APPENDIX C

TEAM SOUTHWEST

Like Teams North, East and South, Team Southwest was an in-depth team, for which we have more extensive data. For clarity and parsimony, we did not include them in the narrative because we categorized the team as "color evasive" like Team East and felt that Team East was a more interesting exemplar for a variety of reasons. Indeed, there are a number of important similarities between the two teams. But there were interesting differences as well and for that reason we provide a full description and analysis, structured similarly to the other three teams, of Team Southwest here.

THE BACKDROP

The catchment area of Team Southwest included a number of small towns in a largely rural area. The office's clients were about 4/5 white; about 15 percent were Latino and the remainder were black. An intact unit, the team decided to join the teaming pilot after the team leader brought it to them to discuss. The team had been an ongoing unit and the team proposed to continue with that work but to do it with formal and informal partnerships on cases. The unit had two Spanish-speaking workers, one a white woman who had lived in Latin America for many years, and the other a Latina. The others were white and there were two men, the team leader and a team member. The team's manager was an African American woman and the office director was a white woman.

Team Southwest's meetings, which occurred once or twice a week, usually included the team's manager along with the team leader and its members. Occasionally, an agency expert in substance abuse attended their meetings to weigh in on case discussions. Most of the meeting time was spent on case discussions, but topics also included updates on agency and office

doings, asking others to help out as necessary, discussions of team practices, such as what kinds

of cases should be formally teamed by assigning two workers versus informal collaboration, and

occasional meetings with their teaming consultant.

TEAM RACIAL-CULTURAL PRACTICE

This team discussed race and culture rarely in their meetings and when they did the

conversations tended to be brief and superficial, so we use the term color evasive to describe

their practice, like that of Team East's. Almost all of them were brought up by a white Spanish-

speaking worker, Ethel, though one was raised by the team's African American manager, Mary.

The other team members were white except for a Latina, who never raised the topic. A couple of

times, Ethel simply mentioned a family's place of origin or the lack of bi-lingual workers in a

particular area, with no further comment by anyone.

However, she also twice brought up important issues that indicated her own cultural

awareness though there was little engagement from the rest of the team. In one instance, Ethel

mentioned that a Latino father with whom she was working had asked to receive all

communications from the agency in English, rather than Spanish. Mary asked if Ethel generally

asked parents what they preferred and Ethel said she would be more "sensitive" about doing so

in the future. Mary then asked if there were form letters in Spanish that Ethel could draw on but

Ethel said there were not. Mary suggested that this be brought up with the another employee in

the office. No one else on the team participated in the conversation, nor did Mary ask anyone

else about their experience with this issue.

In a later meeting, Ethel discussed an immigrant family that was not consistently sending

their five-year-old to kindergarten. While she noted that this was legal and therefore the parents'

decision, she wondered if it was "cultural." She said that, "This family is very particular about the fact that the children are dressed well." Ethel learned from talking with a guidance counselor that if the parents felt they could not dress the child adequately, they would keep him home. Joseph, the white team leader, asked if Ethel felt this was the reason why the parents were sometimes keeping the child home from school and she said yes: "They dearly love their children—they fear [the agency] is going to take them away—if they send them to school not dressed properly, there will be a report." In this case, Ethel is using culture diagnostically by suggesting the family's behavior might be connected to a particular family dynamic. But no one else engaged and the conversation ended there.

Finally, Mary made a brief comment after she came back to the team having been called out to the receptionist's desk. "Saw a little boy out there [in the lobby] whose hair has not been combed in so long . . . We need to teach the foster parents a little bit about hair care for black children . . ." Mary said she had combed his hair a bit but, "It was hurting him to have it combed, hadn't been done in so long." One white team member asked if Mary "had any grease" but she said she didn't, though she did have an afropick "that I hadn't used yet. Just used it to even him off a little bit." That concluded that conversation.

In sum, Team Southwest discussed race and ethnicity rarely, the discussions were quite short, and the topic was raised only by Ethel, the white bi-lingual worker, and once by Mary, the team's black manager. Aside from two brief comments or questions from other team members, no other team members, white or Latina, participated. In total, this suggests a color evasive practice.

INDIVIDUAL RACIAL-CULTURAL PRACTICE

In this section, we begin the exploration of why Team Southwest engaged in color evasive

practice by focusing on individual-level practice. As with the teams profiled in the main

narrative of the book, we look at two key dimensions of racial-cultural practice: whether a

worker sees her own background as having an impact on her work and whether she uses a

racial or cultural lens to better understand the families she works with. We begin with the white

workers on the team since they were the majority and then discuss the one Latina member.

Following that, we discuss the team leader and the team manager who regularly participated in

the team's meetings and was a strong presence.

White Members

The white members of Team Southwest articulated largely color cognizant perspectives.

Without diversity, "Then you can't fully, I think, fully grow. I think you need to have other

experiences, and other thoughts, and other ideas," noted one. A second focused more on the

importance of mirroring the client population: "What's outside should be within the

workplace."

But when it came to applying color cognizance to their practice, the white team

members had less to say. Most of them denied any substantive impact of their own racial or

cultural background on their work. Only one, Henry, said he had to be careful of his "blind

spots," referring to possible discrimination. They also largely reported that they did not draw on

their cultural background in thinking about the work. His teammate Emily said,

straightforwardly, "being a white female, I have no culture." Another worker, Nolan, said that

he grew up in California where he felt it was more diverse than where he currently lived; this

made him feel more comfortable "because I grew up around them [different cultural groups]." He felt that helped him feel less awkward when going into others' homes. But he did not think he drew on his own racial or ethnic background.

Moreover, most of the white workers said that they did not work differently with families whose background differed from their own. Describing his work with an African American woman, Henry said, "It's funny because I didn't feel like culturally she was different. I just felt like she was a just a different color." He said something similar about another family of color: "I am working with a Latino family right now. But I don't feel like—I mean I just feel like I'm at somebody's house." Nolan, noting that he often worked with Latino families, said that he did not try to get additional information to guide his work:

> **INT:** Have there been times when there might have been things about their background that were unfamiliar to you? Did you ever try to get information from someone who knew that particular background?

> **NOLAN:** I don't think so. . . . Because most of them have been families that even though their diversity is different, they're like living in the United States for a long period of time, so there's really not questions that I have about you know what their lifestyle is like, I guess.

