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African American children in an urban foster care system : perceptions of disproportionality and demographics

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AFRICAN AMERICAN CHILDREN IN AN URBAN FOSTER CARE SYSTEM:
PERCEPTIONS OF DISPROPORTIONALITYAND DEMOGRAPHICS

A Dissertation Presented
to
The Faculty of the School of Education
Department of Leadership Studies
Organization & Leadership Program

In Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Education

by
Jeffrey W. Timms
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THE UNIVERSITY OF SAN FRANCISCO
Dissertation Abstract

African American Children in an Urban Foster Care System: Perceptions of
Disproportionality and Demographics

The problem of disproportionality among African American children in the foster care system is a national problem. This participatory study examined the issues that child welfare workers, community based case workers and parents felt contributed to the disproportionate number of African American children in a foster care system. The research was guided by three open-ended questions that were asked of all participants. Data analysis involved extensive review of literature, analyzing field notes and transcripts.

The findings revealed that single women and more specifically, African American mothers are often prejudged and commonly treated as subordinates. In addition, they are frequently excluded from the process of creating case plans that work toward reunifying them with their child/ren. Mothers were open to help, but did not want to be made to feel helpless.

Other findings further revealed how child welfare culture swings have forced changes in practices and decisions made by child welfare workers. As a result, child welfare workers are required to work with the children and families to provide services within the community. Moreover, the research conveyed how community based case workers built relationships with families and communities in an effort to help children and families succeed.

This dissertation, written under the direction of the candidate's dissertation committee and approved by the members of the committee, has been presented to and accepted by the Facility of the School of Education in fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education. The content and research methodologies presented in this work represent the work of the candidate alone.

Jeffrey Timms   May 11, 2009
Candidate   Date

Dissertation Committee

Patricia Mitchell   May 11, 2009
Chairperson

Raymond Verecruysse   May 11, 2009

Betty Taylor   May 11, 2009

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works miracles. He has blessed me with this opportunity, and when doctors had counted

us out, He blessed me and my wife with a healthy son.

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CHAPTER I

Introduction

Statement of the Problem

A disproportionate number of African American children are languishing in the child welfare system (McRoy, Oglesby & Grape, 1997). Moreover, empirical research points out that African American children throughout the nation, are disproportionately represented in the child welfare system (Lawrence-Webb, 1997). Research by noted professionals in the field of child welfare have highlighted that racial biases, decision-making and oppressive policies have contributed to the disproportionate number of African American children in the foster care system. Derezotes, Poertner, & Testa, (2005) highlighted:

> Once children come to the attention of the child welfare system, public policy mandates that "reasonable efforts" be made to prevent the placement of children into foster care. Numerous studies over the years have identified race as predictive of the decision to place. (p. 15)

Furthermore, noted researcher Roberts (2002) pointed out, "Instead of working to eliminate racism in the child welfare system, federal and state governments have recently implemented policies that will increase the system's racial disparity." (p. 103). Racial biases and deficiency in cultural understanding have contributed to the disproportionate number of African American children in the foster care system. Clark, Buchanan & Legters (2008) "Analysis of King County quantitative and qualitative data in tandem pointed to both individual bias and institutional racism as major contributors to disproportionality in the child welfare system." (p. 325). Moreover, researchers also shared that theories about organizational and systemic factors contend that minority overrepresentation results from the decision-making processes of child protective

services (CPS), child welfare workers, and the biases of workers, governmental policies, and institutional or structural racism (Bent-Goodley, 2003; Chipungu, & Bent-Goodley, 2004; Morton, 1999; &Roberts, 2002).

Researchers paint a vivid picture of the problem; and the problem is alarming and extremely disconcerting as African American children are the disproportionate number of children languishing in the nations foster care systems. While this problem has national attention, the disproportionate number of African American children in a small urban city like San Francisco is disturbing, distressing and disheartening.

According to the Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System (AFCARS, 2000), children of color comprised only 15% of the general population, but made up 40% of children in foster care and 61% of children awaiting adoption. While a problem of this magnitude usually produces procedures to decrease and reduce such disparities in affecting children and families, in 2005 the problem continued to exist, as African American children made up 12% of the child population, but accounted for 32% of foster children (AFCARS, 2005). Additionally, according to the AFCARS (2006), the number of children in foster care reached as high as 513,000 on September 30, 2005. Of these children, 166,482 were African American, despite during that time, African American children made up only 15% of the total child population in the United States.

As mentioned earlier disproportionality has become a national concern and researchers continue exploring this phenomenon. "African-American children across the nation were more than twice as likely to enter foster care compared with White children in 2004, and African American children remained in foster care about 9 months longer" (U.S. Government Accountability Office [USGAO], 2007 p. 1). The problem of

disproportionality, i.e. the overwhelming number of African American children languishing in the foster care system, has become not only a national and state problem but has left cities such as San Francisco searching for answers as how to address this problem. Disproportionality continues to receive increasing attention from state agencies and researchers across the nation. USGAO (2007) highlighted the disparaging national problem:

> Overall, the disproportionality index nationwide for African American children is 2.26, which means that African American children were over-represented in foster care nationally in 2004 at a rate of more than twice their proportions in the U.S. child population. In fiscal year 2004, a total of 36 states had disproportionality indexes of 2.0 or more, and 16 states had disproportionality indexes of 3.0 or more for the number of African American children in foster care at the end of the fiscal year. (p. 73)

While the disproportionate number of African American children in the foster care system is a widespread problem in almost every state, the number of African American children in the California foster care system reveals a state problem that ostensibly has no visible solution. For example, in 2003 African American children made up only 11% of the child population in San Francisco, yet they constituted 70% of the children in foster care. (San Francisco Department of Human Services Quarterly Report [SFDHSQR], 2003). Furthermore, 70% of African American children in foster care reflect a serious city problem, that boarders on being a major city crisis. Empirical evidence continued to highlight San Francisco's problem as 66% (AFCARS 2006), of African American children remained in the foster care system. Statistics point out the problematic disparities as a total of 1,798 children were in the San Francisco foster care system, and of that number 1,185 were African American (AFCARS, 2006). Again, this is not just a state or city problem, but a national problem as empirical evidence has forced

a national study by the USGAO (2007), and agencies across the state are now attempting

to investigate the reasons for these deplorable numbers that have left African American

children languishing in the foster care system.

The picture painted by these numbers is not only disheartening for African

American children and families but continues to highlight an epidemic of foster care

placement that puts African American children on a path to oppression, social injustice,

and destitution as they deteriorate in foster care homes away from their families and

communities. Pioneers in the field of child welfare, such as, Billingsley and Giovannoni

(1972) stated that "the combination of racism and poverty caused and maintained by the

institutions of the larger society is, we contend, primarily responsible for the stormy past,

present, and future of Black children in need" (p. 7). Empirical evidence reveals that

foster care systems are fraught with problems. A report by the Children's Defense Fund

(2007) highlighted some of these disheartening problems:

> Twice as many Black children are in foster care as we would expect given their
> representation among all children. They represent 16 percent of the general
> population but 32 percent of the foster care population. Children who age out of
> foster care are less likely to graduate from high school or college, experience
> more serious mental health problems, including post traumatic stress disorder,
> than children generally; are less likely to receive adequate health and mental
> health care; are more likely to experience homelessness; and to be involved in the
> criminal justice system. (p. 16)

The disproportionate number of African American children in foster care systems

across the state continues to fuel studies to address this national problem. Clark,

Buchanan, & Legters (2008) acknowledged:

> With a population of 1.8 million, King county is the largest urban area in
> Washington state. Mirroring national trends, children of color in King county are
> overrepresented at every point in the child welfare system and are faring worse by
> most measures than are Caucasian children in the system. (p. 320)

The national trend presents a problematic and alarming situation that is expressed by the disproportionate number of African American children decaying in the nations foster care system. The overrepresentation of African Americans in the child welfare system mirrors that found in the juvenile justice system, which has faced allegations of discrimination for more than four decades (Derezotes, Poertner, & Testa 2005). Black juveniles are about four times as likely as their White peers to be incarcerated (Children's Defense Fund 2007). Additionally, Taylor, R (1981) points out, "The Juvenile justice system shaped these violent criminal careers…the system did little to rehabilitate or reform them." (p. 104)

The following researcher reveals that foster children who age out of foster care often end up homeless, incarcerated, and/or unemployed. In fact, 33% of foster children who age out of the system experience homelessness 12-18 months after leaving the system, and 3 of 10 of the nation's homeless are former foster children. Furthermore, 27% of the males and 10% of the females have been incarcerated (80 % of prison inmates have been through the foster care system); 51% are unemployed; 37% have not finished high school; and only 2% obtain a Bachelor's degree or higher (AFCARS, 2003). Research paints a very gloomy picture for children languishing in foster care systems. Disproportionality is a problem that not only has immediate oppressive affects, but another alarming concern was that only "2% of foster children obtain Bachelor's degree or higher" (AFCARS, 2003). Ladson-Billings (2007) points out, "It comes to us as if the students are not doing there part. We hear nothing of the other "gaps" that plague the lives of poor children of color. (p. 317).

The picture is distressing, as we see that foster care and its ominous outcomes present a disparaging situation to the African American family especially the African American child who represents a disproportionate number of children in this troubled system. Ironically, these children in the foster care system have been removed from parents for neglect, only to be emancipated into a society where they experience more cruelty, poverty, and hardship, which is largely related to the care they have received in the foster care system.

The disproportionality of African American children in the foster care system seems to be one devastating storm after another. Smith (2003) referred to it as the "foster care drift" (p. 966). In other words, African American children in the foster care system often move from one state institution (e.g., foster care) into another state institution (e.g., prison). On June 5, 2002, the San Francisco Sheriff's Department found that 55 % of the 1,995 inmates held on that date were African American. On the same date, 87 % were male and 13 % female (San Francisco Board of Supervisors Legislative Analyst Report, 2003).

The problem of disproportionality and its prevalence in the foster care system has taken center stage in the child welfare arena. In California and across the country, Black children comprise a far larger proportion of the foster care population than of the overall child population (Shaw, Putnam-Hornstein, & Margruder, 2008). Further highlighting this problem is the USGAO's (2007) attention and report on the disturbing issue of African American children in foster care places this problem center stage, and magnifies the concerns of cities and counties throughout the nation. However, while a solution to this serious dilemma is sought, African American children continue to be harmfully

impacted. This impact will have long lasting effects on their self-esteem; their ability to establish, build, and maintain positive social networks; and their future in the labor market.

Purpose of the Study

This participatory study examined the issues that child welfare workers (CWW), community based case workers (CBCW) and parents felt contributed to the disproportionate number of African American children in the San Francisco County foster care system (FCS). The total number of children in San Francisco is 14%, while the total number of African American children in the foster care system is 65%, (San Francisco Department of Human Services Quarterly Report [SFDHSQR], 2003). As a result, a problem of this proportion not only warranted a national study by the USGAO (2007) as previously mentioned, but demands continued research to provide more understanding and possible solutions to a national problem.

This study explored, through a series of questions, factors that contributed to disproportionality in San Francisco, and included suggestions and recommendations that can add value to practices in the field of child welfare. The study identifies some contributing factors to disproportionality among African American children in the foster care system. In addition, the study highlighted some issues that have to be addressed, if the numbers of African American children in the foster care system is going to be reduced. Additionally, the study examined services that child welfare workers, community based case workers and parents found helpful in San Francisco.

Background and Need for the Study

Research is replete with evidence suggesting that children of color have been disproportionately represented in the United States foster care system for years. According to (Derezotes, Poertner, & Testa 2005), "African American children continue to be represented in the child welfare system at higher rates than they are represented in the general population throughout the country" (p. 18). The vivid and disheartening historical background presented by pioneers in child welfare research, such as Billingsley and Giovannoni (1972), illuminated the need for continued study, investigation, and exploration into disproportionality as it related to African American children in the foster care system. Billingsley and Giovannoni (1972) provided timeless and insightful background into the systemic problem of disproportionality:

> The kinds of child welfare services that have come to be institutionalized in the United States are almost exclusively focused on the care of children away from their parents through some sort of substitute parental care. Services to enhance the welfare of children living with their own families have been only minimally developed and do not constitute any significant portion of the total child welfare effort. (p. 11)

While Billingsley and Giovannoni (1972), completed their study 30 years ago, their contributions and insight continue to elucidate a national problem in an area of our society that warrants continued investigation: the child welfare system is designed not as a way for government to assist parents in taking care of their children but as a means to punish parents for their failures. Bartholet (1999) pointed out "Family preservation advocates tell a story of exploitation in which black and poor families are the primary victims. They describe these families as victims of racism, of an unfair economic system, and of other forms of historic injustice." (p. 215). Moreover, Roberts (2002) adds "This protective function falls heaviest on African American parents because they are most

likely to suffer from poverty and institutional discrimination and to be blamed for the

effects on their children" (p. 74). Researchers seem to suggest that systems look to

punish, blame, and pervert the meaning of protection, particularly as it pertains to African

American children being separated from their families. More importantly, if children with

the same needs were treated fairly, regardless of their race, their -representation in child

welfare would be less of an issue (Hill, 2003).

Researchers continue to point out that African American children are being

disproportionately represented in foster care systems across the nation. The overall

number of children in foster care highlights a glaring need for continual studies. Research

by AFCARS (2005) pointed out that the number of children in the foster care system

reached 513,000, African American children making up 32% of the children in the

system, while they comprised only 12.9% of the total child population. While San

Francisco's disproportionality rate is problematic, with African American children

making up 66 % of the children in San Francisco's County's foster care system

[SFDHSQR], 2003 the problem warrants urgent attention, solutions and change.

Empirical evidence continues to reflect that this is a nation wide issue effecting

not only America's children.

> In seven (7) states, the proportion of African-American children in foster care is
> four times what you would expect based upon their occurrence in the general
> child population of those states. The states with the highest African American
> disproportionality ratios based upon 2000 AFCARS and Census data are:
> California (4.14), Oregon (4.38), Wyoming (4.53), Minnesota (4.77), Idaho
> (4.84), New Hampshire (4.93), and Wisconsin (5.48). The African American
> disproportionality ratio for the entire U.S. is 2.43. (Center for the Study of Social
> Policy [CCSP], 2004)

In addition, according to the CCSP, 46 states, including California, have a

disproportionate rate of African American children in their foster care system relative to

the general population. Nationally, the percentage of African American children in the foster care system continues to point to deep disparities as 12% of the child population is African American yet 32% of the foster care population is African American (AFCARS, 2005).

Moreover, decisions involving the removal of African American children from their families seem to be influenced by the economic status of the family; thus, if the family is poor, the judgment is to remove and place the African American child in the FCS. The disproportionate removal of children of color and poor children from their homes should be acknowledged as a crisis in child welfare warranting immediate action (Chipungu, & Bent-Goodley, 2004). And Madhubutii (1991) added,

> Welcome to America. Money before people is the creed and policy in the U.S. If a culture of society is to be humane, it must be people-oriented with much of its resources going toward the care and development of its people especially the young. (p. 201)

Research suggested that the foster care system has missed the mark in their provision of appropriate services for families and children, particularly African Americans. Taylor (1981) pointed out that the services were not reaching the families and children.

> Youngsters were back in the community, they were back in the system that had rejected them, a system of inadequate community accommodation plans, inadequate communication and coordination between service delivery systems, inappropriate placement, lack of services delivery and inadequate monitoring; California service delivery systems are not reaching these children and their families. (p. 178)

Several themes dominate the issue of the disproportionate number of African American children in the foster. The first theme is the inequality of services rendered to minority families. Empirical evidence suggested that AA families and children mistrust the FCS and feel that their needs go on addressed:

> Families' distrust of the child welfare system was cited by child welfare directors in 28 states as a factor contributing to the entry of African American children into foster care to at least a moderate extent. According to state child welfare officials and some researchers we interviewed, African American families' distrust of the child welfare system stems from their perception that the system is unresponsive to their needs and racially biased against them. Child welfare officials and researchers said that many African Americans in poor communities perceive child welfare caseworkers as more intent on separating African American parents from their children than on working within their communities to address child safety issues. (USGAO, 2007, p. 23).

The second theme is the fact that there seems to be a correlation between poverty among minorities and their status in the United States foster care system. Poverty in the U.S. disproportionately affects children of color and the children of single parents. Fifteen percent of white children live at or below the poverty line, compared 34% of Latino children and almost 37% of African American children (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2000). Inadequacy of income, more than any factor, constitutes the reason that children are removed (Lindsey, 1994). These narrow and biased decisions seem to have cast thousands of America's poor deeper into a hopeless sea of disparity.

The third theme is racial bias which seems to influence child welfare decision-making. Decision making in the child welfare organization appears to be perpetuating a historic problem.

> In short, if these white agencies wish to serve the needs of Black children to some substantial degree while maintaining their major commitment to white children, they must be transformed from white agencies to multiracial ones. In the process they must develop structured attacks on the racism, professionalism, and bureaucracy so rampant today. (Billingsley & Giovannoni, 1972, p. 223)

As previously stated, the inequality of services, personal/racial biases, and cultural misunderstandings seem to have contributed greatly to disproportionality. However, until researchers address this problem with the honesty and integrity needed to confront historically inequitable decisions, children, particularly children of color and more

specifically African American children, will remain adrift in the nations foster care systems.

Change is impossible unless we can face up to the issues (Bartholet, 1999). Clearly, research continues to point toward the imperative need for researchers to remain diligent in efforts to investigate disproportionality and the decisions, policies, and practices of child welfare agencies, which detrimentally affect African American children, families, and communities. Consequently, this study helps in providing a clearer window into the problem of disproportionality through the stories of those directly involved in carrying out the policies of the child welfare culture. Moreover, this study provided a clearer understanding of the problem of disproportionality among African American children in the foster care system through the lens and stories of the parents who have had direct involvement with the San Francisco child welfare system.

<center>Conceptual Framework</center>

This study used two concepts to explain disproportionality in the foster care system. Proctor's (2002) concept on decision making as high stakes in the child welfare system was used to explain the importance of child welfare workers obligation to be culturally competent and sensitive, by including parents in decision making and receptive to discourse as it relates to difficult and important decisions about our nation's most vulnerable population (children). Decision-makers should take steps to gather intelligence about needs, specify desired results, uncover options, and evaluate options according to their benefits (Nutt, 2002). In addition, Critical Race Theory (CRT) was used to facilitate understanding around perceptions of race, policies and power. Who has the power to shape the perception about the logic and worth of diversity action plans are an important

consideration as well as the ways knowledge is used to reproduce racial inequalities

Delgado & Stefancic, (2000).

Decision Making is High Stakes in Social work

Decision-making tools are needed in the field of social work to give providers an

opportunity to better prepare and support the workers mandated by society to make

complex and consequential decisions about our nation's most vulnerable children

(Proctor, 2002). Numerous studies have shown that decision making in the child welfare

system has been less than equitable in placing African American children in the foster

care system at a disproportionate number. For example, the USGAO (2007) reported that,

"race is an important factor that affects the decision to place children into foster care" (p.

25). As a result, Proctor (2002) argued that "Decision-making in social work is high

stakes, regardless of practice setting, client population, and role. Practitioners confront

the challenge of both making and facilitating good decisions." (p. 3)

Decisions made by child welfare workers have major implications on

disproportionality and family disruption, particularly among African American families

and children. Therefore, decisions made by a child welfare worker is regarded as "high

stakes" (2002), and should include discourse with the parent as to what are the most

appropriate services to stabilize the child in the home and the community. An important

part of the casework role includes helping parents by working collaboratively with them

to assess needs, arrange services, or provide encouragement (Smith & Donovan, 2003).

Decisions made by the child welfare worker have a direct effect on whether or not the

child will enter into foster care or receive the valuable resources, services and help

needed to maintain a child's placement and bond with his/her family. Researchers,

contend that child welfare workers determine whether services are delivered or denied

(Chapman & Sonnenberg, 2000).

Research pointed to race, lack of cultural competence and racial inequality as

contributors to the problem of disproportionality among African American children, and

it shows that a number of African American children could have remained in the home if

the parent(s) had access to appropriate services and proper resources. Institutional racism

can be perpetuated by seemingly benign policies, practices, behavior, traditions and

structures, which can go unchallenged (Hill, 2005).

