

**ANSWERING THE CALL FOR RACIALIZED
REFLECTIVE IECMH SPACES:
EVALUATION FINDINGS FROM RACIAL
AFFINITY GROUP PARTICIPANTS AND
FACILITATORS IN TRAINING**

**REPORT PREPARED BY
INDIGO CULTURAL CENTER**

FEBRUARY 2026



ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Thank you to all the racial affinity group participants and facilitators for graciously sharing their experiences with us.

Thank you to our amazing Indigo Cultural Center team for their assistance and amazing attention to detail in gathering, entering, managing and analyzing various aspects of the data for this evaluation, and for all the additional administrative and emotional support required to move this work to completion.

Thank you to the Perigee Fund for their continued support of our equity- and justice-centered Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health (IECMH) workforce development work.

IN PARTNERSHIP WITH

**Study funded by and
report prepared for**



Suggested Citation:

Matriano, R., Shivers, E. M., Janssen, J. , Pérez Byars, N., Canare, K. (2026). *Answering the call for racialized reflective IECMH spaces: Evaluation findings from racial affinity group participants and facilitators in training*. Report generated by Indigo Cultural Center for the Perigee Fund.

**For more information about this report, please email:
Eshivers@IndigoCulturalCenter.org**

TABLE OF CONTENTS

| | |
|---|------------|
| Acknowledgements..... | i |
| Executive Summary..... | iii |
| Introduction..... | 1 |
| Literature Review..... | 2 |
| The Pilot Project..... | 5 |
| The Present Study..... | 8 |
| Evaluation Methodology..... | 9 |
| Findings..... | 10 |
| Discussion..... | 29 |
| Implications for Practice..... | 32 |
| Implications for Organizational Policy..... | 33 |
| Implications for Research..... | 34 |
| References..... | 35 |

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Answering The Call for Racialized Reflective IECMH Spaces: Evaluation Findings From Racial Affinity Group Participants and Facilitators in Training

In response to the dual pandemics in 2020 of COVID-19 and racialized police brutality and violence, Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health (IECMH) systems experienced an increased demand for reflective spaces that explicitly addressed race, identity, and racialized stress.

Indigo Cultural Center launched the Small Group Equity Facilitator Coaching Pilot to address the painfully clear gap in the field that there were not enough individuals who were trained in the triumvirate skills of 1) reflective facilitation; 2) a deep understanding of key tenets and ways of being in IECMH; and 3) racial healing.

The pilot had dual purpose:

- To provide racial affinity reflective spaces for IECMH professionals across the country who were committed to deepening their racial healing journeys.
- To build reflective facilitator capacity through intensive coaching and reflective support.

This paper explores the experiences and perspectives of both IECMH professionals participating in the racial affinity groups and the racial affinity group facilitators in the training. In addition, we identify key lessons that can inform future workforce development efforts.

Pilot Design

The pilot included three reflective racial affinity group series: 1) Black, 2) White, and 3) People of Color (POC; a diverse group of people of color). Each was facilitated by a racially-matched IECMH professional. A total of 39 infant and early childhood professionals were selected from 121 applicants. The racial affinity groups were held over six months, with each session lasting between 60-90 min.

Simultaneously, seven facilitators participated in an 11-month coaching cohort led by a leader at Indigo Cultural Center. Coaching focused on enhancing facilitation skills using Indigo Cultural Center's Anti-Racism Transformational Healing Framework. In addition, a facilitation template was shared that guided facilitators to host reflective conversations explicitly centered on race and identity with an embodied, Healing Justice approach (Pyles, 2018) and that guided facilitators toward presence and responsiveness over a rigid curriculum.

Evaluation Methodology

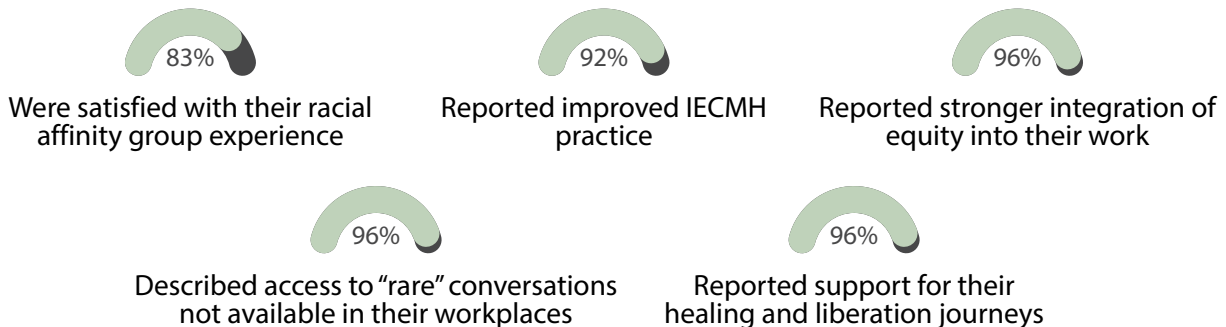
This study employed a mixed-method design. Data was collected after the racial affinity group series and the facilitator training concluded. Data was collected using both surveys and virtual focus groups with racial affinity group participants and facilitators completing data collection separately. Both descriptive analyses and thematic analyses were conducted.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

KEY FINDINGS

Participant Experiences Across ALL Racial Affinity Groups

Across all racial affinity groups, participants (n= 28) reported high satisfaction and meaningful impacts on both personal and professional practice:



Participants consistently described racial affinity groups as psychologically safe, relationally rich spaces where vulnerability, reflection, and authenticity were possible. Facilitators' modeling of humility, embodiment, and presence was repeatedly named as essential to establishing trust and engagement.

Participant Experiences Unique to Each Racial Affinity Group

Participants in the **Black racial affinity group** emphasized experiences of joy, affirmation, and relief from the emotional labor of navigating predominantly White professional spaces. They shared that their racial affinity group fostered solidarity, sustainability, and empowerment. Participants reported that their experiences in the racial affinity group led to a greater capacity to advocate for themselves, set boundaries, and release responsibility for educating others.

Participants in the **White racial affinity group** appreciated the opportunities to engage deeply with accountability, discomfort, and reflection on whiteness. Participants also valued the opportunity to process guilt, shame, and fear without causing harm to colleagues of color. They also shared that the groups helped them to and practice reflective skills that translated directly into supervision, leadership, and personal relationships.

Participants from the **People of Color (POC) racial affinity group** highlighted somatic awareness, slowing down, and being held without expectation to perform or educate. However, both facilitators as well as participants also noted challenges related to varied racial identity development and readiness, which underscores the complexity of grouping diverse racialized experiences under a single "POC" category.

Facilitator Experiences and Coaching Impact

Facilitators (n = 6) described the work as deeply meaningful and emotionally intensive. Across all groups, facilitators emphasized that coaching support was essential—not optional—for sustaining the labor of holding racial affinity spaces. The key elements of effective facilitator support included:

- Ongoing opportunities for vulnerability and self-reflection with their Indigo coach as well as with their facilitator cohort
- Having dedicated space and time to debrief the emotional and relational labor involved with facilitating a racial affinity group
- Observing reflective racial equity facilitation modeled in real time by the Indigo coach
- The model of co-facilitation of each racial affinity group served as a protective and grounding structure.

Facilitators reported that coaching provided by Indigo Cultural Center strengthened their confidence as facilitators, deepened their racial healing journeys, and enhanced their capacity to engage in equity-centered work across professional contexts. Findings from this pilot study illuminated the awareness that facilitator development must be relational, embodied, and ongoing, rather than limited to discrete training sessions.

IMPLICATIONS

| | |
|--|--|
| <p>Implications for practice</p> | <p>When implementing racial affinity groups in IECMH contexts:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • For facilitator coaching: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ Ensure that facilitators receive adequate preparation and training before leading racial affinity groups ◦ Consider peer learning and co-facilitation models ◦ Provide ongoing mentoring and consultation, including individualized support to promote facilitator sustainability. • For racial affinity group implementation: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ Assess and intentionally respond to participants’ developmental readiness along a continuum of racial awareness, healing, and identity development ◦ Assess how, whether, and to what extent the racial affinity groups will explore intersectional identities ◦ Structure racial affinity groups to meet over longer, sustained periods of time to support trust-building, depth of reflection, and relational safety. |
| <p>Implications for organizational policy</p> | <p>Organizations can consider:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establishing policies/frameworks for supporting intentional and ethical facilitation of racial affinity groups for IECMH professionals • Having a clear purpose for implementing racial affinity groups such as reduction of feelings of isolation, promotion of racial healing, and fortification of equity-oriented practice • Establishing safeguards to ensure participation or non-participation does not lead to stigma, pressure, or professional disadvantages • Considering having dedicated funding streams to support the development of racial affinity group opportunities, including funding for facilitator coaching and training <p>More broadly and most importantly, invest in developing and supporting a cadre of IECMH professionals with expertise and skills in racial affinity group facilitation.</p> |
| <p>Implications for research</p> | <p>Future studies can consider:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Expanding the range of racial and intersectional identities represented in racial affinity group studies such as additional racial identities, multiraciality, gender, immigration status, language, and professional role. • Exploring a mixed-methods approach to assess targeted outcomes related to professional well-being, reflective capacities, equity-orientation, and sustainability in the workforce. • Implementing a longitudinal design to assess the impact of engagement in racial affinity groups over time. |

References

1. Pyles, L. (2018). *Healing justice: Holistic self-care for changemakers*. Oxford University Press.
2. Shivers, E. M. & Arbel, Y. (2019). *An Exploration of Racial Equity through the Reflective Process: Key Equity Findings from the 3rd Annual Reflective Supervision / Consultation Symposium*. Report requested by The Alliance for the Advancement of Infant Mental Health. With funding from the Perigee Fund.

Introduction

Answering The Call for Racialized Reflective IECMH Spaces: Evaluation Findings From Racial Affinity Group Participants and Facilitators in Training

In April 2023, our organization, **Indigo Cultural Center**, launched a pilot project to increase the number of reflective facilitators in the Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health (IECMH) field who are skilled at facilitating racial affinity groups. This pilot was launched in response to the dual pandemics in 2020: both COVID-19 and the racialized police violence towards Black citizens in the United States and beyond. As many individuals and organizations in the IECMH field reckoned with explicitly addressing race in our work and healing from the virus of racism, our organization was called upon repeatedly to facilitate reflective groups with many community-based mental health organizations throughout the country. These requests were beyond the capacity of our organization and we desperately called upon our colleagues and other facilitators to respond to the requests that we were unable to fill. It became painfully clear that there just were not enough professionals who were trained in the triumvirate skills of 1) reflective facilitation; 2) a deep understanding of key tenets and ways of being in IECMH; and 3) racial healing.

