

Compassionate Regulation:

Building a Culturally Connected,
Future-Ready Workforce

March 25, 2025

Robert S. Wright, MSW, RSW

Land Acknowledgement and Greetings



Link to This Presentation



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Who is Robert Wright?

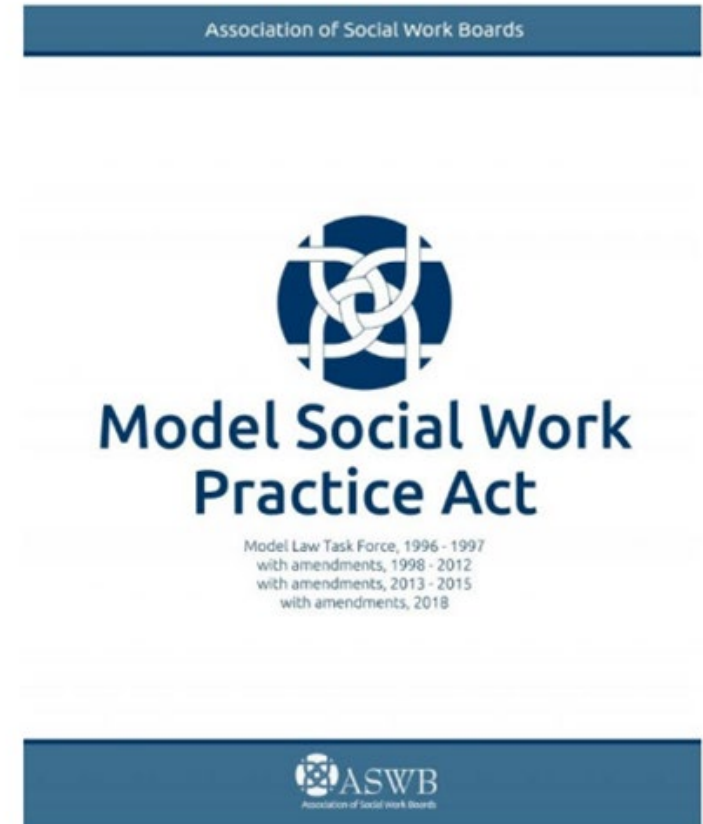
- A Queer, Black, Forensic Mental Health Clinician
- Director Emeritus The Peoples' Counselling Clinic
- Former:
 - Ex. Dir. The Peoples' Counselling Clinic
 - Ex. Dir. African Nova Scotian Justice Institute
 - Ex. Dir. Nova Scotia Child & Youth Strategy
 - Ex. Dir. Child Welfare Agency (Cumberland County)
 - Coordinator Race Relations DDSB
- Former Correctional Mental Health Worker (WSP)
- Creator: ManTalk, InsideOut, Open Intake Group Therapy for Perps of IPV
- Pioneer of Impact of Race and Culture Assessments



The Purpose of Regulation

1. Public Protection
2. Ensuring Competent Practice
3. Ethical Standards and Accountability
4. Professional Advancement
5. Social Justice and Advocacy

Though several, the first purpose is the main purpose that drives the others.



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The Dilemma

- Regulation advantages some and disadvantage others.
- Conversations about systemic racism is difficult in the face of push-back against DEI.

Regulation May Protect Some More Than Others

- Regulation may protect non-racialized persons more than others
 - “Despite all of the advancements in health care . . . , disparities based on race and ethnicity persist in access to health care, quality of care received, disease incidence and prevalence, life expectancy, and mortality.”(1)
- Racialized professionals may be disciplined more heavily than others
 - “After controlling for a number of other variables, Latino/a and Black physicians were both more likely to receive complaints and more likely to see those complaints escalate to investigations.”(2)

Standardized Tests May Disadvantage Some (3)

First-time clinical social work licensure pass rates

Between 2018 and 2021, Black test-takers had the lowest pass rates.

