REFLECTIONS

NARRATIVES of PROFESSIONAL HELPING

"Academic Justice" Pencil on Paper 9"x12" Shonda K. Lawrence 2023

Artist Statement: Social work is rooted in core values that are taught by social work academics across the country. The core values instilled in students support advocacy for vulnerable populations. However, what happens when the teacher is a part of the vulnerable population? Navigating academic systems can leave many vulnerable as they experience issues in academic settings. The hand represents the weighted feeling of oppression and hinders the full potential of the person no matter how accomplished.

A Call for Social Work Educators to Confront and Dismantle Systemic Racism *Within* Social Work Programs (Issue 1)

Guest Editors: Tiffany D. Baffour and Shonda K. Lawrence

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Reflections from the Guest Editors: A Call for Social Work Educators to Confront and Dismantle Systemic Racism Within Social Work Programs

Tiffany D. Baffour and Shonda K. Lawrence

Abstract: Anti-racism is defined as "an action oriented, educational and/or political strategy for systemic and political change that addresses issues of racism and interlocking systems of social oppression" (Dei & Calliste, 2000, p. 188). This first of a two-part Special Issue of a trilogy on race and racism describes anti-racism efforts to dismantle racism in social work programs and departments. Individual transformation, organizational change, movement-building, and efforts to create more equitable and inclusive classrooms and racial equity in policies within social work programs are described. Counter-storytelling, using identity as its central theme, is used to discuss personal and/or institutional strategies for addressing, confronting, or dismantling systemic constraints that inhibit institutional change.

Keywords: anti-racism, systemic racism, social work education, reflection, higher education

Tiffany

This Special Issue came out of several conversations with my friend and Co-Editor, Shonda Lawrence. We met several years ago on the Commission on Membership and Professional Development at the Council on Social Work Education. As fellow change makers and disruptors, we often share our collective experiences with misogynoir in social work programs at predominately white institutions (PWIs). At the time, I was reading about Black scholars' experiences with racism (and other interlocking systems of oppression) in their careers. This powerful dialogue initiated by two Black women, Joy Melody Woods and Shardé M. Davis, was not happening in peer-reviewed journals but on Twitter via @BlackInTheIvory (#BlackintheIvory). Simultaneously, there was a growing movement happening informally within social work education through discussion and meetings during the pandemic that began to highlight the experiences of Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) faculty with racism. I was interested in documenting these experiences with institutional racism more formally. My experience is that many of our fellow social work educators believe that as a profession (and as individuals) we are above racism. Even after the death of Mr. George Floyd and countless others, I have watched how this lack of action erodes the values and ethical core of our profession. If our profession is to become anti-racist, *we must address our own house first before we tell others theirs is in disarray*. We must be willing to move from conversation to action.

Like many of my colleagues describe in V28(2), the first Special Issue in the trilogy (Gibson et. al., 2022), I grew up experiencing the sting of racism but continued to be inspired by a legacy of social change agents. Odell Sanders, a prominent member of West Tennessee's Rural Freedom Movement, fought for civil rights under insurmountable odds. Among other leaders in West Tennessee, Sanders was a key organizer of welfare leagues in the early 1960s (Ballantyne, 2021). Local, Black-led organizations, along with donations from organizations such as the

National Association for the Advancement of Colored People **(**NAACP), Congress of Racial Equality (CORE), the National Sharecroppers Fund, and the American Friends Service Committee brought needed aid to scores of evicted and blacklisted sharecroppers who had been displaced following their successful participation in voter registration drives (Ballantyne, 2021). Sanders was a key leader in voter registration and the desegregation of public schools as well as chief plaintiff in a lawsuit asserting discrimination in jury selection in rural West Tennessee. Sanders and many others made an indelible mark to humanize Blackness and fight for basic civil rights. He went on to become the first Black member of the school board in Haywood County, TN. He also made many sacrifices to his family's safety and financial well-being to fight for what he believed. In 1965, a cross was burned on his front lawn following the enrollment of several of his children into newly desegregated public schools (Voogt, 2005). Following a Ku Klux Klan rally and reports of gunfire in town, Mr. Sanders' home was bombed by dynamite in 1966 (Voogt, 2005). Although no one was severely physically injured, the perpetrators were never prosecuted for their crime.

Odell Sanders was my paternal grandfather. Thus, I cannot remain complacent in my success because of his sacrifices. I recall how he paced the floors at night checking to make sure we were all safe. This was one to two decades after the crosses burned and the house was bombed. He lacked a sense of physical and psychological safety. Many BIPOC, including myself, also lack a feeling of physical and/or psychological safety in higher education institutions and within social work programs today. Our encounters in social work education don't typically involve crosses or bombings but institutional trauma and betrayal in the form of the denial of racist incidents, intentional disadvantage, isolation, microaggressions, racial gaslighting, and differential workloads to name a few. *Who is checking to ensure the psychological safety of BIPOC in social work programs?*

My grandfather passed away before my 16th birthday. I recall a picture of him and Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. on the mantle in the family sitting room, the place I spent many of my childhood summers and Christmases. He always made me feel special and, that even at a young age, I was somehow ordained to break barriers. Racism continues to function as a system, not a character flaw, a mental health condition, or an innocuous boogie man. My fight is to dismantle racism within the profession I love, including our curriculum, faculty development (hiring, retention, promotion and tenure, funding, pay equity, pedagogical strategies), student development (recruitment, retention, scholarships/funding), practicum-based education, and program assessment. Honoring his memory means that I must continue to break through concrete barriers and ceilings. I have a vision for social work education as a place of belonging and equity *for all*, not just the chosen few. *Thanks, Grandad, for your example.*

My world transformed around age 11, when I relocated to rural Chester County, PA. My mother had recently acquired her PhD and was teaching at a Historically Black College or University (HBCU) in our new community. Chester County has a distressing history of racism and segregation. While *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954) made state-sponsored school segregation illegal in the United States, the Oxford, PA, School District did not fully integrate until 1970. The court ruled that total integration had to be enforced in the School District in 1970 ("50 Year Anniversary," 2020). I genuinely had no idea I was entering middle school

approximately 12 years after the forced integration of public schools (or even what that meant). I was the only individual in my class that identified as Black and female. I was regularly bullied by my classmates which included being slapped, kicked, spit at, and called derogatory names including racial slurs. Often as these things were happening, I would see the teacher looking directly at me while pretending that he didn't see anything. I never remember him intervening. I always received the lowest grade in the class and never any encouragement. Eventually, feeling defeated, I would spend most of the school day with my head down on the desk. Part way through the seventh grade, I relocated back to the Washington, DC metro area, living with my father in a working-class Black community. I rarely spoke of those experiences for decades until after the death of George Floyd. I didn't have the words to express the racial trauma I experienced. I integrated into my new environment, attending a state-of-the art racially diverse school, compliments of court rulings such as *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954), pro-busing policies of the 1980s, and the innumerable sacrifices of the brave children and their families who were trailblazers in the desegregation movement. *Thanks, Grandad, Mom, and the millions of others who stood on the front line.*

I struggled with lack of achievement motivation throughout middle and high school which continued to impact my academic performance. In retrospect, I understand the clear link to unprocessed racial trauma. I am thankful for two tenacious parents who always recognized and encouraged my potential. My last few years of high school in post-colonial Zimbabwe and my college experience at a Hispanic Serving Institution (HSI) were much needed healing experiences marked by mentorship, empowerment, and support from administrators and faculty. I went on to receive two master's degrees from PWIs and a PhD from an HBCU.

My first graduate experience occurred less than a thirty-minute drive from my rural Pennsylvania middle school in a neighboring state. This experience too mirrored my childhood, rarely being encouraged or supported for my academic talents by my professors, only for my creative hairstyles and clothing. I received lesser grades than other students although I gave my all. I often went to see my professors to ask how I could improve. I remember the disapproving look on one professor's face then being told, it was "my writing" (without elaboration about what that meant). [Note, I have often heard this as a reason not to admit students of color to social work programs because "their writing is not good."] I spent hours upon hours in the writing lab with tutors who reviewed every assignment. I attached the feedback from the tutors and proof of every appointment related to the assignment at submission. My grades didn't improve significantly despite my efforts. I completed the required two years of course work with mostly Bs. I am thankful for two steadfast and encouraging mentors, a Black woman, and a white woman. Neither were my instructors, but they met with me regularly, and checked in on me. When I gave up on completing my thesis, they continued to contact me and support me. I dropped out and worked for several years as a case manager before coming back to finish. It took me five years to complete my first masters, two for my second, and four for my PhD. My experiences with intersectional discrimination have continued through my many roles and positions in social work education.

Social work education should be an exemplar for institutional equity. To the contrary, throughout my twenty-plus years in academia, I have noticed a pattern of behavior within social

work programs. Many white educators profess their commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion goals while simultaneously participating in policies and practices that exclude and minimize the BIPOC scholars (Gibson et. al., 2022) and students. What responsibility do we have to each other to ensure workplace equity? How do we truly engage in equitable policies and practices?

After the death of Mr. Floyd, I began to think: What can I do so others don't experience the racial trauma I have within academic institutions? How do I become a more active agent for change in my institution and within my profession? How do I become a more active and effective mentor and support system to support students of color and allies on campus? How can I facilitate my own post-traumatic healing from the racial trauma I experienced in past and present? Challenging systemic racism often feels like challenging a brick wall. I use the influence I have as a tenured faculty and administrator to develop and evaluate programs and services that encourage racial and gender equity within higher education. I work with lots of students across disciplines, as many as I can, on projects that forward racial justice from service to research. This work has facilitated institutional change and my own post-traumatic healing. I am hopeful that things will be different for the next generation of social work educators and in turn our students. These narratives demonstrate that social work institutions can support and promote structural and institutional transformation. They illustrate, with unflinching candor and courage, that racism experienced by BIPOC in social work education is normative, and we need to work collectively to change it. We need all aspects of our profession focused on eliminating institutional inequality. This must be the job of everyone, including Deans, Program Directors, Field Directors, and other key institutional leaders. I implore each social work educator to carve out your space and dedicate yourself to engagement in changing our institutions.

Shonda

This two-part Special Issue is part of a trilogy sharing unpleasant and rarely discussed inequitable experiences of Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) social work educators within institutions of higher learning. When my friend and colleague, Tiffany, and I began to discuss our own experiences of racism, microaggressions, and unfair and unjust treatment, we also began to recount many related untold stories of our BIPOC colleagues. We realized there were few, if any, safe spaces that allowed for the expression of these experiences. We also realized that the impacts of these experiences were not new and deeply rooted in existential realities and familial experiences. The alignment of fear of retribution, unwarranted use of power, privilege, and oppression in our stories was all too familiar. This alignment also helped to explain our need to create this space.

I was born in Greenville, MS. In 1965, when I was eighteen months old, my family became a part of the second phase of African American great migration in the United States. My parents moved to the westside of Chicago, IL, a predominantly African American area. They were looking for a better life for themselves and their children. At the age of nine my father was shot and killed. My mother quickly moved our family to Markham, IL, a southern suburb of Chicago. At that time, Markham and the surrounding communities were predominantly white. I continued to attend a parochial school. It is at this time that I would first become aware of the feeling of

inferiority. One devastating and long-lasting impression comes to mind. While in class, our teacher, a nun, asked that all of the Black students come to the front of the class. She then went on to explain to the rest of the white students that they were the good vanilla babies and that God had left us in the oven too long. As a 10-year-old child, I was embarrassed and did not feel good about myself. I was also angry and became disinterested in school and would not become interested again until high school when an African American counselor saw in me what I could not see in myself. Interestingly, I never told my mother or any other adult. I just carried it. I continued to carry that experience as I graduated from high school, two master's programs, and a doctoral program. It continues to resonate with me and continues to remind me of all the baggage that BIPOC have to carry as they matriculate through institutions of higher learning and as they become a part of these institutions as staff, faculty, and administrators.

As we recruited and advertised for authors to submit manuscripts for the issue, I heard many comments like "What are you all trying to do?" and "I don't know; I'm not trying to get fired." Although we continued to explain that this was an opportunity to provide real life accounts of their experiences that could help in addressing issues of racism and its sub-parts to enhance our social work programs and working environments, the fear of writing and publishing an article that could, or was believed would, impact their working environment, relationships, promotion, and tenure was real for many of our colleagues. It was not that they did not want to share their experiences; however, it was clear that power, privilege, oppression, and retribution were pushing them into silence. My Co-Editor and I were then led to create a space that would allow some authors to share freely through drawings, artwork, poetry, and photographs. This helped, but I believe that the greatest influence was the murder of George Floyd and the Black Lives Matter Movement. Thanks to our courageous and fearless BIPOC colleagues, we don't have to "just carry it." We can identify it, address it, and find solutions that will strengthen our social work profession, working environment, and programs in a way that will not only benefit those in institutions of higher learning but those that will come behind us.

Highlights of This Issue

In this Special Issue, authors present reflective accounts that describe and explain personal experiences of institutional racism within schools, colleges, and departments of social work. They discuss the process of developing personal or institutional strategies for addressing, confronting, or dismantling racism within institutions, as well as structural constraints on institutional change. What systematic changes should schools, colleges, and departments of social work aspire to address regarding issues of systemic racism? Start with being open to listening and understanding these counter-stories. As Khan and Wilson assert in one of the articles, "it takes moral courage to share personal experiences of institutional racism and to challenge whiteness in all its forms" (p. 94). Thank you to the brave BIPOC and our allies in this issue for your moral courage in choosing to share this sacred space and tell your stories to make the social work profession more equitable.

In this issue, *social identities* provide an important theme for describing the experiences of authors from multiple perspectives and voices. Identity can be defined as an individual's sense of self as well as a unique set of characteristics, relationships, and social norms that shape one's

worldview (Yilmaz, 2022). Intersectional characteristics may include (but are not limited to) "age, caste, class, color, culture, disability and ability, ethnicity, gender, gender identity and expression, generational status, immigration status, legal status, marital status, political ideology, race, nationality, religion and spirituality, sex, sexual orientation, and tribal sovereign status" (CSWE, 2022, p. 9).

In "Melanated and Educated: A Scholarly Personal Narrative," Curiel uses scholarly personal narrative as a research method to explore his experiences as a Latinx male in social work education. LatCrit and intersectionality provide an important theoretical framework for understanding the context of systemic racism and oppression including assimilation and acculturation, micro-aggressions, racial gaslighting, and cultural taxation. Curiel discusses the need for a more diverse social work workforce and BIPOC initiatives focused on retention.

In "Changing the System While You Are in the System is Not Easy: Creating Cultural Safety for Native American Students on Campus," Devereaux and Walker explore the practicum experience of a Native American undergraduate social work student implementing a program evaluation at a campus-based Native American student services center. The authors assert that the social work curriculum often "[lacks] relevance" (p. 34) to the underrepresented communities our profession seeks to serve. Thus, centering student voices as well as their expertise of ancestral practices and traditions (rather than research methodology learned through their academic program) allowed for the primary author to create a safe space that maximized dialogue about challenges and needed action strategies to implement institutional change. The authors identify innovative qualitative data collection strategies that can be replicated.

The article from Alvarez as well as the article from Rodriguez-JenKins, Hunte, Mitchell Dove, Alvarez, Ouanesisouk Trinidad, and Mehrotrautilize are literary formats that highlight systemic racism through powerful narratives. In "three nine twenty-one," Alvarez's poem discusses hate crimes committed against the Filipino community and the frustration of "waking up to another headline for 'no apparent reason'" (p. 49). Alvarez confronts the emotional complexity of teaching and learning about hate violence and the change that can occur through transformative pedagogy.

