A Look at Racial Disproportionality in Jackson County Foster Care

Scholar: Nicole Jolly

Faculty Mentors: Dr. Jean Maxwell and Dr. Echo Fields

Published in the Southern Oregon University Ronald E. McNair Scholars Journal, 2010

© 2012, Nicole Marie Jolly
INTRODUCTION

Children of color are represented in the foster care system in disproportionately high numbers. Recent studies confirm that at the national level in 2005, 50% of children in the foster care system are children of color (Casey Family Project 2008). This indicates a racial disproportionality because children of color do not make up 50% of the child population. Oregon state data and Jackson County both suggest similar disproportionality, but there is no research that illustrates this local disproportionality or that explains why it may exist locally. Oregon and Jackson County have made a commitment to address racial disproportionality in our child welfare system because we have realized that it is no longer a question of whether or not we need to do something; we just need to figure out what and how.

To address this gap of understanding, my research examines and documents the data for children of color in Jackson County and offers suggestions for the causal factors of over and under representation in our foster care. Governor Kulongoski authorized an Oregon state initiative in January 2009. He appointed members to the Task Force on Disproportionality in Child Welfare and identified eight counties that will receive state support in developing outcomes that can then be replicated throughout the state. Jackson County is one of the eight counties because of its high numbers and readiness for change; my research is a part of Jackson County’s efforts. The other participating counties are Coos, Deschutes, Malheur, Marion, Multnomah, Tillamook, and Washington. The governor’s task force is a part of a larger effort by the Oregon Department of Human Services (DHS) to reduce the number of children in Oregon foster care. The Casey Family Programs is serving as a partner for this project and is a valuable resource and support to help our state better serve our community of color, especially those in the foster care system. My report and findings will be utilized by Oregon DHS and the Jackson
County office as a starting point from which strategies can be developed and implemented to correct the racial disproportionality and disparity.

My hypothesis is that data will show a correlation between race, poverty level, and foster care numbers. I also hypothesize that there will be evidence of racial disproportionality within the foster care system; for example, cases involving children of color there will disproportionally involve risk factors of neglect and children’s needs not being met due to financial factors. Robert Hill (2005), Senior Researcher at Westat, identified Oregon as one of 16 states with extreme disproportion for African Americans and one of 15 states with extreme disproportion for Native Americans based on statistics from 2000. Based on Oregon’s history of disproportionality, I hypothesize that our state disproportionality rates will show high disproportionality among children of color. I identified six analytical questions that my research will be addressing:

- Is there evidence of racial disproportionality in Jackson County and Oregon?
- How does Jackson County’s statistics on disproportionality relate to the nationwide and statewide statistics?
- Is there a correlation between income level, race, and foster care entry?
- Do case files suggest evidence of patterns of racial bias or differential treatment in cases involving people of color?
- Which case files demonstrate racial disparity and can be used to support statistical findings?
- Do literature review findings, Oregon statistics, and case reviews suggest the reasons for disproportionality are poverty, racial bias, and institutional racism?

Acknowledging and understanding that racial disproportionality exists is the first step in being able to address it, which is why this research is being conducted.
LITERATURE REVIEW

Statistics suggesting racial disproportionality and disparity in the foster care system and in child welfare are not new. People have been looking critically at disproportionality for years. Racial over-representation in Child Welfare was first discussed in 1972 by Billingsly and Giovannonia (Jones 2006). The problem persists today, as shown in the 2000 Census data. Kathy Barbell, director of the foster care unit of the Child Welfare League of America, says that our foster care system "is predominantly made up of children of color." Dorothy Roberts (2002) digs in to the history of the color of child welfare in Shattered Bonds. Prior to WWII, child welfare was segregated and black children were excluded from services. Most orphanages did not accept black children; of the 1,070 child care agencies in 31 northern states in 1923 only 35 were exclusively for black children. In the 1930s, when child welfare shifted to a public service, the numbers of black children in child welfare steadily increased, almost doubling between 1945 and 1961 (7). The numbers doubled again between 1982 and 1999, and by 2002 the percentage of black children in foster care nationwide had risen to 42% (8). Roberts also references the US’s history of controlling black reproductive rights, black sexuality and the black family. Racial assimilation through transracial adoption is the new way of doing this (Roberts 171). MEPA, the Multiethnic Placements Act (OAR: 413-070-0000), makes it illegal to delay or deny a child’s placement for adoption or foster care on the basis of race, color, or national origin of the adoptive or foster parent. Roberts believes this to be a modern tool for the assimilation of people of color.