In fact, some seemed to assume that working differently with a family meant that they were biased in some way and might treat them more punitively, buying into the dichotomy we described in chapter 3: either workers treat people similarly or they engage in discrimination that would harm families of color. When asked, "Do you feel like you work with that case [a Haitian family] any differently?," a worker responded, "No, I don't think so. I usually work with them based upon what the issues are and what the family's needs are. . . . The case

practice itself and like the standards I have for the family meeting . . . isn't any different than any other family that I work with."

One of the white workers stood out from her peers, however. Ethel, of Irish and German descent, was bi-lingual and had spent years living in Latin America. As illustrated in the earlier section, she is the worker who brought up culture several times in the team's meetings. She both talked at length about how she drew on her own background as well as how she drew on her expertise in Latino culture. In Chapter 3, she is the worker who goes on at length about her immigrant heritage. She felt she was affected by her Irish background as well. "If I think about it, I probably identify more with the Irish in that, like, my goal is to bring about justice for people who have been oppressed. And that I am a passionate person. I've been told that, you know, by peers and colleagues. I think that comes from somewhat more of the Irish . . . . Every culture has its own way of being passionate, but I think some more than others. I think I'm warm, and vivacious—sincere; I see that as somewhat connected with my culture . . . "

In addition to this sensemaking about the impact of her own culture, Ethel also gave a number of examples of how her experience in Latino cultures had influenced her work with families. She believed this knowledge was important because of "the ability to relate to the families in a very genuine way, respectful way, because if one doesn't understand the culture, it's much easier to be disrespectful." For example, she believed that Anglo cultures tended to be more "individualistic" with more of a focus on the "personality of the parent," whereas in Latino cultures she saw more "communal respect" with a "mindset" that was more "centered on . . . the family or the community." The interviewer asked: "So, the fact that the Spanish speakers might be less individualistic, does that make a difference in how you work with them?" Ethel responded, "Well, it does to the extent that I think that they're more open to

community supports in following up. It's easier for me, then, to offer that to them."

Ethel also felt her cultural expertise helped her understand the family dynamics between a teen mother and her mother, the grandmother of her child, who were from Central America. "It's more common in [their] culture for grandparents to raise the children, and then this teen mother needs to honor her mother, [who is] the grandmother of her baby, and I think that it's taken some time for her [the young mother] to voice to us [the agency workers] what she wants, rather than what her mother wants . . . " This worker felt she was able to draw on cultural knowledge to understand why a young woman might have a hard time articulating her needs to her caseworker, given that her needs might contradict what her own mother was saying.

While Ethel attended to culture far more than her other white teammates, she was not entirely alone. Her team-mate, Olive, gave an in-depth example of how she had learned from Francisca, the team's only Latino worker, how to connect better with a Puerto Rican father: "Well I had a case—the father is Hispanic, he is from Puerto Rico. We had a difficult time at first working together because he was pretty old school in his view of the roles of women and whatnot so we didn't quite get along very well . . . . He would be rude to me on the phone. He wouldn't follow through with what he was doing, kind of like 'you don't know what you are talking about' sort of thing." Francisca helped Olive understand two things: First, that the fathers' views about the roles of women came from "the way he was raised—not that he disrespected women, but he just felt like the woman's place is in the home and all that" and, second, that he probably did not understand "what social work really was" and therefore she needed to clarify with him her role with his family. Over time, Olive transformed the relationship: "we were working really well together and I tried to help him get his daughter back but he passed away a few months ago."

When the interviewer asked what had enabled the change, she said "I think I just gave him the chance to be who he was. Help him understand my role a little bit more and that if he wasn't comfortable with anything I was doing or saying or whatever, you know he could talk to me about it." She credited Francisca with helping her move from being reactive or defensive to being "just more understanding with him. I took . . . a different perspective. I let him kind of vent . . . " This same worker when asked, "So in the team meetings . . . are there ever any discussions about race or diversity?" responded, "No but we should. We should take it to the next level, definitely."

Overall, while most of the white members of Team Southwest stated the benefits of diversity and seemed genuinely to believe this, most did not really dig into what it meant for their work with families. Only one worker, Ethel, said she drew off her own background and only she showed significant knowledge of other cultures, though Olive described one attempt to learn about others. Ethel could have been a strong voice for color cognizant practice, but she had no real allies, either among the white workers or the other team members as we show below.

Latina Member

There were two people of color who regularly attended Team Southwest's meetings: one was a Latina social worker, Francisca, and the other was the team's African American manager, Mary. However, we discuss Mary in the next section, since she was part of the team's leadership.

Born in the United States, Francisca seemed to struggle with how to think about the role of race and ethnicity. She did believe her own background was an asset, thinking about it

largely in terms of Spanish-speaking families. When asked if her background had an impact she said, "I think I would say that most when I'm working with my bilingual families. I see myself obviously able to understand their culture, you know, and speak to them in their language. And I think they can relate to me, seeing me as a Spanish worker . . . " She gave an example of helping another worker when she was asked if it was a cultural norm for a Latino family to have very little furniture in the home: "'These people don't have any furniture in the house? Is that usual?' I'm like 'no.'"

She also, when prompted, acknowledged that her background would have an impact when working with other families as well, though she didn't know how:

> **INT:** And I wonder whether it affects how you approach things, or how you make decisions kind of across the board? Not just with the bilingual families? Do you think it in any way informs how you work with your white families, or African-American families?

> **FRANCISCA:** Um hmm. What kind of decisions do I make? I mean, maybe. I'm sure it does. I'm sure without even thinking about it, in my head I'm thinking—you know, my thought process includes my cultural awareness, you know, sensitivity to those issues that are involved.

But she also seemed ambivalent about how much importance to ascribe to these issues. When asked if she felt any benefits from working in an ethnically diverse office, she said, "I guess so. I can't say that it's ever been highlighted to me, where I'm like 'wow, you know, thank God that this office is so diverse.'" When prompted, she focused on the positives. She pointed out that Spanish-speaking families found it helpful to work with Spanish-speaking workers. She also noted that she learned things from workers of other backgrounds and gave an

example of learning from an Asian employee. She went on to say, "I'm sure I benefit somehow from working with my white co-workers" though she could not think of an example. Still, this is one of the few times that a worker of color mentioned that possibility which is important because, as we mentioned with the example of Antonia learning from her white co-worker, it shows that Francisca did not lodge race only in people of color.

