

Personal and Professional Explorations During a Dual Pandemic from Two Social Work Professors

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Abstract: We identify as two early career Bachelor of Social Work faculty—a Black, cisgender male, and first-generation immigrant; and a cisgender white queer mother in my second career. We wanted to offer an intimate story about our experience learning and growing during a dual pandemic, one being COVID-19 (Amadasun, 2020; Miller & Lee, 2020) and the other being racial injustices with the shared witnessing of the murders of Black Americans (Sobo et al., 2020). Following the murders of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, Ahmaud Arbery, Walter Wallace Jr., and other people of color in 2020 and 2021, we facilitated seminars on anti-oppressive, trauma-informed education practice (TIEP) to faculty, staff, and students at our academic institution during the 2020-2021 academic year. We both practice anti-oppressive, trauma-informed teaching, and this manuscript focuses on our professional explorations with our students and each other during the pandemic.

Keywords: COVID-19 pandemic, teaching, parallel process, anti-oppressive trauma-informed teaching practice, coping

Introduction

In the early months of 2020, conversations about the “emerging, distant” coronavirus (COVID-19) sporadically took place in each of the spring semester classes that we taught. We and our students were not yet worried about a virus that appeared to be restricted to the Asian continent, specifically to Wuhan, China. After all, China and the United States are a world apart, so why should we (students and professors) burden ourselves with the thought of the virus reaching the shores of the United States and infiltrating our campus from thousands of miles away? Further, if the virus were to become a serious threat to the people of the United States—often self-proclaimed to be the most technologically advanced, intelligent, economically powerful, and prepared country—we would handle it with much ease, or so we thought until the middle of March 2020.

The reality of COVID-19 quickly struck when, on March 13, 2020, the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) declared the virus a national emergency of grave public health concern (CDC, 2020a). Prior to this declaration, we were aware of the lurking virus through the infrequent communications that our university sent out, but the university’s own struggles to provide consistent, clear messages about COVID-19 only reinforced our belief that academic plans would continue uninterrupted. We were clearly mistaken and misguided. No sooner had we gone on our 2020 spring break than professors received a cache of emails from our university advising that campuses would be shut down due to COVID-19, and that professors would not regain access to the campuses until further notice. Professors at our university were also advised to start preparing to switch all face-to-face and hybrid teaching modalities to 100 percent remote modalities. This abrupt change announced in early March completely caught us and our students

off-guard. Our experiences following the CDC's declaration of COVID-19 as a pandemic, the closure of our university's campuses, and the lockdown of cities/towns that ensued are discussed below.

Our Dual Pandemic Experiences: COVID-19 & Racial Injustice Protests

Our experiences related to the COVID-19 pandemic cut through both our personal and professional lives as a collective trauma where both instructors and students had similar challenging experiences about everyday life (Tosone, 2021). These personal and professional experiences overlap in unique ways for each of us. We also acknowledge the parallel process that these experiences brought up for both of us, and the impacts of the blending of boundaries between personal and professional roles on our teaching relationships (Baum, 2010; Sapiro, 2021). Some examples around these mutual experiences include grief and loss, ethical dilemmas around staying physically safe by following the COVID-19 CDC recommendations versus participating in the call to justice by protesting, the impact of increased caretaking, job changes, and challenges with technology. Techniques including safety-first practices, self-care, tuning in, parallel processing, and mutual aid practices were adopted to help us and our students deal with the harsh realities presented by the two life-altering experiences.

Brie's Story

"It's just too much. I don't think I can do this anymore...working, school, taking care of my family," said one of my Black, Indigenous, people of color (BIPOC)-identifying social work students¹, who bravely spoke up in class late October 2020. Other students nodded their heads in agreement. Another student chimed in, sharing that they felt overwhelmed and disconnected learning online, especially since a family member was sick with COVID-19. Another student shared they had lost a family member, and others shared they had lost several friends and family members in recent weeks and that it was very difficult to concentrate on their work while grieving and being pulled in different directions. This conversation came out of a prompt for students to talk about their field placement experiences since everything felt so different this year—some students were remote or hybrid, and those in-person were often under enormous pressure to stay safe and follow the agency's protocol (Mitchell et al., 2021). I asked if they were feeling supported by their field instructors and by me, their professor and field liaison. Notably, this BSW seminar class was composed entirely of post-traditional transfer social work students, mainly BIPOC-identifying students, who were in their final year of college.

