Mitigating the stress effects of racism on health through youth empowerment
A Draft Report Prepared for the Tufts University Community Research Center

A. Specific Aims: The specific aims for this project did not change over the course of the grant. However, specific aim 3 (SA3) was modified. The initial intent of SA3 was to identify a Tufts University Faculty member interested in the study of racism and stress; instead a researcher at The Boston University School of Social Work was identified. There were two key factors that led to this modification, 1) the study PI moved from Tufts University to Boston University and 2) the community PI is an Alumnae of the BUSSW and helped to identify faculty at the school with scholarly interests in line with the pilot. Although this study is now being conducted by BUSSW, the PI is committed to crediting Tisch and TCRC for all previous and future contributions.

B. Studies and Results

1. Pilot and refine a psychosocial health promotion curriculum to improve the ability of youth of color to cope with the stress associated with racism.

Protocol Development. The study protocol was submitted to the Tufts University IRB for review. We ran into a number of challenges with the IRB submission, which took longer than expected. We had initially expected the IRB review would be expedited however there was major concern related to the content area of the study: stress and racism. Because we were prescreening participants to assure group mix and that the folks were "clinically appropriate", a number of red flags were raised. Due to these concerns of specifically targeting vulnerable populations, the intervention was put through a full IRB committee review. After addressing IRB concerns and sharing health center procedures for screening, we were able to continue with the intervention but behind schedule. (This was concerning as the end of the semester was approaching).

Sampling and Recruitment. We recruited a convenience sample of youth of color between the ages of 18 and 24. A flyer (attached for your review) was developed by a local youth from JP, who was employed by the PI. Flyers were sent through University and Community college listservers; Latino and Black student organizations were targeted. In addition, the flyer was sent out via the SJPHC health equity listserver. Over a 2-week period, we had 25 individuals inquire about the intervention, including individuals older than the targeted sample age range. One forty-year-old female said, "I had to call when I saw the flier", "I wish there was something like this for adults". Twenty participants were contacted by phone and pre-screened over the phone and those eligible for the intervention and available during the intervention time period were scheduled for an intake screening with the health center LICSW/group facilitator.

A key challenge for recruitment was the fact that the intervention started so late in the year which meant that it ran into the summer months. Many of the young people who inquired were college students who could not commit into the summer. In addition, the timing of the intervention was from 3pm-5pm and many individuals interested in participating had work commitments.

Intervention and participant retention. Despite the challenges a total of 8 youth (18-24) participated in the intervention over an eight-week period. Of the participants, 6 were female and 2 were male. All participants identified as people of color. Participants attended 10 sessions which included the following curricular elements: team building, affective response and the "Window of Tolerance", critical race theory and racial identity formation, awareness of racial

difference, cognitive behavioral techniques for self-care, role playing through the use of push back circles and health techniques such as ancestor questioning/journeying, guided meditations, breathing techniques, all developed based on the Racial Reconciliation and Healing curriculum. At the culmination of the group, youth reflected on their experience and developed messages for their peers, families members, and the broader community.

Participant perceptions of the intervention. We conducted pre/post interviews with the participants. Exit interviews were transcribed and key themes were identified. Overall participants reviewed the program extremely positively. Themes related to program benefits were identified at both the individual and peer group levels. At the individual level the benefits were related to racial identity development, improved mental wellbeing and career development/personal mobility; at the peer group level the benefits were defined in terms of creating safe spaces for groups to grapple with racism and its impact on their personal health and wellbeing. Sample quotes associated with the benefits can be seen in Table 1: Themes related to the benefits of the group.