Decision making in child welfare have long-term effects on families, children and

society. Moreover, the system seems to think that Black families are less stable, so they

treat them so (Hill, 2003). This thought process has contributed to disproportionality

along with an oppressive child welfare system which through punitive decision making

maintains dominance over poor African American families. Roberts, (2002) "The system

has failed to remedy the underlying causes of their placement in foster care, which are

related to poverty, housing problems, and lack of child care" (p. 21)

Decisions are threatened by communication barriers (Proctor, 2002). Language,

culture, ethnicity and socioeconomic status are among the commonly recognized

challenges to worker client communication for most African American families. In a

report on fairness and equity in the California child welfare system, the following was

observed:

> The system is expected to operate within and be accountable to a set of legal and
> ethical values embodied in our constitution. Statutes, rules, and regulations are all
> designed to ensure fairness. The child welfare system has a culture like other
> bureaucracies. Certain beliefs and assumption permeate this culture and can

produce tension, sometimes leading to serious conflicts between social workers and the family. At the very least the family might find itself required to meet standards, comply with rules, and adapt to a cultural worldview… which is unfamiliar or which it rejects. (Child Welfare Services Stakeholders Group [CWSSG], 2002, p. 159-160)

Moreover, when impoverished families are faced with this crisis situation, they have very little support as they encounter a foreign culture, i.e. foster care system that has historically made unfavorable decisions toward them. Racism must be taken into account because many of the people who decide the fate of Black foster care children are not Black, but White (Hill, 2003).

Empirical research spoke to the need for child welfare workers to change their decision making practices. Child welfare professionals interviewed emphasized the need for a shift in child welfare philosophy from a crisis-driven focus to a focus on strengthening the family functioning before problems worsen to the point of requiring child welfare intervention (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2003). Therefore, it becomes imperative that the child welfare workers improve lines of communication with the community based case workers so that a majority of these families and children can be served directly in their neighborhood.

Tracy (2000) made the point that involvement of social workers in the lives of families should be about "family support" based on a philosophy designed to enhance family strengths and stability, increase the parents' confidence and competence in parenting, and ensure that children are in a stable supportive family environment. Child welfare workers whose decisions affect families and children's lives must begin to explore the factors that steer decisions which have created such a storm around disproportionality. Research on accountability has found that, under certain conditions,

the expectation of having to account for one's decision can lead to more careful decision processing (Tetlock & Boetteger, 1994).

African Americans and Critical Race Theory

Critical Race Theory (CRT) provided a window into which to study and examine decisions within an organizational culture (child welfare system) that perpetuates oppression, social injustice and inequity. Critical race theory recognized that the experiences of African American parents are important to understanding, analyzing and communicating about how disproportionality has affected them. Moreover, CRT provided us with a framework in which to investigate disproportionality, for it addressed social constructs involving racial injustices and oppression. Critical Race Theory (CRT) has emerged from the legal arena to uncover the deep patterns of exclusion and what is taken for granted with respect to race and privilege (Ladson-Billings, 1998). Child welfare workers have historically excluded African American families from participating in the decisions that affect their lives and their children's lives. CRT allows the window of discourse and inclusion to be opened and explored.

Ladson-Billings (2007) keenly pointed out that "When one segment of a society regularly and consistently has access to the best schools, the best health care, the best communities, and social resources; it means that other segments lack or has limited access." (p. 320) African American families and children remain that segment that 'lack." In addition, they make up the society that is excluded from receiving the "best." Data confirms that a significant number of children in foster care are from poor families (Barbell & Freundlich, 2001). A decision to place African American children in foster

care due to poverty, because they "lack," or due to the fact that they don't have access to the "best" is racist and demands confronting. Here Ladson-Billings, (2007) stated that the aim of anti-racist education is the eradication of racism in all its various forms. Therefore, sincere conversation to confront racist decision making in the foster care system culture that has operated in an exclusionary decision making manner must begin, so that movement toward eradicating the disease that continues to cause disproportionality in foster care system among African American is meet head-on.

Critical Race Theory approach to policy analysis help to raise important questions about the control and production of knowledge and the ways that policy can be used to empower individuals to act on/in their environment to challenge dominant ideology (Ladson-Billings, 1998). With the high rates of placement of African American children in the foster care in San Francisco, based on allegations of abuse and/or neglect as defined by the 300 section of the Welfare and Institutional code, it is important that the child welfare worker's decisions involve the inclusion of the parents who are impacted. Ladson-Billings (2007) shared "The poor are deeply committed to and invested in education as the primary vehicle for lifting them out of poverty." (p. 319). Even though a parent lives in poverty, they should be included in the decision making, this has not been a practice, CRT helps to explore conversations that lead to change in this area and calls into question conversation that are stagnate and superficial.

<p style="text-align:center">Significance</p>

This research revealed the stories of child welfare workers, community based case workers and parents who are involved with the child welfare system and have intimate experience with the culture of the organization. The stories and insights provided

valuable description and understanding of the racial biases, oppressions and subordination that influence decisions directly related to disproportionality. The study explored the lives of those closely involved with and affected by disproportionality, and expounded on their experiences.

Consequently, the information from this participatory study operated as a lighthouse providing enriching experiences to the problem of disproportionality and direction in addressing this national problem that is leaving African American children languishing in foster care system. The research provided recommendations to the profession of child welfare that stimulates discussion and practice. The study looked at an organizational culture that has created policies, programs, and procedures that have affected communities, children and families. Disproportionality has stranded many African American children in foster care, leaving them with no connection with family or community.

Limitations

A limitation comes in the form of having worked in the child welfare profession for over ten years, as well as other counseling and children service positions. Within these positions which required providing services to children and families, I have observed many oppressive tactics toward poor families. Another limitation comes from the fact that only 9 participants, 3 child welfare workers, 3 community base case workers, and 3 parents, are part of the research. Moreover, the fact that the stories of the children directly affected by disproportionality are not reflected in this study. While statistically San Francisco has one of the largest disproportionate demographics of African American

children in foster care, it may not accurately reflect the disproportionate number of

African American children in the foster care system through out the state of California.

Research Questions

The research study answered the following research questions:

It should be noted that participants included child welfare workers *(CWW),* community based case workers *(CBCW)* and parents.

1) What factors identified by each participant as contributing to the disproportionate number of African-American children being placed in the San Francisco foster care system?

2) What issues need to be addressed in reducing the number of African American children being placed in the San Francisco Foster Care System?

3) What insular (local) services provided the best resources to children and families?

Definition of Terms

I)   The following terms are functional in this study, and the definitions have been drawn from the Hill (2005) Race Matters Consortium working paper.

***Bias*:** Explicit bias refers to the stated values which we use to direct our behavior
        Implicit bias refers to our unconscious attitudes.
***Cultural Competence*:** A set of congruent behaviors, attitudes and patterns tome together in a system, agency or professional and enable that agency or professional to work effectively in cross-cultural situation word is used because it implies the integrated pattern of human being that includes thought, communication, actions, customs, beliefs and institutions of a racial, ethnic, religious or social group. The word competence is used because it implies having the capacity to function effectively in a culturally competent system of care acknowledges and incorporates levels the importance of culture, the assessment of cross-cultural vigilance towards the dynamics that result from cultural

differences expansion of cultural knowledge and the adaptation of services to culturally unique needs.

Disproportionality: refers to a situation in which a particular racial or ethnic group of children is represented in foster care at a higher or lower percentage than other racial/ethnic groups. It looks across racial/ethnic groups at racial ratios of children at various points in the child welfare system to the numbers of in the general population.

Disparity: involves a comparison of one group (e.g., regarding disproportionality, services, outcomes, etc.) to another group.

II)   The following terms are functional in this study, and the definitions have been drawn from the Child Welfare table of contents chapter 31-000 general requirements (definitions).

Child Welfare Worker (CWW): refers to a social worker or case manager who performs services related to funding services, assessing a child's and family's needs, developing a case plan, monitoring progress in achieving case plan objectives, and ensuring that all services specified in the case plan are provided and met.

Family Reunification: means those services described in Welfare and Institutions code section 1650. Family reunification services shall be provided or arranged for by county welfare department staff in order to reunite the child separated from his or her parent because of abuse, neglect, or exploitation. These services shall not exceed 12 months except as provided in subdivision

> (a) of section 361.5 and subdivision (c) of section 366.3. Family reunification services shall be available without regard to income of families whose child has been adjudicated or is in the process of being adjudicated a dependent child of the court under the provisions of section 300.
>
> b)   Family reunification services shall only be provided when a child has been placed in out-of-home care, or is in the care of a previously noncustodial parent under the supervision of the juvenile court.
>
> c)   When a minor has been placed in foster care with a nonparent, family reunification series may be provided to one or both parents.

Foster care: means the provision of 24-hour care and supervision to a child who has been placed by a child placing agency, including county child welfare services and probation departments, in one of the following types of foster homes:

> a)   A licensed foster family home.
> b)   A licensed small family home.
> c)   A family home certified by a licensed foster family agency for its exclusive use.
> d)   A foster family home which has been certified pending licensure.
> e)   A licensed group home for children.
> f)   The home of a relative other than the child's parent/guardians, pursuant to

a court order of voluntary placement agreement.

Community-Based Case Worker (CBCW): means a case manager who is responsible for: linking children and families with resources, such as parenting classes, visitation, substance abuse counseling/support groups, and/or counseling.

Languishing: refers to children who have been placed in long-term foster care with no parental interaction or who, in some cases, have had their parental rights terminated.

III)   The following terms are functional in this study, and the definitions have been drawn from the Smith, D.B. (2003)

Foster Care Drift (FCD): refers to the phenomena of children remaining in foster care for many years.

Summary

Disproportionality among African American children in the foster care system has inundated the nations foster care systems, so much so that national studies continue to investigate this phenomenon that have states and counties searching for solutions. The empirical evidence presented elucidates statics that are both discouraging and alarming for the African American community and states as a whole. Moreover, it suggest that racial biases both in decision making and organizational practices must be explored if resolutions and answers are going to be provided in curtailing this national problem.

The next chapter of the research moves into the Review of Literature and will highlight the history of child welfare and the foster care system, the racial biases, the lack of cultural competency and the detrimental effects on the African American child from past decisions. While this research does not provide the complete history of the child welfare system, it does present significant portions to facilitate an understanding of the current problem of disproportionality of the African American child in the foster care system.

Following the Review of Literature, the researcher discussed the research process in detail. Chapter four presents the data and which into the participatory study, the

importance of the population chosen, for the narratives provide a significant meaning toward our understanding of the problem and possible solutions to resolve the crisis. The researcher provided description and understanding which opens a window on the possibilities of addressing disproportionality in other arenas..

CHAPTER II

Literature Review

Introduction

Disproportionality in the foster care system remains a problem that affects states across the nation. The U.S. Government Accountability Office (USGAO, 2007) confirmed that "African-American children across the nation were more than twice as likely to enter foster care compared with White children in 2004, and African American children remained in foster care about 9 months longer" (p. 1). Moreover, children of color throughout America, especially those who are African American, are disproportionately represented in the child welfare system (Barbell & Freundilich, 2001; Lawrence-Webb, 1997). Adding to this problem is the fact that once in the system, families and children of color receive fewer child welfare services than their Caucasian counterparts (Courtney, Barth, Berrick, Brooks, & Park, 1996). Research is replete with evidence confirming that disproportionality of African Americans in foster care systems across the nation is a severe problem.

California had 101,297 children in the foster care system during 2000. Of that number, 35,644 were African American; consequently, African American children made up 35% of the children in foster care while they constituted only 7% of the total child population in California. Seven years later, the problem of disproportionality remained formidable as African American families and children continued to drown in a system that remained inundated with an inordinate number of African American children: In 2007 African American children only made up 6% of the child population, yet they constituted 26% of the children in foster care (Needell et al., 2008). As evidenced in the

research, California is engulfed with a major problem that requires research, attention, and solutions. Moreover, problems in the foster care system of the San Francisco City and County mirror the problems of the state. For example, in 2000 African American children only made up 12% of the child population, yet they made up 71% of the children in the San Francisco foster care system (Needell et al., 2008). As disheartening and discouraging as these numbers are, they remain a reality that demands greater attention. The USGAO (2007) pointed out, "As a whole, child welfare administrators we surveyed reported that in their view, their own states should be doing more to address disproportionality" (p. 49).

As this study examines the literature and explores the problem of disproportionality of African American children in the foster care system in San Francisco's City and County, it is important to highlight that the goal is to examine possible factors contributing to this crisis and generate recommendations that will add value to the problem. In addition, this study explores services and resources that have played a significant role in helping, supporting, and providing essential assistance to those directly involved with this problem.

The review of the literature is divided into five sections. The first section discusses the topic of race and the fact that many racial implications surround the disproportionate number of African American children in the nation's foster care system. The second section provides an historical perspective of the child welfare system. The third section examines some of the hurdles and challenges of the child welfare system. The fourth section describes child welfare policies and the ways they have impacted families and children in the child welfare system. The final section explores foster care in

San Francisco and the number of African American children languishing in the child

welfare system. By no means will this overview cover the complete history of social and

child welfare in America, but it does provide a means of exploring the genesis of the shift

in child welfare from exclusion to over-inclusion of African American children and

families, a topic that has been the subject of intense debate among child welfare

professional and policy-makers for several decades (Courtney & Skyles, 2003; Needell,

Brookhart, & Lee, 2003).

Critical Race Theory

A thread that can be found in America's history and that continues to be a

dominant strand in the fabric of our nation provides a starting point for introducing and

establishing a thoughtful foundation for this study. The thread of racism hinders progress

and continues inequity and oppression. Valdes et al. (2002) pointed out:

> Racial minorities are unevenly distributed in a community; neighborhoods are
> racially concentrated; those enclaves are isolated from neighborhoods of different
> racial composition; and neighborhoods of racial minorities, particularly blacks,
> are often clustered near urban areas. (p. 175)

Critical Race Theory (CRT) has been incorporated into this study as a way to look at the

flowing, seamless streams of racism, oppression, and inequality in power and the ways

these contribute to the disproportionate number of African American children in the

foster care system. More importantly, this study demonstrates through the narratives

found in Chapter Four that it is imperative for poor families and African American

families involved with the child welfare system to change a history of oppression into a

future of empowerment by sharing their stories.

CRT reveals a truth about America that remains prevalent. It is like a thorn in

America's side, yet some refuse to address the pain. Instead, they leave the thorn stuck,

attempting to ignore the truth and the one and only way toward deliverance from a

history of pain and a future filled with denial. This study examines stories and opens the

door that introduces child welfare workers (CWW), community-based case workers

(CBCW), and parents to the importance of communication that establishes a common

goal. This study's recurring theme is found throughout the narratives in Chapter Four: the

need for communication and the desire to reach a common goal.

 Poor parents and parents of the many children drowning in the foster care system

must begin to assert themselves and understand, as Valdes et al. (2002) explained, that

> Critical Race Theory can make a significant contribution by helping us
> understand how relations of power and powerlessness are institutionalized in and
> through different legal regimes; by helping locate and assess the institutional
> positions subordinated people tend to occupy in these legal regimes; and by
> helping us determine how best to restructure these institutional arrangements in
> light of what we have learned about the way identity politics can enable or disable
> the solidarities and alliances needed to combat subordination. (p. 316)

Poor parents and their children are frequently blamed and victimized by the child welfare

system that perpetrates oppressive tactics to institute abrasive disparities. Yosso (2002)

made the following point:

> It is important to address the inequality embedded in school curriculum before
> addressing unequal educational outcomes. Indeed, one of the first mistakes most
> often made by many educators and policy makers is to look at the inequalities for
> student outcomes and blame students without looking at the conditions, such as
> curricular structures, processes, and discourses that create unequal outcomes. (p.
> 94)

Parker and Villapando (2007) stated that CRT calls for the legitimization of narratives

about discrimination and the power of the law used against persons of color…" (p.520).

Narratives are paramount in discovering factors contributing to the child welfare problem

in America, and communication is imperative as participants involved begin addressing

the issues effectively. Habermas (1984) asserted the value of communicative action:

> In communicative action participants are not primarily oriented to their own individual successes; they pursue their individual goals under the condition that they can harmonize their plans of action on the basis of common situation definitions. (p. 286)

Communicative actions shared through the respondents' narratives are, as Yosso (2005) explained, vital and tremendously valuable in facilitating empowerment:

> Victims of racism can often find their voice. Those injured by racism and other forms of oppression discover that they are not alone and moreover are part of a legacy of resistance to racism and the layers of radicalized oppression. They become empowered participants, hearing their own stories and the stories of others, listening to how the arguments against them are framed and learning to make the arguments to defend themselves. (p. 75)

Poor parents and African American parents whose children continue to constitute the disproportionate number of children in the foster care system are often the victims of racism, but through their own narratives, they can find encouragement, strength, and a common bond. Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) shared, "The story of one's condition leads to the realization of how one came to be oppressed and subjugated and allows one to stop inflicting mental violence on oneself" (p. 55).

Bell (1992), a pioneer of CRT and historically candid in his opinions on racial discrimination, pointed out, "Throughout history, politicians have used blacks as scapegoats for ailed economic or political policies" (p. 8). Race, power, and policies have always had catastrophic affects on the poor, especially the African American family and child. Hill (2008) described "three shortcomings in public policies that contribute to disproportionality":

> (a) overemphasis on child removal, (b) limited services to kin caregivers, and (c) inadequate funding to assist states and counties interested in reducing disproportionality in their locales. This nation clearly places much higher priority on removing children from their homes than in providing services to them at home. (p. 364)

CRT allows one to see that inequity is ever-present in policies affecting the poor and

African American families and children, as Ladson-Billings (2007) highlighted:

> When we speak of an education debt we move to a discourse that holds us all accountable. It reminds us that we have accumulated this problem as a result of centuries of neglect and denial of education to entire groups of students. It reminds us that we have consistently under-funded schools in poor communities where education is needed most. It reminds us that we have, for large periods of our history, excluded groups of people from the political process where they might have a say in democratically determining what education should look like in their communities. And, it reminds us that what we are engaged as we reflect on our unethical and immoral treatment of our underserved populations. (p. 321)

> Racism, class biases, and the resulting over-inundation of the poor and African

American children in the foster care system have continued to dismantle the African

American family. Bartholet (1999) stated,

> Sadly we can predict that profound social and economic reform is not on the horizon, and we can also predict that our society will continue to scrimp on the support services that it makes available to poor people, including those at risk for child maltreatment. (p. 238)

Poor people and African American families remain in a system permeated by an

organizational culture (e.g., the child welfare system) that is rooted in historical

inequalities and oppressive practices. Ladson-Billings (2007) stated,

> There is something to be learned in the midst of poverty. When one segment of a society regularly and consistently has access to the best schools, the best health care, the best communities, and social resources, it means that other segments lack or have limited access. (p. 320)

In sum, poverty is a condition characterized by "lack" and is often the catalyst for many

other ills within a family, a community, and a child.

The thread of racism can be found throughout every aspect of a system that was

established to provide for a child's health and safety but has moved from a non-

threatening stream of water to a threatening waterfall leading to an unpredictable fall for

many African American children languishing in the foster care system. CRT helps one examine racism and oppression in policies, but it also provides an instrumental venue, as expressed in the respondents' narratives, to explore change through communicative action as the respondents expressed what they perceived as factors and issues creating the higher proportion of African American children entering and remaining in foster care (USGAO, 2007).

<div align="center">Historical Background of Social Welfare</div>

The British Poor Law Act of 1601 created a national welfare system in Britain and Wales which brought together "the inconsistent and erratic relief legislation of the previous years, firmly placing its operation in the hands of the civil authorities and establishing a definite system of obligatory financing outside of the church" (Gilbert, 1981, p. 29). While the act provided obligatory financing to the poor outside the church, it did not include African American families and children. Thus, they were left to languish in the "erratic relief" or, more often than not, the total absence of relief from the civic system. Thus began a social system established in an attempt to address the needs of the poor but not the needs of the African American child and family unit. It is important to not lose sight of this fact because the Poor Law Act of 1601 was considered the beginning of the welfare system. According to Handel (1982), "English poor laws required local governments to collect taxes to support the poor" (p. 68).

Today, support for poor families and children remains in the hands of federal, state, and local government in America. As a result, African American families and children continue to languish in foster care systems at a disproportionate rate. Statistics reported by the Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System (U.S.

