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Social Workers' Knowledge and Experience Working with Mixed Race Youth and Families

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SOCIAL WORKERS' KNOWLEDGE AND EXPERIENCE

WORKING WITH MIXED RACE YOUTH AND FAMILIES

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A Project

Presented to the

Faculty of

California State University,

San Bernardino

_____

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Social Work

_____

by

Ashley Renea Bennett

Mellissa Marie Duchesne

June 2020

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Approved by:

Dr. Deirdre Lanesskog, Faculty Supervisor, Social Work

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to gain a better understanding of social workers' knowledge and experience in working with mixed race youth and families. The literature review suggested that biracial and multiracial individuals struggle with identity issues, along with several barriers that affect their interactions with social workers, and the social workers' abilities to provide services for mixed race clients. The literature review also discussed the public's perception of social workers in dealing with minorities, most of which included the notion that social workers are biased. The literature review also discussed the use of technology in child welfare, and inaccuracies that can occur when utilizing a technological database.

The study used a qualitative, exploratory design. The data was obtained from face-to-face interviews with 15 social worker participants who have worked with mixed race families in some capacity. The participants were current employees of a child welfare agency for a California county. The interviews were conducted using a semi-structured interview guide designed by the researchers.

The researchers found that social workers' knowledge and experience in working with mixed race youth and family can be summarized in three themes: professional responsibility to mixed race clients, divergent approaches to identifying race and ethnicity, and challenges in documenting information within the database. Based on these findings, the researchers suggest implications for social work practice, policy, and research. The researchers recommend

enhanced trainings in practice for cultural sensitivity, awareness, and humility,

and updates in the database including the addition of multiracial and biracial

categories. These changes have the potential to improve services for and

research on mixed race youth and families in child welfare.

Keywords: Mixed Race, Disproportionality, Technology, Child Welfare

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

DEDICATION

I dedicate this work to my family, extended family, and close friends for their constant love and support in my pursuit of a higher education. Thank you all for every hug, word of encouragement, and prayer that you gave to me. Each one has meant the world to me and came at a time when I needed it most. Thank you to my parents for giving me my biracial status. My status fueled the passion behind this project. Through your love and support you have helped me to grow and embrace both of my cultures. It is because of you that I am not subjected to societal pressure to conform to one race over the other. I dedicate this work to the Mixed Race population, that I am a part of, know you are unique and have a special place in this world. Thank you to my research partner Mellissa Duchesne for standing by my side and being an amazing support network for me through this program. I am so glad that God allowed our paths to cross and I could be on this journey with you. I could not have done this project without you. Lastly, but most importantly I would like to dedicate this work to my Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Thank you for being my closest friend and for helping me every step of the way. "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me."- Philippians 4:13

-Ashley

I dedicate this project to my family and friends who stood by my side and were my cheerleaders as I took on this MSW journey. To my husband Chris, who supported me, encouraged me, and loved me even on the days when I had nothing to give back. Remember my love, "Not all those who wander are lost" and we shall wander in life on the path that God has made for us, and cherish all

of the unknowns. To my father, thank you for being a voice of reason and encouraging your children to explore all sides of their heritage, your influence fueled my passion for this project in more ways than anyone will ever know, may you rest in peace Tito. Thank you to God for providing me solace and comfort in the times I felt like quitting, your love allowed me to persevere. Thank you to my research partner, and dear friend, Ashley Bennett, you are an amazing person, and I could not have imagined going through this social work education journey without you by my side. I could not have done this project without you.

<div style="text-align: right">-Mellissa</div>

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Introduction

When it comes to today's society there are many ways that an individual may identify in regards to their race or ethnicity. As our population has become more diverse, especially in terms of mixed and multiracial or multiethnic families, racial and ethnic categorization becomes more complex. Many of our government administrative and information systems, record race and ethnicity in limited and sometimes overly simplistic categories. What happens when there are limited options, or an individual is forced to choose only one race, regardless of their mixed or multiracial identity?

Problem Statement

Identity development is a crucial part of a child's life. It can be even more important in the life of a child who is placed in the child welfare or foster care system. This is because they may not grow up in their family of origin which makes them a more vulnerable population. Social workers across the globe have a code of ethics that they are to abide by in doing any social work practice. Part of this code includes the core value of competency, and accordingly, the ethical principles of the National Association of Social Workers (NASW) Code of Ethics

section 1.05 indicates that social workers should uphold cultural awareness and social diversity (NASW, n.d.). Since social workers are to abide by the NASW code of ethics in dealing with their clients, they not only have a professional but a moral obligation to treat clients in a manner consistent with the NASW's stance on cultural awareness and social diversity.

America's child welfare agencies currently utilize what is titled the Child Welfare System/Case Management System (CWS/CMS) database software to enroll and track the children that they come into contact with, or become a ward of the state. The creation of this system and the participation of all 50 states was mandated by federal law in 1989 (CDSS, n.d.). However, not every state in the U.S., even now 30 years after this law was enacted, has a functioning child welfare information management system (Children's Bureau, 2019). The state of California uses CWS/CMS, and has been operational since 1997 (CDSS, n.d.).

All social workers in California are required to enter their clients' demographic and case information into the CWS/CMS software. This demographic data is then reported to the University of California, Berkeley and placed on a public website. When social workers enroll the child into CWS/CMS, they are given a variety of options to categorize the child based on age, gender, race, and ethnicity among various other categories of identification. However, CWS/CMS does not provide an option to identify a child as mixed race, such as a "two or more race" category (California Child Welfare Indicators Project, 2018).

Although the literature acknowledges disproportionality within the child welfare system, the lack of a mixed-race category calls into question the validity of data on race in child welfare, as it is unclear how mixed race children are categorized.

Disproportionality means that there is an over or underrepresentation of children of a specific race in comparison to the population of children within that region/county/state; specifically, in California the data comes from the U.S. Census and CWS/CMS. With no identification category for mixed race populations to choose in the CWS/CMS database, one might question the reliability of race-based data coming from the child welfare system in California.

The disproportionality of Native American and African American children in the child welfare system is clearly visible in the state's CWS/CMS database. In California in 2014, Native American children made up 0.4% of the population, Black children made up 5.8% of the population, and mixed race children made up 3.8% of the population; but in the California child welfare system they made up 20% for Native American children, 22% for Black children, and 0% for mixed race children (CCWIP, 2014). This is a disproportionate representation as in 2014, white children made up 28.6% of the total state population, and were almost equally represented with a make-up of only 5% within the child welfare system (CCWIP, 2014). This disproportionate representation implies that the number of Black and Native American children is far greater within the state than it truly is. This number could possibly be affected by the 0% representation of mixed race

children within child welfare. However, CWS/CMS data may not provide an accurate depiction as it also fails to offer an option for mixed race people. For example, in the year 2000, the U.S. census was adapted to add the category of "two or more races" as an option for people (Parker, Menasce Horowitz, Morin, & Lopez, 2015). As CWS/CMS categories do not match the U.S. census, our understanding of disproportionality may be impacted by an inaccurate capture of race and ethnicity in child welfare statistics.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study is to examine social worker's knowledge and experience in working with mixed race youth and families, especially in identifying the racial categorization of those youth and their family members.

It is important to understand this issue further because mixed race people need to be able to find acceptance within their own cultural identification, while simultaneously not feeling categorized based upon others perceptions of who they should be. Understanding and acknowledging mixed race populations should be important to child welfare agencies because it would allow their social workers and youth to acknowledge both (or more) cultures, as per the NASW code of ethics. In doing so, the study will consist of a qualitative research design, because there has been limited research regarding mixed race populations in the

child welfare system, and this research requires a qualitative design to understand social workers' knowledge and experience in working with these populations. The qualitative research design is more appropriate for this study rather than a quantitative design as there is limited data that is present for studying mixed race populations in the child welfare system. This study seeks to gain knowledge on social workers' experiences in working with mixed race youth and families.

<center>Significance of the Project for Social Work</center>

The findings of this study, and others similar to it, may have implications for social work practice, policy, and research.

<u>Social Work Practice</u>

This study may inform social work practice in several ways. First, the study will expand on our limited understanding of social workers' practices around categorizing race and ethnicity in their clients. Study findings may reveal a need for training or clarification of racial and ethnic categorization for workers. This study may identify gaps in workers' ability and commitment to capturing racial and ethnic identity in information systems. Finally, this study may identify gaps in social workers' understanding of mixed or multiracial and ethnic identity, suggesting that the failure to capture identity is more related to individual social

<center>5</center>

worker perceptions or lack of understanding, than to the limitations of information systems.

<u>Social Work Policy</u>

This study may provide insight on social work policy, by identifying the need for adaptations in agency protocol and child welfare policies, particularly around data collection. This study may identify a need to revise the CWS/CMS database so that it captures mixed race. In order to revise the CWS/CMS database there may be additional requirements for action from the state agency that runs CWS/CMS.

