

Moving Toward Racial Equity: The Undoing Racism Workshop and Organizational Change

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Abstract Since 2002, social workers and others in New York City have attended Undoing Racism™ Workshops (URW) designed to encourage participants to advance racial equity in the organizations in which they work. However, little is known about the extent to which participants pursued these goals following the workshop. Drawing on a participatory action model, this study explored the impact of URW by examining the participants' (1) change in knowledge and attitudes about structural racism, (2) engagement in job-related racial equity activities, and their (3) view of their organization's progress toward racial equity. The study also explored (4) factors that might be associated with personal engagement and progress toward organizational change and (5) the role of race in the outcomes. Findings include increased knowledge and attitude change, considerable individual engagement, mixed organizational progress, and identification of facilitators and barriers with some differentiations by race.

Keywords Antiracism · Undoing racism · Racial equity · Multicultural · Diversity · Organization development · Staff training

Undoing Racism™ Workshops (URW), the focus on this research, represent the signature program of the People's Institute for Survival and Beyond (PISAB), founded in 1980. Overtime, a wide range of national and international community, religious, and professional organizations have encouraged, financially supported, or required their staff to attend URW. In 2002, using URW as the centerpiece, social workers in New York City formed the Anti-Racist Alliance (ARA) to address structural racism in human services and education.

By 2012, ARA was conducting 15–18 URWs a year in the New York City metropolitan area. Each attracted 40–50 participants, many of whom attended multiple sessions, often bringing colleagues with them. The two- and one-half-day antiracist training, taught by a multiracial/multicultural team, focuses on structural racism. The leaders review the history of racism in the USA, address individual attitudes and knowledge, explore the concepts of internalized oppression and privilege, and examine how agency-based and society-wide institutional arrangements implicitly or explicitly foster racism. URW trainers encourage participants to apply the knowledge they gained to pursue racial equity at their workplace. Participants learn that they are institutional “gatekeepers” who can affect organizations either by acting to maintain or helping to undo racism. This study examines URW participants' engagement in efforts to work toward racial equity, their perception of progress made by their organization, and factors potentially related to both individual engagement and organizational progress.

The ARA core organizing team included core PISAB trainers, the ARA co-founders, the President of the NYC Chapter of the National Association of Social Workers, New York City, and members of the Undoing Racism Internship Project, hosted by NASW.

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Addressing Institutional Racism in Human Services

Human services and educational organizations are increasingly called upon to respond to social and institutional factors that lead to disparities in health, mental health, education, child welfare, and criminal justice. One response has been to address problematic discrepancies between the racial composition of organization personnel and the people they serve (Singh and Lundgren 2012). As of 2006, approximately 80 % of the nonprofit sector workforce was white (Halpern 2006) and 75 % was female (Lapovsky 2009), while many clients were people of color. However, the organizations often encountered difficulties in attracting professionals of color and/or fully integrating and effectively utilizing a heterogeneous workforce (Mannix and Neale 2005).

Organizations have tried a variety of strategies to reduce the racial gap between personnel and people served, to become more responsive to clients, and to maximize the benefits of a more diverse work force. These strategies have included hiring a more diverse pool of workers, finding ways to manage organizational diversity, and pursuing organizational change (Devine 2010). These important steps have only gone so far, in part because the change in the racial composition of the work force often disrupted other organizational dynamics (Mallow 2010; Martín-Alcázar et al. 2012).

Managing Diversity

In addition to hiring underrepresented groups (Mallow 2010; Mor Barak 2000), some organizations engaged in diversity management with the goal of improving working relationships within a diverse organization. Their efforts have included reviewing policies and practices related to hiring, promotion, and termination (Mallow 2010; Mor Barak 2000; van Dijk et al. 2012), and taking steps to account for workers' different world views, life experiences, and expectations (Martín-Alcázar et al. 2012). Organizations have also made efforts to recognize the impact of microaggressions, the repeated small insults that build to greater injury (Wong et al. 2014), and to ensure accountability to communities of color served by the agencies (Blitz and Kohl 2012). Most organizations have managed diversity by introducing multicultural or diversity trainings that addressed the personal beliefs, racial identity development, and multicultural practice skills of practitioners (Spears 2004). Others dealt with a range of differences by developing management and intervention strategies (Nybell and Sims Gray 2004). Recognizing that people of color often experience racism on the job (Ejaz et al. 2011), organizations hoped that increased sensitivity would reduce the likelihood that staff would inadvertently promote

harmful biases, assumptions, and stereotypes (Curry-Stevens and Nissen 2011).

However, numerous evaluators found that a singular emphasis on cultural competence yielded mixed results. Some studies reported that a multicultural focus led to important changes in the knowledge and attitudes of participants (Devine 2010; Johnson et al. 2009). Critics argued that the cultural competency approach does not make a sufficient impact on service users or racial equity goals (Cocchiara et al. 2010). They attributed the limited outcomes to a heavy concentration on individual differences and characteristics rather than addressing systemic issues and power differentials (Curry-Stevens and Nissen 2011; Neville et al. 2006; Nybell and Sims Gray 2004). The latter include a reluctance to discuss an agency's institutional arrangements, the wider societal context (Mallow 2010; Nybell and Sims Gray 2004), and the underlying issues of racism and inequality (Bell and Hartmann 2007; Griffith et al. 2007; Mor Barak 2000; Phillips 2010). Many scholars further conclude that addressing racial disparities requires replacing existing organizational culture and structures with a new organizational paradigm (Martín-Alcázar et al. 2012).

