

White Privilege and Racism in Child Welfare

University of Minnesota
School of Social Work
Title IV-E Curriculum Module

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Purpose of this module

- To assist child welfare workers and other social workers in understanding white privilege and racism, and how they affect the study and practice of child welfare work.

What is racism?

- Racism, both personal and institutional, involves prejudice and the power to enforce it (Allies for Change, 2009). It is revealed in attitudes, behavior and systems in which white people maintain supremacy over people of color.

What is white supremacy/institutional racism?

- White supremacy is the institutionally enforced system of racism. (Challenging White Supremacy Workshop, 2000).
- Institutional racism/white supremacy is the network of institutional structures, policies, and practices that create advantages and benefits for whites, and discrimination, oppression and disadvantage for people of color. Institutional racism or white supremacy is built in to many institutions in the U.S (Martines, 1995).

What is white privilege?

White privilege is a historically based, institutionally perpetuated system of:

- preferential prejudice for and treatment of white people based solely on their skin color and/or ancestral origin from Europe
- exemption from racial oppression (that is, oppression based on skin color and/or ancestral origin from Africa, Asia, the Americas and the Arab world (Challenging White Supremacy Workshop, 2000).

Examples of white privilege

- I can turn on the television or open to the front page of the paper and see people of my race widely represented
- I do not have to educate my children to be aware of systemic racism for their own daily physical protection
- I can be pretty sure that if I ask to talk to the "person in charge", I will be facing a person of my race. (McIntosh, n.d)

What is discrimination?

- Discrimination is the differential allocation of goods, resources, and services, and the limitation of access to full participation in society based on individual membership in a particular social group (Racial Equity Tools, n.d.).

What is oppression?

- Oppression is the illegitimate institutionalized power, built and perpetuated throughout the course of history. Allows certain 'groups' to confer illegitimate dominance over other 'groups', and this dominance is maintained and perpetuated at an institutional level (Colours of Resistance, n.d.).

What is race?

- Race is a concept invented by people to use characteristics such as skin tone, ancestral heritage, and ethnic classification to artificially divide people (Wijeyesinghe et al, 1997).
- Research has shown that there is more difference within racial groups than across racial groups (O'Neil, 2009).
- Racial categories change over time.

What is whiteness?

- The term white was created by colonial rulers (e.g. Virginia slave holders) in the 1600s.
- The purpose was to differentiate European plantation owners from African slaves, indigenous peoples and poor white people.
- 'White' was used to separate the servant class on the basis of skin color and continent of origin (Adair and Powell, 1988).

What does the term 'people of color' mean?

- People of color is a term used to refer to nonwhite people instead of the term "minority" which implies inferiority and disenfranchisement.
- The term 'minority' is inaccurate since people of color are the majority of the world's population, as well as the majority in many communities in the United States. (Colours of Resistance, 2008).
- The term emphasizes common experiences of racial discrimination or racism (Colours of Resistance, n.d.).

What is prejudice?

- Prejudice is a set of negative personal beliefs about a social group that leads individuals to pre-judge people from that group or the group in general regardless of individual differences among members of that group (Goodman and Shapiro, 1997 p 118).

What is ethnicity?

- Ethnicity is a social construct which divides people into social groups based on characteristics such as a shared sense of group membership, values, behavioral patterns, language, religion, political and economic interests, history and ancestral geographical base. Ethnicity shapes a group's culture.

What is culture?

- Culture is passed from generation to generation through institutions, groups, interpersonal, and individual behavior. Culture provides the glue which gives institutions their legitimacy. For individuals, culture provides a sense of identity, belonging, purpose, and worldview.
- In the U.S. "white" culture provides the dominant basic values and worldview, assumptions, ways of thinking, styles of learning, and ways of relating to each other (Challenging White Supremacy Workshop, 2000).

What is affirmative action?

- Affirmative action refers to policies that attempt to redress the cumulative harm of hundreds of years of oppression and policies that subjugated people of color, women, and low income whites (King, 2004).

What is an ally?

- An ally is someone who supports a group other than his/her own. Allies stand in solidarity with a group by acknowledging the group's historical and/or current marginalization and commit themselves to reducing their own collusion in the oppression of that group (Albrecht and Brewer, 1988).

How does racism harm white people?