Department of Health and Human Services [USDHHS], Administration for Children and

Families, 2000) bear repeating: In 2000 children of color comprised only 15% of the

general population but 40% of children in foster care and 61% of children awaiting

adoption. While a problem of this magnitude usually produces procedures to decrease

and reduce it, the problem continued to exist in 2005, as African American children made

up 12% of the child population but 32% of foster children (USDHHS, Administration for

Children and Families, 2005). Moreover, according to the USDHHS, Administration for

Children and Families (2006), the number of children in foster care reached as high as

513,000 on September 30, 2005. Of these children, 166,482 were African American,

despite the fact that, at that time, African American children made up only 15% of the

total child population in the United States.

The history of social welfare illuminates a truth that continues to be a problem

within the social welfare system today: African American children and families seem to

be most victimized both by poverty and racism. Billingsley and Giovannoni (1972)

highlighted the following:

> Of the twin evils of our time, racism and poverty, racism ranks first and poverty
> second as causes of the difficulties Black children face. Neither of these maladies
> is caused within the Black community. Both are generated, operated, and
> perpetuated by the White community and the institutions it dominates. (p. 17)

The fact is that throughout the history of social welfare in America, African American

families and children have been victims of racism and poverty. B. M. Katz (1986)

pointed out,

> The more liberal settlement leaders advocated economic and political equality,
> but not social equality; worked to improve black living conditions within the
> ghetto; and accepted segregation either as inescapable or desirable. All of them
> refused to integrate their settlement houses. Even when the racial composition of
> their neighborhoods changed, most settlements remained white islands, and the

handful of settlements opened to serve blacks were always few, always separate, and always unequal. (p. 183)

African American families and children remain affected by an inconsistent, erratic system, and this historical odor continues to permeate the air as the nation's problem with disproportionality continues.

Some suggest that institutional racism negates the strengths of Black families and explains the overrepresentation of Black children in the child welfare system (Derezotes, Poertner, & Testa, 2005), and researchers continue to lament that welfare polices are fraught with discrimination and racial oppression. Roberts (2002) expressed, "The child welfare system, then, embodies a cruel paradox. At the same time that it brutally intrudes upon too many Black families, it also ignores the devastating impact of poverty and racism on even more children" (p. 91).

Freedmen's Bureau

Another form of social welfare that originated in the 1800s was the Freedmen's Bureau, which is considered one of the earliest forms of social welfare specifically formulated for the empowerment of African American families and their children. African American families benefited educationally, economically, and emotionally from the establishment of the Freedmen's Bureau, which was created by an act of Congress in March 1865. L. W. Katz (1967) explained:

> The bureau was a division of the Department of War, and the military staff of the bureau negotiated employment contracts, oversaw the establishment of freedmen's schools, and distributed relief. The bureau also protected the basic rights of former slaves, fighting such remnants of slavery as the practice of apprenticing freed children against the will of their parents. (p. 255)

The Freedmen's Bureau sought to empower those families and children who needed help and were at risk of becoming dependent. In addition to providing African Americans with

the basic necessities of food and clothing, the Freedmen's Bureau looked to provide them

with an education, training, and jobs. According to W.E.B. Du Bois (1935),

> The Bureau furnished day and night schools, industrial schools, Sunday schools and colleges. Nearly all the present Negro universities and colleges like Howard, Fisk, and Atlanta, were founded or substantially aided in their earliest days by the Freedmen's Bureau. (p. 226)

In addition, the Freedmen's Bureau provided comprehensive services to families

who had been abandoned in poverty and left to die. Additionally, it protected families

from violence and exploitation and from being forced back into slavery. Du Bois (1935)

continued,

> The judicial work of the Bureau consisted in protecting the Negro from violence and outrage, from serfdom, and in defending his right to hold property and enforce his contracts. It was to see that Negroes had fair trials and that their testimony was received, and their family relations respected. (p. 226)

Consequently, the Freedmen's Bureau represented one of the earliest and healthiest

family maintenance support programs in the United States, as its intentions were to

strengthen families' economics, in addition to integrating a strong educational

component. Billingsley and Giovannoni (1972) wrote, "This approach was quite different

from that taken by the established child welfare agencies and organizations of the

nineteenth century" (p. 43). They further stated,

> Intended, in part, to prevent and eliminate poverty, the Freedmen's Bureau represented a vastly different approach to children. In effect, the provision of land, work, and direct relief served poor Black children within their families, for it was a means of strengthening and keeping those families together. (p. 43)

Historically, help for the poor and help for the poor African American family had been

met with strong opposition, separation, and manipulation, and as the Bureau attempted to

provide direct relief for African American families, racism prevailed, hidden in policies

and disguised in oppression.

Orphanages

During the 1800s, the problem of children languishing in almshouses and poorhouses with adults living and laboring together was addressed, and laws began to address the detrimental effects of children being housed in the inhuman, unsanitary, and criminal environment most often found in poorhouses. B. M. Katz (1986) pointed out,

> Children, however, worried the New York Senate committee most. Outside of New York City and Kings County (Brooklyn), at least thirteen hundred children lived in the state's poorhouses, enough if not properly cared for to fill some day all the houses of refuge and prisons of the State. (p. 31)

States began to create charity boards whose primary focus was to observe, report, and make recommendations on how to improve almshouses and poorhouses. Trattner (1989) highlighted the growth of child-caring institutions:

> A natural result of removing children from poorhouses, where that did occur, was the encouragement and growth of child-caring institutions. These institutions, often large and of the congregate (as opposed to the cottage plan) type, were mostly private and sectarian in nature. Although they were, on the whole, superior to the almshouses as a place for child care, they too had many defects and limitations. (p. 19)

Poor children suffered greatly during these times, families were scattered, and society struggled tremendously. African Americans again had a disproportionate number of children suffering, scattered, and struggling, as their health, safety, and welfare were not generally included as reforms were made, institutions were established, and laws were passed.

According to Billingsley and Giovannoni (1972), the name *orphanage* "was somewhat of a misnomer from the start, since many of the children taken in them were not orphans but poor children whose families could not maintain them" (p. 22). African American children were excluded from orphanages and constituted the overwhelming

number of children living in the streets and languishing in the juvenile systems and jail. Only then did they begin receiving care.

An orphanage for Black children opened in 1836 in New York: the Association for the Benefit of Colored Orphans. Its premise was to have African American children assume the characteristics of White children. As Billingsley and Giovannoni (1972) wrote, "Whatever education, religion, discipline, and an acceptance of popular morality might do for his soul, they could not change the color of the Black child's skin; and that was the source of his problems" (p. 29). Help is often negated and rarely productive when it is bound to oppression and seeks to have people denounce themselves and become shameful of their history. As Madhubuti (1991) pointed out, "To take the hair of Afrikan Americans, brutalize it and try to change it into 'European' hair cannot be anything but a lifelong losing battle" (p. 208).

African American families have been in many losing battles, and now the children are caught in a system that was established to provide assistance but, instead, has created a state of disproportionality. Time and time again, history paints a picture of African American children and families being victimized by poverty, racism, and oppression. The history of Black children in the child welfare system reveals patterns of exclusion, neglect, segregation, and social constructions of otherness (Graham & Bruce, 2006).

Foster Care in the Twentieth Century

In 1909 the White House Conference on the Care of Dependent Children fueled a wealth of new ideals around the care of children and the importance of children remaining in the home. In fact, in 1909, the preservation of families ranked first among the recommendations of the White House Conference on Children (B. M. Katz, 1986). It

is imperative that one understands that the African American family and child remained

visible, but help remained invisible as foster care begin to rear its disproportionate head.

Victims of racism and poverty, African Americans were blamed for not overcoming their

dilemma. Billingsley and Giovannoni (1972) observed,

> Home life is the highest and finest product of civilization. It is the great modeling
> force of mind and of character. Children should not be deprived of it except
> urgent and compelling reasons. Children of parents of worthy character, suffering
> from temporary misfortune, and children of reasonable and efficient mothers, who
> are without the support of the normal breadwinner, should as a rule be kept with
> their parents, such aid being given as may be necessary to maintain suitable
> homes for the rearing of the children. Except in unusual circumstances, the home
> should not be broken up for reasons of poverty, but only for considerations of
> inefficiency or immorality. (p. 68)

However, all too often children are removed simply due to poverty.

The 1900s continued to have a major impact on child welfare and social welfare

and would forever change the course of both. B. M. Katz (1986) pointed out legislative

patterns of the early 20th century:

> Missouri and Illinois passed the first mothers' pension legislation in 1911, and a
> number of states quickly followed. By the end of 1913, twenty states, mainly
> Western and Central, had authorized mothers' pensions; by 1919, the number had
> increased to thirty-nine states, and the territories of Alaska and Hawaii. In 1931,
> 200,000 children in every state except Georgia and South Carolina lived in homes
> supported in part by mothers' pensions. (p.133)

At the same time, legalization was passed excluding African American women's input, a

decision which greatly affected African American children. This would be a common

thread throughout the fabric of 20th century as well. States and researchers have found

that emerging patterns continue to point to punitive consequences resulting in the

disproportionate number of African American children in the child welfare system. For

example, the state of Illinois has been fraught with the problem of disproportionality for

years. African American children constitute 19% of the child population in Illinois, but

they represent 46% of indicated reports of abuse and neglect and 76% of open child cases at the Illinois Department of Children and Family Services (Derezotes et al., 2005).

In addition, the Minnesota Department of Human Services (2002) conducted a study of the outcomes for African American children in its child protection system and concluded that racial disparities in the entire process constituted an urgent crisis. This study found that the state's African American children were 6 times more likely to be assessed for maltreatment and 16 times more likely to be placed in out-of-home care during an investigation than Caucasian children.

Roberts (2002) offered thoughts to ponder as she pointed out that a "good reason to suspect that poverty cannot completely explain the system's racial disparities are the lower chances of involvement of Latino children, who are also disproportionately poor" (p. 48). She made a strong case toward highlighting both historic and current racism found within the child welfare organization, a truth that must be examined as it relates to the disproportionate number of African American children in the foster care system. Bartholet (1999) pointed out, "Our system is clearly guilty of both under intervention and over intervention. Child protection agencies throughout the nation are overburdened and undersourced" (p. 99).

The foster care organizational culture appears to be unable at this time to address the disproportionate number of African American children in the foster care system. For example, the number of African American children in foster care in California continues to balloon out of control (Barth, 2005). Highlighting this racial imbalance further, Needell et al. (2003) found that, after controlling for such factors as age, maltreatment, and neighborhood poverty, Black children were more likely to be placed in foster care in

California than White children. Finally, Tsang (2001) pointed out that the numerically

disproportionate number of children of color in the foster care system results in their

being disadvantaged by culturally incompetent child protection services. This fact must

not be overlooked as work toward a solution for the problem is pursued.

It is essential that the foster care culture begin to reexamine not just practices but

environment and internal and systemic cultural norms that affect interactions between

CWWs, families, and children. Moreover, the foster care system must begin to develop

healthier avenues toward respect, discourse, and understanding of the dynamics of the

culture of families and children who are affected by the child welfare culture and must

communicate with them (Hill, 1999). Equally important is the necessity of understanding

the history of relationships with systems at the family and community levels (Hill, 1999;

McPhatter, 1997).

<center>Child Welfare Policy</center>

The literature is bursting with the problem of disproportionality facing African

American children in foster care systems, in part because Blacks and Native American

children are 3 times more likely to be in foster care than are White children (Hill, 2005a).

However, no problem of this magnitude exists without being driven by a history of

policies rooted in a culture that has practiced exclusion and oppression. Billingsley and

Giovannoni (1972) highlighted the exclusion when they wrote, "A number of white

agencies began to cut through the knot of racism, bureaucracy, sectarianism, and

professionalism which had for so long closed off adoption for Black babies" (p. 175). The

irony is that prior to the 1950s and 1960s, African American children were excluded from

various child welfare services and meaningful help, but now they are over-included in the

nation's child welfare agencies and often forced to accept meaningless help. Roberts (2002) stated, "The system haphazardly picks out a fraction of families to bludgeon, while it leaves untouched the conditions that are really most damaging to children" (p. 91). In addition, child welfare research has consistently found that children of color are at a disadvantage in terms of the range and quality of services provided, the type of agency they are referred to, and the efficiency with which workers handle their cases (Close, 1983; Courtney et al., 1996; Olson, 1982).

Over the past 50 years, multiple laws have been enacted regarding child welfare and the foster care system. In 1953 the National Urban League Conference launched a nationwide project on foster care and adoptions for Negro children. The focus was to extend adoption services to Black children. According to Billingsley and Giovannoni (1972),

> In all candor, it cannot be said that the primary goal of the Urban League was more adequate care for Black children. To be sure, more adequate care seemed an inevitable outcome of the attainment of integration, but the primary goal was that white institutions should cease discrimination, that they should treat Black children the same way that white children were treated. Unfortunately, the Urban League's strong insistence that the same system serving white children, operating in the same way, should serve Black children, had the ironic effect of actually strengthening the system and forestalling changes that would have made it more specific to the situation of Black children. (p. 156)

While the Urban League's goal was to help eliminate racism in the child welfare system, it did not appear to take into account that policies are driven by ethnicity, institutions, and power, not by equality of services. Therefore, African American families found themselves once again on the short end of the services. Roberts (2002) wrote, "We should not ignore, though, the considerable evidence that race and not poverty alone affects decision-making at every step of the child protection process" (p. 95).

Consequently, it appears that child welfare policy can neither order equality nor regulate or change behavior that has been built into a culture that makes decisions affecting the lives of African American children living in poverty.

Again, Billingsley and Giovannoni (1972) put the situation into vivid perspective:

Most children born into the Black community for whom adoption is the elected form of parental care must be surrendered to agents of the white society, and then members of the Black community must petition these agents to return the child to the Black community. He will be returned, if at all, on conditions laid down by the white establishment. The Black community and its members do not stand in a position of control. They are subjects. (p. 181)

As times changed, people and laws changed, and inequality, oppression, and forms of racism began to be exposed through the creation of policies that worked to provide more family friendly and sensitive services around keeping families together. One example is the 1980 Adoption Assistance and Welfare Act (P.L. 96-272). This federal legislation aimed at encouraging workers to make "reasonable efforts" to prevent unnecessary placements in foster care. It also outlined alternative permanency outcomes for children in foster care who could not or would not be reunited with their families, (Barbell & Freundilich, 2001).

With the implementation of P.L. 96-272, the number of children in foster care decreased (Tatara, 1993). The ideal of P.L. 96-272 evolved into models that were "family-centered," "family-focused," and "family-based" and that assessed the needs and welfare of children within the context of their families and their communities (Barbell & Freundilich, 2001). Unfortunately, this ideal of meaningful help toward poor families affected by the child welfare system was short-lived, and the numbers of African American children in the nation's child welfare systems quickly began to spiral out of control. As Bell (2000) pointed out, "Scrutiny has become useless as a means of

combating continuing racial discrimination and is now a tool for undoing modest efforts to counteract that discrimination" (p. 145).

The next major policy affecting the lives of families and children was the Adoption and Safe Families Act (ASFA) enacted by Congress in 1997 to amend the 1980 Adoption Assistance and Welfare Act. This law did not produce the wholesome and caring benevolence it was originally enacted to produce. In fact, ASFA's implementation created a large and growing group of children in foster care who are waiting to be adopted (Barbell & Freundilich, 2001). ASFA was constructed to combat the growing population of children languishing in foster care, but it seemed to be more punitive, victimizing children and parents more instead of developing and enhancing supportive, in-home stabilizing services to children and families. Roberts (2002) pointed out,

> ASFA threatens to permanently separate children from families, families that might have been preserved with the right incentives, adequate state resources, or creative custody arrangements. Family preservation efforts often fail because they are inadequate: children are returned to troubled homes without focusing on the right problems and without providing the level or continuity of services required to solve them. (p. 113)

ASFA emphasized permanency by moving toward adoption within 3 months if parent(s) were not cooperative and compliant with the reunification requirements of the case plan, and ASFA called for termination of parental rights after the first 6 months should the parent(s) have made only minimum efforts toward compliance. Bartholet (1999) suggested that "many children languishing in foster care could be living safely at home if only support services were provided to their families" (p. 42). The out-of-home care system was geared toward keeping children safe by temporarily removing them from their home, not having them languish in the foster care system. Roberts (2002) added, "I believe that the main reason for preferring extinction of parental ties in foster care is

society's depreciation of the relationship between poor parents and their children,

especially those who are Black" (p. 20). Moreover, the federal government spends about

$8 billion annually on child welfare services. However, only about $1 billion is spent on

family preservation or reunification services (USGAO, 2007). ASFA created a new

direction as well as a blatant disparity in the direction of spending, consequently leading

to a disproportionate number of African American children languishing in foster care

systems across the nation.

The philosophy of the system and the culture of child welfare toward the African

American family and child have been plagued with punitive policies, blatant racism, and

transparent biases. B. M. Katz (1986) pointed out that states maneuvered to keep African

Americans in poverty and further penalize the African American child:

> New state policies drafted after the passage of federal Aid to Dependent Children
> in 1935 continued the limitation of aid to "suitable homes" that had been a feature
> of early mothers' pension laws. Despite pressure from the Social Security Board
> and Bureau of Public Assistance, some states, especially in the South,
> implemented tougher "suitable home" regulations to deny aid to nonwhites and
> children born out-of-wedlock, who had become targets to an increasingly virulent
> anti welfare backlash in the late 1940's. (p. 261)

Social welfare policies that would have assisted and supported the health and stability of

the poor and the African American family and child have a history of exclusion while

simultaneously causing over-inclusion, i.e., disproportionality. As Taylor (1981) pointed

out,

> At each step of the way conservatives worked against any liberalization of the
> welfare laws, including those reforms which would have increased aid to
> children. Even though it had been demonstrated that AFDC reduced the number
> of children in out-of-home placement by keeping them in their own homes, any
> increase in aid or services to the family had been strenuously resisted. (p. 85)

Racism and its effects on how policies are constructed and how directives are carried out have plagued the African American family. Roberts (2002) stated, "Administrators either failed to establish programs in locations with large Black populations or distributed benefits according to standards, such as suitable home tests, that disqualified Black mothers" (p. 176). Billingsley and Giovannoni (1972) made this point: "Those of us who would analyze, conceive, design, and execute child welfare programs must begin to think Black when we think of Black children" (p. 219). Policies must be written and implemented to promote family preservation, family relationships, and community decision-making.

The Multiethnic Placement Act (MEPA) of 1994 and the Interethnic Adoption Provisions (MEPA-IEP) of 1996 opened the door to multi racial adoptions and cleared a highway for African American babies to be adopted. MEPA-IEP increased the time frame for removing parental rights under the guise of creating permanence, but if there is no family or parent to adopt the child, usually an African American child, he/she is left again to languish in the child welfare system. Billingsley and Giovannoni (1972) pointed out a practice that remains detrimental to children and families: "A more serious result of the adoption agencies' color-blindness was their reluctance to place Black babies in Black families and Black communities that did not meet white, middle-class standards" (p. 77). A recent USGAO (2007) report found continued challenges:

> State officials told us that it was a challenge to recruit a racially and ethnically diverse pool of potential foster and adoptive parents, as evidenced by the fact that more than half of states are not meeting HHS performance goals for recruitment. State officials noted the shortage of willing, appropriate, and qualified parents to adopt African American children, particularly older children, and researchers also cited a lack of resources among state and local agencies and federal guidance to implement new recruiting and training initiatives. (p. 56)

ASFA and MEPA are major laws that have had a major impact on the lives of children throughout the state of California. While some would applaud the openness of trans-racial adoption, more emphasis should be placed on prevention of placement in the foster care system. As Roberts (2002) stated, "If family preservation efforts are successful, they avoid the emotional trauma of separating children from their parents" (p.134).

Policies infected with racism can be directly linked to segregation, oppression, and a disproportionate number of African American children being removed from their families. B. M. Katz (1986) shared, "No immigrant group ever lived in neighborhoods as segregated as the black ghetto" (p. 182). Racism is such a vengeful disease, and denial of its existence continues to victimize children, particularly African Americans. Black children have experienced a unique and different kind of childhood, situated exclusively within the context of formal and legitimized enslavement from the 17th century to the middle of the 19th century and within the context of ongoing marginalization, sometimes extreme and in other cases just barely perceptible, well into the 21st century (Graham & Bruce, 2006). Child welfare cannot end disproportionality on its own. Disproportionality is a byproduct of institutional racism, which cuts across all aspects of life in America. As a result, other systems that serve children, such as juvenile justice, health care, education, and advocacy, must also participate in correcting the problem (Clark, Buchanan, & Legters, 2008).

