A Nonprofit Organization's Approach to Cognize Community Responses to Historic and Perpetuated Structural Racism in Baltimore City

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The purpose of this manuscript is to illustrate how a local nonprofit organization in Baltimore City attempted to cognize, depict, and frame the perspectives of community stakeholders concerned about structural racism in the city. Six months after the death of Freddie Gray, a 25-year-old unarmed black man who died in a hospital from spinal cord injuries sustained while in police custody in West Baltimore, the authors were invited to participate in a community conversation aimed at identifying solutions to structural racism. In partnership with the host community agency, which is located in West Baltimore, the authors developed a survey that was used to depict the conversation and analyzed the survey results. Within this manuscript, key findings and a narrative are provided to give readers an understanding of the context and tone of the conversation. This manuscript further provides an approach by nonprofit organizations, public agencies, and/or policymakers to engage in meaningful discourse with economically marginalized communities around issues of structural oppression and inequality.

Keywords: Nonprofit Advocacy, Community Engagement, Social Change

Communities in the United States continue to struggle with the complexities and vestiges of structural forms of oppression, which perpetuate inequalities in accessing basic needs, such as affordable housing, living wage job opportunities, and nutritious food choices, among others. In recent years, differential policing strategies in predominantly communities of color (e.g., Baltimore City, MD; Chicago, IL; and Ferguson, MO) has resurfaced as a contentious area of concern and outrage. Within communities experiencing higher concentrations of poverty and unemployment exists nonprofit organizations, as well as local and state government agencies, which may work toward ameliorating such inequalities and differential practices through the

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provision of public services, programs, and the implementation of public policies. However, addressing these contentious topics may often seem politically and practically unfeasible for practitioners working within private and public agencies. To some extent, some agency administrators might conclude that addressing structural forms of oppression and inequality is too immense of a task and goes beyond the scope or mission of the agency. While policymakers, administrators, and practitioners might dispute whether or not it is prudent to address such inequalities on moral grounds, evidence suggests that ameliorating oppression and decreasing the likelihood for civil unrest is fiscally judicious. For instance, in Baltimore City direct costs attributed to civil unrest cost state and local governments nearly $20 million (Gershenson & Hayes, 2016). Whereas, in Ferguson, MO, civil unrest led to statistically significant declines in math and reading achievement among third- through eighth-grade students (Gershenson & Hayes, 2016) and the civil unrest in Ferguson cost upward of $4 million in property damage (Unglesbee, 2014). In circumstances when there are apparent negative fiscal impacts, it usually becomes obligatory for policymakers and administrators to react to the symptoms of structural forms of oppression when a more proactive and critical approach is often more effective. In some instances, private nonprofit organizations play a role in highlighting, advocating, and engaging diverse stakeholders in issues of structural discrimination and oppression.

Current Study

This manuscript illustrates how one local nonprofit organization in Baltimore City stepped aside from business as usual and attempted to cognize, depict, and frame the perspectives of community stakeholders concerned about structural forms of oppression and racism in the city. Six months after the death of Freddie Gray—a 25-year-old unarmed black man who died in a hospital from spinal cord injuries sustained while in police custody in West Baltimore, the first and second author were invited to participate in a community conversation aimed at identifying solutions to structural racism. In partnership with the host community agency, which is located in West Baltimore, the first and second authors developed a survey to collect community responses, analyzed the survey results, and attempted to adequately depict the sentiments of the conversation (Center for Urban Families, 2015). Within this manuscript, key findings and a narrative are provided to give readers an understanding of the context and tone of the conversation. This manuscript also serves as a guide on ways that nonprofit organizations, administrators, and policymakers can assist in providing transactional human services to meet basic human needs, while facilitating meaningful transformational discourse through community-building activities to address oppression and racism within socially and economically marginalized communities.

Contemporary Baltimore City In-Context

In April of 2015, civil unrest erupted in Baltimore City in relation to the death of Freddie Gray. Community activists alleged that Gray died as the result of spinal injuries suffered at the hands of police during the period he was in the police transport vehicle after being arrested. They said police officers gave Gray a "rough ride," a technique they said police often used when transporting prisoners of color. Gray's death was ruled a homicide by the Baltimore Medical Examiner's office, and five officers were charged with murder and subsequently acquitted. Community reaction to the incident began the day after Gray's funeral and continued off and on for weeks. By the time the marches, protests, and community actions were complete, at least 20 police officers had been injured, hundreds of people had been arrested, businesses had been damaged, and structures and vehicles had been set aflame (Rentz, Broadwater, & Fenton, 2017).