<u>Social Work Research</u>

The study may have influence in social work research as it may help individuals to better understand some of the existing data on disproportionality in child welfare and its significant limitations or inaccuracies. The findings will also benefit the counties in considering mixed race populations as a part of their researchable database, and in doing so the hope is that the public's perception of social workers being biased or racist is alleviated as the results could depict a more accurate level of removals in the system. Our study seeks to examine social workers' knowledge and experience in working with mixed race youth and families.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

Literature Review

Although there is some research on biracial and multiracial people, there is no significant research on multiracial individuals within child welfare. However, there have been various studies conducted on theoretical perspectives dealing with biracial identity, disproportionality and disparity surrounding minority groups within the child welfare system, and technological advancements in child welfare and other areas pertaining to best practice in social work.

Experiences of Biracial and Multiracial Youth

The literature suggests the importance of examining the experiences of biracial and multiracial youth in the child welfare system, as racial identity is an important aspect of daily living. Identity development is a crucial stage in any person's life, and more so for youth who have been placed in the foster care system and are already struggling with feeling as if they are not wanted or do not belong. This section will focus on studies that examine the experiences of biracial and multiracial youth.

Nuttgens (2010) compared what scientists have studied in the past regarding identity theory to a real person's experience growing up biracial. The methods used in this study consisted of a qualitative face-to-face interview on one individual. The key findings of the Nuttgens (2010) study appeared to be that the individual interviewed did not have the same experiences as those of other biracial individuals, which was used as a comparison in the study. The limitations of this study included that the researcher only interviewed a single individual's life experience, and that individual who was interviewed resided in Canada, and there is a different view of biracial individuals in Canada versus the U.S. (Nuttgens, 2010). The participant for this study reported a racial identity of Aboriginal, otherwise indigenous, and European, meaning that their experience was vastly different than those of a minority mixed race within the U.S. (Nuttgens, 2010). Nuttgens (2010) acknowledged that the individual's experiences were different than mainstream research because of the interviewee residing in Canada. Not to mention that mainstream research on multiracial people derives from the U.S. where there is an emphasis on multiracial conformity to one race rather than both or more (Nuttgens, 2010).

Renn (2008) acknowledged that multiracial students in college were not being studied until the 1990's. The purpose of this study was to inform the readers of theories that have been used to describe what identity development of multiracial individuals entails, and so it may be used when working with multiracial students in an educational setting (Renn, 2008). The key findings of

this study included: psychological effects, ecological effects, and foundational effects (Renn, 2008). Each of the effects presented as having a responsibility for providing an understanding about the identity for mixed race individuals (Renn, 2008). The limitations for this research included issues regarding the researcher not performing any study with the participants, and therefore was unable to test the reliability of the findings presented in this work (Renn, 2008). Renn (2008) stated another limitation of only focusing on black and white mixed individuals, which resulted in the research on all mixed races as limited because the focus was on one type of mixed race.

A study by Herman (2004) was done for the purpose of displaying differences between a multiracial youth who is going through identity development, and their indication of which race they identify with if they are forced to choose one race. The methods used in this study consisted of a survey design that was distributed to adolescent aged students (14 to 19) in the states of California and Wisconsin (Herman, 2004). The survey was created and distributed in 1987, and the study was published in 2004. The survey's first question asked the students, who were all multiracial participants, to choose just one category that best described them (Herman, 2004). It then asked the students to choose more than one option (if needed) indicating what the racial background of their parents consisted of (Herman, 2004).

The study's key findings related to how the adolescents participated and the variation of their answers, as nine percent of the students refused to choose one category to identify with because they identified as more than one race and were uncomfortable in limiting themselves to one option (Herman, 2004). The findings also indicated that the individuals who were biracial and of a minority group faced more ethnic discrimination, experienced more disadvantages, and had lower levels of self-esteem about their racial identity than compared to those who identified as one race, even if that race was in a minority group category (Herman, 2004). Limitations of the study consisted of the notion of reverse causality due to the age of the participants, because with adolescents there is always the idea of peer group influence (Herman, 2004). Another limitation is the age of the data, as it was over ten years old by the time the study was published. The questionnaire also possessed a forced one-choice option for the youth to choose from as it was not consistent with the changes made to the U.S. census in 2000 (Herman, 2004).

Choi and colleagues (2012) conducted a study examining whether multiracial youth experienced higher risk factors from peer influences than single race youth. The methods used in the study consisted of the use of secondary data from a statewide study that occurred throughout high schools in the state of Washington in 2002 (Choi et al., 2012). This secondary data was then compared to data gathered from an international youth development study (YDS) that also occurred in 2002, and was tracked through a cohort model for the next three

years (Choi et al., 2012). The researchers utilized a two-stage clustering approach to randomly select and recruit schools for the study resulting in a pool of 120 applicants for the YDS (Choi et al., 2012). During the data collection of the 2002 YDS there was approximately 12% of the participants who identified as multiracial, 25% of the families involved in the study were considered multiracial families and also fell into the economic bracket of living in poverty (Choi et al., 2012).

The key findings of the study indicated that peer related risk factors were significantly higher with multiracial youth (Choi et al., 2012). Those findings included: more pressure from peers, more issues with substance use, increased rates of behavioral problems, higher levels of peer-relation issues, and a higher rate of yielding to peer influence (Choi et al., 2012). The limitations to this study included the reliability and validity of the tool used to measure the individual's racial identification (Choi et al., 2012). Other limitations included the lack of information on peer inclusion or rejection, racial identification, and identity formation in order to have a better understanding regarding the cause and effect relationship between racial identity and the surrounding peer relations (Choi et al., 2012). The study failed to obtain an accurate representation for the sample size of the population, as it was significantly lacking in single race participants for African Americans and Native Americans (Choi et al., 2012). The study only focused on externalized behaviors, but did not measure internal behaviors such

as anxiety or depression, which has much to do with where an individual would more than likely be affected by their issues with racial identity (Choi et al., 2012).

Disproportionality in Child Welfare

Looking at the rates of disproportionality within child welfare will help to display an accurate image as to how serious this problem is. This section will focus on studies where individuals have been interviewed, or focus groups have been held, which address possible reasons as to the high levels of disproportionality in specific ethnic minorities.

The purpose of the study by Miller, Cahn, and Orellana (2012) was to obtain diverse perspectives of collaborating partners and family members regarding the racial disproportionality and disparity within the child welfare system. The qualitative data were collected through focus groups which were a part of a larger mixed methods study (Miller, Cahn, & Orellana, 2012). In this study, each participant of the focus group interpreted information regarding disproportionality and presented their opinions on why disproportionality and disparity occurred in child welfare (Miller et al., 2012). The key findings of this study were that there were eleven themes of opinions, four of those themes surrounded the idea that there was a cause of disproportionality due to racial bias, and the other seven reasons included: poverty, lack of trust, negative perceptions of client's behaviors, inability to relate to the client, raising different expectations for families of color, holding onto the past, and a lack of family

engagement (Miller et al., 2012). The limitations of this study included that the researchers did not break down what the four ideas revolving around racial bias were, or what made them different enough to be categorized into four sections, even though they were similar. Another limitation was that the study was based on the perceptions of those who were involved with the child welfare system at some point, and may have had bias towards the system (Miller et al., 2012).

      The Children's Bureau (2016) explored the prevalence of disproportionality and disparity within the child welfare system, and to describe strategies that exist for professionals to utilize while working in the child welfare system. The methods used in this exploratory and descriptive study involve comparing agency data with U.S. census data in order to measure how populations were being represented in the child welfare system. The key findings of this study indicated that throughout the country there were some major concerning issues of racial disproportionality (Children's Bureau, 2016). The strategies used to address it were not doing as well as they needed to, because even though the trainings were focusing on cultural competence and checking bias, they were not reaching the root of the problem with the disproportionality (Children's Bureau, 2016). The key findings also included suggestions for correcting the issues of disproportionality, with the first suggestion being the use of assessing their system according to their location and the specific races that were affected the most (Children's Bureau, 2016). After which, the agency should reevaluate what they can do to address the needs regarding racial

disproportionality (Children's Bureau, 2016). Because the study is informative, it does not address its limitations, rather it produces limitations with the child welfare system and ways of addressing those shortcomings.

Dettlaff and Rycraft (2010) examined the factors that contributed to disproportionality in child welfare through the legal community's perspective. The methods used in this study consisted of a qualitative approach, using focus groups selected through state administrators (Dettlaff & Rycraft, 2010). The study had three focus groups altogether: two groups focused on the county courthouses and the third group went to the Department of Family Protective Services (DFPS) office for the county it resided in. Each group was two hours long and consisted of a mixture of judges, lawyers, and state attorneys (Dettlaff & Rycraft, 2010). The key findings consisted of five themes that emerged: (1) cultural bias, (2) fearful agency climate, (3) communication barriers, (4) ineffective service delivery, and (5) workforce issues (Dettlaff & Rycraft, 2010). Limitations of the study included a small sample size, which limited the generalizability of the findings, and the questions asked in the focus groups did not direct the participants to indicate issues with disproportionality in any particular system, which led to multiple perceptions of the issue in a wide array of areas (Dettlaff & Rycraft, 2010). However, disproportionality has been found to be a part of the social service systems, and this study was not as accurate as other studies on disproportionality and disparity, as there is a much-needed service change in these areas across the board.