Changing Organizations

The literature offers only minimal guidance related to organizational change targeted to racial equity in the human services, the focus of ARA and URW in the New York City area. However, a few scholars offer first- and second-order models of organizational development (Gonzalez 2010; Hyde 2003, 2004; Ramos and Chesler 2010). "First-order" changes refer to easier-to-implement incremental adjustments that help organizations manage diversity. Some organizations later move on to more fundamental transformations involving long-term, more complex approaches to organizational change. These "second-order" changes focus on modifying organizationally embedded structures and practices that allow or even promote discriminatory practices, oppressive conditions, and power differentials. Even deeper organization change requires addressing the societal stratifications that negatively divide individuals and organizations. These deeper changes move beyond incremental change and the celebration of difference to pursuing greater diversity, embracing differences as strengths, examining institutionalized oppression, and otherwise promoting organizational transformation as the means to achieving racial equity (Hyde 2003, 2004). The National Association of Social Workers *Call to Action* (NASW 2007) argues that social workers have a responsibility to focus on institutional and structural racism when seeking systemic change.

Factors Associated with Organizational Progress

It is clear that organization progress focusing on racial equity does not come easily. Limits include insufficient resources, the attitudes of personnel, organizational reluctance to take on resource allocation conflicts, and their unwillingness to change their structure (Curry-Stevens and Nissen 2011; Hyde 2003, 2004, 2012). Some researchers report that social workers' positive attitudes toward race are more cognitive than emotional, suggesting that they possess the same ambivalence and social distance about race that characterizes contemporary American society (Green et al. 2005). Multiple scholars have concluded that organizations tend to avoid conflict-generating changes (see Hyde 2003, 2012; Mannix and Neale 2005; Nybell and Sims Gray 2004). Organizations find it more difficult to pursue proposals that seek to redistribute organizational resources and alter who benefits and who loses from the existing resource allocation. Initiatives that challenge who has regular access to and influence over organizational processes, as well as efforts that aim to integrate workers and client groups into each level of decision making, are difficult to initiate and hard sustain long enough to create meaningful change. Without these changes, however, racial inequities can remain embedded in organization functioning.

In contrast, researchers report that attitudes of organizational leaders and coworkers can play a positive role in both individual engagement in racial equity work and organizational progress toward this end. Racial equity initiatives tend to fare better when executive leaders openly support and become active in the process (Antle et al. 2008; Cocchiara et al. 2010; Luger 2011). Positive steps toward engagement and organizational progress have also been associated with the support of co-workers (Fung et al. 2012; Mallow 2010; Whaley and Longoria 2008), ongoing organizational dialogue, (Sue 2008), and feeling hopeful about the process (Blitz and Kohl 2012).

The literature contains several articles that reference the PISAB's URW, but only two discuss URW in any detail. James et al. (2008) describe the effort of a state family service department that credited URW training with helping to reduce disparities in child protective services. In their evaluation in two Midwestern urban communities, Johnson et al. (2009) found that URW satisfied participants, changed their attitudes and knowledge about racism, and led them to believe that their practice would improve.

To provide data to inform organizational change, the current study was designed to explore URW alumni's engagement in racial equity work following their participation in the workshop, to understand their perspectives on their organization's progress toward racial equity, and to explore associated factors.

Methods

Using emails supplied at registration, a survey was distributed via Survey Monkey, an online survey tool, to people in the greater New York City area who had attended URW. The survey was sent to 2,673 URW alumni between June 2010 and May 2012. A total of 875 people responded, 258 emails bounced back, and 1,540 did not respond to the email invitation, yielding a response rate of 36.2 %, placing it in the average range of 34.6 % (SD 15.7 %) for web-based surveys (Cook et al. 2000).

Description of Respondents

Over half the respondents were white, and most were female, heterosexual, born in the USA, and held a graduate degree or higher, and they were evenly divided among ages, 18–35, 36–55, and over age 56 (Table 1). The gender ratio and education level reflect the composition of the two major professional groups that participated in URW in New York City: social workers and educators. Just under two-thirds of the respondents attended their first workshop between 2008 and 2012. Many had previously attended some kind of racial disparities training. Most had attended cultural competency or diversity training, almost half had attended some kind of racial equity training, and about a third had attended two or more URWs. Attendance at diversity trainings did not differ by race. However, white people were more likely than people of color to have attended a racial equity training [$\chi^2(1, n = 567) 3.92, p = .05$].

The URW alumni occupied various professional roles. Nearly half worked as administrators or supervisors, followed by practitioners, educators, students, and a few who chose "other" (Table 1). Almost half had worked for their organization for seven or more years. Three-quarters of the respondents worked in the private nonprofit sector, followed by public/governmental and a few who worked for a private for-profit organization. A third worked in education, followed by those who worked in social service and mental health organizations. Approximately one-fifth of the respondents worked in a variety of different settings that did not cluster together and were too numerous to list. The racial composition reported for organizational personnel reflects a pattern common in human service and educational institutions in large urban areas: white people predominated among leadership and staff, while service users were more likely to be people of color than racially diverse or white (Table 2).

Drawing on a participatory action model, the researchers developed the research questions and survey instrument in consultation with the ARA core team. Multiple human service professionals and scholars reviewed the survey for accuracy, comprehension, and relevance. The study, which

Table 1 Demographic description of respondents

	%		%
Race		Year first took URW	
Person of color	38.8	2007 or earlier	39.1
White	57.8	2008–2012	60.9
Other	3.5	Professional role	
Gender		Administrator/supervisor	49.6
Female	77.7	Practitioners	19.4
Male	22.3	Educators	18.2
Sexual orientation		Students	5.4
Bisexual	4.9	Other	7.4
Gay male	2.5	Number of years at organization	
Heterosexual	82.1	0–6 years	52.8
Lesbian	3.0	7+ years	47.2
Other	7.6	Sector	
Heritage		Private nonprofit	75.9
Born and raised in US	87.6	Public/governmental	18.5
Born and raised elsewhere	12.4	Private for-profit	5.6
Education		Service focus	
Postgraduate degree	15.1	Educational	33.3
Graduate degree	64.4	Social service	26.7
Bachelor's degree	14.0	Mental health	17.7
Less than BA degree	5.3	Other	22.3
Age		Previous training	
18–35	31.3	Cultural competency/diversity	83.9
36–55	36.8	Racial equity	45.6
56+	31.9	Two or more URW	29.8