In 2021, our executive director and founder, Dr. Eva Marie Shivers, began mentoring individuals to meet this demand and amped up efforts to partner with IECMH organizations and statewide IECMH initiatives to build their capacity to host racial affinity groups as well as reflective spaces with a strong focus on anti-racism and Healing Justice¹. One of the driving forces behind all of Indigo's work in the IECMH ecosystem is to contribute to the racial justice infrastructure and systemic transformation in the field². As a result, it was not long before we decided to pilot a coaching program for IECMH practitioners who wanted to grow and deepen their reflective racial facilitation practice.

Our vision was to simultaneously coach small group reflective facilitators of racial affinity groups and offer racial affinity groups to IECMH practitioners around the country who were committed to deepening their racial healing journeys.

This report summarizes the activities of the Facilitator Coaching and the Racial Affinity Groups and presents data that explores feedback from participants and facilitators alike and recommendations for future efforts.

1. "Healing justice is both a paradigm and a set of practices that invites practitioners to heal themselves from the same kinds of intergenerational oppressions and traumas that are hurting the world. Healing justice is a practice done with and on behalf of the whole self, which includes the body, mind, heart, spirit, community, and natural world. Healing justice is about being in relationship – with oneself, others, and the environment. Learning to stand with one's own truths requires both vulnerability and courage and can pave the way for empowered action and resistance. [Embodied] mindfulness is an act of resistance to disconnection, marginalization, and internalized oppression" ~ Excerpt from L. Pyles (2019): [Healing Justice: Holistic Self-Care for Change Makers](#)

2. To read more about our role in the field of IECMH, visit our website: <https://www.indigoculturalcenter.org>

Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health (IECMH) professionals operate at the intersection of child development, family systems, and broader sociopolitical contexts. Because of this complex positioning, IECMH practitioners must be able to navigate stressful situations alongside families, early educators, caregivers, and other early childhood professionals (e.g., pediatricians; early intervention specialists; home visitors; etc.) and the communities they serve, while still attending to their own well-being. Thus, reflective practice has become an essential component of high-quality IECMH practice, described as a developmental, relational, and dynamic process (Alliance, 2018; Fraiberg et al., 1975; Shahmoon-Shanok, 2009; Shea et al., 2020; Weatherston & Barron, 2009; Weatherston et al., 2009). Reflective practice is multifaceted, involving the examination of experiences within all levels of relationships within the infant and early childhood ecosystem (e.g., caregiver-child; teacher-family; administrator-teacher; etc.) and an understanding of the IECMH practitioner's own internal reactions to what they observe (Alliance, 2018; Fraiberg et al., 1975; Shahmoon-Shanok, 2009; Shea et al., 2020; Weatherston & Barron, 2009; Weatherston et al., 2009). Importantly, reflective practice helps practitioners critically reflect on their own culture, values, and beliefs and the impact of systemic oppression on the lives of children and families they serve (Irving Harris Foundation, 2018). Through fostered self-awareness and critical analysis of systems impacting the families they serve, IECMH professionals are better able to engage in ethical, culturally responsive, and relationally attuned practice with those they serve (Huffhines et al., 2023).

The Importance of Reflective Practice Within IECMH Contexts

Reflective practice involves various activities to support IECMH and early childhood professionals in sustaining and deepening their work. For example, 'reflective supervision/consultation' (often referred to as RSC) is a foundational component of IECMH training and ongoing workforce support (Weatherston, Kaplan-Estrin, & Goldberg, 2009; Simpson, Robinson, & Brown, 2018). Reflective supervision/consultation describes a relationship-based professional development practice that supports practitioners in processing their thoughts, feelings, and relational experiences that are connected to their work (Alliance, 2024). RSC prioritizes attunement, curiosity, slowing down, and mutual respect, recognizing that the practitioner's internal experiences directly shape their capacity to support children and caregivers. By offering a structured and supportive environment for sustained learning, growth, and emotional support, reflective supervision seeks to strengthen individual practice and maintain systems of care (Alliance, 2024).

Most forms of reflective practice center the emotional context of IECMH practitioners' work with the families they serve and the systems they interact with which can occur in one-on-one and/or group settings (Huffhines et al., 2024). Reflective practices such as RSC are essential in supporting IECMH professionals who are often exposed to secondary traumatic stress, ethical dilemmas, and stressors of operating within under-resourced fields (Gilkerson, 2004). Through reflective practice, professionals have access to an intentional space to process their experiences and reduce feelings of isolation, which is critical for mitigating burnout (ZERO TO THREE, 2024).



Revitalizing the Provision of Reflective Spaces: Centering Race and Justice

While reflective practices such as RSC have been widely recognized as an invaluable practice for supporting IECMH professionals, professionals in the field have sought reflective spaces and reflective offerings where more safety and authenticity are accessible, particularly for IECMH professionals of color (Hardy & Bobes, 2017; Noroña, 2020; Shivers et al., 2022; Stroud, Wu, & Driver, 2022). IECMH professionals who identify as Black, Indigenous, or other people of color (BIPOC) often experience compounded stress due to racialized trauma, marginalization, and the emotional labor of navigating a predominantly White professional field, while simultaneously needing to support those who are also impacted by the very same systems of oppression and structural racism (Hardy & Bobes, 2016; Heffron, Grunstein, & Tilmon, 2007; Noroña, Heffron, Grunstein, & Nalo, 2012; Shivers et al., 2022; Stroud, 2010; Stroud, 2014; Stroud, Wu, & Driver, 2022). For BIPOC professionals, their work and especially the emotional labor extends beyond being able to empathize with their clients. Their work often involves supporting families navigating racialized and systemic stressors that mirror the experiences professionals have in their own lives. The 'parallel process' of holding space for others while managing their own exposure to similar harms can intensify the emotional labor and vulnerability to burnout, trauma, and isolation that IECMH professionals often experience. In the context of reflective supervision, having a supervisor-supervisee relationship where a supervisor is a different race may make it difficult for supervisees to speak openly about their racialized experiences due to fear and concerns of being misunderstood, being minimized, or retaliated against (Simpson, Robinson, & Brown, 2018; Shivers et al., 2022).

Recently, small-group reflective spaces, such as racial affinity groups, have emerged as extensions of reflective practice within the IECMH field (Rice, 2025). Racial affinity groups are reflective spaces where participants share racialized identities and engage in collective reflection through the lens of their shared or similar racialized experiences (Lewis et al., 2023; Rice, 2025). Additionally, racial affinity groups serve as critical and reflective spaces to promote collective learning, build community, engage in critical conversations, and motivate participants to engage in action towards positive change (Lewis et al., 2023; Rice, 2025). Overall, racial affinity groups seek to establish spaces of psychological safety and authenticity, when vulnerable conversations about one's racialized experiences and perspectives can occur without fear of judgment or retaliation (Edmonson, 1999). For example, in Rice's most recent study on racial affinity spaces for Black IECMH professionals, she notes that participation promoted feelings of belonging, community, and visibility rooted in the ability to reclaim cultural connections and engage authentically amongst Black peers (Rice, 2025). In this vein, racial affinity groups have the potential to expand and deepen how the field offers reflective spaces and expand reflective practice within IECMH settings by providing identity-specific spaces for professionals to process experiences that can be difficult to explicitly share or navigate in racially mixed and/or hierarchical supervisory relationships.

Outcomes Related to Racial Affinity Group Participation

Empirical research on the impact of engaging in racial affinity groups has grown in recent years, but still remains relatively limited. Within higher education and professional contexts, engagement in affinity spaces has been associated with increased feelings of connection and belonging, resilience and empowerment, improved self-esteem, and greater capacity for critical reflection (Malone et al., 2023; Moseley, 2018; Muraki et al., 2024).

Literature Review

Recent studies examining racial affinity group participation have also highlighted their potential in supporting equity-oriented practices that parallel the goals of reflective supervision and present benefits for White and BIPOC participants. For example, Dosal-Terminal and colleagues (2024) explored the impact of racial affinity groups on White counselors. While engaging in racial affinity groups led to some discomfort among a few participants, it ultimately fostered growth, enabling participants to reflect on their White racial identity, accountability as allies, and the role of whiteness in their professional practice. On the other hand, Strong and colleagues (2023) found that racial affinity groups among educators of color fostered trust, collective meaning-making, and increased ability to engage in equity-oriented work. These findings offer insight into how racial affinity groups extend reflective practice and mirror the essential conditions of psychological safety and reflection, which are necessary for IECMH professionals to sustain equitable practice, avoid burnout, increase self-efficacy, and improve well-being.



Indigo Cultural Center team members at the Rooted Collective healing justice retreat in Tucson, AZ.

The Pilot Project

PHASE 1: Facilitator Recruitment

Facilitators were leaders from various parts of the country and held various roles within the Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health (IECMH) field. All had collaborated with Indigo Cultural Center previously to varying extents. Facilitators were specifically invited for this pilot due to their strong facilitation skills, deep experience with and knowledge of IECMH practice and policy, and their embodied alignment with Indigo's approach to racial equity.

There were a total of seven (7) facilitators. They all identified as women and they racially identified with the groups they led. The Black racial affinity group was led by two Black facilitators. The White racial affinity group was led by three White facilitators. Finally, the POC affinity group was led by one South Asian facilitator and one Black Latine (bi-racial) facilitator.

PHASE 2: Facilitator Coaching

The racial affinity group facilitators received a modest honorarium for their participation. As part of this pilot, they also received:



Monthly group support from Indigo leadership (Indigo Equity Coach) and their peers for 11 months. Monthly support for facilitators included coaching on the following 4 domains:

1. Frameworks, Rationale, Theory of Change
2. Stance, Disposition, How we 'BE'
3. Preparation, Support, Growth, Learning as an Individual
4. Resources to share during RAGs and how to use resources as somatic experiences.



Individual coaching and consultation with Indigo Equity Coach upon request.



A curriculum guide that contained information about Indigo's approach to facilitating racial affinity groups; a template facilitators could adapt for each of their monthly sessions with RAG participants; and a folder with resources they could use as provocations for discussions with their respective groups.



A meeting with the Indigo Equity Coach with each facilitator team at least once during the experience to focus on the unique needs within their group.



A feedback session with the Indigo Equity Coach after she reviewed a videotaped session of facilitators with their groups.

The Pilot Project

Indigo's facilitator coaching pilot focused on enhancing facilitation skills using Indigo Cultural Center's Anti-Racism Transformational Healing Framework (Shivers & Arbel, 2019). The facilitator coaching explicitly centered race and identity with an embodied, Healing Justice approach (Pyles, 2020). The coaching guided facilitators to prioritize being responsive to what emerged over the creation of a 'set curriculum'. While preparation and intentionality were still required, facilitators were reminded to elevate presence to the group processes. On account of this approach, each racial affinity group took on their own unique nuances, responsive to facilitator style and strength and what emerged from group participants.

It is also important to note that the 11 coaching sessions simultaneously took place while the three (3) racial affinity groups were also being offered to the participants.

PHASE 3: Affinity Group Recruitment and Selection

Application. An application survey was created to select from interested participants from across the country. The application survey was distributed through the Indigo Cultural Center mailing list, social media, and partner outreach and multiple outreach emails were sent over the course of a one-month application period.

