking. These authors concluded that in this study, the professionals' judgments were likely biased due to negative characteristics attributed to low-income parents. As Berger and colleagues explain, in the absence of information, professionals rely on stereotypes and biases to make judgments about clients. In this study, the professionals were not aware of the class status of the parents, so race was used as a proxy measure, as people of color are usually assumed to be poor.

Research has shown that professional judgments may also be biased in the opposite direction. For example, in a study of the influence of case and professional variables on the identification and reporting of child maltreatment, Hansen, Bumby, Lundquist, Chandler, Le, and Futa (1997) found that race had the most impact on psychologists' and social workers' ratings of severity of maltreatment and the need to report. These professionals were more likely to rate vignettes describing possible maltreatment among African American families as less severe and less likely to be reported than similar vignettes including White families. Interestingly, Hansen and colleagues found in the literature evidence of similar response patterns for race among law enforcement officials, day care providers, and teachers. The authors postulated that these differences in reporting by race could be due to views of maltreatment among African American families as more normative and less extreme than maltreatment among White families.

Green, Kiernan-Stern, and Baskind (2005) studied agency-based social workers' attitudes about ethnic and cultural diversity. Although most of the social workers included in the study had positive attitudes toward people of color and the concept of cultural diversity, these social workers expressed some ambivalence regarding a desire for more interaction with people of color. Furthermore, 12% of those surveyed believed that racism is no longer a major problem in the U.S., indicating a lack of racial awareness.

As shown, the literature provides useful information about the issues of cultural awareness and racial attitudes among social workers and other professionals. However, with specific regard to the child welfare system, research on disproportionality points to a need for further examination of the link between professionals' cultural attitudes and awareness and possible resolutions to the problem of overrepresentation of children of color in the child welfare system (Hill, 2006).

### 3. Training as an intervention to address bias

Cultural competence/anti-racism training may be utilized to respond to the problems of disproportionality and disparity in the child welfare system. Researchers and practitioners have posited that increased cultural awareness and sensitivity will serve to address the issue of disproportionality by dealing directly with workers' racial attitudes and biases that affect their decision-making regarding families of color (Chibnall, Dutch, Jones-Harden, Brown, & Gouridine, 2003). This type of cultural competency training has been identified as a "promising strategy" to address disproportionate contact with children of color in the juvenile justice system, which is a part of the child welfare community, through increased awareness of biases, which serves to transform practice (Cabaniss, Frabutt, Kendrick, & Arbuckle, 2007).

Cultural competence is defined as "an evolving process that depends on self reflection, self awareness, and acceptance of differences, and is based on improved understanding as opposed to an increase in cultural knowledge" (Webb & Sergison, 2003, p. 291). Such a definition highlights the attention that a professional must give to himself or herself when considering issues of race and culture. Too often, diversity education focuses our attention outwardly and asks us to adopt a survey approach to cultural awareness, in which the special features of various cultures are explored and rigid notions of culture do little to challenge oppressive stereotypes. Such an approach allows professionals to overlook their own biases and engage (knowingly or unknowingly) in pigeonholing, stereotyping, and victim blaming (Webb & Sergison, 2003). This emphasizes the importance of anti-racism or cultural competence trainings that deal with issues of power, privilege, and oppression. Such interventions promote active self assessment and exploration of biases that may affect practice.

### 4. Training for child welfare professionals

There is some empirical support for cultural competence/anti-racism education resulting in increased awareness of racism and less racial bias. In a study of undergraduate students, Kernahan and Davis (2007) found that those students who were enrolled in a semester-long prejudice and racism course increased their awareness of racism, showed clear emotional changes, and felt more responsible for helping to correct problems of racism and for taking action. Similarly, Probst (2003) found that over the course of a semester, undergraduate students participating in a workplace diversity course developed more positive attitudes toward people of color and demonstrated a greater increase in levels of intercultural tolerance than their counterparts in a statistics course.

Very little research exists that addresses the evaluation of cultural competency, diversity, or anti-racism training in human services and healthcare in general, and training's relationship with addressing disproportionality specifically. Webb and Sergison (2003) evaluated a one-day cultural competence/anti-racism training designed for professionals serving ill or disabled children. Results of a post-training satisfaction questionnaire indicated that the vast majority of participants were satisfied with the training and felt it improved their cultural understanding. A retrospective evaluation was also completed, which explored participants' views two to seven years after they attended the training. Findings indicated that participants continued to regard the training as highly relevant. Nearly half of the participants felt more confident in providing services to minority clients. Furthermore, three-quarters of participants indicated some positive behavior change as a result of attending the training.