Out of the unrest, community organizations in the city began a renewed focus on finding solutions to socioeconomic and political disparities manifested. In cities like Baltimore, where spatial mismatching often exacerbates economic outcomes for predominantly communities of color, it becomes clear that the vestiges of structural racism and discrimination, which are both deep-seated and historical, remain prevalent in present-day Baltimore. Historically speaking, discriminatory housing covenants, redlining, and blockbusting were among the tactics used to segregate Baltimore City neighborhoods. For instance, in 1910, the city became the first in the nation to enact the first law to prohibit African Americans from moving to White neighborhoods (Pietila, 2010). Even after the U.S. Supreme Court struck down discriminatory housing laws, Baltimore later led other cities to create private agreements to bar both Jewish and Black people from certain neighborhoods (Pietila, 2010).

Many of the areas where civil rest occurred are designated "Racially and Ethnically Concentrated Areas of Poverty (R/ECAP)" by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, attenuated by low regional Labor Market Engagement Index (Huggins, 2015). Although Baltimore is located in the nation's wealthiest state, Maryland, which has a median household income of $75,000 (U.S. Census, 2016), Baltimore City, however, has a median income that is only three-fifths that amount. The situation is even worse for those families that live below the poverty line. The Maryland Alliance for the Poor (MAP), a nonprofit that tracks poverty measures to influence poverty policies, reports that nearly half (49.7 percent) of Baltimore City residents have incomes 50 percent below the poverty level (or $5,385 per individual). Juxtaposing this income data with the cost of living, the wage needed to afford housing in the city is $23.69 per hour (or over $49,000 annually) (Maryland Alliance for the Poor, 2016).

To provide further context, the West Baltimore neighborhoods of Sandtown-Winchester/Harlem Park, where much of the civil disturbance took place following the funeral of Freddie Gray, has a median household income of $24,000 (Baltimore Neighborhood Indicators Alliance, 2016). Despite the apparent economic need, these neighborhoods do not receive the magnitude of revitalization and reinvestment compared with neighborhoods surrounding the inner harbor (or "The Baltimore Harbor"), which is roughly four miles away. For example, the neighborhood of Canton, due east of the inner harbor, experienced residential property vacancy/abandonment of less than 1% in 2014; whereas, 35% of residential property was vacant in Sandtown-Winchester/Harlem Park that same year (Baltimore Neighborhood Indicators Alliance, 2016). In the same year, the median price of homes sold was $275,000 in Canton and $18,000 in Sandtown-Winchester/Harlem Park. Sandtown-Winchester/Harlem Park has nearly 100 fewer businesses than Canton—257 versus 358, respectively (Baltimore Neighborhood Indicators Alliance, 2016). Relatedly, nearly 14% (13.6%) of Sandtown-Winchester/Harlem Park residents are unemployed and looking for work versus just over 4% (4.1%) of Canton residents (Baltimore Neighborhood Indicators Alliance, 2016). A key point that intersects race and class inequality in Baltimore City is the fact that a majority (88.9%) of Canton residents are White, whereas a majority (96.9%) of Sandtown-Winchester/Harlem Park residents are Black (Baltimore City Health Department, 2011). Thus, this data contextualizes the state of race, wealth, and concentrated disadvantage within Baltimore City.

The Event: The Center for Urban Families First Community Conversation Focused on Structural Racism

In October of 2015, just six months after the death of Freddie Gray, the nonprofit organization, Center for Urban Families (CFUF), which is also referred to as "the Center," held a town hall-

style community conversation titled "The Future of Baltimore: Conversations and Solutions: How We Got to Where We Are as a City." The community conversation focused on the context of Baltimore's civil unrest, which was fueled by Gray's death. The speaker's presentation offered a history lesson on how such a thriving city legally and systematically oppressed Black people through re-enslavement, violence, racial segregation through restrictive deed covenants, mass incarceration, etc. This was a presentation of Baltimore's history of social and economic marginalization, which elucidated intergenerational poverty and cultural dispossession (Okoye, Nwakibu, Ibelegbu, Rodriguez, & Alshahwan, 2015). The keynote presenter asked, "How did Baltimore create an environment with such low chances of upward mobility? How did we create these neighborhoods in Baltimore?" She proposed, "Structural racism."