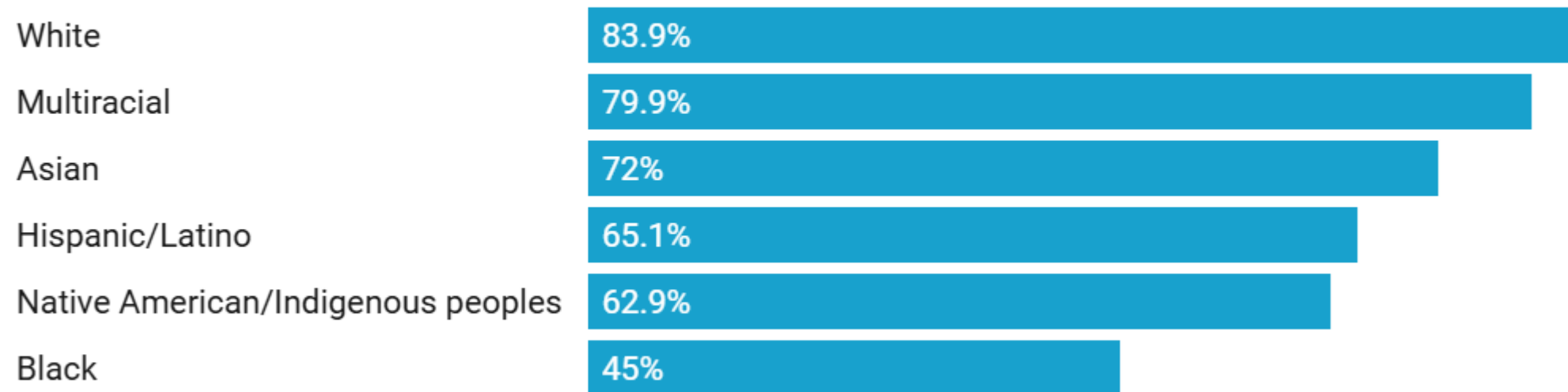


Chart: Farrah Mina • Source: Association of Social Work Boards • [Get the data](#) • Created with [Datawrapper](#)

The Cultural Competence & Reconciliation Imperative

- We regulate in the context of the socio-cultural consequences of the twin projects of First Nations' genocide and the enslavement of Africans
- Social workers and social work regulators must be live to this history and its continuous affect on clients and professionals alike

Compassionate Regulation in the Era of Reconciliation

- From 2007-2015 the Government of Canada conducted a Truth and Reconciliation Commission
- Sparked by the Indian Residential School Class Action Settlement
- Addresses the history of harm caused to Indigenous Peoples from first colonial contact until the present
- US has its own “Indian” Boarding School History



Helping Professionals Implicated

- From 1869 - 1960's hundreds of thousands of children in "Indian" boarding schools
- In 1960's child welfare replaced the 'civilizing' project of Indigenous children



Kent Monkman, *The Scream*, 2016.

Why Does Racism Persist?

- (Speaking of Dalhousie's Transition Year Programme) “Rocky and I were both speaking and we both said, quite independently, that if we knew it would last 20 years, we’d have done something else,” says Dr. [James] Walker, now a professor of Black Canadian history at the University of Waterloo. “We didn’t think we were starting another institution. We thought we could abolish racism or break the syndrome that was keeping kids out of school.” (Dal News, 2020)

Racism is Foundational to Our Culture

- The colonial enterprise was fueled by two separate projects:
 - The enslavement and genocide of Indigenous Peoples
 - The enslavement and transatlantic transportation of African Peoples
- Concepts of state and settler primacy over land was established
- Policing and detention infrastructure aimed at containing Black and Indigenous threat
- Black and Indigenous populations were settled largely on economically non-viable lands
- Public safety and helping professions not designed

Remember - Legal Foundations of Modern Racism

- Laws and theology of warfare hindered crusades (“just war”, “protection of innocents” etc.)
- New form of warfare necessary
- Dum Diversas – 1452
- Papal Bull by Pope Nicholas V authorizing Portugal to conquer and enslave Saracens and North Africans
- Foundation of the Doctrine of Discovery



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Dum Diversas (English Translation)