Race Issues in Child Welfare

Race issues in child welfare have grown throughout the years. Through disproportionality findings, it appears to the public that there is a clear issue with racial bias within child welfare, specifically towards people of color and impoverished families. Technology use in child welfare has grown to become more of a necessity than a luxury, and has allowed researchable data for child welfare to maintain these sorts of public perceptions. The various databases not only tell child welfare spectators just how good or bad of a job social workers are doing, but what children are coming into the county jurisdictions, who is making smart structured decision choices, and so much more. The studies in this section will focus on the use of technology in child welfare and how its use impacts the system, and will discuss issues with race in the child welfare system.

Magruder and Shaw (2008) conducted a study to answer three questions regarding multiple rates of experiences and encounters with child welfare, and their relation to race or ethnicity, while using the data for child welfare from the state of California. The three questions asked in the survey were as follows: (1) what portion of children born in 1999 have experienced an event with child welfare at least once in their life? (2) Do the rates of these experiences vary by ethnicity? and (3) what are the differences, if any, to examine the cumulative differences versus the longitudinal analysis? (Magruder & Shaw, 2008). The methods used for this study included utilizing secondary data from CWS/CMS

and compared that data to the three questions presented in order to indicate potential disproportionality. The study was also compared to previous studies on disproportionality (Magruder & Shaw, 2008). The study analyzed the secondary data using a method that looked at the timespan from birth to age seven, and used the table method (cohort model) which looked at a single time period such as the cohort of children born in 1999 (Magruder & Shaw, 2008).

The key findings from this study indicated that almost 5% of children in California had at least one incident with child welfare by the time of their seventh birthday, almost 20% of the children had been referred to child welfare services, and 2% had a substantiated referral in the system in their first year of life (Magruder & Shaw, 2008). In terms of removals, almost 4% of all children born in 1999 had been removed from their homes by their seventh birthday (Magruder & Shaw, 2008). Findings of this study indicated that incidents had a vast range between races, with 39% of children with African American mothers being the highest for referrals and removals. The study had a strong indication that African American and Native American families have different experiences with the child welfare system than other population groups because they are removed more frequently (Magruder & Shaw, 2008). Limitations to this study also included the methods used in this study which were longitudinal methods and the cohort design (or life table method). In using the life table method, the researchers could only look at the one year in which the cohort was born, which limits the ability to

see the developing trends occurring in society at the time (Magruder & Shaw, 2008).

English, Brandford, and Coghlan (2000) informed the readers of the strengths and weaknesses, along with issues of the analysis and presentation of the use of data in child welfare agencies. The methods used in this study included the use of secondary data through approximately 28 sources, in which they studied the automated child welfare system known as case and management information system (CAMIS) in the state of Washington (English, Brandford, & Coghlan, 2000). The key findings from this study of CAMIS were as follows: computer technology improved the potential for accountability, databases helped to improve programs and develop effective policies for child welfare; in essence, it resulted in an overall positive outlook on switching to an online information system (English et al., 2000). Through this study, the use of technology was proved to be beneficial for child welfare agencies. However, some of the limitations included missing information and the need for data quality to be improved (English et al., 2000). In the state of California, the current use of the CWS/CMS database offers a primary and a secondary area for information to be filled in regarding race and ethnicity. However, the only measurements taken into account for research in the database, consist only of those of monoracial backgrounds; resulting in mixed race people to fall into the category of missing data and are therefore not researched.

A study by Citrin, Levy, and Houweling (2014) was designed with the purpose of gaining societal member's perceptions about how individuals who identify as more than one race should identify on the U.S. census. The methods used in this study consisted of randomly selected participants assigned to one of three focus groups: one was a control group, and the other two were treatment groups (Citrin, Levy, & Houweling, 2014). One of the treatment groups was given a breakdown of former President Obama's biracial ancestry, the other treatment group was given the biracial ancestry along with a statement from President Obama which stated that he identified with only being black, and the control group was given nothing (Citrin et al., 2014). All three groups were asked their opinions on how President Obama should have identified during the 2010 U.S. census, to which every group had a majority of the feeling that he should have identified as two or more races (Citrin et al., 2014). The key findings of this study included that there has been an increase in society's willingness to accept multiracial identification, in spite of the history of society within the country (Citrin et al., 2014). The study declined to list any limitations, however, it did not state the demographic breakdown of the individuals involved in the focus groups, and it was not able to detect if there was any bias involved.

There is limited literature about mixed race populations in the child welfare system, and limited literature on social workers' knowledge and experience in working with mixed race families in the child welfare system. This literature does not exist because CWS/CMS does not track mixed race data.

Theories Guiding Conceptualization

There are multiple theories that are applicable for use when discussing biracial and multiracial individuals and their identity. For the purposes of this project, the theories that will be discussed in detail include: Biracial Identity Theory, Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, and Critical Race Theory.

Biracial Identity Theory (Nuttegens, 2010) has to do with the struggles of a person who is more than one race while searching for their identity through the different experiences they will encounter being multiracial. In dealing with youth and families with biracial and multiracial backgrounds, biracial identity theory is applicable as there is an inherent struggle for youth (specifically) to choose their identity. Since there are no multiracial identities taken into consideration in CWS/CMS, one can assume that the social workers and the system are not adequately capturing the racial identity of these families.

Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs (as cited in Zastrow & Kirst-Ashman, 2007) suggests humans have five categories of needs: basic needs which are physiological needs (i.e. food, water, shelter, clothing, etc.), safety needs (i.e. security of body, employment, resources, etc.), love and belonging (i.e. familial bonds, friendship, sexual intimacy, etc.), esteem (i.e. self-esteem, confidence, achievement, respect from others, etc.), and self-actualization (i.e. morality, creativity, spontaneity, purpose, etc.). Maslow's theory can be directly correlated with the interactions of an individual who is searching for their self-esteem and

self-actualization, such as individuals who are dealing with issues like biracial identity and where they feel they belong (as cited in Zastrow & Kirst-Ashman, 2007). Maslow's theory applies to this study as it suggests that it may be important to children and families that social workers appropriately recognize and acknowledge their racial identities.

Critical race theory is also relevant to this study as it can be used as a tool for professionals. According to Kolivoski, Weaver, and Constance-Huggins (2014) critical race theory could be used to equip social workers with the ability to recognize bias and power differences between workers and their clients, and to understand the effects those differences can inflict upon individuals. Through the use of critical race theory, applied with cultural humility and cultural awareness trainings, this may help workers approach clients with issues and questions regarding racial identity.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODS

Introduction

This chapter provides an overview of the research methods that were used in the study of social workers' knowledge and experience in working with mixed race families. It also discusses the study's design, sampling, data collection, interview guide, along with the procedures, protection of human subjects, and qualitative data analysis.

Study Design

The purpose of this study was to explore social workers' knowledge and experiences in working with mixed race families, and to explore the way social workers enter data on race and ethnicity in child welfare information systems. By using face-to-face, in-depth interviews, the researchers were able to provide the social worker participants with opportunities to explain and to elaborate on how they engaged with mixed race families and established their racial and ethnic identities.

This study used a qualitative research design for the collection of data. Approximately 15 individual social workers from one county child welfare agency in California were recruited to participate in face-to-face interviews. This design allowed the researchers to gather information from current social workers who had experience in working with mixed race families. This study required a qualitative design because the interactions between mixed race populations and social workers are not widely researched, and focus on individual perceptions. A qualitative design allowed an in-depth understanding of the experience of social workers who engaged with mixed race populations, how they went about categorizing them into the CWS/CMS system, and what their experiences were in working with these families. This study design allowed researchers to gain knowledge on a particular subject that had not been widely researched. The small sample size allowed for collection of rich data on participants' experiences and practices, but those samples may not generalize to all social workers in that specific county, in the state of California, or in general.

Sampling

This study utilized a snowball sampling technique, where the researchers used their professional networks to recruit social workers from one particular California county child welfare agency. Participants were accessed through

interagency connections and with agency permission. For example, the researchers reached out to their supervisors, established connections within the county, and these connections then reached out to others in various departments of that county agency. To be included in this study, participants had to be social workers who were currently working within, or had previously worked within child welfare. They also had to have passed the induction time frame within that specific agency. They had to have experience working with CWS/CMS and to have worked directly with the public. The sample size consisted of 15 participants of diverse backgrounds who completed in depth interviews.