However, later she exhibited more ambivalence when describing why she had stopped going to AWARE meetings. (AWARE was the organization's internal caucus for workers of color and bi-lingual workers.) "[At the meetings] you talk about how we can help [agency] become more aware of diversity. Then it's just so cliché. . . . Like they [workers not in AWARE] need to know that you can't have these cultural biases and families are unique because of wherever they come from or - you know the kind of physical differences between maybe what an African American child—you know the hair care, skin care. Those kinds of things make sense but it is kind of your generic 'okay let's have a luncheon for diversity.'" She continued, "The same things I have been hearing since college. You know you almost want to beat your head against the wall." During the first team interview, when the team was discussing if and why it was important for the agency to be diverse, she did not participate, though she did engage in the subsequent team interview. Moreover, she never raised issues related to race or culture during the team meetings and did not participate when Ethel did so, even though her questions or comments related to Spanish- speaking families. This suggests some ambivalence or fatigue around the topic, perhaps in part because she felt the conversation never changed or evolved. However, as we show later in this chapter,team dynamics may also have inhibited her participation.

Team Leader and Team Manager

Joseph, the team leader, was a white man of Italian descent. His superior and the team's manager, Mary, was African American. She was a strong presence in the team, sitting in on most meetings, which is why we include her here.

Joseph stated that he believed that racial and ethnic diversity was an asset because, "based on how a particular ethnicity parents their child, we could look at it as abuse, but it's actually the cultural way of doing things." However, he felt little connection between his own background and the way he conducted his work:

> **INT:** [Is] there any way in which you draw on that [Italian] background, in terms of the families you work with, people in the office, how you supervise others, dealing with collaterals?
>
> **JOSEPH:** Maybe unconsciously, but I'm not aware.

Further, when asked about real life cases, he seemed to see race or culture as more of a liability than an asset. Rather than seeing them as resources or strengths upon which to draw, he assumed that they could only be a potential problem or challenge.

> **INT:** Can you think of a particular case recently where culture seemed to play a role recently?
>
> **JOSEPH:** You mean at work, having a challenge or?
>
> **INT:** Yes, that or different cultural backgrounds coming together or the worker encountering a culture that he or she really wasn't very familiar with or anything like that?
>
> **JOSEPH:** Nothing ever negative, not at all. I don't see that as a challenging-- . . . . There

never was any issue.

While the interviewer did not specifically inquire about the "negative" or "challenging" aspects of race and culture, that is where Joseph automatically went.

Overall, the team leader's answers to questions related to race or ethnicity were quite short. And while he stated his belief that diversity could bring value, he was largely unable to articulate how that might be the case and could give no specific examples of how that had happened on the team.

Mary, the Team Manager, was also the president of AWARE. Her feelings on these issues displayed interesting inconsistencies, as she herself seemed to acknowledge. She began by noting "it is kind of ironic" that she was president of AWARE and active on issues related to race and ethnicity because "I just always felt a person was a person was a person and race didn't enter into it. . . . We all bleed red and we all have the same blood types." At another point she noted, "It is our humanity. It is being able to just walk awhile in the other guy's shoes and see what is it like to be them. And if that person has that capacity, they can be blue. It doesn't really matter."

However at another point, she noted that matching a family with a worker from that same background did have an impact: "Families feel better when they see you there. They just brighten up." She went on, "we need to have people that hear and understand and that can translate it to people who want to understand." A few minutes later, she recalled working in a prison where, "I did better with the white inmates and my Jewish colleague did better with the black inmates. Why? . . . They [the prisoners] wouldn't ever have the chance of ever running into [the worker of a different background] socially under any circumstances," and, therefore, they might be more likely to be candid. She noted this wasn't true for all the prisoners, but "there were certain ones"

who preferred working with someone of a different background. She concluded that that was why diversity was important—because sometimes matching would be helpful and sometimes not matching could be helpful as well. "That option ought to be out there. The diversity should be there." Unlike her earlier statement that "we all bleed red," implying that race is unimportant, she is saying that it *can* matter whether someone is black or white—either because one believes, in a given instance, that it would be useful to match by race or, in another, believes it would be better to deliberately *not* seek racial concordance.

She was less contradictory when discussing her work with AWARE. She was dedicated to the group. Her work had convinced her that the agency had issues with discrimination, both by treating families of color more harshly and by subtly discriminating against workers of color (as we described more fully in our Chapter 2 description of the research site). However, she tended not to make the connections between race and culture and casework, either her own or anyone else's. For example, while she said she drew on her own background, she referred to her religious background and specifically made a distinction between her spirituality and her cultural background. When asked, "Do you think you draw on your cultural background in thinking about how you do your work?" she said "I probably draw more on my faith than on my cultural background." Mary had grown up Catholic but had become a "born again Christian," as she described it, as a young woman. While many African Americans have strong connections to Christianity, she did not seem to connect them in her own mind. Later in the same interview, she noted that her race and culture impacted her "more when I am involved with [AWARE]" than in her "day-to-day" work life "because it [culture] is not on my radar screen most of the time unless somebody brings it to my attention." She said that the team discussed these issues rarely and did not suggest that this should change. At one point, she seemed to make a distinction between

cultural issues and "family issues" instead of assuming that the two would be connected in some way: "No, we haven't had conversations like that [about race or culture] that I can think of except—well, there have been two Latino families that have been a lot of our focus, but it hasn't been around the culture per se. It's been around the family issues more of the particular family." And in fact, while she played a dominant role in team discussions about all their cases, she only raised race once, quite briefly, and that was about a child sitting in the waiting room, not one of the families that the team members were working with.

Therefore, while Mary as head of AWARE was a strong voice for naming and addressing bias and discrimination, she rarely made the connection to casework itself. In her approach, issues related to race and ethnicity tended to have a negative valence in terms of avoiding a problem, rather than having the positive valence of being seen as a resource or a strength. Ultimately, neither Joseph nor Mary took a lead on considering how race and culture could influence work with families.