In "Love Letters for Liberatory Futures," Rodriguez-JenKins et al. utilize letters to narrate courageous conversations in opposition to white supremacy in academia. The authors use their identities and intersections of experience as "Black, Asian/Asian American, Latinx, Multiracial, queer, first generation, parents, daughters, tenured, pre-tenure … from diverse geographies and class backgrounds" (p. 52) to create messages of hope for a liberatory future. With their past selves, children, future social work students, and new BIPOC faculty as their intended audience, the authors impart lessons of love, light, and hope using their experiences in higher education. Together, they allow us to envision an anti-racist society and profession.

Five narratives by Valandra; Coles; Khan and Wilson; Mitchell Dove; and Wade Berg, Robinson-Dooley, Kennett, and Collard interweave personal experiences regarding structural racism and anti-Blackness with a call to action for facilitating social change within the profession. In "Social Work Educators in PWIs: Betrayed and Triggered Regularly," Valandra

explores anti-Black racism in social work education through key concepts such as racial battle fatigue; reproduction of whiteness; and performative diversity, equity, and inclusion practices. Concrete strategies and resources that prioritize the wellness, professional development, and advancement of Black faculty in the academy are forwarded.

"In My Own House: Experiencing Racism and Discrimination as a Black Academic in a School of Social Work" describes Coles' experiences with racial discrimination and trauma *within* a school of social work. The author describes encounters with excessive critique, microaggressions, microinsults, and microinvalidations from senior colleagues, as well as a lack of action taken by administrators to address discriminatory practices, and urges social work education specifically to take a critical step in identifying ways the cycle of racial bias and discrimination is perpetuated within our own walls and to create strategies for change.

In "We Have Some Work to Do: Kitchen Table Conversations Between Black and Brown Scholars in Canadian Academe," Khan and Wilson explore several themes such as anti-Black sexism, racism, and tokenism. The authors provide suggestions for creating alliances to address structural racism.

Like many Black women in academia, Mitchell Dove ponders "how [she] ended up here in academia, occupying this space" (p. 108). Like others, Mitchell Dove asserts education is a practice of freedom. Further, her counter-narrative is a powerful testament to the politics of refusal (Karera, 2021). She asserts responding to racism and anti-Blackness from a place of empowerment in which she emphasizes the need for healthy boundaries, protecting her space and energy.

Similarly, "Reflections on the Climb to Promotion and Well-Being: Confronting the Discipline, the Department, and Drama" provides an account by four Black women. Wade-Berg et al. explore differential treatment, inequitable workloads, unfair scrutinization, micro-aggressions, stereotyping, isolation, pay inequity, and cultural taxation. Importantly, Black women in the academy must support each other through building professional networks with each other.

Lastly, Brown suggests strategies for confronting bias. In "White Like Social Work," Brown uses both personal narrative and a book critique to engage in critical thought about anti-racism and white privilege. Brown provides practical strategies such as "calling out" vs. "calling in" (p. 116) to examine institutional policies within social work programs. Further, Brown identifies *White Like Me: Reflections on Race from a Privileged Son* by Tim Wise (2011) as a resource for white social work students to challenge their biases and for all students, including BIPOC, as a tool to critique anti-racist rhetoric.

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We appreciate your commitment to this journal and its authors!!

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Thank you for visiting salemstate.edu/reflections to help us continue to publish *Reflections*!!

Melanated and Educated: A Scholarly Personal Narrative

Luis O. Curiel

Abstract: I apply Scholarly Personal Narrative (SPN) in this paper as the research method to reflect on my academic experiences as a Latino within social work education. The four major components of SPN—pre-search, me-search, re-search, and we-search—facilitate my discussions on the racist encounters I have survived throughout my academic journey. Grounded in Latina/o Critical Theory (LatCrit) and Intersectionality Theory frameworks, I apply LatCrit's testimonio (narrative) approach to explain the four major themes that emerged: assimilation and acculturation, barriers to education, microaggressions and racial gaslighting, and cultural taxation. I conclude with recommendations for recruiting and retaining men of color in social work education and discuss the potential benefits of cultural resemblance between instructor and student.

***Keywords*:** men of color, social work education, LatCrit theory, intersectionality, racism

National data on graduation rates of students of color compared to their White counterparts reveal palpable disparities (Banks & Dohy, 2019). The national discourse has firmly focused on standardized test scores to justify these inequities, blaming the individual while simultaneously absolving academic institutions of their responsibility to abolish barriers to admission and retention that uniquely impact students of color (Au, 2016). Students of color attending predominantly White institutions are often subjected to racist assaults by their White peers and professors, impacting their academic performance and retention rates (Banks & Dohy, 2019; Harwood et al., 2018). The National Center for Education Statistics (2020) identified an overwhelming number of White faculty in higher education (40 percent White males; 35 percent White females) compared to Black (3 percent male; 3 percent female) and Latinx faculty (3 percent male; 3 percent female).

A renewed commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion proclaimed by academic institutions comes on the heels of the Black Lives Matter movement. Despite these claims, faculty of color, especially women, persistently and disproportionately face barriers navigating the academic pipeline to achieve tenure and promotion (Beeman, 2021). Students identified as Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) seeking social work doctoral education in the US face multiple barriers to success (Tijerina & Deepak, 2014). Primary factors identified as challenges generally fall into two categories: admission barriers and retention challenges. Studies examining diversity in social work doctoral programs recognize a lack of academic support and mentorship, a need for financial aid, and racist experiences as factors that negatively impact both the admission and retention of BIPOC students (Creecy et al., 1979; Davis & Livingstone, 2016; Ghose et al., 2018; Tijerina & Deepak, 2014). To mitigate this issue, some scholars propose increasing faculty of color, establishing mentorship networks, and expanding academic and financial support to students of color (Ghose et al., 2018). However, the relationship between social work practice and higher education is steeped in the discrimination and exclusion of BIPOC students and faculty. Ignoring these historical patterns of racial exclusion within social work education perpetuates them into the present and ensures their existence in the future.

Recent findings from a survey of over 50 Master of Social Work (MSW) programs showed a majority of MSW graduates as White (57 percent), heterosexual (86 percent), and female (90 percent; Council on Social Work Education [CSWE], 2020). Changing demographics in social work over the past 30 years show a decline of men in the field and an increase in women in social work doctoral programs (Reisch, 2013). This demographic information suggests that the future of social work education and its engagement with interpersonal and systemic racism issues rests in the hands of a heterosexual, White, female majority. These findings support the need for more research to understand how having a disproportionate number of White postsecondary faculty impacts BIPOC students pursuing higher education. In conducting this Scholarly Personal Narrative (SPN; Nash & Bradley, 2011), I shed light on my experience as a Latino in social work education in my role as a student and as a professor of the discipline.

Research integrated with personal identity investigation using SPN methodology is applied throughout this paper. SPN writing originates from early slave narratives and places the researcher front and center, legitimizing the first-person's singular perspective (Nash & Viray, 2013). This methodology involves a creative process of selecting relevant themes, sharing personal stories about those themes, and connecting the stories to scholarly works (Nash & Bradley, 2011). SPN applies to studies examining large institutions or analyzing classroom-specific dynamics and the wider academic community (Ng & Carney, 2017). The four major components of SPN—pre-search, me-search, re-search, and we-search—guide my self-reflection to discuss the institutional racism I have endured within academic settings. Within this article, the conceptual frameworks grounded on Latina/o Critical Theory (LatCrit; Valdes, 2005) and Intersectionality (Carbado et al., 2013) are applied as complementary methods to interpret and analyze the overarching themes of ethnicity, race, and gender diversity within academic institutions and social work education.

My intersectional identities and personally lived experiences are inherently intertwined and consequently influence my social work practice. Personal history informs my current role as a social work educator and inevitably shaped my academic work as a student. Similarly, social work's checkered history as a discipline reverberates in present-day practices. My experiences confronting racism within social work education explain how I arrived at this current personal and professional juncture. Currently, the visibility and rise of activist groups like the Black Lives Matter movement have heightened self-awareness among people of color, influencing Black and Brown people to use terms like "'melanated' to describe their love for their dark-colored skin" (Orey & Zhang, 2019, p. 2460). As a melanated and educated man persisting and resisting within the ivory tower, I offer my testimonio (narrative) to add to the few voices of Latinx men in social work education.

Theoretical Framework

A theory is a set of ideas whose primary purpose is to explain the nature of a given phenomenon and the factors contributing to a phenomenon's manifestation (Johnson-Ahorlu, 2017). I apply the LatCrit methodology of testimonio (narratives) to describe my social work education experiences. Perez-Huber (2009) explains this methodology in the following way: "testimonio – [is] a verbal [or written] journey of a witness who speaks to reveal the racial, classed, gendered,

and nativist injustices they have suffered as a means of healing, empowerment, and advocacy for a more humane present and future" (p. 644).

Latina/o Critical Theory

LatCrit theory is a contemporary of Critical Legal Studies and evolved from Critical Race Theory (CRT) to address concerns of Latina/o in legal discourses and social policy (Valdes, 2005). Closely interrelated to CRT, LatCrit analyzes issues raised in CRT and expands on language, immigration, ethnicity, culture, identity, phenotype, gender, and sexuality (Gonzalez et al., 2021). LatCrit scholars recognize the socio-legal inequalities institutionalized through generations of conquest and colonization that disadvantage Latinx communities (Valdes, 2005). LatCrit researchers aim to expose and confront the prevalence of discrimination and subjugation that produces disparate social and economic outcomes for Latinx people in the United States. With a primary goal of promoting social justice and equality, the theoretical method of LatCrit aligns with social work values and provides a valuable perspective to analyze social work practice and education (Kiehne, 2016).

Intersectionality Theory

Intersectionality, coined by Kimberlé Crenshaw in 1989, is rooted in Black feminism and CRT to address discrimination based on race and gender (Carbado et al., 2013). Intersectionality is multifaceted and is regarded as a framework, a theory, a paradigm, a method, a perspective, or a lens to analyze phenomena (Bubar et al., 2016). Intersectionality is critical for deconstructing institutional violence, power, and privileges, such as the disparate treatment and disproportionate rates of policing BIPOC communities by law enforcement (Carastathis, 2014). It simultaneously situates social identities and social locations regarding race, class, gender, and sexuality, drawing connections to the roles of the oppressed and oppressor (Bubar et al., 2016).

Literature Review (Re-Search)

History

In the US, the social work profession's foundation was cross-cultural work with European immigrants. Assimilation methods in social work practice demanded immigrants renounce their culture, language, and ethnic institutions, generating a new "American" cultural group (Potocky, 1997). Some social workers in the Settlement House movement, like Jane Addams, focused on improving neighborhoods and changing social conditions and encouraged White European immigrants to maintain their cultural practices instead of reforming the individual (Reisch & Andrews, 2014). However, early social work services were directed exclusively toward White European settlers and deliberately excluded African Americans (Hounmenou, 2012). As social work strived to gain legitimacy as a profession, it aligned with a "scientific" approach in their practice. Adopting a pro-eugenics stance was sanctioned by the American Social Hygiene Association and endorsed by esteemed social work founders, including Jane Addams, Mary Richmond, Sophonisba Breckinridge, and Edith Abbott (Bromfield, 2016). In alignment with

eugenics, social workers targeted poor, non-White girls and women, supporting, in some cases, their forced sterilization and the deportation of non-Anglo-Saxon immigrants (Kennedy, 2008).

Additionally, the federal Indian boarding school program supported by social work reformers believed that they were rescuing Indigenous children from unfit families and providing them the opportunity for a successful future—aligning with the eugenics project (Kennedy, 2008). Between 1958 to 1968, the Child Welfare League of America (CWLA) and the US Bureau of Indian Affairs initiated efforts to adopt Native American children into White families (Crofoot & Harris, 2012). During this period of family separation and forced assimilation, the CWLA required that a qualified social worker remain on staff. However, there were no requirements for cultural competency or title protection for social workers at the time. Regardless, the trauma and cultural genocide inflicted upon Indigenous people by social workers through the boarding school and Indian adoption eras left an indelible mark that persists in contemporary times (Thibeault & Spencer, 2019).

Since the Indian boarding school era and following the Civil Rights Movement, concerted efforts have increased ethnically/racially diverse social workers at MSW and doctoral levels (Anastas & Kuerbis, 2009). Yet, students and faculty of color remain woefully underrepresented in schools of social work, especially men (CSWE, 2020). During the 60s and 70s, social workers who earned doctorates were likelier to be male (Anastas & Kuerbis, 2009). However, more recently, compared to women, men in social work decreased in North America, the United Kingdom, and Australia (Giesler & Beadlescomb, 2015). Additionally, most social work students are women across the social work education continuum (CSWE, 2020). A barrier that deters men from considering social work as a career option is its framing as a caring profession and the association of caring with women (Pullen & Simpson, 2009). Men are perceived to have a different relationship with caring than women due to the social construction of masculinity (Pease, 2011). Men in social work programs may struggle with identity due to feeling pressured to perform masculinity while engaging in a traditionally female role of caring and compassion (Christie, 2001).

A content analysis of men's portrayal in introduction to social work textbooks positions women (i.e., Jane Addams and Mary Richmond) as pioneers of the profession while simultaneously erasing male social workers (Pease, 2011). Although some White men receive credit for contributing to the profession's evolution from the 1930s and beyond, these men presidents and legislators (i.e., Franklin D. Roosevelt and William J. Clinton) were not social workers (Giesler & Beadlescomb, 2015). Textbook depictions of social work uphold societal regards that it is a female-identified profession and suggest that male students pursuing social work education assume positions of power—perpetuating patriarchal norms (Christie, 2001). As men in social work, we are responsible for being critical of hegemonic masculinity and conscious of gendered injustices associated with male privilege (Pease, 2011).

Latinx Male College Students

A deficit of information exists regarding the motivation to succeed and achieve academic and career goals among Latino college students. Educators may erroneously perceive Latinos as

unmotivated, lacking educational goals, and unlikely to succeed in college—contributing to our lack of representation in higher education (Salinas et al., 2020). Compared to other racial/ethnic groups, Latinos are more likely to drop out of high school to pursue employment, forego academic opportunities due to financial need, and not achieve college graduation due to poverty. Additionally, Latinos are more likely to attend impoverished schools and less likely to receive the necessary academic support to prepare us for higher education (Pérez, 2017).

The cultural value of familismo (familism) impacts Latinos' educational attainment as it may deter us from enrolling in college to contribute financially to support our family (Gloria & Castellanos, 2006). However, other important values such as respect, chivalry, and humility instilled by Latinx parents in their children foster social goals instead of academic pursuits. These values motivate one to succeed and sustain a desire to serve others (Pérez, 2017). To succeed academically, Latinos turn to peers to sustain familial and social capital relying on peer networks rather than college faculty and administrators for support (Flores & Patrón, 2021). Therefore, Latinos' academic success depends on cultural wealth rather than institutional conditions (Olcoń et al., 2018).