Data Collection and Instruments

Data for this study was collected using an interview guide designed by the researchers. The interview guide consisted of approximately 8 questions which are attached in Appendix A. Demographic questions included age, gender, ethnicity, race, time worked in child welfare, position in child welfare, and experience in working with mixed race populations. The questions were open-ended and participants were encouraged to elaborate on their responses in order to gather more detailed information from them. The questions were phrased in a way that allowed the participants to expand on their knowledge and experience in working with the mixed race population. The questions allowed the researchers

to gather information on how often social workers came into contact with families of mixed race, what challenges they faced, and the ability to correctly identify mixed race families in the CWS/CMS system.

Procedures

The participants were recruited through the use of snowball sampling after receiving approval from the county agency and the University IRB. The participants were then interviewed in a private meeting/conference space or in the space of the participant's choosing. The social work participants were recruited during daylight hours (8:00 a.m.-5:00 p.m.) from January through February 2020. Upon meeting the inclusion criteria, participants were asked to participate in the study. Prior to participating, participants were given an informed consent form, which described the study, the researchers' plan to protect their confidentiality, and the minimal risks involved in the study. They were given the choice between placing an "X" or their personal signature on the consent line. The interviews lasted between 15 and 45 minutes in length. The interviews were administered by either one of the researchers and were digitally recorded. Upon completion, the participants were given a debriefing statement.

Protection of Human Subjects

The researchers took appropriate measures to ensure the protection of participants in this study. Before starting an interview, participants were provided an informed consent form, as well as a consent form to be audio recorded. Participants were required to place an "X" in the space provided to sign their consent to participate as well as to be audio taped. Participants were informed of the study's purpose, confidentiality guidelines, and that their participation was voluntary. Participants were informed that they were allowed to cease the interview at any time and could refuse to answer if they felt uncomfortable with any of the questions. In addition, participants of the study were informed about who was performing the study, who was supervising the study, and that the study was approved by the agency and the researchers' University IRB.

At no point in time were the participants ever identified by name. Instead they were assigned numbers between 1 and 15. In doing so, the confidentiality of each participant of the study was protected. All of the face-to-face interview data was transferred from the recording device to a computer, and stored within that computer and on a USB drive that remained in a secure location where only the researchers and research supervisor had access to it. Once the research study was completed, all of the data was destroyed. All participants were, as stated in the informed consent, allowed to stop the interview process at any time without question or penalty.

Data Analysis

This study used thematic analysis techniques. After the data was gathered

from the individual participants, the researchers transcribed the audio recordings

for coding. The first thing the researchers did after this point was code the

transcripts individually. The coding method entailed the researchers highlighting

repetitive information that appeared to present themes throughout the interviews.

The researchers individually looked at the similarities and differences between

the participants' answers. Those similarities and differences identified the trends,

themes, and patterns between the participants. The researchers came together

to discuss their findings and appropriately name the categories within the

findings. Finally, the researchers used axial coding to relate the themes to one

another, and then to group them into the final themes and sub-themes presented

in the findings section.

Summary

In conclusion, this chapter discussed the various methods that were used

within the study. Those methods included the use of a qualitative research

design, along with a snowball sampling technique. After which the researchers

performed face-to-face interviews with the use of an interview guide which

consisted of approximately eight questions. Other items discussed within this

chapter consisted of the procedure that was used, the appropriate steps the

researchers took to ensure the protection of the participants in the study, and the

data analysis for the qualitative research of this specific study.

CHAPTER FOUR

RESULTS

Introduction

Our analysis revealed three themes related to child welfare social workers'
perceptions and experiences in working with mixed race clients. Those themes
included: professional responsibility to mixed race clients, divergent approaches
to identifying race and ethnicity, and challenges documenting race and ethnicity.
Below we describe our participants' demographic characteristics and then we
elaborate on the themes.

Participant Demographics

The ages of the participants ranged from the late 20's to mid-60's. One
participant identified as mixed race, and eight participants referenced being
multilingual. Approximately 6 participants identified as being Black, 1 participant
identified as Asian, and 4 participants identified as Hispanic. Approximately 4
participants identified as being white. In regards to gender, 11 of the participants
were female, and 4 participants were male. All participants had an education
level of either a bachelor's or master's degree.

Participants worked in a variety of positions within the child welfare agency. Those positions include front line workers and supervisors, who have face-to-face contact with their clients. Participants' time at the county varied from new workers to seasoned workers, but all participants have contact with mixed race youth and families in some capacity.

<div align="center">Professional Responsibility to Mixed Race Clients</div>

<u>Clients' Rights to Self-Identification</u>

Many participants emphasized the importance of a client's right to self-identify. This theme was not present in all participants' interviews, but it was essential in those that did indicate it. For the social workers who worked primarily with adolescents that were dealing with identity issues, this was an important topic. Participants felt that being able to explain to their clients that race and ethnicity is essentially a spectrum, and when an individual is a mixed race youth they no longer fit into one category was important. This is because those clients have the ability to place themselves anywhere on the spectrum that they would like. Oftentimes, this form of education involved the social workers advocating with their clients to allow the child to explore their mixed race identity through visits with other family members, or attending religious ceremonies that the current parent or caregiver may not be necessarily comfortable with. Social Worker #12 described a case where a biracial child's parents were at odds over which culture was going to be more dominant in the child's life, and there was more pressure on the mother to conform to the father's culture instead of

allowing the child to experience both. This dilemma was primarily seen when the discussion of religion came up with the family. Social Worker #12 described how they approached the conversation with the family as:

> I told him, go to church with her once, you know and see how it is. Cause a lot of people cast judgment on certain stuff and they've never been, they go off of what they've been told in the past or what they've heard and just the same to her. I've even told her to go to church. See how it is.

In this situation, Social Worker #12 worked with the family and advocated successfully for the child to be able to explore both sides of their culture. In doing so, the outcome of the case was that the child was able to be immersed in both cultures while spending time with each parent separately.

One of the most common themes that came out of the question of what the participants would like other social workers and supervisors to know, was the notion that social workers need to allow clients to disclose their identity of their own volition. This was something that the majority of the participants felt strongly towards. Social Worker #9 stated that the client needs to self-identify, as it is important as is the social workers approach, "I think maybe just having additional training in terms of how to approach the family, how to be, you know, culturally sensitive, I guess we can say." Encouraging a client to explore the heritage and culture provides the empowerment needed to choose where they "fit" in regards to their racial identity. Social Worker #15 discussed race being a spectrum by stating, "Even just learning about multiracial, research and stuff, it's just like you

see, you never really do fit in one or the other. You're somewhere in between. It becomes its own spectrum."

Participants stated that using a straightforward approach and simply asking the clients was the best way to go about discussing their mixed race identity. It was also to be noted that allowing a client to self-identify also includes the ability to be okay with a client not identifying, or not addressing race and ethnicity whatsoever. It is about giving the client the respect and self-determination to choose how they identify and if they want to talk about their mixed race identity at all. It boils down to respect for the client, and displaying dignity and worth of the person.

Unique Challenges Serving Mixed Race Youth

A few participants reported specific challenges in finding appropriate placements for mixed race children, especially those with minority identities. Those mixed race youth have more issues with finding placements that are not only willing to take them, but are also culturally appropriate. Social Worker #7 explained, "We do unfortunately have some caregivers that will flat out say, I don't want to take any black kids or any Hispanic kids. If they're mixed, they're exactly it's just that, some people still have prejudice and racist views." In some cases, participants disclosed placing youth in a foster home for one night and placing a removal notice to allow for more time to locate an appropriate placement. One worker described a particular incident in which their only option

was to place an African American child in a predominantly Hispanic community, one they knew would not be appropriate.

> I placed an African American child in a predominantly Hispanic neighborhood and I knew it was going to be conflict and that was the only place where I could get, because I knew it was gonna be, there was gonna be conflict just based on stuff that had been going on. And so, I mean I had to take the placement that night and I knew he'd be safe, but I knew it wasn't ideal. And so, I had put in an immediate, back then it was seven day notice to get him moved out of that placement because it wasn't going to be a good match for him because there was violence in the area. There's just cultural friction. (Social Worker #14)

Other workers, such as Social Worker #6, discussed making the choice not to place a child at all by stating,

> I went to a placement and I had some African American kids with me and when I looked around, I'm talking to her and I said, no, pack up. We're going, I didn't accept the placement. I called placement back and I said, I'm sorry, this is not going to work. I'm willing to come back to the office and just wait.

Other variables that affect mixed race youth and families include the family dynamics, inherit racism that is affecting the way grandparents speak about the parent of the child who is of a different race and ethnicity, or the desire of

extended family to want nothing to do with the child unless they exhibit characteristics that are predominantly white.

