

# The Mental Health Needs of Children

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Depending on the seriousness of the symptoms, these children may be referred for a mental health screening or to an outpatient psychotherapist. In emergencies, in-patient psychiatric services may be necessary.

## Conclusion

Empirical research studies over the past two decades have unequivocally demonstrated high rates of mental health problems among children entering the child welfare system. These findings warrant mental health screenings for all such children as a matter of national and state policy.

The lack of such an enlightened policy places even more responsibility on already burdened case workers. Case workers need to be aware of the signs of acute psychological distress, such as depression, so that appropriate referrals can be made.

In general, case workers should understand that the vast majority of these at-risk children may need long-term psychosocial support as they struggle to break out of an intergenerational cycle of poverty and abuse. They should familiarize themselves with local programs administering to the complex mental health needs of this at-risk population and should attempt to provide expeditious referrals for the appropriate interventions.

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## CULTURAL ISSUES Implementing Racial Diversity Initiatives in Agencies Serving Maltreated Children

—by Jessica Henderson Daniel

Professionals in the field of child maltreatment confront multiple challenges as they attempt to provide the best possible services to children and families. When professionals and clients differ along class, racial and cultural lines, the challenges if acknowledged, can be quite demanding if not overwhelming. In particular, agencies that serve clients who are racially different from the providers run the risk of offering services which may be counter to the prevailing culture of the community. In such situations, despite best intentions, children and families may not be adequately served. In an emotionally charged field such as child maltreatment, recognizing and incorporating race as an important variable can only serve to improve the quality of professional services offered.

Discourse about "diversity initiatives"—i.e., efforts to ensure that agencies are culturally competent from top administrators to entry-level providers—is current in both the public and private sectors, as some agencies begin to recognize and confront the realities of the "colorization of America." Despite consensus that services must be culturally competent, moving from discourse to implementation has been a substantial challenge. Publications, lectures and workshops which support the rationale

for such initiatives have not been sufficient to mobilize agencies to move forward. Resistance to racial diversity initiatives appears to be a major obstacle to implementation. The purpose of this article is to provide guidelines for ways to conceptualize and move through the resistance in order to implement a racial diversity initiative in agencies serving maltreated children and their families.

## Getting started: Logistics

A racial diversity initiative needs the support of the chief administrator of the agency. Without that support and validation, the initiative is likely to fail, since most people will avoid tackling this difficult topic if given a choice.

The chief administrator can support the process by establishing a non-threatening and non-judgmental tone. In agencies with longstanding histories of serving people of color, resistance to a diversity initiative might stem from the fear that services offered previously have been less than optimal. The reality is that people have offered services based on the instruction and training they have received in college, in professional schools, and at work, as well as their personal histories. Their

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instruction and training may or may not have included racial/ethnic content. The diversity initiative is an opportunity to begin to offer culturally sensitive services from this day forward, and to have people become more aware of the power of race in the lives of both social service providers and clients. Learning about race and racism is a process. What is of importance is the commitment to learn and grow through the process. Past mis-steps and mis-judgments are just that—past. This can mark the initiation of a new phase in the delivery of quality services by informed professionals. If the chief administrator is able to convey this perspective, more people might be open to the process at the agency.

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The chief administrator has options about how to implement a diversity initiative. One suggestion is to begin by forming a diversity committee. The chief administrator might solicit interested volunteers from each of the administrative units or from the agency at large. If at all possible, their participation should be considered a part of their job description so that it is not seen as an additional responsibility. While volunteers might be expected to be minimally resistant, the reality is that a substantial number may resist some aspects of the diversity initiative. The hope is that they will be less resistant than those who decline the invitation to participate.

The volunteers will likely be heterogeneous in terms of goals and receptivity to the process. Some might feel that they know about racial diversity and are interested in learning how to engage others in the process; others might feel that they need to learn more about diversity for both professional and personal reasons; some will be "curious" but not necessarily committed to the process; others might be anxious to prove that they are not racist, and even to point out those whom they believe to be racist; some will volunteer because they see it as the "correct" thing to do. Coming to terms with these differences in motivation will be part of the process for the volunteers.

These volunteers will go through the steps suggested in this article, then introduce the issues and process to the entire staff. Some agencies hire professionals to facilitate the initial process with the committee, then train the participants to work with colleagues. Others, due to financial constraints or other factors, do not hire a professional. Agency cultures vary, and such decisions need to be made on an individual agency basis.