- As a result of white supremacy/racism, white people cannot be whole human beings. If we do not treat people of color as equals, we not only deny them their own humanity, but we deny ourselves as well.
- We believe that part of being fully human means treating each other with dignity, and practicing a belief that all people should have the chance to reach their full potential. White people cannot reach our full potential as humans if we treat people of color as lesser human beings.

How does racism harm people of color?

- Racism affects people of color's health, safety, educational aspirations, access to housing, economic options and psychological well-being (Kivel, 2002).
- Effects of racism are associated with psychiatric symptoms, physical diseases, and the general well being of people of color (Landrine and Klonoff, 1999; Lawrence, 2001; Miller & Garraan, 2007).
- Hundreds of thousands of deaths could have been prevented from 1991 to 2000 if African Americans had received the same care as whites (Woolf, 2004).

Four interconnected parts or racism/white supremacy

- **Standards** - the standards for appropriate behavior reflect and privilege white norms and values which represent the dominant culture.
- **Decision-making** - the capacity to make and enforce decisions is disproportionately or unfairly distributed along racial lines.

Four interconnected parts or racism/white supremacy

- **Resources** – People of color do not have the same access as white people to resources like money, education, and information.
- **Naming Reality** - "reality" is defined by naming "the problem" through the perspective of White dominant culture. Who gets to name "the problem" determines the framework for solutions.

Historical overview of race and social welfare history: Mother's Pensions in the early 1900s

- While African Americans were more deeply impoverished, the aid was given almost solely to white women with Anglo ancestry.
- Because benefits were administered locally, rules frequently were created explicitly to exclude women of color.
- One common requirement was that a mother maintained a 'suitable home' for her children. The term 'suitable', which was not clearly defined, was frequently used to exclude African American women.

Historical Overview (con't): The New Deal and Aid to Dependent Children (ADC) in the 1930s

- Language from the original Social Security Bill that outlawed racial discrimination was removed from the bill.
- The children of poor African American women were commonly barred or removed from ADC rolls under "suitable work" or "employable mother" rules. The same standards were not applied to white mothers- where staying home with children was socially valued.
- Under the Old-Age Insurance Provisions Act, the majority of professions covered were occupations for whites. Occupations filled mostly by African Americans (domestic work, seasonal labor, farm labor) were excluded.
- White widows were offered an alternative to ADC that was preferable as there was no need to demonstrate economic need or morality tests, or compulsory work requirements. These white widows were considered the 'deserving poor', and they rapidly left ADC creating a two-tiered system.

Historical Overview (con't): Post World War II

- More restrictive policies were instituted, including more "suitable home" policies, which were used to racially discriminate.
- "Man-in-the-house" policies implemented, which denied ADC to families whose mothers were suspected of receiving financial assistance from adult males. Practiced more commonly on African American households.
- During the 1960s many studies showed that families of color received less in ADC money than their white counterparts.
- States where more people of color on the rolls were more restrictive with benefits.
- Practices like "redlining" began- which marked a red line on a map where primarily people of color lived to delineate the area where banks would not invest (Brown, 1999).

Historical Overview (con't): LBJ and "The Great Society" in the 1960s

- A stated goal of the Great Society was the elimination of racial injustice, however the racially biased programs were not changed.
- Many of the gains were made by people of color as a result of the War on Poverty were reversed by Nixon's administration

Historical Overview (con't):

1960s-1980s and the role of the media

- The media played a key role in fostering and reinforcing racist stereotypes and negative controlling images African Americans who relied on welfare.
- The idea of the "Welfare Queen"-- an African-American woman who allegedly lived lavishly on Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) money was a powerful racialized controlling image perpetuated by President Reagan.
- Growing national sentiment of white people's hostility toward welfare.
- 1980s and the rise of neoliberalism-- more emphasis was placed on the market to solve problems than on social programs. Neoliberalism is associated with exacerbating racism and inequalities by not acknowledging that social stratifications exist.

Historical Overview (con't):

Clinton and G.W Bush's administrations

- Emphasis on reducing those who receive welfare by instituting work requirements, ending welfare as an entitlement program, mandatory time limits, and the encouragement of two-parent households.
- Many believe that the philosophy behind Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act's (PRWORA) is a fear that immigrants and people of color relying on government aid instead of working.
- "By the 1990s a major goal of welfare reform was the reassertion of racial, gender, and class control over impoverished African-American mothers, and through them, control over their children (Neubeck and Cazenave, p 155)"
- During George W. Bush's presidency, eligibility for Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) became increasingly limited. However, funding was increased for marriage initiatives (Limbert and Bullock, 2005).