Although some of the participants felt that it was important to discuss culture with the clients, the ability to get into a detailed conversation was dependent upon the role of the social worker within the agency. Since the participants came from departments that served either the front end or the back end, their experience with clients differed.

Workers who were primarily in the front end and performed the initial investigation were not immediately concerned with mixed race identities, as they were there to investigate an allegation of child abuse. The only time that workers concerned themselves with mixed race identities was if the allegation included emotional abuse from a caregiver such as calling the youth derogatory names, or if the allegation was brought about due to family dynamics regarding race. Participants who were placed in the front end of the agency, if placed on a jurisdiction disposition (JD) unit, in other words a unit that is responsible for gathering detailed information about the family to present to the court, were more likely to have conversations regarding race and ethnicity. This is because JD writers are responsible for conducting a global assessment of the clients, which entails any issues they have had since birth until present day, including racial tensions, or identity issues.

Participants who were placed in the back end of the agency were more likely to develop a working relationship with the families, and build connections to

the point where discussing mixed race identity was an easier conversation. Social Worker #15 described a case where they had established rapport with their clients and were able to easily have a conversation about race and ethnicity. Social Worker #15 stated:

> Two sisters that I had on the caseload and their dad was deceased, he had been killed. Their ethnicity was listed as one thing when they weren't that. They were half, they would tell, they told me they were half black, half white, so their mom was white. And their dad was black. But I think even trying to think, cause I don't even think he was black. I think he was like an Island nation even, but they were listed as Hispanic in the system. And they looked white. So that was the other thing too, is that they, so they would talk about the, the dynamics of, you know, that they're, the ethnicity of the father was listed incorrectly. I think even on some of their birth documents they would talk about how funny it was to them that they identify like I met their mom and their mom was like white, white. Right. And then, you know, they're listed as Hispanic and then, you know, they're telling me that their dad is this whole other race and ethnicity so they kind of felt like they don't have a fit necessarily. You know, they, they strongly identified with their mom and, and white culture cause that's what they looked like and they accepted that. But were they, they definitely had some, I don't want to call it trauma cause I wouldn't, like identity exploration, I guess.

Participants also indicated that one way that child welfare workers interact with their clients is through a practice called, Child and Family Team Meetings (CFTM's). Participants explained that CFTM's are designed for the family and workers to go over different areas in a child's life, including their emotional well-being. During these CFTM's the families oftentimes end up discussing issues that are sensitive to their family, which can also include issues with a child's racial identity. Social Worker #5 provided one example of a racial identity issue that could come up during a CFTM by stating,

> One of my jobs is to be observant in that room. And I just sit, everybody, let's pause for a moment. And then I looked her in the eye and said, is that an uncomfortable subject for you? She said, yes it is. I said, do you want to proceed talking about it? She said, no, I don't. I said, is that something that you feel you can talk to your therapist about? She said, yes I can. And I said to you, is the sadness tied into you connecting with who you are and where do you fit in? And she said, yes it does. And she looked me right in the eyes and then I said, okay, we don't have to talk about it.

Participants who worked with their clients during these CFTM's had an organic opportunity to discuss their mixed race identities at length, and establish that opportunity to address these factors with their clients. The use of the CFTM's provided social workers the ability to find more culturally appropriate services and resources for their clients. According to Social Worker #5, some of the resources

discovered during CFTM's could include religious services, hair care products, support groups, or counselors who focus on specific cultural barriers.

<u>Social Workers' Duty to Attend to Race, Ethnicity, and Agency Values</u>

Social workers educating themselves on different cultures was prevalent in many interviews. Whether it was utilizing a straightforward approach and asking the families the questions needed to understand, or going back to the office and doing a search for information online, educating themselves on different cultures became a running theme. Social Worker #14 described events that required them to go above and beyond in researching a culture that they had no knowledge about. This entailed the participant going online, researching scholarly articles about the client's specific culture, and citing it in their court report. Social Worker #14 stated this as their reasoning for not only researching the culture in depth, but also citing aspects of it in their court report:

> My idea was if I gave the court a little snippet and it was small, but if I gave the court a little snippet of why this is part of their culture and understanding how it impacts families, then that might help them understand more and learn more about the family and maybe be a little more compassionate. All while acknowledging child safety.

Although many of the participants displayed an importance of attending to their client's race and ethnicity, there was another overarching theme that the participants discussed, which was attending to the agency's values. In attending to the agency's values, all of the participants at one point or another in their

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interviews reminded the researchers that the agency's ultimate goal is child safety. Since the agency's purpose is to keep children safe, the participants must address that aspect regardless of a client's racial identity or culture.

Some participants argued that the agency should be providing exactly the same services to all clients, because the focus of the agency is child safety and not race, ethnicity, or culture. Social Worker #13 described an instance where they had to weigh the choice between cultural difference and parental understanding of child safety. Social Worker #13 stated,

> So that situation I can think of, because I did take into cultural, cause he did tell me that's how he was disciplined. But at the same time you've been here since the eighties, you didn't want to see the picture. So it made me question as far as, okay, why don't you want to see the pictures?

In this situation, although the participant was aware of the client's cultural upbringing, there were too many other details that indicated a risk to the child. All participants agreed that the same services should be offered to any family regardless of race, ethnicity, and culture, except for cases of American Indian children due to the Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA). When asked about how the participants work with mixed race youth and families, the majority of their answers were to the effect of the same way I would work with any other family.

When discussing the notion of educating the family about the agency's purpose and values, Social Worker #13 stated, "Just educating my families as far as what the department recommends." The idea behind this level of education is

that the social workers take culture into consideration, but still have to find a way to communicate the ultimate reason for the department's involvement in their lives at that time. The majority of the participants felt that regardless of the client's culture, social workers were there to serve a purpose, and that purpose should include educating the clients about child safety.

Another part of a social workers displaying a professional responsibility to mixed race clients includes their ability to understand the role they play, and the power dynamics at hand. Social workers discussed the "Power of the Badge" and having awareness of what comes along with it. In essence, social workers have a presence of authority that they must remember when interacting with their clients. This authority is a power dynamic between the social worker and the client. Individuals of mixed race identity and minorities oftentimes have negative experiences with authoritative officials and law enforcement. It is a social worker's knowledge and experience that should guide them in treating their clients respectfully, and recognizing the, at times unspoken, power dynamics that are present in their interactions. Social Worker #10 discussed how clients can oftentimes perceive social workers coming into their home,

> Like they see a role in a title, you know, it's like saying a white cop is this or white social worker. So sometimes I get that. I can't think of, so nothing pops in my head right now where I wasn't able to diffuse that and redirect it to the real reason I was there.

In this scenario, Social Worker #10 is discussing valid perceptions that mixed race individuals and minorities face regularly, but in understanding the "Power of the Badge" it is the social worker's duty to help alleviate that power dynamic, and be conscious and sensitive to the fact that these feelings are valid, when interacting with families.

The theme of remembering the role of a social worker is important, as it relates to the power dynamics, but extends to the NASW code of Ethics. Participants explained that social workers are taught values such as the importance of empathy, maintaining open-mindedness, and the practice of displaying cultural humility, sensitivity, and awareness when working with youth and families of various cultures. In displaying that cultural awareness and humility with clients, the importance of documenting race appropriately in the system is crucial. Social Worker #15 depicts the importance of making sure the client's race and ethnicity is correctly input into the system because of how the case follows the client, through this statement:

> Even if you pick one primary and three secondary, the primary ethnicity is what will always be shown on documentation. So like anything that's preprinted or you know gets pre-populated from the system is always going to identify that primary ethnicity. Whereas if you can select a multiracial option as the primary and then have the secondary is listed and then that's like, then your documentation that you print out, it's actually going to list multiracial and then maybe you have to go back in the system

to see, okay, which different ones instead of having say like, Oh no, this is,

you know, they identify primarily as white, but they're also African

American. And then you know, you don't know that they're mixed race until

you go back and look in the system because all your documentation is just

showing them as white.

Whereas, Social Worker #14 described the importance of documenting, and the

lack of knowledge about where the data goes by stating,

I'm gonna be honest. I don't think that, I think, I believe the majority of

social workers don't give it a thought and they don't even go and update

any ethnicity or race stuff in CWS, they don't even care. They don't, they

don't understand what the impact is, and I, I don't fully understand it either,

but I'm hoping that the data is going somewhere and being used

appropriately. But I don't think they, the importance of documenting it

appropriately has been a priority.

Divergent Approaches to Identifying Race and Ethnicity

Participants described three basic approaches to identifying the race and

ethnicity of the families they served. Those approaches included: a

straightforward approach, the use of visual perception, and specific questions

about American Indian identity.