N = 875

Table 2 Racial composition of agency leaders, staff, and people served

Organizational role	Primarily white	Primarily people of color	Racially diverse	Do not know
Executive leaders	78.1 (<i>n</i> = 439)	9.8 (<i>n</i> = 55)	9.6 (<i>n</i> = 54)	2.5 (<i>n</i> = 14)
Staff members	49.6 (<i>n</i> = 274)	25.0 (<i>n</i> = 138)	20.7 (<i>n</i> = 114)	4.7 (<i>n</i> = 6)
People served	28.9 (<i>n</i> = 160)	48.6 (<i>n</i> = 269)	17.9 (<i>n</i> = 99)	4.5 (<i>n</i> = 25)

was approved by the Institutional Review Boards of the two collaborating universities, explored several aspects of individual experience and organizational functioning. Respondents were asked about (1) changes in knowledge and attitudes about structural racism, (2) engagement in job-related racial equity activities, and (3) perceptions of their organization's progress toward racial equity. The study also explored (4) factors that might be associated with personal engagement and steps toward organizational progress and (5) the role of race in the outcomes. The survey (129 questions) covered respondent demographics, characteristics of the respondent's organization, and perceived supports and barriers to engagement in racial equity activities. To allow time for action following the workshop, alumni were invited to participate a minimum of 6-months post-URW.

Variables

Demographic and Descriptive Data

Information about the respondents included (1) race (person of color or white), (2) gender, (3) sexual orientation, (4) heritage (raised in the USA or elsewhere), (5) highest educational degree earned, (6) age, (7) the year they first took URW, (8) how many URWs they attended, (9) whether they attended other cultural competency or diversity trainings (focused on self-awareness and helping people to understand cultural difference) or (10) other racial equity trainings (focused on power, privilege, and oppression), (11) professional role (multiple options provided, grouped as administrator, practitioner, or educator for analysis), (12) length of employment at their current workplace, (13)

sector (public/government, private for-profit, or nonprofit), (14) service focus (social services, mental health, or education), and (15) the racial composition of the organizations' executives, staff, and people served (majority white or people of color, or racially diverse, meaning no clear majority).

Knowledge, Attitudes, and Perceptions of the Organization

Rating scales measured: personal and professional helpfulness of URW (1–4: “not at all helpful” to “very helpful”); changes in knowledge and attitudes about race following URW (1–5: “no change” to “a great deal of change”); impact of URW on awareness of how organizations can address racial equity (1–4: “no impact on my awareness” to “increased my awareness a great deal”); success of their organization's racial equity work (1–4: “not at all successful” to “very successful”); hopefulness about achieving racial equity in their organization (1–4: “very discouraged” to “very hopeful”).

Engagement in Racial Equity Activities

Engagement in racial equity work internally within the organization and motivation to support racial equity activities externally in other venues were assessed with “yes” or “no” questions. Respondents who answered that they had not engaged in racial equity work were automatically skipped to questions regarding barriers to engagement. Those who indicated that they had engaged within their organization were presented a list of 13 activities that could promote organizational racial equity (i.e., “After URW, did you engage in efforts to: Promote informal discussions with staff about racial equity issues”; “Discuss issues of racial equity with people served/students”; “Encourage staff to attend an anti-racism training or workshop”; see Table 3 for complete list). For each activity, respondents selected either: “both participated and initiated” (3 points), “initiated-only” (2 points), “participated-only” (1 point), or “none” (0 points). To explore potential correlations between engagement as a dependent variable and other variables, the aggregate mean score for the Degree of Engagement Index was calculated. The theoretical range for the Degree of Engagement Index was 0–39, with higher scores indicating a higher degree of engagement, and the Cronbach's alpha was 0.86, indicating good reliability.

Engagement Supports and Barriers

For circumstances potentially associated with engagement, the “engaged” respondents also selected “yes/no” regarding whether they had: (1) access to decision makers, (2) sufficient leadership support, (3) sufficient peer interest,

(4) access to outside strategic advice, (5) enough time on the job to attend to related tasks, (6) positive attention from within the organization, and (7) a sense of job security. To understand if the engaged respondents also experienced barriers, they were asked if they (8) tried to keep a low profile on their activities, (9) faced resistance to their efforts from colleagues, or (10) leaders, and (11) limited their activities due to fear of getting into trouble at work.

Respondents not engaged in racial equity work selected “yes/no” to each of the following potential barriers: They (1) did not know enough about the issue; (2) did not know how to proceed; (3) feared getting into trouble at work; did not have enough (4) leadership support, (5) peer support, or (6) time during the work week; and/or (7) did not consider undoing racism a priority.

Organizational Progress

Respondents were asked a “yes/no” question about whether they worked for an organization that addressed racial equity internally. Those who answered “no” were automatically skipped to a later point in the survey. Those who answer “yes” were asked about their perceptions of organizational progress in relation to 14 different administrative activities that can promote racial equity (i.e., “My organization has: Policies that express a commitment to racial equity”; “Specific mechanisms to invite and follow up on internal or external complaints about racial bias in the organization”; “Committees or task forces to increase staff knowledge and skills about racial equity”; see Table 5 for complete list). For each activity, respondents identified a step that best described the organization's degree of progress: “Already in place” (organization had executed this activity at least 2 years prior to the respondent's URW attendance, 4 points); “Implemented” (organization had integrated the activity into its regular functioning within the past 2 years, 3 points); “Under discussion” (organization recognized the activity as important and planned to act on it, 2 points); “Stalled” (organization either discontinued previous activity or never attempted it, 1 point); or “Don't know/Not applicable” (treated as missing data in analysis).