Another student shared that she was relieved we were finally talking about this, because it felt like professors were keeping the syllabus the same despite it being a pandemic, and that it felt like we were just doing everything as if it were a normal year. This statement also received a lot of agreement from peers. I listened intently to all these comments, feeling that it was important to make space and time for everyone to share, but I could see that we were running out of time.

¹To maintain the confidentiality of my students, responses are composites

Just as I was saying that we did not have much time left, and that I was glad to hear their thoughts, one of my students interrupted to say that there had just been a shooting near her home—Walter Wallace Jr. (a Black father diagnosed with a serious and persistent mental illness) had just been killed by police (Gross, 2020). I am not sure exactly what I said in response—something about this being devastating—but class was then over as quickly as it had begun. It was jarring and unsettling, just like the repeated injustices committed against Black individuals—in this case, while the individual was having a mental health crisis—during a time of systemic racial oppression as well as the COVID-19 pandemic.

I contemplated how to proceed with this course going forward to best meet the needs of both the group and individual students. It was challenging to figure out how to respond to the tension between devoting time and energy to emotionally process the content and also to cover the curriculum. I followed up with the class the next morning with a short video checking in and also an email letting them know I was thinking of each of them; I also wanted to share some university resources such as counseling and a peer group (Darby & Lang, 2019). I shared my office hours with a Zoom link, and a handful of students came to check in during these times. I also shared that our next class would start with a longer mindful moment (a meditative moment of silence where a guided meditation or song is offered and followed up with a longer silence) than usual, and that we'd have time to check in and process together in both a larger group and in smaller groups. Later, the students said they appreciated that I had reached out immediately following that class. This reflects the findings by Darby and Lang (2019), who encourage frequent communication such as videos and check-in posts to connect with students when teaching online. My students shared that this helped them contain and deal with some of their related stressors. In response to the tension around limited time and conflicting needs within the classroom, I took one of our classes and divided it up into 20-minute-long individual meetings.

I could relate to some of my students' sentiments. I had not wanted to admit it to myself, but I was feeling exhausted and uninspired. During the earlier class dialogue, multiple students with connectivity problems had lost their internet connection, and at least a third of the students had their cameras off for this intimate discussion—despite my invitation for them to turn them on (McCarthy et al., 2021). According to a recent Pew Research Survey (Perrin, 2021), 15 percent of all internet users use their cell phones as their sole source of technology and do not have broadband access at home. It was also noted that 30 percent of users still have problems with their home internet, and another 34 percent struggle to pay their bill since COVID-19 (Perrin, 2021). My own internet had also presented challenges and kicked me off in the middle of presenting a new social work concept; as a result, students had become frustrated during our disjointed class time. I began to feel embarrassed by technological barriers on my end. How was I supposed to support my students emotionally and academically when they could not even hear what I was saying?

While my students shared on Zoom, I could hear my first and third grade children struggling with bedtime from my makeshift home office. They were used to me working outside the home and, when I was home, I was usually emotionally and physically available to be with them and

engage in family activities. I felt torn—here I was at home, trying to be there for my students, while also yearning to support my family by being patient and supportive during this tough time (Green & O'Reilly, 2021). My own health was suffering, as I had significant weight gain and had reinjured my back, so I was struggling to be mobile while remaining productive with my work. My partner had left her job teaching art to take care of my immunocompromised mother who was living in our home. Our third grader was being homeschooled and needed one-on-one kinetic and creative instruction, while our first grader had virtual learning but needed someone nearby to supervise them because it was so challenging to stay on task. With our new schedules, my partner was doing most of our children's teaching, childcare, and caretaking, which resulted in long hours, and her own mental health was suffering. My role as friend, sister, and community member also experienced challenging changes. I was used to being the one in my community who supported friends and family but, during this time, I felt limited in being able to support loved ones as much as I usually did. Many of my close friends were dealing with loss and increased stress around caretaking responsibilities due to COVID-19, and many were also experiencing collective trauma related to white supremacy (Watson et al., 2020).