African Americans are often the focus of discussions on racial disparity in the foster care system because their disproportionality rates are the most extreme. Professor of Law, Dorothy Roberts (2002:9) identifies Black children as the most likely of any racial group to end up in
foster care, as they make up nearly half of the total foster care population. In urban areas this number can be even higher; in Chicago Black children make up 95% of the foster care population. Nationally, 33.9% of the children in foster care are African American although African American children make up only 15.1% of the U.S. child population (Casey Family Programs 2009). Black children also stay in foster care much longer than other racial groups and are more likely to have maltreatment reports result in removal.

Another population mentioned throughout the literature for their significant disproportion is Native Americans. Native Americans represent the smallest race group in the nation but based on national disproportionality rates are overrepresented in foster care. They are not as commonly overrepresented as black children, but have extremely high disproportionality rates in 13 states (Fantone 2007:75). Disproportionality rates for each state from 2004 show that Oregon had the highest rate for Native Americans with 8.69, the next highest being 7.31 (Fantone 2007). Oregon’s 2004 rate for Native Americans was up from a rate of 3.04 in the year 2000 (Hill 2005).

The US has a history of removing Native children from their homes; federal Indian boarding schools are a perfect example of the history of Indian child removal. Between 1954 and 1970, prior to the Indian Child Welfare Act, the Child Welfare League of America with the help of the Bureau of Indian Affairs, developed the ARENA Project, also called the Indian Adoption Project, which removed thousands of Native American and Alaskan Natives from their homes in an effort to “save” them from the poverty and social ills that were affecting their people (Cross 2008). This eventually sparked what became the Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA) in 1978. The act was developed as a reaction to a study by the Association on American Indian Affairs who found that 25 to 35% of all Indian children were being placed in out-of-home care and that
eighty-five percent of those children were being placed in non-Indian homes or institutions, which came to be viewed as a form of cultural genocide (Wilkins 2004). Oregon’s state ICWA policy, Placement of Indian Children – OAR: 413-070-0100, states that DHS is required to involve Indian tribes in the placement process to prevent cultural bias in decision making. It also requires that placement attempts to include the Native community and that placement preference is given to the family, the child’s tribe members, or other Indian families.

Disproportionality looks at the overrepresentation of children of color in foster care, but the national Hispanic disproportionality rate is actually closer to White non-Hispanic than it is to other populations of color. There is not very much information available regarding Hispanic disproportionality. Robert Hill (2006), Senior Researcher for Westat, identified that this is an area that needs more exploration. His report for the Race Matters Consortium on disproportionality rates for 2000, showed ten states with Hispanic overrepresentation, with the highest rate being less than 2.0. He also notes that even though Hispanics are underrepresented nationally, they are overrepresented on more local levels, such as at the state and county level (Hill 2006).

Shaw et al. (2008) caution against focusing solely on overrepresentation, as underrepresentation might also indicate meaningful disparity. In California, for example, Black children made up only 7.2% of the child population while making up 28.2% of the foster care population, showing a vast overrepresentation. Asian and Pacific Islander children however, make up 9.9% of the child population and only 2.3% of the foster care population. Shaw et al. suggest that underrepresentation could indicate more or different racial bias in the foster care system, so ignoring underrepresentation would be like leaving out a piece of a very complex puzzle.
According to the National Incidence Study of Child Abuse and Neglect, all children, regardless of race or ethnicity, are equally likely to experience abuse and neglect (Fantone 2007). In 1997, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (USDHHS) officially recognized that minority children, primarily black children, were more likely to be placed in out-of-home care than other children, with other things being equal (Kirk 2008). The challenge is then to identify why some racial groups enter foster care at such a high rate. Susan Kellam says that although poverty and drug use are often thought of as reasons for disparity the evidence suggests that poverty rates are not high enough to justify the numbers of children of color in foster care. For example, in Black and White communities that are equally impacted by drugs and substance abuse, more Black children are taken from their homes and put into foster care.