To explore potential correlations between perceptions of organizational progress as a dependent variable and other variables, an aggregate mean score for the Organizational Progress Index was calculated. Half of the activities in the Index received a high number of “Don't know/Not applicable” responses. The seven activities in this category referenced information that is generally more accessible only to top-level executives or specialized human resource personnel. Therefore, about half of the respondents, mostly direct practitioners, were less likely to be informed about these issues and thus were correctly unable to respond to these questions. All analyses were conducted using SPSS

Table 3 Degree of engagement, arranged in descending order by responses to “Both”

Type of activity: After URW, did you engage in efforts to...	Both (%)	Initiated-only (%)	Participated-only (%)	None (%)
Promote informal discussions with staff about racial equity issues (<i>n</i> = 520)	52.9	23.8	16.5	6.7
Discuss issues of racial equity with people served/students (<i>n</i> = 520)	45.8	22.9	12.9	18.5
Encourage staff to attend an antiracism training or workshop (<i>n</i> = 516)	34.5	30.0	20.3	15.1
Modify procedures related to work with people served so that they addressed racial equity (<i>n</i> = 517)	28.6	16.4	18.2	36.8
Create a staff development or in-service training program on racial equity (<i>n</i> = 512)	22.9	16.4	18.2	42.6
Change staffing patterns to promote racial equity (<i>n</i> = 512)	22.9	11.3	17.6	49.0
Provide data about racial disparities or other racial equity issues to your organization’s senior leadership (<i>n</i> = 510)	18.4	14.1	15.7	51.8
Make the organization’s mission statement, brochure, or other public materials more reflective of racial equity (<i>n</i> = 515)	18.4	13.4	18.4	49.7
Modify educational materials for organizational staff or the board of directors to address racial equity (<i>n</i> = 510)	16.9	10.6	11.0	61.8
Create or work with an organizational task force on racial equity (<i>n</i> = 505)	14.9	5.7	26.3	53.1
Promote racial equity in city, state, or national policies that affect the work of your agency or program (<i>n</i> = 514)	14.2	7.4	18.3	60.1
Change the organization’s physical environment to reflect diversity, other than own office (<i>n</i> = 509)	13.9	7.9	9.2	69.0
Modify clinical, student, or staff evaluation forms to address racial equity (<i>n</i> = 509)	11.8	6.9	9.6	71.7
Total number in italics or bold in column	11	3	10	–

Italics indicate that the greatest frequency is in “Both” column; bold indicates the high frequency between “Initiated-only” and “Participated-only”

21, and the Organization Progress scale was developed using a syntax feature that included responses if the respondent had answered at least seven of the 14 items on the Index. This computation yielded a sample of 391 that was used for correlational analysis. The theoretical range for the Organizational Progress Index was 7–56. The Cronbach’s alpha with “DK/NA” included was 0.86, and with “DK/NA” treated as missing data, it increased to 0.94, indicating good to very good reliability.

Organizational Progress Facilitators

Circumstances potentially associated with organizational progress included support from leaders and co-workers. Leadership support was measured in multiple ways. Respondents were asked if the chief executive or administrative leader of their organization had ever attended URW (“yes/no”). Rating scales measured feedback provided by executive leaders (1–5: “very negative” to “very positive”); responsiveness of leaders and colleagues, respectively, to racial equity activities (1–4: “very negative” to “very positive”). “Yes/No” replies to two questions measured co-worker support: Did co-workers attend URW with respondent? Did co-workers attend URW prior to the respondent? Respondents were also asked whether the organization provided in-house training and/or financial support for cultural competency, diversity, and/or racial equity training (“yes/no”).

Data Analysis

Frequency distributions were calculated and reported for all variables. Since the data were ordinal and did not fit a normal distribution, nonparametric tests were chosen for analysis. Thus, to explore a range of potential relationships, Chi-square, Mann–Whitney, Kruskal–Wallis, and Spearman’s rho tests were used to compare a variety of demographic, descriptive, and organizational variables. Given the large number of combinations, in most cases, the only correlations reported are those that were either statistically significant, or in a few cases, those where the lack of statistically significant difference was meaningful to understanding engagement in racial equity work and organizational progress toward change. While many statistically significant correlations were identified at $p < .05$, in a few cases, a value of $p < .10$ is presented to highlight potential trends that can be explored in future research. Where demographic or descriptive variables are not discussed, no relationships were found.

Frequency distributions were calculated for the responses to each of the Degree of Engagement Index’s 13 activities. Table 3 shows the percentage of responses for each activity at each of the three levels of engagement, arranged in descending order based on the highest frequency for “both.” Numbers in italics indicate that “both” was the most frequent selection for that activity. Bolded numbers indicate the

highest frequency when “initiated-only” and “participated-only” are compared with each other.

Frequency distributions were calculated for the responses to each of the Organizational Progress Index’s 14 activities. Table 5 is arranged in descending order by the frequency of responses for “already in place.” Numbers in italics indicate that “already in place” was the most frequent selection for that activity. Bolded numbers indicate the highest frequency when “implemented” and “under discussion” are compared with each other.

Results

Changes in Attitudes and Knowledge

The URW alumni found the workshop to be helpful. They reported that it was “very” or “somewhat helpful” to them personally (97.3 %; $n = 875$) and professionally (88 %). More specifically, nearly half of the URW alumni (46.8 %) indicated that the workshop changed their *attitudes* about racism “significantly” or “a great deal.” Even more (61.5 %) said that the workshop changed their level of *knowledge* “significantly” or “a great deal.” The impact of URW on *attitudes* did not vary by race. However, more white people (Mdn = 291.99) than people of color (Mdn = 263.52; $U = 33,904.50$, $p = .03$) reported that URW increased their *knowledge* about racism. Almost 86 % of all the respondents further indicated that URW increased their awareness (“somewhat” or “a great deal”) about how organizations can address racial equity issues. More than three-quarters (78.6 %) said that the URW motivated them to support racial equity efforts in venues other than or in addition to their workplace with no difference between white people and people of color.

