

**Reducing Racial Bias in Student Opinions of Teaching through an Informational Primer**

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# **Reducing Racial Bias in Student Opinions of Teaching through an Informational Primer**

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The purpose of this inquiry was to examine the potential of an educational intervention used prior to students' completion of the Student Opinion of Teaching (SOT) survey to reduce racial bias. Guided by the understanding of implicit association, the aim was to reduce students' racial biases in SOTs. The inquiry was guided by one main question: *Can an informational primer on the purpose of SOTs prior the students' completion of SOTs mitigate racial bias?*

A two-group comparison design guided this inquiry, and the intervention was conducted in all courses taught by the instructors in a social work program at the University of Pittsburgh during the fall 2018 who had taught the same course in the fall of 2017. The eligible population for the inquiry included a total of 169 undergraduate students who were enrolled in the courses in 2018, compared to an enrollment of 178 students in 2017, the sample included in the inquiry totaled 75 students. Utilizing both quantitative and qualitative data from the SOTs, I utilized a mixed methods approach to the analysis of both sets of data, allowing the qualitative analysis to further contextualize the quantitative data.

The key findings from the inquiry revealed that students' ratings of instructor teaching effectiveness through the SOT may increase through the inclusion of an informational primer on the purpose of SOTs, how they are utilized by instructors and administrators, and examples of useful feedback. Additionally, as currently designed, the SOT items may foster student implicit

racial biases and the findings present a deeper understanding of the nature of perceived educational authority of the instructor by their students and its relationship with instructor race.

This inquiry identifies the need for better education for students, faculty, and administrators regarding the nature of SOTs, overall, not just its effect of implicit biases.

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## **Preface**

Thank you, Nicole, my wife, for your unwavering love and support throughout this process. Thank you to my children, Isabella and Rhys, for understanding the weekends and late nights away at study, and for the welcoming smiles whenever I got home. Thank you to my colleagues and mentors who provided continual guidance and motivation. Lastly, thank you Dr. Garcia for your unwavering commitment to my work and development as a scholar.

## 1.0 Overview

Racism, discrimination directed at others of a different race based on the belief that one's own race is superior, exists in all aspects of our society, including higher education (Delgado & Stefancic, 1993; Savas, 2014). Racism manifests itself in multiple ways on college campuses across the country, negatively effecting students of color as well as faculty and staff of color (Garcia, G. A., 2015; Harlow, 2003; D. G. Smith, Tovar, & García, H.A., 2012). The presence of racism in higher education directly limits the ability of colleges and universities, particularly predominantly white institutions (PWIs), to recruit and retain faculty of color, limiting their representation on college campuses across the United States (Delgado-Romero, Manlove, Manlove, & Hernandez, 2007; Kelly & McCann, 2014). In order to increase the representation of faculty of color on campus, racism is one of the many factors to be addressed.

While results are limited, efforts are underway to increase the number of faculty of color in higher education. As of 2016, full-time faculty are predominantly white, with white males and females representing a combined 76% of faculty, 41% and 35% respectively (McFarland et al., 2018). The remaining 24% of faculty in higher education are Asian/ Pacific Islander males (6%), Asian/Pacific Islander females (4%), Black males and Black females (each representing 3%), Latino males (3%), Latina females (holding 2% of faculty appointments) (McFarland et al., 2018). American Indian/Alaska Native and those who identify as multi-racial each make up 1 percent or less of full-time faculty (McFarland et al., 2018). While demonstrating some increases, the data show little success in the hiring of non-white faculty, especially when compared to the overall population of students of color on college campuses, which is increasingly more diverse (McFarland et al., 2018).

Moreover, faculty of color continue to experience various forms of individual and institutional racism after they are hired. The experiences of racism faced by faculty of color on college campuses are not limited to student-faculty interactions. Faculty of color experience racism through interactions with colleagues and administrators, including lower quality mentoring as junior faculty, and lower performance appraisals and corresponding promotions (Jackson-Weaver, Baker, Gillespie, Ramos Bellido, & Watts, 2010; Webber & Canché, 2015). The changing nature of student-faculty interactions more broadly, reflecting a greater sense of consumerism and privilege among students, also contributes to a challenging professional environment for these faculty of color (Austin Smith, 2016). Many experience direct challenges from students who question the credibility and authority of their Black and Latinx faculty both in the classroom and through formal evaluations of their teaching (Reid, 2010; W.A. Smith, Yosso, & Solórzano, 2011; Stanley, 2006a; Tuitt, Hanna, Martinez, Salazar, & Griffin, 2009).

Across higher education institutions (HEIs), Student Opinion of Teaching (SOT) surveys are part of the performance appraisal process, incorporated into promotion, retention, and tenure decisions as well as merit pay increases for faculty (Zhao & Gallant, 2012). Yet racism can directly effect how students rate faculty of color on these evaluations, resulting in lower evaluation scores than experienced by their White counterparts (Centra & Gaubatz, 2000; Harlow, 2003; Kogan, Schoenfeld-Tacher, & Hellyer, 2010; McPherson, Jewell, & Kim, 2009; Spooren, Brockx, & Mortelmans, 2013). The type of employment a faculty member has, generally either inside or outside of the tenure stream, correlates with the power the SOT has in promotion, retention, and tenure decisions as well as, for a growing number of contingent faculty members, contract renewal. Black and Latinx faculty are more likely than White faculty to have contingent employment contracts, increasing their vulnerability in challenges related to their teaching (Navarro, 2017).

The growth in contingent faculty appointments in higher education has been substantial, with contingent faculty now representing the majority of overall appointments (Bowden & Gonzalez, 2012; García, McNaughtan, & Nehls, 2017). This term “contingent” is used broadly to identify non-secure positions in higher education including those titled adjunct, non-tenure track faculty, part-time faculty, lecturers, and other clinical appointments of generally one year or less (American Association of University Professors, 2014). Studies have shown that contingent faculty are marginalized in their institutions, even being identified as receiving separate and unequal treatment (Cha & Carrier, 2016; Haviland, Alleman, & Cliburn Allen, 2017). Faculty of color are over-represented among the ranks of contingent faculty, and as such are more vulnerable to the pitfalls of the nature of the position (McNaughtan, García, & Nehls, 2017; Navarro, 2017). Women of all races are also disproportionately represented in contingent faculty positions.

### **1.1 Purpose of Inquiry**

In my current role as director of the undergraduate Social Work program at the University of Pittsburgh (Pitt), I am responsible for the leadership of the program including curriculum development, admissions, advising, and the delivery of instruction. As a contingent (non-tenure stream) faculty member, my performance measures include teaching two classes annually, academic and internship advising, and the overall implementation of standards for accreditation prescribed by both the Middle States Commission on Higher Education and the Council on Social Work Education (CSWE). As a member of the senior administration team for the School of Social Work (SSW), I also have a series of responsibilities supporting the overall attainment of the School’s research, service, and teaching goals. Since 2012, I have served as the chair of the SSW

adjunct (part-time, temporary contingent) faculty committee. This committee was established to support appointments of adjunct faculty in the SSW, which occurs on a semester-by-semester basis. From appointing and re-appointing adjunct faculty members for one-time teaching contracts, recruiting full-time faculty to teach undergraduate courses, and utilizing student feedback to inform curricular decisions, the SOT evaluation is a significant part of many of my administrative decisions. I review SOTs for each adjunct faculty member as part of the reappointment process.

At the University of Pittsburgh, the Office of Measurement and Evaluation of Teaching (OMET) administers online SOTs for every instructor/course except for those teaching in the School of Medicine and School of Pharmacy. The SOTs utilize student's opinions of their instructor's teaching abilities as part of the overall course evaluation. While the University does not require the SOTs, some form of annual course evaluation is an expectation. Students voluntarily complete SOTs online during the last three weeks of each semester. Each academic unit at the University of Pittsburgh utilizes a standardized bank of questions, approved by their respective faculty and administration, but faculty may also add their own questions as well.

Initially, I became aware of the existence of negative racial bias reflected in SOTs, both from some general review of the literature as well as discussions with colleagues. I had been unable to identify other ways to gather useful and meaningful feedback from students about their instructors, and continued to use SOTs to make employment decisions, despite these biases (Aruguete, Slater, & Mwaikinda, 2017; Bavishi, Madera, & Hebl, 2010; Reid, 2010). This problem crystalized for me when Carl Wieman (2014), the keynote speaker from the 2014 Provost's Assessment Conference at the University of Pittsburgh, utilized the following graphic to demonstrate the SOT challenge:



	Meaningful	Meaningless
Useful		
Useless		<b>SOTs</b>

This grid was followed by an explanation that deriving meaning from the SOT was limited due to student biases and their utility was limited by the lack of interpretation and application to strengthening teaching in many institutions of higher education. In summary, the goal should be to move SOTs towards becoming both a meaningful and useful assessment instrument. The SSW identifies specific diversity and inclusion goals, including the number of courses taught by faculty of color annually. This is reflective of our general commitment to inclusive practices as well as a commitment to equity and justice. Yet my ability to meet this goal may be restricted in part when utilizing a biased tool as part of the reappointment process for contingent/part-time faculty, who may also be people of color. Hence, the purpose of this inquiry was to determine if I could reduce the effect of racial bias on student assessments of faculty of color in the SSW. The following question guided this inquiry: *Can a primer on the purpose of Student Opinion of Teaching surveys (SOTs) prior to the completion of SOTs reduce racial bias?*

## 1.2 Overview of Inquiry Approach

This inquiry utilized a two-group comparison model focusing on courses taught by Black and White faculty in the SSW at Pitt (Engel & Schutt, 2017). Specifically, a pre-intervention/post-intervention comparison design was utilized to test the effect of a brief informational primer on the purpose of SOTs prior to the students' completion of the SOTs (APPENDIX A). The inquiry

included those students currently enrolled in any undergraduate (BASW) course taught by faculty members (tenure-stream and contingent) who also taught the same course in the fall of 2017. The faculty in this sample included three Black females, one Black male, two White males, and two White females. The absence of any Latinx or other historically underrepresented faculty within the SSW limited my design to inclusion of only Black and White faculty. The literature identifies both Black women and contingent faculty as being most directly effected by negative racial bias in SOTs (Kelly & McCann, 2014; Navarro, 2017; Turner, 2002).

Students were emailed an identical version of the SSW standard SOT via Qualtrics with an added informational primer, clarifying the purpose of the SOT and its utilization in the SSW (APPENDIX D). Nair, Adams, and Mertova (2008) identified several strategies in the literature to increase graduate student participation in SOTs, including the emphasis on students feeling their participation made a difference. In sensitizing students to the purpose of the SOT, the goal was more thoughtful responses that mitigated the effect of bias. A comparison with the SOTs completed by different students in the prior academic year, 2017, provided opportunity for analysis of the intervention.

### **1.3 Inquiry Setting**

Pitt is a state-related research-intensive university serving over 19,000 undergraduate and 9,000 graduate students on its main campus in the Oakland neighborhood of Pittsburgh. The university's annual operating budget is approximately \$2.1 billion (University of Pittsburgh, 2017). The state-relation designation includes an annual appropriation from the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania of approximately \$150 million (University of Pittsburgh, 2017a). Contingent

faculty play a large role in meeting the educational mission of the university. As reflected nationally in higher education, the umbrella term of “contingent faculty” is used to include all faculty appointments outside of the tenure stream, including part-time/adjunct, and full-time non-tenure stream appointments. In sum, the nature of these appointments does not afford the faculty who hold them with the protections of tenure, which is critical to academic freedom and speaking truth to power (Eagan, Jaeger, & Grantham, 2015). Adjunct faculty comprise 31% of all faculty appointments at Pitt. According to the University Factbook (2018), Black or African-American faculty represented 2.6% of all full-time faculty and Hispanic or Latinx faculty represented 3.3% during the 2017-2018 academic year.

### **1.3.1 School of Social Work (SSW)**

The SSW is a professional school offering degree programs at the baccalaureate, masters, and doctoral level to over 600 students annually. Established in 1918 with the creation of the Master of Social Work (MSW) program, the school grew to add a doctoral program, and then a Bachelor of Arts in Social Work (BASW) program. In the recent history, the school has operated consistently with an average of 34 total full-time faculty, 20 of whom are full-time tenure stream (TS) appointments. Fourteen faculty are contingent full-time, non-tenure stream (NTS) appointments. The school relies significantly on part-time contingent (adjunct) faculty to meet its educational mission, in part due to the high level of research productivity and the related teaching and advising buyouts among the full-time tenure stream faculty. The school employs approximately 60 adjunct faculty annually to teach individual courses.

The standard faculty workload policy requires a four-course annual teaching load divided equally between two courses per term, with reductions for administrative responsibilities

(primarily for NTS faculty) and extramural funding (primarily TS faculty). Two of the NTS faculty carry an exclusive focus on teaching, with an annual teaching load of nine courses. Adjunct faculty are contracted for one semester, with re-appointment contingent on performance and course availability.

### **1.4 Significance of Inquiry**

The aim of this inquiry was to address directly racial bias in SOTs. While one of several challenges Black and Latinx faculty may face in higher education, addressing racial bias in SOTs has the potential to remove a specific threat to their ability to retain employment in higher education. In addressing this one expression of racism in institutions of higher education the ability to recruit and retain Black and Latinx faculty may improve. Moreover, addressing racism is a moral imperative in higher education, with a surge in campus conversations about reparations, dialogues on the legacy of institutionalized racism , and diversity and inclusion efforts at the forefront of institutional planning across the nation (Georgetown University, 2016).

In higher education, Black and Latinx people are disproportionately represented among contingent faculty, representing 12% of part-time faculty compared to 10% of full-time appointments, and as such are more vulnerable, without the protections of tenure, to the effects of negative (racially biased) teaching evaluations from students (Caruth & Caruth, 2013; Navarro, 2017). The Pitt SSW is no exception, where 75% of the full-time Black female faculty (N=4) are employed as contingent faculty, and only one currently in a tenured position. At Pitt, efforts are underway to increase the overall experience of contingent (i.e. part-time) faculty. A February 22, 2017 report prepared by the Senate Ad-Hoc Committee on Part-Time Non-Tenure Stream (PT

NTS) Faculty was shared with the University Senate, providing a series of recommendations designed to improve working conditions for this group. The potential effect of this report in strengthening the employment of contingent faculty and reducing negative employment outcomes for faculty of color led to a review of organizational policy documents and an assessment of organizational climate (Louis et al., 2016). The opportunity to effect change in the institution is timely due to its connection with current institutional goals, specifically the recruitment of a world class diverse faculty (University of Pittsburgh, 2016).

The body of literature supporting the value of diversity in higher education is robust with demonstrated benefits to students and recognition of the value of diversity in enhancing learning outcomes (Gurin, Dey, Hurtado, & Gurin, 2002; Neville & Parker, 2017; Turner, González, & Wong, 2011; Turner, González, & Wood, 2008). Specifically within social work education, hiring a racially diverse faculty is a goal identified as directly supporting the preparation of practitioners for a diverse world (Edwards, Clark, & Bryant, 2012; Hughes, Homer, & Ortiz, 2012).

### **1.5 Definition of Terms**

The following terms are defined according to their use in this inquiry:

***Adjunct Faculty.*** Adjunct faculty are individuals hired to teach single courses in a given semester without guarantee of future employment (University of Pittsburgh, n.d.-a).

***Black.*** Black is used to identify African Americans, people of African descent or origin, as well as Afro-Caribbean descent or origin (Franco & Franco, 2016; McFarland et al., 2018).

***Contingent Faculty.*** Contingent faculty members hold insecure positions in higher education including adjunct, non-tenure stream faculty, part-time faculty, and other appointments

often lasting no more than two academic terms (American Association of University Professors, 2014).

***Latinx.*** Latinx is a gender-neutral term referring to people of Latin American origin or descent (Salinas & Lozano, 2017).

***Predominantly White Institutions (PWIs).*** PWIs are higher education institutions in which Whites account for 50% or greater of the student enrollment. PWIs recognized historically as exclusionary to people of color (Brown II & Dancy II, 2010).

***Faculty of Color.*** Faculty of color refers to Black, Latinx, and Native American faculty, recognized as underrepresented in higher education (J. M. Johnson, Boss, Mwangi, & Garcia, G.A., 2018).