Participant survey responses were utilized to ensure we invited a sample of participants to the reflective racial affinity groups that were a geographically diverse sample of participants from across the United States, and assigned to an affinity group which matched with their racial identity. The application survey received 121 responses.

Selection Process. Once applications closed, the Indigo Cultural Center project team (Indigo team) conducted three rounds of review to select the final participants:



By the end of the selection process, three (3) racial affinity groups were created with 15 participants in each group. A total of 45 participants were invited and 39 accepted the invitation.

The Pilot Project

PHASE 4: Racial Affinity Group Details

Participants. Three reflective racial affinity group series were offered: a series for Black participants, a series for White participants and a series for participants of color (POC, a diverse group of people of color). The groups were created for infant and early childhood professionals who wanted to further integrate equity into their roles, plus engage in their own journeys of healing and liberation alongside other similarly-identified colleagues. Professionals could be from early childhood mental health, home visiting, early education, early intervention, IECMH consultation, research and policy, or other systems within infant and early childhood work. A total of 45 participants were invited and **39 accepted the invitation.**

Logistics and Format. Each series of racial affinity groups were six weeks long and were 60-90 minutes each session. Sessions were offered via Zoom. Facilitators were continuously encouraged to prioritize being responsive to what emerged from group participants, over the maintenance of a 'set curriculum' and strict adherence to the elements within Indigo's facilitation template. Facilitators elevated presence to the group processes, and as a result each racial affinity group took on their own unique nuances, which were responsive to facilitator style and strength and responsive to what emerged from group participants.

The overarching objective for each session was to co-create (alongside participants) a container for discussions about how to integrate equity considerations into IECMH work in the service of growth as individuals and collectively.

Facilitators' responsive stance was balanced with the provision of key elements (i.e., Indigo's facilitation template) for each session⁴.

4. Facilitators were never expected to cover each of the key elements in every session. However, the first 4 elements were highly encouraged as a way to co-create a solid, safe and loving container as the group started to build trust with one another.

Indigo's Facilitation Template

I. Welcome

II. How are you showing up today?

III. Grounding in your body / breath / movement / returning to center

IV. Group agreements reflections – where am I growing?

V. Structuring and advocating for opportunities to advance equity (organizational, regional, and state opportunities to leverage our work)

VI. What's bubbling up for you this month? Sharing stories of racialized experiences in our work and beyond

VII. Offering provocations to use with your groups. Typically as part of an embodied experience

VIII. Ideology transformation (e.g., What does decolonization mean for our work? Exploring an aspect of IMH history through a racialized lens; How do we promote Healing Justice in our everyday work? etc.)

IX. Moving into practice and connecting the dots (e.g., exploring the Consultative Stance; sharing and discussing vignettes/ case studies; etc.)

The Present Study

While research on racial affinity groups demonstrates promise in supporting professionals in mitigating isolation and facilitating equitable professional practice, there is limited research examining the impact of racial affinity reflective spaces among IECMH professionals (Rice, 2025). Additionally, no studies have explored the importance of skillful facilitation of racial affinity groups or the type of preparation that is effective for racial affinity group facilitators. Because of this, we decided to evaluate the pilot of the racial affinity groups and facilitation experience.

Our goals were to:

1. To explore the impact and perspectives of IECMH professionals in a series-based virtual racial affinity group experience
2. To explore the experiences and perspectives of racial affinity group facilitators, and
3. To contribute to the literature base demonstrating the significance of racial affinity groups for IECMH professionals as a method of reflective practice.

Specifically, **this study was guided by the following RESEARCH QUESTIONS:**

| | |
|--|---|
| <p>Racial affinity group PARTICIPANTS</p> | <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. How do IECMH professionals (i.e., participants) describe their experiences participating in Black, White, and POC racial affinity groups?<ol style="list-style-type: none">a. What are important structures, features, and dynamics within the groups, and how did this impact their experiences and perceptions?2. What recommendations do IECMH participants offer for the design, facilitation, and implementation of future racial affinity groups for IECMH professionals? |
| <p>Racial affinity group FACILITATORS</p> | <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. How do racial affinity group facilitators (who were also IECMH professionals) describe their experiences leading Black, White, and POC racial affinity groups for IECMH professionals?<ol style="list-style-type: none">a. What are important structures, features, and dynamics within the group, and how did this impact their facilitation and experiences?b. How do racial affinity group facilitators describe the role of Indigo Cultural Center’s coaching support in shaping their facilitation experiences?2. What recommendations do racial affinity group facilitators offer for strengthening future racial affinity group implementation for IECMH professionals? |

Evaluation Methodology

Procedures and Participants

Indigo Cultural Center played dual roles on this pilot. We served as the implementers of this pilot project and also served as the evaluators. We were careful to maintain confidentiality by de-identifying all data. In addition, the Indigo evaluation team was not part of the implementation of the pilot and vice versa. This study employed a mixed-method design to understand the experiences of participants and facilitators in the racial affinity groups. Data were collected in two phases.

The first phase asked participants and facilitators to complete a survey tailored to their role in the pilot. Surveys were electronic and distributed via email. Survey data was collected on SurveyMonkey from January to March 2024.

- ▶▶ **The participant survey** asked about satisfaction with the affinity group experience and its facilitators, perceptions of the appropriateness of the experience's length and duration, and opportunities for open-ended reflection. A total of 28 racial affinity group participants completed the survey. Data was missing for 11 participants. The majority of participants in the POC (people of color) affinity group completed the survey (78%), followed by the White racial affinity group (80%), and the Black racial affinity group (60%).
- ▶▶ **The facilitator survey** asked facilitators to reflect on their facilitation experience and group dynamics. Three (3) of the seven (7) facilitators completed the survey: One White racial affinity group facilitator, one Black racial affinity group facilitator, and one POC racial affinity group facilitator.

The second phase asked participants and facilitators to join focus group conversations. Focus groups were held via Zoom. Focus groups were conducted in February to March 2024. Focus group conversations were organized by role in the pilot (e.g., a focus group for facilitators and a focus group for participants).

- ▶▶ **The participant focus group** sought to learn about the perceptions and impacts of their racial affinity group experience. Racial affinity group participants were offered a choice of joining a focus group with only those of their original racial affinity group or a mixed-group conversation that included participants from any focus group. Importantly, only white racial affinity group participants selected to join the mixed-group option, thus, we include them in the white focus group total.
- ▶▶ **The facilitator focus group** sought to learn perceptions of the support and training received by the Indigo coach during the facilitation experience, and to explore experiences within each racial affinity group from the facilitators' perspectives. Facilitators were invited to join a focus group with their co-facilitators; they were organized by facilitator race.

| Racial affinity group | Focus Group Participation |
|-----------------------|---|
| Black | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• 4 racial affinity group participants• 2 facilitators |
| White | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• 6 racial affinity group participants• 2 facilitators |
| POC | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• 1 racial affinity group participant• 2 facilitators |

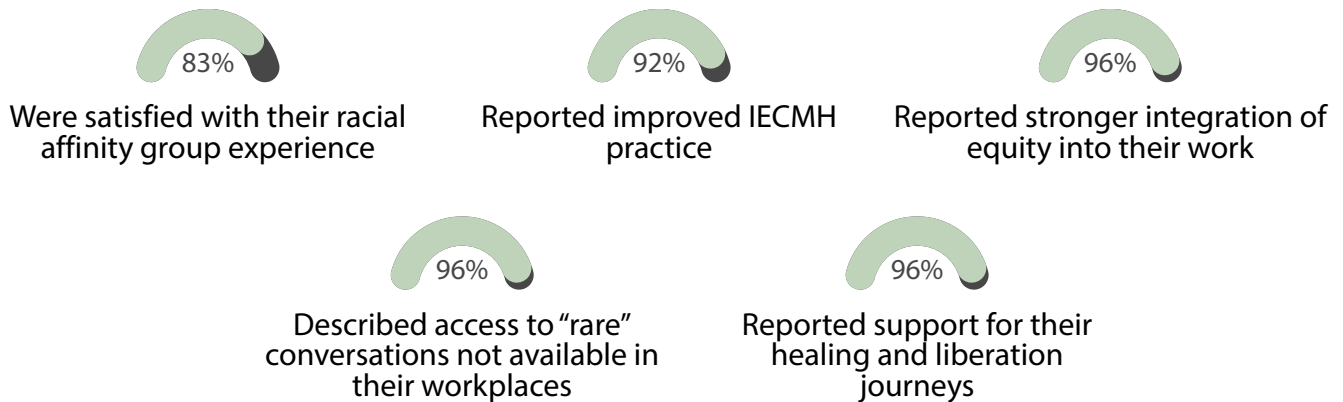
Analytic Approach

Descriptive statistics and analyses of survey results were conducted using SPSS to support focus group findings. Focus group discussions were recorded and then transcribed using Otter.ai, an AI-powered transcription tool that converts spoken language into written transcripts. The transcripts were then reviewed by two research assistants for accuracy. Finally, the research team conducted thematic analysis to identify themes across focus group transcripts.

Findings

Research Question 1: How do PARTICIPANTS describe their experiences in Black, White, and POC racial affinity groups?

Survey responses indicated that participants were satisfied overall with their experience in their reflective racial affinity group. The majority of participants who completed the surveys experienced positive impacts on their personal and professional growth from participating in the racial affinity groups. Specifically, respondents reported that participating in the racial affinity groups enhanced their professional practice and the integration of equity in their work. Additionally, the racial affinity group experience was highlighted as unique in that it offered opportunities to engage in conversations that typically do not occur within their workplace. Finally, participants shared that participation in the racial affinity groups helped them on their healing and liberation journeys.



"I feel like the affinity group has helped me to think about who I am so that I can think about others. So I feel like that's quite the parallel process. I have been held more so I can hold in mind that others aren't where I am. So I feel like I can offer more grace."

- Focus group participant from Black racial affinity group

Common Participant Experiences Across all Racial Affinity Groups

Findings from focus group conversations with participants suggested that racial affinity groups were experienced as meaningful spaces for learning and intentional reflection surrounding one's racialized experiences. Participants emphasized that psychological safety, commitments towards establishing a "brave space", and facilitators' modeled vulnerability and authenticity were essential components to fostering collective engagement and learning. In addition to the positive impacts participants reported in the surveys, focus group participants ultimately shared that simply having the racial affinity group space was something to look forward to in their day and even week.

A White racial affinity group participant shared how the group was a **positive space for learning and reflection** and shared the following:

"...the [racial affinity] group was a bright spot...I genuinely looked forward to it...I could kind of look at it as a bright spot in my week...I never walked away going, 'Oh, God, that was really awful!'...the whole thing. I liked it, I thought there were a lot of bright spots...a real nice mix of learning new things and then reflecting at the same time."