Casey Family Programs, a national non-profit foundation with a long history of serving children, has put forth some promising practices to address disproportionality and disparate outcomes. These practices include requiring workers to attend anti-racism and cultural competence trainings and participate in ongoing education in

this area (Casey Family Programs, 2005). Although there is little research linking cultural competency training programs to improved outcomes for Black children, there is some evidence that this approach is helpful in addressing disproportionality. The U.S. GAO (2007) reported on a three-year evaluation of a comprehensive cultural competency program in Washington state, which resulted in families served by staff trained in this approach having a higher rate of children returning home than Black children in other areas.

## 5. Background and purpose of the study

The present research study speaks to the need for an evaluation of an anti-racism training designed to address disproportionality in the child welfare system. The study was completed in two mid-sized, urban counties, located in a state in the mid-western United States. The public child welfare agency in one of the target counties began working with Casey Family Programs in 2005 to address disproportionality and disparity in its child welfare system. In 2006, the agency contracted with The People's Institute for Survival and Beyond (The People's Institute) to deliver anti-racism training to community service providers associated with the child welfare system.

The People's Institute, which was founded in 1980, is recognized as one of the foremost anti-racism training institutions in the nation (Casey Family Programs, 2007; Shapiro, 2002). The organization's *Undoing Racism Community Organizing Workshop (Undoing Racism)*, which is held over 2.5 days, is designed to help participants understand the following: the foundations of race and racism, participants' connections to racism, the impact of racism on participants' work, and approaches to community organizing to combat racism. *Undoing Racism* emphasizes leadership development, accountability to communities, creation of networks, learning from history, and expansion of understanding as methods of combating or undoing institutionalized racism (The People's Institute for Survival and Beyond [PISAB], 2009).

*Undoing Racism* represents an analysis developed by the People's Institute, which is acknowledged as but one of the many analyses of the issue of race in the U.S. (Casey Family Programs, 2007). The training is designed for people from all levels of the child welfare system, from agency administrators to parents and children within the system (Casey Family Programs, 2007). Topics covered include analyzing power, defining racism, gatekeeping, understanding manifestations of racism, sharing culture, and anti-racism community organizing. Outcome objectives of the training include developing a common definition of racism and a language for examining racism in the U.S. specific to the child welfare system, understanding one's own connection to institutional racism, gaining knowledge about how we can be more effective in our work with families, learning how to effectively build relationships with communities served by the child welfare system, and learning about institutional organizing for positive outcomes (Casey Family Programs, 2007). The training consists of engaging presentations and large group discussions, as well as small group action planning on the final day of the training (Shapiro, 2002).

Each *Undoing Racism* session is facilitated by three or four trainers from diverse racial, ethnic, and cultural backgrounds. These individuals represent a national group of senior trainers and specialized trainers who are veteran educators and organizers in their own communities (Casey Family Programs, 2007; Shapiro, 2002). In fact, the senior trainers all have over 20 years of experience in anti-racism education and organizing (PISAB, 2009). While the training model is consistent across groups and situations (Shapiro, 2002), the trainers' personal perspectives and life experiences inform the presentation of the material (Casey Family Programs, 2007).

Utilizing a diverse cadre of trainers offers participants a chance to see themselves reflected in the training team, which promotes an environment conducive to openly addressing the issue of racism.

Despite the diversity of the trainers and their years of experience, the analysis of racism they present in *Undoing Racism* may be challenging for some participants. This may be due to the fact that this model confronts traditional views of racism and intergroup relations and offers information to which many have not been previously exposed (Shapiro, 2002). However, while some participants find the analysis difficult to accept, others are eager to embrace the understanding of racism offered in the training.

Some states and localities that have implemented the *Undoing Racism* training offer subsequent trainings and/or alumni meetings to encourage reflection, continued learning, and engagement in the anti-racist principles taught in *Undoing Racism*. For example, alumni groups and community advisory boards have been created in the target counties described in this study. These entities offer a space for open discussion and network-building. The advisory boards also promote education and systemic change within the child welfare system to address disproportionality and disparity.

Casey Family Programs (2007) has developed a supplement to the *Undoing Racism* training that is designed to revisit the content of the training and "propel participants into action" (p. 2). The supplement provides tools for educating others, suggestions for implementing reforms in practice or personal settings, and skill-strengthening exercises.

Each of the trainings offered in the target counties began with a "Race, Community, and Child Welfare" presentation, which put the *Undoing Racism* curriculum squarely in the context of child welfare. This is explicitly tied to the final day of training in which participants engage in planning actions that may be taken by child welfare sub-systems (e.g., health, education, law enforcement) to address disproportionality and disparate outcomes for children of color (D. Manson & L. Michalczyk, personal communication, February 6, 2008).