Pursuant to the keynote, a panel of Baltimore City residents, advocates, and policymakers responded to the acts of historic and structural inequity within the city. A planned community dialogue with audience members followed both the keynote and panel discussion. Through this effort, the center endeavored to create an atmosphere that would foster solution-oriented discussion.

During the conversation, the authors were observers of the community conversation. Because the use of "surveys are a common method of primary data collection in community-based research" (Chow & Crowe, 2005, p. 608), the center partnered with the first author to design a survey to collect suggestions from those in attendance for how to address structural racism. While other qualitative methods may provide a greater depth of the community stakeholders' perspectives, the community-based agency requested a survey in order to collect a larger quantity of responses given the community's interest in this issue.

The survey consisted of nine items made up of demographic questions (i.e., age, residency status, gender, and race), Likert scale questions asked about the helpfulness of the community conversation, along with open-ended questions, one of which is the heart of the survey and the focus of this commentary. This question asked participants, "What do you think could change the structural racism in Baltimore City?" As a result of analyzing participants' responses to these questions, emergent codes were developed. Suggestions for changing structural racism in Baltimore were grouped into six themes and are discussed in more detail below.

Methods

Sample and Descriptive Statistics

An estimated 225 people attended the community conversation, which ran two hours in duration. While organizers of the community conversation arranged the event in a town hall format so that participants could voice their solutions to structural racism, they were aware that all attendees would not be able to approach the microphone to make their ideas publicly known. Thus, the host organization recommended a survey that included open-ended qualitative elements, so that participants could record their solutions to structural racism. Participants signed an informed consent form and were aware that survey results would be reviewed, analyzed, and published.

As described in Table 1, out of the estimated 225 attendees, 122 surveys were returned and analyzed, for an overall response rate of 54.2%. Almost three-fourths (71.4%) of survey respondents were Baltimore City residents, while the remaining respondents came from nearby counties. The respondents ranged in age from 22- to 71-years-old with a mean age of 46 years

Table 1. Participant Characteristics, f(%)

Characteristics	f	%	Mean
Gender			
Female	83	68	
Male	39	32	
Race/Ethnicity			
Black	62	51	
White	53	44	
Other Race	7	5	
City Residents			
Residents	87	71.4	
Non-Residents	35	28.6	
Age			
22-71			46

old. Over two-thirds of (68.4%) respondents identified as female and less than one-third (31.6%) identified as male. Over half (51.3%) of the respondents identified as African American/Black, over two-fifths (43.7%) identified as White/Caucasian, and 5% identified as two or more races, Latino/Hispanic, and other races.

The first and second author used qualitative data analysis to identify significant patterns, categories, and themes for four open-ended survey questions. This article focuses on one of the four open-ended survey questions, which asked participants "What do you think could change the structural racism in Baltimore City?" The intent of this question was to seek original solutions from participants, which went beyond what was mentioned by the keynote speaker and panelists.

Coding

Surveys were entered into a data table and reviewed separately by two members of the research team in order to enhance interpretive analysis. The researchers each read through the responses and determined the main concepts. Types of responses were recorded and collapsed as the researchers saw fit. After both researchers reviewed the responses separately, results were compared, and discrepancies were discussed. The emergent themes that were produced came out of a combined effort of both researchers and a cross checking of themes.

Forty-four codes emerged and included topics, such as the need for more media attention, bank regulations, changing drug laws, open-mindedness, housing, and integrated communities. Through further analysis, discussion, and cross checking six themes emerged from these 44 codes. These themes were: greater cultural humility; increased community engagement; more just laws, social policies, and structures; economic opportunity; education and jobs; and changing attitudes. Both the primary and secondary authors collaboratively coded the responses to the community conversation survey (Saldana, 2009) and ensured that collaborative coding lead to relevant and harmonious themes to capture, with authenticity, the voices of respondents.

Solutions to Diminish the Effects of Structural Racism in Baltimore City

Cultural Humility

Twenty-nine respondents expressed the need for cultural humility as a means to change structural racism in Baltimore City. Cultural humility as conceptualized by Tervalon and

Murray-García (1998) consists of lifelong dedication to self-assessment and self-critique, as well as rectifying power imbalances (in this instance, race). Cultural humility, as described by respondents in the statements below, reflect understanding and strengthening relationships between races. The narratives also incorporate a necessity to go beyond awareness in order to combat institutional racism, integration, and racial equality.