Focus group conversations with participants offered insight into the factors that promoted a positive space for reflection, learning, and fostering growth. Participants identified the **importance of feeling psychologically safe among their peers**. A participant in the POC (people of color) racial affinity group shares the importance of developing a '**brave space**' rather than a space where one can sit comfortably in their perspectives without being challenged to grow:

"[It is important that participants] feel they can be authentic, themselves. They can show up as who they are. And, you know, [the Racial Affinity Group facilitator] will [talk] about like a 'brave space': [I learned] from her, I [switched] the word from like saying, like, oh, 'safe place' to [instead] 'brave space.' So that has been pretty...unique for me. And so that's my, like, kind of bigger overall project [in my] professional life [and] personal life."

Focus group conversations revealed that an essential component of authentic engagement was participants' experiences with their facilitators. Specifically, participants shared that **facilitators' reciprocity in modeling authenticity, humility, and vulnerability minimized power dynamics** and demonstrated that the space was safe for everyone to learn together. A White racial affinity group participant shared:

"I appreciate their vulnerability. That's how I have learned the best...I have found to be the most helpful in a space is to be vulnerable. And [the facilitators were] all very vulnerable and sharing their own stories and leaning into this idea that no one's doing this perfectly."

A Black racial affinity group participant also reflected on the **facilitators' authentic approach**, which enhanced their engagement in the group.

"For me, it was their authenticity. Like they always showed up no matter what was going on, you know, for them, personally, professionally, they always showed up, they were authentic. They were genuine in their approach. Just really, you know, and like the good, like down to earth, able to connect with you. I really appreciated that"

Findings

Differences in Experiences Across the Racial Affinity Groupings

While there were shared themes across racial affinity groups, each group also elicited unique experiences. The following sections offer insight into how experiences differed among Black, White, and POC (people of color) participants in the racial affinity groups.

Table 1. Participant Reported Impacts of Engaging in Racial Affinity Groups

| | Black Participants | White participants | POC participants* |
|---|--------------------|--------------------|-------------------|
| Felt satisfied with their racial affinity group experience | 88% | 83% | 75% |
| Agreed that participating in the racial affinity group supported their early childhood / IECMH practices. | 100% | 83% | 100% |
| Agreed that participating in racial affinity groups helped them better integrate equity concepts within their work. | 100% | 92% | 100% |
| Felt that participating in racial affinity groups provided a unique opportunity to engage in rare conversations. | 100% | 92% | 100% |
| Agreed that participating in racial affinity groups supported their own journey of healing and liberation. | 100% | 92% | 100% |

***Note:** Although seven participants from the POC racial affinity group participated in the survey, only four (57%) offered responses to the following questions. Thus, the percentages above reflect responses from only four respondents.

The Experiences of Black Racial Affinity Group Participants

The first prominent theme to emerge from focus group discussions with Black racial affinity group participants was the experience of **community and solidarity**. Participants in the Black racial affinity group recounted moments of courage and strength, which were solidified in the space together. A participant shared the immeasurable significance of the racial affinity group space:

“So I think when I came to the group, it's the mindfulness, sitting with courageous women who are willing to be in spaces that educate and support other individuals that mindfulness that happened in the beginning of each meeting was, was my foundation that I said that I start my days out with now. Because no matter if I'm writing about what happens at work, who I'm reporting to still has the same lens of the environment in which I work here. So the affinity group. It has to be a way that it continues because of the impact that you're sourcing to get the information for. The impact is beyond what could be in a survey.”

Findings

Building on the experience of felt-community and solidarity, participants in the Black racial affinity group spoke about the space as a **rare opportunity to be alongside other Black women in their professional field**. Additionally, several spoke of the Black racial affinity group as a space of joy, alleviating feelings of isolation when they were often the only Black person at their workplace.

"...being in a group with all Black people was wonderful...I think for some of us, it brought tears to [our] eyes, because it had been our first experience. And I know, for me, it was and I've been in the [IECMH] field for quite a long time...And it felt good."

In addition to no longer being the "only one," participants shared their joy and felt a sense of **relief in not having to educate others** or navigate microaggressions from non-Black colleagues:

"...we didn't have to take care of anybody. That's a big one, too. We didn't have to take care of anybody. We didn't have to worry about making somebody feel better because they said something...because they offered a microaggression or [said] something inappropriate. We have to [always make people feel better]. And [not having to take care of others]. Oh my god, it was so refreshing."

Another participant shared:

"I've never been in a professional space where it's been, you know, people of color, but especially women of color, in any capacity. So it was a very welcoming environment. Always, you know, encouraging, you know, we were able to speak our truths, we weren't judged... it was like, the highlight of the day...Knowing that there was a group, a group that existed where we could come you know, as we were and not be judged. And you know, that trope of you know, 'Whoa, you're an angry black woman' and you know, and not have to explain ourselves...just having people speak the same language and get you that was like all encompassing...It was just nice to know that...we had all these different shades of browns and blacks... it was just beautiful."

Black racial affinity group participants reflected on the group's impact on sustainability in their professional practice. Focus group participants shared how the experience **empowered them to advocate for themselves** in the workplace:

"I've been able to go back to work and ask for what I need...leaving and having this experience... I'm taking care of [me]. I take more breaks...when I got around some of courageous women [in] this group, it set me on fire to recognize what I need to do."

Another participant shared:

"So for me, it gave me more of a voice, like I've always had a voice and I would say 'no' to certain things, but it gave me the backing. My 'no' is 'no'...[participating in the racial affinity group] just gave me... more fuel, more fuel to my fire."

Findings

In addition to advocacy, participants shared that their racial affinity group experience helped them recognize that it was not their sole responsibility to educate others on the principles of equity; rather, they can make change in small steps, **like planting a seed**.

"We can't be responsible for other people's growth and learning, they have to want to do that themselves. You need more than just one voice."

Another participant shared:

"I have been asked to join some other groups where I am the only Black person leading... I find myself having to remind myself not to rescue and let them kind of do things on their own. And I feel like the affinity group has helped me to think about who I am so that I can think about others. So I feel like that's quite the parallel process. I have been held more so I can hold in mind that others aren't where I am. So I feel like I can offer more grace. And I feel like that's pretty big. Because it would be easy for me to get angry and more exasperated... And [instead] it's like, 'Well, I'm glad I'm here. So maybe I can plant a seed.'"

The Experiences of White Racial Affinity Group Participants

Focus group participants in the White racial affinity group described their experiences practicing reflection, accountability, and sustained engagement in equitable practices. They emphasized elements of the facilitators' approaches that established conditions of psychological safety, thereby promoting vulnerability, perspective exploration, and growth. Specifically, participants named facilitators' **intentional use of silence and non-intervention during exchanges of ideas as essential for practicing reflection and honing self-awareness**:

"They gave space for just silence. And because sometimes it takes a while to really kind of like, 'how do I want to say this, or what do I want to say?' And it's easy to want to fill that silence. So I think they did a great job at just kind of like sitting back for a moment and not feeling like they needed to jump in to fill... just giving that space to really kind of process and reflect on our own internal processes before sharing."

Building on this, participants reflected on the variety of perspectives offered during the group discussion. Additionally, they noted that all perspectives were welcome and treated with care and consideration, making the space more comfortable for participants to be their authentic selves in their discussions. This establishment of **safety allowed participants to engage in deeper discussion and reflection** with one another:

"I didn't feel like one perspective was leaned on heavier or one was dismissed, or some were positively reinforced and some weren't. It really felt like... lots of perspectives were there and sat there in their own nests, and didn't get explained away by someone else. The person who's sharing was able to have ownership of that, and no one moved it any other way."

Findings

While facilitators established a safe space for vulnerable discussion, focus group participants still expressed **discomfort with the optics of participating in an all-White group**, fearing misinterpretation from outsiders. Despite this discomfort, participants were able to turn those feelings into an opportunity for reflection on how Whiteness may serve as an obstacle to growth. Rather, they felt that **discomfort should be approached with humility and curiosity**:

"I remember being, like, hesitant to say, like, I have my white racial affinity group, because it kind of sounds...icky to me. Like a white pride kind of thing. And I'm like, oh, that's not what it is. And so often I would say, I'm in my racial reflective group... maybe sometimes just discomfort, right.

But yeah, I think again, it was like, it's not a white pride group. It's actually let's think more about whiteness, and how is that showing up? And again...being vulnerable and sharing, and you're never gonna get it perfect."

Another participant shared the importance of **demonstrating humility**, no matter how much reflective work they have done in the past:

"Were there fireworks or huge revelations? I wouldn't say that, because of all the work I had done the last three years. But it still was a huge reminder of the humility I need to carry...these groups helped me kind of go, 'Oh yeah, this is my identity, my upbringing getting in the way of my ability to understand somebody else's.'"

Focus group participants also reflected on moments when they needed to engage in **courageous conversations**. One participant shared how the **established safety in the group reminded them that it was okay to be uncomfortable**. Participants described this **capacity to accept discomfort as necessary for practicing accountability**. Specifically, this allowed participants to learn from one another without retreating into defensiveness:

"I'm just gonna listen. I know there's validity to what [my peer is] saying. And this is hard for me to understand and to hear. But that's okay. Hard conversations are okay, as long as the safety has been established."

Participants also discussed how the group's impact shapes their engagement with others, both in their personal lives and professional roles. Professionally, participants reported using practices from the group in their day-to-day work. Specifically, participants shared that **they were able to utilize these skills during reflective supervision**:

"It doesn't always feel safe and comfortable in our team meetings...yet I'm still building up the courage to go there. Saying, I don't have all the answers, I'm not gonna always get it right, but we can go there... It's a lot of parallel processes. How I am with my supervisee is how I'm hoping she will be with the family she serves."

Findings

Another participant shared the group's impact on how they provide supervision:

"I think it's just a reminder, to make sure that culture is part of that reflective lens. You know, when we're working with the young kids, and bringing that forward, and I'm not saying it's upfront, but it's part of the conversation. And so me being more cognizant of how I bring that to the table... I think groups like this helped me create that space, so that people can talk about it, one-to-one, [staff] can talk about it in our full staff meetings. So this for me reinforced that."

More broadly, White participants shared that their experience in the group helped them better recognize the role of systems in the work that they do:

"I feel like I'm more aware of how race and other established patterns—economic and social—have locked in power dynamics...circumscribing opportunities and risks and resources...I [left the group with] a deeper understanding of how deeply rooted these patterns are. And that's more troubling—but also more motivating."

Regarding personal lives, White participants shared that what they learned in the groups **helped them navigate challenging conversations with others**, including family members:

"I understand that's a privilege I carry that I don't have to always be in the work. So for me, it's that crossover of, I'm reminded often by people closer to me who I feel more comfortable having these conversations with to not just have conversations with them, like make sure I'm having conversations in my in my actual day to day life. And what does that look like in the places that feel a little bit scarier to have to really be engaging in this work. For example...my son and I were having active conversations about, 'Who are you [supplies] to? Are you paying attention to race? Are you paying attention to the patterns that you're creating as we're walking down the street?' So that would be my most recent example of how it's playing out for me."