I also longed to be a steady, dependable, and nurturing educator during this pandemic, and it was challenging to feel like I was doing enough. I felt like if I could just answer emails more quickly, return papers faster with feedback, be more cheerful, or be clearer or more organized with my teaching synchronous Zoom sessions or assignments, then I could make learning easier for my students. I heard their pain and frustration, and I felt like I was failing my students. My usual strategies as an experienced trauma-informed educator were not working, and my students were experiencing collective trauma in multiple ways from the dual pandemics of COVID-19 and racial injustice; many of them were Black, and/or employed as frontline workers in nursing homes, grocery stores, and hospitals, and were expected to take care of family members (Amadasun, 2020; Miller & Lee, 2020; Sobo et al., 2020). Despite my white privilege and the freedom to work remotely, I was also struggling to sleep, eat well, and make time to connect with colleagues and friends. I knew from Hadih, my colleague, as well as my research on undergraduate students in spring 2020 (towards the beginning of the pandemic), that our social work students had been especially resilient to stress and counted faculty as one of their main supports during the pandemic (Deedat et al., in press). I was not sure what I would do next, but my students needed additional support, and I didn't have a lot of time to figure this out.

I realized that, while I wanted things to be different, I also needed more support. I am usually a very independent person and have a high stress tolerance. I thrived on challenges, and I had loved my last job where I had fifteen years in community mental health working with individuals experiencing chronic homelessness and serious mental health challenges. While I longed to practice daily mindfulness or yoga that had worked in the past to cope with stress, I was unable to integrate these self-care activities into my daily practice. I would wake up feeling overwhelmed, and I wouldn't know where to start, which reflected the sentiments my students had expressed. I did, however, go outside whenever I could to jog, walk, or play with my kids and get a break from the persistent Zoom fatigue (Fosslien & Duffy, 2020). When I felt overwhelmed and tired, I intentionally invested more time in meeting with colleagues in a

peer-led mutual aid supervision group to brainstorm challenges; I felt that meeting with individuals outside of my university would provide a safe boundary (Wenocur et al., 2020). At times, it felt like I was working seven days a week, morning, day, and night. As soon as I realized this pattern, I would try to step away to engage in work that did not require being at a computer. That said, when you work where you live and your children are in your workspace, it becomes really challenging to create these boundaries (Sapiro, 2021).

Hadih's Story

The shutdown of our university campuses, the requirement to switch all classes to remote modes of instruction, and the lockdown of the city and state in which I resided in the initial stages of the pandemic made me dread what was to come. As a husband, a father to two incredibly young children, and as a son to an immigrant mother with little command of the English language, I suddenly felt the weight of the disruption in teaching modality. My positions as a husband, father, and son mean that I have multiple responsibilities to juggle, and I had been successful in carrying out my faculty-related responsibilities in the past by carefully planning my personal life, including plans for some emergencies during a semester. However, I had never planned for an emergency of this magnitude.

Personally, one of the most challenging barriers created by the sudden switch to remote teaching was an overreliance on an unreliable internet service. Before the pandemic, our children (three and five years old) were attending early childhood education (ECE) programs. On weekdays, they spent considerable time during the day at their ECE centers. I also spent a good amount of time at my campus offices preparing my courses and working on other faculty-related responsibilities. The pandemic would change everything. From the middle of the spring 2020 semester to now, my wife and I have had to work from home, and we have had to use internet-heavy study programs to instruct our children. We had become dependent on internet services to get our work done and to help educate our children, just as much of the world has (Dé et al., 2020). Unfortunately, this experience has offered little to cheer about. I have had to sign on and off during remote synchronous classes, re-arrange classes, and apologize to students due to an inconsistent, sometimes terrible internet connection—despite my family paying more money to our internet services provider for a stronger internet connection.

Working remotely has continued to negatively impact me well beyond these internet accessibility difficulties. The physical and psychological toll has been immense. Initially, I thought that not having to commute to two campuses was going to ensure physical health benefits. Unfortunately, working from home turned out to be more disadvantageous. From sitting behind my desk for hours on end to completing practically every task by being glued to a computer screen, I have been struggling with back pains and other forms of physical stress. I have visited my virtual doctor three times since March 2020 to complain about my physical health. Unsurprisingly, the doctor's diagnoses of my concerns have been related to my constant sitting and remaining in one position for longer hours than usual. Based on my doctor's advice, I made some significant changes to ergonomically improve my workspace, but the physical health

risks and adverse effects from working remotely have not been eliminated. The uncertainty shrouding the pandemic and my apprehension as a Black person in the age of COVID-19 continues to present a psychological toll. These experiences are shared by a lot of my students, especially students at the university's campus in an urban, predominantly Black community.