***Tenure.*** Promotion to tenured rank constitutes recognition by the university that a faculty member's qualification by achievements and contributions to knowledge as to be ranked among the worthiest of the members of the faculty engaged in scholarly endeavors. This appointment provides secure employment in an effort to secure academic freedom (University of Pittsburgh, n.d.-a).

## **1.6 Delimitations of Inquiry**

Several delimitations apply to this inquiry. The faculty included in this inquiry are a specific group sharing several demographic characteristics. This inquiry focuses specifically on student opinions of Black and White faculty and did not include Latinx or other historically underrepresented faculty. The inquiry did not include non-binary or gender non-conforming faculty. This is specifically tied to the faculty composition within the SSW. Similarly, this inquiry

did not include faculty from other disciplines, emphasizing the inquiry setting directly in my program.

The students participating in this inquiry shared several characteristics. This inquiry did not include students taking courses other than social work courses. This inquiry also did not include students from other academic institutions. The inquiry did not include a baseline identification of students' existing racial biases, nor their experiences with Black people prior to the intervention. This inquiry also did not collect demographic information on individual student participants.

## **1.7 Conclusion**

The way students evaluate faculty on SOTs can be effected by racial bias and can ultimately limit professional opportunities for faculty of color. The aim of this inquiry was to test an intervention utilizing pre-SOT intervention to explore a more just way to assess faculty performance in the classroom for faculty of color in the SSW at Pitt. Although the issue of racial bias effects all faculty of color, this project specifically addressed the experiences of Black faculty in the SSW at Pitt.

## **2.0 Literature Review**

In this chapter I present a review of the literature used to frame the inquiry. The aim of this literature review was to understand the ways in which racial bias is manifest through SOTs and the corresponding effects this has on faculty of color. The SOT was studied within the context of the larger experience of faculty of color. This review of racial bias was conducted under the assumptions laid out by Critical Race Theory (CRT), which center race and racism as core issues to be addressed. While the theory guiding this inquiry is grounded in Greenwald's (1995; 1998a, 1998b; 2003; 2009) work on implicit association and social cognition, CRT provides a lens for understanding the historical and contemporary reinforcement of white supremacy through systems, including those in higher education. The review specifically addressed three areas: the experiences of faculty of color in higher education, faculty of color and SOTs, and student's understanding of SOTs and in particular their understanding of effective teaching. In order to deepen my understanding of the proposed intervention, I also reviewed literature on the nature of implicit bias and the effect of training and information on addressing it.

### **2.1 Experiences of Faculty of Color in Higher Education**

Of the 1.6 million faculty employed by post-secondary, degree-granting institutions in 2016, only 24% identified as people of color, including 6% identifying as Black and less than 5% as Latinx (McFarland et al., 2018). A recent study of 40 highly selective research intensive universities found that Black, Latinx, and female faculty are underrepresented relative to their U.S.



population shares, whereas Asian, White, and male faculty are overrepresented (Li & Koedel, 2017). This study used new data to examine racial-ethnic and gender diversity, and wage gaps, across fields to assess the university's value for and recognition of a faculty member's contribution to diversity. The study also looked at representation across disciplines, intentionally including both STEM and non-STEM disciplines. The overrepresentation of Asian, White, and male faculty is driven primarily by the STEM fields. Of most importance, the study reveals that, at a time when universities are receiving increased pressure to hire a more diverse faculty, wages of underrepresented faculty do not include financial incentives that recognize the role they play in achieving this goal.

While the number of faculty of color in higher education has slowly increased during the past 30 years (from 9% of faculty positions held by faculty of color in 1985 to 24% in 2016) progress is still slow. Faculty of color are underrepresented in comparison to students of color on college and university campuses (McFarland et al., 2018; Tuitt et al., 2009). This underrepresentation can be both reflective of and contribute to some of the negative experiences of faculty of color in HEIs (Cora-Bramble, 2006; Daley et al., 2011; Ho, Thomsen, & Sidanius, 2009). It is also important to note that Black faculty at Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCU's) currently represent 96% of all tenured Black faculty, meaning Black faculty are highly segregated in HBCUs (Crichlow, 2017). This hyper-concentration provides context for national data, tempering the perceived strides in employment for faculty of color, particularly for Black faculty in PWIs.

There are multiple reasons why the representation of faculty of color is not equitable in comparison to their overall representation in the U.S. population and does not match the population of students of color. Challenging work environments for people of color in academia may be one

reason, often taking root in the early stages of careers when successful professional trajectories are established. Mentoring is recognized as a strong contributor to successful careers in academia (Austin, 2002). Yet studies have shown that mentoring provided to graduate students of color is limited, particularly when compared to their white counterparts. Ultimately, this affects their trajectory in the academy (Brunsma, Embrick, & Shin, 2017; Brunsma, Feagin, & McKinney, 2003). Many faculty of color who are able to secure faculty positions face workload challenges that can also negatively affect the scholarly productivity necessary for them to secure tenure and promotion (Allen, Epps, Guillory, Suh, & Bonous-Hammarth, 2000). Faculty of color are also more likely than their white counterparts to have additional teaching and advising responsibilities as well as increased service responsibilities tied to diversity and other multi-cultural initiatives (Louis et al., 2016). Finally, Black and Latinx faculty are more likely than Whites to have contingent employment contracts, increasing their likelihood of experiencing challenges related to their teaching, including the questioning of authority and overall competence by students (Caruth & Caruth, 2013; Navarro, 2017).

Faculty of color experience racism in several forms on a daily basis (Louis et al., 2016). These experiences negatively affect not only overall personal well-being but their ability to succeed professionally. The literature specifically identifies racial microaggressions, racial battle fatigue, and the management of bicultural identities as critical manifestations of racism in the academy that faculty of color report most often. Next, each of these themes are explored in depth, broadly framing the contributions to and effects of racially biased SOTs.

### 2.1.1 Racial Microaggressions

Racial microaggressions are experienced by people of color in every aspect of life, with institutions of higher education being no exception. “Racial microaggressions” are defined as a series of mini-assaults that are challenging to clearly identify due to their indirect, subtle, or often unintentional nature (Brunsma et al., 2003; William A Smith, Allen, & Danley, 2007). They reflect much of the changing displays of racism since the Civil Rights movement, where more overt behaviors were replaced with covert or aversive interactions presentations (Dovidio, Gaertner, Kawakami, & Hodson, 2002). They are commonplace and, coupled with the negative perceptions they convey, create a cumulative negative effect for people of color including reduced confidence in professional abilities and even higher mortality rates (William A Smith et al., 2007; Sue et al., 2007). The term “microaggressions” was found in the literature as early as 1977, identifying both the action and its negative effect on people of color (Pierce, Carew, Pierce-Gonzalez, & Wills, 1977). Microaggressions, while identified as often unintentional and challenging for individuals to prove, are not limited or insignificant experiences, with dozens reported on college campuses annually (Garcia, G.A., & Johnston-Guerrero, 2015; McGee & Martin, 2011).

Sue et al. (2007) describe microaggressions as a “death of a thousand cuts” and found in three forms: microassault, microinsult, and microinvalidation. The *microassault* can be identified in its intentionality and direct action-orientation, commonly reflected in the use of slurs or other visible acts (Sue et al., 2007). *Microinsults* are more subtle in their presentation, such as correlating ones achievement with quota or affirmative action programs (Sue et al., 2007). The *microinvalidations* negate the experiences of minoritized people (Sue et al., 2007). The ability to address these incidents are limited and can have a cumulative impact on the targeted

group/individual (Gordon & Johnson, 2003). Microaggressions are often denied by Whites, many of whom are unable to connect their seemingly innocuous racism with their self-identified non-racist identity (Wong, Derthick, David, Saw, & Okazaki, 2014). According to Wong et al. (2014), “The role of perpetrators is an important factor to consider when addressing the dynamics of racial microaggressions. Oftentimes, racism is perceived as a problem among racial minorities, and in order to fix racism, it is up to the targets to overcome their perceived discrimination rather than examining the role of the perpetrators” (p. 194).

These three versions of microaggressions are common experiences for faculty of color and can be detrimental to their productivity and overall well-being (Cora-Bramble, 2006; Cora-Bramble, Zhang, & Castillo-Page, 2010; Tuitt et al., 2009). Experiences with microaggressions are also not limited to early- or mid-career academics of color. Black faculty at the rank of full professor continue to experience microaggressions throughout their post-tenure experiences (Croom, 2017). A study of high-achieving Latinx faculty found that microaggressions were a consistent theme throughout their academic experiences, beginning in undergraduate education and continuing through their careers as faculty (Solórzano, 1998). Unfortunately, faculty of color experience racial microaggressions across institutional types including public, private, research intensive, and those focused on the liberal arts (Eagan & Garvey, 2015; Louis et al., 2016). Stanley’s 2006 study utilizes qualitative interviews with 27 faculty of color, who identified issues around teaching, mentoring, identify, service, collegiality, and racism. This study noted the limited availability of empirical research on the teaching experiences of faculty of color in higher education, but highlighted several studies reporting negative interactions with students both inside and outside of the classroom. These included student evaluations of teaching. The use of auto ethnographic data from 27 contributing authors provided a specific, first person perspective that

Stanley analyzes further. Utilizing critical race theory as a framework for analysis, the study is grounded in the “normative standard of Whites”, supporting the challenges experienced by faculty of color in teaching white students. Teaching is identified as the strongest theme of the study, with students challenging faculty authority (Stanley, 2006a).

The literature notes people of color in higher education are subjected to microaggressions and experience higher stress levels and related depressive symptoms (Huynh, 2012; Torres, Driscoll, & Burrow, 2010). These symptoms can be misinterpreted by supervisors and other administrators as dissatisfaction or incompetence, furthering the insult and injury to faculty of color and potentially resulting in poor performance appraisals and termination (Young, Anderson, & Stewart, 2015).

The experiences of racial microaggressions have a cumulative negative effect on both personal well-being and professional performance for people of color. One of the presentations of this negative effect is Racial Battle Fatigue (RBF). Paradoxically, the physical and psychological symptoms of RBF can also be interpreted by others as indicators of dissatisfaction, mistrust, and lack of capacity to be professionally successful (W.A. Smith et al., 2011).

### **2.1.2 Racial Battle Fatigue**

Racial Battle Fatigue (RBF), the cumulative harmful mental and physical result of microaggressions, has a negative effect on people of color (Franklin, Smith, & Hung, 2014; Smith, Mustaffa, Jones, Curry, & Allen, 2016; Steele, 1997). The symptoms of RBF are expressed physically through headaches, elevated blood pressure, trembling and stomach pain (W.A. Smith et al., 2011). The psychological responses to racial battle fatigue can include emotional withdrawal as well as physical avoidance, exhaustion and anger (William A Smith et al., 2007).

Certain academic disciplines, including social work, have been found to foster increased experiences with racism for faculty of color, and consequently RBF. Faculty of color are disproportionately represented in social sciences in higher education, including over 15% of faculty of color in education departments (Li & Koedel, 2017). In many cases, these disciplines will include content on diversity and inclusion, oppression, and privilege. A 2013 study found the “emotional labor” of minoritized instructors in delivering diversity education often requires one to regulate feelings/emotion at a greater rate than their white counterparts, contributing to racial battle fatigue (Schueths, Gladney, Crawford, Bass, & Moore, 2013). This study analyzed two years of SOTs of 29 who taught required diversity courses at PWIs. The qualitative analysis of emotional themes in the open-ended responses found more negative student feedback for faculty of color, and in particular female faculty of color.

The effect of RBF on the promotion and tenure process for faculty of color is also detrimental. In some PWIs, the symptoms of RBF can negatively affect professional relationships, particularly with white colleagues, as demonstrated by Arnold, Crawford, & Khalifa (2016). The ability to address incidents of discrimination are limited and cumulatively impact the targeted group/individual. Arnold, Crawford, & Khalifa introduce the role of racial battle fatigue (RBF) in the promotion and tenure process for faculty of color through a narrative study of two faculty of color. . This narrative provides in-depth insight into the effect of racial microaggressions experienced by faculty of color throughout their tenure in the academy. Their cumulative fatigue was expressed in the identification of likability or congeniality as factors influencing their promotion and tenure. These criteria, not expressly identified in formal policies, represent the potential for racial bias to limit the advancement of faculty of color. This study also found that likability or congeniality are often informally utilized as criteria influencing promotion and tenure

decisions; criteria representing the potential to limit the advancement of faculty of color (Arnold et al., 2016).

As previously noted, racial microaggressions have a cumulative negative effect on overall well-being for people of color. The resulting symptoms can be aggregated to form Racial Battle Fatigue, creating challenging interpersonal relationships and obstacles to successful work performance when not acknowledged, particularly by White colleagues. These experiences with racism and their negative effects on well-being results in the creation of coping strategies by people of color, including the creation of bicultural identities.

### **2.1.3 Bicultural Identities**

The literature identifies many coping strategies used by people of color to withstand the efforts of racist actions to reinforce their identity as “others” within the institution. Constantine (2008) identifies one of the challenging results of racial microaggressions as the push and pull of parallel feelings of invisibility and hypervisibility. The establishment of bicultural identities allow individuals to switch between “the ethnic culture where he was born and raised and the university culture where he has found professional success” (Sadao, 2003, p. 398). The norms of university culture reflect the male-dominated, Euro-centric, middle-class, and heterosexual values and norms of the majority of members of the academy in particular in PWIs. These norms reinforce the othering of faculty of color with the expected appearance of the professoriate. Bicultural identities help faculty of color negotiate these norms in higher education. An article by Martinez & Welton (2015) explored the pre-tenure experiences and identity of faculty of color, drawing from the study of 12 participants in predominantly white institutions (PWI). These participants were identified from a larger study of the experiences of 55 pre-tenure faculty of color, specifically selecting those

with roles in education leadership. The authors conducted semi-structured interviews to gather information on background, path to education, preparation, and challenges these faculty faced. The analysis included the creation of bicultural identities that helped them negotiate the PWI. These faculty were regularly reminded of their lack of “fit” with the expected appearance of the professoriate. In many ways, this aligns with the ability to “code-switch” in differing cultural settings (Hill, 1999). The suppression of culture and identity has been utilized by faculty of color as a means of mitigating racism in higher education (Martinez & Welton, 2015). While these strategies are often a necessary response to racist environments, their effectiveness can be limited in addressing the core issues.

## **2.2 Faculty of Color and Student Opinions of Teaching**

Student Opinions of Teaching (SOT) were created as a formative tool, used to help adapt and modify instruction (Driscoll, 2009). In the 1970s this tool moved to a more summative use, providing data for use in personnel decisions (Spooren et al., 2013). The current model of evaluation of teaching, primarily focused on the student evaluator through the SOT, may not properly assess some of the stronger indicators of quality teaching: current knowledge of the content area, active delivery that promotes critical thinking and student involvement in the learning process, positive student-teacher interaction, effective assessment, regular and specific feedback, rigorous evaluation, and meaningful use of classroom technology (Lakin, 2016). Moreover, the identification of positive student-teacher interaction has been directly tied to student perceptions of faculty humor, which has nothing to do with effectiveness in teaching (Richmond, Berglund, Epelbaum, & Klein, 2015).



Student feedback is more valuable when it assesses the attainment of learning goals and outcomes, rather than teaching style alone. The accuracy of student evaluations has been studied since their adoption in higher education without consensus developing on their validity (Clayson, 2009; Wright, 2006). While many have been supportive, often from the perspective of the student as consumer, Pratt (1997) argues that, while valuable, the questions asked of students are “not useful for assessing the effects of teaching” (p. 35). Alternatives have been explored, including the utilization of free-form text as a tool for better understanding faculty instructional performance (Stupans, McGuren, & Babey, 2016).

Importantly, the student-driven evaluation may invite racial bias, which has been identified in the literature related to the experiences of faculty of color in higher education (Anderson & Smith, 2005; Martinez & Welton, 2015; G. Perry, Moore, Edwards, Acosta, & Frey, 2008; Tatum, Schwartz, Schimmoeller, & Perry, 2013). Racial bias may influence how students rate professors on SOTs resulting in an evaluation that is inherently racist (Centra & Gaubatz, 2000; Harlow, 2003; Kogan et al., 2010; McPherson et al., 2009; Spooren et al., 2013). In the case of the SOT, the institution chooses to use this tool – a practice – as a formal part of personnel decisions – a policy – risking the non-renewal of faculty of color, with contingent faculty being the most vulnerable (Dixson & Rousseau, 2005; Ladson-Billings, 1998). When viewed through the lens of Critical Race Theory (CRT) the institution is sanctioning the use of a tool (the SOT), that may invite racial bias as a summative assessment utilized in personnel decisions.