Foster Care in San Francisco

Racial disproportionality is recognized by a number of renowned researchers and government officials as a critical issue in child welfare policy and practice (Courtney &

Skyles, 2003; Derezotes et al., 2005). Disproportionality is a national problem, as the

USGAO (2007) highlighted:

> Overall, the disproportionality index nationwide for African American children is 2.26, which means that African American children were over-represented in foster care nationally in 2004 at a rate of more than twice their proportions in the U.S. child population. (p. 73)

California as a whole is faced with this tumultuous problem, but more

specifically, San Francisco's African American children are drowning in a sea of foster

care as they have consistently represented a disproportionate number of children

languishing in the system. As stated earlier, in 2000, they represented 71 % of the

children in San Francisco foster care system even though they were only 12% of the total

child population (Needell et al., 2008). The crisis has prompted researchers, states, and

governments to explore this phenomenon carefully as African American families and

children continue to be the victims of disproportionality.

Empirical evidence shows the history of the problem of disproportionality in San

Francisco. In 2002, African American children made up 11% of the child population in

San Francisco, yet they constituted 72% of the children in foster care. Moreover, in 2004,

there were 2,135 children in the San Francisco foster care system; of those children,

1,502 were African American, which means that 70% of the children in foster care in

2004 were African American. The problem does not get any better, as research showed

that in 2005, there were 1,941 children in the San Francisco foster care system, and 1,359

were African American; thus, African American children made up only 10% of the child

population in San Francisco but constituted 70% of the children in foster care (Needell et

al., 2008). Clearly, the problem of disproportionality is overwhelming in San Francisco.

While the statistics reflect a serious crisis in San Francisco's foster care system,

the problem becomes even more disheartening in view of the fact that African American

families are being forced to move out of San Francisco. Fulbright (2008) pointed out,

> San Francisco's black population has dropped faster than that of any other large
> U.S. city. It went from 13.4 percent in 1970 to an estimated 6.5 percent in 2005,
> according to the census. Nationally, African Americans make up 12.1 percent of
> the population. Much of the blame has been placed on the Redevelopment
> Agency, which intentionally drove black families and businesses from the
> Fillmore district in the 1960s and 1970s. (p. 15)

Despite this trend, disproportionality in the San Francisco foster care system remains

constant, even with African American families being driven out of San Francisco. For

example, in 2007, even though African American children made up 9% of the child

population in San Francisco, they made up 66% percent of the children languishing in

foster care (Needell et al., 2008). The foster care statistics in San Francisco reveal a

continuing crisis with no existing solution.

In addition, the majority of children in the San Francisco foster care system come

from poverty stricken neighborhoods. City-wide, the number of African American

children has declined 45% over the last decade. However, African Americans still

comprise 65% of the children in foster care (San Francisco Department of Human

Services [SFDHS], 2003). Research reveals that African American families and children,

especially those who are poor, are victimized by policies. Derezotes et al. (2005) found

the following:

> Once children come to the attention of the child welfare system, public policy
> mandates that "reasonable efforts" be made to prevent the placement of children
> into foster care. Numerous studies over the years have identified race as
> predictive of the decision to place. (p. 15)

This adds to the problem of inclusion in disproportionality and exclusion from the decisions that determined whether or not an African American child enters the "foster care drift" (Smith, 2003, p. 966).

Ethnicity should not be the criterion for a parent's child becoming part of a distressing statistic such as disproportionality, nor should living in poverty be an avenue leading African American children into the foster care system. Pelton (1989) found that the major determinant of children's removal from their parents' custody was not the severity of child maltreatment but unstable sources of parental income. However, researchers have been more successful at documenting the prevalence of racial disparities in child welfare processes and services than in explaining why these inequities are occurring (Hill, 2005). Studies confirm the problem of racial disparities in the child welfare system, but a solution for change remains elusive as referrals continue to bring African American children into the foster care system and the national and city tempest of disproportionality continues. According to Billingsley and Giovannoni (1972),

> The hard realities faced by these children must be attacked at their source not the families or the communities, but the larger society in which the children live. Our present national policies and institutions were designed by white people to meet white needs and are therefore infested with the forces of racism, bureaucratic dysfunction, and professional misconception, as well as a generous portion of personal and cultural avarice and greed. Children cannot change this situation; it is the situation itself which must be changed. (p. 247-248)

Ards (1992) argued that Black communities had lower rates of child maltreatment than White communities once such factors as income level, unemployment rates, and urban or rural status were statistically controlled. On the other hand, Roberts (2002) pointed out that "some mothers hold off taking their children to the doctor for accidental injuries for fear they will be reported to child protective services" (p. 75). Bent-Goodley (2003) helped to focus attention on what she contends are the primary problems: poverty

and poverty-related challenges, structural inequality, and racially biased decision-making, all of which have contributed to the disproportionate representation of children of color in child welfare.

"Redesigning" is a new concept in the state of California's child welfare arena, particularly in San Francisco. After a 3-year effort to redesign California's child welfare services, a published comprehensive document in the form of three reports designed to change the way child welfare is guided in the state was developed. The redesigning effort of the California Department of Social Services (CDSS) was predicated on a long-term strategic plan that sets in motion a series of actions across the state to bring the new vision of child welfare services to every county and to examine what works and what needs improvement (Child Welfare Services Stakeholders Group [CWSSG], 2003). However, undoing decades of policies, systems, and a lack of cultural competence will take more than "redesign" or reorganization. According to the USGAO (2007), "Beyond cultural understanding, caseworkers need to understand the challenges of living with economic disadvantages so that they can work effectively with their clients" (p. 36).

As current San Francisco child welfare services begin to implement redesign practices, the hope is to lower the numbers of African American children languishing in the system, especially since they exit foster care at lower rates than other ethnic children (Needell et al., 2003). Despite efforts at redesigning the system, study after study details the need for more exploratory research to be embarked upon in California's cities and counties. The USGAO (2007) noted,

> Child welfare officials in most of the states we visited used their data to show that as a child moved through the child welfare process from having a case reported, then investigated, then being removed from the home, disproportionality increased at each decision point. (p. 44)

Again, research is needed to discover methods and strategies to address the problem of disproportionality and stem the increase of African American children languishing in California's foster care system, specifically in San Francisco.

Summary

Disproportionality has a long history in the United States, particularly among African American children, and finding means of effectively addressing the problem continues to challenge San Francisco. The nationwide disparate impact of child welfare practices and policies on African American children and families and the state-level impact on other communities of color reflect race-based and culture-based factors that cause interventions to last longer, families to be separated more frequently, and reunification to occur less often for these children and families than for Whites (Morton, 1999).

Research indicates that African American children remain in foster care longer, receive fewer services, are less likely to have services plans, and visit with their parents less often (Stehno, 1990). For too many children, foster care is not the temporary state it was intended to be. Rather, children remain in foster care for years at a time, a phenomenon labeled "foster care drift" (Smith, 2003, p. 966). In addition, Courtney et al. (1996) pointed out that race and ethnicity remain central issues in child welfare and that inequity based on racial and cultural factors continues to characterize services and outcomes.

The ASFA, enacted in 1997, was intended to alleviate the problems of children languishing in the foster care system and of disproportionality. Instead, the size of the overall foster care caseload remained about the same during this time period, and the proportion of the foster care caseload comprised of children legally eligible for adoption increased as did the absolute number of foster children (Smith, 2003). The heartbreak of ASFA was that it created more legal orphans than adoptions. ASFA's implementation has created a large and growing group of children in foster care who are waiting to be adopted (Barbell & Freundilich, 2001). While ASFA was intended to move children into permanency, it added to the foster care drift (Bartholet, 1999).

Disproportionality remains a problem in San Francisco that must be addressed with cultural competence and discourse that look to promote equality, transformation, and change. CRT helps move the dialogue from accusatory and/or excusatory toward development of policies that address disproportionality and include African American parents and children in decision making, thus moving toward trust and mutual ends. As Wilkinson and Kitzinger (1995) put it, "Through written language and spoken words, we actively construct our experience" (p. 35).

CHAPTER III

Methodology

Restatement of Purpose

This participatory study explored the stories and narratives of the respondents to address the problem of disproportionality of the African American child in the foster care system. This study examined, through the lenses of child welfare worker (CWW), community based case workers (CBCW), and parents and, the services and resources that are most helpful. Rich and descriptive data from interviews with CWW, CBCW, and parents assisted in answering the research questions and provided a healthy descriptive understanding of the problem as it relates to the disproportionate number of African American children in the San Francisco child welfare system.

Research Design

The participatory research examined the factors and issues identified by child welfare workers, community based case workers and parents contributing to the disproportionate number of African American children in the foster care system. In addition, this participatory research examined what services participants found to be supportive by child welfare workers; community based case workers and parents.

This participatory research consisted of two interviews with three child welfare workers in San Francisco and three communities based case workers in San Francisco. And with three parents who either had directly received or are directly receiving services from a child welfare worker in San Francisco. The research was guided by three open-ended questions that were asked of all participants.

According to Patton (2002), "The open-ended responses permit one to understand the world as seen by the respondents" (p. 20). In addition, to listening to the participants' responses to the interview questions, the researcher listened and gathered a healthier understanding of the foster care system through the lens and perspective of those intimately and directly involved. Bogan. R. & Biklen. S. (2003) pointed out "Good interviews produce rich data filled with words that reveal the respondents' perspectives." (p. 96). The respondents provided vivid heart felt data which pulled back the curtains allowing us to see the intimate perspective of those involved.

Population

The researchers' population consisted of child welfare workers; community based case workers and parents. The researcher arranged and conducted separate interviews with each of the three child welfare workers, community based case workers and parents.

The child welfare workers and the community-based agencies participants all worked in low income areas, and had experience in these communities and in providing services and case management for families and children within low income areas located in San Francisco. Because San Francisco has a child welfare out-station office located in a low income area where the majority of children constituting the disproportionate number of African American children in the foster care system come from, obtaining participants was not a problem.

Data Collection

The researcher conducted private interviews with each child welfare worker and community based case worker in a private room at an out station facility where they worked. The interviews followed semi-structured open-ended questions on values,

training and influences related to decision making, what services were most helpful in working with parents, and gaps in the systems.

The researcher conducted private interviews with each parent. One interview took place at the child welfare agency where the parent participated in a support group. The other took place in a class room at the participant's local church. While another took place over the phone as the participant was in a women's only transitional house with her children. The interviews followed semi-structured open-ended questions permitting interviewees to open-up and share their stories. All names used in this study have been changed to preserve the anonymity of interviewees.

Each interview began with a series of descriptive questions as shared in chapter four where I provide a more detailed description of participants. Each interview lasted between 50-60 minutes. They were recorded, transcribed and analyzed to provide worth and clarity in factors contributing to the problem of disproportionality in San Francisco. In addition, the transcriptions improved the researchers understanding of how imperative narrative was to building and crossing the bridge toward addressing the issues surrounding disproportionality.

<center>Data Analysis</center>

The data analysis for this study involved extensive review of literature, analyzing field notes and transcripts. Creswell (2003) stated that analysis "is an ongoing process involving continual reflection about the data, asking analytic questions, and writing memos throughout the study. It is not sharply divided from the other activities in the process, such as collecting data or formulating research questions" (p. 190).

The researcher focused on emerging themes, claims and ideas expressed by the participants. For example, as the respondents shared their narratives on current practices, opposed to past practices. This helped the researcher connect the child welfare worker to the child welfare organizational culture. And the community base case workers repeated themes reflected on how single women of color, primarily African American women, more often than not are stigmatized and victimized by not only being female and poor, but by being African American. Furthermore, the parents provided rich descriptions of feelings and experiences of oppression, subordination and racial biases in decision making that affected their and their children's lives. Habermas (1984), stated, "Language is a means of communication which serves mutual understanding, whereas actors, in coming to an understanding with one another so as to coordinate their actions, pursue their particular aims" (p. xi).

The analysis and the descriptive narratives help to unfold how macro and micro level decisions, practices and strategies influences disproportionality and how professionals and parents can work more effectively together.

The researcher sought to answer the following:

1) What factors, as identified by each participant, are contributing to the disproportionate number of African-American children in the San Francisco foster care system?

2) What issues need to be addressed in reducing the number of African American children being placed in the San Francisco Foster Care System?

3) What insular (local) services provided the best resources to children and families?

The interview questions used to answer the research questions are as follows:

1. When working with a parent, what environmental, system values, training, or culture influences your decisions?

1a**.** When working with a child welfare worker or community based case worker, what environmental, system values, training, or culture influences your decisions?

2. What service did you find most useful?

3. What have you identify as gaps in the system/services?

Protection of Human Subjects

The request for permission to conduct research was submitted to the Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects of the University of San Francisco. And the Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects of the University of San Francisco did approved the request and give permission to proceed with the research project. A copy of the approval letter can be found in Appendix A, and a copy is in the School of Education Dean's office.

Background of the Researcher

My passion for this study on disproportionality came from over 20 years of working with families and children in the bay area. I worked seven years in a residential facility, where I provided counseling, guidance and support for families and children experiencing difficulties emotionally, physically and economically. In addition, I worked three years in a clinical settings, and ten years for San Francisco's City and County's Child Welfare System. I had the privilege of working with parents to facility reunification

with their children, and with children to find safe and homes where they could thrive and blossom.

During my history of working with families and children I repeatedly observed the escalating number of African American children in the foster care system. Upon emancipation from the foster care system, these children were transitioning into state prisons, homeless shelters, and drug rehabilitation facilities. As a result, my passion for children and families has increased, and my goal is to try and identify the main factors and help in developing a solution to this national problem of disproportionality.

CHAPTER IV

Findings

Introduction

This study examined the issues that child welfare workers, community based case workers and parents felt contributed to the disproportionate number of African American children in the San Francisco County foster care system. Additionally, the findings and data analysis from this study, in the form of narratives, will be presented.

The study takes place in San Francisco County, a small urban area within the state of California that continues to struggle with the disproportionate number of African American children in its foster care system. This problem is alarming both to professionals in the child welfare community and to the community agencies that attempt to provide support and help to these families and children. Consequently, it is imperative that research effectively addresses changes in the decisions that have led to the disproportionate number of African American children in the San Francisco child welfare system.

The aims of this study were to examine the factors contributing to disproportionality in San Francisco, and to examine recommendations for reducing disproportionality. The study explored the narratives of those directly involved with removing children and delivering services to parents. In addition, the study reviewed at the narratives of the parents who are intimately affected by disproportionality. Through

the stories of those making decisions and affected by the decisions, this study sought to explore effective ways to change the course of negative decisions while providing practical ways to address and reduce the disproportionate number of African American children in the foster care system.

Profile of Participants

Child Welfare Workers

Through the course of this study, three child welfare workers—Nathan, Sarah, and Lydia—provided narratives chronicling their experiences as professionals in the foster care system. Nathan, an Asian male in his mid 30's, has worked for the Department of Human Services for over 3 years and has worked in a community providing services to predominantly African American families and children. This community unit is located in the heart of a community where the majority of removals have taken place. He has extensive dealings with African American families and vast knowledge of community services.

Sarah is an Asian female in her early 40's who worked in a different county prior to coming to San Francisco County as child welfare. In her previous job, Sarah worked within a predominantly White environment with predominantly White clients. While she had completed removals in the past, and was familiar with referring clients to services; working in the heart of a predominantly African American community was different. Sarah, who is in the heart of the African American community where the majority of referrals for investigation come from, experienced a new challenge.

An African American female in her late 20's, Lydia has worked for the Department of Human services for 3 years. Lydia's narrative provided some startling

insights because she revealed during the interview process that she was once in foster care. After being emancipated from foster care, she purposefully pursued a career in social work. Lydia relishes the opportunity to work in the heart of the African American community from which the majority of referrals come and seems to welcome the opportunity to help families and children in need. All of the interviewed child welfare workers took pleasure in the opportunity to help, but Lydia's passion was verbally and emotionally apparent.

Community Based Case Managers

Three Community based case workers were interviewed. Mary is an African American female in her early 40s and is a case manager who works in the heart of the African American community. Mary has worked as a professional counselor and case manager for over 3 years and provided a heartfelt narrative about how important it is to her to help parents develop techniques to deal with their anger and to reach them so that their frustration with the system and/or the CWW does not hinder them in seeing their children and/or having their children returned to them.

Mark, an African American male in his late 30s, has worked as a community liaison and case manager for over 3 years. Mark was very upfront in his narrative and emphasized the importance of professionals meeting people's immediate needs first.

An African American female in her mid 30s, Wendy was very reserved and articulate. She has worked as a counselor and case manager for over 3 years and appeared to have a healthy insight into the differences in how services are delivered, how these services are too shallow for people in deep need, and how they are too narrow for people in need of a broader array of services to meet their family's immediate needs.

Parents

Three parents with firsthand experience dealing with the foster care system were interviewed. Rebecca is an African American female in her early 30s and is a single mother of four girls and one boy. Rebecca was very open about her past substance abuse and accompanying behavior. Currently attending a junior college, she is working on her associate's degree in nursing. Rebecca appears to be a very determined mother who is committed to accomplishing her future goals.

Ruth, an African American female, is in her mid 40s. She is the mother of one son who remains in her custody. Ruth is very open about her addictions and the tragedy and trials that she went through during her addiction years. She has a wide range of experiences, and her wisdom comes through in her story. She has a wonderful ability to reach other women in recovery from substance abuse, particularly those who have children in the foster care system or who are currently dealing with child welfare workers. She approaches helping these women from a strength perspective. Rather than being bitter or venomous, she is strong, consistent, and honest as she reaches out to support, mentor, and help these mothers who are not only in recovery but currently involved with the child welfare system.

Martha, a Hispanic female is in her late 30s and is the mother of two boys and one girl who remain in her custody. Martha acknowledged that she was a functioning addict whose habit and lies became too much to hide. Her experience with the child welfare system was horrendous yet educational and empowering. She enjoys advocating for mothers who are in the system, and she likes to speak to mothers about recovery, reality, and the signs of relapse.

This chapter contains the narratives of those directly and intimately involved in making "high stakes" decisions that affect children, families, and communities and the narratives of the parents who have been affected by these decisions. The narratives provide a lens through which to examine the ways that some decisions have negatively impacted primarily single women of color and African American families and children. The research points to the fact that previous child welfare organizational practices supported by managerial staff played a significant role in the disproportionate number of African American children in the foster care system. According to Roberts (2002),

> Both aspects of the child welfare system's racial disparity, the state's intrusion in families and its racial bias are essential to explaining its injustice. First, the overrepresentation of Black children in the child welfare system, especially foster care, represents massive state supervision and dissolution of families. Second, this interference with families helps to maintain the disadvantaged status of Black people in the United States. Not only does the child welfare system inflict general harms disproportionately on Black families but it also inflicts a particular harm, a racial harm, on Black people as a group. (p. 225)

Roberts' points regarding racial bias, state intrusion, and dissolution of African American families were recurring themes throughout the interviews conducted with participants in this study. Moreover, throughout the narratives, the child welfare workers continually echoed that the organizational culture and management swings in the child welfare system were major contributing factors in influencing their decisions to remove or not to remove children from their parents.

Research Question One

Child Welfare Workers

What factors identified by child welfare workers are contributing to the disproportionate number of African-American children being placed in the San Francisco foster care system?

Again, it is important to keep in mind that decision making in child welfare is "high stakes", as decisions made by child welfare workers may contribute to any number of societal problems. For example, removing a child contributes to disproportionality and has the propensity to add to the high school drop out rate, as most foster children do not graduate from high school. In addition, these decisions may have added to the homeless population as a majority of foster children who leave foster care end up homeless. Moreover, child welfare workers decisions could lead to drug addiction or prison, as a number of emancipated foster children end up in drug rehabilitation or overcrowded prisons.

Interview Question One

When working with a parent, what environmental and/or system values, training, or culture influences your decision/s?

The narratives of the child welfare workers told stories of three factors contributing to disproportionality: (a) organizational culture, (b) poverty and communication, and (c) services that provide consistent feedback. Conveyed numerous times in the narratives was the fact that child welfare workers were cognizant of past economic, racial, and organizational biases in practices toward African American families, especially those living in poverty. These findings provide valuable insight toward identifying factors which have historically contributed to the disproportionate number of African American children in the child welfare system.