To date, I am still struggling with the capricious nature of the pandemic and its outlook for my family's safety and security. The thought of not knowing for sure if life will return to some form of normalcy has been psychologically challenging. Conflicting, incoherent messages on the virus churned out daily by public health experts and government officials have only increased this uncertainty. Worse, seeing some health professionals—once a source of hope to fight the pandemic—succumb to the very uncertainty that I am struggling with only affirms my own fears. While the unpredictability related to COVID-19 cannot be eliminated, Koffman et al. (2020) argued that it can be managed far better than is done now to minimize its damage. Managing my own COVID-19-related uncertainty would require receiving consistent, coherent messages, data, and facts from those tasked with providing these pieces of information.

A psychological toll of COVID-19 with which my BIPOC-identifying students and I are saddled is directly related to my race and ethnicity. As a Black person, the sheer knowledge of the alarming COVID-19 infection, hospitalization, and death rates among Black or African American people has increased my fear and trepidation. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC, 2020b), non-Hispanic Blacks or African Americans are 1.4 times, 3.7 times, and 2.8 times more likely to be infected, hospitalized, and die, respectively, from COVID-19, compared to non-Hispanic whites. The disparities in COVID-19 infections, hospitalizations, and deaths among Hispanic, American Indian or Alaska Native (non-Hispanic), and Asian (non-Hispanic) people mirror that of Blacks and African Americans.

As a Black person with a Latina spouse and children, the COVID-19-related disparities have heightened my psychological stress because my family, close friends, and most of my students at the university's urban campus identify as BIPOC, and BIPOC-identifying individuals are likely to have lower access to needed treatment and to experience less culturally responsive care (SAMHSA, 2020). While my students—BIPOC-identifying students especially—and I strongly hope for a quick return to some form of normal life, our hope to first overcome the COVID-related psychological stress has been hampered by the disparities in COVID infection, hospitalization, and death rates, and by the distrust in the emerging and available COVID vaccines within the BIPOC community. Sadly, the distrust of the COVID vaccines by BIPOC-identifying individuals is attributable to the underrepresentation of racial and ethnic minority groups in COVID-19 clinical trials (Chastain et al., 2020).

Furthermore, the slayings of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, and Ahmaud Arbery, among other unjustified murders of Black people by white police officers (or white civilians, in the case of Arbery), exacerbated an already devastating time within BIPOC communities. Though ethical dilemmas are very common within the social work profession (NASW, 2021), the police brutality of young Black people in 2020 did not only worsen the impacts of the ravaging

COVID-19 pandemic on my students and myself, but it also presented a novel dilemma that required a lot of processing and a profound, careful decision-making approach. Like myself, several of my students, regardless of their racial identity, shared how they found themselves at a crossroads during the protests against racial injustice that erupted across the nation following the murders of George Floyd and others. On the one hand, my students and I wanted to follow the COVID-19 guideline of avoiding large crowds to help reduce the possibility of infection and transmission of the virus. On the other hand, if we were to sit aloof during these protests, this would be acting in direct contrast to the call to social justice, a fundamental ethical tenet of the social work profession (NASW, 2021).

In addition to the self-care practices that Brie and I adopted for ourselves and for our students (discussed in detail under the “Tuning In, Parallel Process, and Mutual Aid as Pandemic Teaching Tools” subheading of this paper), I also incorporated and encouraged class discussions around safety to help my students and I deal with the presenting dilemma. First, I made sure to place the safety of myself and of my students above everything else in the face of these two traumatic events. In fact, an individual’s safety is considered the foremost step in any trauma-informed practice (Kirst-Ashman & Hull, 2018), and there had never been a better time to teach and practice from a trauma-informed lens than in the throes of a COVID-19 pandemic and national (and international) outrage and protests over the brutality of police against Black people in the United States. The safety technique that I adopted was to constantly remind myself that my emotional, physical, and mental safety was paramount and needed to be safeguarded in the face of the two competing events. I reminded myself that, in order for me to live another day and fight any and all forms of current and future injustices, I needed to participate in the racial injustice protests with as much COVID-19 caution that helped protect myself and my fellow protestors. In other words, I saw it pertinent to not choose my individual safety by completely disregarding what was in the best interest of the collective—fighting for a fair and just society—but I also wanted to make sure that I was helping address the two events in a careful, safe manner. I shared this approach with my students; through class discussions, it became apparent that students found the approach to be practical and thoughtful, in that it allowed a person to confront the two events simultaneously but in a less endangering way.