The accuracy of SOTs has been rigorously debated independent of their effect on faculty of color, with specific challenges to their ability to assess instructor performance (García, H.A., McNaughtan, & Nehls, 2017). There is a relatively limited amount of literature that directly addresses racial bias in SOTs and faculty color, much of the literature presents SOTs as an element

of the experience of being “othered” in higher education (Benton & Cashin, 2012; G. Perry et al., 2008).

Several studies build upon a body of literature addressing the existence of gender bias in student perceptions of their instructors, extending this to ethnicity and race. Anderson and Smith (2005) focused on how race intersected with gender and teaching style, asking undergraduate students to evaluate instructors on both disposition (warmth/availability) as gendered traits and subject expertise/teaching effectiveness. Students gave their Latinx faculty lower ratings on these evaluations, with their findings supporting the existence of racial bias, specifically perceived negative ratings of Latinx faculty (Anderson & Smith, 2005).

The cognitive nature of bias in SOTs for faculty of color builds from an identified subset of professor behaviors, including smiles, gestures, and mannerisms that are correlated with positive student evaluations. The interpretation of these gestures is further complicated by racial, gender, and other bias against perceived “others” in higher education (Merritt, 2008). This is often reflected in the open-ended sections of the evaluations for faculty of color: being too loud, intimidating, and having a personal bias against the students (Harlow, 2003). These are much less present in the evaluations of White faculty, and in particular White male faculty (Reid, 2010). Tuitt et al. (2009) addresses issues of diminished credibility in the classroom for faculty of color.. This collective narrative of five junior faculty of color reveals that students’ challenging them in the classroom serves as a predictor of later low SOTs. The article includes a poignant narrative of the experiences of teaching in a PWI including more overt racist attacks from students that serve as a direct challenge to instructor authority and may reflect racial biases (Sue et al., 2007).

Negative SOTs for faculty of color can also have a direct financial impact. For example, perceptions of instructor beauty, often correlated with racialized views, are directly correlated with

faculty earnings (Hamermesh & Parker, 2005). McPherson and Jewell (2007) found not only the existence of bias against racially minoritized faculty, but also the ability of instructors to raise their SOT scores by inflating their student's expected grade. As such, they have proposed a system of adjustment of SOT scores by race to offset this disadvantage (McPherson, 2006; McPherson & Jewell, 2007; McPherson et al., 2009).

### **2.3 Students Perception of SOTs**

The rise of the use of SOTs in higher education has been significant since the 1970s, with over 80% of institutions now utilizing them as a primary source of instructor evaluation (Bi, 2018; Kolitch & Dean, 1999). The study of SOTs can be found in the literature as far back as the 1920s, with a publication by Remmers and Brandenburg (1927). This study explored student view of their professors' instruction utilizing data from the Purdue rating scale. The study's goal was to understand the accuracy of student responses, comparing them to both alumni and fellow enrolled students. Over the next 90 years, the study of SOTs was significant in the literature and corresponded to the growth in utilization in HEI's (Bi, 2018). SOTs received a significant amount of inquiry particularly throughout the 1970s with many of these studies concluding SOTs were an accurate assessment of teaching ability (Greenwald, 1997; Marsh, 1987). As an instrument, the SOT is useful administratively, particularly given the ease with which it is implemented use of primary stakeholder (student) feedback. However, the accuracy of that feedback, particularly based on students' understanding of the assessment and effective teaching, is debated throughout the literature.

More contemporary studies have questioned students' ability to accurately assess effective teaching. This is of particular note in several studies that found positive student ratings of instructors were strongly associated with their anticipated grade in the class (Barth, 2008; McPherson, 2006; McPherson et al., 2009). Students have also been shown to provide instructors with lower ratings when academic rigor and standards are higher (Barth, 2008). One of the most notable studies reflecting the lack of student capacity to evaluate instructors effectively was published by Ambady and Rosenthal (1993). In this study, students were asked to complete SOTs on faculty members based on a 30 second silent video recording of the faculty member teaching a course. These scores were compared to the end-of-semester SOTs completed by students enrolled in the full course with the instructors and were found to be a strong predictor of overall student ratings. The seemingly shared expectation of instructor affect and demeanor among students based on both limited and extensive interactions may reflect a limited understanding of what constitutes effective teaching. In spite of this, many students believe they can accurately assess instructor effectiveness (Balam & Shannon, 2010; Galbraith, Merrill, & Kline, 2012).

Moreover, students' perceived utility of SOTs is a strong reflection of their understanding of the instrument. A study by Beran, Violato, Kline, and Frideres (2009) found that students identified value in course selection as a primary benefit of SOTs. Unlike online student rating websites like "Rate My Professor", many HEIs do not make SOTs publicly available thus negating the primary value students identify and creating an incongruence between the purpose of SOTs and the potential aim of student feedback (Helterbran, 2008). These factors bring into question students' ability to accurately assess effective teaching, and to clearly understand the purpose of the SOT. The role students' biases may play in their assessment further contributes to the challenges of utilizing the results of SOTs.

## 2.4 Theoretical Framework: Implicit Bias

Theory is utilized in research to help researchers make meaning of reality as well as support the prediction of behavior in conditions (Engel & Schutt, 2017). Our current understanding of implicit bias builds upon historical studies of prejudice. The study of prejudice in psychology is long and storied. The emphasis of Gordon Allport's ground breaking book *The Nature of Prejudice* (1966) provided analysis on the basis of discrimination and group behavior, as well as a series of policy recommendations on how to address them. The role of prejudice, implied negativity through attitude, emotion, or behavior against a group is often used synonymously with racism (Allport, 1966). For the purpose of this inquiry, the methods will draw from literature on prejudice with the clear understanding that racism requires power and aims to oppress (Bell, 1995; Knowles & Prewitt, 1969). Understanding the cognitive nature of prejudice provides context for the proposed intervention: to provide students with an informational intervention in an effort to reduce or eliminate racial bias from the evaluations of their Black instructors.

One contributor to these prejudices is uncertainty, which can be increased when interacting with people of different identities (Stephan, Stephan, & Gudykunst, 1999). Uncertainty, defined as the perceived inability to predict and/or explain the feelings, behaviors, attitudes of others, can reduce people's conscious awareness of biases within intergroup interactions including communication (Stephan, 2014; Stephan & Stephan, 2017; Stephan et al., 1999). Seeing the SOT as a communication between student and instructor can provide context for the expression of racial bias and the need for mindful participation in the completion of the SOT (Neuliep, 2017). The lack of student understanding of the SOT process generally can also contribute to fostering of prejudices and biased interpretations of instructors' effectiveness.

Greenwald, and Banaji's (1995) work on implicit social cognition furthered an understanding that social behavior is unconscious in fashion, including stereotyping. This work resulted in the Implicit Association Test (IAT), measuring the role of negative and positive associations (Greenwald et al., 1998, 2003). Of particular interest was the ability to identify implicit racial biases among those who publicly state an anti-racist view (Greenwald & Banaji, 1995). This research demonstrated most Americans display a pro-White/anti-Black bias (Dovidio et al., 2002; Greenwald et al., 1998; Sriram & Greenwald, 2009). Interestingly, Greenwald also examined the SOT during this same period, exploring the validity and usefulness of the instrument based on his own evaluations (Greenwald, 1997). The identification of implicit biases and efforts to address them has moved forward in public service professions like police and public education, as well as private sector businesses and health care (Staats, Capatosto, Tenney, & Mamo, 2017). A study by Shaked-Schroer, Costanzo, and Marcus-Newhall's (2008) on capital murder trials and race sought to reduce juror bias towards Blacks. Their work specifically addressed juror instructions as a contributing factor in racial bias and found greater clarity in the instructions provided a reduction in the juror's bias (Shaked-Schroer et al., 2008). In this study, jurors were provided with either a White or Black defendant, and either a standardized or clarified version of juror instructions. The clarity of instructions was demonstrated to effect White jurors' negative racial biases influencing recommendation of the death penalty for Black defendants.

Various efforts to address and reduce implicit racial bias in higher education have been attempted in recent years. Trainings for faculty have been utilized to identify and reduce the racial biases they carry when working with students (Suarez, 2016). Racial bias creates interpretations of behavior that negatively affect people of color which may continue into post-secondary education settings (Staats et al., 2017). The IAT has also been utilized in higher education as a

teaching tool, helping students understand the nature of implicit bias and how it affects their behavior (Hillard, Ryan, & Gervais, 2013). A study of over 3,500 medical school students found that implicit racial bias towards Blacks was decreased through health disparity training and minority health curriculum as well as through the general act of completing the IAT (van Ryn et al., 2015). A general understanding of the development of the study of implicit racial bias provides an identification of one specific contribution to racist behavior. By diagnosing this cognitive phenomenon and connecting it to an outward behavior, the literature has identified knowledge as an intervention to change the racist behavior.

## **2.5 Conclusion**

Faculty of color experience institutionalized racism in many ways, grounded in long-standing racial stereotypes, and manifest both inside and outside of the classroom, thus limiting the employment and retention of faculty of color in higher education. This review of the literature identified several key themes documenting the existence of racism in institutions of higher education though often manifest in less overt ways than the historical outright segregation of students and faculty of color. Today's racism in higher education is more subtle, often having a cumulative effect on minoritized faculty. The specific use of subjective assessment instruments for teaching, including the SOT evaluations, is one way that racism may be institutionalized. SOTs, as currently constructed, may not properly assess some of the stronger indicators of teaching quality and put assessment in the hands of students whose knowledge of effective teaching is limited (Lakin, 2016; Marsh, 1987). While useful when viewed from the perspective of the student as consumer, the questions asked of students may not be useful for assessing the effects of

teaching (Pratt, 1997). Through an understanding of the phenomenon of implicit association and its connections to several of the forms of racism experienced by faculty of color, an intervention focused on greater clarity of the purpose of SOTs presents a targeted opportunity to address this issue.



### **3.0 Method of Procedure**

The purpose of this inquiry was to examine the potential of an informational intervention used prior to students' completion of the SOT to reduce racial bias. Guided by the understanding of implicit association, the aim was to address racial biases implicit in SOTs. Grounded in Implicit Association Theory, the inquiry was guided by one main question: *Can an informational primer on the purpose of SOTs prior the students' completion of SOTs mitigate racial bias?* In this chapter I will first present the setting of the inquiry, followed by a review of the epistemology, or theory of knowledge, guiding the inquiry. Next I review my reflexivity as a scholar and practitioner in this inquiry. A review of the inquiry approach follows, with a presentation on the intervention utilized as well as the sample, data sources, and analysis conducted. Finally, I present the limitations of the study, identifying limitations in the method/approach, setting and sample, and the analysis.

#### **3.1 Inquiry Setting**

The University of Pittsburgh (Pitt) is a state-related research-intensive university that serves over 19,000 undergraduate and 9,000 graduate students at its main campus (University of Pittsburgh, 2018). Established in 1787, Pitt now operates across five campuses, including four additional branch campuses in Bradford, Greensburg, Johnstown, and Titusville Pennsylvania. These campuses are not included in the inquiry but have the potential to be affected by the findings. With an annual operating budget of approximately \$2.1 billion, the state-relation designation

includes an annual appropriation from the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania of approximately \$150 million annually (University of Pittsburgh, 2017a). Pitt offers 156 undergraduate and graduate certificates, 110 baccalaureate degrees, 148 master's degrees, and 103 doctoral degrees through 17 schools and colleges; Dietrich School of Arts and Sciences, College of General Studies, Katz Graduate School of Business, School of Education, Swanson School of Engineering, School of Law, Graduate School of Public and International Affairs, School of Social Work, School of Computing and Information, College of Business Administration, School of Dental Medicine, School of Nursing, School of Pharmacy, Graduate School of Public Health, School of Health and Rehabilitation Sciences, and the University Center for Social and Urban Research (University of Pittsburgh, 2018).

Pitt employs over 4,300 full-time faculty and an additional 750 part-time faculty (University of Pittsburgh, 2018). Over 3,100 (72%) of these faculty are identified as white (University of Pittsburgh, 2018). Data is not available on the percentage of faculty appointed in tenure-stream and contingent positions, yet contingent or adjunct (part-time) faculty play a large role in meeting the educational mission of the university. According to the University of Pittsburgh Factbook (2018), Black or African-American faculty represent 2.6% of all full-time faculty and Hispanic or Latinx faculty represent 3.3% of all full-time faculty. Racial breakdowns are not available for adjunct faculty. This representation is even lower when compared to overall faculty diversity in higher education where 6% identify as Black and 2% as Latinx (National Center for Education Statistics, 2017).

The Plan for Pitt is the current guiding document for the University, the result of a multi-year strategic planning process (University of Pittsburgh, 2016). Of the six pillars of the plan, the goals of increasing diversity and inclusion are driven by a specific focus on recruitment and

retention of a diverse faculty (University of Pittsburgh, 2016). This work began prior to the establishment of the Plan for Pitt. In 2011, then Provost Patricia E. Beeson convened a Task Force on Enhancing Faculty Diversity, charged with developing recommendations to increase the recruitment and retention of a diverse faculty. Several recommendations were generated by the Task Force including mentoring programs, diversity training, and the formation of standing diversity committees at the unit level to focus on the recruitment and retention of a diverse faculty. The continued utilization of a racially biased SOT evaluation tool may undermine the achievement of this overall goal and several diversity initiatives across the institution.

### **3.1.1 School of Social Work**

The School of Social Work (SSW) is professional school at Pitt offering degree programs at the baccalaureate, master, and doctoral level to over 600 students annually. The baccalaureate and master's programs are accredited by the Council on Social Work Education (CSWE), providing guidance for the school's organizational structure and curricular decisions through the Educational Policy and Accreditation Standards (Council on Social Work Education, 2015). These standards include a specific emphasis on diversity, as highlighted in Educational Policy 3.0:

The program's expectation for diversity is reflected in its learning environment, which provides the context through which students learn about differences, to value and respect diversity, and develop a commitment to cultural humility. The learning environment consists of the program's institutional setting; ... program leadership; ... and the demographic make-up of its faculty, staff, and student body (Council on Social Work Education, 2015, p. 14).

This standard also requires that reaffirmation documents include a clear description of how, “The program describes specific plans to continually improve the learning environment to affirm and support persons with diverse identities” (Council on Social Work Education, 2015, p. 14).

The school currently employs 34 total full-time faculty, of whom 20 are full-time tenure stream (TS) appointments and 14 under the contingent faculty umbrella as full-time, non-tenure stream (NTS) appointments. These faculty are 60% female and 40% male; 32% Black, 63% White, and 5% Asian. The contingent faculty are 85% female and 35% Black while the tenure stream faculty are 45% female and 30% Black. There is only one Black woman in a tenure stream appointment compared to 6 Black men. There are no faculty in the SSW who identify as Latinx or Native American.

All faculty operate under a workload policy requiring a four-course annual teaching load (two courses per term), with reductions for administrative responsibilities and extramural funding primarily for NTS faculty and TS faculty, respectively. As a result of these reductions, the school employs part-time contingent (adjunct) faculty to teach courses in the BASW and MSW programs, in response to the significant research productivity and the related teaching and advising buyouts among the TS faculty. Contingent faculty (NTS or adjunct) do not teach in the doctoral program. The school contracts with as many as 60 adjunct faculty each academic year to teach courses. Each adjunct faculty member is contracted on a semester-by-semester basis with their re-appointment based on both performance and course availability.

### **3.1.2 Office of Measurement and Evaluation of Teaching**

The Office of Measurement and Evaluation of Teaching (OMET) at Pitt administers online surveys, SOTs, for every instructor/course except for the School of Medicine and School of

Pharmacy. The SOTs utilize student's opinions of their instructor's teaching abilities as part of the overall annual evaluation of courses. While the SOTs are not required by the University, some form of annual course evaluation is required. SOTs are automatically generated for every instructor and every course that meets the minimum enrollment requirement and are voluntarily completed by students online during the last three weeks of each semester. Students receive emails to their Pitt email address with a link to the survey that can also be accessed through their academic portal and the University's course management system, CourseWeb.