Hill, Roberts, Miller, Kirk, Fantone, Jones, and Richardson conclude that the racial disproportionality is not caused by actual racial differences in the way people treat their children. Families of color are not simply more neglectful, violent, or unfit. All of the articles agree that there are other factors in play and that finding out the reasons for racial disparity in the foster care system is the first step in correcting them. The Government Accountability Office reported in 2007 that three factors are viewed as increasing African American children’s entry into foster care: high poverty rates, lack of support services, and racial bias (also referred to as cultural misunderstanding). Dorothy Roberts (2002:48) offers evidence of racial bias by comparing Black and Latino socioeconomic status’ with their respective disproportionality. Both groups have similar population percentages in poverty, but Latinos do not show overrepresentation in foster care. If poverty were the only justification for high foster care numbers, then Latinos and Blacks should be represented similarly.
Many researchers, child welfare professionals, and academics have come to the conclusion that a primary cause for the racial disparity and disproportionality in child welfare is due to racism and racial bias. Cross, Roberts, Hill, Jones, Kellam, Rivaux, Miller, Onunaku, and James, all identified racism, primarily institutional, as a strong factor contributing to disproportionality. Kellam claims that the racial bias is found among social work professionals, as well as “a general lack of cultural sensitivity.” She discusses how cultural differences, especially between blacks and whites, impact who is viewed as at-risk. A 1999 Health and Human Services report concluded that “substance abusing African American women are more likely to come to the attention of Child Protective Service agencies than are white or Hispanic women with substance abuse problems.” Black and White women are equally as likely to test positive for drugs at birth, but African American women are 10 times more likely to be reported to child protective services (Cross 2008). Robert Hill (2006:27) discusses the visibility hypothesis, which states that “the rates of out-of-home placement of minority children are higher in localities in which the proportion of minorities is relatively small.” Studies have found that there is indeed a visibility pattern, but only for Black children; in counties with Black populations of 5-10%, Black children were twice as likely to be placed in foster care as in counties where Black children make up over 30% of the population.

Most of the authors agree that institutional systematic racism plays a strong role in disproportionality, but that individual bias is also relevant. Rivaux et al. (2008) found that even when risk and poverty are controlled, race affects the decision to provide services and to remove children. They hypothesized that decision errors were the result of misjudgments associated with the way in which a professional thinks about risk, race, and poverty. Theirs findings concluded that African Americans were 20% more likely to have their case acted upon when compared to
Anglo Americans. The National Child Abuse and Neglect Data System conducted a similar study in 2000 and found that African Americans were twice as likely to have reports investigated as compared to Whites (Jones 2006).

Other disparities can be seen beyond entry and can be seen in the length of time that children of color spend in the system. Susan Philips (2002) identified disparities in reunification rates. White children in foster care are four times more likely to be reunified with their families than Black children. Black children are also much more likely to enter foster care as a baby; 1.1% of the total population of foster children in 2005 entered the system before they were one years old, compared to 3.6% of the African American foster care population (Fantone 2007:45). Robert Hill (2006:28) cites numerous studies that found that Black families receive fewer and less adequate services once they are in the system than their White counterparts, and in some cases other minorities are also more likely to suffer from inadequate services.

