

Double Special Issue: The Epilogue

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Abstract: This epilogue comments on the *Reflections: Narratives of Professional Helping* double Special Issue: A Call for Social Work Educators to Confront and Dismantle Systemic Racism *Within* Social Work Programs. The articles highlight the lived experiences, observations, and treatment of Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) in social work programs across the country and the impact on individual productivity, higher education institutions, social work curriculum and the social work profession. The issues create a lens for examination of behaviors and practices and suggest paths forward to address systemic racism within social work programs.

Keywords: institutional racism, systemic racism, anti-racism, social work, epilogue

The proliferation of deaths of African Americans over the past four years has called for an awakening to America's treatment of Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC). The current social and political climate has fueled the reawakening of the quietly present negativity against BIPOC populations to be bold and loud and challenged the social work profession to revisit how we prepare students to practice and conduct research and conceptualize who is worthy and who is not, based on race (Abrams et al., 2023). And, while the social work profession (e.g., the National Association of Social Workers and Council on Social Work Education) has adopted statements on issues of racial injustice, racial disparity, anti-racism, inclusion, equity, and diversity, there continues to be a gap in the practice of these areas, as well as a level of resistance by some to adhere to them or take them seriously. Thus, there is much work to be done in evaluating the production and circulation of racial discourses by communities and institutions, especially how national ideals, bodies, and borders are constituted and challenged within that discourse.

In this powerful collection, we heed a resounding call to action that echoes far beyond the pages and reverberates within the very fabric of social work education. This double issue stands as a collective voice, a unified plea urging social work educators to confront and dismantle the entrenched specter of systemic racism within the very programs designed to foster positive change. The narratives within unfold as poignant testimonials, illuminating the realities faced by educators of diverse backgrounds and experiences as they navigate the complexities of a profession that professes values of equity and inclusivity. As we delve into these narratives, we confront uncomfortable truths, challenge prevailing norms, and emerge with a shared commitment to catalyze real, substantive change. Together, these narratives beckon educators, administrators, and advocates alike to engage in candid dialogue, dismantle barriers, and embrace the imperative of fostering environments that embody the principles of justice, equity, and anti-oppression within social work education.

This double Special Issue—V29(2) and V30(1)—presents parallel narratives that facilitate critical reflection and dialog about the role of the social work profession in the development of anti-racist policies and practices in the social work profession. Additionally, the narratives provide an opportunity for the use of diverse voices, theories, and methods that challenge us to

conceptualize and enact an anti-racist future through reckoning with our past histories of oppression and resistance; de-centering whiteness; and forging new practices, policies, and pedagogies that can lead to an anti-racist future. Concerted and intensified efforts have to be made for change to occur. Throughout this double Special Issue, authors reveal key themes that form common threads across their diverse experiences.

V29(2) focuses on institutional racism, including experiences with misogynoir at predominately white institutions; dual stressors of classism and racism; the witnessing of anti-black racism; historical and contemporary experience of being racially restricted; white fragility; academic censoring due to the use of critical race theory; and contemporary experiences around dealing with the murder of George Floyd. Additionally, solutions for dealing with such experiences and stereotypes expressed over the past years specific to BIPOC people include trauma strategies used to address and survive the documented stressors that African American women often face in the academy.

V30(1) provides in-depth accounts of racism based on space and place, marginalization, and the need for decolonization of the social work curriculum to include critical race theory. Moreover, this issue illuminates racial bias in academic institutions; the profession's checkered history of complicity with racial subjugation; microaggressions endured by Black graduate students in social work programs; the intersectionality of race, gender, age, and citizenship; and the transformative potential of diversifying curricula and incorporating critical race theory.

The themes of both issues include the imperative to dismantle racial inequalities and the envisioning of a future grounded in equity, inclusion, and change. The commonalities among the authors' reflections collectively urge the members of the social work academy to confront, evolve, and actively engage in the ongoing journey toward equity and inclusivity in social work education.

Conclusion: Navigating the Unfinished Journey Toward Inclusivity in Social Work Education

As we stand at the crossroads of these poignant narratives, woven together by the diverse voices of scholars, it is undeniably clear that the journey toward inclusivity in social work education is critical and incomplete. The raw honesty and courageous introspection shared by these academics serve as a testament to the progress made and an unwavering call to action.

Yet, as these narratives unfold, it becomes painfully apparent that the journey toward full inclusivity in social work education still needs to be completed. Despite its commitment to social justice, the academy grapples with persistent challenges—implicit biases, microaggressions, systemic injustices, and historical complicity—that cast shadows over its aspirational ideals.

This collection of narratives is a powerful reminder that true inclusivity requires more than rhetorical commitments; it demands an unflinching examination of institutional structures, curricula, and interpersonal dynamics. The impact of these stories lies not only in their

revelatory nature but in their potential to spark transformative change. The academy must heed this call to action, recognizing that the path to inclusivity is linear and has obstacles. It necessitates a sustained commitment to dismantling systemic barriers, confronting uncomfortable truths, and fostering an environment where every voice is heard and actively valued. The implications are profound, urging social work education to evolve beyond performative gestures toward an authentic commitment to justice, equity, and inclusion.

In the face of these narratives, social work education stands at a critical juncture. The journey toward total inclusivity is ongoing, and the academy must summon the collective will to traverse the remaining distance. The narratives shared here are beacons illuminating the path forward, urging us to confront the unfinished business of inclusivity and affirming that the pursuit of justice is an eternal and indispensable commitment for the profession of social work.

References

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