Standard survey forms are used for each School or department, approved by the School or department based on governance policies of each School. Instructors may select questions from a question library and/or add custom questions. Student survey responses are confidential, and the Office does not release information on survey participants. The complete results (numerical and comments) of the survey are available to the instructor, after final grades are submitted for the term. OMET may release results to another individual (usually a School or department administrator) if an established policy by faculty and/or administration has been agreed upon and reported in writing to OMET. The release to the instructor always occurs before the release to the School/department administrator. The University retains electronic copies of OMET results for ten years (University of Pittsburgh, 2017b).

### **3.2 Epistemology**

My approach to this inquiry followed a professional and personal commitment to social justice and anti-racism, viewing the world through the transformative paradigm, most commonly aligned with research that engages diverse communities, (Mertens, 2007). This transformative

paradigm is represented in the scholarship of critical theorists as well as minoritized populations (Mertens, 2015). The epistemology of the paradigm includes a cultural lens and assessment of power in knowledge, which is central to multicultural research (Kagawa-Singer, 2000; Mertens, 2015).

Although my worldview is transformative in nature, I also utilized a post-positivist approach in this inquiry in order to test an intervention utilizing a two group comparison design (Engel & Schutt, 2017; Mertens, 2015). This inquiry was best supported by this paradigm as it furthers the positivist view of an objective reality but recognizes that a full and complete understanding of reality is impossible (Engel & Schutt, 2017). The post-positivist approach guides the researcher's ethical behavior focusing on respect for privacy and informed consent, as well as justice and equal opportunity (Mertens, 2015). While this paradigm generally applies to quantitative research methodology, the alignment with an interventionist approach is clear in this inquiry (Mertens, 2015). The post-positivist approach may increase the successful dissemination of findings within the institution. In merging these approaches, the inquiry used a more pragmatic paradigm supporting a mixed methods analysis of both the quantitative and qualitative data sources in the inquiry (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2017; Mertens, 2007).

### **3.3 Reflexivity**

Berger (2015) identifies reflexivity as "...the process of a continual internal dialogue and critical self-evaluation of researcher's positionality as well as active acknowledgement and explicit recognition that this position may affect the research process and outcome" (p. 220). As a white, cisgender male administrator in an academic discipline that is predominantly not, it is

important for me to understand clearly the role my privilege plays in this research (McIntosh, 1988; Williams, 1992). The field of social work both as a profession (over 80% identify as female) and academic discipline (over two-thirds identify as female) is predominantly female (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2018; Holosko, Barner, & Allen, 2016). My position as a faculty member in the system of higher education that continues to be white and male dominant (also matching my social identities) will require a clear reflexivity strategy in order to maintain an understanding of my own biases. This inquiry, therefore, is in line with my desire to disrupt racism within my work place.

The literature identifies three ways in which my identity can affect the inquiry: level of access to participants, amount and depth of information provided by research participants, and the effect of my identity on the development and analysis of the inquiry (Berger, 2015). First, the ability to access participants may have been influenced by my identity. I share common personal characteristics with many of the participants in the intervention (students). As a member of the social work faculty, and a graduate of both baccalaureate and graduate social work programs, students may see a shared experience and be more likely to participate. This may be coupled with my sharing of many of the participants' experience, as a white student at a PWI, both currently and in my previous two degree programs. The undergraduate student body in the SSW is 70% White, with 2% of students identifying as Latinx and 12% as Black. The Graduate program is 73% White with 11% identifying as Black and 4% as Latinx. The students could also, conversely, see me as an administrator with power over their academic experience including grading and graduation, which may limit their participation in an effort to mitigate their racist beliefs when assessing their Black instructors. I also identify with the Black faculty members who will participate, which is most likely due to my shared professional role as a colleague in the School

and their roles as teachers in the undergraduate program which I direct. My colleagues understand me as a person who is sympathetic to the experiences of people of color and racism (Berger, 2015).

Second, the number of participants who choose to respond, and the depth of their responses to open-ended questions, is effected by the researcher's identity (Berger, 2015). Student responses to the SOT evaluation may have been influenced by my position, as identified in the preceding section. Social work students have been shown to evolve in their understanding and appreciation of the concept of white supremacy over the course of their education (Swank, Asada, & Lott, 2001). Yet, the depth of responses may be affected by their status as student (undergraduate/graduate) as well as prior experiences and personal characteristics. Finally, a researcher's identity has an effect on both the development of an inquiry as well as the analysis or making meaning of findings (Berger, 2015). As mandated by my professional affiliation as a social worker I carry a commitment to social and economic justice (2017 NASW Delegate Assembly, 2017). Additionally, my lived experiences both as a recipient of the benefits of white supremacy as well as my multiracial family influenced the lens through which I made meaning of the inquiry results (Berger, 2015). With this inquiry, I was actively trying to disrupt racism and bias in SOTs and used my own reflexive lens to do so.

### **3.4 Inquiry Approach/Methods**

For this investigation I used the approach of a two-group comparison model design. Guided by the post-positivist paradigm, this design seeks to establish a causal relationship in an observable phenomenon (Mertens, 2015). The two-group comparison focused on courses taught by Black and White faculty in the SSW. The inquiry was guided by the following:



1.  $O_{1W} > O_{1B}$  In 2017, White faculty SOTs are higher than Black faculty SOTs
2.  $O_{1W} = O_{2W}$  There is no difference in White faculty SOTs scores in 2017 and 2018
- 3.a.  $O_{1B} < O_{2B}$  In 2017, Black faculty SOTs in 2017 are lower than Black faculty SOTs in 2018 after the intervention.
- 3.b.  $O_{2B} = O_{2W}$  There is no difference in Black and White faculty SOTs scores in 2018

In an effort to more clearly explore causation, the following model was used:

White Faculty  $O_{1W} X O_{2W}$

Black Faculty  $O_{1B} X O_{2B}$

The baseline observation ( $O_1$ ) was the instructor's fall, 2017 SOTs. A brief, online intervention ( $X$ ) followed immediately by a SOT survey ( $O_2$ ) was delivered to a different group of students in the same courses with the same instructors via Qualtrics. The online intervention was embedded in the Qualtrics survey and was required to review prior to moving to the SOT survey. The aim of this design was to assess if increased understanding of the SOT (intervention) is introduced, racial bias is reduced (outcome). I used an informational primer delivered online to the students prior to their completion of the SOT. During the final week of the fall 2018 academic term I delivered the intervention online (informational primer) to students in each of the selected courses with the goal of mitigating negative racial bias in students' responses on SOTs. Appendix A provides a general model of the research design and Appendix E provides a transcript of informational primer.

The following steps were completed in the implementation of this inquiry. The SOT is an existing instrument coordinated by the OMET at Pitt. I developed an identical version of the current SOT evaluation utilized by the SSW using Qualtrics and delivered it to students in each of

the courses taught by the participating instructors. Prior to receiving the email, each student received a document requesting their participation (APPENDIX C). With the students' consent, they received the request to participant via an email, with a link to the survey. The SOT was completed by students during the final week of the fall, 2018 academic term. This schedule allowed for the OMET-delivered SOT to also occur over the final three weeks of the semester. The students were notified of the need to complete the OMET SOT. Each iteration of the SOT was expected to take students 10-15 minutes to complete and was completed voluntarily outside of the classroom by students on their own time.

### **3.5 Sample**

#### **3.5.1 Faculty**

The sample included all students currently enrolled in any undergraduate (BASW) course taught by a full-time (tenure-stream and contingent) faculty member who also taught the same course in the fall of 2017. This allowed for a sample of eight courses. The faculty teaching these courses identified as: Black female (n = 3), Black male (n = 1), White female (n = 2), and White male (n = 2). The faculty were contacted via a recruitment letter (APPENDIX B). Seven of the faculty who were approached for this inquiry are all full-time employees with the SSW, although one is employed in a staff capacity and teaches one course annually contracted as an adjunct faculty member (Table 1).

**Table 1 Instructor Sample**

<b>Instructor</b>	<b>U/G Course(s) and attributes</b>	<b>Employment Status and Professional Background</b>
Black Female A	1 Course – open to students pursuing the social work major and minor. 2017 Enrollment – 14 students. 2018 Enrollment - 11 students.	Full-time, PhD, NTS clinical faculty member with 10 years' experience in the SSW.
Black Female B	1 Course – upper level course for students completing their final year of study. 2017 Enrollment – 25 students. 2018 Enrollment - 25 students.	Full-time, MSW, NTS clinical faculty member with 3 years' experience in the SSW.
Black Female C	1 Course – upper level course for students completing their third year of study. 2017 Enrollment - 21 students. 2018 Enrollment - 20 students.	Full-time, MSW, staff member with 6 years' experience in the SSW. Adjunct clinical faculty member hired annually to teach course for 12 years.
Black Male A	1 Course – upper level course for students completing their final year of study. 2017 Enrollment – 15 students. 2018 Enrollment - 17 students.	Full-time, PhD, TS faculty member with over 25 years' experience in the SSW.
White Female A	1 Course – upper level course for students completing their final year of study. 2017 Enrollment – 21 students. 2018 Enrollment -16 students.	Full-time, PhD, TS faculty member with over 20 years' experience in the SSW.
White Female B	1 Course – open to students pursuing the social work major and minor. 2017 Enrollment – 15 students. 2018 Enrollment - 14 students.	Full-time, MSW, NTS clinical faculty member with 8 years' experience in the SSW.
White Male A	1 Course – open to students pursuing the social work major and minor. 2017 Enrollment - 36 students. 2018 Enrollment - 37 students.	Full-time, PhD, TS faculty member with over 25 years' experience in the SSW.
White Male B	1 Course – open to students pursuing the social work major and minor. 2017 Enrollment – 31 students. 2018 Enrollment - 29 students.	Adjunct, MSW clinical faculty member hired annually to teach course for 3 years.

The reliability and validity, or trustworthiness of an inquiry, focuses on the evidence that the results were caused by the intervention (Engel & Schutt, 2017). As required by the design of the inquiry, the sample was bounded to undergraduate instructors who taught the course in the previous year.

### 3.5.2 Students

The intervention was conducted in all courses taught by the instructors during the fall 2018 who had taught the same course in the fall of 2017. The eligible population for the inquiry included a total of who 169 were enrolled in the courses in 2018, compared to an enrollment of 178 students in 2017. Based on the 2018 response rate, the sample included in the inquiry totaled 75 students. Student response rates in 2018 were slightly below the 2017 observation, as shown in Table 2 below.

**Table 2 Student Response Rate Overall in Percentage**

	<i>N</i> – Total Students	<i>M</i> %
Response Rate 2017	178	46.2038%
Response Rate 2018	169	45.3313%

Overall the students enrolled in the courses in 2017 identified as 84% female and 16% male, compared to 87% female and 13% male in 2018. Racially, 13% of the students identified as Black, 2% Latinx, and 6% Asian in 2017, with 79% identifying as White. In 2018, 13% of the students identified as Black, 3% as Latinx, and 5% Asian, with 79% identifying as White. Demographic data was not collected on participants as part of the SOT intervention as it was unavailable in the 2017 data. Students in each of the classes were presented with an opportunity to

choose participation through a process of ensuring informed consent (APPENDIX C). Informed consent is the assurance that “potential research study participants have sufficient information about the costs and benefits of participating in the study, what their participation involves, and their rights as participants in the study to make an “informed decision to participate” (Engel & Schutt, 2017, p. 439). The informed consent document followed the requirements for IRB approval (APPENDIX H), clarifying the confidential nature of their participation, ensuring the privacy will be protected, ensuring any identifying data provided will not be associated with them directly (Mertens, 2015).

### **3.6 Data Sources**

The standard SOT instrument for the SSW Teaching Survey (University of Pittsburgh, n.d.-b) includes a series of closed-ended questions utilizing a five point Likert scale related to the students’ perceptions of their instructors teaching effectiveness (APPENDIX D). Example questions include:

- The instructor treated students with respect. (Hardly at all/To a small degree/To a moderate degree/To a considerable degree/To a very high degree).
- Express your judgement of the instructor’s overall teaching effectiveness. (Ineffective/Only fair/Competent/Well above average/Excellent).

An additional set of closed-ended questions utilizing a five-point Likert scale questions is included, related to the students’ perceptions of the course. Example questions include:

- Course content covered stated objectives. (Hardly at all/To a small degree/To a moderate degree/To a considerable degree/To a very high degree).

- Lectures contributed how much to your learning. (Hardly at all/To a small degree/To a moderate degree/To a considerable degree/To a very high degree).

The survey also includes two open-ended questions related to teaching effectiveness. Lastly students are asked to self-rate using two closed-ended questions (APPENDIX D). The student responses to the 2017 and 2018 SOTs were the data source for this inquiry.

### **3.6.1 Informational Intervention**

An online informational intervention was delivered to each student prior to the completion of SOT. Nair, Adams, and Mertova (2008) identified several strategies in the literature to increase graduate student participation in SOTs, including the emphasis on students feeling their participation made a difference. In sensitizing students to the purpose of the SOT, the supposition is that it will result in more thoughtful responses and mitigate bias (Shaked-Schroer et al., 2008; Stephan, 2014; Stephan et al., 1999). The use of SOTs within the SSW, including the emphasis on formative assessment was presented to students via a brief informational primer to the SOT (O2). This primer was adapted from the University of Michigan Center for Research on Learning and Teaching (University of Michigan Center for Research on Learning and Teaching, n.d.). (Appendix G)

## **3.7 Data Analysis**

This section describes the data analysis process for this inquiry. The inquiry utilized a mixed methods approach to analyze the data. Specifically, the inquiry focused on analysis of the

quantitative and qualitative data independently, which were then converged to make meaning of the data and identify findings (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2017). This approach to data analysis was selected due to the presence of both quantitative and qualitative data within the SOT, as well as the opportunity to gain a more completed understanding of the question guiding this inquiry (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2017).

All items on the SOT were analyzed, providing an opportunity to study responses to both close-ended scaled and open-ended responses. Testing the mean scores on the close-ended questions provided greater variability and was be the primary focus of analysis. The data analysis focused on both the use of descriptive statistics of overall SOT scores on the Likert scale questions as well as descriptive thematic analysis of open-ended student responses. The coding of open-ended student responses was deductive, allowing themes to emerge from the raw data (Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 2014). A specific approach for both the scaled questions and open-ended questions follows in more detail, reflecting the importance of this approach.

### **3.7.1 Quantitative Data Analysis**

Analysis of the quantitative data was completed utilizing the SPSS software package, analyzing the data utilizing descriptive statistics. Descriptive statistics are used to describe the distribution of and relationship among variables (Agresti, Franklin, & Klingenberg, 2017). Each of the Likert scale questions in the SOT reflects a quantitative variable, a characteristic observed in the inquiry. Likert scales specifically utilize discrete variables, due to their finite values (Agresti et al., 2017). In this inquiry mean score, the average of the variable, was utilized to provide a measurement of change as a result of the intervention. The standard deviation further analyzed the distribution of the data, telling how the measurements were spread out from the mean value

(Agresti et al., 2017). A significance test is a method used to analyze the evidence against or in support of the intervention's effect, providing a probability ( $p$ ) value (Agresti et al., 2017). The  $p$ -value test was applied to the mean scores. In addition, a t-test was conducted to establish the existence of statistically significant difference between the groups (Mertens, 2015).

The opening analysis focused on means testing utilizing a Paired Samples T-Test. This analysis

looks at the means for the paired questions across the two observation points. Correlations were also tested utilizing the Paired T-Test to compare mean scores for each item at each observation point. Means testing was also conducted via the Paired T-Test to compare mean scores for each item at each observation point, by race.

### **3.7.2 Qualitative Data Analysis**

Analysis of qualitative data provides the opportunity to make meaning observations, documents, interviews found in research participants (Miles et al., 2014). Miles, Huberman & Saldana (2014) identify a three stage process for qualitative data analysis; data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification. In order to condense the data, a coding of open-ended answers related to both instructor effectiveness and overall course evaluation was conducted. Data were displayed in column format, representing raw data followed by preliminary codes and final coding (Saldaña, 2009). The inquiry was grounded in Implicit Association Theory and supported the identification of themes in the data, but not exclusively.