Individual Contributions

Many members of Team Southwest, both white and of color, overall seemed to genuinely value and be open to the role of cultural diversity, yet for the most part they did not act accordingly, leading to a color evasive practice. Most white workers expressed an interest in learning about the role of race and ethnicity and demonstrated some evidence of past learning. But Ethel was the only white member who translated this inclination into action. The others seemed to lack the knowledge or skill to do so. Given Joseph's leadership role, his approach is particularly important. While he made generally positive statements about the benefits of diversity, he seemed uncomfortable with the topic. His answers to questions were brief and superficial. His

immediate reaction to questions about working with the families differently focused on concerns of discrimination. Such concerns are essential. But framing race and culture as largely about problems to avoid rather than resources to explore desiccates their potential contribution. Perhaps unintentionally, Joseph was sending strong if implicit signals to all the team's members to direct attention elsewhere.

Meanwhile, the Latina team member of color and the African American manager, who others may have looked to—rightly or wrongly—for guidance, gave conflicting signals. Both had some awareness of these issues. But Francisca's interviews suggest some internal conflict about how much weight to accord them. And her behavior in group meetings was quite clear: we did not observe her ever raising these issues or engaging when others raised them. Meanwhile, Mary, who everyone knew was head of AWARE, focused on discriminatory practices towards families or workers of color rather than on how race and culture could be used diagnostically to enhance work with families. Why this is the case is unclear. From her own remarks, it sounds like it could be rooted in an emphasis on equity and fairness rather than the diagnostic potential of race and culture, but it may not be that simple. Other work suggests that workers of color in social service contexts may feel they have to fight the perception that they are biased towards members of their own groups. "Some black service providers may actively seek to divorce the issue of race from their interactions with black clients to sustain the impression of professional legitimacy and impartiality."[1] Mary may have had particular concerns in this regard precisely because she was the head of AWARE and therefore felt she needed to manage her image more carefully. But regardless of its source, Mary's disinclination to dig into the impact of race and ethnicity on the agency's clients could have discouraged others from doing it.

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[1] Watkins-Hayes, Celeste. 2009. "Race-Ing the Bootstrap Climb: Black and Latino Bureaucrats in Post-Reform Welfare Offices." *Social Problems* 56(2): 285—310.

Ultimately, Ethel was by far the strongest advocate for color cognizant practice. In fact, her expertise in and passion for cultural issues could have led her to play a role similar to Antonia on Team North. We saw earlier that Ethel brought up these issues far more than anyone else. But unlike Antonia's experience, Ethel's teammates did not join her with their own knowledge and practice, in this effort. She was largely working solo in this arena, something that she felt was unfortunate, noting that she felt the team should discuss these issues more. While she took some leadership in raising these issues several times, she did not forcefully champion this approach. No one mentioned learning from her as many did regarding Antonia. And no one else stepped up as a partner.

While individual leanings certainly seem implicated in the team's color evasive practice, their incubator holds clues as well.

INTERGROUP INCUBATOR

Team Southwest had neither the impassioned debates of Team North nor the roiling conflict of Team East. On its surface, the team presented as quiet and placid, even disengaged. Conversations in team meetings could be halting and were often dominated by Mary and, to a lesser extent, Joseph. Case discussions usually involved the worker assigned to the case and the two leaders, most often Mary, with little input from other members. Open-ended questions by the leaders—how are things going? How do you feel the team is doing? Any concerns?—usually elicited little response. Members were often observed looking down, sitting back from the table, playing with a watch or phone and generally appearing uninvolved with the discussion.

When submitting their proposal to become part of the teaming pilot, team members had not proposed any significant changes in how they did their casework, only that they would

formally and informally partner on cases. They did meet regularly and they did create formal partnerships on a small subset of cases but, mostly, workers simply helped each other informally, little different from how workers in a traditional unit might work. Shortly after they began teaming, the team asked to participate in another experiment the agency was pursuing: providing palm pilots to workers to see if it enhanced their efficiency. The team members were avidly interested but they were not included. They were very disappointed, even to the point of being disheartened. More than a year later, at least one team member felt the incident had contributed to a sense of disempowerment. Joseph, the team leader, seemed to sense the deflation. We often observed him playing a kind of cheerleading role at the beginning of the team meetings, recounting examples of good teamwork that all team members would have already been familiar with or asking for such examples in order, it seemed, to motivate the group. While team members were effectively carrying out their casework, their progress as a team had largely stagnated by the end of the first year.

Like Team East, the office context may have played an outsized role in the team's dynamics. Not long before the teaming program began, an investigation had found that workers had been falsifying records, the office Director was fired, and the office was merged with another. The wounds were relatively recent and, therefore, not fully healed. Moreover, participants from this office described more inter-group conflict than those from Team North and Team South described, though definitely less than Team East. This conflictual atmosphere may also have contributed to a sense of caution or hesitation on the team—a desire to avoid anything that could create discord.

Whatever the reason for the disenchantment, as time went on, the team saw even their low level of formal division of labor slide. In interviews near the end of data collection, both the

team leader and team manager felt the team had lost ground and needed to be revitalized. This could well have been related to their relative lack of both learning behaviors and safety.

Learning Behaviors

All three learning behaviors were largely absent in Team Southwest. While Team North was usually able to productively engage conflict and Team East often bitterly battled outright, Team Southwest avoided addressing conflict whenever possible. In fact when asked about conflicts, members generally said they were relatively few and inconsequential, though they sometimes undercut these assertions with statements that seemed to suggest something larger was afoot. Nolan denied any significant conflict but then immediately noted, "One of the reasons [there is no conflict is because] there's not really long periods of time that we're all in the office together, getting on each other's nerves. ..Because I'm sure if we were all stuck in the office all day long, five days a week . . . there would be a lot more complaining about each other." In fact, while the team seemed to be even-tempered, it contained a number of simmering resentments. Team members generally liked the team leader and no open contention flared in team meetings, but individual interviews revealed numerous dyadic conflicts between team members.

Ethel and Francisca were often paired together because they were both Spanish-speaking, but Francisca felt that Ethel was largely a drag on her because she asked for help too often: "She'll ask you little things like how—you know, 'how do I send this e-mail?' And she's sent a thousand e-mails, and she knows how to do it, but sometimes I think she just needs to hear it from someone." But she was reluctant to confront Ethel directly, "I don't know if it's out of respect that I don't say anything [to her] because I feel like she is older than me and I need to respect her in that way." Francisca also felt Ethel tried to "guilt trip" her into writing a lengthy

court report that Ethel, as the primary worker on the case, was responsible for. Francisca initially agreed but then changed her mind. Rather than tell Ethel directly, she went to Joseph and told him she would not do it.