Finally, White participants shared a prominent theme that arose during their time in the racial affinity group was the importance of **"rest as resistance" to white supremacy**. Specifically, focus group participants shared that they learned about Dr. Tricia Hersey's seminal work ([Rest Is Resistance](#), 2022), and that they learned to reject aspects of capitalism that urged them to work until they burned out, citing how the group promoted the mindfulness practice of intentional rest in order for their work to be sustainable:

"The mindfulness and resting as resistance and thinking about that for myself [in] this hustle culture...I'm a social worker, I wear multiple hats, and I'm on the board of different communities...learning that the way I work and the way I function, I need to schedule breaks, and I need to schedule mindfulness and like have it as a pop up on my phone that says it's time to take...a 30 minute rest outside...And that has been wonderful for me and it's really changed a lot and then when I return to whatever it is I'm doing I feel so much more focused and...I do feel like it's it's helped my productivity in ways that I didn't expect..."

The Experiences of POC Racial Affinity Group Participants

Findings for the POC (people of color) racial affinity group participants were limited, only one participant participated in qualitative feedback in the form of an interview. We bolstered our analysis in this section by adding in other participants' responses from open-ended surveys (n = 7).

An important theme that emerged from the POC affinity group was the racial affinity space as a place for **holding perspectives and fostering self-awareness**.

"I think my lens always is like holding space. That's my background, that's my work. And I feel like so many people don't actually get held. They're always expected to do something, fix something, respond, be better, say the right thing.

So for me, being in a space where...you don't have to fix anything, you don't have to teach, you don't have to perform, you can just sit and notice what's coming up—that felt really meaningful."

Specifically, participants shared that they honed their **somatic awareness** through the group. The focus group participant reflected on how discussions led to physical reactions, which were important to really experience in the moment:

"What stayed with me wasn't like, 'now I know what to do differently.' It was more these moments where something came up emotionally that I wasn't expecting. Hearing someone talk and suddenly feeling something in my body, or remembering something from childhood, or just noticing, 'oh, that touched something.' That felt like the real impact."

A survey respondent shared how facilitators encouraged them to slow down and really feel what they were experiencing while in the group:

"I appreciate the two facilitators for meeting people where they are and for being lovely models of slowing down and centering somatic awareness. I wonder if more sessions would have been offered would people have started opening up more? It would be great for these groups to be offered in organizations or by most employers. Important topics were presented and many people did not know how to respond, which illustrates the high need."

The quote above also illuminates another prominent theme from the POC racial affinity group. Open-ended survey responses and focus group findings revealed that participants may have been at **different phases of development in their racial healing journeys**, resulting in instances in which participants opted for a 'color evasive' ideology versus a more racially centered reflective process. One POC participant described her lifelong experience of unpacking her identity. For her, racial identity was not particularly salient at this point in her life; thus, she felt she could not engage authentically. Rather, the emphasis on race led to some tension with how she engaged with the group:

"I don't see myself as just [my race] or just a woman or just anything like that. I see myself more as a human being, as loving light...So when it felt like, 'you are this because of your race,' that didn't land easily for me. It felt constraining. I don't want to be put into a box, even if it's a box that's meant to affirm me."

Findings

An additional example of 'color/race evasiveness' that showed up in the POC racial affinity group is evident in this participant's quote about the salience of her gendered identity:

"Honestly, gender was way more charged for me than race. Growing up in [my home country], I was part of the racial majority, so race wasn't the thing that hurt me the most... It was being a girl. It was the way women were treated, the expectations, the lack of respect. Those memories came up really strongly for me in the group, more than racial ones."

Finally, despite challenges in engaging in discussion about identity amongst group participants, they still spoke to the importance of having the racial affinity group space available. One participant emphasized the need for the presence of a skilled facilitator to ensure these critical conversations continue:

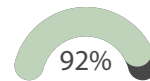
"I don't think these conversations can just keep going without facilitation. I really don't. Someone has to be holding the container and also taking care of themselves... Otherwise it just becomes too much. People burn out, people feel resentful, or things fall apart. Facilitation is real labor."

Research Question 2: What recommendations do PARTICIPANTS offer for the design, facilitation, and implementation of future racial affinity groups for IECMH professionals?

Most participants felt that meeting once per month for six months had a positive impact on their reflective practice. However, many shared that they wished the groups were longer in order to fully build trust and deepen conversations. Specifically, respondents shared that they wished the racial affinity groups lasted at least a year.



Of respondents believe the racial affinity group experience should be **longer than 6 months**.



Of respondents felt that the racial affinity group experience **should be offered for at least 12 months**.

Additionally, a number of participants noted that the **length** of sessions should be longer. With the exception of the POC (people of color) group, which utilized 90-minute sessions, the Black and White racial affinity groups met for only one hour per session. Open-ended responses from participant surveys and focus group feedback indicated that **90-minute sessions were the ideal length**.

For example, a White racial affinity group participant shared:

"I think [once] per month (maybe bumping up to 90 minutes) for 12 months would be great as there is so much trust to be built for our nervous systems to even begin to open up to one another. As white people who are trying to do good work but muck it up a lot of the time there is so much shame and guilt for so many of us that gets in the way of vulnerable and authentic sharing."

Findings

Participants also considered **group pacing**, as some shared that being in larger groups meant introductions took up a large portion of time. For example, the White racial affinity group spent two sessions getting through participant introductions, leading to participant drop-off and a seemingly slow pace of discussion. Participants recommended a breakout group approach to help them get to know peers, facilitate trust, and begin engaging in critical conversations.

Regarding **content structure**, participants had mixed responses. Some shared the desire for a more structured curriculum for each session. On the other hand, others appreciated the open curriculum, which allowed participants to explore salient topics important to them at the time. These responses may indicate a need for a balanced approach, where facilitators have an even mix of structure and participant-guided discussion. A survey participant from the Black racial affinity group reflected:

"I would have appreciated a more structured meeting if not regularly, at least periodically. It would've been cool to be presented with some resources/materials in advance for those who need time to gather our thoughts prior to."

Finally, participants were asked about what additional types of affinity groups they would like to see in the future. **Participants shared the following desires for future affinity groups:**



Intersectional identities such as:

- Immigration status and experiences
- Gender
- Level in career (e.g., early career, mid, senior, equity leader)
- Ethnicity/cultural identity



Urbanicity



Region



Findings

Research Question 3: How do racial affinity group FACILITATORS describe their experiences leading Black, White, and BIPOC racial affinity groups for IECMH professionals?

The Experiences of Black Racial Affinity Group Facilitators

The Black racial affinity group facilitators emphasized unique dynamics within their group. In particular, they centered the experiences of affirmation, healing, and joy amongst participants.

The Black racial affinity group facilitators consistently reflected on the affinity group as a space of affirmation and connection among participants surrounding the shared identity of being Black women in the IECMH field. Even when participants shared differences, those differences were welcomed and accepted. A facilitator shared:

“There wasn’t a need to explain ourselves. Even when our experiences were different, there was a shared reality that grounded us.”

The facilitators both continued to discuss how the racial affinity space affirmed participants’ experiences and was a space of love and healing:

“It felt like a space to say, ‘I see you, I value you, you are worthy.’ There was a lot of recognition and relief in that.”

Finally, the Black racial affinity group facilitators shared how the participants wanted to move away from focusing on the topic of oppression. Rather, they valued the centering of joy. Facilitators shared how they reacted to this collective request and ensured the space was one of celebration and healing:

“Once we...put our focus on joy, and just shipped it. And I just think that glimmering and shining moments were seeing a screen full of Black women smiling and laughing and enjoying the space. We played music upon their arrival. And what we did is we, after the first meeting, we asked them to put in their favorite song or a song that brought them joy. And so each meeting you, you possibly get to hear your song that you had put in and so you could tell who it was immediately when they came in, because got a little bit excited about their song. And then we all jammed out to it. So that that was fun... music brought us together”

The Experiences of White Racial Affinity Group Facilitators

White racial affinity group facilitators described unique experiences with participants in the group. Similarly to how participants named feelings of discomfort, facilitators also described their experiences managing the group’s feelings of guilt, fear of causing emotional harm to BIPOC peers, and vulnerability, while still centering accountability as allies in racial equity work. The facilitators emphasized the importance of having the affinity space as a container for White participants to explore these feelings. One White facilitator shared:

“There was a lot of awareness of not wanting to put the issues we were facing onto people of color. Having a space where white folks could say the unspeakable things and sit with them—that felt really powerful.”

Findings

The White facilitators continued to discuss the importance of **making space for uncomfortable conversations** about participants' beliefs and biases to occur, sharing that the experience was necessary in order to lead to growth. Rather, they encouraged vulnerability:

"We let it happen. And it was uncomfortable, but those are real thoughts people are having. The [reflective] work was letting them be there without validating them."

They also reflected on practices they engaged in that actively rejected white supremacy. Specifically, they noted engaging in exercises for grounding, allowing space for silence, and **practicing embodiment as resistance to white supremacy culture**:

"White supremacy encourages us to live outside of our bodies and only in our brains. So [the practice of] grounding [ourselves] is actually a way of resisting white supremacy."

While facilitators shared how they engaged in generative discussions among participants, they also recounted moments where they struggled with the direction conversations went in the group. Specifically, when topics of intersectionality occurred such as **complex discussions around marginalized intersectional identities**, they expressed how it was a learning edge that they were hesitant to explore:

"We had many conversations with our entire group about like, when you are a white person who is navigating race and thinking about race, you already have a tendency to say, 'I'm white, but I'm white, but I'm a woman. I'm white, but I'm queer. I'm white, but I'm, you know, Jewish.' And so, I almost think in some ways, we didn't really want to take an intersectional approach, because for so, for so much of this work, it can be used as like a barrier to being vulnerable and really like looking into yourself for ways that you either internalize or exhibit racism towards your BIPOC colleagues or whoever it might be. And so I don't know if that's a good thing that we did that, but I do you think we...encouraged against it."

Finally, the White racial affinity group facilitators shared that hosting the group promoted their own capacity for engaging in anti-racism work both personally and professionally. One of the facilitators shares about **their own engagement in anti-racism**:

"I share that a lot in like the small spaces of that group... we talked a lot about fractal abolitionism. [And] doing what you can where you can, that feeling I named is a function of white supremacy, trying to be like, don't continue on, right? And then also, I can't remember what the quote was, I wish I could find it. But one of the group members shared... a fantastic quote of like, "when you start feeling like, you're not like, doing the right thing, or doing enough, that means you need to, like work within,"...when you work on yourself, you work on basically how you interact with the world. And so I think this space came for me at such a perfect time of transition, where, learning how to do this work in my professional life, as opposed to in like classrooms with fellow people who are all concerned about the same exact thing, and professors who are guiding you and pushing you to really like think critically. And so, that's just one small way for me that this space contributed to me continuing on this journey."