Coding of qualitative data allows the researcher to make further analysis possible by “chunking” data in to different concepts or themes (Miles et al., 2014; Padgett, 2008). According to Padgett, “Coding and thematic development are the most commonly used analytic procedures



in qualitative research” (2008, p. 151). The use of open coding begins with concepts from the inquiry area to guide initial identification of key concepts (Saldaña, 2009). The inquiry utilized a focus on implicit racial bias, negative associations with race, to build the coding scheme. The Implicit Association Test (IAT) utilizes images of different races and pleasant (caring, thoughtful) and unpleasant (hurtful, angry) in an effort to identify implicit racial biases in participants (Greenwald et al., 1998). During this stage of data analysis, code labels should be brief and avoid professional jargon (Padgett, 2008). These two areas provided the coding scheme for the open-ended SOT responses, followed by a more refined identification and classification of racially-biased content. Numbers and quantification in qualitative analysis can be utilized to support descriptive statistics, but may be misleading if used in the interpretation of data (Padgett, 2008). As such, I utilized the qualitative findings to contextualize the quantitative data in lieu of demonstrating density of themes through quantification.

Peer debriefing and support is an effective process in reducing the threat of research bias in qualitative studies (Padgett, 2008). A peer-debriefing process was utilized to provide feedback on analysis and support credibility of findings, specifically engaging a scholar (Lincoln & Guba, 1986). The coding process was reviewed with two colleagues in the SSW who have expertise in qualitative research. In addition, my adviser provided additional support in overall analysis and the prevention of research bias.

The open-ended survey includes four items seeking student opinion on strengths and weakness of the instructor, as well as strength and weakness of the course. The themes presented in the open-ended questions we identified through the deductive coding process, beginning with an identification of response themes across all instructor’s classes. General themes were identified and “chunked” across the entirety of the data set for both strengths and weaknesses of the

instructors. The instructor strengths were reflected in three broad themes: professional experience; knowledge; and empathy. Positive opinions of the instructor and/or course were attributed to the instructor's level of professional experience and the sharing of that experience in the classroom. Additionally, the instructor's subject knowledge or expertise was also represented. Empathy terms identified strengths in the instructor's warm or caring affect was by far the most cited instructor strength. Instructor weaknesses had a greater variety of comment areas, with two key thematic areas identified, disorganization, followed by responsiveness to students.

Following the independent analysis of both datasets, the data were viewed in relationship to each other. The mixed methods analysis converged both the qualitative and quantitative data allowing for a deeper interpretation of the SOT ratings during the findings (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2017).

### **3.8 Limitations**

This inquiry had several limitations that must be identified. It is critical in any inquiry to identify limitations, clarifying the focus of the inquiry and avoiding the presentation of a "perfect" study (Mertens, 2015). This section will provide an identification of limitations in methods, sample, and analysis.

#### **3.8.1 Limitations of the Method/Approach**

In choosing a two-group comparison design, some of the scholar-practitioner benefits of both improvement science and action research were lost. The ability to utilize improvement cycles

and iterative processes to enact incremental change may increase the likelihood of sustained change (Nolen & Putten, 2007; *The six core principles of improvement*, n.d.). The design has also been critiqued for studying what can be clearly observed, drawing from the dominant white cis-gendered male perspective of the positivist and postpositivist scholars and the historical limited inclusion of people of color (Fisher & Kalbaugh, 2011; Mertens, 2015). The limitations of this approach also included the strength of the intervention. The sample is an additional limitation, with only two racial and gender groups included (Black/White, male/female). Generalizability can be limited without a broad inclusion of racial groups (Mertens, 2015).

### **3.8.2 Limitations of the Setting and Sample**

With regard to the inquiry setting, only one University (the Oakland campus of Pitt) was included in this design. Similarly, only one academic unit was included in this inquiry (SSW), and only one academic discipline was represented in both the area of inquiry for students and academic training for the faculty members. Moreover, only Black and White faculty employed in the SSW at Pitt participated as well as those identifying as binary male or female. This inquiry, therefore, did not look at this same phenomenon with other faculty of color (i.e., Latinx and Native American) or with non-binary faculty within other academic areas and/or at other institutions of higher education. The academic unit does not currently employ any Latinx faculty, limiting their opportunity for inclusion in the inquiry.

The sample included students only within the SSW, threatening internal validity. Selection bias is identified as “The lack of similarity between groups may offer an explanation for an experiment’s findings as opposed to the effect of the independent variable (mindfulness mediation) on the dependent variable (racial bias in SOTs) (Engel & Schutt, 2017, p. 157). The ability to

randomly assign students is restricted by the focus on specific faculty members' courses taught in a specific semester.

### **3.8.3 Limitations of the Analysis**

The quantitative analysis was limited by the overall size of the study, with limited ability to interpret statistical changes in a significant way. Coding is an intellectually demanding activity. Co-coding is a team-based approach to coding and is effective in utilizing consensus through comparison of results to; identify what is worthy of being coded, the words or phrases used to label the code, and the definition of the code and identification of what is not included (Padgett, 2008). While peer debriefing was utilized to support internal validity, it did not provide the level of depth of analysis providing by a co-coding approach.

## **3.9 Conclusion**

The purpose of this inquiry was to examine the potential of an informational intervention used prior to students' completion of the SOT to reduce racial bias. The intervention reflects the scholar-practitioner approach endorsed by the Carnegie Project for the Education Doctorate in its ability to directly affect a problem of practice facing the researcher (Perry, 2015). A two-group comparison design guided this inquiry, and the project is grounded in Implicit Association Theory. Utilizing both quantitative and qualitative data from the SOTs, I utilized a mixed methods approach to the analysis of both sets of data, allowing the qualitative analysis to further contextualize the quantitative data (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2017).

## 4.0 Findings

In this chapter, I present the findings of this inquiry, focused on the way which an educational intervention may influence students' opinions of their instructors through a two-group comparison model: a group of students' opinions of their instructor in 2017 and a different group of students' opinions of the same instructor teaching the same course in 2018. This inquiry includes both quantitative and qualitative data from the SOT, which were analyzed independently and then converged for interpretation and findings. The intervention was an informational primer which provided students in the fall 2018 courses with examples of useful feedback and clarification on the purpose and use of SOTs within the SSW. Several themes emerged from the mixed methods analysis of the data, which when viewed through the theoretical lens of implicit bias which guided this inquiry, reveal potential strengths and limitations of the intervention.

First, I present findings that address the main inquiry question. Specifically, I show that instructor scores were higher in 2018 than in 2017, following the intervention, and that there were differences based on instructor race and classification (contingent/tenure stream). The two-group comparison model, utilizing different groups of students in the pre- and post- intervention, limits the ability to establish a causal relationship, yet the findings are worth considering for this inquiry.

To further answer the inquiry question, I describe the three items that had the largest mean score increase for Black faculty. These three items are each further contextualized by converging qualitative data, specifically quotes that connect to the themes presented in the three items (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2017). I also incorporate findings on instructor weaknesses identified by students. The integration of quantitative and qualitative data from the SOT in this inquiry provided

multiple layers of understanding of the main themes and revealed ways in which the student scoring of both their Black and White instructors may have been influenced by the intervention.

#### **4.1 Student Ratings of Instructors**

The data reveal a change in student ratings of their Black instructors following the intervention at a higher rate than their White colleagues. Although not statistically significant, increases in mean scores were observed in nearly 90% (17/19) of the items in the SOT for Black faculty, compared to 53% (10/19) of the items in the SOT for White faculty. Means testing was conducted via the Paired T-Test to compare mean scores for each item at each observation point (2017 and 2018), by instructor race. Standard deviations (SD) and Standard Error Mean (SE) were also analyzed. A sample of each data set is presented in Table 3 and Table 4 below, the full tables can be found in Appendix E and Appendix F.

**Table 3 Paired Sample Statistics, Black Instructors, all SOT Items**

<b>SOT Item</b>	<b>Year</b>	<b><i>M</i></b>	<b><i>SD</i></b>	<b><i>SE</i></b>
The instructor presented the course content in an organized manner.	2017	3.81750	0.860363	0.430182
	2018	3.8200	0.96778	0.48389
The instructor was well-prepared for class.	2017	4.06500	0.968349	0.484175
	2018	4.0625	0.63710	0.31855
The instructor treated the students with respect.	2017	3.42500	2.015254	1.425000
	2018	4.7400	0.19799	0.14000

**Table 4 Paired Sample Statistics, White Instructors, all SOT Items**

<b>SOT Item</b>	<b>Year</b>	<b><i>M</i></b>	<b><i>SD</i></b>	<b><i>SE</i></b>
The instructor presented the course content in an organized manner.	2017	4.11250	0.124466	0.062233
	2018	4.0000	0.66126	0.33063
The instructor was well-prepared for class.	2017	4.28500	0.346843	0.173421
	2018	4.2675	0.89938	0.44969
The instructor treated the students with respect.	2017	4.54000	0.077460	0.038730
	2018	4.8175	0.17289	0.08645

Table 5 below presents the overall mean scores by race of instructor across the two observation points. The overall mean SOT scores for Black instructors increased from 3.70 in 2017 to 4.20 in 2018 (SD .68072) while the mean SOT scores for White instructors decreased from 4.01 in 2017 to 3.83 in 2018 (SD .27316). The 2-tailed significance test shows the change in scores to not be statistically significant for both Black and White instructors.

**Table 5 Instructor SOT Ratings by Instructor Race**

<b>Instructor Race</b>	<b><i>M</i> 2017</b>	<b><i>M</i> 2018</b>	<b><i>SD</i></b>	<b><i>Sig. (2-tailed)</i></b>
Black	3.70	4.20	.68072	.431
White	4.01	3.83	.27316	.960

Perhaps the change in SOTs had nothing to do with a mitigation of racial bias as a result of the intervention, and instead has to do with the fact that students have a limited understanding of effective teaching (Balam & Shannon, 2010; Beran et al., 2009; Richmond et al., 2015).

#### **4.1.1 Potential Effects of Informational Intervention**

The mean score increases observed in the SOTs for Black faculty across the two observation periods shown in Table 5 suggest, in addition to the overall increased understanding of effective teaching by students, the inclusion of a primer may decrease student implicit bias and increase the accuracy of the SOTs assessment of instructor effectiveness. By providing students with examples of useful feedback, the informational intervention can provide a challenge to the unconscious connections made via implicit bias (Greenwald & Banaji, 1995). As noted previously, the eligible population in this study was 79% White in both observation points. Implicit bias research has shown the majority of Americans display a pro-White/anti-Black bias (Dovidio et al., 2002; Greenwald et al., 1998; Sriram & Greenwald, 2009). Students receive the SOT towards the end of their term, generally during the final three weeks of the semester. At that time, they are asked to reflect on their experience with the course to date, with a generic instrument that asks them about the course content, but in many ways focuses them on the person delivering the content, the instructor. An example of this is one of the SOT items that saw a positive change in mean score for Black faculty, “The instructor treated students with respect”, as shown in Appendix E.



With this inquiry, I explored how a brief informational intervention that gives students a pause for reflection on the course and how to present useful feedback through the tool prior to completing the SOT may allow for an opportunity to reconsider their experiences and interpretations of their instructor's teaching. In the case of one Black instructor included in the inquiry, student feedback on their teaching effectiveness following the intervention included feedback that spoke to the limitations of the class length. Specifically, one student noted that "I think the class structure...which most of the classes followed...a little boring/hard to pay attention to just because it's a long time to try to stay focused." This was of particular interest as it was not noted in the pre-intervention 2017 SOT even though the course schedule was identical and indicates students assessing their instructor's teaching effectiveness in a larger context.

There were three SOT items (APPENDIX E) in particular which had sizeable mean score increases for Black faculty; (1) item 3, instructors treating the students with respect, (2) item 7, the instructors facilitating the development of students' problem-solving skills, and (3) item 10, the course covering the stated learning objectives. Themes identified in the open-ended SOT items are converged with specific quotes to further contextualize the findings, reflecting the mixed methods analysis guiding the inquiry (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2017).

#### **4.1.1.1 Respect.**

Students value instructor respect and may interpret it differently following the intervention. The first item on the SOT with a large score increase for Black instructors across the two observations was student perception that the instructor treated students with respect, item 3 in the SOT. As shown in Table 6 below, the mean scores for Black faculty on this item increased from 3.42500 in 2017 to 4.7400 in 2018. There was also a significant decrease in both the standard deviation (SD) from 2.015254 in 2017 to .019799 in 2018 and standard error (SE) from 1.42500

in 2017 to 0.14000 in 2018. The standard deviation is the difference from the observation to the standard mean (Agresti et al., 2017). The data show a decrease in standard deviation across the two observation points, potentially suggesting a greater consensus among the students taking the SOT. This coalescing of the data may reflect a clearer understanding of the instrument’s purpose.

**Table 6 Paired Sample Statistics, Black Instructors “Instructor Treated Students with Respect”**

<b>Year</b>	<b><i>M</i></b>	<b><i>SD</i></b>	<b><i>SE</i></b>
2017	3.42500	2.015254	1.425000
2018	4.7400	0.19799	0.14000

This can be a challenging concept as perceptions of respect can vary widely between and among faculty and students (Z. D. Johnson, Claus, Goldman, & Sollitto, 2017; Z. D. Johnson & LaBelle, 2017; Okonofua, Paunesku, & Walton, 2016). Respect, when interpreted as esteem or regard in the classroom, can best be defined as being in the eye of the beholder. As a survey item, the student’s perception of being treated with respect, or their perception of the instructor treating others in the class with respect, can have broad interpretations and a significant likelihood of racial bias influencing the students’ opinion (Merritt, 2008). This item is further explored in relation to its thematic counterpart in the qualitative data, with students identifying instructor empathy (i.e. warmth) as a frequent strength, and poor responsiveness as a weakness. Identification, and misidentification of each of these characteristics in an instructor can be affected by implicit racial biases. The increase in this rating for Black instructors following the intervention is also supported in the open-ended responses. As noted by one student when identifying strengths of a Black instructor, “...also is extremely respectful in every way.” A student’s change in interpretation of

their instructor's respectful interactions is also revealed through how they connect the instructor's overall empathy or warm demeanor.

The SOT is in many ways a reflection of what students' value in their classroom experience and is as much an assessment of the course content as it is an assessment of the instructor delivering the content. This inquiry reveals through the open-ended items related to instructor strengths and weaknesses what students' value in their experience as learners. The students' strengths emphasis was on the instructors' attributes, such as empathy, as opposed to those instructors whose weaknesses emphasize those who are inaccessible or not responsive to students both in and outside of the classroom. Students value an instructor who demonstrates empathy and may connect that with their assessment of being treated with respect. Empathy was reflected in terms related to the demeanor of the instructor, focused on the positive ways in which the student was treated by the instructor. One student described their instructor as "upbeat at all times. Willing to work through difficult topics." Students' perceived empathy of the instructor was often identified as a passion, with the terms passion or passionate utilized in the identification of instructor throughout the responses. As stated by one student, "You can tell he's passionate about social work." Students clearly find a warm, empathic, and caring instructor as a strength in the classroom.

***Race and title differences.*** There was very little difference by instructor race or title with this theme. The overwhelming majority of student responses identified empathy as a strength of Black instructors' in both the 2017 and 2018 SOTs. As noted by one student in 2017, the instructor "...was extremely nice and approachable." The theme of instructor passion connected to empathy when describing Black instructors specifically, including "Very passionate about the profession of social work." Similarly, White faculty strengths focused significantly on empathy in 2017 and even more so in 2018. This student recognition of empathy in both White and Black faculty may

be related to the mass shooting that occurred near campus during the fall 2018 term, and the coordinated and supportive response by the school. As noted by one student of their White faculty member,

...always made sure to cover the topics and adapted well to the changes that occurred after the Tree of Life shooting to provide us with the appropriate amount of time to get assignments done as well as give us the opportunity to speak with...in private if we needed any support.

The identification of empathy as a strength for contingent faculty was consistent throughout the data as well. When considered with the disproportionate representation of Black faculty appointed to contingent roles, there may be an intersectional relationship between these two identities.

#### **4.1.1.2 Problem-Solving Skills.**

Another item which demonstrated the largest score increases for Black faculty was that the instructor facilitated the development of problem-solving skills, item 7 on the SOT. As shown in Table 7 below, the mean scores for Black faculty on this item increased from 3.310 in 2017 to 4.0750 in 2018. As with item 3 on the SOT, there was also a significant decrease in both the standard deviation (SD) from 1.852620 in 2017 to .95459 in 2018 and standard error (SE) from 1.31000 in 2017 to 0.67500 in 2018. The again data show a decrease in standard deviation across the two observation points, potentially suggesting a greater consensus among the students taking the SOT and may reflect a clearer understanding of the instrument's purpose.