Many groups, organizations, and foundations have been formed in response to the existence of the racial disproportionality. In 1997 the National Commission on the Role of Culture and the Assessment of Risk in African American Children and Families was created. The Edna McConnell Clark foundation and the Race Matters Consortium were formed to address issues of racial disparity in child welfare. The Child Welfare League of America is committed to addressing racial disproportionality. They formed a National Advisory Committee on Cultural Competence and Racial Disproportionality and Disparity of Outcomes that includes participation from Casey Family Programs and they also formed the organization the Black Administrators in Child Welfare. Casey Family Programs, however, the organization that has been leading the nation’s recent efforts toward solving racial disproportionality in child welfare.
Casey Family Programs has worked with states and counties on initiatives to address racial disproportionality specifically through the Casey-CSSP Alliance for Racial Equity. The purpose of the Alliance is to reduce racial disproportionality in jurisdictions willing to partner with the Alliance. They produced the report “Places to Watch” in 2006 that did case studies of ten jurisdictions, counties, cities, and states, who committed to reducing racial disproportionality. These ten locations implemented and tested strategies that used the systematic approach of: highlighting the problem, using data, increasing community participation, improving services and support, changing policy, conducting ongoing evaluation, and seeking external funding. The report found that two of the most crucial things where to include community partners, such as grassroots and civil rights organizations, and to increase understanding of the concept of structural racism. One site utilized Undoing Racism trainings conducted by the People’s Institute for Survival and Beyond, and found it to be an extremely useful and successful educational tool. This report recognizes that “this problem stretches beyond the purview of child welfare agencies alone, involving factors such as chronic poverty and long-standing institutional inequities—i.e., structural racism” (9).

Another collaborative effort with Casey Family Programs is a statewide initiative in Texas that has set an example for other states and counties. Texas took a very specific approach to addressing racial disproportionality. After using data to confirm that race was a relevant factor they looked at the issue very holistically and “forged a cultural shift using a cross-systems approach linking child welfare, juvenile justice, education, health and mental health, workforce, and other systems.” Texas CPS created new positions, disproportionality director and disproportionality specialist, and created a State Disproportionality Division. They included many partnerships within DHS and the community, offered disproportionality community
awareness presentations, and participated in the Casey Breakthrough Series Collaborative on Disproportionality. They utilized three strategies: Undoing Racism trainings, values-based leadership development, and community engagement strategies. All the directors, administrators, and office managers completed the Undoing Racism training, which was also available to caseworkers and staff. Texas DHS altered their leadership development in order to foster “systemic cultural changes.”

Brad Richardson (2008) reported on Iowa’s efforts to address disproportionality. Children of color are represented in foster care at a rate of twice their population in Iowa and as a response, Iowa DHS implemented two pilot programs focused on improving relationships, services, cultural awareness, and satisfaction for Native and Black families. They created a DHS Specialized Native American Unit in Sioux City area and contracted to a provider who focused on the needs of African American families in the Des Moines area. The two pilot programs had the ability and freedom to tailor their services and analysis to the context of their environment. For Sioux City this meant increasing attention for ICWA, cultural competency, and increasing communication with local Native communities. The Des Moines initiative could focus on the specific needs of Black families. The primary changes felt by all participants in the initiative were an increased feeling of respect and an increase in trust between clients and child welfare workers. Both pilot programs found that race-matching mattered a great deal to both Native Americans and Blacks – it allowed the families to have more trust and feel that they could speak honestly. Fantone’s information from the Government Accountability Office mentioned several times that African American families often do not trust child contributes to African American children’s longer length of stay.
From all of these studies there appears to be consensus that race matters, we need to increase awareness of racial disproportionality, community partnerships and participation is crucial, data needs to be utilized to support efforts, and trainings for undoing racism are a valuable tool. Miller (2008) adds several other suggestions learned from the Casey Breakthrough Series Collaborative on Disproportionality: we need to use a common and well defined language, there needs to be safe space for open dialogue, and long-term efforts can be improved by address “hiring procedures, performance evaluations, and ongoing training for staff through a racial equity lens.” Terry Cross, Executive Director of the National Indian Child Welfare Association, has worked in cross-cultural training and advocacy in Oregon for 30 years. She believes that there is an “environment of oppression” that needs to be addressed through self-determination. Based on lessons learned from apartheid in South Africa, she suggests a five phase process of reconciliation to tackle racial disproportionality in child welfare: self-determination, culture and language, a holistic approach, structural interventions, and nondiscrimination. She claims that, “To change the field, values must be changed, diversity must be valued, and the mistakes of the past reconciled.”
METHODOLOGY