Table 1: Themes related to the benefits of the group	
Theme	**Illustrative Quote**
Racial Identity Development	*They had us do ancestor quest and it was basically go out and talk to somebody in your family and you learn about the history of your ancestors and you know, people who walk your talk and things like that. And through that I learned a lot about myself and my family and someone who I had absolutely no idea existed in my family.*
Mental Health Benefits	*I liked the fact that she called us out on the fact that we're experiencing a certain particular emotion at this time and we may wanna jump on to the next topic but she was like hold on, what you're feeling right now, you need to feel that. Because you're so used to it, you've been socialized to feel it and move on but you've never really been taught to actually sit in that and to really analyze what's happening to you and why is it that you're so quick to move on to another topic or another issue instead of really identifying your emotions or anger.* *We don't allow ourselves to feel our anger, and if you don't feel your anger you can't heal from it. And in this place you are allowed to be angry. You are allowed to feel. You say "I have a feeling, I may not understand what feeling I am having, but I am having a feeling right now and I need to work through that." But I am allowed to do that, and in the real world I am not.*
Career Development	*As a person who is going forward in my education and my career, it is definitely valid and great information that I have taken away from the program.*

	It intrigued me to want to participate just cause of the topic and to see the correlation in of it and to see if there's any interlocking systems that can connect to me personally on a professional role, and as a student and, on a personal level so all together it was a great experience.
Affinity Spaces	*… I enjoyed working in an affinity and I want to be able to discuss things openly without worrying about offending someone or just whatever.* *… But the difference is when you are in an affinity like one you can racial analyze everything and everyone feels comfortable doing that because that is just like people of color tend to racial analyze everything because that is just how we are.*

2. Vet health promotion messages and materials developed by youth during a series of focus groups.

   Protocol. We developed a protocol based on the themes that emerged from the intervention group: Exploring youth perceptions of messages related to mitigating the stress effects of racism. Youth will be presented with the messages and asked to reflect and discuss their reactions.

   Focus Group Procedures. Groups were recruited and scheduled by SJPHC staff and interns. Youth ages 18-25 participating in health center programming were invited to participate in focus groups. Two groups were conducted one with youth who identified as people of color (POC) (facilitated by Dr. Sprague Martinez) and the other with youth who identify as white (facilitated by Ms. Abigail Ortiz). Participants are all between the ages of 18 and 30. A total of 9 participants took part in the POC group 4 male and 5 female, and 9 participants took part in the white group 3 male and 6 female. Groups were audio recorded and transcribed. Transcriptions were coded thematically and a codebook was developed.

   Key focus group themes. The group of people identified as people of color (POC) and the group identified as white shared themes on how they defined racism, but their self-reported personal awareness of and experience with race and racism differed. Both focus groups primarily identified racism as structural or systemic, citing police brutality and disparate health outcomes as examples. Both groups touched on cultural appropriation as a form of racism. Both groups talked about racism as being internalized. Participants in the POC group spoke to how racism can be internalized for POC, so that they think negatively about themselves and communities. The white group also spoke about internalized racism, but they addressed the way racist thoughts and behaviors can be internalized for white people.

   Both of the focus groups were asked how racism affected them personally. The focus group of people identified as people of color spoke about racism as something that was personally painful and stressful, while the white group did not. The white group instead brought up feelings of guilt. A theme in both groups was the degree to which they could choose to think about racism or not. Within the POC group, participants used terms such as "inescapable" and "unavoidable," while members of the white group spoke of how their attention to race and racism varied by setting. Facilitators asked both groups about potential recommendations. Members of the POC group spoke to the power of being able to name racism as it occurs

structurally, as well as the pain of being aware of these damaging and omnipresent systems. White group participants also talked about the benefits of having conversations about racism amongst whites, and a couple people emphasized the importance of white people being able to talk about their own feelings about race and racism.