The *Undoing Racism* training offered in the target counties is directed at the entire community of professionals involved in the larger child welfare system (including members of the court, law enforcement, school personnel, mental health and substance abuse counselors, domestic violence advocates and child welfare workers). The purpose of this strategy is to both acknowledge the important role of the community in impacting children's welfare, and to address a key decision point through which many children and families enter the system—referrals to child protective services. Black children comprise nearly 25% of children in one of the target counties (U.S. Census Bureau, 2000), but make up roughly 43% (average percentage from October 2006 to October 2007) of referrals to child protective services and 55% of children in foster care in this county (Kentucky Cabinet for Health and Family Services, 2008). The target counties' model of addressing disproportionality by engaging the entire child welfare system is fairly unique, as other localities and states have focused intervention strategies on their child protection staff only (U.S. GAO, 2007).

The purpose of this study is to evaluate the effectiveness of the *Undoing Racism* training in impacting participants' knowledge about racism, attitudes towards race, professional practice, and personal relationships. Specific research questions include:

- How satisfied are participants with the *Undoing Racism* training?
- Does the *Undoing Racism* training increase participants' knowledge about racism?
- Do participants' attitudes towards race and racism change after attending the *Undoing Racism* training?
- How do participants expect that the *Undoing Racism* training will affect their professional practice and personal relationships?

## 6. Methods

### 6.1. Design and sample

This study employed a one-group pretest-posttest research design. The pre-training evaluation questionnaire measured demographic

variables, current knowledge of key concepts regarding race and racism, and attitudes towards race. The post-training evaluation measured satisfaction with and reactions to the training; anticipated transfer of knowledge/skills gained in the training to personal relationships and professional practice; knowledge of key concepts regarding race and racism covered in the training; and attitudes towards race. The training was voluntary and targeted community service providers who are part of the larger child welfare system in the target counties.

Individuals in the target counties who participated in one of the 16 *Undoing Racism* trainings offered between June 2007 and June 2008 ( $n = 565$ ) were invited to complete pre- and post-training evaluation questionnaires. Although there were only 565 total participants, data collection resulted in 611 cases, 462 (75.6%) of which contained both pre- and post-training questionnaires. The presence of more cases than participants is likely caused by two factors. First, the researchers were unable to match some post-training questionnaires with their pre-training counterparts due to (1) a missing case identifier on either questionnaire or (2) a participant providing different case identifiers for the two questionnaires. The second cause of the discrepancy between the number of participants and the number of cases is the variability in attendance. Some of the participants arrived at the training after the pre-training questionnaires had been administered and some left the training before administration of the post-training questionnaires. Only two training participants informed the researchers of their desire not to take part in the study. Given that there are more cases than participants, the response rate for this study is most accurately reported as 81.8%, as approximately four-fifths of participants completed both pre- and post-training evaluations.

Women constituted 78% of participants and men 22%. More than half (57%) of the participants were White, and 37% of participants identified themselves as Black, while 6% identified themselves as another race or ethnicity. Participants' ages ranged from 21 years to 83 years, with an average age of 42 years ( $SD = 11.23$ ). Participants had an average of 14 years of experience in their current areas of practice, with a range of between 1 and 60 years. The educational distribution of participants was as follows: High School/GED, 5%; Professional Certification, 4%; Associate's Degree, 7%; Bachelor's Degree, 37%; Master's Degree, 42%; Doctoral Degree, 5%; and "Other," 5% (for example, some college completed). Participants' practice areas were represented as follows: Education, 11%; Law Enforcement, 4%; Child Protective Services (state employees), 10%; Health, 6%; Courts, 6%; Community Social Services, 40%; and "Other," 20% (for example, communications and community organizing). Finally, 21% of participants reported their annual household income as greater than \$50,000, while approximately one-third (33%) of participants reported a household income of between \$30,000 and \$50,000 per year. Only 12% of participants' household incomes were \$30,000 or less per year.

## 6.2. Variables and measurement

The training satisfaction scale used in the post-training evaluation questionnaire was adapted from a scale first developed by Barbee and Barber (1995) and later revised by Antle, Barbee, and van Zyl (2008). This scale measures participants' reactions to the training along two dimensions: utility and affective reactions. These dimensions measure how useful the participants find the training and the degree to which they like the training, respectively. The training satisfaction scale used in this study contains 12 items rated on a Likert-type scale from 1 (disagree strongly) to 5 (agree strongly).

The knowledge test included in both the pre- and post-training evaluation questionnaires was developed by the researchers specifically for this study. The test consisted of 11 multiple choice questions that addressed various aspects of the *Undoing Racism* curriculum. Six of the questions were from the Race Literacy Quiz developed by

California Newsreel (n.d.). The Race Literacy Quiz is comprised of 20 multiple choice questions that address myths about the concept of race. The other five questions in the knowledge test were derived from information gathered by the primary author during participation in the February 2007 session of the training.