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<u>The Straightforward Approach</u>

The use of the straightforward approach primarily consists of the social workers asking direct questions to the clients about race, ethnicity, and culture. The straightforward approach allows the client the opportunity to identify themselves, and choose which racial and ethnic categories they relate to, regardless of what their parent's heritage was. Social Worker #2 provided an example of using the straightforward approach, as follows:

Usually I would just talk about family. Like I would bring up family and ask first about like grandparents, if they have any contact, you know, with grandparents. And then I go into more. Tell me about your grandparents. Where are they from? If I don't get a lot of information because the kids are younger, I'll ask what do you identify yourself as, as far as what your race is or what your culture is. So it kind of depends on what age you're talking to. With adults it's a little bit easier because I'll say, you know, I have to do my report and I want to go ahead and identify what your race is. And then usually they're pretty open about it. And then that's also how you learn. Cause you know, sometimes people, families or adults want to be specified as Latino, but some don't want to be specified as Latino, want to say that they're Mexican. So it kind of opens up the door for me to know exactly how they want to be identified.

Several of the participants who utilized a straightforward approach had a minority background, a multiracial background, or were raised in an environment

where cultural inclusion was harnessed and resulted in them being bilingual and multilingual individuals and cultural advocates. The participants who had any of these characteristics were generally more sensitive to capturing the clients' identification and voice in regards to their own ethnicity. These participants were not only more likely to utilize a straightforward approach in asking their clients about race, ethnicity, and culture, but were also more likely to educate themselves on cultures that differed from their own. These participants, when discussing their experiences with mixed race youth and families, were more likely to display cultural sensitivity, cultural humility, and respect for their clients' culture and homes. Social Worker #10 provided an example of treating clients with respect and cultural humility. Social Worker #10 described an event with a family of Asian descent and stated,

> I had someone out with me one time, a trainee, that didn't want to take their shoes off. It was brand new. It was a nice home, something I could never afford. And they had white carpet. It was beautiful. And it wasn't even, I don't even think that's cause of the white carpet, it's just their culture, and they didn't wanna take their shoes off. So, they were given these slippers like in the operating room, those ones that go over and they put them on there. But I don't care. I take my shoes off now.

Social Worker #10 was describing the importance of giving clients respect for their culture, and how their thought process has evolved over time in this regard, and because of it they are more sensitive to culture with their clients now.

Participants who came into the interview with a clear understanding of race and ethnicity tended to be more culturally aware of their client's needs, and were more sensitive to issues surrounding race and racial identity. These participants were also of the mindset to utilize a straightforward approach. Social Worker #6 displayed a culturally aware practice through speaking about placements. Social Worker #6 said,

> I ask questions about how's the placement going, you know, or cause you went from your parents' home to this placement and it's a totally different culture then you know, so are there, is there any concern you have about that? And there are some of them who will say food down to religion, down to hair care, that kind of stuff.

Another example of this straightforward approach combined with culturally aware practice came about in a discussion surrounding the use of hygiene products, Social Worker #14 stated,

> I want to make sure they had hair care products because I would always ask for that in a court report. If I had a child that had very curly or kinky hair, I would ask for a specific allowance for things like hair care products.

The Use of Visual Perception

The use of visual perception entails the social worker making a determination of the client's race and ethnicity based on the physical appearance

of the client. Social Worker #3 disclosed using visual perception to determine that is how they confirmed a client's race and ethnicity in this statement,

> I mean it was based on looking at the, the, the children. They obviously looked different. They didn't appear to be from the same exact ethnicity. You know, they appear to, like I said, a few, they had been identified and appear to look Hispanic and then a couple others look mixed as far as Hispanic and African American. So that was a visual sign.

Oftentimes, the use of visual perception is seen when a social worker is also utilizing the data in CWS/CMS stating what the client's race and ethnicity are, regardless if it is correct. Utilizing visual perception can be correct in some cases, but more often than not, the clients' race is determined by their physical attributes such as the color of their skin, shape of their facial features, and texture of their hair, to make a generalized assumption of what their race and ethnicity consists of. The use of visual perception could also be known as the "Best Guess" approach.

Of the 15 participants, approximately 10 participants lacked a definitive understanding of the difference between race and ethnicity, or how to appropriately categorize the two; whereas five of the 15 participants came into the interview with a clear understanding of race and ethnicity, and the issues surrounding mixed race youth and families. Several of the 10 participants who lacked clarity on the terminology were only able to provide their demographics and racial identities after the researchers gave definitions of the terms. Social

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Worker #3 indicated confusion on the terminology in the statements, "What's the difference between race and ethnicity. I know there's a difference, but I don't know the difference. Race is... I heard there was not a race, so African?"

Participants who lacked clarity on the terminology did not only utilize visual perception, but they were more likely not to concern themselves with updating the client's profile in the CWS/CMS database in order to accurately reflect the client's identification. Social Worker #8 showed that they are not concerned about updating the system through this statement, "I honestly, I usually don't do it cause it's already on there by the time it gets to me. But there is a little tab or you just switch it."

Specific Questions for American Indian Identity

Each participant discussed the notion of gathering information on clients' American Indian ancestry, which is mandated by the federal government by the Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA) of 1978. ICWA was put into place to remedy the excessive removal of American Indian children from their families and to provide tribes a say in the treatment of American Indian children in the child welfare system (Children's Bureau, n.d). Social workers across the country are required to ask all individuals if they have any American Indian ancestry or tribal affiliation.

Gathering information related to ICWA is similar to the straightforward approach; however, workers are only required to ask directly about American Indian identity and not about mixed race identity. Social Worker #11 described

addressing a client's race and ethnicity and the importance of federal mandates

that could affect the case outcomes as follows:

> I work with them the same that I work with any other family members,
> which is trying to advocate on their behalf, trying to get them resources
> that may be pertinent upon their particular race or ethnicity because they
> could be ICWA or something like that. So that would be pertinent. But if it's
> not that, then just, we're all, we're all just trying to basically work with
> people in a way in which you are accepting and recognizing their
> difference, but also treating them with the same level of concern and
> empathy.

Challenges Documenting Race and Ethnicity

All participants were mandated to use the CWS/CMS database. They

used the CWS/CMS database for numerous reasons including: updating the

demographics on the client's profile, entering contact notes after speaking with

the youth and family, entering court reports, receiving information from the hotline

regarding referrals made about the client, and updating any changes to the

client's profile to name a few. Participants reported three main challenges in

documenting race and ethnicity, all of which were related to the CWS/CMS

system. These challenges included: the limited options for categorizing race and

ethnicity in CWS/CMS, the questionable accuracy of race and ethnicity data already in CWS/CMS, and the utilization of contact notes for documenting details about race and ethnicity.

Limited Options for Race and Ethnicity in Child Welfare Services /Case Management System

Within the participants, there were various answers ranging from easy to difficult on the process of entering the data. One social worker described the database as "Not user friendly" (Social Worker #9). Whereas, other participants described the database as pretty straightforward because "It's pretty simple. Well, self-explanatory too. So you just got to play with it a little bit" (Social Worker #1). Other participants were unclear as to whether or not they should even be altering the data at all. Social Worker #5 stated, "I didn't think we have to do that. No, because when the referral is generated, they kind of put like a standard of what it is. I think it was just in my narrative."

Although some participants had views that were on completely different ends of the spectrum, the overall consensus was that the physical act of entering the data was easy, but capturing the true essence of how biracial and multiracial individuals identified was difficult. This is because there is no option to click that says multiracial, thus requiring the social workers who are entering this information to be forced to choose a primary race and ethnicity for their clients. Oftentimes, the primary race that is chosen is based upon the social workers'

visual perception, or the identity of the parent who the child resides with. Social Worker #14 explained why the database is difficult for capturing culture as,

>I think doing the actual push of the buttons is easy. But I think obtaining the information from people can be challenging because I've never inquired about this, but for example, you put in one, I think it says ethnicity.

Social worker #14 was describing the database and how there is not always an option to accurately capture categories. For example, Hispanic and Latino individuals have to be categorized as white under race, but that does not accurately represent that community. Social Worker #15 also described the database as, "It's really difficult. The act itself of documenting isn't difficult. It's capturing the culture, capturing what's accurate. That's the difficult part." Because of this difficulty in capturing accurate culture, a large percent of the participants felt that in order for the database to improve there was a need for the addition of more categories of race and ethnicity, and the option to have "multiracial" and "biracial" choices listed as such.

Questionable Accuracy of Race and Ethnicity in Child Welfare Services /Case Management System

When using the CWS/CMS database, oftentimes there is already data present in the system. This data is usually entered when an allegation against the family is made and a referral is generated at the hotline or reporting station. However, when this data is input into the system, it is collected based on

information from the reporting party, which can also mean that the information may not be completely accurate. Social Worker #14 discussed the data being skewed because of the reporting party providing information. Social Worker #14 stated,

> It's all based on the person who's receiving the call or if it's just, if it's just like a faxed report, I guess they would take it off the fax report. But when they call they ask what's her ethnicity? I mean I've called in referrals or reports and they ask you and you just, I guess people just use whatever they think. Right.