Organizational culture, training, and managerial swings. Interview participants shared that they felt the pendulum of organizational culture had swung over to the other side. In other words, their stories expressed that, because of the overwhelming number of

African American children in the child welfare system, they were being pressured *not* to remove African American children from the home. Sarah stated, "Um, well, now, I mean, as you well know, child welfare practice has swung over to the other end of *not removing* unless you know the situation is grave and there is imminent danger, you know, that we see" (Timms, 2008, p.10).

The narratives repeatedly revealed that until disproportionality became an nationally alarming problem, the organizational culture and practices seemed to err heavily on separating African American children from their parents, homes, and communities and placing them in a foster care system where they languished until emancipation. The USGAO (2007) reported that African American children across the nation were more than twice as likely to enter foster care compared to White children. Since this report, policies and practices within child welfare agencies have been overhauled, affecting the culture and the practices of the child welfare worker. Nathan pointed out, "Well, we're trained now to leave the kid, you know, unless he's in imminent danger, I mean, you know, um, what you going do?" (Timms 2008, p. 21)

The narratives communicated a history of organizational decisions, culture, and practices that have perpetuated racial inequality, and contributed to the disproportionate number of African American children in the foster care system. Nathan's narrative expressed a tone of frustration. He conveyed a feeling of having his decisions influenced by policy swings and training, emphasizing that child welfare workers are now to "leave the kid." This abrupt change in policies begs the question, why not "leave the kid" before? The problem of disproportionality should not dictate equality, impartiality and fairness should drive respect for all children and families. Acknowledged, earlier in 2000,

children of color in California comprised 35% of the children in foster care while they only constituted 7% of the total child population in California (Needell et al., 2008). Least we forget, children and families lives are at risk.

This pattern of inequitable treatment of African American children left languishing in a system points to disparities at best and racial bias at worst, particularly as some of the tragedies of foster care continue. As stated earlier, foster children who age out of the system often end up homeless, incarcerated, and/or unemployed. In fact, 33% of foster children who age out experience homelessness 12-18 months after leaving the system, and 3 of 10 of the nation's homeless are former foster children. Furthermore, 27% of males and 10% of females who were once foster children have been incarcerated, and 80 % of prison inmates have been through the foster care system. Finally, 51% of foster children become unemployed, 37% do not finish high school, and only 2% obtain a bachelor's degree or higher (AFCARS, 2003).

Lydia, a younger child welfare worker, described the organizational culture as one looking to hold child welfare workers accountable for the numbers of African American children coming into the child welfare system. Lydia pointed out:

> Disproportionality, the numbers are constantly thrown in my face at every training that we've gone too, so I think the Department, um, has definitely made it a point to drill down that this is definitely an issue that everyone should be concerned [about]. (Timms, 2008, p. 17)

Indeed, people are concerned locally and nationally as reflected by USGAO (2007) report and interest in the problem.

The themes that continue to stand out in this picture are that organizational culture swings have forced changes in practices and decisions made by child welfare workers. The narratives drive home the fact that a contributing factor in the disproportionate

number of African American children in the foster care system was culture, practices, and

decisions geared toward removal. Now, those practices have been called into question,

driving workers toward *not* removing children from their homes and being cognizant of

the disproportionate numbers of African American children in the foster care system.

Further discussion validated that past practices have lead to decisions contributing

to disproportionality of the African American child in the foster care system. For

example, Sarah stated:

> Okay, like, this is the difference. Um, now we're told or we're trained if the
> parents did not intentionally hurt the child, like the parent says "I just lost it, I'm
> well aware you shouldn't be hitting Tommy, but you know, he was disrespectful
> he didn't do this, you know, and mouth off and gave me the finger and that was
> the last straw. He gave me the finger, so I hit him. But, you know, I am sorry. I
> really shouldn't have hit him." If it was some time ago, maybe last year, a year
> and half, we would have substantiated something like that. So the culture [is]
> shifting, the practice is shifting. Therefore, the training is reflecting that shift. So
> now we are practicing differently. (Timms, 2008, p. 11)

Nathan shared:

> We're told, you know, to assess whether the child is in imminent danger. If not,
> then we should try and provide the services as much as we could, um, to
> strengthen, you know, the family so that the risk is lowered. So then there's
> lowered risk. Then the likelihood [of] the family facing the possibility of removal
> is much less. (Timms, 2008, p. 21)

Lydia made the point that because she is relatively new to the field, her training has

always emphasized not removing children unless the situation is dire. Lydia stated,

"Whereas I see my co-workers really struggling with that, and you hear a lot of people

commenting, 'We're not removing, we're not removing'." (Timms, 2008, p.18)

These narratives helped uncover the reasons for past breakdowns in the child

welfare system, and they communicated a story of a culture that once practiced removal

with very little emphasis on communication and understanding. These past practices,

fueled by the child welfare organizational culture, have had a major impact on

disproportionality. The decisions made and the mindset of the child welfare workers, as embodied by organizational culture, has changed the lives of thousands of parents and children. As Roberts (2002) pointed out, caseworkers are instructed not to relate to parents or to be sentimental about taking their children away (p. 124).

Now that some of the contributing factors are understood, problems can begin to be addressed. These narratives help map the direction of the foster care system toward positive change, but if African American children, most vulnerable to becoming victims of disproportionality, are going to benefit from organizational change addressing disproportionality, there must be commitment to this new ideology. Child welfare systems county-wide, state-wide, and nation-wide must first find room in their organizational culture for these changes if they are going to be effectively practiced. Commitment must be accompanied by relentless, vigorous, and sometimes painful changes, both fundamental and superficial, at every level of the organization's structure and operation (Billingsley & Giovannoni, 1972, p. 179).

Research Question One

Community Based Case Managers

What factors identified by community based case workers are contributing to disproportionate number of African American children being placed in the San Francisco foster care system?

Interview Question One

When working with a parent, what environmental and/or system values training or culture influences your decisions?

Relationships. Community based case managers are vital in helping parents understand the steps to completing case plans, which often entangle poor families, particularly single mothers, in what appears to be a maze of endless requirements. As Roberts (2002) stated,

> The agency's "service plan" usually has little to do with services for the family. It is typically a list of requirements parents must fulfill in order to keep their children or get them back. Rarely are parents asked what services they need. The plan reminds me of probation orders that list requirements and restrictions judges impose on criminals. Violation of a single provision lands the offender back in jail. In the child welfare system, parents who fail to comply risk never seeing their children again. (p. 79)

The recurring theme from the interviews with community based case workers was building relationships with families and communities and helping children. The narratives provided a window into the ways in which mutual understanding increases the chances of collaboration with no one as "subordinate" or "superior," just a common goal of success. Success reflects and highlights the importance of ethnic understanding and empathy around decisions that affect a family and their children. Success is a consensus what constitutes help between the distributing services and the person receiving services, and it works to empower each person as they work together to accomplish established goals. These narratives not only provide a window to look out of but also one which can be opened to embrace the refreshing wind of building relationships by working together.

The CBCWs interviewed emphasized building relationships *with* families and communities instead of building cases *against* them. Consequently, this emphasis has led to healthy relationships in families that have opened the doors of communication, understanding, and meaningful movement toward child welfare case plan completion. CBCWs' understanding of the importance of building relationships with families and

communities as well as understanding the cultural dynamics affecting African American

families are imperative in effectively addressing disproportionality. Mark pointed out:

> It's very important to build relationships. You hear it about it all the time about building relationship, but that's what we take our time to do: build a relationship with a person and try and ensure them that we are trying to keep them with their children. Here there are no rules in helping people and families. We are that community piece to stop kids from going into the system. (Timms, 2008, p. 1)

Mary, shared:

> Their need for help, basically that's the whole thing: their needs, their need for help. I get all kinds of people from all walks of life, basically anyone who has children or grandchildren, and so basically, it's their need for help. That's where I start. What do you need? What can we do? How can we do it? (Timms, 2008, p. 5)

Furthermore, Wendy highlighted:

> I just want to help the families that come into our agency 'cuz it's about the whole unit. It's about what the family needs, to give them the tools to work together as a family, so whatever the family looks like . . . whatever to keep their family together, to keep their family safe, to keep their family out of harm's way, to keep this child going to school, whatever. (Timms, 2008, p. 9)

These narratives reflected a theme that is altogether different from their child

welfare workers counterparts: people determine what constitutes help and what

constitutes need. No rules or training can dictate how to help. The appropriate methods

must be established through communicating and building relationships.

What emerged from the stories of the these community based case workers as a

contributing factor to disproportionality among African American children was the

absence of building relationships with the families that were losing their children and the

communities that were losing children who could one day become future leader's. The

narratives highlighted that, without willingness to communicate with families and

communities, disproportionality will continue. The foster care system must cultivate

communication and mutual understanding so that relationships can be built with families and within communities.

Community based case workers talked about providing help to families. It is imperative to note that their narratives did not address what the *agency* perceived as help but what the *family* perceived as help: the definition of *help* from the people at the end of their rope, the only ones who can truly identify the help needed and how that help could enhance their families, enhance their lives, and help their child.

In addition, one must not ignore how vital decision making is as it has a direct impact on African American families, their children, and their lives. Specifically, child welfare workers perceive maintaining family (i.e., "leaving the kid") as a training and policy mandate, while CBCWs seek to engage and meet the family at the point of hurt and pain, with a goal of providing whatever help is needed to strengthen the family, keep them together, and keep their children in their school.

In addition to African American children being disproportionately represented in the foster care system, the transition to foster care can negatively impact their education, which Wendy noted in her interview. As Miriam Krinsky (2003) pointed out, "The states population of foster-care children today is larger than the combined enrollment of our three largest universities" (p. B,25); moreover, Conger & Finkelstein (2003) expounded, "Foster children may also be more likely to transfer schools and experience longer delays during these transfers than their non-foster peers" (p. 97). Consequently, help should be comprehensive, and in an organizational culture geared toward help, that help must be defined by those who need help, not by organizational cultures, trainings and managerial swings.

Critical race theory assist us in viewing the narratives as a starting block in which to acknowledge the problem, and begin building relationships that will help children, and families find their voice. To challenge the silence around inequality, and include the stories of those involved with advocating change. The narratives from the CBCWs exposed the camouflage of the foster care system and again pointed out a contributing factor to the disproportionate number of African American children in the foster care system. Specifically, Mary's and Mark's narratives pointed out that permanent change is brought on by genuine help, and bona fide solutions for reducing disproportionality must be rooted in building relationships, communicating, and developing a mutual understanding of what constitutes help. Historic problems of racial bias, subordination, and the disproportionality of African American children in the foster care system cannot be addressed by pendulum swings in organizational culture based upon external pressures. The factors that have contributed to swings in practice, training, and culture will continue to contribute to disproportionality if they are not addressed collaboratively and mutually with the families and communities most affected by them.

Exploring the narratives further revealed that a lack of understanding of families living in poverty, children exposed to community dynamics brought on by poverty, and a dominant ideology have been contributing factors to disproportionality. Mark pointed out:

> Think before you remove the kids because it may be more damaging once you remove them from what they know. I mean, think: Where [are] these kids going anyway? I mean, you have to understand that most kids from the projects whatever, they used to going to funerals. This is kind of like it becomes a part of life, so this, when you looking at culture, you have to look at that and that this is a part of their life . . . If you understand that concept, then that's the place for me, like I'm saying, that's where you start work. (Timms, 2008, p. 3)

Of course, this is a sad reality of poverty; nevertheless, it is the reality of real families and children. The question becomes, should the children be removed? If so, where to? How does someone deal with children who have witnessed such violence in their community? Or does one try and provide help and hope to children where they are so that they can perhaps have a better future? To reiterate Mark's ideas, if one starts with helping and caring for a child where he or she is, then that child will help another child. Removal does not resolve a child's problem; it only exacerbates it by placing him or her in an environment that institutionalizes, subordinates, and ignores the reality of what he or she will have to overcome. Mary shared,

> Culture and classism, workers, they, they come from different places, and they don't understand, uh, they have no feelings about the parents and treat them as though they're criminals rather than somebody who needs help. And place these kids in foster homes with people who can't understand them, so they let them [children] go, and they move to another foster home. (Timms, 2008, p.6)

> According to Roberts (2002),

> The racial disparity in the criminal justice and child welfare systems is no coincidence. These institutions serve a similar social function. Both use blame and punishment to address the problems of the populations under their control. The explosions in both the prison and foster care populations during the 1980's occurred at a time of rising income inequality. Expanding the foster care and penal systems are substitutes for implementing social policies that address poverty and racial inequality. (p. 206)

Wendy lamented,

> It's totally unacceptable how they [the child welfare system] treat poor families, they're, I mean, I have to say it: racist. They take a child from their parent and put them way out in Vallejo or Fairfield. That's not right . . . You're gentrifying the city again. Why would I want to take you out of where you have been brought up and move you out the city? (Timms, 2008, p. 8)

According to Billingsley and Giovannoni (1972), employees of the child welfare system see themselves in business to serve "'disadvantaged,' 'hard-to-place,' 'problem,' and 'unfortunate' children who are left out of the more favored placement . . ." (p. 227).

The theme of building relationships in order to address the needs of the family and children being served cannot be discounted as trivial, particularly as a lack of relationships is a contributing factor to disproportionality. Wendy points out that children's' lives are not a business. Children's lives are not to be brought and sold i.e. transferred from one county to other. Her narrative illuminated the essential importance that placement away from family and community is detrimental and is another form of abuse that can destroy a child. As a result, it would appear, without communication, mutual understanding and respect, these types of abuses may continue.

The CBCWs' narratives expressed the detrimental effects of removing children from their families. Mark and Mary both expressed concern about the removal of children from their parents and homes and their placement with people who have no understanding of what they have gone through, "people who can't understand them," as Mary phrased it. Wendy lamented, "They take a child from their parent and put them way out in Vallejo or Fairfield that's not right," (Timms, 2008, P. 8). These discourses constructed images of African American children being displaced by a system that has either ignored or refused to understand the significance of building relationships and mutual understanding. As Roberts (2002) stated,

> Family integrity is crucial to group welfare because of the role parents and other relatives play in transmitting survival skills, values, and self-esteem to the next generation. Growing up in a family teaches children how to form healthy relationships with others in their immediate community and in the broader society. Families provide a base of support from which neighbors can join together to accomplish communal projects. (p. 237)

Research Question One

Parents

What factors identified by parents are contributing to the disproportionate number of African American children being placed in the San Francisco foster care system?

Interview Question One

When working with a child welfare worker or community based case worker, what environmental and/or system values, training, or culture influences your decisions?

To extend our understanding of the problem of disproportionality, it was important to include the narratives of the parents most affected by the decisions of child welfare workers and the child welfare system. These parents are affected by the services and support of the CBCWs and the agencies for which they work because these agencies have been funded to provide services and support to parents and families. Moreover, it is vital that we hear the stories, as they are told through tears and anger, guilt and pain, of those who have experienced firsthand racial biases, social injustices, and systemic values that have led to the phenomenon of disproportionality.

Our nation has seen an overwhelming number of African American children enter the foster care system over the last 30 years, contributing greatly to disproportionality, and research is replete with the disparities that the child welfare system and foster care have caused. Consequently, these narratives enhance the research and provide stories that reflect the essence of parents who have been directly involved with the people and the system with the power to make decisions that have led to the removal of their children. These narratives also reflect the hard work these parents have done toward reunifying with their children.

Respect off the top. Rebecca is a mother who expressed her story through passion that exemplified the fortitude she had during her experience with the foster care system. She provided insight that reveals some of the contributing factors to disproportionality from the perspective of a single mother who happens to be African American. She is a mother who wants to be respected and who wants to be heard, a mother who wants her decisions respected and who wants to be treated like a person, not a prisoner. She wants her opinions and suggestions valued, not belittled. She described for us a mother who was open to help, but not to be made to feel helpless. She is a woman who demands to be looked on as human instead of viewed as a subordinate to the decision makers/child welfare worker. A healthy working relationship starts with respect. Rebecca stated:

> Um, the way the person speaks, if I feel comfortable, not so much with the environment but with the person because this is a person I will be working with, so, um, off the top, we have to have respect for one another. I don't need the case manager or the social worker feeling like they can tell me what to do or even run my life. I want to be able to tell them what I have already been through and what has worked and what has not worked for me. And maybe we can come up with a plan . . . But the main thing for me is just respect—open communication. (Timms, 2008, p. 27)

Rebecca's narrative described that mothers want to be treated not as subordinates but with dignity, not as the property of the state but with respect. Communication and respect are not treating the person on the other side of the table as an empty seat on which to pile requirements and demands or as just another case going through the system but with civility. Mothers want to be treated with respect, as human beings with human rights. Rebecca continued:

> If the worker is talking at me and not talking with me, if the worker keeps bringing up the past and throwing it in my face, they keep saying, "You did this and you did that," but they're not trying to help me move forward . . . trying to belittle me in a professional way, um, they're not working with me . . .Basically, the CPS worker writes out a case plan, what they feel I should do, but they have

not included me, so when I come to see them I see ABCD, but it's like where do my feelings come in? Why I wasn't able to input on this if this is what I have to do to better my life to get my kids back? Why is it that you are the only one that gets to make the decision? Okay, yes, I got here because of my behavior. I may have been on drugs. I may have been in domestic violence. Whatever the case may be, but I'm in your office and need your help. But that does not mean that it's okay for you to try and run my life because I may be addicted or domestic violence survivor, but don't put a label on me [voice changes as she fights back tears] because you see a whole bunch of me's everyday. Don't just have tunnel vision when it comes to me or any other recovering addict or any other domestic violence survivor. I don't think that's okay. (Timms, 2008, p. 28)

Rebecca's narrative revealed the pain of an African American woman experiencing racial bias and subordination through a discourse and organizational culture that have rationalized and normalized procedures that have contributed to the disproportionate number of African American children in the San Francisco foster care system. Barth, (2005), Billingsley & Giovannoni (1972), Hill (2003), and Roberts (2002) are just a few of the researchers who have continuously pointed to the disparities, injustices, and subordination within the foster care system. But who better to illumine the challenges that systemic racial injustice brings to children and families than a mother who has experienced the various measures of inequality, racist biases, and subordination and has overcome them?

Not looking at the addict. Ruth shared her experience with prejudice and racial biases that attempted to characterize her as just another addict, another bad welfare mother. These images and perceptions of welfare mothers have predictable adverse effects on women of color and African American mothers, families, and children, as seen in the disproportionate number of African American children in the foster care system. As the findings Sarah, Lydia and Nathan shared, removals of the African American child from the home were part of the culture prior to a swing, "not to remove" in the

organizational culture and its training practices. The system's defective philosophy has

not been fixed, only altered, and if the culture does not change to include and cultivate

respect for parents, the poisoned practices of the past will resurface. Ruth pointed out:

> Well, I have felt that because of my past and because of the situation of my case that I was being looked at. That if I did anything, you know [any missed appointments], I mean, I know what I did [using drugs] was bad, right. I feel like when I deal with CPS or a case manager and what they read on the paper until they get to know me. Their actions, like, how they act toward me is, like, um, just [shakes her head]. It's like the questions they shoot toward me. I get the assumption that, um, like they're wondering if I being mean to my child, if I have been beating my child, if I been really taking care of my child, and then they start asking my son certain questions that really inappropriate. That's when I say, okay, I'm being looked at, and that makes me feel uncomfortable. And then I have to speak and tell them. You know, some of the things on that paper have been blown way out of portion. I can sit and admit to what I did, and I can tell my truth because today I'm facing what I did. But don't sit there, you know, basically, I feel, degrading me. Because you're not talking to that paper. You're talking to the person in front of you, the one sitting in your office right now, and if I was the person on that paper, I would not be here right now. (Timms, 2008, p. 33)

Ruth's narrative allowed a look at the ways in which racial biases hamper, if not

stop altogether, communication that can lead to building healthy relationships and

supporting families and children. Ruth shared that no one can help the person in front of

him or her by reading a piece of paper. To connect with the person being helped and to

understand what help looks like, one must engage the person, communicate, and avail

himself or herself to the other's story in order to transition from racial bias to human

interaction and understanding. The decisions that affect a mother's life and her child's

life should not hang on the balance of constructed words on a piece of paper. Instead,

meaningful dialogue and communication must take place before a decision is made that

might contribute to the disproportionate number of children in the foster care system.

Again, through these mothers' narratives, this study revealed a clear image of a

contributor to the disproportionate number of African American children in the foster

care system: a dominant cultural view of mothers connected with the system that is racist and that ignores the humanity of these mothers.