> Individuals wanting to assist/even those in Baltimore must receive cultural competency training especially if serving residents in the city. (Hispanic, Female, 37-years-old)

> Experience. If you never experience what a person is or have gone through, you will never sympathize only experience empathizing over and over. (African American, Female, 37-years-old)

> Let more White people involved in the community commune with Black people and really understand that blacks are human. More Black people come to the Black church, go to events. (African American, Female, 36-years-old)

> Need to improve more opportunities for Whites + non-Whites to interact—the less groups of people interact, the more they fear each other & thus avoid each other—this event was an excellent means, yet it was also the case that whites tended to sit with Whites + Blacks with Blacks—finding ways for the two groups to interact, not live (or sit) in different areas. (White, Male, 34-years-old)

Increased Community Engagement

Twenty-five respondents offered solutions that fit within the theme of community engagement. According to McCloskey, McDonald, and Cook (2013), several critical organizing principles (i.e., fairness, justice, empowerment, participation, and self-determination) are components of community engagement. These principles were apparent in the responses. Specifically, their suggestions encouraged more community- and national-level conversations, which should be community-led, so that such concerted efforts would allow for diverse voices to join together.

> Empowering those who are hurt by the structure. Investing in individuals and communities that are at the butt of the system. (African American, Female, 22 years old)

> Community dialogues—not experts talking but all people. Celebration—ways to bring together. (White, Female, 44 years old)

> More involvement of community members in these forums. (White, Male, Age unknown)

> A consistent and intentional, long-term strategy that galvanizes us and mobilizes us toward success. (African American, Male, 27 years old)

Changing Laws, Policies, and Structures

Twenty-one surveys included approaches that formed the theme "laws, policies, and structures" to change structural racism in Baltimore. These focus on changing laws and policies as well as leadership. Respondents highlighted the need for more and better leaders at every level. Among the narrative is also a call to fix the systems that perpetuate structural racism. As is the case with previous themes, overlaps appear. The authors agreed that while there was thematic overlap between economic opportunity and the solution surrounding laws, policies, and structures, it was important to isolate the issues given that the responses provided salient political overtures that should be examined separately.

> Rid political good ol' boy systems. Leaders come from neighborhoods. (African American, Male, 52 years old)

> Actual representation and equality in our government and getting rid of racist policies for a start. (White, Female, 32 years old)

> Get rid of most city council reps—the entrenched passivity on part of city leadership is keeping the city from moving forward. (White, Female, 55 years old)

> The challenges are rooted in public policy that must be changed. Identifying the policies that are creating distressed communities and fight for change. (White, Male, 44 years old)

> Reform: Remove the three strikes, remove minimum mandatory, remove laws that are racially biased (i.e., crack versus cocaine). Police reform: Let people with drug charges get financial aid to go to college. Drastic innovative change. School choice, police department. Gutting of ideas and bad practices and training, REAL SMART executive leadership willing to SHAKE UP THE SYSTEM. No one in the race now fits that bill. (African American, Female, 37 years old)

Economic Opportunity

Nineteen respondents echoed solutions related to increasing economic opportunities. Participants raised a myriad of solutions as crucial to economic opportunity. These include wealth redistribution, greater economic investment in underprivileged people and neighborhoods, jobs, workforce development, income equality, economic literacy, more businesses, mandatory hiring of Baltimore residents, and the need to hire individuals returning to their communities from incarceration.

> 1) Redistributing of wealth; 2) decriminalize drugs; 3) drug treatment; and 4) jobs. (Hispanic, Male, 41 years old)

> More investment in communities, not just downtown business neighborhoods/districts. Bold desegregation policies for city schools. (White, Female, 27 years old)

> A fundamental change in the U.S. economic system. There will not be better jobs for young drug dealers because these jobs are being outsourced due to the inherent proceedings of capitalism. (African American, Male, 27 years old)

> Requiring large institutions, new developers to hire Baltimore natives. Mandate they maintain a percent. (African American, Female, 24 years old)

> Reduce incarceration, improve job training and better decent-paying jobs, charter schools. (White, Male, 63 years old)

Education and Jobs

Eighteen surveys brought up solutions touching on the topic of improved education. Many comments emphasized the need for stronger and improved education system across demographics (e.g., race and age). Other comments reflected the need to change funding priorities from corrections to education.