Participants' attitudes toward race/racism were measured in both the pre- and post-training questionnaires through use of the Color-Blind Racial Attitudes Scale (CoBRAS), developed by Neville, Lilly, Duran, Lee, and Browne (2000). The CoBRAS is designed to assess the extent to which individuals deny or are unaware of racism. This scale is composed of three factors: *Racial Privilege*, which refers to blindness to the existence of White privilege; *Institutional Discrimination*, which involves a limited awareness of implications of institutional forms of racial discrimination and exclusion; and *Blatant Racial Issues*, which concerns unawareness to general, pervasive racial discrimination. This scale consists of 20 statements rated on a Likert-type scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 6 (strongly agree). A lower score indicates greater awareness of racial dynamics. In several studies of college students and some community members, the CoBRAS demonstrated acceptable validity and an overall Cronbach's alpha of 0.86 (Neville et al., 2000).

The post-training evaluation included six open-ended questions designed to elicit more in-depth comments from participants about their reactions to the training as well as the perceived impact of the training on their personal interactions and professional practice. The questions are as follows: (1) How do you expect that the material in this training will affect your professional practice?, (2) How do you expect that the material in this training will affect your personal relationships?, (3) How do you plan to use the information learned in this training?, (4) How will you use the information gained in this workshop in working with community partners and/or doing community organizing?, (5) Did the trainers respect and value the participants' humanity?, and (6) What changes would you recommend regarding the trainers and the educational experience?

## 6.3. Procedure

The pre-training evaluation questionnaire was administered to participants on the first day of each training session, prior to the start of the first module. The post-training evaluation questionnaire was administered to participants on the last day of each training session, immediately after the final module, and before participants were dismissed. Both questionnaires took approximately 15 min to complete. Prior to completion of the pre- and post-training questionnaires, participants were provided with informed consent statements, per approval by the University Institutional Review Board.

## 6.4. Data analysis

Quantitative data analysis included use of independent samples *t*-tests and one-way ANOVAs to measure group differences in knowledge change, attitude change, and training satisfaction. Paired samples *t*-tests and repeated measures ANOVAs were used to assess pre- to post-training changes in attitude and knowledge. Bivariate correlations were employed to determine associations between demographic variables and training outcomes.

Qualitative data analysis was informed by the Tesch (1990) method. A list of respondents' answers for each of the six open-ended questions from the post-training evaluation questionnaire was generated. After a preliminary review of these lists, each statement was read carefully and assigned an initial code, which served as a summary word or phrase for the statement. The codes were then used to explore categories and themes among the responses for each of the six open-ended questions. Once themes were identified within each of the six questions, individual responses were categorized and listed by theme. This allowed for

a content analysis of the data, as frequencies of responses for each theme could be determined. Thematic similarities between the sets of responses to each of the questions were also noted. Next, statements illustrating the themes, as well as unique cases, were identified for each of the open-ended questions. Finally, analyses of the data using the crosstabs function in SPSS allowed for comparison of responses by race and age.

The qualitative analysis was completed by the first author. A peer debriefing process, which included the other authors as well as a representative of the public child welfare agency and a community partner, was used to determine the appropriateness of the findings.

## 7. Results

### 7.1. Satisfaction

Overall, participants were very satisfied with the training. The range of training satisfaction composite scores was between 21 and 60 (possible satisfaction scores ranged from 12 to 60), and the average training satisfaction composite score was 53.21 ( $SD = 6.62$ ). There was a significant difference between the training satisfaction composite scores of White participants and participants of color,  $F(1, 143) = 4.09$ ,  $p < .001$ . Participants of color were more satisfied with the training ( $M = 55.33$ ,  $SD = 5$ ) than White participants ( $M = 52.36$ ,  $SD = 7.25$ ). There was also a significant difference between the training satisfaction scores of participants in different educational groups,  $F(6, 413) = 2.14$ ,  $p < .05$ . Those with master's degrees ( $M = 53.86$ ,  $SD = 6.26$ ) and doctoral degrees ( $M = 57.14$ ,  $SD = 3.63$ ) were more satisfied with the training than those with bachelor's degrees ( $M = 52.41$ ,  $SD = 6.63$ ) and other lower-level educational degrees. Analyses also indicated a significant difference in training satisfaction scores among participants from different income levels,  $F(6, 395) = 2.13$ ,  $p < .05$ . Those with the lowest reported annual household income (up to \$20,000) were the most satisfied ( $M = 57.36$ ,  $SD = 3.78$ ), and those with the highest reported income (above \$70,000) were the least satisfied ( $M = 52.55$ ,  $SD = 6.66$ ).

Bonferroni post hoc analyses were performed for both the education and income variables. Differences in training satisfaction within these groups were not significant, indicating that although the overall patterns of difference were significant, no two educational or income groups were significantly different from one another. There was no significant difference in training satisfaction by practice area or gender.