Our Shared Context, Intersectional Identities, and Roles

We are both Bachelor of Social Work (BSW), early career, untenured undergraduate social work faculty members at a large public university in Pennsylvania: One of us identifies as a Black, cisgender male, as well as a first-generation immigrant, and the other identifies as a white, queer, cisgender, female, clinical social worker. We also serve as academic and extracurricular advisors to our students. In addition to these roles, Brie serves as a field liaison to her students who are in the field. Brie’s experience is in clinical work with families and individuals and as a clinical supervisor and team leader in the field of community mental health and chronic homelessness, while Hadih’s experience is in social services for underserved and low-income communities. Hadih also has extensive professional experience working in the child welfare system, which, due to factors such as poverty and racial discrimination, lack of informal and formal supports,

and worker bias, is disproportionately overrepresented by Black children (Chibnall et al., 2003; Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2016). Both of us have a similar teaching philosophy and use anti-oppressive, trauma-informed pedagogy (Sherwood et al., 2021). We both love teaching and engaging with students from a strengths perspective and meeting them where they are in their social work processes (Rapp et al., 2006).

What is unique about our teaching roles is that we teach and advise on both a large suburban campus made up of traditional college-aged students and on a smaller urban campus that operates in both the afternoon and evenings for post-traditional aged college students. The campuses are physically over an hour apart and, while different in many ways, the curriculum we teach and the commitment we provide as faculty in our courses and as advisors is similar, though the delivery methods may vary due to educational pedagogy best practice. While Brie focuses on teaching seminar, advanced policy, generalist practice, and practice field work classes as a field liaison to students, as well as an elective on mental health and substance use, Hadih teaches core classes such as the generalist social work practice and human behavior in the social environment courses. He also teaches a university-wide diversity course, Race Relations, as well as shares his expertise in child welfare in the undergraduate Child Welfare Policy and Practice course.

As the end of the second semester of teaching during COVID-19 drew closer, we paused to reflect together and individually on what had worked and what had not worked with the curriculum, formats, teaching prompts, and assignments, so that we could incorporate student feedback and our own observations into our future classes. Students shared in the chat on Zoom, via email response, anonymously via Google Forms, and verbally in class. We also devised a series of forums to discuss this pedagogy across different disciplines. After we reviewed the cumulative feedback and reflected on our experiences, we devised two thematic interrelated areas of teaching interventions that we utilized in the spring and summer 2021 terms and plan to build on going forward. First, we used the collective social work skills of tuning in, parallel process, and mutual aid as instructors and then used this knowledge as a reflective tool to guide discussions and assignments, and concurrently integrated in the frame of anti-oppressive, trauma-informed pedagogy (Dean, 2019; Sherwood et al., 2021; Shulman, 2015).

Tuning In, Parallel Process, Modeling and Mutual Aid as Pandemic Teaching Tools with an Anti-Oppressive, Abolitionist, Trauma-Informed Teaching Pedagogy

In traumatic moments such as the COVID-19 pandemic and instances of racial injustice experienced by our students and ourselves, the utilization of the social work skill of tuning in becomes particularly important. We have been utilizing the tuning-in skill—which involves a worker’s (in this instance, a professor’s) efforts to understand and relate to a client’s (a student’s, in this instance) actual and potential feelings, concerns, beliefs, or values—to build empathy for and awareness of students’ feelings, emotions, and concerns (Shulman, 2015). To generate empathic response, we make sure to ask sensitive questions at the beginning of each class session, as well as encourage students to see the dual pandemic from their own views,

experiences, and situations. We continue to see educational and cultural benefits of using the tuning-in skill in our classrooms during the dual pandemic of COVID-19 and racial injustice. Not only have a significant number of students disclosed that the empathy and awareness they received from us made them feel respected, appreciated, and comforted, but we have also witnessed how our own self-awareness has helped us increase our work toward the development of cultural competence and sensitivity (Heydt & Sherma, 2005).