> Opportunities for education for all children and young adults opportunities for jobs and affordable housing for all working to fix a system that continues to oppress those w/ criminal backgrounds & lack of education. (White, Female, 59 years old)

> Within existing structure of capitalism, better education at the front end and jobs with opportunity for advancement for minority communities. (White, Female, 63 years old)

> Improve education for all, encourage economic development. Baltimore needs to prosper. (White, Male, 54 years old)

> Investing more money into education (rather than jails); connecting grassroots community organizations that serve the underserved; have community organizations flood college campuses to enroll students in their causes. (White, Female, 24 years old)

> Education and education to free the minds of youth. Teaching to young females as strong as the work being done with fathers. Mothers/females need a program that helps their character. (African American, Female, 52 years old)

Change in Attitudes

Eleven respondents expressed sentiments of becoming more honest, open-minded, aware, and hopeful toward one another and about the future of Baltimore. These concepts were grouped into the theme "Change in Attitudes."

> First, be honest about the situation and then revisit the policies and undo the laws. Put resources where they're needed most not in

the place that are healthy and don't need it downtown. (African American, Female, 40 years old)

I think b/c we can go after the fire-breathing dragon called structural racism we have to address and begin to reawaken people's sense of hopefulness, empowerment, and self-defined destiny. (African American, Female, 44 years old)

More awareness, deepened understanding of structural racism. Building/strengthening relationships between races. (White, Female, 42 years old)

Candid conversations (solution focused) with documentation and then funding the initiatives that are created from these convos. Open-mindedness and respect (for/of diversity) are a must. Not being afraid/intimidated by one another. (African American, Female, 45 years old)

Community Responses Embody Broader Theoretical Perspectives

Community leaders' responses reflect takeaways provided by Reid in his 2015 manuscript "Ferguson, Baltimore, and The Search for Civil Health Metrics." Reid found (2015) that economic development strategies must encompass community well-being and civil health metrics to enhance quality of life and attract business, and urban design should take into account the importance of community cohesion and civic health. Moreover, from the authors' point of view, community leaders' responses to addressing the city's most pressing issues reflected social-community development, anti-oppression/anti-discrimination, and critical race perspectives, which service providers, program administrators, and policymakers should be aware. Given the power and importance of focusing on the responses of community leaders, these perspectives are discussed in more detail below.

Social-Community Development as a Perspective

Social and community development are important aspects of equality and equity, particularly for socially and economically marginalized communities. Social development includes building the capacity of people to work continuously for their own and society's well-being (Paiva, 1977). Structural change, socioeconomic integration, institutional development, and renewal are four dominant components of social development, while also emphasizing individual capacity development. Apparent in the responses of community leaders is the need for institutional renewal or reform. This relates to planned changes that result in a better fit between human needs and ambitions as well as social policies and programs (Payne, 2005).

Four contemporary concepts guide community work, including social capital, civil society, capacity-building, and social inclusion (Henderson & Thomas, 1981). These four concepts were also apparent in the solutions suggested by Baltimore community leaders.

Social Capital

The first of these concepts is social capital. According to Coleman (1988), "social capital is productive, making possible the achievement of certain ends that in its absence would not be possible" (p. 98). Unlike other forms of capital (i.e., financial, human, and physical), it exists as a resource for and among people and is predicated on social norms, social structures, and public good, which are built via trust, cooperation, reciprocity, effective communication, and sense of obligation to the social group (Coleman, 1998; Fukuyama, 2001; Portes, 1998). Lin (1999) sharpened the concept of social capital to include both instrumental (i.e., economic return, political return, and social return) and expressive actions (i.e., defending against possible resource losses) when individuals ascertain which social relationships to invest in. Greater social capital is associated with greater community health (House, Landis, & Umberson, 1988; Kawachi, 1999), whereas conditions related to low social capital may include social isolation, social stratification, and income inequality (Frumkin & Danneberg, 2010). Diversity of race and class is integral to social capital, as segregated and homogenous communities often forestall political discourse, which necessitates social capital (Frumkin & Danneberg, 2010).

Civil Society

The second concept of civil society is integrally related to the first. Fukuyama (2010) provided that civil society balances the power of people and the state, and the absence of civil society causes the state will need to step in to organize people. Thus, social capital and its tenets of trust, reciprocity, and cooperation among people may be thought of as foundations for promoting an effective civil society.