Respondents’ Engagement in Racial Equity Work

A main goal of URW was for alumni to engage in racial equity efforts in their workplace. Most of the respondents reported that they did so (60.7 %; $n = 531$); 11 % did not, and just under 30 % did not respond to this question. Thus, a conservative estimate is that just over 60 % of respondents became engaged in racial equity work. Since engagement in racial equity work is rarely easy, it was not anticipated that any individual would engage in more than a few activities (see the “none” column in Table 3). Yet most alumni generally “dug in” to make their organization more racially equitable. Table 3 shows that for 11 of the 13 activities, more respondents checked “both initiated and participated” than either “initiated-only” or “participated-only.” For 10 activities, more respondents checked

“participated-only” than “initiated-only,” and for three activities more respondents checked “initiated-only” rather than “participated-only.”

Factors Associated with Engagement

The aggregated mean for the Degree of Engagement Index was 15.19 (SD 9.08; $n = 466$) ranging from zero ($n = 6$) to 39 ($n = 9$). To better understand what might support engagement, this aggregate mean was used to explore potentially associated factors.

Earlier interest and prior exposure to racial disparity training as well as learning about structural racism may play a role. Engagement tended to be greater for URW alumni who participated in the URW before 2008 (Mdn = 269.78) than 2008 or later (Mdn = 203.22; $U = 17,561.50$, $p < .001$) and for those who took part in two or more URWs (Mdn = 281.78) compared with those who attended only one URW (Mdn = 208.19; $U = 16,024.00$, $p < .001$). Alumni who had prior diversity training reported higher levels of engagement (Mdn = 241.07) than those with none (Mdn = 163.90; $U = 8,390.50$, $p < .001$). Likewise for those who took part in other racial equity training (Mdn = 254.96) compared with those who did not (Mdn = 205.97; $U = 10,579.00$, $p < .001$) and potentially for those whose knowledge about racism increased as a result of URW [$r_s(468) = .11$, $p < .10$].

Positive perceptions of their organization’s racial equity efforts also affected engagement as did one’s organizational role and setting. The more engaged respondents perceived organizational success in the area of racial equity [$r_s(466) = .17$, $p < .01$], felt hopeful about their organization’s capacity to achieve racial equity in the future [$r_s(466) = .14$, $p < .01$], and saw URW as helpful professionally [$r_s(466) = .21$, $p < .01$]. Administrators became more engaged than direct practitioners or educators (Table 4). Those who worked in mental health settings became more engaged compared with URW alumni employed in social service or education.

Contrary to the literature, the support of co-workers as measured in this study was not associated with engagement. Respondents who worked for an organization where others had previously attended URW reported less engagement (Mdn = 106.13) than those who were the first in their organization to attend (Mdn = 149.08; $U = 3,757.00$, $p < .001$). Nor was engagement associated with URW attendance by the respondent’s executive leader, or with positive or negative feedback or expression of interest from leaders or colleagues. In contrast engagement in racial equity work tended to be greater for those receiving financial support for participation in racial equity trainings (Mdn = 139.98) than for those who did not receive this support (Mdn = 123.41; $U = 7,374.50$, $p < .10$) although statistical significance was not strong.

Table 4 Scores on engagement by associated factors

Variable	Mean rank	χ^2	df
Professional role of respondent ($n = 234$)		7.33**	2
Administrator/supervisor	127.66		
Direct practitioner	103.13		
Educator	103.62		
Service focus of the organization ($n = 203$)		6.30*	2
Mental health	118.83		
Social service	98.82		
Education	94.09		

Kruskal–Wallis tests; asymp.

Significance: * $p < .05$;** $p < .01$

Engagement Supports and Barriers

The URW alumni who became engaged in racial equity work ($n = 531$) identified organizational supports and barriers, with more people reporting supports than barriers. Key supports included access to decision makers (75.2 %), sufficient peer interest (61.2 %), access to outside strategic advice (59.7 %), positive attention from within the organization (59.2 %), a sense of job security (46.1 %), and enough time on the job to attend to related tasks (34.2 %). Common barriers included insufficient leadership support (50.0 %), resistance from colleagues (43.3 %), resistance from leaders (37.4 %), need to keep a low profile, (20.2 %), and fear of getting into trouble at work (17.5 %). Those who had access to organization decision makers were more engaged (Mdn = 219.02) than those without access (Mdn = 169.87; $U = 10,784.00$, $p < .001$). Similarly, engagement was higher among those who had access to outside advice (Mdn = 225.64) than those who did not (Mdn = 153.47; $U = 11,460.00$, $p < .001$).

The URW alumni who did *not* become involved in racial equity efforts at work ($n = 119$) identified several obstacles. Personal barriers included not knowing how to proceed (41.0 %), lack of time (35.3 %), not knowing enough about the issue (13.8 %), or not regarding undoing racism as a personal priority (15.3 %). Organizational barriers included lack support from peers (35.3 %) and/or leadership (32.8 %), and fear of getting into trouble at work (21.6 %).

Among the engaged the race of the respondent made a difference in relation to some supports and barriers. The respondent's race was not associated with support from leadership and colleagues or with access to outside advice. However, more white than alumni of color reported having access to organizational decision makers [$\chi^2(1, n = 443) = 7.80, p = .01$]. In contrast, more people of color than white persons limited their activities because they feared racial equity work would get them into trouble on the job [$\chi^2(1, n = 408) = 11.85, p = .001$]. People of color also tried to keep a low profile in relation to these activities [$\chi^2(1, n = 405) = 6.11, p = .01$].

Both white people and people of color who did not engage in racial equity activities reported similar barriers.

Organization Progress Toward Racial Equity

The URW goals include both individual and organizational change. The trainers encouraged participants to take their new knowledge back to their colleagues, organizations, and communities and to promote institutional change (Anti-Racist Alliance, n.d.). Sixty four percent of the respondents ($n = 560$) worked in organizations that addressed issues of racial equity internally since they had attended URW. Upon return to their workplace, the alumni's new or strengthened race lens enabled them to take an informed look at their organization's progress toward racial equity including the administrative activities covered in this study.