### 7.2. Knowledge

There was a significant difference in the pre-training and post-training knowledge test percentage scores,  $t(427) = 21.88$ ,  $p < .001$ . Participants averaged 3.2 (of 11 possible) correct answers (30%) on the knowledge test before the training and 5.3 correct answers (48%) on the knowledge test after the training. There were negative correlations between years of experience and the knowledge change score,  $r(494) = -0.10$ ,  $p < .05$ , as well as age and the knowledge change score,  $r(408) = -0.14$ ,  $p < .01$ . This indicates that older, more experienced participants had less knowledge gain. There was no significant difference in knowledge change by race, gender, education, or practice area, and no significant relationship between income and knowledge change.

### 7.3. Attitudes

There was a significant difference in participants' CoBRAS scores from the pre-training evaluation to the post-training evaluation,  $t(425) = 10.90$ ,  $p < .001$ . The participants' overall mean attitude scores decreased from pre-training ( $M = 57.36$ ,  $SD = 17.18$ ) to post-training ( $M = 51.21$ ,  $SD = 20.99$ ). A decrease in scores on the CoBRAS indicates a decrease in color-blind racial attitudes (which is an improvement in racial awareness).

**Table 1**

Average pre- and post-training scores for CoBRAS factors.

Factor	Pre-training	Post-training
Racial privilege	$M = 22.60$ , $SD = 8.54$	$M = 20.60$ $SD = 11.32$
Institutional discrimination	$M = 20.22$ , $SD = 6.24$	$M = 17.49$ $SD = 6.42$
Blatant racial issues	$M = 14.77$ , $SD = 6.57$	$M = 13.72$ $SD = 7.18$

The vast majority of participants demonstrated a decrease in their color-blind racial attitudes: 148 participants (35%) decreased their score by 1 to 10 points, 102 (24%) decreased their score by 11 to 20 points, and 43 (10%) decreased their score by 21 to 45 points. Only 18 (4%) participants maintained the same score, and 115 (27%) of participants showed an increase in color-blind racial attitudes (which is a worsening of racial awareness).

There was a decrease (which is actually an improvement) in all three factors (see Table 1). Differences from pre to post in all three factors were statistically significant: Racial Privilege,  $t(385) = 5.11$ ,  $p < .001$ ; Institutional Discrimination,  $t(379) = 11.20$ ,  $p < .001$ ; Blatant Racial Issues,  $t(394) = 5.37$ ,  $p < .001$ . This indicates that participants became more aware of the implications of institutional forms of racial discrimination and exclusion, more aware of the existence of white privilege, and more aware of general, pervasive racial discrimination.

There was a negative correlation between attitude change score and training satisfaction composite score,  $r(424) = -0.18$ ,  $p < .05$ . This indicates that participants who were more satisfied with the training had significant decreases in color-blind racial attitudes. There was no significant difference in attitude change scores by gender, practice area, race, or education, and no correlation between age or income and changes in attitude.

### 7.4. Qualitative analyses

Participants who completed the post-training evaluation questionnaire had an opportunity to respond to six open-ended questions about their reactions to the training, as well as the anticipated impact of the training on their personal relationships and professional practice. Major themes threaded throughout responses to the first four questions were education, awareness, collaboration/discussion, and action. Many sub-themes also emerged and are discussed in detail in the sections below.

*How the training affects professional practice.* The vast majority of the 116 participants who responded to this question indicated that the training material positively impacted their professional practice. Overarching themes in this area were self-development, education of others, system improvement, and service enhancement. Several sub-themes emerged and will be discussed further.

In the area of self development, many participants discussed an improvement in awareness, knowledge, and/or skills as a result of information learned in the training. For example, one participant stated, "I will have the tools to be anti-racist towards systemic racism, rather than being non-racist." A difference in responses by race was noted in this area, as more White participants indicated an increased awareness of racism, while more Black participants noted an improved skill set for addressing racism.

Another key part of self development mentioned by participants was increased awareness of their roles as gatekeepers. This concept is a focal point of the *Undoing Racism* training. As one participant reported, "[The training] helped me think for future situations where I am the gatekeeper ways to engage clients/community in discussion."

Beyond awareness, participants reported positive changes in their attitudes about race.

Participants also discussed utilizing information from the training to inform and educate others. This could occur through informal

conversation or formal trainings. One participant stated, “I intend to communicate with my peers that attended this training with me. I will share the Undoing Racism principle with my team.”

Participants also offered comments about using concepts learned in the training to change and improve the systems in which they practice through evaluation and advocating for change. Many of the participants who responded also indicated that the training provided them with the tools to enhance direct services. This could be accomplished through taking into account power and oppression and how these impact clients and their experiences. As one participant wrote, “I will be more aware of how racism affects the types of services I offer and make helpful changes to end racist policies and procedures.” A difference in responses by age was noted, as younger participants directly mentioned issues of privilege or racial dynamics in their comments regarding system improvement.