However it is constituted, the committee needs to follow groundrules which anchor the members to the process. Discussions about race can generate

strong affect and unexpected feelings which require structure so that the process can continue with the minimum number of reversals and terminations (e.g., individuals resigning from the committee, the initiative being abandoned by the agency, or the committee dissolving due to insufficient members). Systematically addressing the resistance in the manner proposed may provide the needed structure and direction for the committee.

The diversity committee needs to maintain its focus and not become the place to discuss other agency problems and concerns. In order to keep the initiative from being blamed for all the ills of the agency, the problems and concerns of the agency need to be labeled accurately to discriminate between diversity issues and general organizational development issues.

Finally, the committee needs to be a place which is safe and where individuals are open to a range of opinions. The proceedings of the group should remain within the group. Individuals may share their own views, but not those of other members of the committee. Consensus building is not necessarily the goal, but rather an openness to considering a range of perspectives. Individuals should speak from their own experience and take turns talking, without interruptions. Offering clarifications of statements and rationales for positions generally contributes to understanding and open discussions. Questions and not accusations help create a positive tone.

In its first meeting, the committee should discuss the groundrules and establish some structure which will ensure full participation. A suggestion is for all members of the committee to share the tasks of preparation and presentation. This article provides the readers with resources, including books, articles, and videotapes which can be the basis for discussions. Members of the committee on an individual basis or in small groups may be assigned resources for presentations to the entire group.

## Dealing with resistance

Resistance is a common response when race is the topic. In her classic article on talking about race in the classroom, Tatum (1992) identifies three sources of resistance: the feeling that race is a taboo topic; the belief that the U.S. is a meritocracy; and the belief that race and racism are not important in one's own daily life.

This paper will elaborate on the above sources of resistance. Instead of the classroom, the context will be a social service agency with staff members who range from recent college graduates to senior staff who are nearing retirement. The quotations are from participants in diversity workshops conducted by the author over the past 15 years.

## Part I: Giving voice to race as an issue

Tatum (1992) noted that race has long been a

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taboo topic, especially in mixed company. Many adults actively avoid talking about race, having had heated discussions on the topic which generated hurt feelings and no resolutions. Since it has been a taboo topic, individuals have not learned how to discuss race; it is unfamiliar terrain. Paradoxically, many also consider race a "tired topic."

## From junior staff:

- My roommates were all different racially and we got along with each other. Race is something we did not talk about. There was no need because we are all just people—no different from each other. People talk about it—that creates problems. (White female)
- Every time there was a racial incident a school, we had special assemblies. I have heard it all. Talking about race is a waste of time. Nothing changes anyway. (White male)
- The reason why I don't talk about race is that it makes people angry. Plus I don't know how to talk about it anyway. (White female)
- I am tired of educating White people. They need to learn about race on their own. (Black female)
- I resent having to censor my comments in order to make White people comfortable. White racism has been a source of tremendous pain for me. Now I have to carry them to racial understanding. It makes me angry. (Black male)
- I feel invisible in discussions about race because Asians are supposedly the model minority. But we suffer because of discrimination too. (Asian male)
- Being Hispanic is complicated—because there are so many differences. I just want to speak for my group. (Chicano male)

## From more senior staff:

- I am not racist. My record with Blacks is clear. I have provided services to Blacks my entire career. I don't see what can be gained by my participation. Anyway what will happen is that people will feel guilty and that will be the end of it. (White female)
- When I think about race and racism, I just think about Blacks. I had not thought about Asians and Hispanics. (White female)
- My family has a long history of working in the Civil Rights Movement and the Union Movement. I don't need to spend time talking about race relations. (White female)
- I have so much pain stored from working as a professional. I don't know if I dare risk even beginning to talk about race with colleagues. They will not understand. (Black female)
- I grew up in an all-white suburban community. There were no Blacks or other minorities. I have no feelings about race. (White female)

Most people would rather avoid the topic of race if at all possible, and some people have felt silenced, especially Asians and Hispanics/Latinos who feel that Blacks have been the focus of race relations.

## Resources

1. Tatum, B. D. (1992). Talking about race, learning about racism: the application of racial identity development theory in the classroom. *Harvard Educational Review*, 62,1,1-6.

This article includes definitions for commonly used terms, e.g., "racism," "discrimination," and "prejudice," as well as discussions about resistance.

2. Frankenberg, R. (1993). *White women, race matters*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Frankenberg's research experience is evidence that talking about race can be difficult for Whites even when interviewed by a White person. Frankenberg, herself White, interviewed some thirty White women about their experience of whiteness and the implications of race in their lives. Discussing this work could begin the process of "thinking through race," examining the impact of race on the respondents' lives regardless of their communities of origin. The conflict of seeing vs. not seeing color, i.e., whether color blindness is the "polite language of race," as well as the many ways to discuss race, are the two core topics. Participants can argue about whether or not Frankenberg's sample is representative. However, the value of the book is that it frees people to talk about the impact of race in their lives. The group should avoid focussing on her sampling techniques and instead process the rich narratives of the respondents.