Francisca also mentioned her concern with another worker, Olive, who she felt also asked for help too much—in this case, Olive would ask Francisca to cover something like a supervised visit when she had double-booked herself: "She would ask me to do it, because she had it scheduled, and then she had to do something else, like another appointment. So, I kind of— without speaking to her about it, I viewed it as poor planning within her own schedule." Francisca never spoke to Olive about the issue and was relieved when Olive stopped making the requests.

Francisca also was angry that Olive never came to the all-team reflection meetings that happened roughly twice a year, always proffering some kind of an excuse. She felt Olive was not really committed to the team. "I personally felt a little bit like, well, the rest of us are making this effort to be here. Okay, it might not be the funnest day ever. And she took it as a sick day. When we came back to the office and the next teaming meeting we were discussing the reflection meeting and she's not able to contribute." When asked, "Do you feel like it takes away from the team a little bit?," she said yes.

For her part, Olive felt she often helped others but was not helped in return, though she didn't name any individuals. " When you ask for help, you don't get it, but then when they want help, it's like no one's going to help me, you know, I'm pulling my hair out, because no one's helping me." She also complained about a worker whose on-line documentation of her cases was often "six months behind."

What is striking about these recollections is that none of the workers involved ever dealt

with the conflict straightforwardly with their teammates. Either they said nothing or they went to Joseph, the team leader. One foundational learning behavior is the ability to address conflict straight on, using the differing perspectives to come to new insight. That process was short-circuited.

The problem was compounded since, though team members felt it was Joseph's job to address conflict, they didn't think he was good at doing it. "I don't think he addresses it [conflict] with the unit . . . It's brought to his attention and I don't know what he does with that information," said one member, echoing comments by others.

Team member Melanie told a story which illustrates Joseph's reluctance to directly deal with conflict while also telling us something about her own reluctance. Working with Nolan on a case, Melanie expected that he would make a particular home visit. Nolan did not make the visit and also said nothing to Melanie or to Joseph about it. Joseph found out when the client called to complain, but never told Melanie that the meeting hadn't happened. Instead, he put this information directly into the on-line documentation about the case and Melanie only learned of this by reading his notes. Once she learned about it, however, she never asked the worker about it nor did she know if Joseph ever did. She felt that Joseph's behavior was "conflict avoidant" because "I came to him with my concerns . . . and [he] never sat both of us down and dealt with it." Melanie did not comment on her own decision not to discuss the issue with Nolan or Joseph.

Joseph admitted that he needed to be better about confronting conflict with the team more directly. He said he dealt with interpersonal conflicts "covertly," meaning just with the workers involved, but

> **JOSEPH:** I would like to be able to build up the confidence level because I don't think
> we will be a true strong team until all of us can sit down at the table and freely be

constructively critical of each other.

INT: What do you think is interfering with the team to do exactly that—to deal with conflict more as a group than on the side?

JOSEPH: Maybe I am not bringing it up. Maybe I should bring it up as a team. Maybe that is the first step. I don't know. Maybe it is me. It probably is because I haven't brought it up as an issue.

INT: And it's clearly something that has been on your mind, right?

JOSEPH: Yes.

Joseph is aware of the critical role that a team leader plays in modeling and encouraging learning behaviors, but he seems unable to act on that awareness. As we demonstrate shortly, this appears to be something of a pattern.

Their low-level but pervasive conflict may have meant that discussing issues related to race and ethnicity were simply too threatening. This was a team that largely avoided addressing conflict—the team members felt that the team leader should address it individually with the workers involved but also recognized that he was unlikely to do so. If issues like whether workers were doing their fair share felt unresolvable, it wouldn't be surprising if anything related to race or culture felt too hot to handle.

Constructively addressing conflict is one crucial learning behavior that the team was lacking, but it was not the only one. The team experimented with some new approaches early on, but they mostly gained little traction and the motivation to experiment died down relatively quickly. In one example, Francisca described her idea to bring together some of the adolescents that team members were working with for a social event so they could meet others also involved

in the child welfare system and see "that it's okay [to be agency-involved] and that they see us as not just a social worker but someone they can trust." She said several other members liked the idea, "so we brainstormed a little bit but it never got off the ground. . . . It is a great idea and I feel bad that I had the idea and then kind of left it, but we are just so busy. We don't have time to do extra planning."

In fact, team members generally agreed that the team was hesitant to make changes. "I think there is a little bit of reluctance [to] do something out of the norm" said Francisca. Olive, in response to the question, "Has the team had some time to think about how to do things differently or better? Are there kind of conversations about that?," suggested that the discussions were happening, but changes were not. "Yes [there are conversations]. There are. I think—I don't really know how it's going to happen. It kind of seems like it's just out of our reach, you know?"

The team leader and the team manager agreed with these assessments.

INT: Would you say that the team is able to spend time thinking how to do things differently, thinking how to do things, trying new ways of approaching things, to think things out?

JOSEPH: We haven't spent a lot of time on that. And that's - maybe that's the frustration I'm feeling. I think we need to be within the team to think - spend more time in our teaming meetings discussing better ways to do things.

Here again Joseph acknowledged a problem that he has some power to solve, though he didn't explicitly explore his own contribution as he did earlier. In response to a similar question, Mary said, "It [the casework] has become more routine. A lot of the innovation that we started with has disappeared. Some of it I wish we could get back." She felt Joseph contributed to the

problem. "Some of the things that Joseph originally wanted to do, he didn't keep up with."

As with the lack of experimentation, the team also did not engage in self-reflection or review errors or group dynamics. One noteworthy illustration came up early in the group's work. Ethel used a team meeting to bring up her concern that she was a "secondary" on several other team members' cases, meaning she was formally assigned to help them out, but she had no secondaries on any of her cases. Issues regarding workload were something that all teams needed to talk through. But Mary said that she and Joseph would take care of this, "because you shouldn't have to worry about all of that stuff. That's management stuff that we need to work out." Mary likely was well-meaning: her rationale was that the team members already "had enough on [their] plate." But denying workers the opportunity to collectively reflect on how they work together—including fundamental issues like caseload balance—likely sent a powerful message. First, such a move implies that they were not really a team taking responsibility for running themselves; they were a unit like other units that were run top-down. The managers would make decisions on important issues and the workers would be asked to ratify them. Second, it also likely signaled that the climate was not safe for the team to take on what might be difficult issues, like workload equity.