Parallel process can be used as a reflective tool in teaching when both students and teachers reflect on their similar shared experiences and use these reflections to change and design real time interventions (Miller, 2004). Social work instructors and students can use the feelings projected on to them as a tool to assist them in navigating dynamics with their peers, clients, and supervisors. In addition, use of self and authenticity can be used as relational teaching tools to increase teacher effectiveness especially with adult learners (Wang, 2011; Clemans, 2021). One example of parallel process and shared collective trauma was around the shared grief experiences by both us and our students. We mourned the loss of relationships, in-person connection, and the normative rites of passage such as graduation or in-person BSW field experiences. This is similar to Sapiro's (2021) discussion around parallel process where instructors also experienced collective grief experiences with their students around the loss of rituals that symbolize life transitions, normalcy, and private spaces to work, live, and learn in, as well as loss of income and family, autonomy, and faith in the future. Due to the shared collective trauma of the dual pandemic, students were encouraged to use these topics in class and in field supervision (Tosone, 2021). We also created new rituals such as class playlists, Google picture books about favorite college moments and classes, silly check-ins (i.e., our favorite study snack, or something funny we had recently watched), and made self-care plans to get us by from week to week.

As we instructors made more space to reflect on the social and political context, we regularly acknowledged that this was a pandemic, and that life was challenging. For example, we all wanted smooth Wi-Fi connectivity and to have screens on to connect with each other, but there would be some moments where we were unable to prevent issues. We would continue to try our best and to communicate with one another. In addition, if students did not want to have a camera on during seminar and group discussions, they should reach out to their instructor (Day & Verbiest, 2021; Marquart, 2021); we preferred cameras to be on, but we also were sensitive to unique circumstances. This addressed the students' request that we not proceed as business as usual; we needed to name and be flexible to the uncertain world we were all living in.

We made more space for mutual aid, which is complementary to parallel process (Clemans, 2021; Spade, 2020). Rooted in group work, mutual aid—which emphasizes and encourages group members to respond to other group members' needs and form supportive relationships—has proven to be a helpful, effective group dynamics approach that has positively impacted our engagement with our students. Through power-sharing (one of the core principles of mutual aid) with students, we have employed mutual aid to increase and highlight collaboration with and resourcefulness of students respectively. In line with Cohen and

Graybeal's (2007) findings, our students have shown a sense of personal and interpersonal control during virtual classes.

In addition to the interventions that were adopted to address the earlier ethical dilemma surrounding protesting in person for social justice or following the CDC guidelines to stay safe from COVID-19, we also processed these tensions in class by listening to student's diverse decisions and by sharing our own experiences. Using Marc Lamont Hill's (2020) text, *We Still Here: Police, Pandemic, Protest, and Possibility*, we explored Hill's own ethical dilemma to create social change in the streets and his fears around putting his vulnerable family members at risk. His complex decision to find alternative ways to create change while still participating in social action measures were weaved into our ethical decision-making discussions and inspired the assignments in our class. These assignments echo both Hill's (2020) and Bettina L. Love's (2019) call to civic action and participatory democratic education to create social change and justice. In our Advanced Social Policy social work class, we went from learning about how to use alternative social justice tools to doing assignments such as writing a policy memo to a social policy-maker like a governor or a state senator; crafting opinionated editorials that evoked empathy but also used facts; supporting and creating petitions; and honing the skills and tools necessary to give a five minute live oral testimony about a current social issue. Students left the course feeling empowered and skilled to actively engage in civic action.

Students also highlighted that the anti-oppressive TIEP (trauma-informed education practice) strategies such as safety and transparency they experienced in the classroom could then be applied to their field placements and coursework. While our students still expressed anxiety and fear that they would not be prepared when they graduated to practice social work, we talked about the new skills and knowledge that they had acquired. We highlighted the strength perspective by individualizing the growth and challenges of each student (Rapp et al., 2006). Using Love's (2019) abolitionist teaching framework, we, as instructors, deviated from some outdated practice examples in the assigned texts, instead using current events and examples of the courage and hope of folx resisting white supremacy to illustrate social work theory and practice. We used strength-based and liberatory examples from our own practice experience of struggle, as well as skills of mastery and growth. We continually centered the theories, practices, and experiences of BIPOC-identified scholars and social workers and are continuing to work towards decolonizing our curriculum as we move forward.