## Suggested strategy

Assign Tatum article for everyone to read. Discuss the terms which will be used in the discussion. Avoid group paralysis if members disagree on the definitions of terms. Just agree to disagree. Chapters in the Frankenberg book to be read by at least two members of the group who would then lead the group discussion.

## Part II: Reconciling meritocracy, privilege, and discrimination

Tatum's (1992) second point of resistance to talking about race is related to the cherished belief that America is a meritocracy, i.e., that we are all created equal and those who work hard will achieve. McIntosh (1989; see below under "Resources") has tackled that issue directly. The implications of her work are that Whites have power and privilege which are (1) not earned and (2) so seamlessly woven into society's fabric that Whites do not notice it. In contrast, people of color are aware of this power and privilege clearly since they do not share it. The purpose of discussing this discrepancy between people of color and Whites is not to assign blame but to acknowledge a reality that has been painful for people of color.

Discussing meritocracy in the context of affirmative action can be difficult. The media have highlighted Whites who have felt unfairly treated as a consequence of affirmative action initiatives. The data, however, reveal that White women have been the principle beneficiaries of affirmative action and therefore indirectly White men, since White women tend to marry White men. Blacks, Hispanics and

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Native Americans have experienced some advancements which are attributable to affirmative action, but not as many as those gained by White women. A discussion on such a difficult topic might not produce consensus. However, concerns may be aired in the group and the committee members can learn to live with the differences.

A major issue is to what degree individuals are willing to acknowledge the levels of inequality that actually exist in American society.

- Black people in particular are always whining about racism. They have all the advantages with affirmative action. White men are now disadvantaged. (White male)
- I don't want to believe that racial discrimination happens today. It is too difficult to watch people being mistreated. (White female)
- Black people discriminate against White people too. (White male)
- I don't support discrimination by anyone. But the fact is that when Whites discriminate against Blacks the impact is far more powerful especially economically than when Blacks discriminate against whites. (Black female)

(The above three comments were made after watching the video *True Colors*.)

- I don't ask people about the details of their lives because I don't want to hear that level of pain. I know that I should, but listening to their life stories makes me feel powerless and guilty. So I don't ask questions about discrimination and unfair treatment. (White female)

## Resources

- 1 Videotape: *True Colors* (Prime Time ABC News, November 1992).

This video follows two men, one Black and the other White as they shop, seek employment and attempt to rent an apartment in St. Louis. They are alike in background; the major difference between them is race. The viewer sees the impact of racial discrimination as it occurs. Talking about the tape can begin a discussion about the realities of daily inequities experienced by some people of color.

- 2 McIntosh, P. (1989 July/August). White privilege: Unpacking the invisible knapsack. *Peace and freedom*, 10-12.
- 3 Tatum, P. D. (1992) Op. cit. pp 6-8.
- 4 Tyler, F.B., Brome, D.R., & Williams, J.E. (1991) *Ethnic validity, ecology and psychotherapy*. New York: Plenum. Chapter 4: The Ecology of Race; and, Chapter 9: Case Examples of Racial Dyads.

## Suggested strategy

For at least one group discussion, all participants should read the Tatum and McIntosh articles and view the videotape. A very important individual exercise based on Tyler's (1991) chapters is to develop one's own racial psychohistory. Through these, participants can begin to understand their personal histories and how such narratives might

affect perceptions of race. Discuss the dyads discussed in Tyler's Chapters 4 and 9.

## Part III: Racism as an issue for "others"

Tatum (1992) points out that most individuals are aware of the KKK and neo-Nazi "skinheads" and see them as the "real" racists. But seeing the problem as only "out there" is a way to avoid their own feelings about race. This is the third area of resistance. The power of racial stereotypes in the daily lives of ordinary people cannot be disregarded. Whites as well as people of color who have participated in this author's diversity workshops have been shocked, when asked for adjectives to describe racial minorities, to find that a consensus often emerges which includes many negative adjectives. Holding such stereotypes is incongruent with their perceptions of themselves as well-educated and free of prejudice. They begin to question whether these stereotypes are the basis of their behavior as they interact with people from various racial/ethnic groups, and wonder about the source of the stereotypes. Students of color often feel angry and frustrated at the confirmation that the stereotypes are still in place. Some students of color are confused by their stereotypes of other people of color.