Joseph acknowledged his own role regarding the paucity of reflection. When asked if the team ever sought feedback from people they worked with in order to improve, Joseph said they hadn't and took responsibility. "Sometimes I feel I could be doing more—so maybe I should ask [for feedback] for my team, which I haven't." Again, Joseph showed an individual ability for self-critique but did not seem able to act on it. It's possible that his open acknowledgement of his shortcomings in some way took him off the hook; team members may have appreciated his self-reflection and forgiven his ability to follow through.

Francisca told a striking story that illustrates the team's inability to straightforwardly reflect on and address team problems that everyone felt were present. The team had just had a session with the external teaming consultant. Several team members including Francisca were back at their desks which were all together in one room. Francisca said that when she entered the space, both Nolan and Olive were at their desks. She asked them how they "felt about the teaming" and they both shrugged their shoulders in the same way at the same time. They laughed about that and then "We just discussed that. We didn't feel it [the teaming] was being productive." A few minutes later, Joseph came into the room and Francisca said to him that she didn't feel teaming "was working." "And he's like, 'oh, you know, what can we do? What about this? Maybe we should do it this way?' . . . He knows, I think, how everyone feels." Francisca responded to his suggestions and she and Joseph had a conversation, but neither Olive nor Nolan participated, "even though they were there and they were hearing what we were saying . . . [they were] not wanting to be part of the conversation." It is remarkable not only that Nolan and Olive did not participate but that Joseph and Francisca did not allude to this at the time or invite them into the conversation. The team was apparently not ready or able to have these discussions, despite Francisca's initiative in bringing them up. Perhaps dyadic conversations had become normative in the team, in part because team members picked up Joseph's unwillingness to address things in the group as a whole.

In fact, there was a kind of strange lassitude about their interactions. At the meeting with the teaming consultant, the team had set a time for a follow-up meeting two days later, just among themselves. In the conversation in the office, Francisca told Joseph that she had to be in court that day and couldn't make the meeting and suggested they re-schedule. It was left unclear as to whether the meeting was re-scheduled or not. Francisca was not sure, "So I think they just

had it [the meeting]. But I don't even know." This had happened a couple of weeks earlier and no one had briefed Francisca on whether the meeting took place and, if so, what had happened. For her part, Francisca did not ask anyone for this information.

This incident and others we've detailed in this section suggest an overall apathy and disengagement—the opposite of a learning stance. Perhaps a lack of safety on the team was at least partially responsible.

Safety Climate

The data suggest, overall, a low level of psychological safety in the group; data regarding a lack of identity safety is scarcer but suggestive.

Both the team leader and the team manager referred to fear and anxiety on the team. Mary, referring to a meeting that morning in which one member had signaled a concern that they would not get help from their teammates even if they asked for it directly, said, "Well, in discussions like we had today: 'what if I ask for help, and I don't get it?' They've never asked for help and not gotten it. They're so afraid . . . " But the expressed fear gives an impression that team members do not feel they can depend on one another, a foundation of feeling safe in a group. And Joseph said multiple times over three interviews that he felt the team was not ready to handle threatening conversations. At one point, he mentioned the importance of being able to express personal fears or discomfort, "I think what we need to work on more is to be able to express how we feel with each other. . . . Are we at a point where if we do feel some anxiety, are we willing to share that anxiety - - with each other? And we can't grow unless we're willing to feel comfortable and safe to do that."

Melanie indicated that she generally felt safe on the team but wondered about others.

When asked, "Do you have a sense that people on the team can bring up tough issues within the team, with the supervisor or with the other team members?" She responded, "I don't know. I feel like, I'm the one who has been there the longest in that unit and everyone's fairly new and I feel like I dominate the conversation a lot and I bring up questions and I bring up things and I have to think in myself, 'okay, step back from that and does everyone else have an opinion . . . ?' I don't hear from them as much."

Safety can also be related to stress. Joseph believed that he had a responsibility to lower the stress his workers felt but seemed unsure about what to do. "Sometimes I see the stress that my workers are under and I think I should be able to offer more. That is the first step that I think I need to do." Again, Joseph showed an individual ability for self-critique but does not seem able to act on it. In fact, Ethel suggested that Joseph himself had "a fearful response" to change. "'Someone is going to come down on me if I do this, if I think outside the box,'" she imagined Joseph thinking. It may have been impossible for Joseph to create safety for his members if he himself was anxious.

Overall, then, it appears the team lacked the general sense of safety that could have enabled it to experiment more broadly or reflect more deeply on their own team dynamics. It is also possible that some team members may have felt less than fully identity safe. While Francisca, the only person of color on the team, felt enough comfort to let her team leader know that she felt teaming was not working, she may have been less comfortable discussing issues related to race or ethnicity. She was working in a primarily white context which can often trigger concern for people of color. Certainly, she did not engage in those discussions in team meetings, as we related earlier. She did not raise those issues herself nor did she join the conversation when others did. In the first team interview, she did not participate in the portion of the interview

related to issues of race and ethnicity in the work, though she was directly encouraged to give her perspective. She did participate during the second term interview, however. (She had left the team during the third interview.) We suggest she was ambivalent about how to address these issues; that ambivalence may have been connected to a lack of safety or a sense of fear or anxiety, but the data aren't clear.

Two team members describe dynamics that suggest Mary may have contributed to a lack of identity safety because of her strong Christian beliefs. Olive said that Mary had taken her aside to tell her not to wear clothes that would reveal a tattoo she had on her back. "She sat me down, and pretty much told me that it's provocative, that you know, I need to cover it, because the men in this office don't need to see it [because] even though they're married, they can't control themselves . . . So, I was upset about that. You know? Because she could have just said 'could you cover it?' And not make me feel like I was being a sexually provocative person . . ." Here Olive is describing a way in which Mary may have brought unwelcome attention to Olive's identity as a young woman. Emily, another member, was concerned that Mary's opposition to homosexuality (which Emily gleaned from a critical comment Mary gave her when she went to a "two mommies" conference) could result in problems for families though she acknowledged that she hadn't seen anything yet that would indicate that.