Findings

Another White racial affinity group facilitator shared how hosting the group promoted their own **introspection about their day-to-day practices**, helping them grow:

"I was able to bring [what I learned] to other spaces...mainly through work...that also creates space for working on creating an anti-racist culture in the organization [like] ...slowing things down in terms of decision making...when we don't like getting away...[from] the sense of urgency of everything. And I think...I definitely learned about the [White] shame response...[through group] discussions and just seeing how sort of shame shows up for me personally...I found... one of the things that rang true to me, which I was... horrified at, but it was, was like, was, like, almost like, deferring. Like, I'm not gonna say it correctly...but it was like... treating... people of color or Black people...much better, like better than I would another White person because of their skin color. So almost like overcompensating in a way and differing in a way that's probably not respectful, but for a different reason. And so I think that so just like, seeing, seeing myself in problematic behavior in some of the discussions was really helpful and and, you know, trying to create change from there. And then, like, yeah, that's just one example."

The Experiences of POC (people of color) Racial Affinity Group Facilitators

Focus group conversations with facilitators for the POC racial affinity group revealed unique dynamics which did not arise for the Black and White racial affinity groups. Namely, the POC racial affinity group facilitators spoke to challenges related to navigating **participants' uneven readiness to discuss topics of racial identity**. Thus, much of the discussion that occurred over the six weeks involved navigating differences rather than commonalities. A POC racial affinity group facilitator shared:

"What stood out most was how different everyone's experiences were. There wasn't a lot of shared normalizing—more like navigating a lot of unique stories and levels of readiness."

Information gathered from the participant surveys may illuminate some of these observations from the facilitators, as all of the POC racial affinity group participants who completed the surveys shared that **they had never participated in a racial affinity group in the past**. While differences in experiences and perspectives are always welcomed in racial affinity groups, tensions among facilitators arose due to there being a mismatch in participants' willingness to engage in challenging conversations but not yet having the racial literacy to "go deep". A facilitator shared:

[on the topic of challenging conversations] it takes so long to be able to talk about [race] and then to...be able to talk about them in...what I would say in a really 'deep way'...there are so many times where...'I [wanted] to go further...' And I'd have to pull myself back in with dialogue with my co-facilitator about this as well...it's not where I want them to end up, but where they're going, and where their journey is, and where they are. And not that we're all going to the same destination..."

Research Question 3b: How do racial affinity group facilitators describe the role of Indigo Cultural Center’s coaching supports in shaping their facilitation experiences?

Findings from focus groups and interviews with the facilitators offered insight into the impact of Indigo Cultural Center’s training and support.

First, facilitators reflected on their experiences receiving coaching from a leader at Indigo Cultural Center. They noted the benefits of engaging in reflective practice rather than just learning content. Simply being told what needed to be done was not enough; rather, **an essential component of their learning and development was experiencing reflective practices with their coach in real time.** A White racial affinity group facilitator shared:

“[Our Indigo Coach] does this work in such a natural way, but when someone stopped her and said, ‘Hold on—break it down,’ that’s when it really clicked for me. I needed to see what was happening underneath the surface.”

A facilitator from the POC racial affinity group also spoke on the importance of being able to observe reflective practice being done in real time:

*“One of the biggest parts [of the training was] really the like, how [our Indigo Coach] shows up in the space of modeling [facilitation], not just the content of it, but **how** she is and **who** she is in the modeling and... the art of like being able to [reflect] in real time.”*

In addition to observing reflection in practice, facilitators spoke to the significance of seeing the Indigo Coach **be vulnerable in their coaching sessions**, reminding them that they do not need to be experts to be successful in their roles. Additionally, the Coach’s vulnerability created space for facilitators to be their authentic selves, serving as a model for their participants as well. A Black racial affinity group facilitator shared about the importance of vulnerability in establishing a space where everyone was able to be authentic:

“I’ve learned specifically to model vulnerability. Because I think when I was able to model that the participant followed suit.”

Later in the focus group, the facilitator revisited the topic, emphasizing their ability to be authentic even in their role as a facilitator:

“[Our Indigo Coach] modeled vulnerability. I really feel like I was my whole self. Period.... when I was having a bad day, I said it... I did appreciate [that approach]... I think I bought my whole self... And I felt like I was authentic.”

Findings

Building on the importance of practicing vulnerability, facilitators emphasized the value of ongoing personal reflection. They noted that simply having experience as facilitators in the past or being critically reflective does not entail that the work ever stops. Rather, to be ready to hold space for the complex racialized dynamics in each group, personally engaging in ongoing reflection was a necessary component of the training. A POC (people of color) racial affinity group facilitator shared:

"I had to keep checking myself—what's coming up for me, what am I reacting to, what's mine to hold and what's not. That self-reflection wasn't optional; it was constant."

Facilitators also spoke to the significance of having spaces to "debrief" their experiences within their racial affinity groups. They noted the significant emotional and relational labor required to facilitate the groups. Facilitators noted that engaging in one-on-ones as a **parallel process to discuss their experiences as facilitators was necessary to avoid burnout and sustain their work**. A White racial affinity group facilitator shared:

"I don't think this work can happen well without that facilitator [coaching] support. It really shouldn't be optional. Otherwise facilitators are just holding way too much on their own."

One of the POC racial affinity group facilitators echoed the emotionally intensive nature of the work:

"I went into it hoping it would be healing for me too, but it ended up being about holding the group. That's important to name so facilitators aren't surprised by that."

The facilitators also reflected on other aspects of support that sustained their work. Several noted that having a **co-facilitator was a non-negotiable** component of hosting the racial affinity groups. In particular, having a co-facilitator helped facilitators feel supported and grounded, as they could lean on one another when their capacities or knowledge were limited. A Black racial affinity group facilitator shared how their co-facilitator helped them feel a sense of safety:

"Having another facilitator there meant I could breathe. It wasn't all on me, and that made the space feel safer—for us and for the group."

A POC racial affinity group facilitator echoed the feeling of support from their co-facilitator:

"It was really nice to not feel like I had to hold everything myself. If I needed backup, I could call the other facilitator in."

Findings

As facilitators reflected on the support they received from Indigo’s coaching, several noted **the power of learning alongside their peers**, which offered opportunities to explore new strategies for healing and reflection that could be brought into their personal and professional practice. A White racial affinity group facilitator shared how **being part of the cohort helped them advance their own healing journey**:

“[The] facilitator training group like advanced my... own journey... I felt really lucky to be in this space with those fellow humans and... really honored to... hear and listen. And so I think just like being in that space... [and] my identity as a white woman, I think I was just more reverent in those spaces, and like really, listening and learning, especially when everyone would like do their own grounding for us. Like, they're just very reflective humans. And that's something that isn't first nature to me, or isn't something that either you know, like it's not present in your research or training... I learned a lot about different grounding opportunities and different ways to integrate embodied practice into [my] personal and professional [practice]... because at this point, I was only doing it at work and not really thinking about doing it in my personal life.”

This facilitator also added how the support provided in **the coaching space promoted their healing**:

“Sometimes the lines felt blurred between training and... I'm experiencing and healing in my own way as well. It didn't feel like just learning skills—it felt like being held while doing this work...”

That space allowed you to not feel alone in the work and more grounded going back into the group.”



Research Question 4: What recommendations do racial affinity group FACILITATORS offer for strengthening future racial affinity group implementation for IECMH professionals?

Facilitators offered several recommendations regarding the facilitation and design of their racial affinity groups. Specifically, they provided recommendations on dosage and duration for the groups, the approach, the purpose, and the groupings. Additionally, they offered recommendations on additional supports that could be offered in future racial affinity group coaching initiatives.

Feedback on Affinity Group Design

Facilitators echoed participants' recommendations for an extended timeline of hosting the racial affinity groups, noting that six months at one-hour increments was simply not enough time for participants to "go deep." Thus, facilitators recommended that **future affinity groups operate at least once a month for a minimum of 12 months, with 90-minute meetings**. A POC racial affinity group facilitator shared:

"Oh, it felt so short! It felt we needed time to build relationships and trust, and courage, and then as we were starting to hold more diverse experiences/opinions within our group (holding differences in our experiences/opinions/worldviews), it felt like we only had time for 1 -2 sessions of getting into the murkier areas of collective experiences and then it was time to close. We had a more reflective, easier Session 6, to end us, and I wonder what it would have looked like for all if we had come in knowing we'd have 9-12 months, or more, and time to pace everything and make mistakes and repair..."

Reflecting participants' perceptions of pacing, facilitators also **recommended introducing breakout rooms for larger participant groups**. Facilitators also offered recommendations for further **differentiation amongst intersectional identities in future affinity groups**. A White racial affinity group facilitator reflected on their desire for a more intersectional space:

"...The dream [affinity space]...caters to all of those intersectional identities. [For example] someone who is white and queer and male gets to process with fellow white male people who identify as queer... Whereas... I would be with... white heterosexual women. And so because we were mixed on ...different gender identities and sexual identities and racial backgrounds-- or and religious backgrounds--all of us were white, obviously--I think that is why we did stick to just discussing the way that our whiteness and racism is experienced. Because I've been in other affinity spaces with just white women. And in that way, we were able to like really dive into themes more about like, white female tears and like the dangerousness of white women in US society. But again, in that group, then there was weirdly like, just because I think a lot were on the East Coast. Like there was a lot of discussion about white women who are Jewish versus white women who are Christian. And so again, like even further delineation between affinity spaces, so I think you can always get deeper, but maybe you're a little bit restricted to the shared identities in the space."

Feedback for Providing Coaching to Facilitators

Facilitators were asked to reflect on aspects of the coaching they received from Indigo Cultural Center. They had a number of recommendations to improve facilitation training experiences for future cohorts. Several facilitators noted that they wished they fully completed training prior to hosting the racial affinity groups, sharing that beginning the affinity groups midway through training felt like they were still learning important skills. A POC racial affinity group facilitator shared:

"It felt like we were learning while doing, which was helpful, but also hard. I think having more of that training before the group actually started would have allowed me to feel more grounded going in."

While this facilitator highlights the benefit of "learning while doing" a White racial affinity group facilitator shared how this timing made it difficult to feel like they had a solid foundation to rely on in their facilitation:

"There were moments early on where I was still figuring things out as we were already meeting with participants. In hindsight, I would've liked more of that foundation before the first session."

To support their facilitation practices, facilitators shared that they would have benefited from more one-on-one reflective meetings with their Indigo Coach.

While they engaged in group coaching, having additional individual sessions to reflect on their experiences could help them process their individual emotions. A Black racial affinity group facilitator shared:

"Having that space to say, 'Here's what's hard for me right now,' without worrying about the group—one-on-one—would've been helpful, especially in the middle."