Latinx Faculty

Despite comprising the largest ethnic group in the US (Orozco-Figueroa, 2021), few Latinx people become faculty in university settings. Often, those who become faculty concentrate in Hispanic Serving Institutions and two-year colleges occupying low-status, non-tenure-track positions. Even though becoming a professor was ranked as the top choice for Latinx college seniors' occupations, few successfully navigate the academic pipeline to the professoriate—only 0.2 percent complete a doctorate (Delgado-Romero et al., 2007; Sólorzano et al., 2005). Barriers Latinx faculty encounter include feeling isolated, marginalized, and tokenized due to our low representation—precluding us from being more positive role models for Latinx students (Gloria & Castellanos, 2006; Salinas et al., 2020).

Additionally, BIPOC faculty who often teach coursework on multiculturalism and diversity are routinely evaluated harshly by students, reflecting negatively on teaching evaluations and tenure (Morehouse-Mendez & Perez-Mendez, 2018). Furthermore, Latinx faculty barriers are related to the vast diversity within our broadly defined ethnic group, including differences in skin color (colorism), degree of acculturation, country of origin, and accent (Delgado-Romero et al., 2007). These attributes may contribute to differential treatment from colleagues and students (Delgado-Romero et al., 2007; Morehouse-Mendez & Perez-Mendez, 2018).

Latinx in Social Work Education

The dual pandemic of COVID-19 and racism has shed light on many changes needed within the academy to address the disparities experienced by BIPOC faculty (McCoy & Lee, 2021). Although "Social Work's Call to Action Against Pandemic Othering and Anti-Asian Racism" (CSWE, 2021) is a recent effort toward the fight against racism, it does not and cannot capture the breadth of the needs of all BIPOC communities. For instance, there is a high demand for Spanish-speaking and culturally aware social workers throughout the US to serve the growing

number of Latinx communities (Calvo et al., 2018). Approximately 11 percent of active social workers identify as Latinx, restricting our capacity to effectively address the Latinx population's needs. Despite this deficiency, limited attention exists to recruiting and retaining Latinx professionals in social work (Olcoń et al., 2018).

The racial and ethnic representation of social work professionals does not reflect the diversity in the US population (Calvo et al., 2018; Orozco-Figueroa, 2021). This gap is alarming, given that Black and Brown people are disproportionately affected by poverty and oppression, which social work aims to address (Fong et al., 2014). Growing the number of future social workers to meet Latinx clients' and communities' needs requires more significant efforts to recruit and retain Latinx students in social work education (Furman et al., 2013). BIPOC students face multiple barriers to accessing and achieving education, including full-time employment and family responsibilities (Gloria & Castellanos, 2006; Olcoń et al., 2018; Salinas et al., 2020). Therefore, social work programs must modify the existing academic paradigm to promote a sense of belonging, offer an inclusive curriculum, and provide financial assistance (Furman et al., 2013; Ghose et al., 2018; Olcoń et al., 2018).

Personal narratives shared by Latinx scholars shed light on multiple barriers encountered in the academy and serve to validate and give voice to unaddressed structural and sociopolitical issues in higher education (Chandler et al., 2014; Delgado-Romero et al., 2007; Garcia, 2014; Martinez & Toutkoushian, 2014; Reddick & Sáenz, 2012). However, the drawbacks to sharing one's narrative include being rendered vulnerable and exposed, and personal stories are often not regarded as legitimate academic scholarly work by the academy (Delgado-Romero et al., 2007). The concept of distance in research is valued as it implies neutrality and objectivity on the researcher's part—legitimating what and who counts as research(er) (Tuhiwai Smith, 2012). Nevertheless, personal narratives tell a story that statistics alone cannot. Also, having close personal relationships is a core cultural value for Latinx people; sharing one's lived experiences as Latinx faculty is imperative (Flores & Patrón, 2021; Gloria & Castellanos, 2006).

Findings

> Personal history is a fleeting element unless it is recorded. One concern is that one's personal experiences are of no value to anyone else and, therefore, do not need to be recorded in any way. The problem with this kind of thinking is that the individual determines the value of such information, rather than allowing other interested parties to participate in that assessment. (Garcia, 2014, p. 80)

Pre-Search

When I read the assigned materials in my doctoral course on the history of social work education, I did not see myself reflected within the pages of social work history. Understanding the context of the time offered some answers to this erasure. However, this is not merely an issue that impacted BIPOC students in the past, as it persists. Social work textbooks often proclaim inclusion; however, they marginalize BIPOC, leaving us on the periphery (Bernard et al., 2014; Chandler et al., 2014; Garcia, 2014). In the literature written through a dominant

perspective, words such as "we," "us," "our," and "I" exclude the BIPOC students I teach and myself. History is told from the perspective of the colonizers. Decolonizing education calls for reclaiming history as a critical and essential aspect of assuring racial justice (Tuhiwai Smith, 2012). Recognizing this exclusionary history, the need for BIPOC students in social work education, particularly at the doctoral level, is evident.

Me-Search

The academic knowledge acquired through formal education provides a foundational baseline for how and what we teach. In academia, conditioning in a classroom setting colonizes our minds with our chosen discipline's doctrine. As educators, we perpetuate this colonization within the courses we teach. We subject our students without consent to the ideology imposed upon us as pupils of the discipline and punish them when they deviate from the standard. As an academic institution, research serves as a tool to perpetuate colonization by rewarding researchers for distorting truths about people, granting academic research, authority, and expertise over entire communities, primarily Black and Brown (Tuhiwai Smith, 2012).

The colonization of our minds is not limited to the classroom setting. Intellectual colonization occurs throughout our existence via socialization, which, in turn, influences our identities. As individuals, we risk becoming who and what is dictated to us by the professoriate. As social work stewards, our lives become the curriculum from which we teach. To Palmer's (1997) dictum that "we teach who we are" (p. 15), I would also add that we teach what we know or believe to know. Our social-historical locatedness is summoned during the transmission of our institutional knowledge and structures of feeling as we indoctrinate future colleagues into the profession (Wilson, 2017).

The following themes emerged through self-reflecting on my academic trajectory leading up to social work education: assimilation and acculturation, barriers to education, microaggressions and racial gaslighting, and cultural taxation. The themes are explained in the following:

Theme 1: Assimilation & Acculturation

The introduction to my elementary education occurred under a false identity. My first-grade teacher introduced me to peers as "Louis"—a name that persisted for years. As a monolingual Spanish-speaking child, I deduced that "Louis" was the equivalent English translation of my given name, "Luis." I embraced the name as I looked forward to mastering English to navigate peer relations better. Later, I would understand that misidentifying me as "Louis" was the beginning of the colonization process enacted by benevolent White women to erase my Indigenous-Mexican identity. Jacobs (2005, as cited in Crofoot & Harris, 2012) describes the maternal colonialism enacted by White women, including teachers and administrators, who perceived themselves as saviors of Indigenous children from their deficient Indian mothers. Middle and high school were social experiment projects designed by the public school district to manufacture diversity and inclusion. The school district placed ethnic youth on buses allowing White suburban kids to interact with urban BIPOC youth. The early morning wake-up call, the long walk to the bus stop, and the hour-long bus ride to school served as a daily reminder that

we were foreign visitors on a campus intended to keep kids like us out. The sea of brace-mouthed White gazes transfixed with curiosity at the caravan of yellow buses was reminiscent of zoo-like conditions; only we were the exotic creatures deserving of gawking. It occurred to me that the school district would never consider placing White students on buses and shipping them to schools in poor urban communities.

In my efforts to engage in extracurricular high school activities and resist being wholly assimilated into the predominantly White school culture, I joined the campus MEChA (Movimiento Estudiantil Chicano de Aztlan [Chicano Student Movement of Aztlan]) club. For BIPOC youth, ethnicity can positively influence identity development and serve as a protective factor, generating a sense of belonging and improving academic performance (Holcomb-McCoy, 2005; Reddick & Sáenz, 2012). This student-led club created an enclave for my peers and me to be Brown and Indigenous-Mexican (or a Latinx diaspora member) in a predominantly White school. My experience in our theatre club and ensuing extracurricular activities afforded me the right to self-expression and visibility. Theatre performances and rehearsals required much dedication and time spent after school. However, the bus ride home was regimented and exercised a zero-tolerance policy for late arrivals—"The bus is leaving!" became a familiar cry for many of us when the school bell rang. I spent a month parked in neighborhoods surrounding my high school campus, sleeping in my father's truck to ensure I was on time to participate in afterschool activities.

Theme 2: Barriers to Education—Poverty, Limited Options, Need for Mentorship

The period leading up to high school graduation was an uncertain time, thinking about what direction to take academically—the only way out of poverty was to invest in my education. At the time, I did not have access to college-educated professionals in my immediate family or a social circle that would provide me with career or academic guidance. Academic advisors offered two options at my public high school: join the military or enroll in trade school. A common theme among Latinos is to join the military or workforce, surrendering educational aspirations (Pérez, 2017; Sáenz & Ponjuan, 2009). After some research, I enrolled in general education coursework at the community college level.

As a first-generation college student, it was not within my reach to experience the "traditional" student life. I worked full-time to pay for tuition and books and contributed financially to help support my family. Time restrictions on my studying ultimately impacted my grades. It also contributed to my delay in transferring from community college to the university and graduating on time. Among ethnically/racially minoritized groups, particularly Latinos, this is a common factor contributing to college student attrition rates (Pérez, 2017; Sáenz & Ponjuan, 2009). School, work, and family obligations became barriers to academic and professional achievement; however, dropping out of school was not viable.

College coursework offered many directions for learning with little guidance, bolstering uncertainty about the focus of my academic degree and subsequent career options. A high school psychology course piqued my interest enough to sustain my curiosity about human behavior, becoming an introduction to my future academic pursuits. Academic coursework

granted me internships in various mental health, substance abuse, and hospice service settings working directly with ethnically/racially diverse individuals and families in urban environments. Exposure to these settings became the catalyst for the justice objects (Wilson, 2017) I value.

Social-political-economic justice, community activism, equity, and equality for BIPOC continue to drive my passion for change. My direct practice work with individuals and families fueled my desire to eventually earn a bachelor's degree in psychology. With an undergraduate degree secured, I worked in a non-profit organization with medically fragile/terminally ill children. The social workers I encountered at the agency encouraged me to pursue graduate school and social work as a career.

Theme 3: Microaggressions and Racial Gaslighting

History repeats itself. Like an echo from the past, as a student in my MSW program, efforts to colonize my mind and identity within the academy were again perpetrated against me. There were three of us Latinos in the class. Although we shared similar identities, we were born in different parts of the world, where our parents gave us distinct names. Like a Border Patrol Agent demands identification when one enters a foreign land, we were forced to relinquish our identities when crossing the imaginary border created within the classroom space. "José" would become the only name our White female professor used to identify the three of us, forcing us to share one identity as melanated men. We attributed this occurrence initially to the newness of our relationship with our professor, but it persisted throughout the course despite protests. Stripped of our individual identities, our collective invisibility was conspicuous. Everyday acts of racist aggression aimed at BIPOC, known as microaggressions, are ordinary at the university level and are relevant to faculty and students of color and our presence in the academy (Louis et al., 2016; Reddick & Sáenz, 2012).

As an MSW student, I was indoctrinated with mostly White female instructors' social work profession ideologies. The structures of feelings inculcated in me through classroom theory were practiced and reinforced in practicum (Wilson, 2017). There was no choice but to learn to care about evidence-based practice interventions, even when the evidence excluded the clients I served. Any attempts to refute them were futile as scientific proof is the gold standard in the academy, and a letter grade serves as a reward and punishment for upholding the status quo. Evidence-based practice and protocols are privileged as "scientific" over other epistemologies and cultural practice wisdom within communities of color. An assumption of the universal applicability of treatment interventions for BIPOC based on White evidence may serve to exclude further researchers of color and our voices (Aisenberg, 2008).

At the doctoral level of social work education, I had hoped for a reparative experience from my MSW program. I was one of few BIPOC students and the only melanated male in my cohort of primarily White and female doctoral peers. As it was my first experience in social work education within a predominantly White institution, I was disheartened by the microaggressions and racial gaslighting at this education level. The microaggressions commenced at the onset of my doctoral journey. During the initial course in the program, I shared my testimonio (narrative) as a melanated man confronting racism within the context of class discussion. Before I could

complete my narrative, a White peer interjected and co-opted my story by sharing the challenges of being White—without ever acknowledging her Whiteness and the power and privilege she wielded. Compared to BIPOC individuals, White women are privileged to evoke a virtuous victim role. Therefore, it is common for people with privileged identities to deny, rationalize, and experience false envy and benevolence during difficult discussions surrounding social identities (Accapadi, 2007). Similar experiences were replicated differently with White peers and faculty, and the White silence enveloped the classroom. This experience is commonplace in the academy, as stated in Amos' (2010) study that identifies feelings of despair, fear, and frustration experienced by BIPOC students because of Whiteness' power to silence students of color in the class.

There were no acknowledgments or discussions related to the widely publicized racist public executions of Black people (e.g., George Floyd) or protests over police brutality that ensued (Hughes, 2020). Although in vogue for schools of social work to issue statements of solidarity supporting anti-racism, public statements repudiating White terrorism were notably absent following the US Capitol's siege by White supremacists (Barrett et al., 2021). I experienced the White silence and lack of critical examination of racism within social work education as racial gaslighting. Racial gaslighting normalizes White supremacy by obfuscating racist acts that occur at an individual micro-level that are part of a macro-level system structure. Concurrently, racial gaslighting pathologizes those resisting a color-blind agenda (Davis & Ernst, 2019). On a structural level, racial gaslighting denies BIPOC groups' and communities' lived experiences and upholds power imbalances and racial inequities (Fleming, 2018). However, this degree of concerted denial of racism is endemic within social work education and the ivory tower—begging the question, to what extent is our value of social justice merely performative?

Theme 4: Cultural Taxation

As Latinx faculty members, we are chiefly dedicated to enhancing the Latinx community's living conditions via service (Martinez & Toutkoushian, 2014). Within the Hispanic Serving Institution where I teach, I have focused on working with first-generation students of color, some living with mental health diagnoses. In academia, this sub-population appears to go largely unnoticed, and is often attracted to the human services field, including social work. An academic setting is not equipped to address the mental health needs of students. Therefore, this can become an obstacle for some students grappling with mental health and achieving their academic goals. Thus, I offer students coaching, mentoring, and support through a bridge program and Latinx student affinity group. I work within the educational institution to provide BIPOC students a chance at achieving their academic goals—help I could have significantly benefitted from receiving as a student.

Steered by a strong sense of responsibility to serve the Latinx community, Latinx faculty may devote much time to activities not rewarded by the academy. Time expended by Latinx faculty on teaching could overwhelmingly be spent on classes dealing with racial/ethnic issues. Similarly, our time teaching and mentoring may be overwhelmingly consumed serving BIPOC students (Martinez & Toutkoushian, 2014). As such, Latinx faculty may experience a penalty or "cultural taxation" for participating in such programs or mentoring activities (Padilla, 1994;

Reddick & Sáenz, 2012). Higher teaching, advising, and service loads can significantly reduce Latinx faculty members' research output and prospects for tenure and promotion (Martinez & Toutkoushian, 2014).