**Table 7 Paired Sample Statistics, Black Instructors “Instructor Facilitated the Development of Problem Solving Skills”**

<b>Year</b>	<b><i>M</i></b>	<b><i>SD</i></b>	<b><i>SE</i></b>
2017	3.310	1.852620	1.310000
2018	4.0750	0.95459	0.67500

As a professional degree program, social work students are focused on developing the knowledge and skills to solve problems in the lives of people (Council on Social Work Education, 2015). Teaching student problem solving requires clear communication, limiting assistance to students, and sensitivity and positive reinforcement with students (Jonassen, 2000). This is supported in the 2018 student responses for several Black faculty, including one student who noted,

The instructor is very good at explaining concepts and providing relevant examples... is also good at engaging the class in discussion and asking questions which help clarify concepts...also created a good environment in the class where we felt we were able to ask questions and where we were positively encouraged when we answered questions.

The facilitation of problem solving skills clearly connects with the theme of respect and identification of empathy in their instructors. This also connects with another theme revealed in the data, which is that students want to identify their instructor as knowledgeable. As directly stated by one student, “Thoroughly understands his subject” and by another, “He knew the material backwards and forwards.” Other responses demonstrated some interplay between knowledge and the problem-solving skills areas such as, “Ability to break down information clearly; concern for students’ well-being and growth; experience and professional connections,” and “Extremely

knowledgeable about the subject-made a potentially very dry, boring class interesting.” Unlike the empathy theme, student identification of instructor knowledge was mostly unaccompanied by specific examples or demonstration of knowledge. In summary, these examples of instructor knowledge were generally assumed by the student in the comments and may represent an initial assumption based on implicit racial bias. I will explore this further by breaking out this thematic area by difference observed in the students’ responses based on instructor race and appointment type.

*Race and title differences.* Knowledge was identified as a strength for White faculty more frequently than that of Black faculty in the open-ended responses. This did increase for both Black faculty in the second, post-educational intervention SOT, where one instructor was lauded for their “Passion, respect, knowledge of subject.” It is important to note that this comment was connected to the one tenure-stream Black faculty member in this inquiry. The data show a much greater student identification of knowledge as a strength for tenure-stream faculty than for contingent instructors. Student responses that identified knowledge independently of other instructor characteristics were primarily found in the SOTs completed for White instructors. As stated by one student, their instructor was “Extremely knowledgeable about the subject...” while another student noted their instructor was “Very knowledgeable about topics, easy to understand...” This may reflect implicit racial biases of students, namely the assumed role of White instructors at the front of the classroom, particularly in predominantly white institutions. The aspect of “knowing” as perceived by the students was conveyed in ways that did not require further explanation or example and was reserved primarily for White instructors as was the case in one student’ assessment, “Very knowledgeable about course material...” This theme connects well with the literature grounding this inquiry, around negative experiences of Black instructors. The “othering”

of Black faculty in higher education is often linked with the students' challenging or questioning of the instructor's authority in the classroom (Navarro, 2017). In the feedback received by one Black instructor, a student commented, "Bring in more guest speakers who work with a variety of groups", possibly a reflection of questioning the instructor's knowledge and/or authority by requesting additional instructors in the classroom. This theme of the granting of authority by student to instructors and its relationship to instructor race continues in the theme of professional experience as an identified strength.

As a professional degree program, students may be likely to see practice experience as a strength in instructors, and a reflection of their knowledge and authority as instructors (Jahangiri & Mucciolo, 2008). One student response reflected the importance of this experience through its incorporation in to classroom lectures, "She was very forthcoming about her experiences as a social worker and exposed us to a lot of different elements of social work practice." This theme continued with other student responses including, "Very knowledgeable about course material and had much experience in social work," and "He has real experience in his field, and this shows in class." This emphasis on "real world" application is also a common interest among undergraduate students in general. The ability of these instructors to concretize learning through examples from their own work not only supports our social work education's competency-based learning model but also supports the facilitation of students' problem-solving skills.

The effect of professional experience on students' perceptions of the strengths of their instructors is particularly interesting in the context of social work education where a professional social work practice background is the rule, not the exception. The accrediting body for social work programs, the Council on Social Work Education (CSWE), requires that all practice courses (those other than research, policy, and history in general) are taught by faculty with a master's

degree in social work (MSW) and at least two-years of post-MSW practice experience. It is unclear whether students know this requirement, but the interest in an instructor “proving” themselves as social workers is evident across the responses.

Experience was identified as strength for both Black and White instructors in the qualitative data analysis, reflecting the student interest in their instructors having practiced what they teach. The differences in how instructors were rated in this theme appears more related to the instructor academic appointment than instructor race. For instructors appointed as contingent faculty in particular (of which three of the four Black faculty in the inquiry are appointed as), experience is a significant theme, reflective of the professional practice experience as one of their primary qualifications for a teaching appointment. As stated by one student their instructor’s strengths included, “...experience and professional connections”, while another student noted their instructor “...had personal experiences with the subject.” Conversely, only a single response reflected the experience theme for tenure-stream instructors in the two observations. At a research-intensive university, this is consistent with the significant emphasis on faculty productivity reflected in research and publication. As with previous themes, the instructor’s professional experience, race, and faculty appointment type all intersect. This emphasis on having worked in the field as a social worker is not surprising in a professional degree program, but when explored through the lens of implicit racial bias in a higher education setting, also reflects the literature on Black faculty viewed as “others” in the academy (Harlow, 2003; Tuitt et al., 2009).

#### **4.1.1.3 Stated Objectives.**

Finally, there was an increase in the way students rated the item related to course content covering stated objectives, item 10 in the SOT. Table 8 below shows the mean scores for Black faculty on this item increased from 3.43950 in 2017 to 4.2150 in 2018. There was a decrease in



both the standard deviation (SD) from 1.506137 in 2017 to .058690 in 2018 and standard error (SE) from 1.06500 in 2017 to 0.41500 in 2018. The decrease in standard deviation across the two observation points again suggests a greater consensus among the students taking the SOT and may reflect a clearer understanding of the instrument’s purpose.

**Table 8 Paired Sample Statistics, Black Instructors “Course Content Covered Stated Objectives”**

<b>Year</b>	<b><i>M</i></b>	<b><i>SD</i></b>	<b><i>SE</i></b>
2017	3.3950	1.506137	1.06500
2018	4.2150	0.58690	0.41500

In converging the qualitative themes with the quantitative data, findings suggest that students dislike an instructor who lacks organization. The level of organization an instructor displayed was identified as a key theme when coding for instructor weakness in the SOT. On the surface this seems like a reasonable concern. In a time-limited period of fifteen weeks, with 2.5 instructional hours per week, students are looking to maximize the time both in and outside of class. Disorganization on the instructor’s part can limit the students’ ability to meet the learning outcomes of the course. When looking more deeply in to the terms used when describing the course, instructor disorganization was reflected in the activities included in the instructional time. As noted by one student, “I felt like my time was not used well at all during this class”, while another stated “Not very organized, or clear about assignments nothing!”

***Race and title differences.*** When looking further in to the description of the disorganization, there are several instances where Black instructors are described in a more critical and in one case a disrespectful way prior to the intervention. As one student noted, “The class seemed unorganized sometimes and she would often rearrange our schedule every class,” where

another student's feedback noted, "The class seemed disorganized. I would not know going in to class what would be covered that day..." In each of these situations, this perceived disorganization could instead be the instructor's attempt to adapt the course schedule to the learning of students, a common practice when working to meet session or unit-specific course content learning objectives. When Black instructors' authority in the classroom is not recognized, the potential for a student's racially-biased interpretation of their classroom management and organization skills may occur. This is elucidated by a pre-intervention student statement that a Black instructor was "...unorganized and scatterbrained at times." Conversely, White instructor organization was presented in the context of the class and not the person, "I felt like my time was not used well." Another student in 2017 said that a Black instructor was, "A bit disorganized felt like a lot work can go off on tangents sometimes" while another student described their White instructor as, "very disorganized and did not get assignments with feedback in a timely manner." The student description of the disorganization with the same Black instructors in 2018 following the intervention was more direct and without the personal descriptors observed in the first SOTs. These student comments included limited statements such as, "Disorganized", and more contextualized statements such as "It may have been more the students than the instructor, but sometimes things felt a little disorganized."

Related to meeting stated objectives, poor responsiveness was identified as a theme in the qualitative data, reflected most commonly in the instructor's lack of feedback on assignments, the timeliness of that feedback, and student access to instructors both inside and outside of the classroom. Assignments allow instructors to assess how well students are progressing towards learning the course content and meeting learning objectives. This concept of access and responsiveness in the classroom was highlighted by one student noting that a Black instructor, "...

at times... barely responded to individuals when they raised their hands in class and just moved on to the next person” while another student stated that “...rarely responded or responded condescendingly to students who raised their hands.” This second statement intersects both the lack of instructor responsiveness to their students and the absence of respect, a core theme in the identified strengths of instructors presented previously. Another student stated that an instructor’s “...instruction is not always clear, does not always answer the question or gives very vague instructions on major assignments.”

Students’ critique of the lack of responsiveness of their Black instructors’ may reflect the effect of the informational primer in the 2018 SOT. When looking at the responses provided by students, there was an element of subjectivity to the comments prior to the intervention, as stated by one student in a 2017 SOT, “...does not communicate well with... students... Very unhelpful to students and caused more stress during the semester.” When responsiveness was identified as a weakness in the 2018 SOT for the same instructor, the feedback was clearer and more direct with students stating the instructor was “...difficult to reach.” When identifying responsiveness as weakness for White instructors, the examples provide were more commonly tied less to interpersonal or communication skills and more around instruction and access. One student noted that an instructor was “...unclear about what we would be tested on” while another stated that an instructor “Didn’t get grades back fast.”

The theme of respect is reflected across all aspects of the data. In the quantitative data, item 3 in the SOT asks students to rate their instructors based on the perception of “The instructor treated students with respect” is merged with thematic findings in the qualitative data showing both empathy as an area of strength and lack of organization as a weakness. This overarching theme of respect in the classroom integrates well with the literature on instructor authority and the

type of teaching evaluations that are most effective. Student feedback should focus on the attainment of learning outcomes, rather than an instructor's style (Pratt, 1997; Stupans et al., 2016). When looking at the themes in the open-ended responses, an over identification of instructor empathy as a strength does not clearly tie to student learning outcomes. The findings of this inquiry support the effect of these types of teaching style questions on SOTs and the implicit racial biases in students they can create an avenue for including in assessment of instructor effectiveness. The findings of this inquiry also show the potential for an informational primer to have some observable effect on the reduction of implicit racial biases. The combination of increased Likert scores and changes in the themes identified in the open ended items across the two observation points for Black faculty in this inquiry support the potential for this intervention and opportunity for further inquiry.

## **4.2 Conclusion**

In this chapter I reviewed my findings about the role that an informational intervention may play in mitigating student racial biases expressed in the SOT. In the opening section, I reviewed the findings expressed in the quantitative data, and in particular the observed differences and their potential interpretations. There were mean score increases observed in fifteen of the nineteen Likert scale survey items for all eight faculty in the inquiry. When broken out by race, the increases were seen with Black faculty in seventeen of the nineteen items while mean score increases were observed in White faculty on nine of the seventeen items. Interestingly, the overall mean scores for Black instructors increased while the overall mean scores for White instructors decreased, although these changes were not found to be statistically significant. In further

analyzing the scores of Black faculty, the largest increase in mean scores were in three items in particular, including the instructors' demonstrated respect for students, the instructors' facilitation of student problem solving skill development, and the course meeting stated learning objectives. In each of these three items, the data show a decrease in standard deviation, suggesting a greater consensus among the students taking the SOT following the intervention. This coalescing of the data shown in the decreased standard deviations may reflect a clearer understanding of the instrument's purpose. I further explored these items by converging the themes identified in the qualitative data.

The findings present several interesting changes in student assessment of Black instructor's teaching effectiveness through the SOT which may reveal bias but may also reflect a greater understanding of the SOT by the students. The common themes revealed through the convergence of the quantitative and qualitative data reflect an over-arching assessment of the instructor's demeanor, where they have the combination of knowledge, demonstrated professional experience, empathy and warmth in interactions with students. The findings of this inquiry may present a greater effect of increased student understanding of useful feedback, as opposed to the mitigation of racial bias. In the final chapter, I will synthesize these findings in to three key findings, grounded in the literature.

## 5.0 Discussion

In this final chapter, I discuss three key findings that are connected to the overall purpose of the inquiry. The chapter begins with a summary of the inquiry, including the purpose, the theoretical grounding, and the methods of inquiry. Next, I present three key findings connected to the literature used to frame the inquiry. Implications for this inquiry follow these key findings, including those for both my professional practice and opportunities for future inquiry of implicit racial bias and the SOT.

### 5.1 Summary of Inquiry

This inquiry aimed to answer the question – *Can a primer on the purpose of Student Opinion of Teaching surveys (SOTs) prior to the completion of SOTs reduce racial bias?* Racism exists in HEIs, and in many ways reflect and perpetuate the racism we see in society. Faculty of color experience racism in many ways, with the SOT being a way racism is further exacerbated. The SOTs can even have a negative effect on their career trajectory, as the SOT has the potential for racially-biased responses from students, resulting in lower ratings than their white colleagues (Centra & Gaubatz, 2000; Harlow, 2003; Kogan et al., 2010; McPherson et al., 2009; Spooren et al., 2013). This is particularly poignant when considering faculty appointment type, tenure stream or contingent, and race. The purpose of this inquiry was to explore an educational intervention’s effectiveness in mitigating the effects of students’ racial bias on the SOTs. The inquiry was grounded in implicit association theory, selected in part due to its ability to identify implicit racial

biases among people who in particular convey themselves to be anti-racist (Greenwald & Banaji, 1995). When applied to a social work program, grounded in anti-racist values such as social justice, and the dignity and worth of all persons, this framework helps to make meaning of the existence of negative racial biases students may present in SOTs, even though these biases are often unconscious.

This inquiry utilized a two-group comparison model focusing on courses taught by Black and White faculty in the School of Social Work (Engel & Schutt, 2017). Specifically, a pre-intervention/post-intervention comparison design was utilized and included all students enrolled in the fall 2018 term in an undergraduate social work course taught by a faculty member who also taught the same course in the fall of 2017. The use of an informational primer as an intervention in this inquiry was chosen due to the unconscious nature of implicit bias and prejudgments informed by stereotypes (Greenwald et al., 1998, 2003). With an eligible population for the inquiry identifying as 79% White and research showing the majority of Americans holding a pro-White/anti-Black bias, the study looked to directly address this implicit bias (Dovidio et al., 2002; Greenwald et al., 1998). The literature on the experiences of Black faculty identifies microaggressions, or a series of mini-assaults that are often indirect, subtle, or unintentional, which may be an outward presentation of implicit bias. (Brunsma et al., 2003; William A Smith et al., 2007; Sue et al., 2007). These reflections of implicit racial bias can be expressed in the lower SOT's Black faculty receive, and potentially higher scores for White faculty. The SOT was the data source for the inquiry across the two observations. A total of nineteen Likert scale items and four open-ended items in the SOT were analyzed, which included both quantitative and qualitative datasets, applying a mixed methods approach. There were a number of findings revealing an observable change in scores for Black faculty following the intervention. These findings were

further contextualized through the qualitative data in the SOT. A deeper discussion of three key findings are presented next.

## **5.2 Key Findings**

The findings revealed that students' understanding of the purpose of the SOT may have an effect on how they rate Black instructors. The findings also revealed that as it currently exists, the SOT may draw responses that foster students' implicit racial biases, demonstrated by the decrease in student responses reflecting racial bias. Third, the findings present a deeper understanding of the nature of perceived educational authority, in particular through the findings related to respect of the instructor by their students and its relationship with instructor race.