Martha's narrative addressed the need for the child welfare culture to be more cognizant of how these factors contributing to disproportionality can cascade into affecting other minority cultures. The view of minority women as subordinate perpetuates racial biases and racial injustice and has a direct impact on disproportionality. The current study pointed to hidden yet dangerously prevalent systemic cultural behaviors that sabotage reunification between mother and child. Martha's passionate story is only one of hundreds as strategies and education must be explored to address the blatant destructive words poured on the victims of a color-attracted, color-biased child welfare system dominated by the disproportionality of African American children. Highlighting her hurt and need for respect. Martha stated:

> Well, the first one, the first worker, they changed after a couple of months, but she would, she was white, and the way she would make me feel, she made me feel uncomfortable. She kept telling me that my kids were going to be taken away, that she, she really didn't feel that I was going to be able to do what they were requiring me to do. She was trying to make me sign the adoption papers right there! So I requested another CPS worker, and she was Hispanic, and she really made me feel comfortable. She really gave me hope [power returns to her voice and anger begins to leave]. She gave me rights to see my kids, you know. So the second CPS gave me hope to get my kids back. She didn't see me as an addict. She saw me as whole. She gave me hope. (Timms, 2008, p. 35)

The triumph of this story is the fact that Martha has been reunified with her children and they are all doing well. The tragedy of this story is that Martha initially gave up on her children and herself based upon the first CWW's response to her as disadvantaged and plagued with deficiencies and disparities. Martha pointed out:

> I'll be honest with you. After that first worker, I relapsed for a month; I was just getting high everyday 'cause I still had that first CPS worker, and I had no hope. And once I got the Hispanic CPS worker, I was honest with her. I told her, you

know what, they're going to do random drug testing on me, and I can't do it. I
cannot leave drugs. I need help. So I voluntarily put myself in the rehabilitation
place. I had to wait for another month, and my CPS got me in out-treatment
because you don't want to risk losing your kids. I called Asian American
Recovery Place every Friday and Monday. The lady saw that I was serious . . .
and I stay in the program for 17 months before I got my kids back [crying].
(Timms, 2008, p. 36)

Martha pointed to a major contributing factor to the disproportionate number of

African American children in the foster care system: a cultural organization rooted in

racial bias, racial subordination, and a perpetuation of social injustice on poor women,

especially those of color. As Roberts (2002) pointed out, "Learning to be culturally

competent helps case-workers to deliver services more effectively to a diverse clientele

and to uncover unrecognized biases in their view of minority families" (p. 271).

<div align="center">Research Question Two</div>

Child Welfare Worker

What issues do child welfare workers recommend addressing to reduce the

number of African American children being placed in the San Francisco foster care

system?

Interview Question Three

What do you identify as gaps in the system?

In order to understand how to reduce the disproportionate number of African

American children in foster care, it is critical to identify the gaps in the system from the

perspective of those directly engaged with families and children: frontline workers who

know what bolt will fasten the bridge. For example, the bolt of communication that

connects respect with a non accusatory interaction between participants is crucial for

families and children so that participants don't fall as they cross over from systemic

oppression and departmental subordination.

Poverty and communication. Through the narratives, a theme emerged that

uncovers the road which must be traveled to effectively address reducing the numbers of

African American children in the San Francisco foster care system. First, the foster care

system must stop blaming the parent for being poor. To reduce the number of African

American children in the foster care system, the economic situation of the family should

not be dissected and scrutinized by the child welfare system. Poverty should not be the

only reason for the child welfare system to be "called in" to a home. The USGAO (2007)

reported, "Major factors affecting children's entry into foster care included African

American families' higher rates of poverty, families' difficulties in accessing support

services so that they can provide a safe home for vulnerable children and prevent their

removal, and racial bias and cultural misunderstanding among child welfare decision

makers." (p. 16)

In addition to poverty being a contributing factor in disproportionality, poverty is

often associated with single house holds, lack of resources and oppression, and these

biases lead to prejudice in decision making, racial injustice and the perpetuation of

African American families and children being oppressed as the disproportionate number

of children in foster care reveals. Communication is desperately needed if adequate and

appropriate attention is going to be given to this problem. Poverty should not be a conduit

of the child welfare system into families' lives, nor should it be a highway for children

into foster care where they suffer. African American families and children should not

continue to be victimized by where they live or their economic gap.

Sarah shared,

> I think, you know, the state or the county or the governments, you know, could work on, you know, alleviating poverty. I mean, that would help a great deal. I mean, you know, poverty could be a catalyst to so many things. If you're poor, you know. You don't have a job . . . But if people have a job, there's income coming in . . . There is less chance for us to be called in. (Timms, 2008, p.15)

Nathan added,

> Let's face it, you know, a lot of the families that have referrals come from the public housing or subsidizing housing. Unfortunately, these families tend to be minorities. And you're always going to find something with poor families. We get so many calls from this area [low income area in San Francisco], and that is why more cases [with] African Americans are substantiated. (Timms, 2008, p. 23)

Finally Lydia noted,

> Fairness and equity, being fair, how we're bringing people into the system . . . I don't think we allow parents to make mistakes. I think we penalize parents. We don't allow for them to be parents. We're so quick to go in and say, No, no, no, no, you shouldn't have done that. I feel like everybody, all parents, should have a chance to parent and not just, um, penalize the ones that are coming to our attention. (Timms, 2008, p. 20)

CRT provides a "parking space" to stop and examine the present and historical inequities and biases within the child welfare system; and the ways in which African American families have been and are victimized because of their economic disadvantages. African American families are often penalized because of the lack of available resources to help them. CRT also provides a map for empowerment, as poor families should not be persecuted for being poor, for society's flawed and unequal system of help. Poor families should not be blamed for endemic racial biases that have historical roots, both in society and in the child welfare system. According to Billingsley and Giovannoni (1972),

> Essentially the Black perspective must become meaningful to the white agencies, and the Black community must become a partner. Agencies which now devote ten percent of their resources to Black children and families must move that up to

thirty percent. At the same time, as a means and an end of this activity, they must involve the Black community as a partner in every phase of the agency. The programs must be designed by Black people who know the Black community, as a partner in every phase of the agency. The programs must be designed by Black people who know the Black community, the wider community, and the profession of caring for children. (p. 223)

Another theme that emerged from the narratives was a lack of communication

between agencies and resource providers. Sarah shared,

I think the problem, the gap, comes in when we step out too quickly. The family can say, "Well you know they [the Community-based Organization or CBO] didn't call me back," you know, after both of you made the visit . . . Mom says they didn't call; the CBO says mom didn't call. Well, I am not going to play judge and say, "You're right, and you're right." I am not an arbitrator. (Timms, 2008, p.16)

Nathan added, "Gap, it's in agency communication. A month goes by, no news until a

referral, a new one, comes in. You know, it's important to have agency exchange."

(Timms, 2008, p. 25). Lydia stated, "What I feel like some of the family resource centers

and some of the Homeless Prenatal and different things should be in different people's

work place so that everybody, all parents, can have access . . . accessing, its bridging

services. . . ." (Timms, 2008, p .20)

Examining the themes that emerged from the interviews with child welfare

workers reveals that education needs to take place throughout the child welfare system

regarding ways to effectively communicate and work with families living in poverty.

While the child welfare agency is attempting to enforce a new culture through new

practices regarding removal of children from families, the dominant ideology of privilege

still must be curtailed so that mutual respect can take place. In addition, communication

between professionals must be solidified if disproportionality is going to be reduced

within the foster care system. The USGAO (2007) reported,

To address gaps in the provision of services like substance abuse treatment and financial supports, agencies can work with one another in any of the following

ways: training staff jointly, sharing information and tracking systems, using common intake and assessment forms, coordinating case management, and placing staff from multiple agencies in the same office. (p. 39)

The child welfare workers' narratives shed light into a dark area of foster care, for their stories highlight the importance of the issues and ways in which to incorporate possible solutions to reduce the number of African American children in the foster care system. Communication, as their stories affirmed, can ultimately drive the system into eliminating racial, economic, and social biases. These narratives elucidate the historic and present problems within the child welfare system, and their recommendations for addressing poverty as well as establishing effective communication are critical to reducing the disproportionate number of African American children in the foster care system.

<div align="center">Research Question Two</div>

Community Based Case Workers

What issues do community based case workers recommend addressing to reduce the number of African American children being placed in the San Francisco foster care system?

Interview Question Three

What do you identify as gaps in the system?

In response to this question, the narratives revealed the heart of a historical shame that America has faced for years. Women, particularly single women and more specifically African American women, continue to be neglected because they are (a) female, (b) poor, and (c) African American. Interestingly enough, the narratives all began by pointing to housing and then to the lack of respect for single mothers, but as discourse

continued, the root of the problem emerged. This root, disrespect of African American women living in poverty, must be addressed in order to reduce the number of African American children in the foster care system and to put an end to racial, gender, and economic subordination. The practice of placing an unwritten label of "subordinate" and "unvalued" on poor African American mothers must stop. While the label is unwritten, the narratives pointed to a culture and a system that continue to look down on, bully, and blame these women for social injustices that they have neither created nor resemble.

Respecting African American women living in poverty.

Mark's candidly stated:

Relocating people, that's a huge gap. Like, if it is some real violence going on and the person lives in public housing, the gap is trying to relocate somebody. You know, just to another project. It, it's there. It's huge, you know. It's like you need to move somebody . . . You go to their house and see it's violence happening, and things are jumping off, and I want to move somebody, but it might take 3-4 months before they can move. (Timms, 2008, p. 2)

Mark pointed to housing, a problem that is difficult to address: providing low income housing. Making such housing available to poor African American women would reduce the number of African American children in the foster care system. Next, Mark pointed to the providing *safe* low income housing which would help reduce the number of African American children in the foster care system. He went on to share that when the police get involved; children end up in the foster care system. In sharing his story, Mark exposed the root of the problem: "Yes, they (children) might be exposed to violence. They may be exposed to a lot of things . . . but the African American woman is the one who is always punished." (Timms, 2008, p. 3). Mark further stated:

> And the other problem, I see with a whole lot of this. It's just 'cause it came to my head. How with the African American women she is always the main one singled out. As far as I'm concerned, the woman has the requirements to do everything. She's always the main parent, but we have to start finding the father and make him be a part the situation . . . See, that's a problem I have with the whole system is that you can't just be putting all that on the women. (Timms, 2008, p. 3)

Mark identified the root of disproportionality: lack of respect for the African American women. Three prominent images of Black mothers cast them as pathological: the careless Black mother, the matriarch, and the welfare queen (Roberts, 2002). If the image of African American women remains negative and distorted, then disrespecting them and subjecting them to racial injustice remains acceptable.

Mary first pointed to housing as a gap, then began to address a more substantive gap, and eventually pointed to another root problem that must be addressed. Mary stated,

> Also, I have seen a lotta things, certain workers and, uh, they, they come from different places, and they don't understand, uh, they have no feelings about some people who have made mistakes and, uh, treat them as though they're criminals rather than somebody who needs help. (Timms, 2008, p. 6)

As she continued to express her story, she shared the hurt that disrespect, economic subordination, and inequality bring:

> The child welfare worker didn't care for women, and she was really adamant about, "getting these kids" from this woman. She did everything she could to her. Not just by talking but by writing the documentation in the report. So it looks like she's done everything wrong, and the child welfare worker has done everything right. And she just took her kids, not because she didn't try, but because she didn't try the way the child welfare worker wanted her . . . It became to be a personal thing rather than what we're supposed to be doing. She took her kids. It's really a bias type of thing. The way you talk to people, the way you talk about people, the way you, uh, write things down. It's just so biased. (Timms, 2008, p. 7)

Mary's tone expressed hurt for the African American mother who experienced disrespect, racial injustice, and subordination as she tried to reunify with her children. Roberts (2002) pointed out:

> Black mothers are often perceived as hostile and less amenable to rehabilitation
> . . . The mothers I talked with were constantly torn between contesting unfair
> decisions or complaining about their children's treatment and complacently
> acceding to caseworkers' demands. They legitimately feared that their
> outspokenness would hurt their chances of getting their children back. (p. 66)

Wendy, who was very reserved, began her narrative by pointing to the obvious,

but she too began to point out the root of disproportionality, expressing with candor the

disrespect displayed toward African American women living in poverty. Wendy stated:

> The gap is there is not enough housing. There is not enough emergency funding
> for, um, families. There is not enough emergency vouchers if you're trying to help
> somebody. Housing is the biggest one, um. Well, there's enough housing projects
> . . . that I should be able to be relocated, but that doesn't happen. (Timms, 2008,
> p. 9)

She continued,

> There's a lot of mothers that come through that don't have a place to stay, and
> there's enough boarded up projects, housing projects that are just left abandoned.
> Yet there's no housing for them, so that's part of a puzzle . . . How can you help
> they need a place to stay. I can't get them into a shelter. I can't get housing. I
> mean, the city needs or the system or somebody needs, it needs to be fixed.
> (Timms, 2008, p. 9)

Again, Wendy's tone expressed the pain and hurt that so many African American

mothers living in poverty feel.

A shortage of safe low income housing is one aspect of the issue; the other is the

victimization of poor single mothers both by the system and by poverty's indignities. The

narratives pointed to this theme as one of the root causes of disproportionality that needs

to be addressed if the number of African American children in the foster care system is

going to be reduced. Until single mothers living in poverty are respected, their stories

valued, and their perseverance esteemed, their subordination at the hands of an oppressor

will continue. If people don't respect these women, then they will not be concerned about

their problems because the problems become the person. African American mothers in

poverty are victimized by racial bias and by social and gender injustice and feel

disempowered. Consequently, they are further battered by those who have the power to make decisions, and when someone looks *down* on a group instead of looking *at* it, there will only be paramount failure in decisions and disproportionality in systems.

While housing is a valid and obvious issue, this theme points to a much deeper problem than housing. These community base case workers directed attention indirectly and directly to the stories of single African American mothers and the lack of respect for them. Women living in poverty, surviving poverty, and enduring the stigma of being single mothers must be respected, their stories must be esteemed, and those making decisions in the child welfare system must value what they bring to the world, their family, and their children. Madhubuti (1991) pointed out,

> The problems Black women face worldwide are complex, and cross-cultural solutions do not necessarily work; racism (white world supremacy), sexism, inequalities in wealth and lack of opportunities keep Black women dependent . . . I do not believe that the lives or futures of Afrikan American women should revolve around the thoughts, actions, wishes, demands or strategies of men. (p. 175)

The CBCWs provided an invaluable exploration of the problem as they shared from firsthand experience what so many professionals often overlook: the value of the stories of people enduring poverty and the value and worth of African American mothers. If disproportionality is going to be effectively dealt with and if the numbers of African American children in the foster care system are going to be reduced, the input of African American mothers should be incorporated as an indispensable piece in the reduction of children entering the foster care system.

Research Question Two

Parents

What issues do parents recommend addressing to reduce the number of African American children being placed in the San Francisco foster care system?

Interview Question Three

What do you identify as gaps in the system?

Reducing the number of African American children in the foster care system must be a permanent cultural change. It cannot and must not be a temporary change to placate the numbers highlighting historical injustice and racial biases. It must be implemented as a continual practice tool and reemphasized in staff meetings and ongoing training.

Housing, a major issue that needs to be addressed to reduce disproportionality, is an important thread that weaves together patterns of social injustice, racial bias, and subordination by an organizational culture that has not allowed poor parents' voices to be heard or stories to be told.

Relationships and connections. Rebecca addressed the need for housing but emphasized the need for building relationships to understand that parents need transitional services. However, she was clear that one does not want to create dependency because it "institutionalizes." Rebecca shared:

> I think, um, now they need to have something as far as housing like guaranteed housing. Like when these ladies and these men come out of these programs [rehabilitation programs], they need to have some type of set housing. You know what I mean, because transitional housing is only extended for so long, and their stay there is ended. And you don't want to stay too long in programs because you know what? You're institutionalized. So when they do get out on their own, they have a lot of fears because they no longer have the structure. You know, that's where they need help, you know, how to get this and how to get that. That's where you need to have a relationship because now it's on you to live your life and to continue with your recovery, and you have to find the resources, and you

> have to build the structure. You have to build you a solid foundation. Even if you have to go back to where you came from, and it's drugs all over and whatever. (Timms, 2008, p. 29)

While Rebecca pointed to housing, she highlighted the importance of building

relationships. Once parents successfully complete a rehabilitation program, relationships

are a crucial part in reducing the numbers in the foster care system.

Consequently, building relationships and connecting with people who can assist

in life skill services will facilitate parents' healthy transitions, helping to prevent reentry

of them or their child into the foster care system. Understanding the importance of

connections and relationships, as Rebecca pointed out, is a way to effectively deal with

reducing the number of African American children in the foster care system. As Rebecca

alluded to, many parents have no choice but to return to poverty-afflicted communities

where violence and high unemployment are not given any attention. Ruth shared a

similar narrative. She emphasized that it is not just the parent involved in a relationship;

everybody has a part to play and a voice and a story to share. Ruth:

> You know, this is CPS, so basically you already walking on pins and needles because you know they have control of what's the decision to be made with your child, but you play a part in that decision too. But if you a person that don't know, it's just going to go one way. The CPS worker should be more understanding and provide you with what is going to help you go in the right way instead of just cutting you off [your thoughts] . . . If I'm doing my part, I would appreciate if you would do your part. Do what it is you need to do to work with me. The worker needs to let their wall down too. Instead of answering and asking the questions on the paper, try and establish a relationship with the person. That's team work because y'all trying to work together to accomplish something. (Timms, 2008, p. 34)

Ruth pointed out the fear that a parent is dealing with upon the initial meeting

with a CPS worker. A healthy relationship does not begin with attempts to assert

authority and speak to someone as if they are a subordinate, nor should anyone enter *any*

healthy relationship thinking that he or she is less-than. Why enter this one in that way, when the outcome of a child is at stake? Ruth's narrative clearly pointed once again to how incredibly important it is to build a relationship and have connections so that the direction of the decisions affecting one's child, family, and life are not based upon answers and questions on a piece of paper but rather on human beings attempting to establish a relationship, to be understanding, and to help.

Martha's narrative further provided evidence that building relationships and establishing connections are effective ways to reduce the number of African American children in the foster care system. Martha expressed her connection with her worker and the ways in which this connection moved her toward empowerment: "I mean, I really feel she was really open to helping me out. She was there for me, you know, whatever I needed. She really went out her way for me," (Timms, 2008, p. 35). Martha's connection and relationship with her worker and the caring and the respect that each person demonstrated toward each other made the difference for her. Simply put, Martha's worker reduced the number of children in the foster care system by two because she cared.

These parents' narratives told a story of how the child welfare culture's racial biases, disparities, practices, trainings, and attitudes have had a direct impact on the numbers of children in the foster care system. One of the ways to reduce these numbers is to continue training toward removal but provide the essential piece to accompany that training: the importance of respect, relationship building, and connection. CBCWs and more specifically child welfare workers must learn to build relationships and connect with parents who have historically been disenfranchised, disempowered, and abandoned

in economically impoverished communities until their children are brought to the attention of a system that has disproportionately placed them in foster care. Beyond cultural understanding, caseworkers need to understand the challenges of living with economic disadvantages so that they can work effectively with their clients (U.S. USGAO, 2007).

<div align="center">Research Question Three</div>

Child Welfare Workers

What insular services do the child welfare workers find most helpful in the San Francisco area?

Interview Question Two

What service did you find most useful?

Child welfare workers conveyed that services were an essential component of working with families, whether for providing family maintenance or reunification. They felt that it was imperative to provide services that would address specific needs of the family and child. Equally important was the fact that providing services to families within the system is a court mandate. Initially, Sarah was hesitant about naming a particular service that she found most useful. Sarah stated:

> You know it's hard to say what is most effective or successful. I think it really depends on the parents. Is their heart in it? Do they want change? And some people don't care to make their lives any different, and we can't force them to change either. (Timms, 2008, p.15)

Sarah went on to state the importance of easy access to services, "Homeless Prenatal—everything's under one roof, support groups, substance abuse and counseling," (Timms, 2008, p.16). Sarah was sharing that agencies that have services and resources centrally located are most effective and helpful in working toward success.