Capacity Building

The third concept of community work involves capacity building within communities. This is a process whereby communities' abilities are strengthened (Arole et al., n.d.), so that they identify assets, problems, goals, and actions to sustain or make communal improvements. In this instance, community strengthening is approached through social cohesion and social capital, as steps toward capacity building (Arole et al., n.d.). Atkinson and Willis (n.d.) provided additional elements to this concept by emphasizing the need for organizational and leadership structure to beget community capacity. Parisi et al. (2002) advised that it takes more than social capital to build community capacity and community efficacy. Additionally, local features, such as dedicated locally owned business and congregational spaces are necessary to facilitate this kind of civic-engagement process.

Social Inclusion

The fourth concept of community work (i.e., social inclusion) is defined as both an outcome and a process of improving participation in society, which is central to ending poverty and begetting mutual prosperity (Mundial, 2014). Inclusivity has the potential to elicit equitable economic growth, especially for urban areas. Prospectively, such growth that could benefit entire communities might come in the form of equitable transit-oriented development (eTOD), which integrates housing and transit development (Andrews & Choi, 2016). Andrews and Choi (2016) found that eTOD's reduce inequality and foster upward social mobility for previously economically distressed areas. Relatedly, a transit-oriented development plan was proposed for Baltimore City via a 14 mile east–west transit line called the "Red Line," which would provide access to jobs for city residents at major anchor institutions, such as the Social Security Administration headquarters in West Baltimore County, higher education, and financial

institutions downtown, and Johns Hopkins Bayview Medical Center to the east of Baltimore City. However, when Maryland's current governor began his first term, the Red Line plan was canceled (Dresser, 2015).

While most of these concepts emerged from the community's solutions, through the theme of "Increased Community Engagement" responses related to increased community participation and social inclusion became the most salient topic. Practically speaking, social development relates to participatory approaches insomuch that a myriad of social concerns, including poverty, employment, entrepreneurship, and urban gentrification (Allen & Thomas, 2000), should be addressed by both direct-practice and community-practice approaches (Payne, 2005). This was an approach that the center was hoping to create through its traditional service delivery programs and this community conversation.

Anti-Discrimination and Anti-Oppression as a Perspective

The anti-discrimination/anti-oppression perspective espouses that people experience discriminatory and oppressive situations because they are a part of a group that is defined on the basis of shared characteristics (e.g., race, class, gender, ethnicity, sexuality, nationality, age, ability, etc.), which are erroneously deemed inferior and powerless (Hinson & Bradley, 2011). As such, discrimination and oppression occur on the basis of a variety of human characteristics. Racism, in its structural form, is one of these types of discrimination and is the focus of this manuscript given the intent of the community conversation. Within this human-made social construct, people are divided into distinct hereditary groups because they are deemed to be inferior and powerless (Landis, 1998). It is crucial to note that institutional discrimination may be more clandestine but is equally as intentional as individual discrimination (Landis, 1998).

A form of discrimination, which is not often acknowledged, relates to the differential treatment of people with prior criminal histories. Community leaders noted this as a problem that needed to be addressed. To be clear, while the possession of a criminal record alone may cause some employers to not hire a potential applicant, some employers' discriminatory practices have been cited to have a "racial disparate impact," which is a double conundrum for Black and Hispanic job applicants with criminal histories (Harwin, 2012). In other words, having both a criminal record and being a person of color wields inequitable employment prospects for this subgroup.

Helping people overcome the stigma of having a criminal record and educating employers that a job applicant with a criminal record does not automatically equate to an untrustworthy employee are areas that the center takes on. Efforts like this have caused a growing number of employers to begin initiatives aimed at training and hiring citizens with prior records. For instance, large institutions like Johns Hopkins Hospital in Baltimore have begun matching formerly incarcerated individuals with hard-to-fill health care jobs; in Illinois, the state legislature enacted a law to allow individuals with certain felony convictions to petition for professional licenses in health-related fields (Quinton, 2017). In fact, Johns Hopkins Hospital has found that employees with criminal records were more likely to stay in their jobs longer than employees without criminal records (Quinton, 2017); other evidence suggests that employees with criminal records are more likely to stay in their jobs longer, are no more likely to be fired, and make a better pool for employers (Minor, Persico, & Weiss, 2016). This is not unique to Baltimore, as one in four U.S. citizens has a criminal record (Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2014). Given the prevalence of this circumstance, government agencies and nonprofit organizations should explore initiatives to train, hire, and/or match individuals with prior criminal records with employment or develop small businesses.

