Equity in Practice: Engaging Youth and Families in a Culturally Competent Manner

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Objectives

- Develop a common language around inequities in child welfare.
- Develop an understanding of implicit biases and their impact on families and youth.
- Develop an understanding around providing equitable services.
What is equity?
What is equity?
Evidence of Inequity:

Examining Disproportionality and Disparities
Disproportionality and Disparities

Disproportionality: The over or underrepresentation of certain groups in a public agency relative to the group's proportion in the general population.

Disparity: Differences that should not exist.
Disproportionality and Disparities in Child Welfare

Nationally, research shows families of color are no more likely to mistreat their children than white families, yet black families are over reported for suspected maltreatment and caseworkers are more likely to substantiate abuse and remove a child in cases involving neglect (which disproportionately involve black families) than those of physical and sexual abuse (disproportionately involving white families).

What drives disproportionality and disparities?

- Stereotypes
- Prejudice
- Discrimination
- Power
- Implicit Bias
- Individual Actions
- Racism
- Systemic

Diagram representation:

- Stereotypes
- Prejudice
- Discrimination
- Power
- Racism

Relationships:

- Implicit Bias to Prejudice
- Prejudice to Discrimination
- Discrimination to Power
- Power to Racism
Understanding Implicit Bias

Unlike our explicit biases (which operate on a conscious level), implicit bias is the bias in judgment and/or behavior that results from subtle cognitive processes, often operating at a level below conscious awareness and without intentional control. (Dovidio, Gaertner, Kawakami, & Hudson, 2002, p. 94; also Banaji & Heiphetz, 2010).
Understanding Implicit Bias

Implicit bias (attitudes and stereotypes that impact our actions without conscious recognition) are more likely to have an impact when the decision maker has:

- A high level of discretion;
- A high cognitive load (many demands on his or her cognitive energy);
- A need to make quick decisions; and
- A low likelihood his or her decisions will be reviewed.

See e.g. Jerry Kang et. al., Implicit Bias in the Courtroom
Bias in our language

A study of narrative reports written by probation officers revealed differences in the way probation officers described black and white youth. The reports were more likely to use negative personality traits for black youth and more likely to cite negative influences for white youth. Black youth were also more likely to have a higher risk of reoffending. See Bridges, G.S. & Steen, S (1998). Racial Disparities in Official Assessments of Juvenile Offenders: Attributional Stereotypes as Mediating Mechanisms.
Bias in our Language

Research on the effect our language in report writing finds the connotations of report language can:

- Affect evaluation of ambiguous evidence;
- Influence how attorneys interpret a client’s behaviors and facial expressions;
- Negatively influence attorneys’ behaviors
- Cause attorneys to treat individuals in stereotype consistent ways.

Why do our biases matter?

We can often predict outcomes within a system based on how much the consumer has in common with a given gatekeeper. Helping professions are predominantly staffed by white women, next by white men, then women of color, and last men of color.

Across most our institutions, men and boys of color often have the worst outcomes. They are also the only identity that does not intersect with the dominant helping professional identity group.
Do Implicit Biases Impact Our Work?

Regardless of *intent*, our implicit biases do harm to the populations we serve. There is evidence of implicit bias contributing toward systemic inequities in:

- Data
- “Best Practices” and decision making
- Policies with disparate impacts
Providing Equitable & Culturally Competent Services

* Be conscious of your biases and be honest about when and how they affect your work.
* Be aware of your cultural lens and how it impacts the way you interpret communications with your families.
* Double check your report writing for language with negative connotations.
* Never assume that how you view a family’s inner workings is correct; ask questions about what you’re perceiving.
* Keep in mind that a family with unmet needs is not the same as a neglectful family; how can you intervene to support the family’s needs?
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