This data follows the client's profile throughout their interactions with the department, both front and back end, and can be changed to accurately represent the client, if the social worker does so. Even if this data is changed to the correct identifications per the client's testimony, if another report is generated against the family the data will be reverted to whatever the reporting party states. Social Worker #14 described this in detail as,

> So you would think the client notebook would like follow ***** her whole life and just always going to be Chinese. But if somebody calls intake, get them to get another referral for them and somebody says, "Oh no, she's African American." That intake person on the hotline is gonna change it to African American, and it's not going to stay Chinese.

Social workers who use the data that is already present in the system varied from front end to back end workers. The back end workers who have been

given a case to work with and provide case management to, and did not discuss

race and ethnicity in detail with their clients often used the data already in the

system. Whereas, the front end workers who used data already in the system

were of the mindset that they were present to investigate an allegation of child

abuse, not to delve into culture, unless related to American Indians.

Social workers who also utilized data that was already in the system were

less likely to change the data, or ask any of the straightforward questions that

would allow them to discover differences between what was in the database and

what the client identified as. The participants who fell into this category of

working with the CWS/CMS data were also more likely to utilize visual

perceptions of the clients to determine their assumed race and ethnicity.

Using Contact Notes to Capture Race and Ethnicity

When discussing the use of contact notes within the CWS/CMS database

the participants described utilizing these notes to elaborate on discussions they

had with their clients. The participants who stated that they used contact notes to

not only document their interactions with the family, but they would also use them

to update any details regarding race and ethnicity that differed from what was

already stated in the system. Other participants indicated that they would only

use contact notes to document race and ethnicity if it was a topic of conversation

that the client initiated, or was a part of the investigation. Social Worker #7

described an example of an investigation where there was an allegation of racist

statements made by a professional care provider to a client by stating, "Staff was

using racially disparaging remarks towards a foster youth within the home."

Social Worker #7 claimed that the challenge of this case was "Getting the staff to

understand that just because he was also Hispanic or Mexican American, it did

not give him a right to make derogatory remarks towards that particular foster

youth."

Another indication as to why some participants would utilize contact notes

to update the details for their clients was because they were unsure as to how to

appropriately document mixed race individuals into the CWS/CMS database.

Summary

This chapter reported on the demographics of the interview participants

and the themes identified in the data collected. The following themes were

identified in this chapter: professional responsibility to mixed race clients,

divergent approaches to identifying race and ethnicity, and challenges

documenting. The three themes revealed to the researchers that through social

workers experience they value their client's right to self-identify, have unique

challenges when serving mixed race youth, and are aware of a social workers

duty to attend to race, ethnicity, and agency values. They utilize three different

approaches in identifying race and ethnicity (straightforward approach, visual

perception, and specific questions for American Indians). Lastly, social workers

have limited options within the CWS/CMS database, which questions the accuracy of the system. Due to a lack of knowledge on maneuvering the database, social workers are utilizing only their contact notes in an attempt to capture race and ethnicity. These three major themes represent the experience that social workers have had in working with youth and families of mixed race.

CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION

Introduction

This study examined social workers' experiences and beliefs in working with mixed race youth and families in the child welfare system. This chapter summarizes the study's findings and their relationship to the existing literature on child welfare with mixed race families. The chapter presents practice, policy, and research implications, as well as the study's limitations.

Discussion of Professional Responsibility to Mixed Race Clients

Prior to the study, we expected our participants to be sensitive to culture, race, ethnicity, and mixed race identity. Our study suggests that child welfare social workers acknowledge their professional responsibility to mixed race clients, and that they believe in clients' rights to self-identify and to be supported in exploring and claiming their identities. Our participants suggested that social workers bear a professional obligation to educate themselves about issues of race and ethnicity, as part of their work in serving diverse groups of clients. These findings are at least partially consistent with the profession's Code of Ethics (Ethical Principles, n.d.) which emphasize the importance of

acknowledging and understanding the ways clients' racial and ethnic identities shape their world views and life experiences.

Our study suggests that social workers are aware that mixed race clients, particularly those with minority identities, experience unique and greater challenges in life and in the child welfare system. Our participants suggested that mixed race clients, especially youth, often struggled with their identities and required additional support in exploring and understanding their identities. This assertion is consistent with the literature on racial and ethnic minority group's experiences (Choi et al., 2012; Herman, 2004; Magruder & Shaw, 2008). Our findings build on this literature by identifying some of the unique challenges social workers face when serving mixed race youth, including difficulty finding and keeping appropriate placements.

Perhaps it is in part because social workers recognize the unfairness of these experiences that they view attending to clients' race and ethnicity as part of their professional responsibility. Our findings suggest that child welfare social workers are especially sensitive to what one participant termed the "Power of the Badge." Workers expressed feeling obligated to ensure they provided services in fair, ethical, and unbiased ways in part because they recognized how often clients were treated unfairly by systems. This finding is consistent with an extensive literature on Critical Race Theory and the importance of recognizing and managing biases using cultural humility, especially in serving clients with

different ethnic and racial identities (Kolivoski, Weaver, & Constance-Huggins, 2014).

Discussion of Divergent Approaches to Identifying Race and Ethnicity

In spite our participants' appreciation for the role of race and ethnicity in clients' lives, and their support for clients' rights to self-identify, we were surprised to find that participants used a variety of methods other than asking the client to determine the clients' race and ethnicity. In fact, our findings suggest social workers use three main approaches in identifying race and ethnicity in clients: a straightforward approach, visual perception, and a very specific approach for American Indians. The straightforward approach was not discussed in any of the literature the researchers found, in discussing race, ethnicity, or biracial and multiracial identity, and therefore, supports the lack of literature regarding the studies of mixed race populations and child welfare workers.

The use of visual perception can be supported by the findings from the study by Miller, Cahn, and Orellana (2012) specifically in regards to racial disproportionality and bias. As the entire premise of the use of visual perception rests on the social worker's bias in how a mixed race individual should physically appear. In reviewing the transcripts, it was apparent that some social workers would not have a physical discussion with the families about mixed race identity, or race and ethnicity at all for that matter. Instead, there were participants who

stated that they would look at the children and parents to determine if they were mixed race, or if they were categorized as a minority based on physical characteristics.

While the literature did not specifically discuss the use of gathering information for American Indians, it is to be noted that this specific finding came about as it is mandated by law due to the Indian Child Welfare Act of 1978. Which requires social workers to ask families about Native American heritage and ancestry, when involved in the child welfare system. Most of the participants indicated that the use of gathering information for American Indians was not something they found important, but was something they had to do as it was a legal requirement of their job.

Discussion of Challenges Documenting Mixed Race Identity

Our findings suggest that the CWS/CMS system used in California, does not capture race and ethnicity in ways that allow for documenting mixed race or ethnicity. CWS/CMS does allow social workers to indicate that their clients are mixed race, but requires the social worker to choose a primary race or ask the client to choose a primary race. Asking clients to identify which of their racial or ethnic identities is their primary identity seems counter to the profession's understanding of the complexity of race and clients' right to self-identify. This

data collection problem likely contributes to inaccuracies in the reporting of child welfare clients' race and ethnicity, as well as to data on disparity and disproportionality. Through the discussion of the CWS/CMS database, the participants indicated that agency workers had similar challenges documenting information into the system. Those challenges included: limited options in CWS/CMS, questionable accuracy of the information within CWS/CMS, and the action of using contact notes to capture race and ethnicity within the system.

Although the topic of limited options in the CWS/CMS database was a common finding within the participants. A study by Herman (2004) which discussed the fact that there are no multiracial identities taken into consideration in CWS/CMS, supported our findings and is of the same assumption that the social workers and the system are not adequately capturing the racial identity of these families.

When it came to the topic of questionable accuracy of information within the CWS/CMS database, a study of CAMIS stated that the use of technology proved to be beneficial for child welfare agencies, but listed several limitations including missing information and the need for data quality to be improved (English et al., 2000). Adding this information to the study by Herman (2004), one could see how the accuracy of information provided by this database is questionable to say the least. The lack of studies regarding technology within the child welfare system is another indication as to why there is a lack of literature regarding mixed race individuals and child welfare.

Additionally, the use of contact notes to capture race and ethnicity proved to be a popular practice among the participants. However, in using this approach the participants were not actually entering the data into the demographics that the state of California uses from the system. Although the participants who utilized their contact notes to enter data were under the impression that this was an acceptable means of entering the data alone, the fact is that they were not filling in the correct information and are therefore, not providing an accurate representation of their clients. This finding could be supported by the study by Dettlaff and Rycraft (2010), as social workers not having the awareness of how to correctly update demographic information into a database that they are required to use on a daily basis is a category that could fall into ineffective service delivery and workforce issues to say the least.