Critical Race as a Perspective

The approach employed by the center to a certain degree reflects the critical race approach recommended by Kolivoski, Weaver, and Constance-Huggins (2014), which calls on human services agencies to begin dialogue and enact social change action by critically examining the relationship among race, racism, and power. Similarly, Davis (2017) suggested that a critical race approach to analyze policies and programs by calling identifying racist narratives, shifting viewpoints, and ultimately transforming policy and program outcomes. Critical race theory (CRT), which developed out of legal scholarship, has been applied across disciplines as a framework to examine existing power structures. The theory has basic tenets, including privilege, supremacy, and perpetual marginalization of people of color (UCLA School of Public Affairs, 2009). These tenets relate to the themes generated by participants in this community conversation and should be applied by agencies to better understand environmental factors that are at stake. In terms of the misuse of power, community leaders' expressed frustration with city development projects being directed towards downtown neighborhoods (or surrounding "The harbor") at the expense of the neighborhoods within East and West Baltimore City relate to the tenets, "racism as ordinary and normal" and "Whiteness as ultimate property." These tenets reflect that, on the one hand, racism is normalized and perpetuated through social structures and institutions (Bell, 1992), and, on the other hand, inequities could be best understood at the "intersection of race and property" (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995, p. 47). Critical race theory posits that wealth, power, and White privilege affords the right to exclude select racial groups (Harris, 1995) from multigenerational wealth-generating resources, such as property. This phenomenon occurs in Baltimore City when taxpayer dollars are reallocated to development projects in the downtown and harbor area neighborhoods of the city where the majority of White residents live.

To an extent, CRT becomes congruent with the social-community development approach insofar as it focuses on social and economic development for impoverished communities whose power is yet to be realized. Payne (2005) agreed that this becomes apparent where a minority of the population holds a majority of the wealth at the expense of low-income households and where government budgets are diverted from promoting the general welfare of society (e.g., education, health, housing, public assistance, and public transit) to instead funding the militarized (e.g. military, law enforcement, corrections, parole and probation) units of government. This is actualized when the funding of law enforcement surpasses the funding level allocated for educating the city's children (City of Baltimore, 2017). Thus, state and local policymakers and administrators must remain conscientious not to perpetuate program funding and economic development disparities, which often have an adverse impact on neighborhoods of color. Furthermore, residents from all neighborhoods (e.g., affluent and economically disadvantaged) must be invited and active in the planning and resource allocation processes.

Implications for Administrators and Practitioners

Collectively, the conceptual perspectives provide a framework for agency administrators and practitioners to begin the process of transformation and capacity building with marginalized communities. These perspectives are aimed at solutions, which recognize the need to reform the intentional and subtle racial injustices within the education, employment, housing, and criminal justice systems, while building the social and human capital of individuals within marginalized neighborhoods.

From the perspective of local governments, decades of inaction on issues of structural injustice have real fiscal impacts. For instance, in order to satisfy the U.S. Department of Justice, an issued consent decree and repair police-community trust stemming from police misconduct are projected to cost Baltimore $7.5 million, and the state of Maryland has committed to paying $2 million for the first year (Rector & Broadwater, 2017). Relatedly, for failing to implement agreed-upon reforms to the local police department and courts systems, the city of Ferguson, Missouri, was sued by the Department of Justice (Powell, Meitl, & Worrall, 2017). These fiscal retaliatory actions demonstrate the need for local governments to address structurally racist practices and the oversight role of the federal government when local governments fail to reform public systems.