Discussion

We-Search

The 2007 Task Force on Latinos/as in Social Work Education identified a paucity of representing Latinx students and faculty in social work education (CSWE Task Force, 2007, as cited in Chandler et al., 2014). The scarcity of men of color in academia draws attention to the issue that Black and Latinx faculty are highly underrepresented—mostly Black and Brown men (in terms of numbers and an equity perspective; Reddick & Sáenz, 2012). As the academy's racial and ethnic demographics change, its values must reflect the ideals of diverse voices involved in the system, not only those who have historically maintained power (Martinez & Toutkoushian, 2014). To expect students and faculty of color to challenge and transform a system in which we have historically been marginalized seems hypocritical at best (Delgado-Romero et al., 2007).

In a review of my findings, assimilation and acculturation were one theme that emerged, highlighting the importance of cultural and social capital among Latinos pursuing higher education, as well as the protective factor ethnic identity has on academic success (Holcomb-McCoy, 2005; Olcoń et al., 2018; Pérez, 2017; Reddick & Sáenz, 2012). A second theme identified in this article and underscored by scholars examining challenges encountered by BIPOC students in academia included barriers to education related to poverty, limited options, and a need for mentorship (Ghose et al., 2018; Pérez, 2017; Reddick & Sáenz, 2012). I addressed the microaggressions and racial gaslighting I have encountered in my social work education by White faculty and peers in yet a third theme. Similarly, experiences of microaggressions in academic settings were found in the scholarly work written by other males of color (Louis et al., 2016; Padilla, 1994; Reddick & Sáenz, 2012). Cultural taxation was a fourth and final theme in my experience as a professor in social work education. This phenomenon involves having to endure an excessive amount of time and emotional energy allocated to dealing with racial/ethnic issues as an instructor of color—an experience shared and recognized in similar research conducted by faculty of color (Martinez & Toutkoushian, 2014; Padilla, 1994; Reddick & Sáenz, 2012).

Implications for Social Work Education & Practice

To increase student retention and engagement among Black males, research on Black Male Initiative Programs (e.g., The Brothers and Scholars Program and the Minority Men Mentoring Program) have demonstrated positive social and academic outcomes among participants (Brooms, 2018). Establishing close relationships among peers through BIPOC affinity groups can mediate against encounters with explicit racism (Strayhorn, 2017). Banks and Dohy (2019) identify homogenous peer groups as an approach to intervene against opportunity gaps between BIPOC students and their White counterparts within academic settings. Also, Fleming et al.

(2004) found that a culturally relevant curriculum can enhance reading skills among Black students.

The benefits for BIPOC students in social work education to see themselves reflected among faculty of color may hold implications for teaching and practice that have yet to be thoroughly examined. Some BIPOC students engaging with faculty of color report feeling heard and validated in their lived experiences and valued for the insights and perspectives they contribute to the classroom (Bernard et al., 2014). Whereas some students of color report feeling devalued by White faculty—who expect them to assume the role of a "race expert" and to disproportionately challenge racism—students then keep silent in the classroom for fear of retaliation, further isolation, and being viewed as troublemakers (Davis & Mirick, 2021). The racial composition of social work faculty may significantly affect the overall learning environment and learning experience (Bernard et al., 2014).

These factors may also influence the teaching and preparation of social workers in mental health service settings. An inability to engage BIPOC clients in mental health treatment has been identified as a significant public health concern (Aggarwal et al., 2016; Redmond et al., 2009). Some particularly formidable obstacles to seeking treatment include viewing clinicians as intimidating based on historical legacies of racism and patient concerns that ethnically different clinicians will not understand their cultural needs (Schouler-Ocak et al., 2021). Clinician and client ethnic resemblance may encourage treatment engagement among BIPOC groups. However, a deficit of ethnically and racially diverse clinicians cannot provide mental health services to meet this need (Aggarwal et al., 2016). To address the lack of engagement among BIPOC populations in mental health treatment, efforts to recruit and retain students and faculty of color in social work education need prioritizing. Additionally, further attention to improving the training and education of White social workers who do not share ethnic resemblance and engage with BIPOC communities is a matter of significant importance and ethical practice.

Conclusion

An increase in Latinx faculty representation who can serve as role models and mentors for Latinx students may significantly grow Latinx students' graduation rates (Martinez & Toutkoushian, 2014). Enhancing the representation of BIPOC faculty in social work programs is recommended to help mitigate the issues experienced by faculty of color related to microaggressions, racial gaslighting, and cultural taxation identified in this narrative. Academic institutions must strengthen their efforts to recruit and retain BIPOC males in social work education and include strategies to eliminate barriers to their education, namely racism. To assist in melanating the ivory tower, academic institutions require hiring more BIPOC faculty, establishing mentorship programs, and expanding educational and financial support to BIPOC students (Ghose et al., 2018). Instituting affinity groups for BIPOC students to fortify peer relationships can also mediate against academic opportunity gaps (Banks & Dohy, 2019; Strayhorn, 2017).

Additional research highlighting social work education experiences among Latinos is necessary to understand our needs better and improve ways to recruit and retain this decreasing workforce

segment. Featuring men of color's narrative experiences in academia may help other men of color visualize themselves as successful pupils and professionals in their fields of endeavor (Reddick & Sáenz, 2012). Lastly, future research is warranted to investigate previous findings identifying Latinx faculty working more hours per week without pay at public institutions than their White faculty counterparts (Martinez & Toutkoushian, 2014).

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Changing the System While You Are in the System Is Not Easy: Creating Cultural Safety for Native American Students on Campus

Turquoise Skye Devereaux and Laurie A. Walker

Abstract: As a Native American social work student and practicum supervisor, we describe a program evaluation at a campus Native American student services site and share insights on integrating Indigenous ways of knowing, cultural practices, and a justice orientation into identities and practices. We describe disseminating findings and student efforts to work within systems to make policy changes; however, changing a system—that constantly tells you that you (and who you are) are not meant to be there—while you are in the system is not easy. We describe key engagement concepts including microaggressions, stereotype threat, tokenism, resiliency, and survivance. We—as decolonizing social work scholars—provide a vision for how to move forward together in creating culturally safe classrooms, campuses, communities, and social work practices grounded in Indigenous ways of knowing and being.

***Keywords*:** culture, higher education, Native American, resilience, worldview

I (Devereaux) stand in the middle of a room in the Native American Center on campus. The tables are full, and I can hear the hum of voices. I recognize the feeling of safety in the laughter of my peers. I can see and feel the connectedness happening around me. I know that I am meant to be here, in this room, with the sweetgrass and drum sitting on a table owned by the University of Montana – Missoula, in which we are trying to transform.

The campus Native American enrollment varies between about 5 to 6 percent (577 to 802 students) depending on the year, which includes 7 to 8 percent of social work students (17 to 48) between 2013–2021 (University of Montana, 2021). The social work program includes a 2+2 program with students from tribal colleges across the state enrolled in primarily online social work courses from their home communities. The social work program has had at least three Native American tenure track faculty in the last five decades; however, I did not experience Native American instructor representation during my bachelor's program. Native American student experiences within the program are mixed due to the fact that values and policies do not always align with day-to-day procedures and processes rooted in the way people think and act.

My roots run deep where this university stands as someone who is Salish and Blackfeet. My ancestors' origin stories describe our connection to this place since time immemorial with archeological evidence to back up our stories dating to at least 12,500 years ago (Wilson et al., 2019). The campus library has archival photos, often used in land acknowledgements, with the teepees of my kin in the spaces that campus buildings now occupy. The teepees sit in front of the same mountains with distinguishable crevices and tree patterns in the background. Consciously, I use this same archived photo during my introduction of every presentation I do to represent where I come from. Today, it is very common to see university students and employees zigzag up that same steep terrain for exercise off in the distance, and within the view

of this room where we gather, on the trail carved into the side of the mountain, you can see the M representing our university on the hillside.

My great-great grandparents' generation were forcibly marched from the Bitterroot Valley and through Missoula by the United States Army to the Flathead reservation—where I grew up—with the St. Ignatius Mission boarding school awaiting their arrival just 16 months before when the third state assembly selected this land for the public university where I stand today. My Blackfeet father and Salish grandmother attended boarding schools designed to assimilate our family to a Euro-western way of thinking and being (Hunt et al., 2020; Wilson et al., 2019). Boarding schools, and the policies and practices of this newly formed state, worked together to attempt to strip us of our languages, kinship networks, religious practices, food systems, and ways of being together in community (Hunt et al., 2020; Pon, 2009; Stanton, 2014). My relatives needed a pass to travel to the town of this campus despite living less than 50 miles away (Ross, 1998). Our presence was generally limited to practicing our treaty rights when gathering bitterroot in our usual and accustomed places near campus.

I could sense the sacredness of this place standing in the present moment. I could feel the possibility of change. I could sense our ancestors' dreams allowing our stories to come alive and rebel against this system we were never meant to be a part of. Yet, we were always destined to be where our roots originated and continue to take place despite systemic efforts to disrupt our ways of knowing and being in this place (Ross, 1998; Wilson et al., 2019; Wilson & Hughes, 2019). This ground I stand on, this building I am in, all of it was made so that I could hear these students' raw experiences and strategies of navigation (Wilson et al., 2019). I stand here blessed, honored, and humbled that these students trust me with their sacred stories, but I also know that this moment will change me forever and impact so many people to come. We are one piece, a part of a whole, and we will always be in this together (Wilson & Hughes, 2019). We are the living and breathing parts of our ancestors, here to make a change in a place where our existence is the revolution (Hunt et al., 2020; Stanton, 2014).

Wilson et al. (2019) describe relational approaches to Indigenous research, "challeng[ing] Eurocentric conceptions of what research is, who it is for, and who gets to do it" (p. xi). The event I described above was a component of my Bachelor of Social Work practicum at a Native American student services office. I was leading the research design, data collection, data analysis, and dissemination efforts on behalf of my student peers. I was a young Native American student at a Predominantly White Institution when I designed this project, so it is not surprising that I received pushback for my efforts from both the Native and non-Native student and faculty communities on campus. One alumni response to my Facebook recruitment efforts included asserting the work has already been done and presuming no one would participate and that the efforts would not result in any changes. Faculty asserted that an undergraduate student did not have the training to conduct the project and questioned whether I had appropriate faculty supervision. In essence, with the exception of my co-author who served as my practicum field instructor, I received a lack of support in the design and data collection phases from places within the institution designed to provide these skills such as research courses and the departmental diversity committee.

I became interested in macro social work practice with the help of my co-author who instructed my Small Groups and Communities course and served as my field instructor at my practicum. The curriculum of the course was appealing to me, but lacked relevance to someone who grew up on a nearby reservation (Hunt et al., 2020; Kirkenes & Barnhardt, 1991; Stanton, 2014). What do these urban case examples have to do with my wanting to serve my very rural community? I needed "culturally responsive teaching," which was rare on campus (Stanton, 2014, p. 2). I wanted to apply what I was learning, but I had to do a lot of work to translate the course concepts into serving rural Indigenous communities—the context I knew I was going to practice social work within. I was already tired from juggling my three part-time jobs, my fulltime course work including this summer course, and my community and family responsibilities (Guillory & Wolverton, 2008).

My instructor luckily had some familiarity with my experiences, and we were able to advocate together to establish a relevant practicum site that enabled me to integrate my academic and practical knowledge. Programs that support Native American students are an important component of persistence in higher education (Guillory & Wolverton, 2008), and I was grateful to be a part of this program. I became extremely passionate about systemic change for Native American students within higher education based on my own experiences in the classroom, on campus, and in the community. My passion led me to perform a program evaluation on Native American student experiences.

Program Evaluation

The focus of this reflection is not on the traditional reporting of research methods and results. The priority of this article is to use a critical-theory oriented approach to analyze the insights generated from my time evaluating Native American student experiences during my undergraduate practicum. My leading the program evaluation process in 2016 overlapped with required competencies and skills from my social work coursework focused on research (facilitating focus groups, qualitative data analysis, and institutional dissemination) and small groups and communities (community organizing, student recruitment, and cultural adaptations in practice). The truth is, however, that my program evaluation methods to uncover Native American experiences in higher education were more so informed by my instinctual knowledge of what Native American students needed in order to feel safe in academic spaces than by what I learned in my courses.

Utilizing input from Native students, I was able to ensure a culturally safe space for the data collection process. Cultural safety, which was developed in nursing fields in New Zealand and Australia in the 1980s, includes "no assault, challenge, or denial of identity, of who they are and what they need. It is about shared respect, shared meaning, shared knowledge and experience, of learning together with dignity, and truly listening" (Williams, 1999, p. 213; see also Muir-Cochrane et al., 2014). The processes of my research were deeply entrenched in Native cultural practices to ensure that Native students' experiences and cultural knowledge were valued and prioritized as much as Western research practices. I was less interested in "validity or reliability" and aimed instead for "authenticity and credibility" (Wilson & Hughes, 2019, p. 15).

I learned to trust my own ability to serve my community. The students I was trying to help rarely get the validation that their experiences are worthy of being addressed or changed. I wanted Native American students to know they deserved not to experience the commonly reported instances of racism specifically tailored towards Native identities. I wanted them to know they had a right to have their identities and experiences represented in institutional policies and practices. I wanted students to feel validated as individuals and as a community, and I wanted students to enter a space where the process of how we do things matched their various learning styles and outlets for sharing stories. We share a collective worldview where we were taught how to take care of people and how to incorporate genuine, trusting, intuitive, and caring relationships.

I hosted focus groups for two days with different groups of students and alumni attending each day. All students identified as Native American but were comprised of a very diverse array of tribes, majors, departments, ages, level of education, and professions. I set the room, described above, with four groups sitting around tables visiting about four specific topics associated with their experiences in higher education in a reciprocal manner for 20 minutes (Hunt et al., 2020). The groups then rotated to another table based on a symbol on their name tag, to ensure they mix and mingle with different students. I know some of my peers are more reserved and some more outgoing, so I created an opportunity to reflect and privately write a story or experience on a piece of paper they dropped into a decorated shoebox and/or talked about and shared with the group at the table. As a visual and hands-on learner, I used shoeboxes and had the questions posted as visual prompts on the wall. I designed this process to create an opportunity for students to move around the room and expand their support network (Hunt et al., 2020; Sue et al., 2019).

I developed questions based on four academic concepts relevant in my social work and general education coursework. First, *racial microaggressions*, which are "commonplace verbal and behavioral indignities, whether intentional or unintentional, which communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative racial slights and insults" (Sue et al., 2007, p. 278; see also Hunt et al., 2020). Second, *stereotype threat*, the idea that preconceived notions about your group have an impact on your academic performance (Steele & Aronson, 1995). Third, *tokenism*, a non-meaningful representation meant to take the place of respectful and accountable relationship (Sabzalian, 2019; Wilson et al., 2019). And fourth, *resiliency*, the individual or collective ability to have strength and growth in the face of adversity (Saleebey, 2006). Each table had a different topic including (a) What microaggressions have you experienced? How did it make you feel? If you did respond, how? (b) What stereotypes have you heard? How did it affect your academic performance? (c) Have you experienced tokenism? and (d) What does resiliency mean to you? What attributes of yourself make you resilient?

The shoe boxes, where participants dropped their handwritten replies to the questions, came from my part-time job at a department store, as did some of the incentives for student participation that I arranged into gift baskets (Guillory & Wolverton, 2008). I was able to receive over $1,500 worth of incentives from different departments within the university and the local retail store because of my community involvement and part-time job. My relationships

were the source of the participation incentives (Kirkness & Barnhardt, 1991; Wilson et al., 2019).