This study will analyze disproportionality in Jackson County and Oregon by comparing foster care populations by race to total populations by race, using disproportionality rates, and by reviewing case files. The primary data sources for this study are statistics from the Oregon DHS Central Office in Salem, United States Census data from 2007, the Office of Juvenile Justice, national and state statistics from Casey Family Programs, and case files from the Jackson County DHS-CAF Office.

The process for gaining access to confidential information through Oregon DHS included becoming a DHS volunteer through the Jackson County office which included an orientation, fingerprinting, a background check, and online confidentiality trainings. I also submitted a Research Application and an Information Access Agreement to the Oregon Department of Human Services Children, Adults and Families Division. Based on the data I calculated disproportionality rates for Jackson County and Oregon, and created a graph illustrating disproportionality. I also used GIS Mapping software to graphically show poverty rates in Oregon by County, Foster care populations by race, Black and Native American foster care percentages and Black and Native American total population percentages.

Race/Ethnicity: In this study I used five racial/ethnic categories: Asian/Pacific Islander, Black, Hispanic, Native American, and White. Race and ethnicity are self identified by the families in child welfare. To stay consistent with the Casey and National data used in this study, I consider Hispanic its own category. Hispanic ethnic identities are removed from the racial identities so that the terms White, Asian, Black, and Native Americans actually represent racial/ethnic groups who are non-Hispanic.
Disproportionality vs. Disparity: Disproportionality will be defined in this study as overrepresentation or underrepresentation of a racial group in the foster care system. It is illustrated by comparing the group’s percentage of the child population to their percentage of the foster care population. Disparity is different in that it refers to unequal treatment that and racially disparate outcomes in child welfare, such as length of stay, types of services, etc.

Disproportionality Rates: Disproportionality rates are used to compare disproportionate representation between racial groups. They are derived by dividing the percentage of children in foster care of a certain race by the percentage of children of that same race in the census population. For this study, the percentage of children in foster care of a certain race is based on the point-in-time figures from the Oregon DHS Central Office. Disproportionality rates less than 1.0 indicate underrepresentation and rates higher than 1.0 indicates overrepresentation. Robert Hill (2005) classifies disproportionality rates by five categories: underrepresented (under .50), comparable disproportion (.50-.99), moderate disproportion (1.00-2.49), high disproportion (2.50-3.49), and extreme disproportion (3.50+). I will also use this categorization.

Case File Review: A list of names was provided by the Oregon DHS Central Office for open case files in Jackson County, grouped by the racial identity of the child. The racial categories for the case files where: Black or African American, Asian, Native American, White non-Hispanic, and White-Hispanic. From the lists provided by the central office we chose files randomly, but also based on availability. I reviewed eleven cases total, three Native American cases (two of which were ICWA), three Black cases, three White non-Hispanic cases, one Hispanic case, and one Asian/Pacific Islander case. While reviewing, I looked for patterns in the reasons for removal, placement, services, and permanency plans, for each race group. The files also provide a basic understanding of decision making patterns and ICWA tribal involvement.
RESULTS

Disproportionality: The comparison of Jackson County’s child population by race and Jackson County’s foster care population by race shows an obvious overrepresentation among Blacks who make up 1.7% of the child population and 3.1% of the children in foster care, and American Indians who make up only 1.4% of the child population and 14.3% of the children in foster care. The Asian/Pacific Islander population shows a slight underrepresentation, while there is a more dramatic underrepresentation among White people who make up 78.8% of Jackson County’s child population but only 54.5% of the children in foster care in Jackson County.