However, Mary herself, though she was in a leadership position in the office, may also have felt less safe on this terrain. Several members of the team described her as "over-cautious" and "an absolutist" when it came to following agency rules and regulations. As we saw in the discussion of Team East, its team leader Pilar was subject to the same charge of being scrupulous and inflexible. Like Pilar, Mary may have been concerned about heightened scrutiny, especially given her presidency of AWARE, and therefore did not feel she could bend the rules. Moreover,

she believed she had been the subject of discrimination throughout her career at the agency, though she had soldiered on. Given her role with AWARE, she heard stories from others about the discrimination they felt they faced. She suggested, though did not say so in so many words, that there was not identity safety for people of color in the organization, which of course included herself.

Ethel supported this supposition when she suggested that Mary was "fearful." "We all have our personalities, and you know, Mary basically is a—you know, do *not* do this; do *not* do this; do *not* do this. It's that negative absolute—you know? It's always, I think a fearful response." Like Joseph, if Mary were concerned with her own lack of safety, it would make it all the more difficult to create a safe space for team members.

The office context may have contributed to a sense of uneasiness, though the situation was complex. As we alluded to earlier, a sense of mistrust lingered in the office since an investigation had found that workers were falsifying records to indicate they had done work that they hadn't actually done, spurring the firing of the director. Several managers were "disgraced" according to Mary. As with Team East, two offices had been merged in the wake of the scandal. The new director and the management team were working with a consultant to build relationships. While this was starting to bear fruit, the consultant felt the office still had a long road ahead of it. (This history could be another reason why Mary was so "by-the-book;" the office as a whole was likely being watched closely and felt it had to be scrupulous.)

Moreover, several team members voiced some concern about intergroup relations in Office Southwest. It is true that Donna, the white office director, stood out among the office directors for her strong remarks on the importance of race and culture. Most of her experience at the agency had been in an urban community of color, and it was a new experience for her to

work in this largely rural context. "It has been my commitment to come to the office and really help with diversity and hire more diverse staff," she said. She felt this was important not just for families but the workers themselves: "You grow as an individual, I mean it widens your scope . . . it makes you, I think, a much fuller and more well-rounded person." She also said that she cracked down on any hint of discrimination. "I don't allow any slurs in this office. If I hear about them and it's only happened once or twice, believe me, I confront it immediately."

However, testimony from other respondents suggests a more antagonistic picture. We know that Mary was concerned about discrimination, though she did not name this particular office as a problem. Further, the two bi-lingual workers indicated some concerns about intergroup relations in the office. Ethel felt that that there were issues related to bilingual workers, of whom she was one. As a Spanish-speaker receiving a $1000 bonus, she was expected to take on additional work as a translator for workers outside the team. She accepted this as part of her job, but felt she was asked to do this too often. She also wondered whether other workers resented the fact that bi-lingual workers received the bonus. Further, she felt it was "taboo" to discuss these issues.

Francisca also felt there might be resentment about the bonus though she also felt the pay differential was quite small given the extra work she felt was required of her. She also recounted a frustrating process of learning how her additional duties were supposed to work and when she would be paid for them. "I had to go to [the office director]; I had to go to the Boston office; I had to go through all these different people to try to get my pay, and they didn't want to give it to me." She was hired with the understanding that she would receive the extra $1000 bonus. However, she found out once on the job that she couldn't receive this payment during her probationary period, which was six months, and not until half her caseload was Spanish-

speaking. In the meantime, she was getting lots of requests for help. "And people are coming to you in the office, and like, 'oh, can you call this person for me? They only speak Spanish. Can you come with me on a visit, and translate? Can you read this paper to me?' You know, so definitely, they were drawing on my skill." The office director told her that until she received the bonus, she did not have to help other workers. But the director did not understand the interpersonal consequences of refusing to help: "of course, when you're introduced, 'oh, this is our new bilingual worker.' You know? 'But don't forget you can't use my skills until I'm getting paid,' . . . And I thought how does she expect me when a co-worker—and a new co-worker at that—comes to me and says, 'Oh, can you read this for me?' 'No. Sorry. I can't.'" Overall, she said she found the experience quite "unpleasant" and difficult to maneuver.[2]

Francisca also recalled an incident where two Spanish-speaking workers were going to a training on cultural issues and therefore had to decline to help another worker who was angry because she needed a translator. "If it had been [a training on] how to write court memos, they [the other worker] would have been, 'oh, okay, fine.' But 'you're both leaving to go to a cultural training, and you're not here to interpret for us?'" was not fine, according to the story she heard. Therefore, some bi-lingual workers seemed to feel there was some ambivalence towards those who brought cultural expertise and language proficiency, including both appreciation and resentment.

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[2] Providing a bonus for bi-lingual workers may seem like a constructive solution since it provides tangible proof that the agency values this skill. However, this arrangement can send a mixed message, with the potential to create negative interpersonal dynamics. It singles out bi-lingual workers, which can give the impression that they are both part of the larger office and separate from it. Mono-lingual workers may feel resentful; bilingual workers may feel like they are simply service providers to be farmed out when needed, rather than full-fledged members of the team. Since people of color are often stereotypically viewed as servants, this arrangement can reinforce that expectation or assumption. A practice that might create less division for the workers would be to hire people who can serve in the role of translator for the case workers.

All this suggests that Office Southwest was experiencing a significant level of conflict, some of it related to inter-group conflict, which may well have dampened psychological safety and identity safety for Team Southwest's members, especially given the other team dynamics in place. This lack of safety likely contributed to the relative absence of learning behaviors on the team. It also could have made the more difficult terrain of race and culture virtually impossible to broach—resulting in the team's color evasive practice.

TEAM SUMMARY

Team Southwest's story has some strong similarities with Team East even though the demographic make-up of the teams and of their clients were quite different. Like Team East, they rarely discussed race or culture. Also like Team East, most members seemed open and interested in racial and cultural issues, though they did not have the same level of knowledge and skill. Finally, as we discussed here, both teams were relatively unsafe environments in which little learning occurred. Therefore, like Team East, it appears that the intergroup incubator did not allow the incipient interest and curiosity of the team members, even with some leadership by team members, to grow into a team color cognizant approach.