The Native American undergraduates, masters, doctoral students, and alumni who gathered described their experiences with culturally unsafe environments including microaggressions, non-Native assumptions, tokenism and invisibility, the emotional toll, the impacts on their academic performance, and how we are resilient like our ancestors. I had several campus-level opportunities such as presenting to the academic officers of the institution and several departments to share what we learned from the focus groups, which also helped inform some changes to campus policy and on-campus student support staff (Guillory & Wolverton, 2008). I described our engagement processes with students, as well as campus departments, colleges, committees, the administration, and faculty through common Indigenous values described in higher education settings including relationships, respect, reciprocity, relevance, responsibility, reverence, and responsiveness (Archibald, 2008; Kirkness & Barnhardt, 1991; Wilson & Hughes, 2019). However, much of the way we understand and implement these values in higher education settings do not reflect our current reality.

Unsafe Environments

Westernized institutions have promoted their success in serving Native American students but do not sufficiently provide culturally safe environments that acknowledge the deep historical problems institutions have had with Native American students and their communities (Guillory & Wolverton, 2008; Muir-Cochrane et al., 2014; Pon, 2009). Gray et al. (2013) assert that, "the dominant social work model of education largely socializes students into Western norms, values, and ways of thinking" (p. 486). Many of our efforts at inclusion are like swimming upstream, as we "try to move things forward, but with the recognition that other forces are at play that are moving things back" (Wilson et al., 2019, p. xiii). Many disciplines like social work, education, and religious institutions need to acknowledge that we are formed within colonization processes and are a part of those systems and structures by design. Social workers "must confront the continuing effects of colonialism and the ways in which the profession has been, and continues to, participate in colonial projects" (Yellow Bird, 2013, p. 281).

As Native Americans in the classroom, participants in campus events, and even shoppers in the community, we experience racially motivated microaggressions on all three levels: micro-insult (insensitive and demeaning comments), micro-assault (attacks like name-calling meant to hurt), and micro-invalidation (discounting thoughts, feelings, and experiences) (Sue et al., 2007). We get called an "Indian savage" in the financial aid line, professors use "chief" as an identifier for us, advisors exploit our ceremonial events and the loss of loved ones as indicators of our inability to achieve a desired degree, and we are consistently followed in stores (Ross, 1998). Furthermore, microaggressions are not only experienced by comments or statements, but also through non-verbal communication.

Non-Native Assumptions

Native American students face assumptions and stereotypes pertaining to certain financial "privileges" and experiences of addiction, which challenge our ability to participate and succeed in academics. Non-Natives students on campus assume that we get "free money," "free college," and that we are "alcoholics by genetics" or that we drink ourselves "out of college." Non-Native stereotypes of Natives regarding alcohol impact our relationships, ability to attend social gatherings, and choices at departmental social gatherings with alcohol present despite numerous attempts to change the departmental and campus culture regarding alcohol. Non-Native assumptions and stereotypes degrade our identity, worldview, and cultural priorities while also impacting our ability to see ourselves as deserving of education and access to opportunities (Hunt et al., 2020; Ross, 1998; Stanton, 2014). Financial supports are an important component of Native American student persistence in higher education, yet Native American students must qualify and apply for scholarships and tuition waivers that are often merit- and need-based like most scholarships (Guillory & Wolverton, 2008). For many of us the stereotypes and assumptions confirm the feeling that we do not belong in this Westernized education system. However, despite the reality of stereotype threat, we are expected to navigate higher educational systems nonetheless, even though every part of us is challenged or denied within it.

Tokenism and Invisibility

Any Native topic that comes up in class, we get "the glances" from other classmates and professors expecting an "Indian expert" to contribute because we cannot escape representing our entire population (Hunt et al., 2020; Sabzalian, 2019). Hunt et al. (2020) describe:

> due to the lack of American representation and inclusion of American Indian culture and history in the curriculum, the participants were often expected to represent the American Indian population and provide a comprehensive knowledge of American Indian culture and history. (pp. 770–771)

Token Indians in classrooms are often stripped of place, context, and relationship and expected to participate in "oversimplified, pan-Indigenous understandings of Indigeneity [where] the result [is] more colonial paternalism" (Wilson et al., 2019, p. 3). Native students are not in higher education to be the educators of peers or instructors, they expect to receive an education (Hunt et al., 2020).

Yet, time and time again we see how higher education systems fail Native American students. Institutions do not know how to create a supportive campus climate, and they perpetuate oppression by not making Indian education a priority within curriculum. Decolonizing practices and critical thinking skills within the classroom can address systemic oppression and have many positive outcomes. Furthermore, decolonizing practices and developing critical thinking skills creates spaces that represent Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) experiences and prepares students to work within communities they do not belong to.

Social workers in particular, through decolonization practices, can then go on to change the systems they will work for in the future and go about their practice with humility (Wilson et al., 2019). As social workers, it is our ethical obligation to think critically, so we can provide the best services possible while addressing oppression and every "ism." However, it is impossible to fulfill our ethical obligation to the BIPOC community, and specifically to Indigenous peoples, if social work educators continue to teach that being competent in everyone's culture is a reachable goal (Pon, 2009). The social worker illusion of achieving competence in all cultures they might encounter allows for fear to be one of the biggest barriers to fully understanding client's experiences, including how they identify, as well as their cultural background (Pon, 2009). For example, instructors expect Native American students to know enough about entire Indigenous populations and to be able to teach this content to other students and the instructors. Social workers act as if cross-cultural work is a box that can be checked off as complete, which lacks ongoing self-awareness and ongoing attention to how we teach and function in the classroom and in social work roles.

Discrimination happens at all levels of our institution, yet students often feel invisible due to the lack of institutional responsiveness (Muir-Cochrane et al., 2014; Wilson & Hughes, 2019). We know "nothing happens" when we experience these things, because the administration does not make change happen, including designing committees and advisory groups without much power or decision-making authority. As a result, Native students and their ongoing experiences are being ignored and dismissed, which contributes to non-retention rates (Hunt et al., 2020; Sue et al., 2019; Tuck, 2011).

Social work educators need to find methods that create a safe environment where experiences can be shared in order to stop pushing policies that harm Indigenous students. Sue et al. (2019) encourages interventions that "make the 'invisible visible' … [that] challenge the stereotype… ask for clarification … express disagreement … educate the offender … [or] seek external intervention" (p. 135). Native students are constantly placed in positions of experiencing microaggressions in classrooms and in social work education. Students are forced to find ways to explain their experiences in a manner that is understandable to others who do not share their identities and experiences. Frequently, we find a wide gap between stated racial equity and justice values and actual practices within social work. Native American students have limited choices when faced with daily hassles such as hearing an instructor explain people having been on specific land for decades without acknowledging the Indigenous people there previously. Native American students who serve on committees may have a good experience collaborating to develop anti-racist and decolonizing content under the leadership of one faculty member. However, when that leader steps back from the role for a sabbatical, or other reasons, the committee often devolves to prior lower levels of functioning that render Indigenous perspectives unheard. As result, I and others often rotate off committees when we feel our emotional labor no longer results in implementing change.

Emotional Toll

Culturally unsafe environments, along with non-Native assumptions, tokenism, and the invisibility of microaggressions have an immense impact on Native students' mental health. Not

only are we experiencing the oppression, but also the guilt for not being able to overcome our emotional reactions in the moment and advocate for or provide education to non-Natives. As a result, we constantly have to respond with a filter. We act "less Native" to be taken seriously and we "beat [ourselves] up over not responding or educating others" or even not raising our hands because we do not want to "feel stupid." Native American perspectives being absent or misrepresented in the curriculum communicates that Native experiences, including Native history, are not worthy of recognition (Hunt et al., 2020; Stanton, 2014). Baltra-Ulloa (2013) describes Whiteness this way:

> [It is] an ideology, a silent mainstream, dangerously and pervasively setting invisible benchmarks against which everyone is measured. Whiteness eludes overt discussion while it nevertheless dictates how people should live, advantaging one way of thinking, one way of being and doing above all others. (p. 2315)

White mainstream education is challenging, as the curriculum directly negates us and continues the effects of colonization, which results in a crisis response to invalidation (Hunt et al., 2020). We are expected to do twice the emotional labor; not only are we supposed to earn a degree, but also defend our identity in a system that is not invested in Native success (Hunt et al., 2020).

Negative Impact on Academic Performance

Native students experience challenges and barriers that take on a much deeper meaning than just meeting requirements to get a degree; they also impact our belief that we can succeed in an academic setting. We question if we can perform to the Westernized standard of success (Steele et al., 1995). Students spoke about having to "earn" their space in the classroom and within the system, which entails the need to be "more prepared," feeling unworthy of support and acknowledgment, and having to consistently disprove how "poorly Natives do 'in general' in school." The experience of the lack of safety affects our "sleep" and "focus," which contributes to our "inability" to perform. We are required to invest additional energy and time that limits our emotional and mental stability when we are trying to contradict negative stereotypes in education (Hunt et al., 2020).

Resiliency

Native students prevail even though the curriculum, professors, administration, and community tell us that the betterment of our Indigenous community is not worthy of support. Sabzalian (2019) describes Native students experiencing what is called "survivance, a semantic combination of the words survival and resistance … survivance characterizes the everyday ways Indigenous people have reframed imposed narratives" (p. xv). Sabzalian (2019) explains survivance further as refusing "colonial scripts of reassurance or victimization, and instead creatively confront[ing], resist[ing], decenter[ing], and transform[ing] those scripts" (p. 4). We prevail, because everyone before us did. Our ancestors survived genocide so we could be here today (Gray et al., 2013). Our experiences not only give us unique challenges, but they also give us unique strengths and tools to survive systems that were not made for us (Sabzalian, 2019; Saleebey, 2006). We utilize our values of community, family, and spirituality as a means

to overcome obstacles within education (Guillory & Wolverton, 2008; Saleebey, 2006). Native students bouncing back, overcoming, and not giving up gives us even more leverage. Navigating the Indigenous worldview and the Westernized worldview simultaneously teaches us that we need to know both in order to make the most impact. Therefore, we stay resilient even though the Westernized education system does not acknowledge our values or beliefs (Saleebey, 2006). We embody resilience; survivance has become a part of how we function, but we transform indignities into positives (Hunt et al., 2020; Sabzalian, 2019; Saleebey, 2006). Indigenous support networks and the associated sense of community that is felt exceeds any expectation that you had when looking for a way to stay on your educational journey (Guillory & Wolverton, 2008).

Campus Opportunities and Successes

I can still feel what it was like to stand in a room again with my peers, sharing the findings of the program evaluation. Students were present and engaged even though we were tired, as the end of the semester approached. I am guessing I was not the only student in the room in this situation: I was relieved that I was somehow able to finish the data analysis without turning my computer off and losing the codes and associated themes that were exceeding the limits of the free student version of the software. I looked out into the room and could see my friends, mentors, and first-year student mentees sitting in rows and enjoying a meal they did not have to prepare or pay for. I could tell they could relate to the results and were hungry for change. We were fired up, and I was confident that I would not be alone in working towards institutional change.

I was invited to share the results of the study with the campus Academic Officers and the School of Social Work that semester, as well as the College of Education at their fall retreat the next semester. I have also shared these results at several other institutions. I do not know what happens in most of the meetings following my disseminating of results; however, I have experienced a few institutional changes that I believe were directly tied to hours of difficult conversations inside and outside of formal committee meetings. Baltra-Ulloa (2013) encourages dialoguing and working through conflict in organizations as a means to create change.

On our campus—like all contexts—change came in the form of ongoing organizing and demands for concrete and winnable solutions. Sabzalian (2019) describes, “drawing attention to the structures, discourses, and practices that sustain settler colonialism” (p. 7) and “the unexamined ways whiteness and colonialism surface in educational policy and practice” (p. xviii). Cultural and funeral leave is an example of an educational policy that our university lacked. I was told I could not be excused from class for a funeral unless my name was listed in the obituary purchased in a newspaper; however, Native American kinship networks define family in much more inclusive ways (Guillory & Wolverton, 2008). Our attendance at several wakes, funerals, and cultural ceremonies in a typical year are a protective factor in how we manage unexpected deaths; maintain our spiritual practices, family and community connections; as well as manage our traumatic grief (Guillory & Wolverton, 2008; Hansen, 2014; Saleebey, 2006; Swaney, 2016). Native students who are not permitted to participate in ceremonial events

and funerals may have long-term consequences for their academic performance, which result from unresolved complicated grief (Hansen, 2014; Swaney, 2016).

However, despite the adversity we manage, we are the means to the change we want to see in the world. For example, my first-year mentee at the Native American student services became the first student co-chair of our university-level Diversity Advisory Council (DAC) to the university president that previously was led by a faculty and staff co-chair team. Our Native American Student Advisory Council (NASAC) researched and successfully fought for a cultural leave policy change, which was modeled after another regional campus process. The cultural leave policy enables students to request excused absence(s) from their instructors, advisor, or chair when they will be missing class due to attending a cultural event, ceremony, or funeral (Muir-Cochrane et al., 2014). The policy also includes a clear appeal process if students experience issues with the policy implementation, as well as clear guidance on make-up work to ensure the student is supported in learning course materials and attending to their community commitments (Guillory & Wolverton, 2008). The DAC supported the NASAC in the process of getting the faculty senate to pass and implement a university-level cultural and ceremonial leave policy. The policy is an example of higher education responsiveness to accommodate a persistent request for Native American students with the potential to both increase retention and as a concrete means of supporting and respecting Native American identities (Archibald, 2008; Guillory & Wolverton, 2008; Kirkness & Barnhardt, 1991; Muir-Cochrane et al., 2014; Wilson & Hughes, 2019). Our campus also created a Native American community advisory board, as well as two additional staff positions held by Native Americans with doctoral degrees including a tribal liaison and a student-facing diversity, equity, and inclusion role. The Native American staff roles are a way for them to serve as role models, who successfully navigated their higher educational experiences, and now give back to the wider community (Guillory & Wolverton, 2008).

We created these changes together, “we” including my co-author and I along with my mentee and other Native American faculty, staff, and students. My co-author collaborated with other faculty and co-chaired the DAC, which eventually created the DAC student co-chair role that my mentee was the first to hold. My co-author and mentee both played active roles in advocating for the student attendance policy and Native American staff roles. My role focused more on the direct work with Native American students, advocating for the Native American Studies (NAS) certificate, and running trainings for students, faculty, and administrators focused on historical and intergenerational trauma and Native American student experiences. Our other collaborators continue to manage the NAS certificate and continue to advocate for a Chief Diversity Officer role since we rotated out of these roles. Many programs continue to be under-resourced and require repeated advocacy to maintain staffing through university allocations, grant writing, and joint appointments to maintain momentum and manage programs such as the NAS certificate. We all remain in ongoing relationships; however, we all often take breaks to rest from the taxing nature of this systems change work.

Coda: Challenges Related to Changing the System

I am also in ongoing roles that enable me to give back to the community (Guillory & Wolverton, 2008). The community recognized and nurtured my gifts in speaking, training, and conducting program evaluations in Indigenous contexts. I completed my advanced standing Master of Social Work degree and launched a Native American women-owned social enterprise with university, school, conference, and Indigenous community contracts to speak, train, and conduct program evaluations.