### **5.2.1 Key Finding #1: Increasing Understanding of SOTs May Increase Scores for Black (and White) Instructors**

Students' ratings of instructor effectiveness through the SOT may increase through the inclusion of a primer on the purpose of SOTs, how they are utilized by instructors and administrators, and examples of useful feedback. The SOT was first used in HEIs to help faculty adapt and modify their teaching practices (Driscoll, 2009). In that approach, the SOT may be limited in its ability to provide useful feedback to Black instructors as a result of student racial bias on SOTs (Centra & Gaubatz, 2000; Harlow, 2003; Kogan et al., 2010; McPherson et al., 2009; Spooren et al., 2013). As an instrument that may also be used in hiring, retention and promotion decisions, it is also limited in supporting those efforts (Lakin, 2016). The increased SOT scores



for Black faculty across the two observation periods suggest the inclusion of a primer may decrease student implicit bias and increase the accuracy of the SOTs assessment of instructor effectiveness. Increases were observed in nearly 90% of the Likert scale items for Black faculty, compared to 53% of the items for White faculty (APPENDIX E, APPENDIX F). These increased scores for White faculty do reveal that the informational primer intervention may address students' limited understanding of teaching quality, and that the intervention may best help students provide more useful feedback (Balam & Shannon, 2010; Beran et al., 2009; Galbraith et al., 2012; Richmond et al., 2015). This is supported in part by the decrease in standard deviation in three specific SOT items, suggesting a greater consensus among the students taking the SOT following the intervention. This coalescing may reflect a clearer understanding of the instrument's purpose.

The intervention intentionally did not include information on racial bias in SOTs, which may also contribute to the overall changes in scores for faculty in an effort to avoid students' focus on socially desirable responses. Instead, this key finding relates directly to the relationship between expressions of racial bias and individual uncertainty people experience in intergroup or cross-identity (race, ethnicity, etc.) interactions. Uncertainty, particularly in the perceived inability to predict or explain the behaviors of others, can reduce awareness of biases within intergroup interactions (Stephan, 2014; Stephan & Stephan, 2017; Stephan et al., 1999). As noted in the literature review, greater clarity and understanding of general tasks has been shown to reduce racial bias (Shaked-Schroer et al., 2008). The increases in overall scores and in particular the increases in the vast majority of scores for Black instructors in the inquiry, may relate to the decreased uncertainty or increased understanding by students regarding the SOT when identifying strengths and weakness of their instructors.

## **5.2.2 Key Finding #2: SOTs *May* Draw Responses that Foster Students' Implicit Racial Biases**

As currently designed, the SOT items foster student implicit racial biases. While many of the nineteen Likert-scale items on the SOT focus on learning outcomes and the instructor's ability to help students reach those outcomes, the open-ended responses from students focused primarily on the instructor's teaching style instead of the course itself, particularly with Black faculty. The primary themes found in the analysis of these open-ended responses do identify some of the indicators of quality teaching found in the literature, including instructor knowledge of the content area, and positive student-teacher interaction (Lakin, 2016). Conversely, the significant emphasis on instructor empathy or warmth found in the qualitative data, particularly for Black faculty, maintains an emphasis on disposition or teaching style, which can be negatively interpreted for faculty of color (Anderson & Smith, 2005). The interpretation of disposition or teaching style is further complicated by racial, gender, and other bias against perceived "others" in higher education (Harlow, 2003; Merritt, 2008; Reid, 2010).

While an educational intervention may be effective in reducing implicit racial bias in students completing the SOT, a more direct approach may be needed, such as revising the instrument to focus exclusively on learning outcomes achieved in the course. Following the intervention, there was an increase in student ratings of items related directly to learning outcomes, specifically covering course content stated in the course objectives and facilitating problem-solving skills, for Black instructors. These item increases reflected a clear student focus on the course over the instructor, and in particular the instructor demeanor and possibly racial identity.

This finding may also reflect the role of uncertainty in students' understanding of their instructors' behavior and identify the need for an increased "dosage" of the intervention across

earlier points in the semester to have a significant effect on implicit bias (Stephan et al., 1999). Educational interventions aiming to reduce implicit bias have been shown to have lasting effects when approached as a habit to be broken (Devine, Forscher, Austin, & Cox, 2012). When viewed through a Critical Race lens, the current SOT format may perpetuate the lower assessment of Black faculty as instructors, and negatively affecting their professional standing and advancement (Bell, 1995; Delgado & Stefancic, 1993).

### **5.2.3 Key Finding #3: Perceived Educational Authority**

The findings reveal a deeper understanding of the nature of perceived educational authority of the instructor by their students and its relationship with instructor race, but also the instructor's appointment type. Authority in the classroom is consistent theme in the literature when exploring the experiences of faculty of color in higher education, particularly when faculty of color are appointed as contingent faculty (Navarro, 2017). There is a strong body of literature exploring the role of microaggressions and their role in diminishing the authority of faculty of color (Cora-Bramble, 2006; Cora-Bramble et al., 2010; Tuitt et al., 2009). The negative effects of microaggressions on faculty of color can cause high stress and depressive symptoms, which can be misinterpreted by administrators, colleagues, and students (Eagan & Garvey, 2015; Huynh, 2012; Penner, Blair, Albrecht, & Dovidio, 2014; Stanley, 2006b; Torres et al., 2010; Young et al., 2015). This was revealed through the increased scores Black faculty received related to their students' assessment of being treated with respect by the instructor. This is of particular note with the eligible student population for the inquiry identifying at 79% White, and the likelihood of pro-White/anti-Black biases in the implicit association theory grounding this inquiry (Greenwald et al., 1998, 2003). The inquiry revealed, in particular, an interesting relationship between respect

and students' identification of instructor empathy as something they strongly value in their classroom experience and overall instructor interactions. It is important to note that instructor's appointment type (contingent or tenure stream) also may have had a role in the perceived authority of the instructor. The theme of professional practice experience and its value identified by student in their SOTs highlights both the authority it provides instructors in the classroom (Cha & Carrier, 2016).

Each of these findings present implications for practice and future inquiry. I will now present implications through the lens of opportunity in my professional practice, followed by implications for future inquiry.

### **5.3 Implications for Practice**

In the spirit of the dissertation in practice model, this inquiry sought to fill a gap in practice, specifically efforts to better understand the SOT currently being used by the SSW and the ability of an educational intervention to reduce students' implicit racial bias when completing the SOT. More broadly, this inquiry aimed to explore a potential hindrance on the hiring, retention, and promotion of faculty of color in both tenure-stream and contingent positions, the SOTs. Faculty diversity has been shown to strengthen learning outcomes for students, reflecting the stated values of social work education. This inquiry identifies the need for better education regarding the nature of SOTs, including the effect of implicit biases, for not only students but faculty and administrators as well. In order to meet this need, I offer two concrete recommendations which I can support in my role as a member of the SSW administration at Pitt.

### **5.3.1 Recommendation #1: Increase Overall Awareness of SOTs Utilization and Limitations**

There is an opportunity for increased awareness of the limitations of SOTs across the University community, in particular with students, faculty and administrators.

#### **5.3.1.1 Students.**

First, the findings reveal that increased understanding of SOTs may reduce lower ratings of Black instructors and increase the students' emphasis on the course and learning outcomes over more subjective and potentially racially-biased assessment of instructor demeanor. The opportunity to better educate students in the SSW on implicit bias can have positive effects in many settings, including their overall engagement with and assessment of all faculty, and in particular faculty of color. A multi-point student communication plan would allow for early and ongoing orientation to the SOT, supporting their ability to pause and reflect on their interactions not just when completing the instrument, but throughout their interactions with their instructors. Providing a standardized informational primer on SOTs as part of the instrument could provide a final communication to students, reinforcing the emailed information about the SOTs they will receive at multiple intervals over the semester.

#### **5.3.1.2 Faculty.**

Increasing awareness of the implicit bias in SOTs can be helpful for faculty, and faculty of color in particular, identify true opportunities for adapting and improving their teaching, separate from student feedback informed by implicit bias. The SSW has significantly increased its focus on effective instruction, helping faculty take better advantage of the training opportunities available through the University's Center for Teaching and Learning. The ability to separate out areas for

improvement in teaching from feedback unrelated to achieving student learning outcomes will support the ongoing growth of instructors.

The potential for a more accurate assessment of teaching effectiveness could be coupled with an annually developed teaching improvement plan, focusing on specific opportunities to increase instructor effectiveness. This ongoing process of improvement will support incremental professional development and increase the likelihood of participation. This is particularly helpful for contingent faculty, who overwhelmingly practice as professional social workers full-time in addition to their teaching (Cha & Carrier, 2016; García et al., 2017). As such, they have limited opportunity to participate in instructional training and must maximize their efforts to do so (Kimmel & Fairchild, 2017).

### **5.3.1.3 Administrators.**

Lastly and most importantly, administrators must increase their understanding of the existence of implicit bias in SOTs, in particular its role as a formative assessment for faculty development rather than summative (Driscoll, 2009). Administrators have significant influence over the careers of faculty, with performance appraisals, inclusive of SOT scores, incorporated in to retention and promotion decisions (Spooren et al., 2013). Providing our administration with greater understanding of the current approach to assessment of teacher effectiveness through SOTs can have positive effects on the ongoing development of faculty as instructors, particularly when incorporated in to a faculty mentoring approach (Austin, 2002). Education on SOTs, which are commonly part of the criteria presented for faculty retention and promotion decisions, may help increase equity in these decisions, particularly with contingent faculty who's retention is more susceptible to the SOT scores they receive (García et al., 2017; Navarro, 2017; Pearlman, 2013).

### **5.3.2 Recommendation #2: Provide Faculty Guidelines for SOT Implementation**

Current faculty guidance on implementing SOTs focuses primarily on increasing response rates through encouraging student participation. Additional guidance on useful feedback, utilizing the primer included in this inquiry, may increase both participation and feedback that helps faculty continue to strengthen their teaching. In conjunction with raising awareness among faculty members on the limitations of SOTs, an implementation guide provided to each faculty member may help to yield more useful feedback. This would include language on how to talk with students about the SOT, including providing examples of useful feedback using the primer from this inquiry.

### **5.4 Implications for Future Inquiry**

The aim of this inquiry was to examine the potential effect of an educational primer on students' implicit biases reflected in the SOT. As demonstrated in the three key findings, several of the observations deserve consideration for further inquiry. Here I present two opportunities for furthering inquiry and research in this area.

There are several research implications on the broad topic of the experiences of faculty of color in higher education based on these findings. The literature on race and racism, and their effects on SOTs, is limited, particularly when compared to the body of literature exploring the relationship between gender and SOTs. This inquiry could be adapted to more directly address the potential for racial bias in SOTs in the informational primer. While this current inquiry did not

include the issue of racial bias in the primer in an effort to avoid socially desirable responses from the participants, the findings are limited in their ability to reveal findings on racial bias as a result.

The opportunity to contribute to the theory of implicit association that grounded this inquiry is possible through further research on educational interventions with the SOTs. Additionally, further research on the adaptations of these instruments to increase emphasis on learning outcomes may support a reduction in implicit racial bias in responses. The emergence of the implicit association theory and the Implicit Association Test (IAT) provided new ways of exploring the nature of prejudice and cognitive functioning (Greenwald et al., 2003). The IAT in many ways can serve as an educational intervention, bringing to one's conscious the unconscious or implicit biases that may lead to racist or other oppressive beliefs and behaviors. This inquiry builds upon the spirit of the IAT in an indirect way working to reduce implicit biases while also attempting to control for what participants may view as socially desirable responses. A more direct implementation of the IAT as an educational intervention, and the utilization of an experimental design to test effects, may further our understanding of implicit racial bias in SOTs and provide a clearer roadmap to removing them (Engel & Schutt, 2017; Mertens, 2015).

### **5.5 Demonstration of Excellence**

The findings of this inquiry will be useful to a number of stakeholders. I will begin with a presentation to my school's Dean, followed by a presentation to our faculty. The aim of these presentations is to provide greater understanding of SOTs as they are an encourage adaptation using an informational primer to increase the usefulness of the survey. I will also submit a proposal to present at Pitt's Provost's Assessment Conference. Established in 2012, this annual conference



works to explore the most effective ways to assess graduate and undergraduate student learning at the University. Faculty, staff, and administrators from all campuses of the University will be in attendance. Additionally, I will submit this inquiry for presentation at the CSWE annual program meeting in 2020. This annual conference focuses on social work education and research. Coordinated by social work education's accrediting body, the audience would support further efforts to address the problem potentially on a national level. My goal in these presentations is to further the awareness of the limited effectiveness of SOTs as currently constructed, including the potential for racial bias and its negative effects on faculty of color in SSWs. I also see this work directly being incorporated through these presentations, at an institutional level at Pitt, further shaping our use of the SOT survey.

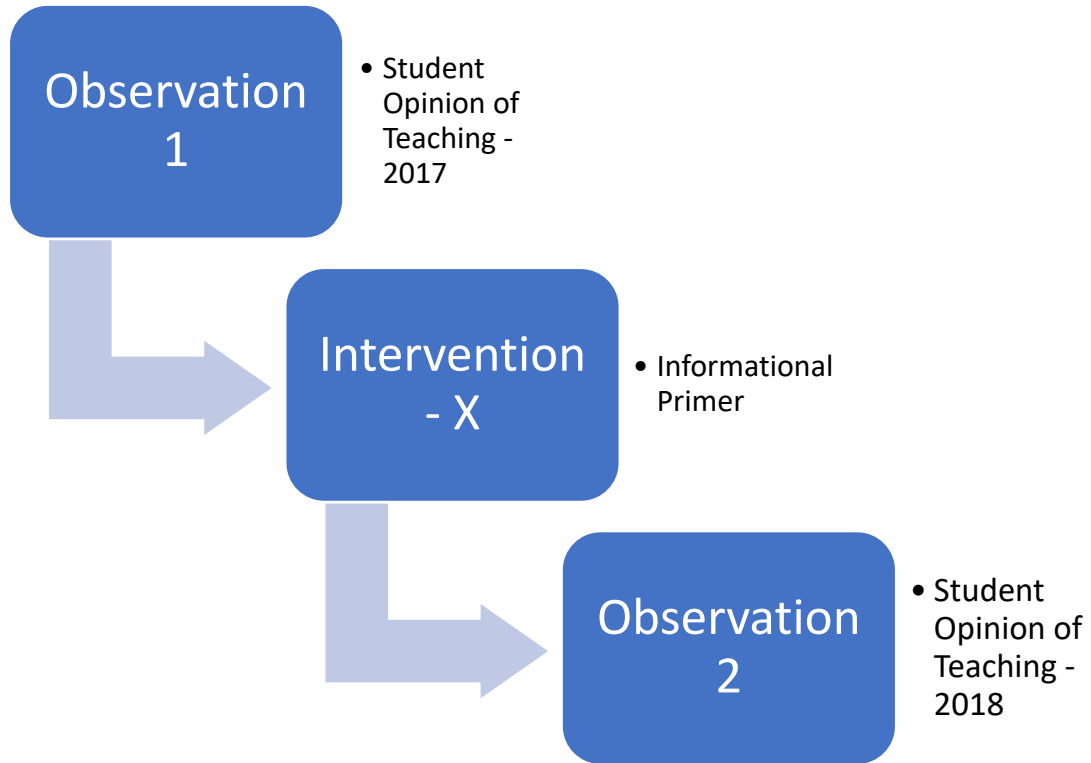
## **5.6 Conclusion**

The final chapter of this dissertation in practice presented three key findings from the inquiry. The first key finding revealed that students' ratings of instructor teaching effectiveness through the SOT may increase through the inclusion of a primer on the purpose of SOTs, how they are utilized by instructors and administrators, and examples of useful feedback. The second key finding revealed that, as currently designed, the SOT items may foster student implicit racial biases. Third, the findings present a deeper understanding of the nature of perceived educational authority of the instructor by their students and its relationship with instructor race and appointment type.

The inquiry provides some initial observable changes following the educational intervention, and provided several implications for practice, which may have positive results both

in the site of the inquiry and other HEIs. The chapter concluded with two specific opportunities for further research on both educational interventions to reduce implicit bias and alternative SOT models for practice. The justification for these efforts to reduce the implicit bias and other expressions of racism is a moral imperative and necessary for the future success of higher education. As the nation's demographics move away from a White majority, efforts to remove barriers to full participation in the academy will clearly influence the future success or failure of colleges and universities in the United States.

## Appendix A Research Flow Chart



**Figure 1 Research Flow Chart**

## Appendix B Faculty Recruitment Letter

Dear Instructor,

I would like to formally request your participation in my study this fall, which I am conducting as partial fulfillment of the Doctorate in Education (EdD) degree. This study is for the sole purpose of completing the dissertation in the School of Education at the University of Pittsburgh. Your participation is completely voluntary, and you can stop participating at any time. The aim of this study is to explore if an informational primer can reduce students' negative racial biases in the completion of the Student Opinion of Teaching (SOT) for faculty of color in the School of Social Work. If you agree, participation will include:

- Allowing me to send a replicated OMET via Qualtrics to each of your students in each of the courses you are teaching in November/December 2018 with the responses only going to me.
- Allowing me to review your 2017 OMET for the undergraduate course you are teaching this term.