Lydia echoed Sarah's comments "Homeless Prenatal, I think they really do a good job at engaging the families. I feel like they go out and engage the family . . . .," (Timms, 2008, p.19). Lydia went on to comment that a local agency, Positive Directions, "They are very honest with the client . . . they're accessible. They're located directly in the community. They're open after business hours [after 6 p.m.]. They offer classes for couples, and they also have a place for kids while parents are receiving services," (Timms, 2008, p. 19). Nathan shared:

> Epiphany in Home Service, they were very helpful. They gave me feedback . . . things don't go into the abysses. They keep me in the loop. If Dad was supposed to go to parenting class and Dad missed the last four meetings, they say, "Hey, Dad hasn't been here . . . ." (Timms, 2008, p. 25)

The common themes shared by these child welfare workers were effectiveness in services, consolidation in service location, and feedback from the service providers. Their narratives reflected that an agency getting back to the CWW s with progress or lack of progress of the client was the most helpful and useful aspect about any service provider. Child welfare workers conveyed throughout their narratives that they need services and service providers that are going to help make a difference in families' lives. Services for the sake of services do not help families or reduce disproportionality. Instead, their narratives revealed a need for services that provide content, consistency, and communication.

<center>Research Question Three</center>

Community Based Case Workers

What insular services do the community based case workers find most helpful?

Interview Question Two

What service did you find most useful?

Initially, in addressing this question to CBCWs, the researcher was very apprehensive; however, the narratives did not reveal any partiality; instead, they provided healthy information regarding what the CBCWs perceived as professionals and what community agencies perceived as helpful in reducing disproportionality.

Services through family. Mark exposed a trend that is slowly being reincorporated into the child welfare system: the need for services to include family, friends, and community—those who can have a positive impact on the child's life, who will be in the child's life long after the service providers have transitioned out, and who will shape the characteristics and behavior of the child. Mark found family input to be a key component in keeping children out of the system. Mark shared:

> The whole family, whoever that family might be . . . being able to inform everybody, it's like doing an intervention, being able to inform all the players involved in that kid's life . . . And if it means for the kids to go and stay with an uncle for a while until the parents get they're stuff together or whatever. But we try and come up with a plan first with all the parties involved that has contact with the child. Even if it's a friend, we try and get as many people possible, and we try and address the issues. (Timms, 2008, p. 3)

Family participation is the best service to the family, as Mark expressed the need for everyone in the family as well as friends in the community to support the parents in providing a healthy and supportive environment for the children. Mark stated in the best situation, "Everyone is involved and whatever one can contribute to keep safety as an issue. . . .," (Timms, 2008, p.3). Mark went on to share the following regarding the role of family:

> If the children are hungry, they make sure that they have food and make sure that the food comes on a regular basis, not just that one time, but ensure them, so that they don't have to worry about where the next meal is going to come from. (Timms, 2008, p. 4)

He highlighted the fact that a family's commitment lasts long after the system has exited the family and the child's life.

Services that wrap-around. Mary conveyed that with the challenges families face, struggling mothers need to be connected with agencies that offer wrap-around services, such as child care, access to housing, parenting classes, psychological counseling, and food and clothing pantries— "you know, things to keep families stable and with their children," (Timms, 2008, p7). While Mary recognized her agency as one that helps to empower parents through building relationships and improving families' lives by wrapping them in supportive services that are geared toward stabilizing the home, keeping children with their parents, and working toward establishing a healthier future, she acknowledged another agency that offers wrap around services. Mary shared:

> Homeless Prenatal. The women can go to Homeless Prenatal. That was a good service that worked like a wrap around service. That was about the best one. They work directly with the women and the children, providing support groups, helping with housing. That was big one and helping with misunderstandings. (Timms, 2008, p. 7)

<div align="center">Research Question Three</div>

Parents

What insular services do parents find most helpful?

Interview Question Two

What service did you find most useful?

The narratives of the mothers reflected their experience with services that they either "loved" or services that "helped." Each one indicated that the services were always "needed," as help is always needed in some form when children are involved. They shared that the services were significant because they could access them without being

singled out as a "bad mother" by CPS. Rebecca received her services from Homeless

Prenatal, and continues to receive support and services when needed for both her and her

children. Rebecca:

> I love therapy because I was able to open up and talk about what was going on inside of me and I didn't have to worry about being cut off. I could cry, I could scream, I could yell, you know what I mean? I loved it for my kids, because brother spent time with them, and they would go to therapy, and at first my oldest daughter would never talk. She would just make pictures, and she always made picture of me, her sister, and her living together happy. She would always make homes and stuff . . . [crying]. "Mama, that's how I want us to be . . . ." And it just made me so mad at myself, and I felt like my kids are so important, and it [therapy] made me pay more attention to life more. It made me more appreciative. I started realizing that it's the little things that count because the little things turn into big things. (Timms, 2008, p. 31)

Martha shared:

> Homeless Prenatal, that's where I got my parenting certificate. That's where I kept on going to parenting class and starting doing more meetings with my kids, and if I needed their help, they would always help. That's the one I use a lot. They [Homeless Prenatal] offer help with classes that teach you how to speak to your kids, let them know what they did wrong. My parents never spoke to me about what I did wrong or let me know, "Well, you did this wrong," and how I could have did it different. So I am learning how to teach my kids how to turn things around when they did wrong. Hopefully, it will work. They help you with how to close your CPS case, how to advocate for your self. [She interjects] My CPS worker advocated for me to get my kids back. (Timms, 2008, p. 36)

Ruth pointed out:

> It was more than one service, but mostly transportation [fast passes] to get to my appointments, medical, schools programs. Epiphany helped with clothing and furniture, and they would make the effort to help me get the stuff there [home]. And workers were available. I really didn't ask for to much from CPS because the program I was in met my needs. I mean, child care, therapist on site, doctor on site, counseling on site, housing, transitional housing assistance—they would go to court with you and advocate for you, they would provide dental care and glasses, you know, they would help you out, you know what I mean? They helped with the services you need. (Timms, 2008, p. 34)

The narratives revealed that services are most effective when they meet the

parents' needs from their perspective, not from a framework of racial biases or

subordination. These mothers told stories that point out that when communication, compassion, and civility are intertwined with relationship building, the chances for success increase. As Ruth points out, "We're in this together." Victory does not belong only to the parents but to workers, the organizational culture, and the communities in which these children live. Most importantly, the children win, for they do not have to languish in the foster care system where disproportionality has become a national problem.

Disproportionality has become a national problem. Inequity in decision making, racial injustice and oppressive policies within the child welfare organizational culture are suspected. Derezotes, Poertner, and Testa (2005) "The overrepresentation of African Americans in the child welfare system mirrors that found in the juvenile justice system, which has faced allegations of discrimination for more than four decades. (p.3). While the pendulum within the organizational culture has swung over to "not removing," it does not negate the fact that the previous organizational practices had a direct impact on disproportionality of the African American child in the foster care system. These practices have changed, effecting how decisions are made and forcing the organizational culture to look at the endemic racial inequities in the systems state wide and the oppressive practices described by both parents and community based case workers.

Statistically racial injustice in the foster care system is pointed to by the conspicuously high numbers that the Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System shares. For example, AFCARS (2000) stated that children of color comprised only 15% of the general population but 40% of children in foster care and 61% of children awaiting adoption. And in San Francisco the disparities remain equally

disparaging. As stated previously, but deserves repeating, in 2005 African American children made up 70% of children in the foster care system while constituting only 10% of the total child population in San Francisco (Needell et al., 2008) Unfortunately, the problem still has not been resolved and African American children remain disproportionately represented in the San Francisco foster care system.

The narratives of the child welfare workers conveyed a reality that current practices have driven decisions, "not to remove." However, their narratives also infer a past practice that removal of African American children was acceptable practice. While, community based case workers expressed how important it is to understand the community from which the families and children live in. schools. Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) point out:

> While some might argue that poor children, regardless of race, do worse in school, and that the high proportion of African-American poor contributes to their dismal school performance, we argue that the cause of their poverty in conjunction with the condition of their schools and schooling is institutional and structural racism. (p. 55)

CHAPTER V

Discussion, Conclusion, Implications and Recommendations

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to examine, through the stories, the issues that child welfare workers, community based case workers and parents felt contributed to the disproportionate number of African American children in the San Francisco City County foster care system. Moreover, this study looked at solutions that could assist in the reduction of the number of African American children entering the foster care system at a disproportionate rate, and examined ways that services could best help meet the needs of those directly impacted by this problem. The stories of these individuals provided a healthy understanding of the realities they faced. These stories and narratives from the hearts of the people most affected and directly impacted offer the best view into a problem that chain thousands of African American families and children across the nation to foster care.

This study further looked at the stories of those families intimately involved in the child welfare system. First, it examined the stories of child welfare workers and community based case workers who have implemented reunification plans, as well as, provided services toward parent and child reunification. In addition, the study looked at the stories of parents who have experienced the removal of their child/ren and have been faced with working with child welfare workers and complying with service plans in order to successfully reunify with their children.

The participants were all from the City and County of San Francisco, and either work or live in the heart of the community where the majority of removals take place.

This community is hindered by poverty, high unemployment and dilapidated schools. Moreover, this community, the, has historically been the area where the majority of reports and removals occur. As a result, high numbers of African American children from this area account for the disproportionate number of children in the foster care system. Consequently, it is imperative to hear the stories of the people hit the hardest by this phenomenon. Who better to enhance the understanding of organizational cultures, racial biases, and oppression than those living in the community faced with the problem?

<div align="center">Conclusion</div>

The narratives of the child welfare workers reveal how the child welfare organization and culture have begun to adapt their practices to address the disproportionate number of African American children entering the foster care system. The current organizational cultural swing and the implementation of the new trainings and practices "not to remove" are a clear indication a problem existed. The San Francisco foster care system has acknowledged that it must embrace a different ideology, if the number of African American children entering the foster care system is going to diminish. The historically oppressive and subordinate attitudes and practices which ignored and disrespected the strengths, significance, and importance of parents have to change. The child welfare system must continue to address the problems within their organizational culture in order for sincere and significant change is to transpire. Sarah stated, "I think a lot now that these children should be with their families, you know, that's where they should be, or if not with the parent, family step in. We don't have to do a removal." (Timms, 2008, p. 10). As affirmed, statement, family is the place for a child.

San Francisco is demonstrated movement in the right direction as practices have shifted. Narratives reflected that child welfare workers are constantly reminded of the problem and bombard with the dilemma of disproportionality. As a result, their objective now is to work with the family in an effort to reduce the numbers of African American children coming into the system. In the past, as reported earlier, empirical evidence pointed out in 2003 African American children made up only 11% of the child population in San Francisco, yet they constituted 70% of the children in foster care, [SFDHSQR], (2003).

Factors contributing to the overwhelming number of African American children in the foster care system were racially biased and influenced decision making as well. Derezotes, Poertner, and Testa (2005) "Analyses of report disposition revealed a significant difference for African American children. Specifically, reports involving African American children were more likely to be investigated rather than referred for community based assessment or services" (p. 67). Moreover, child welfare practices included oppressive and subordinate practices toward parents, particularly poor African American women as indicated by the parents', community based case workers, and child welfare workers' narratives. Nathan pointed out "We're told . . . to assess whether the child is in imminent danger if not then we should try and provide the services as much as we could um to strength the family facing the possibility of removal . . . .," (Timms, 2008, p 21).

This study pointed to breakdowns in understanding, communication, and respect. The study reveals that change is possible when the organizational culture is driving positive change, and it is committed to reinforcing change through trainings that support

practices shifting methods. However, it must not vacillate because of political climate, economic trials, or media attention, for training must continue to reflect shifts in practices "not to remove." Emphasizing the importance of commitment, communication, and respect remains vital at this fragile and infant stage of change, as the Lydia pointed out. "I think with me coming in now that's the only way I've been trained . . .," (Timms, 2008, p. 18). Training is necessary and cannot be ignored as movement in a new direction is imperative if reducing disproportionality is to take place.

Consequently, when one looks at factors contributing to disproportionality, one must be cognizant of the fact that the child welfare workers whose methods are rooted in historical practices must be retrained. Furthermore, the new practices being encouraged by the organization must be embraced by workers as this new direction for the organizational culture is promoted. Those child welfare workers who feel they cannot "buckle up" in a vehicle that is moving toward discourse, respectfulness and collaboration with parents in decision making. Equally important, a reduction and elimination of racial biases should be removed so that another willing passenger who embraces change can assist in positive direction. (Needell et al., 2008) African American children only made up 9% of the total population of children in San Francisco in 2007, yet they made up 66% of children in foster care. The numbers are inexcusable, and it's time for a new direction in the foster care system.

Implications

The disproportionate number of African American children in the foster care system has historical implications. There remains a wealth of information to be known about racial, gender, and economic biases; inconsistencies in decision making; oppression

and the subordination of poor parents. Removing children and placing them in different counties, where visits are practically impossible for poor parents, speaks volumes for the historical and current disregard for the poor. Ladson-Billings (2007) "No one acknowledged that my students' parents were less likely to have transportation to travel across the city…" (p. 318). Placing children with people who have no cultural understanding, shared values or connection with the child was reflected in the narratives. Removal from a parent is extremely detrimental, but when a child is placed in an environment that has no cultural understanding, shared values or connection it can be disastrous for a young child.

The findings of this study showed how vital sharing stories are. Moreover, the need for further sharing of stories, and more effective communication between child welfare workers, community base case workers, and parents. If the factors contributing to disproportionality are going to be effectively addressed, then the stories of the parents directly affected by having their children removed must be included. These parents are the ones with the insight to help bring about effective change that will benefit the child welfare cultural organization. In addition, their input can be beneficial for developing practices and trainings that can help stem the disproportionate number of African American children entering the foster care system across the state of California. Listening carefully to how parents perceive help will stop the suffering of African American children in the nation's foster care systems.

It is important to point out that while this research identifies factors contributing to disproportionality, it points to another area of concern: how disproportionality contributes to other problems. For example, the school dropout rate among foster children

is a huge problem. As earlier mentioned, once children are removed from their homes, and placed in foster care transferred from placement to placement often occurs. Wendy stated, "Keeping this child going to schoo,l" (Timms, 2008, p. 9), was one of her major concerns as children are removed and placed in different counties from their parents and schools.

The study identified a history of practices that favored removing children from parents. Child welfare workers shared their narratives highlighting an awareness of past practices. Behaviors toward poor mothers, preconceived attitudes of child welfare workers and organizational practices were identified in the narratives as factors contributing to San Francisco's disproportionate number of African American children in the foster care system. As a result, trainings have been greatly influenced, and practices are moving and demanding that child welfare workers change their methods of engagement.

While this movement is positive, it must be expanded upon. It must include the willingness on the part of child welfare workers to communicate with parents and treat parents, especially single and poor mothers, respectfully and in a less oppressive manner. This research has pointed out that it is essential that parents do not feel like subordinates; for these feelings greatly hinder communication and do not work toward providing the appropriate type of help needed to address disproportionality. Again, organizational training is attempting to change the culture and child welfare workers narratives revealed a movement toward change.

As parents shared their stories, it was clear that they were already anxious as they entered into a relationship with the child welfare system. Ruth pointed out they are

already on "pins and needles," (Timms, 2008, p. 34). And they are trying extremely hard, in most cases, to work with the Department of Human Services so that they can reunify with their children. As a result, child welfare workers must be cognizant of how important it is to work with parents, be respectful and not to oppress parents. Parents must be included in the decision making process as partners. Rebecca, another parent, pointed out that she would rather come in and work with the child welfare worker to develop a plan than to come in and see that "ABCD," (Timms, 2008, p.28) has already been develop without her contribution. Rebecca shared, "Where do my feelings come in? Why I wasn't able to have input on this if this is what I have to do to better my life to get my kids back?" (Timms, 2008, p.28). Rebecca makes a valid point, as she asked the question from a system struggling with disproportionality. Oppressive tactics must be challenged, and child welfare workers must commit to open communication and respectful interaction.

Community based case worker narratives also pointed to the importance of meaningful and respectful communication. As they shared through their observations, child welfare workers' hesitance to incorporate parents in meaningful and respectful ways when it comes to developing a plan to reunify with their children has detrimental effects that contribute to disproportionality. Community based case workers discussed the importance of incorporating the parent in decision making and other operational steps, for the parent (especially the single mother) is the one who has to carry out the plan, not the worker. Therefore, the organizational culture must be vigilant in its move toward change so that biases are appropriately confronted, child welfare workers are respectful in incorporating parents in decision making, and parents are instrumental in collaborating

with child welfare workers to develop a plan that prevents another child from entering the foster care system.

In addition, this research suggested that the foster care system must stop penalizing parents for being poor. To reduce the number of African American children in the foster care system, the economic situation of the family must not be the sole reason for removal of a child. Poverty is a national problem, but it should not contribute to the national problem of disproportionality too. Children's Defense Fund (2007) pointed out:

> The most dangerous place for a child to try to grow up in America is at the intersection of poverty and race. That a Black boy born in 2001 has a 1 in 3 chance and a Latino boy a 1 in 6 chance of going to prison in their lifetime is a national disaster and says to millions of our children and to the world hat America's dream is not for all. (p. 4)

The child welfare worker must look at working with parents in a collective effort, and eliminate stereotyping parents through a lens of privilege and oppression. Communication and respect must emerge from interactions. Racial biases and unfair decisions to remove children must continue to be challenged by the organizational culture. The child welfare workers who participated in this study were very astute in pointing out that changing the child welfare systems' historic and present means of addressing poverty, especially attitudes toward mothers, is critical for reducing the disproportionate number of African American children in the foster care system.

A perceptive point made by community base case workers pointed to the historically disrespectful treatment of women in America, particularly single women and more specifically African American women. To reduce the number of African American children in the foster care system, the system must work to eliminate racial bias and gender and economic subordination. CBCWs highlighted a fact that is echoed by Roberts (2002), Barth (2001), stated: poor women are systematically look down on, bullied, and

blamed for their positions. Mark pointed out ". . . the African American women is the one who is always punished," (Timms, 2008, p.3). African American women experience disrespect, racial injustice, and subordination, issues that must continue to be addressed if the reduction of African American children being placed in the foster care system is going to be affected.

A key factor to point out is that the all respondents concurred that housing was a major issue that needed to be addressed, and would help in reducing disproportionality. In addition, what was emphasized was the need for child welfare workers and parents to build functioning respectful relationships, ones in which understanding takes place. Establishing a connection helps parents toward achieving success, and child welfare workers toward eliminating disproportionality.

Parents felt that it was incredibly important to have a connection with the person with whom they were working. The direction of the decisions affecting their child/ren, their family, and their lives, they shared, should not be based solely upon answers to questions on a piece of paper, or prejudgments, rather on two people collaborating in mapping out a plan for success. For example, Martha made a connection with her worker, and that connection empowered her: "I mean, I really feel she was really open to helping me out, she was there for me, you know whatever I needed. She really went out her way for me," (Timms, 2008, p.35). Community base case workers and child welfare workers must learn to build relationships and connections with parents who have historically been oppressed and abandoned in economically impoverished communities. In addition, the study showed that all participants felt that agencies such as Homeless Prenatal, Epiphany House, and Positive Directions offered them the most helpful services. The participants

shared those agencies that provide a full array of supportive resources under one roof improved their opportunities for success.

Child welfare workers looked for agencies that responded promptly back to them on the progress of parents or lack of follow through of parents. They needed workers who would keep them in the loop, and would not lose contact with them once the parent began participating. On the other hand, community based case workers looked at building relationships and bridges between agencies and parents. They conveyed that, with the challenges faced by families, especially mothers, agencies that offer wrap-around services, such as access to child care, housing, parenting classes, counseling, and healthy food and clothing pantries, were essential. Parents echoed the same feelings: agencies that were the most helpful worked directly with the women and their children, providing support groups, child care, job training and helping to find safe housing. Professionals as well as parents shared that not having to go from one agency to another to access services was extremely helpful and beneficial.

<div align="center">Recommendations for Future Research</div>

Based on the findings of this study, more participatory research describing the racial biases in decision making, gender, and economics is needed. Historically, racial biases and biases in decision making towards females and oppressive tactics by the child welfare culture have contributed to the disproportionate number of African American children in the foster care system. Consequently, it is imperative that the child welfare culture acknowledge the detrimental practices of the past, and implement guidelines, parameters, and departments to monitor desired progress. This is indispensable as monitoring methods hold all involved in ensuring that policies, organizational culture, or

child welfare workers do not relapse back into historically oppressive and racially biased tactics. These past practices played an enormous role in disproportionality as research proves. To recap, African American children comprise only 12% of the general population but 32% of children in foster care system (AFCARS, 2005). African American children are more than double the number of children in the foster care system, than in the general population. Hence, a department must be instituted to monitor for deviation, complacency and relapse.