We were surprised by our respondents' general lack of motivation and initiative to locate and enter accurate data in the CWS/CMS database for the families they serve. Participants made statements that clearly displayed their lack of motivation to discuss mixed race status with their clients, and their lack of confirming with the clients if the information regarding their race and ethnicity was even correct in the first place.

Implications

<u>Practice Implications</u>

Our findings suggest the need for more training on cultural sensitivity, awareness, and humility, especially around issues of race and ethnicity. Workers need help approaching conversations on race, ethnicity, and culture with families of all identities, but particularly with mixed race families. This could entail the use of vignettes, and role play activities in which the social workers act out different scenarios that could arise within the discussion of race and ethnicity. The training could also be offered to seasoned social workers as well in order to keep them updated on new findings regarding race, ethnicity, and culture.

<u>Policy Implications</u>

Although practice implications are relevant, the need for policy implications are just as relevant for social work. The use of the CWS/CMS database is an important policy across the board in California child welfare agencies. Altering the way that data is submitted will help ensure that mixed race individuals are not only accounted for in the California child welfare database, but it will also provide categories that accurately represent the mixed race individual. The participants provided suggestions in altering the CWS/CMS database to accurately reflect their clients mixed race identity, those alterations included: adding the specifically worded categories of biracial and multiracial to the database for the client to identify with, and an additional option to choose all races and ethnicities the client identifies with, or adding an option to manually

type in the race and ethnicity the client identifies with in order to accurately capture the client's identity.

<u>Research Implications</u>

The policy requiring California child welfare social workers to utilize the CWS/CMS database to enter in demographic information about clients who are involved in the child welfare system, also requires that they provide that data to the UC Berkeley website. This website then tracks all counties child welfare information throughout the state of California. In adding the specific policy changes discussed in the previous paragraph, the potential research implications could include the representation of biracial and multiracial individuals being accounted for in the overall statistics for the state. By adding a mixed race option to the CWS/CMS database, this could possibly alter the findings of disproportionality and potentially alleviate the levels of overrepresentation and underrepresentation of certain races, thus giving a clearer picture of race in child welfare across the board.

Limitations to the Study

Limitations to this study primarily revolved around the location of the participants. All sample participants were interviewed in one California County Agency. This is a limitation because there are 58 child welfare county agencies

within the state, and one office within one county does not accurately capture the perspectives of the various counties within the entire state. Perspectives of mixed race may vary based upon office, location, or county. Another implication to our findings was participant interviewing locations. Every participant that participated in this study was given the option to interview privately in a secluded room to respect their confidentiality. However, most of the participants chose to interview at their desks and denied the private room. These workers appeared to have more distractions than those who interviewed privately, as they were more apt to engage in discussions with other workers walking by, and were more inclined to complete physical casework on their computer during the process of the interview. These distractions could have had an effect on the participants' ability to remain focused on the interview, thus resulting in potential mishaps in their statements to the researchers.

Summary/Conclusion

Gathering knowledge and experience from social workers in regards to mixed race youth and families was a unique task. Through this task three themes were identified which displayed the way social workers approach and handle conversations with mixed race families, along with a small insight as to what the social workers value in working with this community. Several of the themes, and aspects to those themes, could be applied to children who fall into monoracial categories of minorities, but it should be understood that the number of biracial

and multiracial people is continuing to increase, and these themes can impact

their lives in a different manner within the child welfare system. The social

workers who are assigned to engage with mixed race youth and families should

be aware of these themes, barriers, and ideas surrounding the mixed race

population. Without a clear understanding of race, ethnicity, and culture, nor a

true care across the field of social work in regards to this topic, there will be no

significant change in addressing the mixed race population.

APPENDIX A

QUALITATIVE INTERVIEW GUIDE

CREATED BY:

ASHLEY BENNETT

MELLISSA DUCHESNE

Qualitative Interview Guide

1. Before we get started, I'd like to ask some questions about your own

   identity.

         a. What is your gender?

         b. What is your race?

         c. What is your ethnicity?

         d. What is your age?

2. Tell me about your role at this agency.

         a. What is your title?

         b. How long have you worked here?

         c. Any other prior experience?

3. Now I'd like to ask you some questions regarding your work with mixed

   race youth and families. Describe your experience with mixed race

   individuals and families in the child welfare system.

4. Have you worked with youth who are mixed race?

a. How about adults who are mixed race? Mixed race families?

b. How do you ask youth and family members about race?

c. Do you utilize specific case management techniques or other resources when working with children and families who identify being of mixed race or heritage?

5. When a family identifies that they are of mixed race, how do you work with them?

    a. How do you enter the data into CMS/CWS?

    b. How does mixed race identity inform your approach?

6. How easy or difficult is it to document mixed race identity in the CMS/CWS system?

    a. Can you explain how you document?

    b. What could be done about this?

7. Now I'd like you to think back to a time you served a mixed-race family or youth.

a. Tell me about the case.

b. How did you learn the family/youth was of mixed race?

c. What, if any, challenges did you encounter?

d. How did you address those challenges?

e. What was the outcome?

8. What would you like other social workers or supervisors to know about working with families of mixed race?

APPENDIX B

INFORMED CONSENT FORM

College of Social and Behavioral Sciences
School of Social Work

INFORMED CONSENT for Clients

The study in which you are being asked to participate is designed to help us understand clients' experiences with Spanish-speaking staff at Riverside County Children's Services. In this study, we ask clients to describe their interactions and how they felt in working with Spanish-speaking staff. This study is being conducted by Dr. Deirdre Lanesskog, Assistant Professor of Social Work and Dr. Jose Munoz, Associate Professor of Sociology at California State University, San Bernardino. This study has been approved by the Institutional Review Board, Social Work Subcommittee, California State University, San Bernardino.

DESCRIPTION: You are being asked to complete an in-person interview in which you will be asked to describe your experiences working with Spanish-speaking staff at Riverside County Children's Services.

PARTICIPATION: Your participation is completely voluntary. You do not have to answer any questions you do not wish to answer and you can stop participating at any time. We **will not** tell Riverside County staff whether or not you participated. Your choice to participate or not to participate **will not** impact any current or future services you receive from Riverside County.

CONFIDENTIALITY: Your identity and anything you say will be kept confidential. Only the CSUSB research team will have access to the information you provide. We will destroy the audio recording after transcription and we will remove any information that might be used to identify you from the transcript. We will not identify you or your family in any of our future reports or articles.

The only time we would reveal your name is we were required to do so by a judge or if you tell us that you intend to harm yourself or others (including if you disclose child abuse).

DURATION: This interview is expected to take between 30 and 60 minutes.

RISKS: There are minimal risks to you from participating in this study, such as feeling uncomfortable talking about your experiences.

BENEFITS: There are no benefits to you from participating in this study; however, what we learn from this study may help us improve services for other clients.

AUDIO RECORDING: Interviews will be audio-recorded with your permission and will be transcribed so that the researchers may study them.

909.537.5501
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Maritime Academy · Monterey Bay · Northridge · Pomona · Sacramento · San Bernardino · San Diego · San Francisco · San Jose · San Luis Obispo · San Marcos · Sonoma · Stanislaus

_____ (Initial here) I understand that this research will be audio recorded.

CONTACT: If you have questions about this study, you may contact Deirdre Lanesskog at (909)537-7222 or at dlanesskog@csusb.edu.

If you have questions about your rights as a participant in this research, you may contact the Research Compliance Officer, Michael Gillespie at (909)537-7588.

RESULTS: Results from this study will be available after June 15, 2018 from the Pfau Library Scholarworks website at http://scholarworks.lib.csusb.edu or from Dr. Lanesskog at 909-537-7222.

CONFIRMATION STATEMENT: I understand that I must be 18 years of age or older to participate in your study, have read and understand the consent document and agree to participate in your study.

SIGNATURE:

Signature: _____ Date: _____

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APPENDIX C

INTERNAL REVIEW BOARD APPROVAL FORM

IRB #: IRB-FY2020-92
Title: Social Workers Experience in Working with Mixed Race Populations
Creation Date: 11-4-2019
End Date:
Status: Approved
Principal Investigator: Mellissa Duchesne
Review Board: Main IRB Designated Reviewers for School of Social Work
Sponsor:

Study History

Submission Type	Initial	Review Type	Exempt	Decision	Exempt
Submission Type	Renewal	Review Type	Unassigned	Decision	
Submission Type	Modification	Review Type	Exempt	Decision	Approved

Key Study Contacts

Member	Deirdre Lanesskog	Role	Co-Principal Investigator	Contact	Deirdre.Lanesskog@csusb.edu
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ASSIGNED RESPONSIBILTIES

This was a two-person project where authors collaborated throughout. Ashley Bennett and Mellissa Duchesne collaborated on the following sections:

- Introduction

- Literature Review

- Methods

- Results

- Conclusion

Both Ashley Bennett and Mellissa Duchesne contributed to the formatting, editing and revisions process throughout the preparation of this paper for submission.