I applied for a social work doctoral program with essays using the methods of my undergraduate program evaluation as a starting place for my proposed dissertation methods. I know what makes students feel safe. I know the feelings and the practice skills come naturally because they are grounded in Indigenous culture (Wilson et al., 2019). I was admitted to and accepted a place in a doctoral program where I completed my Master of Social Work degree and served on many committees focused on diversity, equity, and inclusion work. I learned the language and culture of academic settings, yet I continue to experience social workers and educators who are unaware of the systemic oppression I have faced throughout my educational and occupational career (Muir-Cochrane et al., 2014). Social workers should be taught Indigenous research and program evaluation frameworks and methods in the explicit curriculums. As I work as a program evaluation consultant in the community, faculty collaborators are often asking me for the resources that I utilize to guide research in Indigenous communities in a manner that values the way Indigenous communities function as they build trust, gain access, and interact in manners that are comfortable, safe, and flexible for Indigenous collaborators. Again, I continue to be tokenized even in my profession by the same professors who do not prioritize learning about Indigenous approaches to research. Indigenous communities often practice research in manners guided by ancestors and with the impact of future generations in mind, which rarely aligns with Westernized researchers and institutions. The University of Montana is currently in the process of proposing and developing a master's degree in NAS and an Indigenous Studies doctoral degree through an Interdisciplinary Graduate School program, which are both institutional efforts that can develop resources for Indigenous students.

Most of us go into social work because we want to help people and change systems, but we need to teach about structural oppression in order to make change (Stanton, 2014). We have an ethical responsibility to be educated and implement standards of professionalism in daily practices and professional development including decolonizing classrooms and curriculum to be allies to challenge and support Native American students (Muir-Cochrane et al., 2014). Ives and Loft (2013) explain:

> In designing curricula, educators need to move away from the assumption that Eurocentric knowledge and practice approaches "could and should be uncritically and universally applied to all peoples regardless of culture or political and historical circumstances" (Baikie, 2009, p. 42). An approach that seeks to liberate and heal must address colonialism directly, its past injustices and its present manifestations. (p. 5695)

To me, being a social worker is helping people regardless of where they come from, which entails understanding lived experiences without judgment and with humility. Unfortunately, in reality, I am often treated like my worldview is not a priority and sometimes like my presence or efforts do not matter (Wilson & Hughes, 2019). Changing the system while you are in the system is not easy. The system and the people within the system constantly tell you that you—that everything you are—are not meant to be there (Hunt et al., 2020).

Critique of the Profession of Social Work

My experience is one thing, but it is reflected broadly in the experiences of Indigenous students and people. Social workers can recognize and understand that we perpetuate oppression. Baltra-Ulloa (2013) explains:

> The contradictions experienced in my social work training have endured through my years of practice. We were trained to believe we were "the good guys": caring, sensitive, aware, competent, ethical, agents of social justice and change, and above all, capable of empowering ourselves and others. This seemed an ill-fitting cloak from the very beginning, uncomfortable and burdensome when, "in the job," I was essentially being paid to support and promote a new form of colonization—a "fitting in" to a system that values individualism, discourages collective issues, prefers to control, survey and judge people. I was to do this by managing risk, reporting my activities, withdrawing my services if people did not comply, and timing my availability. I was to know at all times what to do. I was to keep an emotional distance, avoid conflict, and never ever speak of befriending a "client." (p. 2290)

My Indigenous worldview and experiences as a social worker align with both Baltra-Ulloa (2013) and the Native student and alumni participants in the program evaluation I led. However, the invalidation and the micro-insults are minuscule compared to the sense of belonging and healing I gain when working with Native American students (Wilson et al., 2019). My undergraduate research ignited this feeling of belonging and purpose in giving back to my community, but the direct practice I do now encompasses the change I want to make (Guillory & Wolverton, 2008). I want to make sure that Indian education is systemically included in curriculum and that Indigenous worldviews, knowledge, experiences, and histories are held at the same value as a Westernized education (Hunt et al., 2020; Wilson & Hughes, 2019). Coates (2013) assert that we need to work on

> changing the language we use to describe another's experience: the "language of deficiency and dysfunction" does not fit Indigenous Peoples' "survival and resistance… to oppressive conditions" (Nadeau & Young, 2006, p. 91). Nadeau and Young (2006) use the term education instead of therapy or healing to shift the focus from the victim-oppressor relationship to resistance and survival: to restore "sacred vitality" referring to Indigenous Peoples' "feeling of energetic connection with [their] own sacredness, with the earth, and with others in the community, a feeling of being fully alive." Many First Nations Peoples use traditional ceremonies to restore "sacred vitality" while many non-Indigenous people may use strengths-based models. (p. 1924)

The students and alumni that participated in my undergraduate program evaluation project changed my trajectory as a social worker. The students, now alumni, are all working towards systemic change in their respective careers, as am I in my academic institutional role and consulting work. We are part of a global resistance, resurgence, revitalization, restoration, and reclaiming of Indigenous ways of knowing and being in the world (Hunt et al., 2020; Stanton, 2014; Wilson et al., 2019; Wilson & Hughes, 2019). The Native American participants in my practicum role gave me the power, the courage, and the passion to do the hard work. But in the end, I can only hope that as a social work profession, we can understand how much critical thinking and creating culturally safe spaces can maximize the impact we make (Muir-Cochrane et al., 2014). Social work is about helping people, but you can only ethically help people—who have less privilege than you—when you recognize your role in the system and how that system inherently supports you (Guillory & Wolverton, 2008). Stanton (2014) describes the moral agency of textbook authors and educators who can build "social and political consciousness-building, resistance, questioning, and reflexivity" (p. 4) that explicitly, rather than passively, describe colonization and current implications. Knowledge of systemic oppression has the potential to not only make an influence on a community or systems level, but also how we practice humility with each individual and group we engage with in office hours, the classroom, committee- or research-meeting.

Suggestions for the Profession of Social Work

I can imagine a social work academic- and practice-community where Native American students feel safe, whole, and connected (Hunt et al., 2020; Wilson & Hughes, 2019). However, first we as a discipline must develop an understanding of how we got here and where we are trying to go together. The values my Indigenous communities practiced before colonization can point a way forward together. Baltra-Ulloa (2013) describes an ethic of care in the context of reciprocal relationships in the context of community. The ethic of care and the associated relationality and reciprocity come naturally to me because it was developed in me by my grandmother and my community (Archibald, 2008; Kirkness & Barnhardt, 1991; Wilson & Hughes, 2019). Resmaa Menakem, an African American licensed social work therapist, trainer, and activist articulates something similar:

> consider Malcolm Gladwell's observation that it takes about 10,000 hours of practice to become highly proficient in almost any serious endeavor. By the time African Americans reach adulthood, many have spent 10,000 or more hours learning how to navigate the dangers, constrictions, and contradictions of white-body supremacy. They have done this not by choice, but as a matter of survival … white people who want to grow out of white-body supremacy now need to put in a similar amount of time and effort in order to change themselves and create a new culture … white Americans will need to expend considerable effort towards those goals, both individually and collectively, over an extended period of time. (2017, p. 267)

However, for those working within systems and structures designed for your benefit creating this change in your daily interactions might not flow as naturally. We all have unlearning to do, which can be done relationally, as we allow ourselves to be challenged and unsettled, as we

navigate in new directions (Wilson et al., 2019). Yellow Bird (2013), an Indigenous social worker, asserts, "social workers have the opportunity either to support Indigenous Peoples' rights or continue with practices that further erode them" (p. 292).

Social workers, wanting to change policies and practices that continue oppression and perpetuate problems, often communicate that the work requires more effort than they expected. However, how do we do the work and be a part of the solutions? Wilson and Hughes (2019) state, "to care is not enough, to be compassionate is not enough, to know the truth is not enough. We must use this awareness to guide our actions … the actual change work—is personal and relational" (p. 6). We need awareness coupled with action that are grounded in relationships with people that are accountable to a place with an ability to "persist through uncomfortable experiences of not-knowing… [which] requires a level of vulnerability… as well as a willingness to learn and grow and change, and take cues from the broader environment" (Wilson & Hughes, 2019, p. 10). Stanton (2014) describes decolonizing as "a curriculum that deconstructs the colonizing narrative and historical representation of Native peoples—may help teachers and students develop the critical habit of mind needed to effectively advocate for widespread change" (p. 7).

Wilson et al. (2019) uses the following relevant metaphor: "All you have to do is pick out the weeds. All you have to do is remove the barriers and provide the space and people will do it for themselves" (p. xvi). The roots of the weeds of colonization are still present in our academic spaces. We must go underground to identify and remove the sources of colonial structures and processes that reemerge time and time again as ongoing acts of injustice and cultural insensitivity. Students, staff, and faculty can provide leadership that finds and removes the roots of ongoing injustices. Weeds are embedded in our daily interactions, our curriculum, and our policies. We all know weeds seemingly pop up out of nowhere, even in places we weeded yesterday. Yet, if we have a willingness to acknowledge and continually pick the weeds in our implicit curriculum (daily interactions and practices) and our explicit curriculum in classrooms, then the seeds and plants intended for that place will grow and flourish. The literal roots have always been there, reengaging allows for an active replenishment of Indigenous knowledge systems and people. Our campus focus groups and the Native American students navigating their respective professional journeys are evidence that the balance, harmony, and equilibrium we seek in shifting our disciplines and practices to include and actively represent Indigenous perspectives with critical awareness are already embodied in our students as they are the future leaders of our communities (Stanton, 2014; Wilson & Hughes, 2019).

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three nine twenty-one (3/9/21)

Antonia R. G. Alvarez

waking up to another headline
for “no apparent reason”[1]

another Filipino is dead. someone’s Lolo.
another Filipina is complicit in anti-blackness. someone’s *Ate*, an elder sister;
someone’s daughter, trying to make sense of the
suckerpunch(Falcon)stomachkick(Kari)subwayrage(Quintana)sittinginyourowncar(Echano)
“Possible Hate Crime” world we are living in.
the layers of pain and rage and internalized shame and fear
these cycles
—ouroboros—
like the snake eating her own tail they
are killing us

sister
I can see you.
I can see this rage this suffering I
can see the weight of it pulling you
down

and I feel you now grabbing
my ankles grasping my wrists

gasping for breath

it is how we are taught to survive

it is how we are NOT taught to survive
throwing my body out for parts
picking and choosing
truncated truths
while the remains fuel the fire that keep the engines running
the system locked in gear
I place my hands to my temples

trying to narrow my focus
trying to attend to what is in front of me
the containers I have built

[1] Monotoc (2021). *Elderly Filipino killed in Arizona in suspected hate crime.* ABS-CBN News. https://news.abs-cbn.com/news/03/08/21/elderly-filipino-killed-in-arizona-feared-to-be-an-asian-hate-crime

I see now they are filled with holes
leaking
seeping

and why do I STILL feel betrayed?

these walls are not built to teach us how to be free
these spaces are not built to facilitate growth beyond borders
the transgressions and imperfections and beautiful conversations that shatter plexiglass screens between us
were not meant to happen here

pedagogies of performance
pedagogies of protection
pedagogies of pedagogy

but the classroom doesn't contain my learning
nor my teaching
nor my growth

my pedagogy doesn't get tweaked by curricular revisions

it gets tweaked by
murders in broad daylight

by gaslighting and finger-pointing and blame

it gets tweaked by fear and dismissal
by weaponized critique

it gets tweaked by the body I am in
and the very little nuance I am perceived to contain
to necessitate

lest it leaps—for a moment—into full view

grotesque and imperfect
—monstrosity! (butfinallySEENallowedtoexist)

before slithering back into the sands
seeking shelter
trying not to dry out in the sun.

This poem emerged through the pain and increasing numbness I experience as a queer, Filipina-American social work educator and scholar-mama, as we witness continued violence among our Brown and Black communities and increasing violence explicitly targeting our Asian and Pacifica communities. The names in parenthesis are victims of anti-Asian hate that have been in the news over the past two years. I have found myself so tired of headlines that announce rather than confront, that reflect a biased observation rather than an uncompromising truth. I have watched as Asian community leaders and family members who are the survivors of this violence align themselves with white supremacy, committing to a rhetoric of fear and anti-blackness. This poem emerged through the pain and increasing numbness I experience as I have watched colleagues around the country scramble to adopt anti-racist and decolonial syllabi and curricula (mostly written by black and brown scholars in the academy; e.g., Ahadi et al., 2020; Johnson et al., 2020; Lopez et al., 2021; Transforming the Field Education Landscape, 2021). I can't help but struggle with the questions as to why they were not doing that already. I can't help but struggle with wondering *what more will it take?* This poem emerged through the pain and increasing numbness I experience when my student evaluations are shared each term and I am critiqued through a lens of white supremacy, for systemic and programmatic and virtual faults that shove me into a corner. I am charged with asking too much, "demanding" reflection, assuming awareness. I am relegated and my own identities are made invisible term after term. This poem emerged through the pain and increasing numbness I experience as I continue to try to build spaces in my classroom for hope, healing, and radical growth, particularly for the queer and BIPOC students, knowing all the while the price we (my students and me) will pay for feeling too free. The poem ends with a metaphorical monstrosity of the body of a woman of color in the academy appearing briefly and then slinking away seeking shelter and solace, buried in the sand. I hope for better, but sometimes I fear worse.

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Love Letters for Liberatory Futures

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Abstract: This collection of letters serves to explore the narratives of a collective of women of color in academia by examining individual, collective, spiritual, and institutional strategies for surviving and transforming our institutional spaces and the ways that White Supremacy has shaped our journeys. Multiple perspectives are viewed, and we have written to our children, our future social work students, our future selves, our BIPOC faculty siblings, and our feared enemies to envision and embody more liberatory futures.

***Keywords*:** liberation, academia, BIPOC faculty, institutional racism, White Supremacy

Introduction

As a collective of women of color faculty in a predominantly White institution, we appreciate the way that this publication has continued to make space for BIPOC narratives and to center issues of structural racism in our field. As we read this most recent call, we had a range of reactions to thinking about the ongoing forces of White Supremacy in social work as well as the ways that our bodies, voices, and labor are continually tapped to do the work of anti-racism in the institutions we inhabit. We found ourselves exhausted by the ways we repeatedly share our narratives of oppression and are expected to do so in various forums as BIPOC faculty and social workers. However, we did resonate with the aims and scope of this call as we all have lived experiences of racism that are important to share, and have found individual, collective, spiritual, and institutional strategies for surviving and transforming these conditions.

As a group of scholars, we occupy many different identities and intersections of experience. We are Black, Asian/Asian American, Latinx, Multiracial, queer, first generation, parents, daughters, tenured, pre-tenure, and come from diverse geographies and class backgrounds. We have had varied pathways to academia and yet are connected by threads of shared experience, context, and congruent values and commitments. We sit in different programs and points along our tenure track careers in a school of social work in the Pacific Northwest, in a city where all but two of us moved for our academic positions. Motivated initially by the pandemic, we sought each other out to intentionally build community and collective care. When we learned of the call for presenters on dismantling White supremacy for a series of symposia being held by the University of Houston Graduate College of Social Work in 2020, we began to meet regularly to discuss our professional experiences in the school and think about our connections to each other and the academy. What emerged was a collective support group, a conference presentation, and theorizing about what it has meant for us, as women of color, to be in this field in academia during 2020–2021: COVID-19, racial uprising, academic precarity, and a time of great social need.