Analysis utilizing the invaluable input of parents and the interventions of public agencies and research intended to specifically decrease disproportionality of African American children in the foster care system must continue. Moreover, parents who have gone through the system and are now pursuing their education should be requested to be a part of a team that will implement and set up parameters in the child welfare organizational culture. These parents should be hired to make up a team of monitors, charting the progress and managing progress toward addressing the disproportionate number of African American children in the foster care system. These parents who have gone through the system and who are currently pursuing an education can add tremendous value to an organizational culture engaged in changing practices.

Because of the detrimental effects of past racial injustices and biases in decision affecting African American families and children within the child welfare system, it is important that research explore the inclusion of parents. African American and Hispanic women, whose children make up the majority of children in the foster care system, could add tremendous value in addressing the symptoms of deviation, complacency and relapse which has lead to this national problem. The organizational culture should begin to look

at ways to team up parents with workers in order to enhance understanding of each other's feelings and create an environment in which each person can tell their story unhindered. Enormous value is found in the stories of those who are directly impacted by systems and communities. Biases can be sincerely addressed and parents and child welfare workers can work toward, honest, meaningful and lasting change.

The organizational culture of the child welfare system is involved with moving toward a change in training and practices. Training is being enforced and behaviors, attitudes and past practices are being challenged. However, it would be presumptuous to think, that historical practices and mind-sets will change because it has been demanded. Organizational cultures do not develop over night, nor will they be dismantled as quickly. Consequently, methods for monitoring the implementation of new training and practices in the form of teams (parents and child welfare workers) must be instituted. Observing and continued encouragement toward change in the culture will be great task, demanding team work and honest and unhindered discourse.

Opportunities for child welfare workers and parents to meet and share their stories, feelings, and concerns must be created in a structured and safe forum. Bridges can be built and crossed, families, children and lives can be restored and saved, but it demands the joining and respecting of profession toward people. Incidentally, this works both ways, people, parents and single mothers living in poverty must be respectful of the others stories, feelings in discourse. As the culture of the child welfare system changes, the child welfare workers in it must grow and move toward this change. The process will require monthly, if not weekly monitoring and meetings that avail themselves to communication, sharing narratives and ensuring mutual respect.

In conclusion, policymakers, management, and public agencies cannot be the only assessors of the effectiveness of change within the child welfare organization; parents must also be included. Parents must also be respectful, though it has taken some time, toward child welfare workers and the movement toward change too.

Recommendation for the Profession

Disproportionality has prompted a national study USGAO (2007), and has garnered the attention of numerous researchers. One such researcher is Roberts, who paints an extraordinary poignant picture of the problem. Roberts (2002) "Child welfare agencies rarely offer Black families the kind of help they need; in fact, they often subject Black children in foster care to affirmatively harmful programs, such as multiple relocations to strange homes and brutal institution, making family reunification more difficult." (p. 20). Disproportionality has left an indelible mark on the nation, and change in child welfare practices and policies necessitate a team approach between child welfare workers and parents. The organizational culture has moved toward change, and it must not deviate from the goal.

After centuries of racial injustices, biases in decision making and oppressive tactics the organizational culture of child welfare appears to have charted a course toward addressing the alarming number of African American children in the foster care drift. However, the course for change must include the invaluable input of the stories of those who have been intimately involved, and have first hand knowledge of the pitfalls, and gaps in services.

The child welfare culture is fraught with a history of inequities and oppressive decisions that have affected children's lives. Juvenile facilities, drug rehabilitation

facilities and homeless shelters, as mentioned earlier, are filled with children who were once in foster care. The child welfare culture has a direct impact on creating disproportionality in a number of other state facilities a problem that must be addressed by embracing a new approach to help. A new approach, that includes parents who have successfully gone through the system. They are the perfect candidates to pair up with child welfare workers and encourage an organizational cultural movement toward addressing the phenomena of disproportionality.

Concluding Statement

This study confirmed the problem of African American children making up a disproportionate number of children in the foster care system. Furthermore, the USGAO (2007), along with other empirical evidence, validates and highlights the problem of disproportionality by the continued attention that this issue has received. While a number of studies have presented the views of policy makers' and decision makers' associated with research around disproportionality, this study conveyed the stories of child welfare workers, community based case workers, and parents. From those stories, this study exposed a past organizational culture inclined to remove a child from his or her family, based upon racial, economic and gender biases. The stories shared the problems of oppression found in the San Francisco foster care system and areas for improvement. These stories highlight the critical need for continual monitoring of organizational trainings and practices.

Finally, research must continue to examine and sustain efforts to promote cultural competency, address racial biases in decision making and oppressive tactics, and welcome the invaluable knowledge of parents.

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APPENDIXES

APPENDIX A

APPROVAL LETTER

May 1, 2008

Dear Mr. Timms:

The Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects (IRBPHS)

at the University of San Francisco (USF) has reviewed your request for human

subjects approval regarding your study.

Your application has been approved by the committee (IRBPHS #08-004).

Please note the following:

1. Approval expires twelve (12) months from the dated noted above. At that

time, if you are still in collecting data from human subjects, you must file

a renewal application.

2. Any modifications to the research protocol or changes in instrumentation

(including wording of items) must be communicated to the IRBPHS.

Re-submission of an application may be required at that time.

3. Any adverse reactions or complications on the part of participants must

be reported (in writing) to the IRBPHS within ten (10) working days.

If you have any questions, please contact the IRBPHS at (415) 422-6091.

On behalf of the IRBPHS committee, I wish you much success in your research.

Sincerely,

Terence Patterson, EdD, ABPP
Chair, Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects

APPENDIX B

CONSENT LETTER

Date

170 Otis St.
San Francisco, CA 95823

Dear Survey Participant:

My name is Jeffrey Timms; I am a Doctoral candidate at the University of San Francisco (USF). As you know social work literature is replete with evidence that African American children make up a disproportionate number of children in the foster care system nationwide, as well as in California. Moreover, San Francisco is faced with the awesome challenge of effectively addressing this issue of disproportionality. Therefore, I am interested in studying the possible contributing causes and/or factors as articulated through the language and stories of the protective service worker, (over 25 years of age) directly involved.

As a protective service worker in the child welfare system, your insight, stories and thoughts would be vital to this research. The discussion **will not** take longer than 45 minutes.

Study records will be kept as confidential as possible. No individual identities will be used in any reports or publications resulting from the study. Participant's data will remain anonymous so that the identity of no study participant will be known. And collected data will be destroyed in approximately two years from the collection date. PLEASE DO NOT PUT YOUR NAME, IDENTIFYING MARKS, OR ANY OTHER INFORMATION THAT WOULD REVEAL YOUR IDENTITY ON THIS DOCUMENT.

While there will be no direct benefit to you from participating in this study, the anticipated benefit is a healthier and clearer understanding of the possible contributing causes and factors towards one of this nation's current challenge.

As a result of taking part in this study, there will be no costs to you or your agency; neither will you be compensated for your participation in this study.

PARTICIPATION IN THIS STUDY IS STRICTLY VOLUNTARY. You are free to decline to have your agency used as a site for this study, or to withdraw from it at any point.

If you have questions about the research, you may contact me at jwtimms@sbcglobal.net (415) 517-9874 In addition, if you have further questions about the study, you may contact the IRBPHS at the University of San Francisco, which is concerned with protection of volunteers in research projects. You may reach the IRBPHS office by calling (415) 422-6091 and leaving a voicemail message, or by e-mailing IRBPHS@usfca.edu , and by writing to the IRBPHS, Department of Education, University of San Francisco, 2123 Fulton Street, San Francisco, CA 94117-1080.

If you agree to participate, please inform me and I will make arrangements to meet with you.
Sincerely,

Jeffrey W. Timms MSW
Graduate Student
University of San Francisco

APPENDIX C

CONSENT FORM

CONSENT TO BE A RESEARCH SUBJECT

Purpose and Background

Jeffrey Timms, a graduate student in the School of Education at the University of San Francisco is doing a study on the disproportionate number of African American children in the foster care system.

I am being asked to participate because I am a Child Welfare Worker, Community Based Case Worker or Parent who can add value to this research.

If I agree to be a participant in this study, the following will happen:

1. I will agree to at least two interviews with Mr. Timms to discuss disproportionality.

2. I will provide some basic information about me, including age, gender, work history and educational background.

3. I will agree to answer five questions around disproportionality.

Risks and/or Discomforts

1. It is possible that some of the questions around this topic may make me feel uncomfortable, but I am free to decline to answer any questions I do not wish to answer or to stop participation at any time.

2. Participation in research may mean a loss of confidentiality. Study records will be kept as confidential as possible. No individual identities will be used in any reports or publications resulting from the study. Study information will be coded and kept in a locked file at all times.

3. The time required should be approximately 45 minutes.

Benefits

There will be no direct benefit to me from participating in this study. The anticipated benefit of this study is a better understanding of the causes and factors around disproportionality, recommendations and identifying helpful services.

Costs & Financial Consideration

There will be no financial costs to me as a result of taking part in this study.

Payment/Reimbursement

I understand their will be no payment or reimbursement for my time spent completing the questions.

Questions

If I have any questions or comments about participating in this study, I should first talk with the researcher Jeffrey Timms by calling (415) 517-9874. If for some reason I do not wish to do this, I may contact the IRBPHS, which is concerned with protection of volunteers in research projects. I may reach the IRBPHS office by calling (415) 422-6091 and leaving a voicemail message, by e-mailing IRBPHS@usfca.edu, or by writing to the IRBPHS, Department of Psychology, University of San Francisco, 2130 Fulton Street, San Francisco, CA 94117-1080

Consent

I have been given a copy of this consent form to keep.

PARTICIPATION IN RESEARCH IS ***VOLUNTARY***. I am free to decline to be in this study, or to withdraw from it at any point.

My signature below indicates that I agree to participate in this study.

_____

Subject's Signature   Date of Signature

_____

Signature of Person Obtaining Consent   Date of Signature

APPENDIX D

TRANSCRIPT, 2008

CONVERSATION WITH REBECCA SINGEL AFRICAN AMERICAN
MOTHER

Question: When working with a child welfare worker or community base case worker what environmental, system, values, training or culture influences your decisions?

Answer: Um the way the person speaks, if I feel comfortable, not so much as with the environment, but with the person because this is a person I will be working with, so um of the top we have to have respect for one another um. I don't need the case manager or the social worker feeling like they can tell me what to do or even run my life. I like for them to put suggestions out there, I want to be able to tell them what I have already been through and what has not worked for me, and maybe we can come up with a plan. I'm open to like whatever options they may have although I may feel discomfort around some of them especially if I have never done it before. But the main thing for me is just respect open communication. Um as far as like the cultural thing it really doesn't matter to me as long as the case manager or social worker knows what they are doing. Like it wouldn't matter if they were African American, Caucasian, Latino or Asian just so long as they know what they're doing, and putting my best interest first.

Question: So, you talked about discomfort speak a little bit about what causes you discomfort when working with a child welfare worker or case manager.

Answer: If we don't have eye to eye contact if the worker is talking at me and not talking with me, if the worker keeps bringing up the past and throwing it in my face, they keep saying Rebecca you did this, Rebecca you did that but their not trying to help me move forward. If they try and make my race an issue, then I may have problems. Like as far as the culture thing if their not African American like myself, um making me feel just through conversation if they make me feel like their better than me just because of my past like my addiction or whatever I may have put my children through, um trying to belittle me in a professional way then their now working with me.

Question: I hear you when you say bringing up the past, and not working with you, those are two dynamics I really want to touch on and then also I want you to talk a little bit about the respect piece what dictates respect what does respect look like? I know you said the eye to eye contact, but what else would be respect to you?

Answer: Say I had a CPS case, and basically the CPS worker wrote out a case plan, what they feel I should do, but they have not included me, so when I

come to see them I see ABCD, but it's like where do my feelings come in at. Why I wasn't able to input on this if this is what I have to do to better my life to get my kids back? Why is it that you are the only one that gets to make the decision? Okay yeah I got here because of my behavior I may have been on drugs I may have been in domestic violence. Whatever the case may be, but I am in your office and need your help, but that does not mean that it's okay for you to try and run my life because I may be an addict or domestic violence survivor. But don't put a label on me just because you see a whole bunch of me's everyday, so don't have just tunnel vision when it comes to me, or any other recovering addict or any other domestic violence survivor. I don't think that that's okay. Because in the beginning say Rebecca I want you to do this, this and this, go to therapy go to school make sure you meet your program requirements, I need you to UA for me for six months, if you this I get visits with my kids or maybe I get my kids back, so I do this for six months, and we go to court and you tell the judge that you don't think it's a good ideal for me to have my kids back because there are other things that you want me to do. if that was the case you should have told me that from the beginning don't wait for six months down the line and I'm anticipating on getting my children back and you just take that from me because all that's letting me know is that everything you wrote on that paper I was just doing it to please you. How do you know that I was not doing that to better myself? Regardless of how many times I've been here? I feel as if though that is not working with a person with a parent, 12 months later I have done everything you have asked me to do and you still don't want to give me my kids back. That's not working with me.

Question: Yeah, I hear you, I hear you, is there anything else?

Answer: Say um you make up a case plan and you put everything on there but therapy and I feel like me and my children need therapy but you don't want to get me therapy. That's not working with me, because I feel like that's the main thing a parent needs whether it's a man or a women with their children. the parents or the children are taking away from the mother or the father you know the children are going through changes just as well as the parent, it's going to be easier for the parent because the parent is grown to where as it's not going to be easier for the child, for the children to cope especially if there staying in a foster home whatever is going on in the foster home and so um I feel like they should be able to have we should be able to have family therapy .

Question: Who do you think has the power in this working dynamic?

Answer: I think the parent. But um they choice to give their power to the social worker probably because of fear um that's the number one thing because of fear low self=esteem, um use to having their lives ran by an authority

figure you know what I mean? But to me I feel like the parent has the power, because I know that a lot of times when I was in the system and whenever I had a case plan when my social worker wrote up a case plan and say I had to do this and had to that, and it um was a part of me that did it just because they said I had to it, and I did it in order to get my kids back, but once I really got into and I paid attention to it like as far as the therapy um or the school applying myself to the program I liked it because now here it was I was living life off of drugs, and I was able to function in a way that I knew nothing about. Of course it was scary for me because at times like in groups or whatever feelings would come up and I would cry, and I wouldn't want to talk about this I wouldn't want to talk about that. And on the streets whenever I felt uncomfortable I would go use so I could numb myself so I wouldn't have to feel that, but once I did feel that I was able to cry I was able to heal, so it's more of me wanting to change my life so that I can be with my kids.

Question: How was your case referred?

Answer: Relative made the call, the very first case was my youngest daughter's auntie (father's sister), I call her my sister, but yeah it was my youngest daughter's auntie. And um I don't know I always had in my mind every sense I was younger that CPS was this big old monster like you know what I mean?

Question: Why?

Answer: Because of what was told to me, because of society they lead me to believe that CPS workers were evil, just taking kids that's it that's all and no matter what you never wanted to get caught up in CPS, and um, um it really like knock my block off you know what I mean because I was raised in a dysfunctional home my mom was on drugs my dad was on drugs, um when my mom left my biological father she got with my step father and he was on drugs he died when I was 18 my mom continued to use you know she just got clean. But I was bounce around like a ping pong ball and it tripped me out because even though my mother was in her addiction and she was prostituting and doing all the things she was doing I never got caught up in the system. I never got caught up in the system, and I don't know if it was something that my granny had felt, but um she would always send me away every summer if I wasn't in Texas I was in LA every summer I have been in school in LA and everything, and I don't know if it was because of God might have been talking to my granny get me away as soon as possible to make sure nothing would happen to me, because my granny did not have custody of me. My mom would just drop me off at my granny's house and I was just there. But, but I got older and I got caught up in my addiction my kids got caught up in the system.   And I like, I'm not going lie I had resentments like how is it that my mother did

all the things that she did and me and my brother never got took to where as I'm doing the things that I'm doing and my daughters auntie really called CPS on me, but it was one of the best things that could ever happen to me just like my kids are the best thing that could have happen to me.

Question: So a relative made the call?

Answer: Yeah, for my oldest daughter now, but the hospital held my youngest son for positive tox, and they put a police hold on him. But I got into residential March 1, March 2, my son was placed in my care, I coming up on 4 years clean and sober.

Question: Do you feel that there is a difference in how racial groups discipline their children and does that play a role in a CPS case being opened?

Answer: Yeah, yeah, there's a total difference, you know what I mean just by me being African American and growing up the way that I grow up, My granny always said it takes a village to raise a child, you know and I know that my uncles and aunties could be down the road away from home and do something and one of the neighbors see and pop them on their buns and call my granny and they get popped on they buns until they get to my granny. To where as now if they look at you it's like child abuse.

Question: So you do you feel there is difference?

Answer: Um as far as like Asian and Hispanics, so forth and so on, one day I was on the bus and this was recently it was this year I was going to Treasure Island. I was on the 108 this lady it was an Asian lady, she had one of her babies tied to her and she had a son and he wasn't getting up fast enough for her to get off the bus, so when he finally did get up she kicked him and then when they got of the bus she talking crazy whatever he had in his hand she took it out his hand and threw it in the garbage can and slapped him all upside his head you know what I mean. To where as if it had being an African American somebody like a Caucasian person on the bus would have made a phone call. Everybody seen her do that and nobody said nothing it was just like oh my God how could she do that you know what I mean. To where as I know that if that Asian mother had of been an African American it would have been way more talk on that bus. And um I don't know I always felt like African Americans were at the bottom of the barrel anyway. You know what I mean? Just because of all the things that we have been through, and it's always somebody trying to keep us oppress no matter how hard we fight to make it to the top when we get there it's still somebody that's able to try and find something to bring us back to where they feel comfortable with us being. You know what I mean? We can do millions things right, and do one thing wrong and they

will blow that one thing out of portion. I don't know it really saddens me it really does.

Question: I hear you. What about you're disciplining of kids?

Answer: I don't put my hands of my kids um and um, I know that um verbally I can be real harsh, but I have to bring it back you know what I mean? I have to go back and I have to talk to them, you know what I mean? I have to apologize, you know what I mean? All I know is if you put your hands on them you put fear in to them, and that's not what I'm about, that's not what I'm all about, that's not what I'm going to do because it's taken so long for me just to have communication with my oldest daughter. And by putting my hands on them is not going to anything but put fear in them or make them run away from home. So I don't, I rather just talk see what's going on. Now I will put her on punishment you know she do something she know she don't have no business doing and you know you didn't have no business doing that. I put her on punishment.

Question: Do you think that that is the norm for African American parents?

Answer: No, the norm for African American parents is to whoop um, and you know they take that consequence and they go right back out the door doing it again. You know what I mean? They don't really learn nothing.

Question: What local service did you find most helpful and/or useful?

Answer: Therapy I loved therapy because I was able to open up and talk about what was going on inside of me and I didn't have to worry about being cut off, I could cry I could scream, I could yell you know what I mean? And I could get up and leave that office and come back the next week a whole new person and even if I had no problems I had a person there for me that was consistent that had listen to me. More so I loved it for my kids. Because when my brother had them they were going to therapy and um, my oldest daughter would never talk she just made pictures, and she always made pictures of me her sister and her living together happy she would always make homes and stuff, you know what I mean? (Rebecca begins crying) I asked her why she didn't want to talk and just draw pictures, she said mama, that's how I want us to be. I cried when they left, and I was just so mad at my self, and felt like my kids should be here with me it made me pay attention to life more. It may me um more appreciative. I started realizing that it's the little things that count because the little things turn into big things. It made me not want to take so many things for granted.

Question: What would you identify as a gap in the system or services?

Answer: I think um now they need to have something as far as housing like guaranteed housing. Like when these ladies and these men come out of these programs (rehabilitation programs), they need to have some type of set housing you know what I mean? Because they can only extend their stay so long, and their stay there is ended. And you don't want to stay too long in programs because you know then your institutionalized. So when they do get out and their on their own sometimes they have a lot of fears because they no longer have structure you know? And so now they need the help you know? How to get this and how to get that, so that's where you need to have a relationship because now it's on you to live your life and to continue with your recovery, and you have to find the resources, and you have build the structure. You have to build you a solid foundation. Even if you have to go back to where you came from, and it's drugs all over and whatever, if you have not made conscience decision within yourself to not use then you going get high.