Brie worked to differentiate her service and scholarship away from performative allyship to areas that directly impact her teaching and students (Kalina, 2020). She focused on targeted antiracism activities at her university by engaging regularly in an antiracism working group with other faculty, staff, and students to reinforce direct change for our environment by offering trainings, and she also supported others to integrate antiracism work into their teaching and scholarship. After a decade and a half in community mental health, she reached out to public health contacts to propose a partnership to focus on alternatives to calling the police about mental health crises. She also started decolonizing her curriculum by integrating in more decolonized theorists in all her courses (i.e., Loretta Ross, Kimberlé Crenshaw, Angela Davis,

Dean Spade, Mariame Kaba, Bettina Love, Derald Wing Sue) and acknowledging the “white wall” of therapists and social workers (Stone & ChenFeng, 2021).

Another area Brie focused on was equity with students and mentorship. After learning about the dearth of research opportunities for undergraduate social work students, especially first generation and BIPOC-identifying students (Davidson, 2018), Brie decided to create more opportunities for her students. Brie put out an open call to any students in her classes interested in presenting and research, and she had four students participate in four different presentations and research projects, including an international conference about housing inequality and racism, as well as a gender justice conference regarding queer spaces during the pandemic; two students received funding for their ideas.

Conclusion

As the pandemic and its aftermath are still ongoing, we will continue to engage in parallel process and anti-oppressive, trauma-informed educational pedagogy with our students as we head into the future. Our recent mixed-methods research study, which focused on the wellness and coping of students in the beginning of the pandemic, demonstrated how resilient social work students can be when faced with adversity (Deedat et al., in press). Surprisingly, despite the ongoing challenges due to the COVID-19 pandemic, more BSW students applied to graduate school than in previous years to continue their social work education (Bradshaw, 2021).

There has been recent acknowledgement that faculty’s mental health has also greatly suffered during this time, and engaging in a mixed-methods study around faculty coping and well-being could greatly benefit the field of helping professionals (Ao, 2020). For future research, we think it would be helpful to see how a study of mental well-being could be applied to faculty and staff to measure their stress responses before, during, and after the pandemic. How have the increased tensions around racial injustices or issues around the pandemic intensified; such issues might include health worries, loss of loved ones, unemployment, and the continued stress of working in a pandemic environment or running a virtual school at home? In accordance with the new social work code of ethics additions (NASW, 2021), we will encourage self-care as a core practice skill and ask students to integrate self-care into every class session (Grise-Owens, 2018). Furthermore, our university focused on supporting students but did not always acknowledge the stressors that faculty and staff had to face (Berger et al., 2021). This is another implication that was brought up through this reflection essay. While TIEP has been used in various settings in the last ten years, there is limited research on integrating anti-racist pedagogy into TIEP. We hope that more research is applied to both online/remote and in-person educational process.

The COVID-19 pandemic has presented a once-in-a-lifetime experience for us as educators and for our students (Berger et al., 2021). The gravity of the pandemic has been immeasurably elevated due to a long-standing, systemic disregard for Black lives in America, which generated an overdue response in the form of protests and other racial justice campaigns during the very nascent months of the pandemic. While the COVID-19 pandemic and the racial justice protests

are now appearing to recede, together they have altered the social, physical, psychological, economic, and political landscapes of American society to a certain degree. In response to these two ongoing events, we, as social work professors, and our students have had to adapt to the changing landscapes and unexpected ethical dilemmas personally and professionally without having to sacrifice the code of ethics of the social work profession. The safety-first, self-care, and anti-racist, trauma-informed techniques adopted and co-opted into our virtual classrooms allowed us to create safe spaces for our students and for ourselves, which helped our students and ourselves to process, make sense of, and deal with the dual pandemic while upholding the tenets of the social work profession. We believe that current and future educators—particularly social work professors—can take solace and encouragement from the various techniques that we utilized to confront and continue to live through the unprecedented times presented by the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic and the systemic racial injustice in the United States.

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