Contemporary effects of white privilege and racism on the child welfare system

- Racial disparities and disproportionality in child mistreatment cases.
 - African American children represent 15% of the general child population, but comprise approximately 42% of the children in Child Welfare Services (Hines et al, 2004).
 - Multiple studies have shown that child maltreatment is experienced across races at approximately the same rates, however, children of color enter the system at much higher rates.
 - Children of color are less likely to receive services, and more likely to be removed from their homes (Cross, 2008; Rivaux, 2008).
 - Studies show that racial disparities cannot be explained by poverty and substance abuse alone (McRoy, 2004).

Contemporary effects (con't)

- While in many areas the majority of clients are people of color, approximately 70% of those receiving social work degrees (BA, MA, and PhD) are white (Council on Social Work Education, 2007).
- Approximately 25% of all Social Work faculty members were identified as people of color (CSWE, 2007).
- 78% of child welfare workers are white and 80% of supervisors are white, whereas the majority of their clients are African American (National Child Welfare Training Center).

Contemporary effects (con't)

- How white social workers define 'normal' or 'dominant' determines what characteristics they see as strengths and weaknesses of their clients.
- The NCWTC found that the majority of workers have not received training in service provision to African Americans (McRoy, 2004). Most social work programs only offer one or two required courses that focus on "diverse populations," or "cultural competencies."

"The real culprit appears to be our own [white social workers] desire to do good and to protect children from perceived threats and our unwillingness to come to terms with our fears, deeply ingrained prejudices, and ignorance of those who are different from us (Cross, 2008, p 11)."

Thirteen Action Strategies and Recommendations

(from Kivel, 2002)

1. Assume racism is everywhere, every day.
2. Notice who is the center of attention and who is the center of power.

Action Strategies and Recommendations (con't)

5. Understand the connections between racism, economic issues, sexism, and other forms of injustice.
6. Take a stand against injustice.

Action Strategies and Recommendations (con't)

9. Don't call names or be personally abusive.
10. Support the leadership of people of color.

Action Strategies and Recommendations (con't)

3. Notice how racism is denied, minimized, and justified.
4. Understand and learn from the history of whiteness and racism.

Action Strategies and Recommendations (con't)

7. Be strategic.
8. Don't confuse a battle with the war.

Action Strategies and Recommendations (con't)

11. Learn something about the history of white people who have worked for racial justice.
12. Don't do it alone.

Action Strategies and Recommendations (con't)

13. Talk with children and other young people about racism.

Suggested Activities

- Go over each of the 13 recommendations (from previous slides) with a partner. Discuss it and see if you can name an example of how you might do this in your life.

Suggested Activities (con't)

With a partner or small group, discuss the following:

- When was the first time you thought about race in your life? What is that story?
- What commonalities do you notice in your stories? What differences?

Questions for discussion

- Why is the anger of people of color valid? What purposes does it serve? What choices do people of color have besides being angry?
- What is white guilt and fear? Why does it happen? How does it make white people feel? What purposes does it serve? What else can white people do besides feeling guilty and afraid for confronting personal and institutional racism?

Creating a Personal Action Plan

Dismantling white privilege in your life

What needs to change?
What do you need to do first?
What's your main priority?

Information I plan to seek out to further my understanding of white privilege, white supremacy and other forms of institutional and systemic oppression:

A topic of conversation related to white privilege and white supremacy I would like to have with my friends, colleagues or family:

The different groups being negatively affected or benefiting from privilege I feel I still need to gain knowledge about:

Events or activities I plan to participate in to increase my understanding of white privilege and white supremacy:

An action I can take (through a leadership position, organization or project) to end any types of privileges and oppression in my _____?

Creating a Personal Action Plan (con't)

Once you identify your main priority, how do you go about making change? Identify specific objectives.

Objective 1:

What will you do?
What do you need to do this?
How will you do this?
When will it be done & how will you hold yourself accountable?

Objective 2:

What will you do?
What do you need to do this?
How will you do this?
When will it be done and how will you hold yourself accountable?

Objective 3:

What will you do?
What do you need to do this?
How will you do this?
When will it be done and how will you hold yourself accountable?

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