- I don't believe that when you asked us to generate adjectives associated with Hispanics that we came up with so many negative stereotypes. (White female)
- Even the stereotypes of the Asians are worrisome. What if an Asian is not good in math or science? The assumption is those are their fields. Stereotypes—even the positive ones—are a problem. (White male)
- I grew up watching the old movies on the weekend. I did not realize that the portrayal of Asian women was so racist. I just sat there taking it all in. (White female)
- I am a minority person. I know that some minorities have stereotypes about other minorities. How could that be? Of all people they should know better. (Black female)

The Frankenberg (1993) interviews indicate that race has been a topic—both covert and overt—in the lives of many White women in this country. People often "speak in stereotype"—i.e., speak as though the stereotypes were true. Major sources of stereotypes are the print and electronic media as well as humor and comedy. Exposure to these sources of stereotypes can help individuals recognize their own perceptions and begin to acknowledge how these stereotypes may affect them personally and professionally.

## Resources

- 1 Videodocumentary: *Ethnic Notions* (Producer/Director: Marlan Riggs) 1987.

This classic documentary traces 150 years of negative images of Blacks in popular culture up to the television age.

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**Professionals who work in the field of maltreatment who are informed about the meaning of being White in this culture as well as the implications of being a person of color are better equipped to serve clients from many racial backgrounds.**

2. Videodocumentary: *Color Adjustment* (Producers: Marlan Riggs and Vivian Kleiman; Director: Marlan Riggs) 1991.

This documentary examines the impact of television on the images of Blacks in America placing television shows in the social contexts of the various eras.

(Both of these documentaries are available from California Newsreel, 149 Ninth St., Suite 402, San Francisco, CA 94103.)

3. Videodocumentary: *Mixed Blood* (Producer/Director Valerie Soe, 1992 KQED, San Francisco).

This documentary examines Asians in racially-mixed marriages as well as stereotypic images of Asians in the media

4. Book: Hagedorn, J (Ed.) 1993. *Charlie Chan is dead*. NY: Penguin Books.

This is an anthology of Asian American fiction which speaks to the many cultures represented in the Asian community

### Suggested strategy

Take three separate sessions to view and discuss the documentaries and their implications in terms of stereotyping.

Assign the preface and introduction of the Hagedorn book, which provide important information about the evolution of the Asian voice in the media and literature.

### After resistance: A look at racial identity development

The Tatum (1992) article presents racial development for both Blacks and Whites in detail. The reader is referred to that excellent resource to explore the various stages of development for the two groups, especially where persons may become stuck, stages which may generate conflict between the two groups, and stages which encourage learning more about one's racial group. Familiarity with theory about racial identity can ground individuals as they seek to position themselves in this continuous process.

### Resource

Tatum, B. D. (1992). Op. cit. pp.9-18.

### Suggested strategy

Participants identify where they are in their own racial identity development and the implications for their understanding and resisting discussions about race and racism

### Overwhelmed vs. strategic planning

Persons in social service agencies work with individuals who are frequently overwhelmed by the

challenges of their lives. Strategic planning—prioritizing the problems and tasks—is a way to help clients begin to manage the situation. The same holds for diversity initiatives. The work needed to be done around race and racism is considerable, and there are no easy solutions. However, it is the responsibility of individuals to make a difference where they are

The goal of this paper is to help agencies begin to tackle the issue of racial diversity by first working on the issues related to resistance and then looking at racial identity development. Talking about resistance is a first step in managing resistance. Once the resistance is on the table for discussion, both social service providers and clients can better acknowledge ways in which race matters

If a small group begins talking about race, their experience can become the core for the agency when the initiative is introduced to the entire staff. After the diversity committee has taken itself through these steps, which must include processing their experience affectively and cognitively, they can turn their attention to considering how to introduce the experience to the entire staff.

### Child maltreatment and racial diversity

Many people associate the field of child abuse and neglect with the removal of children from their families. This is a traumatic experience for the children, their families and the social service workers. Learning about one's perceptions of individuals who are racially different under these circumstances would be problematic at best. The racial diversity initiative is a place to learn about oneself in a less stressful environment, so that when major decisions need to be made about the placement of children, the worker can feel a level of confidence about her decision-making process.

Children and families being seen around maltreatment issues are entitled to services which take into consideration their needs from many perspectives, including race. Professionals who work in the field of maltreatment who are informed about the meaning of being White in this culture as well as the implications of being a person of color are better equipped to serve clients from many racial backgrounds. More important, these professionals are better prepared to take the next step—to learn about the particular races and cultures represented by their clients. The quality of services and the morale of the staff both can improve when people are truly serving with an awareness of the cultural contexts for themselves as well as their clients.

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