Of the 14 administrative activities listed in Table 5, eight received the greatest number of responses for "already in place," and the highest frequency for an action "already in place" was just over 40 % with most other actions ranging from 20 to 30 % at this step. Ten actions received the greatest number of responses for "under discussion," two for "implemented" and two for "stalled." While "implemented" ranked highest for only two activities, 10 activities ranked highest for "under discussion" suggesting that, at minimum, participating in the URW opened the door to discussion of the possibility of pursuing some racial equity activities.

Factors Associated with Respondent's Perception of Organizational Progress

To better understand organizational progress, several potentially associated factors were explored using the aggregated mean for organizational progress. The aggregated mean was 36.24 (SD 11.58; $n = 391$) ranging from 14 ($n = 2$) to 56 ($n = 6$), with an average of 2.61 (SD .80) on the scale of 1–4.

Table 5 Organizational progress, arranged in descending order by “Already in place”

My organization has...	Already in place	Implemented	Under discussion	Stalled	DK/NA
Policies that express a commitment to racial equity (<i>n</i> = 406)	<i>40.6</i>	19.7	25.4	9.4	4.9
Specific mechanisms to invite and follow up on internal or external complaints about racial bias in the organization (<i>n</i> = 393)	<i>34.4</i>	9.2	15.5	15.3	25.7
Committees or task forces to increase staff knowledge and skills about racial equity (<i>n</i> = 402)	<i>31.6</i>	22.6	19.2	16.2	10.4
A deliberate strategy to hire, retain, and promote staff of color (<i>n</i> = 401)	<i>31.7</i>	19.2	18.5	15.0	15.7
A way to involve community/student representatives on organizational or advisory boards (<i>n</i> = 398)	<i>30.4</i>	10.8	17.1	15.8	26.9
An orientation process for new staff/students that highlights the importance of racial equity (<i>n</i> = 405)	<i>27.4</i>	13.1	23.5	21.7	14.3
A way to review the composition of the organization’s staff/workforce to reflect the racial diversity of the community served (<i>n</i> = 397)	<i>27.0</i>	14.4	26.2	15.4	17.1
Procedures to implement policies that express a commitment to racial equity (<i>n</i> = 405)	<i>25.4</i>	20.0	33.3	13.6	7.7
A way to review admissions policies so that people served reflect the racial diversity of the community served (<i>n</i> = 399)	<i>24.6</i>	12.0	21.1	13.8	28.6
A way to review the composition of the organization’s leadership/executives to reflect the racial diversity of the community served (<i>n</i> = 401)	<i>20.9</i>	11.0	24.2	21.4	22.4
Criteria for hiring and promoting staff that includes assessing the individual’s competency in dealing with...racial equity issues (<i>n</i> = 394)	<i>19.3</i>	11.2	20.1	22.6	26.9
A shared language or analysis about race and racism within the organization (<i>n</i> = 406)	<i>19.0</i>	20.0	38.2	17.2	5.7
A way to review the composition of the organization’s board of directors to reflect the racial diversity of the community (<i>n</i> = 399)	<i>13.5</i>	9.3	19.3	16.3	41.6
An internal strategy for dealing with possible backlash against racial equity efforts (<i>n</i> = 395)	<i>11.1</i>	6.8	15.5	22.0	39.0
Total number in italics or bold in column	8	2	10	2	–

Italics indicate that the greatest frequency is in “Already in place” column; bold indicates the high frequency between “Implemented,” “Under discussion,” and “Stalled”

Professional Role and Organizational Setting

The view of an organization’s progress toward racial equity also varied with the respondent’s professional role. Administrators tended to report greater progress toward organizational change than practitioners or educators (Table 6). Organizational setting also made some difference. The URW alumni employed in the nonprofit sector reported significantly greater organizational progress than those working in the public sector (Table 6). There were no differences found based on whether the respondent worked in mental health, social services, or education.

Organizational Support

Organizational support, which is often the key for those pursuing change, was significantly correlated with progress toward racial equity. Organizational progress was greatest for alumni whose executive leaders provided positive

feedback for their racial equity efforts [$r_s(224) = .50, p < .01$], showed more interest [$r_s(192) = .47, p < .01$], or had ever attended URW (Mdn = 116.83) compared with those whose executive leader had never attended (Mdn = 84.18; $U = 3,407.50, p < .001$). Respondents who reported that their executive leader had attended URW also received more positive feedback for their racial equity work (Mdn = 170.05) than those whose executive leader had not attended (Mdn = 120.19; $U = 7,152.00, p < .001$).

Progress was also greater in organizations that provided in-house racial equity training (Mdn = 128.32) than those that did not (Mdn = 66.19; $U = 1,951.00, p < .001$). Organizations that provided financial support for external racial equity training also received higher scores (Mdn = 113.71) than those that did not (Mdn = 79.92; $U = 3,133.50, p < .001$). Additionally, there may be indications of a trend showing some correlation between respondents who were more engaged in racial equity work and the progress of their organization [$r_s(170) = .14, p < .10$].

Table 6 Scores on organizational progress and associated factors

Variable	Mean rank	χ^2	df
Professional role of respondent ($n = 219$)		6.49*	2
Administrator	118.46		
Educator	97.78		
Direct practitioner	94.28		
Organization sector ($n = 238$)		7.40*	2
Private for-profit	163.60		
Private nonprofit	123.05		
Public/government	94.73		

Kruskal–Wallis tests; asymp. Significance: * $p < .05$

Co-worker Support

In contrast to levels of engagement, organizational progress was associated with co-worker interest and URW attendance. Greater organization progress was reported by URW alumni whose colleagues showed more interest in their racial equity work [$r_s(193) = .50, p < .01$] and by those who attended URW following co-workers (Mdn = 115.84) than those who were the first from their organization to attend (Mdn = 93.35; $U = 3,950.00, p < .01$). Organizational progress was also greater for those who attended URW with co-workers (Mdn = 126.57) compared with those who attended alone (Mdn = 107.19; $U = 5,361.00, p < .05$).