- we grant to you full and free power, through the Apostolic authority by this edict, to invade, conquer, fight, subjugate the Saracens and pagans, and other infidels and other enemies of Christ, and wherever established their Kingdoms, Duchies, Royal Palaces, Principalities and other dominions, lands, places, estates, camps and any other possessions, mobile and immobile goods found in all these places and held in whatever name, and held and possessed by the same Saracens, Pagans, infidels, and the enemies of Christ, also realms, duchies, royal palaces, principalities and other dominions, lands, places, estates, camps, possessions of the king or prince or of the kings or princes, and to lead their persons in perpetual servitude, and to apply and appropriate realms, duchies, royal palaces, principalities and other dominions, possessions and goods of this kind to you and your use and your successors the Kings of Portugal.

Racism's Effect on All Peoples

- On BIPOC Peoples
 - Historical Legacy of Underprivilege
 - Intergenerational Trauma
 - Post Traumatic Slave Syndrome**
 - The Advantage of Disadvantage

**Leary, J. (2017). Post traumatic slave syndrome : America's legacy of enduring injury and healing (Newly revised and updated ed.). Portland, Oregon]: Joy DeGruy Publications.

Racism's Effect on All Peoples

- On White People
 - White Privilege
 - White Supremacist Acculturation
 - Absence of Cultural Competence
 - White Empathy, White Guilt, White Fear*, White Fragility
- On BIPOC Peoples
 - Historical Legacy of Underprivilege
 - Intergenerational Trauma
 - Post Traumatic Slave Syndrome**
 - The Advantage of Disadvantage

*Spanierman, L. B., Todd, N. R., & Anderson, C. J. (2009). Psychosocial costs of racism to Whites: Understanding patterns among university students. *Journal of counseling psychology*, 56(2), 239–252.
<https://doi.org/10.1037/a0015432>

**Leary, J. (2017). Post traumatic slave syndrome : America's legacy of enduring injury and healing (Newly revised and updated ed.). Portland, Oregon]: Joy DeGruy Publications.

Cultural Competence: Definition

- Cultural competence refers to an ability to interact effectively with people of different cultures, and to manage and promote diversity and inclusion:
 - A. Acknowledge and address hostility towards diversity**
 - B. Understand our own cultural positions and how they differ from others
 - C. Understand the different social and cultural realities we work in
 - D. Cultivate appropriate attitudes towards cultural difference
 - E. Generate and interpret a variety of verbal and non-verbal responses
 - F. Understand structural oppression and commit to social justice
 - G. Cultivate the ability to manage diversity tensions and conflicts in a way that promotes inclusion and improved team effectiveness**

Towards Compassionate Regulation

- Regulators must confirm awareness of systemic racism
- Regulators must understand consequences of systemic racism on the peoples regulated and served by the profession
- Regulators should have pro-active programmes to engage historically marginalized peoples in regulatory decision making
- Regulatory leaders must be competent to facilitate conversations about racism
- Alternative paths to licensing should be considered for certain populations where indicated

Final Q&A



OPINIONS - 5¢
THOUGHTS FOR
THE DAY - 10¢
SOUND ADVICE - 25¢

1. Hall, W. J., Chapman, M. V., Lee, K. M., Merino, Y. M., Thomas, T. W., Payne, B. K., Eng, E., Day, S. H., & Coyne-Beasley, T. (2015). Implicit Racial/Ethnic Bias Among Health Care Professionals and Its Influence on Health Care Outcomes: A Systematic Review. *American journal of public health*, 105(12), e60–e76.
<https://doi.org/10.2105/AJPH.2015.302903>
2. California Research Bureau (2017). Demographics of disciplinary action by the Medical Board of California. Retrieved March 27, 2025, from <https://www.library.ca.gov/wp-content/uploads/2021/08/MedicalBoardDemographicsJan17.pdf>
3. Farrah, Mina (2022, September 20). Results in social worker exams reveal stark racial disparities. *The Imprint: Youth and Family News*. <https://imprintnews.org/top-stories/results-in-social-worker-exams-reveal-racial-disparities/173406#0>

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