Figure 1: Percent of Foster Children and Total Population of Jackson County Under 18 by Race

*These data are from the U.S. Census Bureau and "Summary Counts for Children in Out-of-Home Care by Ethnicity" from the Department of Human Services - CAF Child Welfare on 3/31/09

Disproportionality Rates: Tables 1 and 2 show that the rates for the State of Oregon are higher than they are in the nation for Blacks and Native Americans. Hispanic and Asian/Pacific Islander rates are lower in Oregon, while White is almost the same. Compared to the disproportionality rates from 2000 that Robert Hill determined, disproportionality has gotten worse in Oregon. Based on statistics from 2000, the disproportionality rates for African Americans and Native Americans in Oregon were 4.38 and 3.04, respectively. Based on statistics from 2008, the
disproportionality rates for African Americans and Native Americans in Oregon were 3.95 and 7.57, respectively. This increase, especially for the Native American child population in Oregon is very large and indicates that Oregon should focus on Native American disproportionality as a priority. Table 3 shows that Jackson County’s disproportionality rate for Native Americans is extremely high when compared to the state and the nation. At all three levels, White disproportionality rates are similar to each other and Hispanic and Asian rates also do not show much variation. When compared to the state, Jackson County has a lower rate for Black disproportionality, but shows similar underrepresentation for Hispanic and White.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Race</th>
<th>Rate</th>
<th>Race</th>
<th>Rate</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Asian/Pacific Islander</td>
<td>0.32</td>
<td>Asian/Pacific Islander</td>
<td>0.61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black</td>
<td>3.95</td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>1.82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>0.58</td>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>0.55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>American Indian</td>
<td>7.57</td>
<td>American Indian</td>
<td>10.21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>0.79</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>0.69</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 3**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Race</th>
<th>Rate</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Asian/Pacific Islander</td>
<td>0.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black</td>
<td>2.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>0.85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>American Indian</td>
<td>3.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>0.7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Racial Disparity:** Figure 2 displays data from Jackson County showing that children of color more often get placed in homes with parents of an ethnicity different than their own. Disparity can be seen in the foster care system beyond entry. It is also present in placement. There is only one White child in a home with parents of a different ethnicity, whereas all of the children of color are placed in homes with parents of a different ethnicity. These data could suggest that
either there are very few parents of color who serve as foster parents, or that White children are
only placed in homes with White parents. There are many possible hypotheses as to why there is
such a difference in placement by ethnicity, but the data suggests that this is something worth
investigating. These data are also a starting point that could lead to further research on how racial
identity is affected by foster care placement. One case study I reviewed of a Black child revealed
that the child had been placed in 13 homes while in foster care, and that none of them were
Black.

**Figure 2: Jackson County Foster Care Placement by Race**

*These data are from the document "Summary Counts for Children in Out-of-Home Care by Ethnicity"
produced by the Department of Human Services - CAF Child Welfare on 3/31/09

**Case File Review:** The sample of cases reviewed is not big enough to generalize about the entire
population of foster children in Jackson County; however, there were notable characteristics and
patterns to indicate areas for further research and investigation. It was very common for racial
classification to change throughout the case file, indicating that race was not always paid
attention to or that it is a hard thing to identify. Disparity is evident in the number of volumes for
cases involving children of color, especially Native and Black children. All of the Black and
Native American cases were at least four-seven volumes, whereas all three of the White cases where one-two volumes. This supports national findings that children of color stay in the system longer than White children.

There were several common reasons for removal among the cases reviewed. Lack of resources (adequate amount and variety of food, adequate housing), lack of adequate childcare of supervision, and substance abuse, all of which fall under charges of neglect, were reasons for removal in cases of color. Of the eight cases of color, seven of them involved removal based of a lack of resources (housing, cleanliness, food, and childcare/supervision) whereas the three White cases involved removal for medical neglect and abuse. This is consistent with Dorothy Roberts’ (2002:21-34) findings that families of color are more likely to be removed for neglect that results from a lack of resources that people of color have less access to. High risk pregnancies were common among all race groups, five in cases of color and in two of the three White cases.