The major difference between the two teams is that Team East's dysfunctional conflict was more extreme and out in the open, while Team Southwest's lower level of tension was mostly hidden under a mild front. In fact, Mary, the team's manager, denied there was any serious conflict on the team at all, suggesting team members kept it well covered. Their dynamics reveal that even lower levels of conflict—if left largely unaddressed—can inhibit a learning orientation, including one that is interested in learning about race and culture. Ultimately, the interaction between the incubator and the team members' individual inclinations

led to a particular set of roles and relationships that resulted in color evasive team practice. Three individuals played critical roles: Joseph, the white team leader, Mary the African American team manager and Ethel, the white, bi-lingual team member. The relationships on the team were marked by isolation and withdrawal.

Team Southwest didn't just have simmering conflict, it exhibited no ability to address it. Joseph was key here. We know from team members that he largely avoided conflict and, when he did address it, did so in private which meant that the workers had no model for how to address conflict as a group. He himself acknowledged this as a shortcoming but he showed no real drive to act on his self-awareness. Given his general desire to sidestep conflict, he may well have acted, probably unintentionally, as an anxious suppressor of conversations related to race and culture. Why raise the possibility of further conflict, given his and the team's inability to deal with that which was already plaguing the group?

Mary, the team's manager, would seem to have been an obvious leader for taking on race and culture in their meetings, given she was the president of AWARE. But her attention was focused on racial or cultural discrimination in the organization. She appeared to have little interest in considering the diagnostic potential of race and ethnicity. It is also possible that she was reluctant to take on these issues in casework given that she was already very visible in the organization on issues related to race and culture. She may have felt she needed to carefully manage how others saw her and avoid being too fully identified with race. Either way, she was basically a non-leader in the team, when it came to raising or discussing race or ethnicity in the their caseload.
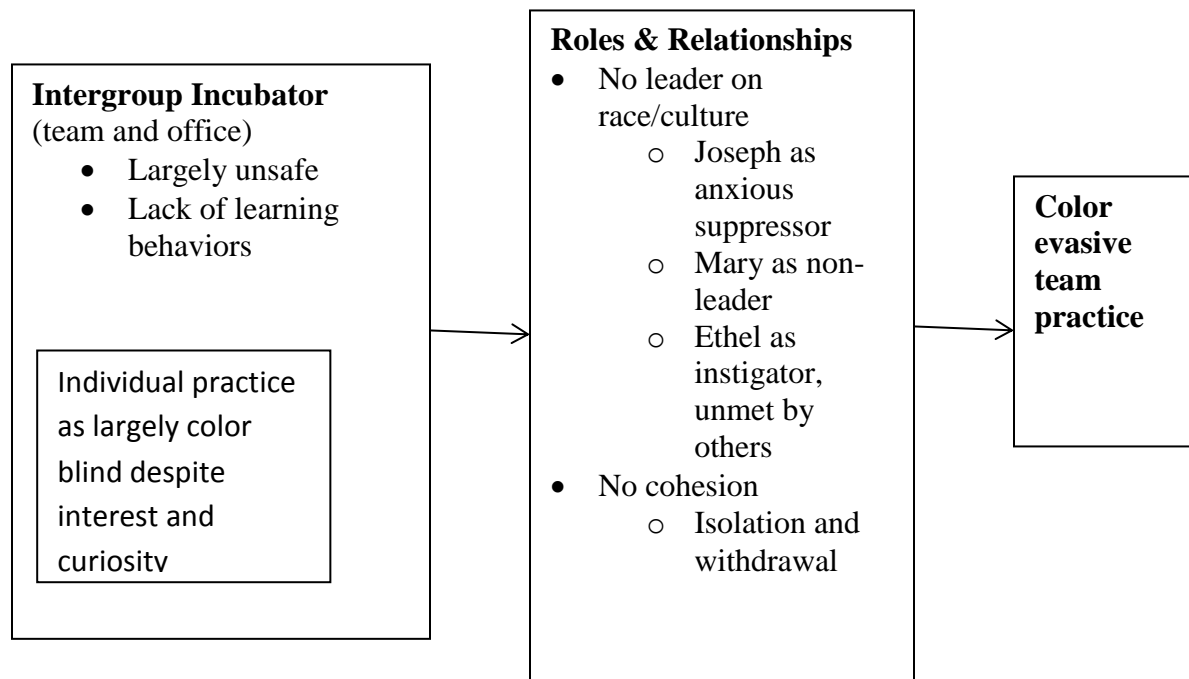
In fact, the person who took the most leadership in the team was Ethel, the white, Spanish-speaking member. She brought up these issues much more than anyone else, though still

infrequently. Ethel seemed to be trying to play the role of instigator, but her culture-related contributions to team conversations were rarely met by others' and never were deeply engaged. It's not surprising that she did not raise these issues more often.

Ethel, Joseph, and Mary may all have been affected by the office context which was still dealing with the aftermath of a scandal and the merger of two offices. Both Ethel and Francisca, the team's lone Latina, also spoke to intergroup tensions in the office. They may have all felt unsafe and therefore unwilling to take the risk of raising race and culture.

Finally, like Team East, the team lacked cohesion, though for different reasons: its multiple dyadic conflicts impeded any sense of group or even sub-group connection. It lacked any close relationships among team members, leading to an overall sense of isolation and withdrawal. Therefore, it becomes easier to understand why a team supervised by the head of AWARE, with one worker who was vocal on cultural issues, and others who brought interest and curiosity, avoided any deep incursions into this territory. Given the team's lack of connections and its flight from any kind of forthright debate, it is not surprising that the team evaded conversations related to race and ethnicity. (See Figure 7.3 for a graphic summary of this argument.)

Figure C.1: A Model of Team Southwest[3]

Intergroup Incubator (team and office)	Roles & Relationships	Color evasive team practice

• Largely unsafe
• Lack of learning behaviors
 	
Individual practice as largely color blind despite interest and curiosity
	• No leader on race/culture
	  o Joseph as anxious suppressor
	  o Mary as non-leader
	  o Ethel as instigator, unmet by others
	• No cohesion
	  o Isolation and withdrawal	

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[3] *Source:* Authors' Compilation.