Bias & Child Welfare
OBJECTIVES:

- Understand the importance of recognizing bias in the child welfare system.
- Consider areas where bias emerges and recognize groups affected by bias.
- Develop techniques to de-bias perceptions and improve client interaction.
IMPACT OF RACIAL BIAS ON CHILD WELFARE CASES

- Racial disproportionality and disparity in the child welfare system.
  - Minority children are placed in the foster care system at a higher rate than white children.
  - Though they represent a fifth of the nation’s population, Latino and Native American children are also in the system disproportionately.

- National studies by the U.S. Dept. of Health and Human Services reported “minority children, and in particular African American children, are more likely to be in foster care placement than receive in-home services, even when they have the same problems and characteristics as white children.”
Disproportionality and Disparity

**Disproportionality**

\[
\frac{\text{# of } x \text{ children in foster care}}{\text{# of } x \text{ children in the population}}
\]

**Disparity**

\[
\frac{\text{# experiencing the event}}{\text{# in the population}}
\]

Compared to

\[
\frac{\text{# of } x \text{ children in foster care}}{\text{# of } x \text{ children in the population}}
\]
**Disproportionality Compared to Total Population, 2014**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Race (Non-Hispanic)/Ethnicity</th>
<th>% of Total Child Population</th>
<th>% of Children Identified by CPS as Victims</th>
<th>RDI</th>
<th>% of Children in Foster Care</th>
<th>RDI</th>
<th>% of Children Entering Foster Care</th>
<th>RDI</th>
<th>% of Children Exiting Foster Care</th>
<th>RDI</th>
<th>% of Children Waiting to Be Adopted</th>
<th>RDI</th>
<th>% of Children Adopted With Public Agency Involvement</th>
<th>RDI</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>American Indian/Alaska Native</td>
<td>0.9%</td>
<td>1.3%</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>2.4%</td>
<td>2.8</td>
<td>2.3%</td>
<td>2.7</td>
<td>2.1%</td>
<td>2.4</td>
<td>1.9%</td>
<td>2.2</td>
<td>1.5%</td>
<td>1.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>4.8%</td>
<td>0.9%</td>
<td>0.2</td>
<td>0.5%</td>
<td>0.1</td>
<td>0.6%</td>
<td>0.1</td>
<td>0.7%</td>
<td>0.1</td>
<td>0.4%</td>
<td>0.1</td>
<td>0.4%</td>
<td>0.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black or African-American</td>
<td>13.8%</td>
<td>22.6%</td>
<td>1.6</td>
<td>24.3%</td>
<td>1.8</td>
<td>22.4%</td>
<td>1.6</td>
<td>23.2%</td>
<td>1.7</td>
<td>23.1%</td>
<td>1.7</td>
<td>19.4%</td>
<td>1.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander</td>
<td>0.2%</td>
<td>0.2%</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>0.2%</td>
<td>0.9</td>
<td>0.2%</td>
<td>1.1</td>
<td>0.2%</td>
<td>1.2</td>
<td>0.1%</td>
<td>0.6</td>
<td>0.2%</td>
<td>0.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic (of Any Race)</td>
<td>24.4%</td>
<td>24.0%</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>22.5%</td>
<td>0.9</td>
<td>21.9%</td>
<td>0.9</td>
<td>21.8%</td>
<td>0.9</td>
<td>23.6%</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>22.1%</td>
<td>0.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>51.9%</td>
<td>46.4%</td>
<td>0.9</td>
<td>43.4%</td>
<td>0.8</td>
<td>46.1%</td>
<td>0.9</td>
<td>45.6%</td>
<td>0.9</td>
<td>43.2%</td>
<td>0.8</td>
<td>48.5%</td>
<td>0.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Two or More Races</td>
<td>4.1%</td>
<td>4.7%</td>
<td>1.1</td>
<td>6.8%</td>
<td>1.7</td>
<td>6.4%</td>
<td>1.6</td>
<td>6.5%</td>
<td>1.6</td>
<td>7.7%</td>
<td>1.9</td>
<td>8.0%</td>
<td>2.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Nearly half of families (47 percent) who have their children removed from their homes have trouble paying for basic necessities.

Families without access to stable housing are involved in the child welfare system at much higher rates.

Inability to obtain stable housing can become a “barrier” to family reunification when children have been placed in foster care or other out-of-home care – even when housing may not have been the original reason for removal.


**Potential Causes of Disproportionality & Disparity**

- Disproportionate & disparate needs of children and families of color, particularly due to higher rates of poverty
- Racial bias and discrimination exhibited by individuals (e.g. caseworkers, mandated and other reporters)
- Families involved with social service systems, such as financial or housing assistance, further increase their exposure to mandated reporters
- Child welfare system factors
- Geographic regions

https://www.childwelfare.gov/pubPDFs/racial_disproportionality.pdf
HOW DO WE PREVENT OUR SCHEMATA FROM LEADING TO DISCRIMINATORY PRACTICES?

1. Understanding & Acknowledging Bias
2. Welcome & Embrace Diversity
3. Individual Approach
1. Understanding & Acknowledging Bias

- **Explicit**: Conscious
- **Implicit**: Unconscious

Bias

Explicit

Implicit
Explicit Biases

- Blatant discrimination
- Prejudices
- Occurs consciously
- May be easier to identify than implicit biases
Implicit Biases

- Occur in the subconscious
- Involves both stereotypes and attitudes
- Our brains develops schemas from life experiences to assist with “automatic processing”
- Can lead to discriminatory preferences
Implicit Bias is a type of schema

- Encyclopedia Britannica defines schema as the “mental structures that an individual uses to organize knowledge and guide cognitive processes and behaviour.”