While facilitators who underwent coaching were all experienced in facilitation, they still noted the importance of learning from someone more seasoned in their IECMH racial facilitation practices. A number of facilitators made recommendations for a mentorship-type model which involved one seasoned facilitator and one less experienced facilitator. This way, the less experienced facilitator can learn from their co-facilitator through collaboration. A White racial affinity group facilitator shared:

"I learned so much just from watching [our Indigo Coach] facilitate. There were moments where I thought, 'I wouldn't have known what to do there,' and seeing how she handled it in real time was huge. I think pairing newer facilitators with someone who's done this before would be really important."

Findings

Facilitators reflected on their experiences navigating the topic of intersectionality in their groups. They shared their desire for more training on navigating differences and intersectionality. A White racial affinity group facilitator shared:

"Intersectionality came up a lot, and sometimes it felt like people used it to move away from talking about whiteness. I think having more guidance in training about how to hold intersectionality without it becoming avoidance would be helpful."

A POC racial affinity group facilitator also shared the need for increased capacity building to support discussions about intersectionality:

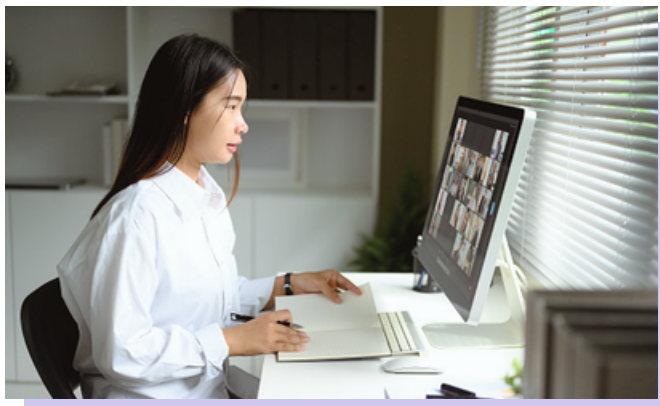
"Because the group was so diverse, intersectionality was always present. I think more training on how to navigate that—especially around anti-Blackness—would be really important."

Facilitators discussed the importance of establishing an overarching goal of their racial affinity group to ensure that participants have clear expectations, which would ultimately guide discussion. A White racial affinity group facilitator shared:

"I wish I had a clearer vision on what we are trying to do with the White affinity group. Are we simply holding the space/container for the group? Or are there certain things/ways of being that we should be modeling and encouraging? I think it's a little bit of both and it would be helpful to explore. For the White affinity group, are there specific things we should look out for when facilitating that are unique to that group?"

Finally, facilitators reflected on the intensive nature of facilitating the racial affinity groups. A way that some stressors could have been alleviated would have been by offering additional administrative support so they would not have to worry about the small details. A white racial affinity group facilitator shared:

"There were times where we were trying to hold the emotional space and also track logistics, timing, follow-ups. Having more admin support from Indigo would have freed us up to really focus on facilitation."



Discussion

Purpose of the Current Study

Emerging research suggests that racial affinity groups can reduce professional isolation and promote equitable practices. However, there has been little research conducted examining the use of racial affinity groups in infant and early childhood mental health (IECMH) settings, and particularly, with considerations for the facilitation approaches and preparation required to conduct such groups. Thus, the purpose of this pilot study was to explore Black, White, and POC (person of color) IECMH professionals' experiences and perceived impacts of participating in a series-based, virtual racial affinity group, as well as facilitators' perspectives on leading these spaces with the support of Indigo Cultural Center's coaching. Additionally, this study aimed to contribute to the paucity of literature on racial affinity groups within IECMH by offering insight into the feasibility and perceived value of the facilitator coaching model grounded in Indigo Cultural Center's Anti-Racism Transformational Healing Framework (Shivers & Arbel, 2019) as well as a Healing Justice framework (Pyles, 2019).

Summary of Findings from Racial Affinity Group Participants

Emerging themes across ALL racial affinity groups. Across Black, White, and POC racial affinity groups, participants described the racial affinity space as meaningful, critical, and transformative, fostering collective learning, reflection, and personal and professional growth. Survey responses and focus group conversations indicated that participants experienced high levels of satisfaction and perceived impact, noting that engagement in the racial affinity groups strengthened their ability to integrate principles of equity within their IECMH practice, supported their healing and liberation, and created opportunities to have brave conversations, which did not often occur in their workplace. Participants consistently emphasized the importance of felt psychological safety, which cultivated a "brave space" for collective accountability and learning. Additionally, facilitators' modeling of authenticity, humility, and vulnerability was an essential condition that promoted active engagement among participants.

Emergent themes DISTINCT for each racial affinity group. While participants across racial affinity groups described a number of shared experiences and outcomes, distinct experiences also emerged. For example, **Black racial affinity group** participants emphasized their experiences of a felt sense of community, solidarity, collective joy, and relief from isolation, often felt by being the "only" in their professional settings. Specifically, Black racial affinity group participants emphasized the reduced emotional labor that came with participating in the groups, freedom from managing microaggressions experienced from other professionals who did not share their race, and increased capacity to advocate for themselves in the workplace, take intentional rest, and actively set boundaries to ensure their personal and professional sustainability.

Discussion

In the **White racial affinity group**, participants emphasized the importance of sustained self-reflection, collective accountability, and engaging in the important practice of experiencing discomfort related to their whiteness and systemic power. Through these experiences, White participants described their ability to grow in their anti-racist praxis, practice humility, and vulnerability, and described their increased awareness of structural inequities. Additionally, participation in the affinity group allowed White participants to better integrate reflective and equity-oriented practices within their professional supervision, leadership engagement, and personal lives.

Participants in the **POC racial affinity group** described how engagement in the group honed their somatic awareness, allowing them to slow down and really understand their emotions. However, different from the Black and White affinity groups, a theme that emerged in the POC racial affinity group centered on varying levels of readiness to engage in explicit discussions of racial identity and experiences. Reflections from participants and facilitators emerged moments of racial evasiveness and differences in comfort and capacity for naming and examining racialized experiences. These dynamics influenced the depth and direction of dialogue that occurred in the group.

Overall, participants shared similar recommendations for future racial affinity groups. Specifically, participants noted the importance of having skilled facilitators to sustain brave and reflective dialogue. Among groups, participants recommended that future racial affinity groups be extended beyond 6 months, as most endorsed that future experiences should last at least 12 months, with 90-minute sessions, to allow sufficient time to build trust amongst peers and engage in deeper reflection. Additionally, participants recommended improved pacing through the balanced use of breakout groups and large-group discussions. Building on this, participants expressed a desire for a balance between structured content provided by facilitators and participant-guided discussion. Finally, participants offered recommendations to expand racial affinity groups to be organized around additional intersectional identities, such as gender, immigration status, career stage, and region of residence.

Summary of Findings from Racial Affinity Group Facilitators

Facilitators across racial affinity groups described their experience as deeply meaningful yet emotionally intensive, requiring continuous self-reflection and relational attunement, and emphasizing the importance of navigating complex group dynamics. Across all racial affinity groups, facilitators shared the importance of being able to model authenticity and vulnerability as foundational components to garnering active participant engagement.

While racial affinity group facilitators shared many perspectives on their facilitation experience, each team of facilitators identified unique topics and themes that were particularly salient in their specific groups. For example, Black racial affinity group facilitators discussed the importance of centering affirmation, joy, and healing amongst their participants. On the other hand, White racial affinity group facilitators shared how they navigated participants' feelings of guilt, shame, and the importance of promoting collective accountability while resisting white supremacy culture. Finally, facilitators from the POC racial affinity group shared how they navigated uneven racial literacy and readiness to explore racialized experiences among participants, which required facilitators to be flexible and cautious with how they engaged in discussion throughout the group to ensure they met participants where they were at in their journeys.

Discussion

Facilitators identified that Indigo Cultural Center's coaching was critical to their success and sustainability over the 11-month period. Facilitators expressed that their coaching experiences allowed them to observe reflective practice within facilitation in real time, engage in ongoing self-reflection, model vulnerability, and process the emotional labor of facilitation. They also noted that one-on-one and group coaching spaces promoted parallel process, which helped facilitators remain grounded in their work, avoid burnout, and feel supported. Finally, facilitators highlighted the co-facilitator model and the ability to learn amongst peers as essential supports that promoted sustainability and collective learning.

Facilitators offered several recommendations, particularly focused on training future cohorts of racial affinity group facilitators. Specifically, facilitators recommended completing training before launching any racial affinity groups to build a stronger foundation for facilitation. Additionally, facilitators noted the desire for additional training on navigating intersectionality and group differences. Finally, they called for a clearer understanding of their group's purpose and intended outcomes, as well as increased administrative and logistical support from Indigo Cultural Center, which would allow them to better focus on their relational and reflective work.

Limitations of Our Study

While this study's findings illuminate the positive impact of engaging in racial affinity groups among IECMH professionals, both personally and in the workplace, we note several limitations that should be considered when interpreting our findings. First, limited funding and administrative resources only allowed for a 6-month racial affinity group experience. Secondly, small sample sizes in survey and focus group data limit the generalizability of our findings and the extent to which our results can be assumed to reflect the experiences of all IECMH professionals participating in racial affinity groups. Third, participants' readiness and willingness to engage in racially reflective conversations may have shaped how participants engaged in the groups and interpreted their impacts. Finally, our evaluation design did not assess comparisons between participants within the same organization and those participating with individuals from different organizations. Thus, we were unable to examine how organizational context, shared workplace culture, or existing professional relationships may have affected participants' experiences.



Discussion

Implications for Practice

Findings from this study suggest that effective implementation of racial affinity groups in IECMH contexts requires intentionality surrounding facilitation and support structures offered to facilitators. It is essential to articulate a core set of facilitation skills and qualities that enable facilitators to effectively hold racial affinity spaces, including capacities for reflective practice, modeling humility and vulnerability, and navigating participants' discomfort with challenging topics without stifling transformation. Additionally, this study underscores the importance of facilitators being adequately prepared before leading racial affinity group spaces. Our findings suggest that peer learning, co-facilitation, and ongoing support, such as mentoring and one-on-one reflective supervision, are important for sustaining facilitators' well-being and their ability to succeed in their roles.

Related to group design, our findings suggest that it is important to consider participants' growth along a continuum of racial awareness, healing, and readiness for reflection. Additionally, this study emphasizes the importance of having intentional space to explore intersectional identities beyond just race. Finally, findings from participants and facilitators both point to the need for longer periods of time for racial affinity groups to work together, allowing for adequate trust-building and deeper reflective work.



Discussion

Implications for Organizational Policy

Our findings have a number of implications for organizations that seek to implement racial affinity groups. First, our findings suggest that there is a need for clear organizational policy frameworks which support intentional and ethical implementation of racial affinity groups for an IECMH workforce. Organizations that seek to offer racial affinity groups should be able to explicitly articulate the need for racial affinity groups in the workplace and what they hope to address that is often not achieved in general professional development initiatives. Namely, the provision of racial affinity groups should reduce feelings of isolation, promote racial healing, and strengthen equity-oriented practice among participants. Organizations that have a clear purpose for the implementation of racial affinity groups can help mitigate concerns raised by human resources departments as it related to inclusivity, legality, and ethics.