Table 1: Themes related to the definition of racism		
Theme	**Illustrative quote from POC focus group**	**Illustrative quote from white focus group**
Structural/systemic	*…Our economy is built on racism and so like it doesn't surprise me, um to that it will continue to reproduce racism just by the nature of it and I'm also thinking about these aspects of health like environmental health and just where you live and all these things and how that inadvertently and it's also structural.* *I always thought racism was more interpersonal. If someone were to say something mean to me that was just racist. But it is more than interpersonal, it's more systemic, more structural. And I see the world differently now from a different lens*	*The first thing that popped into my head was, I was thinking about police violence. It's the image that came to my head when I hear the word racism, but when I think about it more, it gets more confusing…there's much more going on than stuff you can see, or stuff that can be on the news.* *I remember reading about Reagan and those political campaigns were so racialized and so blatant and like that still happens all the time. You want to sit there and be like well why do people think that or like where do those ideas come from that's the systemic part*
Stressful/painful for POC	*Ouch, I think of pain. I think of ignorance. I think of, um, things that are unfair and unjust.* *Trauma. Racism is really traumatic* *Go back to the shooting in Charleston South Carolina and being shot in a church like, that makes me wonder if I'm not safe in a church, am I safe anywhere else because of my skin color, that right there puts a stress on me like am I next being shot.*	
Internalized	*I've been thinking a lot about internalized racism and how painful that is and it so in my life um especially it makes you think of like family…and like*	*And my mom was like oh I don't have any implicit bias she like teaches at HPS about racism and gender issues so its like, oh ok, and then my dad was like oh I*

	sad *I would say racism impacts people of color to think negatively about themselves and their people*	*have positive feelings towards people of color… I was like this doesn't mean its ok, like I heard you say things that are uncomfortable*
Unavoidable/inescapable	*…I think about race all the time cause I feel like every single one of my decisions and actions is filtered through race* *Can't even escape it watching TV*	
Can choose not to think about it	*[talking about white people] they go by their day not having to think about their race unless they're In this space with others people color and race is brought up*	*I think it's a lot easier to notice interpersonal racism and even internalized racism. But because I'm not affected everyday by institutional and systemic racism, it's just like, it's a lot harder to think about that.* *I was with my friend, who's a woman of color and we went to this party and we were there for maybe two minutes and she said "There are too many white people like I can't deal with this, I'm like the only person of color" and I'm like I had not even noticed*
Cultural appropriation	*And there's also like for white people acting not white is like being cool*	*Cultural appropriation, are able to have dreadlocks and get a job. There's a saying, like a white person who has gone to prison is more likely to get a job than a black person who has not gone to prison.*
White guilt		*In this place while I been thinking about racism all the time, I was just felt so guilty, I didn't use any of my time for self-care or "Am I feeling okay?", I'm feeling guilty or, I didn't think about my feelings because I felt guilty for whenever I think about my feelings, which doesn't help you to get back at all*
Interventions	[Responding to a question about whether learning about systematic racism is helpful or hurtful] *I think for me it exactly mix. It helps in the sense that it*	*I appreciate everything you guys have said. It's been a while for me since I've been in a white affinity group space, but I have these conversations and every time I*

	allows me to stop being angry every single time that someone acts a certain way to me that's being racist but at the same time its systematic, structural and it has been for 400 years, makes me feel like its not going to change in my lifetime or anytime soon *And also having the vocabulary and the words and learn that racism and the systems and having words that describe the way that I feel or the way on how situations happen, being able to describe that and being able to name … and I think also can be pretty empowering and also having a community that I can talk to*	*learn something.* *How do you allow white people to feel some stuff but not at the cost of people of color having to deal with? How do we allow that to happen, so we can…? I feel like if you feel heard, then you would want to do something than if you feel like you're being told, like "You're bad…"*

3. Identify and build connections between Tufts University faculty studying racism and stress and the existing partnership.

We have identified two researchers at the BU School of Social Work whose research is focused on racism and health. Phillipe Copeland, PhD and Lisa Moore, PhD. Both are clinical faculty. The PI is currently working on developing a proposal targeting men of color with Dr. Copeland. In addition, Dr. Copeland participated in summer training for young men of color at SJPHC.

C. Plans
1. Prepare a manuscript describing the intervention and key themes for submission to the a social work practice journal.
2. Discuss more about what a prevention intervention might look like.
3. Apply for funding to scale up the intervention.