- Schema may be gathered through learned stereotypes and stored in the recesses of our brains. Our schema operate as the lens through which we interpret and predict the world.
EVERYONE HAS IMPLICIT BIASES

- A preference for a group of individuals, whether positive or negative
- May occur in one’s subconscious
- Based on stereotypes

*Having implicit biases does not necessarily lead to explicitly bias decisions and behaviors*
SCHEMAS: GOOD v. BAD

Bike Riding

Racial Profiling

INSERT PHOTOS
Research suggests that one way to reduce or prevent implicit bias in our decision making process requires recognizing our biases.

The Implicit Association Test (IAT) uses a methodology relating reaction time to words and categories to elicit your unconscious opinions.
### Skin-Tone IAT

This IAT requires the ability to recognize light and dark-skinned faces. It often reveals an automatic preference for light-skin relative to dark-skin.

### Weight IAT

This IAT requires the ability to distinguish faces of people who are obese and people who are thin. It often reveals an automatic preference for thin people relative to fat people.

### Asian IAT

This IAT requires the ability to recognize White and Asian-American faces, and images of places that are either American or Foreign in origin.

### Arab-Muslim IAT

This IAT requires the ability to distinguish names that are likely to belong to Arab-Muslims versus people of other nationalities or religions.

### Native IAT

This IAT requires the ability to recognize White and Native faces in either classic or modern dress and name of places that are American or Foreign.

### Weapons IAT

This IAT requires the ability to recognize White and Black faces, and images of weapons or harmless objects.
**Project Implicit IAT Tests**

**Gender-Science IAT**
This IAT often reveals a relative link between liberal arts and females and between science and males.

**Age IAT**
This IAT requires the ability to distinguish old from young faces. This test often indicated that Americans have automatic preference for young over old.

**Gender-Career IAT**
This IAT often reveals a relative link between family and females and between career and males.

**Religion IAT**
This IAT requires some familiarity with religious terms from various world religions.

**Race IAT**
This IAT requires the ability to distinguish faces of European and African origin. It indicates that most Americans have an automatic preference for white over black.

**Disability IAT**
This IAT requires the ability to recognize symbols representing abled and disabled individuals.

All tests can be accessed at PROJECT IMPLICIT, [https://implicit.harvard.edu/implicit/takeatest.html](https://implicit.harvard.edu/implicit/takeatest.html) (last updated 2018) (all test descriptions are quoted from the site).
TAKE A TEST

https://implicit.harvard.edu/implicit/takeatest.html

Each test takes about five to ten minutes. If you are interested in learning more about unconscious associations that you have, this is a great place to state.
DAILY IMPACT OF IMPLICIT BIAS

- Prejudice
- Stereotyping
- Associations
ADDRESSING BIAS AS A CHILD WELFARE PRACTITIONER:

“Raise consciousness” in the child welfare system.

Regardless of what role you play (social worker, attorney, judge, etc.) there may be opportunities to raise consciousness.
Areas Impacted by Implicit Bias in Child Welfare
Social Workers:

- Referrals
- Language Barriers
- Assessments
- Recommendations
- Home visits
- Removals
AREAS IMPACTED BY IMPLICIT BIAS IN CHILD WELFARE

Attorneys:

- Language Barriers
- Meetings
- Representation
  - Requesting visitation
  - Motions
  - Appeals
Areas Impact by Implicit Bias in Child Welfare
Judges & Magistrates:

• Removals
• Decisions regarding visitation or reunification
• Permanency decisions
• TPR
2. **WELCOME & EMBRACE DIVERSITY**

- Exposure to varied groups may reduce bias

- Reducing homogeneity and embracing a diverse system

- Positive “exemplars”
Be Color Conscious Rather than Color Blind

- The color blind approach attempts to view the world through a “nonracial” lens

- Those who operate as color blind are more likely to succumb to implicit biases because this approach refusing to acknowledge things in front of us – including differences in treatment
3. **INDIVIDUAL APPROACH**

- Deliberation and reflection
- Changing perspective
- Micro-messaging
DELIBERATION AND REFLECTION

- An effective way to reduce implicit biases requires taking more time to consider decisions
- High-effort processing
CHANGING PERSPECTIVE

• Attempt to take the viewpoint of a member of another group
• A first-person perspective can help one empathize and understand the implications of stereotypes or attitudes
• “In their shoes” approach
MICRO-MESSAGING

- Recognizing messaging, whether intentional or unintentional
- Small messages can be affirming or inequitable
Case Story
RESOURCES


**RESOURCES (CONTI.)**

  [https://ncwwi.org/files/Cultural_Responsiveness__Disproportionality/Addressing_Implicit_Bias_in_the_Child_Welfare_System.pdf](https://ncwwi.org/files/Cultural_Responsiveness__Disproportionality/Addressing_Implicit_Bias_in_the_Child_Welfare_System.pdf)

- *Understanding Bias: A Resource Guide*, Dept. of Justice,
  [https://www.justice.gov/crs/file/836431/download](https://www.justice.gov/crs/file/836431/download)

- *Implicit Bias Initiative*, ABA Section of Litigation,
  [https://www.americanbar.org/groups/litigation/initiatives/task-force-implicit-bias/](https://www.americanbar.org/groups/litigation/initiatives/task-force-implicit-bias/)