For this piece, we collectively came to the format of letter-writing and creative expression as a way to present our reflections on the experiences, strategies, dreams, reminders, and aspirations

we have for ourselves, our students, our field, and our future colleagues. As you read our pieces, we invite you to listen for the double-storied experiences of institutional oppression and our strategies of resistance therein. For us this has been both a form of trauma healing and narrative practice (Mitchell, 2005; White, 2004; Yuen, 2007). Our work engages in collective narrative practice as we have sought to connect our individual stories with a collective group and context for change (Denborough, 2008; Denborough et al., 2006). We have contributed to each other through the sharing of wisdom and continued commitment to being in community together. This has been a strategy of persistence. We work from the belief and come from numerous cultural traditions in which storytelling is central to healing and protecting our joy. We know that pain can be avoided, disrupted, interrupted, and healed through this collective narrative practice and wisdom sharing across time and space.

We are using the letter writing format to preserve our individual voices, and to mark our various places along the tenure and post-tenure process. In our letters, we drew upon ancestral knowledges, our own experiences, and our shared meaning-making to write directly to different people and groups. We see this as a disruption to traditional, dominant culture styles of academic writing and as theorizing in its own right. As such, our narratives here are personal and our approach is political as we ground our writing in our lived experiences. Further, as many of us have experiences of transnational families and are living in diaspora, the significance of letter-writing as a form of communication across distance felt resonant.

In this piece, we write to our children, our future social work students, our former selves, our BIPOC faculty siblings, and our feared enemies in order to envision and embody more liberatory futures. Each letter or "entry" is written by a different author and yet we see our voices as deeply interconnected and co-constituted. The first letter is written to future social workers with the expectation that this particular moment of social unrest be remembered and the liberatory potential within it realized in the future. The second letter is from the perspective of an early tenure track faculty and reflects on the sacrifices required to enter this profession. The third letter is from a faculty member further along the tenure process calling for future scholars to hold tightly to their purpose for working within academia and the pursuit of joy. The fourth letter, from a tenured mother to her daughter, recognizes that our children are with us on this journey and may one day become our colleagues. The fifth letter is from the perspective of a post tenure scholar on what comes next. We close with a poem that is both a prayer and a ceremonial offering of resistance.

—

Dear future social worker,

4/20/21, 3:05pm PDT

We are writing this letter on the day that George Floyd's death was ruled murder, if you consider a guilty verdict vindication. It is our hope that you have learned about the movements that ignited in 2020 during multiple pandemics, one being racism, in your social work history or macro practice courses. We were initially taken aback by the inundation of emails following the

verdict on April 20, 2021. A flurry of well-crafted messages, within minutes following the announcement. We pondered whether the messages were pre-generated. They seemed so scripted. These emails were chock-full of words and phrases such as racial trauma… it's been an extraordinarily difficult year for Black people… this does not mark an end to injustice… and there is still much work to be done. In the year since the uprising in America, many continue to question: What has changed? Black and Brown people are tired of the perpetual cycle of White supremacy and racism. Is this truly a turning point or false hope? It is certainly not a time to celebrate. The value of life is justice. We will celebrate when it is no longer necessary to protest. For many of us who occupy Black and Brown bodies, these emails and messages simply do not resonate.

It is our sincere hope that by the time you are reading this letter that a massive shift has occurred as a result of our unwavering determination for true justice and liberation. As social work educators, it is our hope that the years that we have dedicated to battling monsters in the institution, many who changed faces, titles, and positions, have been eradicated. We hope that social work practice embraces paradigms of critical consciousness and liberatory practices—not only embrace, but that they become standard frameworks used in all courses. It is also quite possible that by the time you're reading this, there is an expansion of these paradigms, which would be a success. Social issues may continue to plague society, but we hope that all of the talk about anti-racism did not become a fading trend or the politically correct phrase to embrace in 2020.

We hope there was finally a recognition that people of color are exhausted. The endless conversations about racism and what to do about it are not why many faculty of color committed to being a part of an antiquated system. We were motivated by the possibilities we could create. We did not see disrupting racism as our sole role or responsibility. We did not occupy spaces within the academy and within social work programs to teach others how to dismantle a system that we did not create, yet were significantly impacted by. During 2020, social work as a profession had to critically examine its underpinnings. It was a profession that distinguished itself by its embrace of social justice, yet staunchly defended racism inherent within its curriculum, values, and principles of the profession.

We hope all of the work that was done will banish the ghosts of racism from haunting you. May you know that although we were tired in our souls, we did this for you, just like our ancestors did it for us. We never got sidetracked by the illusion, hype, false promises, and lip service. We allowed those who were performative or prescriptive to fade into the background as time went on. We confided in those who mirrored our experiences, proved dedicated to the work through action and sincerity, and developed our own strategies to thrive. We simply knew that we could not rely on a system that was never intended to support us. In this respect, we were innovators, forging a less cumbersome path and teaching others how to do the same. We hope you are reaping the benefits of our labor and never forget our history and legacy. We held this vision for you and developed a blueprint for you. It is our sincere hope that you are no longer battling the adverse impacts of racism. It is also our sincere hope that if this is the case, that the profession of social work learned valuable lessons from the year 2020, took those lessons to heart, implemented significant structural changes, and is now in alignment with combating and not

contributing to racism. We will be watching, inspiring, and encouraging you. It will also be your responsibility to do the same for generations to come.

Sincerely,

Your Ancestors

—

Dear beautiful, intersectional, first year, faculty of color,

You have fought so hard to get here and sacrificed more than seems fair or just. You have undergone the most amazing and brutal transformation on your journey. Please, try not to forget why you started out on this long road to begin with. Your love for your community, the foundation for your passion and drive is intimately tied to your why, and easily misplaced. You will need to remind yourself of your why over and over again like an anchor when you are adrift in the sea of the academy. This system was not built with supporting and sustaining you in mind, and its core is rotten with White supremacy.

You will experience cognitive dissonance about why you're doing this work. The outrageous demands, driven by patriarchy and heteronormativity, where people of color are drawn into the fold, a place where our simple presence, point of view, or critique is feared. The traumatic memories of generations of our ancestors attempts to claim space and break into a system that was not made by us, or for us, has left us rubbed raw. A system embedded and enmeshed with a White savior complex, built on a foundation of White supremacy, because for so long it was the only way.

You will feel like a butterfly, caught in the institution's net. Frantically beating your wings, trying to be free again. With only memories of freedom, trapped in a glass jar, the academy waits for your fight to go out. The monsters will stare in at you, waiting for the light in your eyes to dim. They will want to put you on proud display, one for their collection. Silenced. Assimilated.

The academy can be a lonely place. Isolating in a way that you could have never been prepared for. The funnel up for us, as people of color, contributes to the loneliness. The higher you reach, the greater your ambitions, the smaller your community. The more suffocating it gets. The more colonized your mind and soul are.

This system is going to try and take everything that is left of you if you let it. It will demand that you both solve its problems and stand in solidarity with its weaknesses.

Never, for a single moment, forget that you owe it nothing. You have already sacrificed so much, do not sacrifice yourself at the feet of the institution. Your body, blood, and bones are not for them. Your ancestors and histories are not for them. "We were never meant to survive"

(Lorde, 2000, p. 255–256), but look at us. While still few, there are many of us who are surviving and fighting for more liberatory futures.

Remember, no matter how it feels, you are not alone. Find your people, trust them, claim your space. They will sustain you. We will sustain you.

Sincerely,

Those who've walked before you

—

Insecure attachment,

Welcome to this side of higher education. I am so proud of you. You did it. You figured out how to get your degrees. You did something that few in your family have done. You are part of a very small number of Black academics in this country. There are some things you should know about the life you've chosen.

Firstly, and most importantly, the work you do is important. You are important to the people you teach, to the students you mentor, to the communities you research with, to the direction of this institution. You can choose when and how you want to use your voice. You can choose. Remember that in all of this you have a measure of choice. You will need to look for it. You have more choice than staying or going. Though you will toy with the idea of going as often as you work to stay. That is the insecurity of your attachment to this institution, and its attachment to you.

Hold on to why you've come here. You came here to work for racial and gender justice for your community. You saw something in the tools and mechanisms offered in this place, this School of Social Work, that could help you develop more of the muscles to support your people. Seeking has brought you here. Continue to seek. There is generation and growth in the seeking. Do not allow the constrictions of this place to tell you not to seek. Academia is a place of creativity coupled with rigidity. It is a place that rewards innovation and punishes those who push for it. As you think about working with your community, listen to what they want. As you sit in your institution ask yourself, what can I take from here that will help my people; that will help Black lives survive and thrive through birth; that will support our children to make it past one; that will love Black families in all of our formations; that will support all bodies to live and love in freedom. In this place may you have moments that move our community towards liberation. I ask you to remember that. That is what you seek.

This will feel urgent. It is and has gripped this country since its inception. The reality of oppression cannot, must not, please do not allow it to, negate your experiences of joy. It is in joy, beauty, tenderness, connection that you will find what sustains. The quest for dancing is as important as the work for change. You must know a measure of joy; it is oil in the engine of your soul.

In terms of your own growth, what do you want? This institution will take every ounce of you. There will be sacrifice for you. But do you feel that coming here is generative and good? Separate from all of the collective pressures and your care for the collective. If you don't have grounding in yourself this is not sustainable. But also, you don't have to do this indefinitely. This may be a lifetime track for you, or it may just be a chapter moving you towards something else.

My aspirations for you:

> Well, I wish I could be like a bird in the sky.
> How sweet it would be if I found I could fly.
> Oh, I'd soar to the sun and look down at the sea
> And then I'd sing 'cause I'd know, yeah
> Then I'd sing 'cause I'd know, yeah
> Then I'd sing 'cause I'd know
> I'd know how it feels.
> I'd know how it feels to be free, yeah, yeah (Simone, 1967)

May you be joyful,
May you be happy,
May you be free.

– with you in sequins

—

Dear 13-year-old daughter,

It's 2021 Mother's Day. I love you, both you and brother! Wow! You are growing so nicely as you enter adolescence. Oh, how you have become articulate and sure of yourself. I didn't know being a PhD mama of color would take me here to where you are, so much stronger than I was at your age in navigating a world that can make us feel less than and unworthy. I was a shy girl, trusting that the monsters rarely existed, only to face them throughout life, even as I became a mom.

When I was thirteen, we had to leave Molokai, Mommy's home island, because Grandma and Grandpa's employer, Del Monte pineapple company, closed down. Grandma and Papa decided to transfer to the same types of jobs on Oahu. Those were the jobs they knew. The thought of looking for a different type of job stressed them out. It was at this time in Mommy's life I first began to see some essence of unfairness in the world.

When Grandma S was thirteen, she was going to school and living with her aunt. She soon would be married seven years later to Papa. Grandma had some college experience, but did not finish. When she married Papa and came to America, she was discouraged by Papa to enroll into college. Papa emphasized that he needed her to work to help build their future.

When your Great Grandma H was thirteen, she was not in school. In fact, what we know, she had a first-grade education. Despite that, she was a very vocal person and wise in her own right.

Fast forward now, you should know that you were just 2.5 years old when Mom started this tenure track position. I was the first Filipino American professor to be hired at the School of Social Work. It was my first full time gig in higher education! Your dad was supportive of me earning my doctorate and being in this career trajectory. Mom has seen many couples and families go through hardships and challenges in this path. I was scared, anxious, and often felt insecure being a professor while raising very young children like you. I felt isolated, because I didn't have Grandma S or Papa nearby to provide help. Your dad and I had to do our co-parenting duties on our own.

Because Mom taught many social justice related courses in undergraduate programs, you became aware of the disparities and inequities that existed in the community at a young age. There were times when your dad indicated that there were some discussions that needed to be age appropriate. I guess it did not help that I dragged you everywhere—conferences, community-based work, and events.

Through the years, I am seeing some of the impact that all this exposure has on you. You are so aware of oppressive forces and their dynamics. Now with multiple pandemics, you have experienced the world go through drastic changes. Yep, Mommy has seen your social media posts on BLM, Anti-Asian hate, LGBTQI rights, immigrant and refugee issues, and climate change. The best part of it all, is that you have a big, empathetic heart! And, you are thinking like a scientist, lol … like Mom! I also love how you remind me time and time again to practice self-care and rest. This helps me fight the monsters from within and out there. During the pandemic, I love learning things with you like baking, and doing more arts and crafts. I love spending more time watching you and brother grow, as before the pandemic, I was always tending to work (e.g., teaching, student meetings, etc.).

I just want you to know that I love the person you are becoming! Please keep moving forward. Your generation is more equipped to address racial inequities and global capitalism. When this pandemic becomes more manageable, there will be many things that I hope we keep as a family, as you blossom. In the meantime, please know that you come from a lineage of strong and beautiful women. Know your worth.

Love,
Mommy A

—

Dear pre tenure WOC professor in a White school of social work,

I hope you are taking care of yourself and yours during these multiple pandemics. It has been such a challenging time for many of us. I am with you in all that you are experiencing! This year and a half has shed light on the disparities in the academy, a lot that we already knew. It just

made them more explicit for more to see! The trauma is real. There is also beauty and grace that are emerging in all the chaotic movement.

As I actively think about going up for promotion to full professorship, the highest rank in the professoriate, I think of the phase in my career where you are now. Know that I am proud of your arrival! I have been waiting for a critical mass of us to be part of this school. I am proud of the handful of us who had these courageous and hard discussions and decisions to rightfully have you occupy this space. I not only boldly justify such occupancy, but know that I will continue to advocate for your needs and voices to be heard. I have your back.

Hyun (2005) uses the metaphor of the "bamboo ceiling" to describe the structural processes and barriers Asian American women face in professional spaces. Likewise, "the glass ceiling" is commonly used to describe the challenges faced by women and other minoritized people when trying to move to higher roles in a structural hierarchy (Kagan, 2022). People say, "Pull and elevate as you climb towards the bamboo or glass ceiling." That ceiling is hard to break! When we break that ceiling and feel that we have attained major life achievements for ourselves, families, and communities, we note how it comes with deep scars of pain and struggles. It need not be such. I look forward to the day that this path is not ableist, classist, and all the embodied -ists. I aspire it to be a path of healing, liberation, and empowerment for us and our peoples.

I say that you must, at all cost, preserve your soul. The White academy will suck every beauty and light of your soul, telling you that you are not enough. You are enough and then some. For each milestone, however big or small, honor it. Honor the people, places, and processes that led you to it. Take the time to care for your well-being. Reclaim the rituals or ceremonies that were forgotten along the way, as your ancestors will gently remind you of your purpose. Remove the temptation of glorifying the individualized success early on, as the addiction can be potent. Practice how to identify power hoarding that the academy rewards through its tokenized ways. Be disciplined in the stance of humility, as elitism is reinforced as well. The academy breeds on such, and may enable the forgetting of the earlier seedlings of one's collective purpose to serve.

When the academy justifies epistemicide (the killing and intentional erasure of knowledge systems, including Indigenous and minoritized communities' ways of knowing), with a growing critical mass of us occupying, we must resist. You are not alone, even if you are the only one there for a moment. Ancestral wisdom and love show up when you least expect it, including the times when you feel beaten, fatigued, and down. It is those moments that will pull you out, reminding you and holding you tight.

Congratulations on being here, again! I look forward to continuing to walk and be with you on this journey!

Deep respect,

Dr. A

—

dear monsters:

bite me.
I mean it.

get a little closer.

try it.
invite me to "the table"
make sure my "voice is heard."
I'll wear the cape. I'll be on time.
I freaking dare you.

cuz every time I hear that invitation–veiled threat–weak attempt at action—
I feel the reverberations in my bones
the spirits of all the other Others'
still sitting at that Table
waiting to be fed.

see,
my people warned me about you.