Racial Composition of the Organization

The respondents' views of organizational progress toward racial equity varied with the racial composition of the people served, the executive leadership and the staff. As shown in Table 7, organizations where all three groups were racially diverse had higher scores on the Organizational Progress Index. The least progress was reported by respondents from organizations where the majority of the staff and people served were white, and organizations whose leaders were either primarily people of color or white had the same scores. The association between race and progress was strongest in organizations where the staff were racially diverse, and there are indications that the race of the people served may also be related to organization progress. There was a slight, but not statistically significant, association between the race of the respondents and progress reported, with white respondents reporting slightly greater progress ($m = 30.03, n = 187$) than respondents of color ($m = 28.14, n = 99$).

Perceptions of Success

URW alumni had different impressions of the success of their organization's progress toward racial equity. About

Table 7 Organizational progress by racial composition of agency leaders, staff, and people served

Organizational progress	Mean rank	χ^2	df
Executive leaders ($n = 189$)		1.41	2
Racially diverse group	109.05		
Primarily people of color	92.56		
Primarily white people	93.53		
Staff group ($n = 175$)		7.40*	2
Racially diverse group	102.83		
Primarily people of color	96.12		
Primarily white people	78.80		
People served ($n = 184$)		3.30 ⁺	2
Racially diverse group	103.70		
Primarily people of color	92.90		
Primarily white people	84.15		

Kruskal–Wallis tests; asymp. Significance: ⁺ $p < .10$; * $p < .05$

one third (32.8 %) felt that efforts were “successful” or “very successful,” while two-thirds (67.2 %) reported “limited” or “no success.” The perception of success differed by the racial composition of the respondent's organization. In organizations where the majority of executive leaders were white, more alumni saw racial equity efforts as successful compared with organizations where the majority were people of color or racially diverse (Table 8). No differences in perceptions of success appeared related to the race of the staff or the race of people served.

Discussion

The findings of this study suggest that that no single activity alone will lead to transformative organizational change in relation to achieving racial equity. This is not surprising given the intricate set of institutional factors that contribute to structural racism and the ongoing complexities of racial equity work. However, it is clear that a combination of factors can promote change. Therefore, a complex strategic plan that addresses multiple aspects of organizational functioning becomes necessary to move beyond first-order changes and promote deeper, second-order change (Gonzalez 2010; Hyde 2003, 2004; Ramos and Chesler 2010). In this context, the study's findings add to knowledge about how URW can affect (1) participant's attitudes and knowledge about race, (2) their personal engagement in racial equity work, (3) their organization's racial equity progress, (4) the factors associated with personal engagement and organizational progress, and (5) the role of race. Understanding these factors can inform how

Table 8 Scores on perception of success and racial composition of the organization

Variable	Mean rank	χ^2	<i>df</i>
Race of the organizational leaders (<i>n</i> = 545)		9.06**	2
Majority of organization executives are white	275.41		
Majority of organization executives are people of color	234.16		
Organization executive group is racially diverse	226.15		

Kruskal–Wallis tests; asymp. Significance: ** $p < .01$

organizations can use URW or other racial equity training to promote organizational change.

Attitudes and Knowledge

More URW alumni reported that the training added to their knowledge about racism than reported attitudinal change. Since this was not the first racial disparities training for most respondents, it is likely that prior training or other events had already influenced their attitudes. Moreover, the URW devotes considerable attention to knowledge building with its focus on the history of American racism and other substantive issues. It is also possible that the URW explores structural racism more than other trainings, thus contributing to the reported greater increase in knowledge. Interestingly, white respondents were both more likely than respondents of color to have attended a racial equity training pre-URW, and more likely to state that participation in URW increased their knowledge about racism. Since increased knowledge about structural racism may be a factor in fostering engagement in racial equity work, education in this area can be an important investment for organizations seeking change.

Engagement

The overwhelming majority of participants found URW helpful personally and professionally, and three-quarters stated that URW motivated them to work toward racial equity in a variety of venues. URW participation also left respondents substantially more aware of ways in which organizations can address issues of racial equity. Most of the URW alumni became deeply engaged in a range of activities directed toward promoting racial equity, with large numbers reporting that they both initiated and participated in a variety of specific activities. It may be that URW tends to attract participants with greater than average interest in undoing racism marked by this study's respondents having attended two or more URWs, having attended racial disparity trainings prior to URW, and having

participated in URW before the program became well known or required by their employer.

Having outside strategic advice and access to organization decision makers were important to engagement as was financial support from the organization to attend racial equity training. Optimism may also foster engagement as the more engaged respondents felt more hopeful than the non-engaged about the future possibility of achieving racial equity. In this context, the weaker positive associations between individual engagement and (a) perceived success and (b) organizational progress suggest that those who are committed to racial equity will persevere in their efforts even if progress is slow. Indeed while organizational progress benefited by positive interest from executive leaders, engagement in racial equity work carried on without active leadership support.

Engagement suffered from negative responses from leaders or an organizational culture that did not welcome progress toward racial equity. Non-engaged alumni tended to fear getting into trouble, or lacked information, outside support, and/or interest in the undoing racism project. These factors further support a conclusion that active organizational interest advances engagement. Such interests also benefit efforts toward racial equity within an organization.

Race Matters

Regardless of their race, respondents reported similar barriers and supports to engagement in racial equity work. However, three critical exceptions stand out: (1) more white respondents than respondents of color reported having access to organizational decision makers and (2) more people of color feared getting into trouble at work and (3) tried to keep a low profile when engaged in racial equity activities. This corresponds to discussions in the literature about racial differences in access to power. Mor Barak (2000) indicates that employees from marginalized groups often find themselves excluded from both formal and informal networks of information and opportunity. She adds that such exclusion from circles of influence keeps individuals from fully contributing and benefiting from their involvement in the organization. Our findings affirm that understanding the subtle differences related to race in the experiences of staff members is important to consider in engaging diverse groups to work toward equity.