All of the fathers also have been incarceration either prior to being involved in child welfare or after; which is a factor in determining the parents ability to care for their children. One interesting commonality among the Black cases is that all of them involved White mothers, Black fathers, and children identified as Black. This differs from the Native cases where children have to be eligible through blood quantum to technically be Indian. Child welfare will still consider them Native American but they will not be eligible for ICWA. This difference is a result of our racial history which continues to impact children. In one family there may be some children who do not qualify for ICWA and other that do. This can make placement more confusing and challenging. Two of the Native America cases identified a need or desire to know more about their cultural heritage, and one was said by the caseworker as having a very negative perspective of his Native heritage. Many of the children of color from these cases had issues with
racial identity. The psychiatrist for one of the Native children suggested the child participate in Native American art therapy, like “making dream catchers.” A caseworker for one of the Black cases noted that the child had been teased about being black by her (White) parent’s friends. They also reported that the child lacked support for her racial and cultural background and needs an environment where these will be honored. This same child has been placed in 13 foster homes, none of which were Black.

One White case in particular stood out as different from all the other cases. The parents in this case were said to have domestic violence issues, but when both parents denied it, they were not required to go through treatment, nor were all the children removed from the home. This is noteworthy because in every other case where the parents are accused of domestic violence, which is in every Native American case, two of the Black cases, and one other White case, the children are always removed and required to participate in domestic violence training, even when both parents deny that domestic violence occurred. Similarly, even when the mother in this family admits to using Meth, the children are not removed. In all but one case, drug abuse was an issue and part of the reason for removal, with Meth being the most common drug. Even though the mother in this family admitted to using meth, her children are determined at not at risk were not removed. This particular family also had the benefit of receiving private medical services. This is only one case, but the experience of this White family is vastly different from that of the others, especially the families of color. It would be worth reviewing additional White cases and seeing if this were a pattern.
CONCLUSION

The Casey-CSSP Alliance for Racial Equity (2006) recognizes that there is not a one-size-fits-all approach to solving racial disproportionality. Each County, jurisdiction, or state may require different strategies. Child Welfare is just one American institution that suffers from racial disparity; disproportionality is a result of the history of racial practice in the US and to solve it we will ultimately have to address racism in a much broader sense. Ngozi Onunaku (2008), program associate at the American Public Human Services Association, stated in her essay that, “Disproportionality observed in child welfare results from social disparities that families of color have historically faced in accessing or receiving quality resources, service provisions and opportunities to thrive.” This is why it is so important to expose child welfare workers to the concept of institutional racism. We could decrease disproportionality and probably overall child welfare numbers by improving basic services to our people of color who are systematically deprived of resources such as health care, housing, and education, and by addressing disproportionality in criminal justice as well.

Institutional racism cannot be discussed as if it were an isolated problem. It is affected by the way we all live our lives, the way our institutions function, and the policies that impact our lives. Racial disproportionality in child welfare is a social justice issue and needs to be looked at through broader social justice terms. The Black case files, and the fact that all of the fathers in these cases, and only in these cases, had been incarcerated, are evidence of the interconnectedness between institutions. Racial disproportionality cannot be adequately analyzed without looking at other institutions, such as criminal justice, education, and the economy. Some jurisdictions from Fantone’s (2007:41) study believe that making a greater effort to locate fathers and paternal kin is particularly relevant for African American families who are less likely to have
What then needs to be examined is why Black families are less likely to have a father living with the family, when 1 in 3 Black men will be incarcerated in their lifetime.