Daft (2010) presented in the management literature that "organizations need to keep in touch with what is going on in the environment in order to respond to market changes and other developments" (p. 230). The same can be applied to nonprofit and government agencies. In responding to such changes and needs of constituents, organizations typically build allegorical bridges to communities (Haynes & White, 1999). Larger companies utilize boundary-spanning activities, which engage people at the grassroots level to interpret changes or problems and often rely upon "intelligence teams" of managers and employees to conduct these activities (Daft, 2010). Also, smaller nonprofit organizations may involve employees from various levels in the organization, including the chief executive, operating officers, members from the board of directors, and funders. The community conversation on October 1, 2015, did just that and is one example of how organizations can make a first step toward critical analysis and consciousness-raising of issues in the environment, which are adversely impacting community stakeholders. A sense of hope, reconciliation, and a need for action were apparent from the survey responses. The Center for Urban Families' community-engaged approach to address structural forms of oppression and racism is consistent with the intergroup approach developed by Potapchuk (2007), which brings together racially diverse groups to eradicate negative stereotypes, build trust, and identify solutions. Community-based institutions serving low-income populations must develop new collaborative approaches to solve complex issues (Meehan, Reinelt, & Perry, 2009). To fulfill the goals of social-community development and anti-discrimination/anti-oppression, a critical approach must be taken to beget actual change. Thus, agencies and practitioners must continue to facilitate these critical conversations, ask reflective and critical questions in both direct practice (micro) and community (macro) settings (Kolivoski, Weaver, & Constance-Huggins, 2014), while proposing and acting upon policy reforms in order to foster equity among communities who have been historically marginalized.

Limitations

A critical race theory traditionalist may note differences in philosophy. For instance, a traditionalist might agree that the methods of this study diverged from CRT, given the tenet of interest convergence, whereby those in power have minimal interest in eradicating racism, unless it also advances the interests of those who maintain power (Kolivoski, Weaver, & Constance-Huggins, 2014). This may be realized by investigating the intentions of funding sources that support reform initiatives. Also, the racial composition of survey respondents does not completely resemble the demographic composition of Baltimore city. Of the survey respondents, over half identified as African American/Black, over two-fifths identified as White/Caucasian, and 5% identified as Hispanic and other. When comparing the surveys racial composition with the general population of Baltimore City, over three-fifths of the population is made up of African American/Blacks, over three-tenths are White, less than one-twentieth is Latino/Hispanic, and over one-twentieth is made up of other ethnic groups (U.S. Census

Bureau, 2016). Another nuance of this study relates to the average age of respondents, which was 46 years old. Age is an important descriptor because the civil unrest in Baltimore was mostly performed by youth, whereas the majority of respondents (community leaders) present at the community conversation were adults aged 27–71 (average age of 46 years old). Collaborations, such as community conversations, should aim to be inclusive and target for participation those who are most impacted.

This study is not necessarily generalizable to the entire city of Baltimore or for other metropolitan areas in the United States. Nevertheless, public and private agencies in other cities facing similar issues around historic and structural racism may find utility in this effort and decide to take similar approaches or build upon this example. Furthermore, this study may have been strengthened if a subsample of event participants were interviewed or invited to participate in a post-event focus group. These data-collection methods might allow for more detailed responses, in order to receive a deeper understanding and intent of the solutions proposed by the respondents. However, the strength of this approach is the high number of analyzed surveys, which provided a broad understanding of what a segment of the community was thinking as it relates to ameliorating structural racism in Baltimore City.

Conclusion

Nonprofit organizations and government agencies often operate within neighborhoods experiencing poverty and unemployment. Often stakeholders become reactive to community crises, on both moral and fiscal grounds; thus, it is necessary for organizations, government, and community members to proactively collaborate to address critical issues aimed at ameliorating oppression and decreasing the likelihood for civil unrest.

This manuscript demonstrates how nonprofit organizations can transcend a business as a usual approach and persist toward deeper engagement within communities, where they operate to understand their experiences with structural forms of oppression and racism. Such initiatives move beyond traditional forms of nonprofit and public administration approaches, which are often aimed at training practitioners to become more culturally competent (Rice, 2007) and progress toward greater cultural humility (Tervalon & Murray-Garcia, 1998). Moreover, through approaches like community conversations, it is plausible that human service organizations, in partnership with government and communities can begin creating a healing and solution-focused process. This process should include aspects of social-community development and anti-oppressive/discrimination elements. The solutions generated by over 120 individuals concerned about racism and oppression in Baltimore City have been documented through this effort. These solutions foster deeper progress toward inclusive critical consciousness raising and spur further community involvement, particularly for residents who are most affected by historical and contemporary racial trauma stemming from structural racism. Efforts such as these are a great start for the social change process, and more advocacy must be led by community stakeholders and supported by community-based agencies (Rocha, 2007). Doing so will facilitate shared power within marginalized communities in order to expedite necessary social and economic equity.

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