Organizational Progress

Our findings generally indicate the presence of movement toward racial equity in the organizations represented by the respondents, although progress was limited. The most highly ranked “already in place” action only received

40 % of the responses. Alumni reported more activities as “under discussion” than “implemented,” indicating that their organization may have just begun to address racial equity issues. At the same time, for most activities “stalled” received the fewest responses which points to some movement in most organizations. That organizations had difficulty moving racial equity activities from “under discussion” to “implementation” evokes Hyde’s (2003) finding that while the values of multicultural organizational development efforts reflect interest in comprehensive transformation, the subsequent goals and activities do not always fulfill such a vision. That twice as many respondents reported “limited” or “no success” than reported “successful” or “very successful” progress also suggests that much work remains to be done. Interestingly, administrators reported some greater organizational progress than practitioners or educators, perhaps because they have a wider overview of and more information about agency activities, more influence on the change process, and/or wanted to believe that more is happening than what is actually taking place. It is also important to note that those who worked in public or governmental organizations, which are arguably more bureaucratic and less flexible than privately run organizations, reported the least progress.

Leadership and Organizational Climate

Leadership plays a key role in encouraging or mobilizing action (Githens 2009; Kerman et al. 2012). Our data confirm that leadership matters. Factors showing the strongest correlation with progress toward racial equity speak directly to the climate of the organization. Positive feedback from executive leadership regarding an employee’s racial equity work and interest from both leaders and colleagues were all associated with organizational progress. Executive leader attendance at URW was also a factor and was associated with employees receiving positive feedback for their efforts. Together with providing access to racial equity training in-house and in the community, the combination of these factors become strong enough to create a foundation for organizational shift.

Social support is important in organizational change (Brazzel 2007; Cocchiara et al. 2010; Mannix and Neale 2005), and the role of co-worker support was significant in this study. Respondents who attended URW after coworkers had done so, those who attended with colleagues, and those whose colleagues showed more interest in their racial equity efforts reported more organizational progress. These findings suggest that group support on the job may be central to change, and that the climate of support is both crucial and multifaceted.

The Racial Composition of the Organization’s Leaders, Staff, and People Served

Ironically, URW alumni employed in white-dominated organizations believed that their organizations were more successful in racial equity efforts even though those organizations showed the least progress based on this study’s index. Organizations staffed by racially diverse groups, however, were more likely to make progress toward racial equity than those staffed by people of color or white persons. The same pattern emerged in relation to the racial composition of the people served by the organizations, where again diversity was most associated with organizational progress. It is possible that the need, desire, or pressure to examine organizational assumptions and practices is greater in racially diverse than in more homogeneous organizations.

Given findings showing that support from executive leadership is fundamental for organizational progress, the lack of correlation between the race of the executive leaders and organizational progress merits attention. While organizational diversity on all levels is critical, if those in power desire greater racial equity, they have a special responsibility to support and/or drive change efforts, regardless of their race. Since more than three-quarters of the respondents reported a majority of white executive leaders, it is important to understand that all leaders have central roles in creating change toward racial equity in the organizations they lead.

Limitations and Areas for Future Study

The study has several limitations. The instrument was locally developed with racial equity activists and could contain inherent bias and assumptions not validated by previous research. Procedural bias may also exist as the online survey eliminated URW participants who lacked internet access. Selection bias is another consideration given that only URW attendees who provided their email address and only those who were most motivated to complete a long questionnaire participated. That only those who felt most favorably about URW may have responded to the survey could also skew some findings upward. While respondents were asked about whether they had engaged in racial equity activities after attending URW, we did not assess whether they had also engaged in these activities prior to URW, so we cannot know for certain whether URW participation was a primary catalyst for action. The online survey instrument included several skip points that were included to shorten the length of time it took respondents to complete the survey, but this then created limitations in the ability to conduct correlational analyses with those who answered “no” to key questions. Although

the response rate was average for online surveys, it still raised questions about the representativeness of the respondents relative to all persons who received the survey and all who participated in URW.

The study relies on perceptions of employees from multiple organizations. Therefore, the actual progress of organizations represented by the respondents is not known. That the Organizational Progress Index contains a high rate of “Don’t know/Not applicable” responses adds to this limitation. More rigorous study is needed to determine the actual status and progress of racial equity work in human services and educational organizations. Cross-sectional design such as the one used in this study do not allow for causal interpretations. Therefore, further study is also needed to explain the causal impact of URW and to identify mediating and moderating variables related to racial equity work. Given the lack guidance from the literature regarding the impact of an organization’s racial composition on progress toward racial equity, these issues also merit future study.

Conclusion

Undoing racism is hard work even for the respondents in this study who reflected a high level of exposure to racial equity training and strong interest in undoing racism. Most respondents reported considerable personal engagement. While a good number of administrative activities were “under discussion,” only a few organizations readily “implemented” most of the racial equity activities beyond what was “already in place.” Organization leaders seeking racial equity can look to maximize the supportive factors reported in this study that (1) facilitate individual engagement, (2) influence organizational change, and (3) minimize barriers. To this end, the list of engagement and organizational change racial equity activities contained in Tables 3 and 5 can be used as action steps with strategic planning to guide movement from first-order to second-order change.

The external context over which organizations have little or no control also matters. In the current economic and policy climate, any effort at organizational change will inevitably have to contend with economic problems. For example, in various studies (Abramovitz 2005; Abramovitz and Zelnick 2013; Hyde 2004), practitioners overwhelmingly described their human service agencies lurching from crisis to crisis due to downsizing, having to do more with less, staff anxious about job security, and clients presenting with more complex problems, among many other shortfalls. Despite a resulting demoralization, practitioners and organizations continue to forge ahead. The current intense racial polarization of society makes efforts such as URW more critical but also more difficult. Interested individuals

and organizations may lack the funds to enroll in a workshop (despite generous scholarships), and organizations may be even more wary of raising the controversial issues. Nonetheless, many URW alumni reported that their organizations had begun to discuss a range of racial equity activities, which holds promise for future organizational change.

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