A challenge in fighting for racial justice is proving that racism exists and exposing how it is manifested. How do you expose institutional racism? That is the same challenge in child welfare. It is not quantifiable and can be easily ignored. Sociologists Kleinman and Copp (2009) identified that in their experience with teaching, ignorance of systems of oppression and privilege is common. They found that students commonly hold the belief that inequality is a “product of an individual’s intentions” and that in order for “harm to occur, there must be an individual to blame.” Thinking of racism individualistically makes it easy to point to others as the problem, and makes it hard to address if an individual is not the culprit. You cannot change something that you don’t understand and our culture is very poorly educated about race and institutional racism; this is why it is so important to have discussions about racial disproportionality within Child Welfare. Racial disproportionality is hard to address because we first have to have an understanding of race and an understanding of how race interacts within our particular environment.

From reviewing all the literature, studies, data, and initiatives, it seems apparent that each location needs to design its own efforts for addressing disproportionality, and specifically look at each race in its own context. The research on racial disproportionality in Jackson County is not complete, but I would suggest that Jackson County and the state increase awareness within the agency and community about disproportionality, include members beyond our agency and involve other agencies and community members, assess what would work best for this specific location, consider policy changes that improve services to people of color, consider participating
in Undoing Racism trainings with the People’s Institute for Survival and Beyond, and treat racial awareness and disproportionality as a priority at all levels.
BIBLIOGRAPHY

Child Welfare League of America. (www cwla.org)


Equity Task Force Blog. 2009. (oregonfostercare.wordpress.com)


The People’s Institute for Survival and Beyond. 2009. (www.pisab.org)

APPENDIX

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Number of Oregon Foster Care Children (Point in time) 2008</th>
<th>Percent of Oregon Foster Care Children (Point in time) 2008</th>
<th>Number of Oregon Population Under 18, 2007</th>
<th>Percent of Oregon Population Under 18, 2007</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Asian/Pacific Islander</td>
<td>108</td>
<td>1.2%</td>
<td>30,184</td>
<td>3.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black</td>
<td>718</td>
<td>7.9%</td>
<td>16,463</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>862</td>
<td>9.5%</td>
<td>133,544</td>
<td>16.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>American Indian</td>
<td>964</td>
<td>10.6%</td>
<td>11,216</td>
<td>1.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>5,504</td>
<td>60.8%</td>
<td>625,623</td>
<td>76.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unknown/Unrecorded</td>
<td>902</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>NA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Totals</strong></td>
<td><strong>9,058</strong></td>
<td><strong>100%</strong></td>
<td><strong>817,030</strong></td>
<td><strong>100%</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Number of Jackson County Foster Care Children, 2008</th>
<th>Percent of Jackson County Foster Care Children, 2008</th>
<th>Number of Jackson County Population Under 18, 2007</th>
<th>Percent of Jackson County Population Under 18, 2007</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Asian/Pacific Islander</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1.1%</td>
<td>779</td>
<td>1.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>3.1%</td>
<td>739</td>
<td>1.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>7033</td>
<td>16.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>American Indian</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>14.3%</td>
<td>600</td>
<td>1.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>285</td>
<td>54.5%</td>
<td>33983</td>
<td>78.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unknown/Unrecorded</td>
<td>94</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>NA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Totals</strong></td>
<td><strong>523</strong></td>
<td><strong>100%</strong></td>
<td><strong>43134</strong></td>
<td><strong>100%</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Rates determined using child population percentages from Easy Access to Juvenile Populations: 1990-2007; Foster care percentages from Oregon DHS Central Office
Oregon Poverty Rates by County

Poverty Rate %
- 9
- 10 - 12
- 13
- 14 - 15
- 16
- 17
- 18 - 19
Oregon Black Population Percentage by County 2007

*Data from US Census 2007

Oregon Black Foster Care Population as a Percentage of Foster Care Total by County 2008
Oregon Native American Population Percentage by County 2007

Native American Population %
- 0.6% - 0.8%
- 0.9% - 1.4%
- 1.5% - 2.4%
- 2.5% - 4.1%
- 4.2% - 12.9%

*Data from US Census 2007

Native American Foster Care Population as a Percentage of Foster Care Total by Oregon County 2008