*How the training affects personal relationships.* The comments of the 119 participants who responded to this question were thematically similar to those offered in response to the question about the training’s potential impact on professional practice. Major themes found in the participants’ responses were increased awareness, education, and dialogue, as well as a change in attitude. Participants also offered predictions about how the training might impact their interactions with friends and family.

Many participants discussed ways in which the training positively impacted their level of awareness about racial dynamics. For example, as one participant shared, “It will make me think more about being White and how that makes things easier for me.”

Increased awareness led to a change in attitudes toward race for some participants, particularly White participants. In general, participants also discussed the desire to educate family and friends using information learned in the training as an impetus for further learning. An element of educating others is being open to discussing race and racism, as well as including such topics in discussions. While younger participants’ responses focused on educating others, older participants spoke more about engaging in discussions with their family and friends. Several participants discussed ways in which their involvement in the training would have a positive impact on their relationships. One participant wrote, “Profoundly. I have a “bi-racial” family. This has given me great understanding.”

While many participants discussed ways in which lessons learned from the training would be beneficial for their relationships and interaction with friends and family, nine (seven White and two Black) participants provided comments indicating negative, challenging, or questionable outcomes. A participant shared these thoughts, “Controversy. It will be difficult to discuss with family and friends.”

A few participants indicated that attending the training inspired them to take action beyond sharing information with others. For example, a participant planned to “Become more sensitive and engaged in discussion pertinent to the issues addressed. [I will] model behavior conducive to Undoing Racism.”

Lastly, below are other responses given by participants that offer insight into the relevance of the training to their lives: “Created a sense of clarity regarding the nature and working definition of racism — devoid of the emotional buttons.” Another stated, “[The information will be important] in my personal and professional life. I see this as one of those ‘life altering’ trainings.”

*How information learned in the training will be used.* Education was mentioned by many of the 117 participants who responded to this question. This included using information from the training to educate themselves and others. Furthermore, participants felt material learned in the training was not only useful for self education, but also for general self betterment.

Beyond their own education, many participants also indicated a desire to share information from the training with others in an attempt to educate them about racial dynamics. Part of this sharing of information included building dialogue around the topic of race. As

one participant commented, “I hope to bring people of various backgrounds together to openly discuss issues of disparate representation — and how we need to be aware and to help “all children” no matter what color or religion.”

Several participants specifically referred to family and co-workers when talking about sharing information from the training. A few participants offered responses that illustrated ways in which they would go beyond simply sharing the information with others to using what was learned in the training to take action to address racism. For example, one participant believed in “Holding discussions, joining committees, doing more research to gain a better understanding of the history of “doing” racism.”

Participants’ statements about taking action included use of concepts learned in the training to inform evaluation and service provision. Another part of proactive change discussed by the participants was better decision-making. This concept is illustrated in this statement, “Help make gatekeepers more aware of their power and the source of their biases that may be affecting their decisions.”

*How the training will impact community organizing and work with community partners.* As in responses to the previous questions, the 107 participants who offered comments on this question indicated coming away from the training with increased awareness and a desire to educate others. They also discussed recommending the training to others and the personal/professional changes that the training would stimulate in their lives. Below are examples of the many comments offered by participants who felt that the training led to increased self awareness and a willingness to be more aware of others’ experiences. These are important attributes to have when attempting to work with community partners. One participant planned to “Recognize the lenses that impact community organizations and community members. Work against internalized manifestations of oppression.” Black participants were particularly likely to list these kinds of goals.

A major theme related to the question of how the training would impact collaboration and organizing was that of building collaboration. Participants discussed three ways in which they might accomplish this task: planning/strategizing new partnerships, including discussion of racism in current networks, and using networks to improve service provision. The comments below are examples of participants’ ideas about building collaborative partnerships to address racism. One participant stated, “I will try to build coalitions with people and organizations to effect change at an institutional level.” Another reported that “speaking out in groups and demanding unity and strength in numbers” would help build partnerships.

A few participants discussed the need to plan/strategize and take action to build collaboration among community service providers. As one participant stated, this can be accomplished “By paying more than lip service to bringing community partners to the conversations.” Recognizing that many networks and partnerships already exist, several participants commented on the need to insert discussions of race into ongoing conversations. One participant suggested that “Before partnering or when partnering bring issues re: racism to the table and identify how to lessen or “advocate” against.” Another participant planned the following action: “I will use it in the court system with some issues I am working on. Now that I know about the systemic problem, I know I don’t have to go it alone and community partners have their place — I will use it with committees I am involved with.”

Finally, participants commented on the need to utilize networks to better determine and address community needs through effective service provision. As one participant stated, “I hope that this will increase effective communication with community partners which in turn will ensure appropriate services are getting to the families we serve.”