Building upon the need for a clear goal, organizations should also be ready to attend to negative perceptions, especially surrounding misconceptions that racial affinity groups may be exclusionary or spaces that promote division. To mitigate this risk, organizational policies should ensure that racial affinity groups are equity-informed structures of support rather than segregated spaces. Moreover, participation in racial affinity groups should be voluntary, opt-in, and free from formal and informal repercussions. Organizational safeguards must be set in place to ensure that employees who choose not to participate do not experience stigma, pressure, or professional disadvantages such as lower likelihood of advancement, leadership, or access to other professional opportunities. Another consideration is the accessibility of identity-based groupings that are important to an organization's team. Affinity group offerings should reflect the identities that matter most to their workforce rather than being predetermined and presumptive. For organizations, this may entail ongoing assessments of staff needs, attention to staff members' intersectional identities, and flexibility in how and what groups are formed over time.

More broadly and most importantly, our findings point to the need for investment in developing and supporting a cadre of IECMH professionals with expertise and skills in racial affinity group facilitation. Dedicated funding that supports facilitator training and coaching experiences and pathways for facilitator mentorship could increase the field's capacity to offer responsibly developed racial affinity groups.

[The Black racial affinity group] is the first space where I believe all of us had been collectively held and appreciated and celebrated. So the only challenge you know, wish [the experience] was longer.

-Black racial affinity group participant

Discussion

Implications for Research

This study contributes to the scant body of literature which examines racial affinity groups in IECMH settings and emphasizes the need for continued empirical attention to both racial affinity group design and facilitation practices. To date, there is a paucity of research that has focused on racial affinity groups facilitated in IECMH contexts, including the preparation, skills, and supports needed to ensure facilitators are able to hold these spaces effectively. Future research should build upon this pilot project by more systematically examining approaches to facilitation, diverse coaching models, and further elucidating the competencies which support the establishment of psychological safety, brace conversations, and sustained engagement amongst professionals.

Additionally, research is needed to expand the range of racial and intersectional identities represented in racial affinity group research. Namely, future studies should explore racial affinity groups that center more specific racial and ethnic identities, such as Hispanic/Latine, Asian/Asian American, Pacific Islander, and multiracial identities. Additionally, evaluators should seek to integrate an intersectional lens to examine the interactions among race and other salient identities, such as gender, immigration status, language, and professional roles.

Future studies may also benefit from utilizing a mixed-methods approach, which combines qualitative methods with standardized measures that assess targeted outcomes related to professional well-being, reflective capacities, equity-orientation, and sustainability in the workforce. Moreover, researchers may consider a longitudinal design to assess the impact of engagement in racial affinity groups over time, including how participation has influenced participants' personal growth, professional practice, and engagement with equity principles beyond the group experience.

***Rarely, if ever, are any of us healed in isolation.
Healing is an act of communion.***

**-bell hooks
*All About Love: New Visions***

References

- Alliance for the Advancement of Infant Mental Health. (2018). Best practice guidelines for reflective supervision/consultation (Version FINAL_20190606) [PDF]. https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5884ec2a03596e667b2ec631/t/5d24ccf5deb9b400018b0998/1562692856382/Alliance_BPGRSC_FINAL_20190606.pdf
- Dosal-Terminel, D., Chang, M. K., Carter, H., Jiang, A. J., Robertson, A., & Mason, E. C. M. (2024). A pilot implementation of affinity groups for White school counselors and its impact on antiracist practice: The experiences of group members. *Professional School Counseling, 28*(1a). <https://doi.org/10.1177/2156759X241234905>
- Edmondson, A. C. (1999). Psychological safety and learning behavior in work teams. *Administrative Science Quarterly, 44*(2), 350–383. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2666999>
- Fraiberg, S., Adelson, E., & Shapiro, V. (1975). Ghosts in the nursery. A psychoanalytic approach to the problems of impaired infant-mother relationships. *Journal of the American Academy of Child Psychiatry, 14*(3), 387–421. [https://doi.org/10.1016/s0002-7138\(09\)61442-4](https://doi.org/10.1016/s0002-7138(09)61442-4)
- Gilkerson, L. (2004). Irving B. Harris Distinguished Lecture: Reflective Supervision in Infant-Family Programs: Adding Clinical Process to Nonclinical Settings. *Infant Mental Health Journal, 25*(5), 424–439. <https://doi.org/10.1002/imhj.20017>
- Hardy, K. V., & Bobes, T. (Eds.). (2016). *Culturally sensitive supervision and training: Diverse perspectives and practical applications*. Routledge.
- Hardy, K.V., & Bobes, T. (Eds.). (2017). *Promoting Cultural Sensitivity in Supervision: A Manual for Practitioners* (1st ed.). Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315225791>
- Heffron, M. C., Grunstein, S., & Tilmon, S. (2007). Exploring diversity in supervision and practice. *ZERO TO THREE Journal, 28*(2), 34–38.
- Huffhines, L., Herman, R., Silver, R. B., Low, C. M., Newland, R., & Parade, S. H. (2023). Reflective supervision and consultation and its impact within early childhood-serving programs: A systematic review. *Infant mental health journal, 44*(6), 803–836. <https://doi.org/10.1002/imhj.22079>
- Huffhines, L., Silver, R. B., Low, C. M., Newland, R., Herman, R., Ramirez, I., Elwy, A. R., & Parade, S. H. (2024). Feasibility, acceptability, and preliminary effectiveness of a Reflective Supervision professional development series within early care and education. *Early Education and Development, 36*(5), 967–990. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10409289.2024.2424733>
- Irving Harris Foundation (2018). Diversity Informed Tenets for Work with Infants, Children, and Families. <https://diversityinformedtenets.org/about/the-tenets/>
- Lewis, L., Cribb Fabersunne, C., Iacopetti, C. L., Negussie-Retta, G., McBride, D., Irving, P., & Marbin, J. (2023). Racial affinity group caucusing in medical education—A key supplement to antiracism curricula. *New England Journal of Medicine, 388*(17), 1542-1545.
- Mosely, M. (2018). The Black teacher project: How racial affinity professional development sustains Black teachers. *The Urban Review, 50*(2), 267-283.

References

- Muraki, E. J., Atay, E. J., Chadwick, L., van der Wijk, G., Mori, C. M., Murry, A. T., & Exner-Cortens, D. (2024). Affinity and allyship groups to advance inclusion in postsecondary institutions: A systematic scoping review. *Journal of Diversity in Higher Education*.
- Noroña, C. R. (2020). A paradigm shift for group reflective supervision and consultation [Unpublished manuscript]. Boston, MA.
- Noroña, C. R., Heffron, M.C., Grunstein, S., & Nalo, A. (2012). Broadening the Scope: Next steps in reflective supervision training. *Zero to Three*, 33(2), 29-34.
- Pyles, L. (2018). *Healing justice: Holistic self-care for change makers*. Oxford University Press.
- Pyles, L. (2020). Healing justice, transformative justice, and holistic self-care for social workers. *Social Work*, 65(2), 178–187. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/48592320>
- Rice, D. K.-M. (2025). *Circle of stories: Exploring the experiences of Black infant and early childhood mental health professionals in reflective supervision/consultation* (Publication No. 4267) [Doctoral dissertation, Wayne State University]. Digital Commons @ Wayne State University. https://digitalcommons.wayne.edu/oa_dissertations/4267
- Shamoon-Shanok, R. (2009). What is reflective supervision? In S. S. Heller & L. Gilkerson (Eds.), *A practical guide to reflective supervision* (pp. 1–22). ZERO TO THREE.
- Shea, S. E., Jester, J. M., Huth-Bocks, A. C., Weatherston, D. J., Muzik, M., Rosenblum, K. L., & Michigan Collaborative for Infant Mental Health Research. (2020). Infant mental health home visiting therapists' reflective supervision self-efficacy in community practice settings. *Infant Mental Health Journal*, 41(2), 191-205.
- Shivers, E. M., & Arbel, Y. (2019). *An exploration of racial equity through the reflective process: Key equity findings from the 3rd Annual Reflective Supervision / Consultation Symposium*. Alliance for the Advancement of Infant Mental Health. <http://coaimh.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/Alliance-Equity-and-RSCSymposium-Eval-Report-v1-2-4-19.pdf>
- Shivers, E. M., Janssen, J. A., Subramaniam, A., Parker, A. L., Noroña, C. R., Lara, C., Best, D., Yazzie, D. A., Cimino, J., Kohchi, J., Fitzgibbons, S. (2022). *Digging Deeper: De-Colonizing Our Understanding and Practice of Reflective Supervision Through a Racial Equity Lens: First-Wave Findings*. Prepared by Indigo Cultural Center for the Alliance for the Advancement of Infant Mental Health. With funding from Perigee Fund.
- Simpson, T. E., Robinson, J. L., & Brown, E. (2018). Is reflective supervision enough? An exploration of workforce perspectives. *Infant Mental Health Journal*, 39(4), 478–488. <https://doi.org/10.1002/imhj.21719>
- Strong, L., Pittman-Polletta, M., & Vázquez-García, D. (2017). Creating critical racial affinity spaces for educators. In B. Picower & R. Kohli (Eds.), *Confronting racism in teacher education: Counternarratives of critical practice* (pp. 133–141). Routledge.
- Stroud, B. (2010). Honoring diversity through a deeper reflection: Increasing cultural understanding within the reflective supervision process. *Zero to Three Journal*, 31(2), 46–50.
- Stroud, B., Brent, T., Driver-Woods, M., & Wu, T. (2026). What supervisors are saying and not saying about culture, privilege and equity in mental health settings. *Infant Mental Health Journal*, 47(1), e70042.

References

- Tomlin, A.M., Hines, E., & Sturm, L. (2016). Reflection in home visiting: The what, why, and a beginning step toward how. *Infant Mental Health Journal, 37*(6), 617–627. [PubMed: 27870193]
- Weatherston, D. J., Kaplan-Estrin, M., & Goldberg, S. (2009). Strengthening and recognizing knowledge, skills, and reflective practice: The Michigan Association for Infant Mental Health competency guidelines and endorsement process. *Infant Mental Health Journal, 30*(6), 648–663. <https://doi.org/10.1002/imhj.20234>
- Weatherston, D.J. & Barron, C. (2009). *What does a reflective supervisory relationship look like?* In S. Heller & L. Gilkerson (Eds.), *A practical guide to reflective supervision*. Washington, DC: Zero to Three, 61-80.
- Zero to Three. (2025). *Preventing burnout in early childhood professionals: Practical self-care strategies*. <https://www.zerotothree.org/resource/preventing-burnout-in-early-childhood-professionals-practical-self-care-strategies/> (retrieved February 16, 2026).