This inquiry is being conducted under the guidance of Dr. Gina Garcia, Department of Administrative and Policy Studies. She can be reached at [ggarcia@pitt.edu](mailto:ggarcia@pitt.edu) for questions.

Please let me know if you have questions about this study.

Thank you for your consideration.

Keith J. Caldwell, MSW  
[Kjc45@pitt.edu](mailto:Kjc45@pitt.edu)  
412-648-3921 (W) / 412-551-2139 (C)

## Appendix C Student Consent Letter

### **STUDY TITLE: Mitigating Racial Bias in Student Opinion of Teaching Surveys**

**PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR:** Keith J. Caldwell, MSW – 4200 Fifth Avenue, 2108 Cathedral of Learning, University of Pittsburgh, Pittsburgh, PA 15260 – [caldwell.keith@gmail.com](mailto:caldwell.keith@gmail.com) – 412-551-2139

### **QUESTIONS ABOUT THE STUDY:**

If you have any questions about your rights as a research subject or wish to talk to someone other than the research team, please call the University of Pittsburgh Human Subjects Protection Advocate toll-free at 866-212-2668.

**SOURCE OF SUPPORT:** There are no sources of support.

### **INTRODUCTION:**

The purpose of this study is to examine the effect of an informational primer used prior to students' completion of the Student Opinion of Teaching evaluation (SOT) generally implemented by the Office of measurement and Evaluation of Teaching (OMET) You are being asked to participate because you are currently enrolled in a class with Prof. \_\_\_\_\_. A total of 200 students in the School of Social Work at Pitt are being asked to participate.

### **RESEARCH ACTIVITIES:**

Your participation will occur during the 12<sup>th</sup> week of the fall term. You will be asked to complete a student opinion of teaching survey on Prof. \_\_\_\_\_ via Qualtrics. Demographic data will not be collected. You will not be identified in the survey responses.

### **STUDY RISKS:**

Overall there are minimal risks to participating in this study. Although every reasonable effort has been taken, confidentiality during Internet communication activities cannot be guaranteed and it is possible that additional information beyond that collected for research purposes may be captured and used by others not associated with this study.

### **STUDY BENEFITS:**

The study will benefit the Pitt School of Social Work a better understanding of how to conduct evaluations of teaching effectiveness.

### **PRIVACY (Person) and CONFIDENTIALITY (Data):**

Demographic data will not be collected on you as part of this study.

University of Pittsburgh Research Conduct and Compliance Office and School of Education will have access to the research.

**WITHDRAWAL FROM STUDY PARTICIPATION:**

You can, at any time withdraw from this research study; you can also withdraw your authorization for us to use your identifiable medical information for the purposes described above. This means that you will also be withdrawn from further participation in this research study. Any identifiable research or medical information obtained as part of this study prior to the date that you withdrew your consent will continue to be used and disclosed by the investigators for the purposes described above.

Your decision to withdraw from this study will have no effect on your current or future relationship with the University of Pittsburgh.

**VOLUNTARY PARTICIPATION:**

Your participation in this research study is entirely voluntary. You may want to discuss this study with your family and friends before agreeing to participate. If there are any words you do not understand, feel free to ask me. The investigator will be available to answer your current and future questions.

Whether or not you provide your consent for participation in this research study will have no effect on your current or future relationship with the University of Pittsburgh.

**CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE:**

The above information has been explained to me and all of my current questions have been answered. I understand that I am encouraged to ask questions, voice concerns or complaints about any aspect of this research study during the course of this study, and that such future questions, concerns or complaints will be answered by a qualified individual or by the investigator(s) listed on the first page of this consent document at the telephone number(s) given.

I understand that I may always request that my questions, concerns or complaints be addressed by a listed investigator. I understand that I may contact the Human Subjects Protection Advocate of the IRB Office, University of Pittsburgh (1-866-212-2668) to discuss problems, concerns, and questions; obtain information; offer input; or discuss situations that occurred during my participation. By signing this form, I agree to participate in this research study. A copy of this consent form will be given to me.

**INVESTIGATOR CERTIFICATION:**

I certify that I have explained the nature and purpose of this research study to the above-named individual(s), and I have discussed the potential benefits and possible risks of study participation. Any questions the individual(s) have about this study have been answered, and we will always be available to address future questions, concerns or complaints as they arise. I further certify that no research component of this protocol was begun until after this consent form was signed.

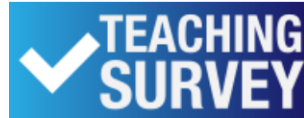
\_\_\_\_\_  
Printed Name of Person Obtaining Consent

\_\_\_\_\_  
Role in Research Study

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Person Obtaining Consent

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date (Time if placed in medical record)

## Appendix D Student Opinion of Teaching Survey



### SCHOOL OF SOCIAL WORK TEACHING SURVEY

#### Self-Ratings

1. Compared to most courses you have taken, amount that you contributed to your learning.  
(*Much less, Somewhat less, About the same, Somewhat more, Much more*)
2. Compared to most courses you have taken, amount that you learned.  
(*Much less, Somewhat less, About the same, Somewhat more, Much more*)

#### Instructor

Scale (Items 1 – 8):

*Hardly at all*

*To a small degree*

*To a moderate degree*

*To a considerable degree*

*To a very high degree*

1. The instructor presented course content in an organized manner.
2. The instructor was well-prepared for class.
3. The instructor treated students with respect.
4. The instructor interpreted difficult concepts clearly.
5. The instructor provided useful feedback.
6. The instructor was accessible to students. (Do not answer if no basis to judge)
7. The instructor facilitated the development of problem-solving skills.
8. The instructor stimulated student interest in subject.
9. Express your judgment of the instructor's overall teaching effectiveness.  
(*Ineffective, Only Fair, Competent, Well above average, Excellent*)
10. Would you recommend this instructor to other students?  
(*Definitely not, Probably not, Probably yes, Definitely yes*)



### Course

Scale (Items 1 – 6)

*Hardly at all*

*To a small degree*

*To a moderate degree*

*To a considerable degree*

*To a very high degree*

*Not applicable (Items 3 – 6)*

1. Course objectives and requirements were clear.
2. Course content covered stated objectives.
3. Lectures contributed how much to your learning.
4. Class discussion contributed how much to your learning.
5. Readings contributed how much to your learning.
6. Assignments contributed how much to your learning.
7. Would you recommend this course to other students?  
*(Definitely not, Probably not, Probably yes, Definitely yes)*

### Teaching Comments

1. What were the instructor's major strengths?
2. What were the instructor's major weaknesses?

### Course Comments

1. What aspects of this course were most beneficial to you?
2. What suggestions do you have to improve the course?

## Figure 2 Student Opinion of Teaching Survey



## Appendix E Paired Sample Statistics, Black Instructors, all SOT Items

**Table 9 Paired Sample Statistics, Black Instructors, all SOT Items**

<b>SOT Item</b>	<b>Year</b>	<b><i>M</i></b>	<b><i>SD</i></b>	<b><i>SE</i></b>
The instructor presented the course content in an organized manner.	2017	3.81750	0.860363	0.430182
	2018	3.8200	0.96778	0.48389
The instructor was well-prepared for class.	2017	4.06500	0.968349	0.484175
	2018	4.0625	0.63710	0.31855
The instructor treated the students with respect.	2017	3.42500	2.015254	1.425000
	2018	4.7400	0.19799	0.14000
The instructor interpreted difficult concepts clearly.	2017	3.79333	1.583709	0.914355
	2018	4.4600	0.64211	0.37072
The instructor provided useful feedback.	2017	3.63000	1.134225	0.567113
	2018	4.2450	0.80505	0.40252
The instructor was accessible to students.	2017	3.13500	1.605132	1.135000
	2018	3.7850	1.11016	0.78500
The instructor facilitated the development of problem-solving skills.	2017	3.31000	1.852620	1.310000
	2018	4.0750	0.95459	0.67500
The instructor stimulated student interest in subject.	2017	3.87500	1.250427	0.625213
	2018	4.4250	0.43493	0.21747
Course objectives and requirements were clear.	2017	3.27000	1.796051	1.270000
	2018	3.9500	0.77782	0.55000

**Table 9 (continued)**

Course content covered stated objective.	2017	3.39500	1.506137	1.065000
	2018	4.2150	0.58690	0.41500
Lectures contributed how much to your learning.	2017	3.43500	1.562706	1.105000
	2018	3.8250	0.60104	0.42500
Class discussion contributed how much to your learning.	2017	3.68000	1.428356	1.010000
	2018	4.2550	0.64347	0.45500
Readings contributed how much to your learning.	2017	3.70500	0.530330	0.375000
	2018	3.6900	0.97581	0.69000
Assignments contributed how much to your learning.	2017	4.05750	0.744911	0.372455
	2018	4.1425	1.05888	0.52944
Express your judgement of the instructor's overall teaching effectiveness.	2017	3.90250	1.311396	0.655698
	2018	4.0625	0.72270	0.36135
Would you recommend this course to other students?	2017	3.33000	0.725580	0.362790
	2018	3.4375	0.61016	0.30508
Would you recommend this instructor to other students?	2017	3.32500	0.925257	0.462628
	2018	3.4075	0.52047	0.26024
Compared to most courses you have taken, amount that you contributed to your learning.	2017	2.65250	1.112696	0.556348
	2018	3.6300	0.31864	0.15932
Compared to most courses you have taken, amount that you learned.	2017	3.24500	1.395624	0.697812
	2018	3.6725	0.68937	0.34468

## Appendix F Paired Sample Statistics, White Instructors, all SOT Items

**Table 10 Paired Sample Statistics, White Instructors, all SOT Items**

<b>SOT Item</b>	<b>Year</b>	<b><i>M</i></b>	<b><i>SD</i></b>	<b><i>SE</i></b>
The instructor presented the course content in an organized manner.	2017	4.11250	0.124466	0.062233
	2018	4.0000	0.66126	0.33063
The instructor was well-prepared for class.	2017	4.28500	0.346843	0.173421
	2018	4.2675	0.89938	0.44969
The instructor treated the students with respect.	2017	4.54000	0.077460	0.038730
	2018	4.8175	0.17289	0.08645
The instructor interpreted difficult concepts clearly.	2017	4.26750	0.121758	0.060879
	2018	4.5225	0.45654	0.22827
The instructor provided useful feedback.	2017	4.22500	0.181567	0.090784
	2018	4.0575	0.68246	0.34123
The instructor was accessible to students.	2017	4.55000	0.035590	0.017795
	2018	4.3800	0.69914	0.34957
The instructor facilitated the development of problem-solving skills.	2017	3.95000	0.482977	0.241488
	2018	4.1200	0.66468	0.33234
The instructor stimulated student interest in subject.	2017	4.17750	0.305655	0.152828
	2018	4.3250	0.39971	0.19985

**Table 10 (continued)**

Course objectives and requirements were clear.	2017	4.19000	0.434818	0.217409
	2018	4.3400	0.27725	0.13862
Course content covered stated objective.	2017	4.37750	0.303026	0.151513
	2018	4.5750	0.33432	0.16716
Lectures contributed how much to your learning.	2017	4.42250	0.295677	0.147839
	2018	4.4050	0.42162	0.21081
Class discussion contributed how much to your learning.	2017	4.04750	0.430842	0.215421
	2018	3.9150	0.62974	0.31487
Readings contributed how much to your learning.	2017	3.65500	0.145488	0.072744
	2018	3.0775	0.40877	0.20438
Assignments contributed how much to your learning.	2017	4.19500	0.177106	0.088553
	2018	3.7300	0.33754	0.16877
Express your judgement of the instructor's overall teaching effectiveness.	2017	4.15000	0.310805	0.155403
	2018	4.2275	0.73690	0.36845
Would you recommend this course to other students?	2017	3.28750	0.222317	0.111159
	2018	3.6025	0.42789	0.21395
Would you recommend this instructor to other students?	2017	3.52500	0.278149	0.139074
	2018	3.6875	0.43385	0.21692
Compared to most courses you have taken, amount that you contributed to your learning.	2017	3.46000	0.363410	0.181705
	2018	3.3850	0.15631	0.07816

**Table 10 (continued)**

Compared to most courses you have taken, amount that you learned.	2017	3.46000	0.451664	0.225832
	2018	3.5825	0.51662	0.25831

## Appendix G SOT Informational Primer

### SOT Informational Primer

Adapted from the University of Michigan Center for Research on Learning and Teaching. [http://www.crlt.umich.edu/sites/default/files/resource\\_files/Course%20Evaluation%20Guidance.pdf](http://www.crlt.umich.edu/sites/default/files/resource_files/Course%20Evaluation%20Guidance.pdf)

Thank you for taking the time to complete the Student Opinion of Teaching Survey. Many students wonder how these surveys are utilized, who reviews them. Are there incentives for high scores? Consequences for low? In the School of Social Work, both the instructor and administration review survey responses. They are considered a formative assessment, one that helps to identify areas of strength in our teaching and opportunities for growth.

We often find students' written comments are the most valuable element of course evaluations. To help us get the most out of your end-of-term feedback, please keep the following in mind:

- Remember that you are writing to your instructor. Your feedback can valuably influence the ways they teach this course and others in the future. (Unlike an online review site like "Rate My Professor," this is not a forum for saying whether or not you recommend a course to other students.)
- Specific constructive suggestions that focus on your learning are far more useful than general praise or critiques. Try to provide feedback that helps instructors understand how their instructional choices facilitated or hindered your learning. Both positive and negative feedback is most helpful when very specific.
- Comments that are not related to your learning diminish the value of your feedback. For example, it is not helpful to comment upon an instructor's appearance or to include personal insults in your feedback.

Thanks again for your help as we work to ensure that all of our students have the knowledge, values, and skills to be a great social worker.

**Appendix H Approval of Submission (Exempt)**

***APPROVAL OF SUBMISSION (Exempt)***

<i>IRB:</i>	STUDY18110120
<i>PI:</i>	Keith Caldwell
<i>Title:</i>	Reducing Racial Bias in Student Opinions of Teaching Through Information
<i>Funding:</i>	None
<i>Date:</i>	December 12, 2018

On 12/12/2018, the Institutional Review Board reviewed and approved the above referenced application through the administrative review process. The study may begin as outlined in the University of Pittsburgh approved application and documents.

***Approval Documentation***

<i>Review type:</i>	Initial Study
<i>Approval Date:</i>	12/12/2018

<i>Exempt Category:</i>	(2) Tests, surveys, interviews, or observation
<i>Determinations:</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Students / Employees</li> </ul>
<i>Approved Documents:</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• SOT Student Consent Email.pdf</li> <li>• Faculty Recruitment Email.pdf</li> <li>• SSW SOT w.Informational Primer.docx</li> <li>• SOT Student Consent Email.pdf</li> <li>• Faculty Recruitment Email.pdf</li> <li>• HRP-711- WORKSHEET - Exemption_Tests, Surveys, Interviews, Observations_Version_0.02_Caldwell.docx</li> </ul>

As the Principal Investigator, you are responsible for the conduct of the research and to ensure accurate documentation, protocol compliance, reporting of possibly study-related adverse events and unanticipated problems involving risk to participants or others. The HRPO Reportable Events policy, Chapter 17, is available at <http://www.hrpo.pitt.edu/>.

If this trial meets the definition of a clinical trial, accrual cannot begin until it has been registered at [clinicaltrials.gov](http://clinicaltrials.gov) and a National Clinical Trial number (NCT) provided. Contact [ctgov@pitt.edu](mailto:ctgov@pitt.edu) with questions.

*Research being conducted in an UPMC facility cannot begin until fiscal approval is received from the UPMC Office of Sponsored Programs and Research Support (OSPARS). Contact [OSPARS@upmc.edu](mailto:OSPARS@upmc.edu) with questions.*

*If you have any questions, please contact the University of Pittsburgh IRB Coordinator, Larry Ivanco at [lsi1@pitt.edu](mailto:lsi1@pitt.edu).*

*Please take a moment to complete our [Satisfaction Survey](#) as we appreciate your feedback.*



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