*Trainers’ respect for participants.* The vast majority (93) of the 118 participants who responded to an open-ended question about how the trainers treated the participants felt that the trainers respected

and valued participants' humanity. As one of the participants who felt this way stated, "Definitely. They strongly emphasized "it's not personal" for the White participants. I thought I would be made to feel guilty as an individual, but that wasn't the purpose. Empowerment through knowledge occurred."

Only 13 respondents had some concerns about the trainers' ability to respect and value all aspects of the participants' humanity, and six participants indicated that they did not feel trainers respected and valued participants' humanity. These sentiments were illustrated by a participant who wrote, "Yes mostly, but I do feel Whites were blamed all three days. I understand that is the history, but [I] also looked forward to hearing about racism toward me and other groups." Another participant stated, "[They] did not respect others' opinions. It appeared as if they believed their answers to be the only correct answer."

*Changes recommended for the trainers or the training.* Participants were given the opportunity to provide recommendations regarding the trainers and the educational experience in their own words. A total of 104 participants responded. Several participants offered feedback about the structure of the dialogue during training. Common statements included requests that the trainers speak less and that more dialogue be elicited from a greater array of participants. Below is an example of comment regarding the structure of the training: "[Trainers should] figure out how not to thwart comments because it appeared [the trainers] were moving conversation in their own direction, in their own way, as if this is the only way."

A few participants discussed the need for more physical activities as well as a range of learning activities during the training. These participants suggested more small-group and hands-on activities. Also, a few of the participants commented on the materials used in or needed for the training. Although a couple of participants suggested shortening the training, many more participants recommended that the training be extended.

Another theme that arose from participants' feedback about the training was a need to focus on future learning and advocacy. Participants offered ideas of follow-up courses or ongoing educational/organizational networks.

In responding to a request for recommended changes, several participants provided suggestions such as being more open to participants' opinions as well as being more sensitive to the feelings of White participants. The following response reflects this sentiment, "Better define racists vs. bigots before making the statement "all White people are racist." Possibly use another term/phrase to explain the concept to prevent that wall from going up. Some people can get past that wall. For others, once that wall goes up, it won't come down and they can miss out on the real message being presented."

Finally, a large number of participants who responded had no recommendations for changes and/or offered positive feedback about the training and trainers. For example, one respondent stated, "Nothing. Just keep up the good job that you all are doing because this has brought a change for me and a heart change."

## 8. Discussion

### 8.1. Key Findings

Overall, participants were very satisfied with the training. Participants of color were more satisfied with the training than White participants. Although initial analyses indicated significant differences in training satisfaction by educational level and annual income, post hoc analyses revealed that differences were, in fact, not significant. This is likely due to the very small sample sizes of the groups that were most different, those with the lowest income level (N=11) and those with the highest educational level (N=14). There was no significant difference in training satisfaction by practice area, or gender.

Training participants' overall knowledge test scores increased significantly. Older, more experienced participants had less knowledge gain. There was no significant difference in knowledge change by race, gender, education, or practice area, and no significant relationship between income and knowledge change.

Participants' color-blind racial attitudes decreased significantly. This was further illustrated by a significant gain in awareness of racial privilege, institutional discrimination, and blatant racial issues. Raised racial awareness was associated with a higher level of satisfaction with the training. There was no significant difference in attitude change scores by gender, practice area, race, or education, and no correlation between age or income and changes in attitude.

The majority of participants who responded to the open-ended questions indicated that they expect the training to positively impact their professional practice and personal relationships. These participants indicated that the training raised their awareness about racism and its impact on the child welfare system, created in them the ability and desire to educate others, and made them desire to network and collaborate to improve the system. Many participants also reported that information and understanding gained through the training will lead to improved/more thoughtful relationships.

Most of the training participants reported that they felt respected and valued by the trainers. Some participants suggested that when they did not feel valued it was due to feelings that Whites were being blamed for racism. Other participants cited a lack of opportunity to constructively disagree with the trainers' interpretations as a barrier to feeling respected in the training.

The absence of significant differences in attitude and knowledge by gender, practice area, education, and income indicates that the training was effective for a diverse group of participants. This is an important finding, given that the training is utilized by professionals from a variety of disciplines and cultural backgrounds.

### 8.2. Interpretation

Racial and professional differences in training satisfaction could be due to participants' experiences during the training. For instance, qualitative analysis revealed that the great majority of negative feedback about the training was given by White participants. This supports the quantitative finding that White participants were less satisfied with the training than Black participants.

The finding that older, more experienced participants demonstrated less knowledge gain could be due to these participants having been exposed to societal messages that deny or downplay the existence of privilege and racial oppression for a longer time than their younger counterparts. Also, the color-blind racial attitudes of older participants were more often maintained or increased than younger participants. Again, this could be a function of stricter adherence to misconceptions about race learned over long periods of time.

The results of this study show that the racial attitudes of individuals participating in an anti-racism workshop can be influenced in a brief amount of time (2.5 days). Furthermore, this training resulted in improvement in racial attitudes in the form of increased awareness of racial dynamics for the majority of participants. Instead of seeking to solely increase participants' knowledge of cultural differences, *Undoing Racism* focuses on increasing knowledge and awareness of the history and impact of racism, privilege, power, and oppression on community systems. This intense focus on racial dynamics was the likely catalyst for a significant change in participants' racial attitudes/awareness.

Analysis of the responses to the open-ended questions supported quantitative findings that indicated the vast majority of training participants had positive satisfaction, learning, and attitudinal outcomes. The qualitative findings also indicated that the participants felt a good deal of momentum to utilize concepts learned in the training to

work for changes in the child welfare system that may address disproportionality and disparate outcomes for children of color.

### 8.3. Limitations

This study utilized a pre-experimental research design, which, lacking a control group and random assignment, could not control for many threats to internal validity. Use of this design also prevented causal interpretations. Therefore, we cannot assume that changes in the pre-to-post-test scores are due exclusively to the training intervention. However, because of the brief length of the training, there is less opportunity for outside influence on the attitudes or knowledge of the participants. Utilization of random assignment and a control group of community service providers who did not attend the training would likely protect against such threats. Yet, such an experimental design was not feasible given the limited time and resources of the research project.

The *Undoing Racism* training is relatively short, only 2.5 days. However, despite this limited time, the evaluation showed that the participants experienced an increase in knowledge of race and racism and a decrease in color-blind racial attitudes.

The study design promoted, but did not account for changes in the training over time. Feedback in the form of preliminary data was given to the public child welfare agency training coordinator, who forwarded this information on to the People's Institute trainers. Therefore this evaluation served as a continuous quality improvement tool, through which the trainers were able to make timely adjustments to the training curriculum, so as to enrich the participants' experiences. Consideration of such development in the training was not included in the evaluation tool design or the data analysis.

Participants' practice changes as a result of involvement in the training were measured qualitatively as "planned" practice. While this information is useful in gauging how the training might impact practice, it limits the inferences that can be made about how such practice changes may influence outcomes of children and families in the child welfare system.

Participants' racial attitudes were measured using self-reported data. Although the CoBRAS was developed to account for social desirability bias in the wording of its items (Neville et al., 2000), social desirability bias may be reflected in the results of the present study. This is especially true for the post-training results, as participants may not have been fully aware of racial dynamics, but sensitized by their experience in the training to the social acceptability of certain responses that would reflect racial awareness.

Finally, the seemingly contradictory findings regarding differences in training satisfaction among participants with various education and income levels were likely caused by small sample sizes in some of the groupings. If sample sizes were more closely matched, it is possible that post hoc tests of group differences would be significant.

### 8.4. Future research

Given the aforementioned limitations of this study, future research on anti-racism training evaluation in human services should address such limitations. It is recommended that future research designs include random assignment and control groups as much as possible. Also, it would be helpful to do fidelity assessment research to determine the extent to which trainers follow consistent curriculum. Comparisons between training groups in urban and rural areas would also be helpful. Measuring attitude change through observation or means other than self report would be ideal, but this may prove to be extremely difficult. Training participants' actual practice behaviors (training transfer) should be measured through both quantitative and qualitative methods. This could be included in longitudinal studies, which would be extremely important in determining retention of knowledge, skills, and raised awareness gained through training.

As Hill (2006) points out, most research in this area focuses on the presence or absence of disproportionality and disparities, and not on their causes. Thus, exploring and identifying a causal relationship between bias among human service professionals and disproportionality and disparate outcomes for Black children in child welfare is a valid and needed area of research. Hill (2006) recommends that future research include in-depth assessments of interventions designed to prevent or reduce racial/ethnic disproportionality and disparities in child welfare.

### 8.5. Implications

Training for community professionals involved in the child welfare system that addresses racism, power, oppression, and privilege can be useful in raising awareness of and knowledge about individual and systemic biases that may negatively impact children and families. Disproportionality is a systemic issue because it is likely related to the racism embedded in the child welfare system. Therefore, it is sensible to hypothesize that the solution to the problem of disproportionality would be a systemic one. Educating only child protective services workers is not the most effective method of addressing disproportionality. The network of community service providers, and even lay community members, who make up the child welfare system need to be included in interventions designed to cure this system of racial inequity. Specifically, family court judges, educators, and other individuals who serve as gatekeepers within the child welfare system and are responsible for making decisions about children and families should participate in an anti-racism training. It has been shown that *Undoing Racism*, though it is a brief intervention, is a useful method for promoting attitude and knowledge change. Although more research is needed to determine the extent to which these changes in attitude and knowledge lead to positive behavior changes, the current findings provide a foundation for future research endeavors.

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