I've heard you called reviewer two, imposter syndrome, ivory tower—
[I called you Academons once, when I was more afraid]

I have heard you morph your voice, matching the language of women of color; stealing the pedagogy of queers, blurring the lines; arming yourself with "equity" and other words that make us think you understand, believe, support this struggle; offering a "statement" during the Q&A, filling the space with your voice, filling the air with your own fear.

silence.

I pray that I will know when you arrive
nightly rituals to ground myself in my knowing.

and I am learning not to be afraid.

(re)membering that I have skills for this fight.
my father taught me not to wave at the ghosts walking down old mountain roads.
kupuna instruct me to lower my eyes when I hear the drums.
mama helps me seek the moon, the birds, the winds for disturbances.
my siblings remind me to find the interconnectedness, the spaces of sameness, to not feel alone.

we do not have to be afraid.
instead

we leave an offering
wrapped in bananas leaves
scattered with ash, with soot:
we hope for you to be fed, to be warm, to be held,

but not by me. not by we.

– yours, in monstrosity

Our Call and Response: To the Readers

There is no conclusion. This is a work in progress. Our double storied narratives of oppression and strategies of resistance stand within an expansive field of experiences held tightly by BIPOC women in academia and others with minoritized identities. Even as we look forward, towards liberatory futures, we look back to honor our ancestors and those who preceded our journeys to pave our way. Our letters are just a piece of a continued conversation. We are still collectively in this resistance grappling with the many different forms of White supremacy in our institutions and in our communities. We invite you to engage with our shared narratives, and to sit with what you have read and consider how to implement meaningful change in your own respective institutions, communities, and space.

Our collective work has been both a form of trauma healing, narrative practice, and theory building. We continue to reflect on the through lines of our individual and collective experiences and explore what theories and strategies we can create from these embodied experiences. We take care of us and view our collective care as a strategy of survival and resistance. In the face of epistemicide, we stand in defiance, holding these visions for better practices in our communities, our academic spaces, and our field, as a collective and towards true healing and liberatory futures.

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Social Work Educators in PWIs: Betrayed and Triggered Regularly

Valandra

Abstract: This article chronicles some of the significant experiences I have dealt with regarding anti-black racism in the academy. I focused the article on the systemic ways I witness and experience the reproduction of whiteness and performative efforts by many of my White colleagues to give the illusion that they value racial diversity while simultaneously embracing and perpetuating whiteness in different ways in the academy. Given the pervasiveness of white supremacy within social work education, I focused my recommendations on guidance and strategies for Black faculty to survive anti-black racism and thrive within White academies to minimize stress and being betrayed and triggered regularly.

***Keywords*:** racial battle fatigue, white racial frame, reproduction of whiteness

Prologue

I am inspired by the definitive title of Stacy Abrams' (2020) book *Our Time is Now: Power, Purpose, and the Fight for a Fair America*. I have been a social work educator for 20 years, teaching, doing research, and providing service in predominantly White colleges and universities dealing with everyday racial microaggressions (Sue et al., 2007) and systemic anti-black racism. I do not want to spend the next 20 years of my academic career in such a toxic environment. The time is now to dismantle white supremacy and anti-black racism in social work education. The time is now for social work educators to critically examine how they are complicit in reproducing whiteness and anti-black racism in schools of social work (Bates & Ng, 2021). When I think about the obstacles to racial justice created by liberal White racism, a brand of racism that can lull me into thinking we are really making strides in achieving a "fair America," I grow weary and disheartened. I feel hopelessness creeping up through the middle of my inspiration, slowly ripping it apart.

Introduction

I became a social worker, my second career, in 1996 when I found out that the social work profession has a mission of social justice, and I could see some of my values reflected in the profession's code of ethics (National Association of Social Workers [NASW], 2017). I was elated to be part of a profession with such an explicit and bold mission and an eloquently stated code of ethics to guide my interpersonal relationships and professional conduct. I started my first career as a young Black woman in the business world armed with my hard-earned degree in business administration and an eagerness to make my mark on the world as a financial analyst. After several years of seeing few reflections of myself, I had enough of being one of only a few Black women in a field dominated by White men then. I also got tired of deciding how to dodge, ignore, or confront what I experienced and witnessed, as routinized, racist, and sexist jokes or comments. It did not matter the location or circumstances. I could be in a board meeting, having an informal small group or individual discussion, or walking in the hallway between meetings. It

did not matter. I left the corporate world despite being promoted to senior financial manager a year earlier. Naively, I thought I was leaving behind a professional culture characterized by everyday race and gender-based microaggressions (Sue et al., 2007). Little did I know that, in some ways, by entering social work, I was jumping from the frying pan into the fire.

The Road to Social Work Education

A social worker herself, one of my best friends, who is like an othermother (Guiffrida, 2005), told me about the social work profession. In fact, she is the first non-White social worker I ever met, ironically, at the financing company we both eventually left. I served on a diversity planning committee that she chaired. We loved to go into the office on the weekends to work to escape the otherwise toxic White culture we each met in our respective departments during regular business hours in the work week. Although we worked on different floors, on the weekends, we would set up shop in her cubicle or mine to focus on our work, and during our breaks, she would tell me about her first career and love of social work. I listened to her with awe and fascination. I decided to go back to school and get an MSW. It was refreshing to be in graduate school again as an older student with classes where women professors were the norm and female students outnumbered males 10 to 1. This was a world far different than my experiences as an MBA student. Granted, most of the professors and students in my MSW program were White women. I thought it would be great to be in a profession with an explicitly stated mission of combatting systems of oppression that I have had to contend with for a significant portion of my life because of bigotry based on the color of my skin, my gender, my social, economic status, my sexual orientation … and now my age. I thought it would be wonderful to forge a second career with people who truly valued the dignity and worth of all individuals and recognized the importance of self-determination while simultaneously understanding the power of group advocacy and systems change.

I have experienced these like-minded souls with a passion for justice and who share some of the same values that shape my actions. What I failed to see, however, is how the social work profession, despite its virtuous mission and code of ethics, is also a product of white supremacy and white privilege. As such, it is also a part of the system of racial oppression and anti-black racism specifically. The only difference between social work education and my business experience for me is that instead of being dominated by White men, social work education is dominated by White women. And herein lies the betrayal that I regularly experience when it comes to trying to confront anti-black racism within the social work profession that promises to work to undo racial injustice. Many White women tell me they are oppressed by some White men in a patriarchal system and that we are allies solely on that basis. They erroneously argue that our experiences of oppression are the same because they are subject to sexist treatment. In the 25 years I have been a social work practitioner and educator, I have known some White social workers I would describe as allies. They are the individuals who have worked to develop a critical racial consciousness and an understanding of the impact of their whiteness. These social workers are allies because they do not put me in the all too exhaustingly familiar position of teaching them about racism. They are the ones who have been willing to confront their White colleagues during a meeting instead of coming to me privately after the meeting to sympathize or commiserate with me about the racist remark(s) our White colleague(s) made, and everyone

heard but pretended that they did not hear. They are the social workers who promote my ideas and work without taking credit for it or promoting themselves like some White savior with a complex. They are the ones who consistently express a tone of genuineness with their compliments instead of exaggerating my accomplishments in a patronizing, shallow, self-serving tone that grates on my last nerve. Moreover, they do not try to impress upon me how good-hearted and kind their White colleague is when that person makes a racist joke or comment or commits a racial microaggression (Sue et al., 2008). They are, sadly, rare in my experience.

Inevitably, since I am typically the only Black faculty surrounded by White social work colleagues, and among few Black faculty in the whole university, I am frequently triggered by systemic anti-black racism through the relentless White racial frame (Feagin, 2013)—"which includes whiteness, white privilege, and institutionalized racism" (Arnold et al., 2016, p. 894). Yes, it is so routine that I have unfortunately taken it as a given that at faculty meetings, committee meetings, or any setting in which I am required to congregate with a majority group of White social work educators, I will become irritated, alienated, or ignored, especially if I bring up racism. I can expect that if I bring up racism that I will be exorcized, spoken for, and overzealously praised (read as patronized) for a minor contribution. I am expected to address diversity issues for the department, school, college, and university, to mentor the rare Black students in our program, and to smile and remain patient with the pervasive excuses used by White colleagues that they are still learning about white supremacy, white privilege, and anti-black racism. It is beyond exhausting (Brown, 2018). It interferes with my health, wealth, productivity, and creativity. Scholars describe the cumulative effects of these persistent and pervasive racial microaggressions as "racial battle fatigue … defined as the psychological, physiological, and behavioral stress responses due to the cumulative impact of racial microaggressions" (Franklin, 2016, p. 46; see also Smith, 2004, 2009). Racialized sexism in higher education compounds racial battle fatigue for Black women (Chancellor, 2019). Others describe the burden of working while Black in the White academy as the "Black tax" that Black people must pay "in order to enter and participate in White spaces" (Burrows, 2016, p. 15). A prominent feature of working in this toxic White academic space is the assiduous and ubiquitous promotion and reproduction of whiteness (Anderson, 2003; Bates & Ng, 2021; Feagin, 2013; Leonardo, 2013).

Reproducing Whiteness in the Name of Diversity and Inclusion

One of the most pervasive ways I have experienced the reproduction of whiteness systemically is through implementing diversity and inclusion programs. Theoretically, diversity and inclusion policies have been touted as a mechanism for increasing the recruitment and retention of minoritized and otherwise underrepresented faculty, particularly in historically White institutions; however, in practice, they have become just another way to camouflage white power and privilege and undermine the inclusion and advancement of Black faculty, thereby, reproducing a climate of racial inequity, isolation, and tokenism through educational policies (Iverson, 2007). For example, when I was hired as a tenure-track faculty in the School of Social Work almost a decade ago, I became one of only two Black tenured or tenure-track faculty in the predominantly White and female School of Social Work. Since I have been at the institution,

the School of Social Work has hired five White tenure-track faculty—two White cisgender heterosexual women, two cisgender heterosexual White men, one cisgender gay White man, and two Black female cisgender heterosexual tenure-track faculty. Additionally, the School of Social Work has hired scores of mostly White females and a few White male clinical faculty, too numerous to count. White male and female tenure-track faculty are hired at 2.5 times the rate of Black female tenure-track faculty, and to my knowledge, the program has never hired a tenure-track Black male faculty in its 90-plus year history. Almost 10 years later, I am still one of two Black tenured or tenure-track faculty in the program.

In contrast, the White tenure-track faculty has grown by four faculty—a net ratio of 1 Black faculty to every 4 White faculty or 25 percent over the past decade. *The Journal of Blacks in Higher Education* (2007) noted that "progress into faculty ranks is so slow that, at the current rate, it will take about a century and a half for the percentage of African American faculty to reach parity with [that of] blacks in the nation's population" (para. 1). Dismayed by the persistent consecutive hiring of White men and women, I asked the then-director of the program about what I perceived to be incongruence in our diversity and inclusion policy and the consistent hiring of White faculty. She told me that because the School of Social Work is a predominantly female workforce, hiring men is considered a diversity hire. I felt betrayed by my White female colleagues who consistently voted overwhelmingly to hire White faculty despite having, from my perspective, at least one qualified Black female faculty in each of the faculty search pools from which the White faculty are hired. My feeling of betrayal grew into sadness and anger that prompted me to isolate myself from my colleagues to protect myself from the pervasiveness of the whiteness that surrounded me. Since all the tenure-track hires over the past eight years met the DEI goals of the university and the social work department, according to what I was told, it would be fair to conclude that DEI is synonymous with the reproduction of whiteness and White domination as it is implemented at that institution.

Biased Privileging of White Candidates in Faculty Searches

I was constantly asked to serve on faculty search committees at one of the social work departments where I was employed. I believe it was because I was the token Black faculty, and the department wanted to appear racially inclusive to potential candidates despite the truth. Serving on these faculty search committees was a time-consuming service endeavor, and extensive research indicates that racialized faculty are disproportionately asked to perform service-related functions relative to their White peers in PWIs (Gregory, 2001; Hirshfield & Joseph, 2011). During one of these numerous faculty search experiences, the department invited Black and White female candidates to campus for a job talk. The Black female candidate presented first. She was poised, confident, and clear about her research and future. She had already met the requirements of her dissertation. However, she decided to conduct another study to gain a more nuanced understanding of the experiences of the population of her research focus. The second candidate, the White female, presented her research and future plans the next day. She explained that her findings were tentative in an apologetic, uncertain tone, inviting a very different response than the tone and line of questioning directed at the Black female candidate. The Black candidate was interrogated aggressively and presented with a series of "why" questions that could have easily invited defensiveness. However, the Black candidate

maintained a pleasant composure and responded directly to the series of rapid-fire questions she received. I would describe the tone of the questions as hostile and confrontative, not inquisitive or clarifying.

In contrast, the White candidate was barely questioned at all. Instead, she was offered generous suggestions about what variables and factors she should consider in completing her analysis. She received so many suggestions that she started taking notes based on the feedback she received and thanked the faculty profusely for the great suggestions she received after her presentation. I continued to reflect on the differences in how the faculty responded to each candidate. It is as if hardballs were thrown at the first candidate and, in contrast, softballs were tossed at the second candidate. To continue exploring what could account for the difference in the responses to the questions, I also considered the race of each candidate and the concepts of implicit bias, white rage (Anderson, 2016), and white fragility (DiAngelo, 2018).

In her book *White Rage: The Unspoken Truth of Our Racial Divide* (2016), historian Carol Anderson systematically illustrates that white supremacist policies and practices developed and applied to stop and disadvantage Black people are white violent reactions to Black progress. She coined "white rage" to name the legacy of structural racism willed by white anger and resentment. As I continued to think about how my White colleagues fired questions at the first candidate, a confident Black woman, particularly in contrast to their reactions to the presentation of the White female candidate, I could not help but wonder if I was witnessing a sort of collective, unspoken hostility in the White racialized space of the academy. The Black candidate experienced what African American literature scholar Koritha Mitchell (2020) describes as "know-your-place-aggression" (p. 2), the white backlash to Black achievement. Did the Black candidate, in effect, challenge Eurocentric ideals of academic rigor with her plan to conduct research beyond the expectations of her dissertation? Was her audacity to think and dream big by conducting another study threatening, in some unconscious way, to our department faculty, a microcosm of the White academic power structure? Did her plan threaten the academic standards of an institution that so many value, embrace, and sanction in direct and indirect ways?

In her book *White Fragility: Why It's So Hard for White People to Talk About Racism* (2018), antiracist educator Robin DiAngelo characterizes white fragility by emotions of anger, fear, and guilt and by behaviors that function to reinstate white racial equilibrium and protect racial inequality. I experienced my White colleagues' reactions to the White candidate as a reification of the White academic space. They legitimized and affirmed the White candidate and her research process. In effect, the subtext of their behaviors sent an unconscious message that the White candidate "belonged" and at least was "worthy" and "deserving" of their support. In contrast, the Black candidate was an "outsider" to be feared, chastised, interrogated—"unworthy" or "undeserving" of white support.

As I continued reflecting on this experience, I wondered about the invisible and insidious nature of white supremacy and white privilege. I believe that, individually, my White colleagues would not engage in such racist behavior. I also know that they believe in the ethics and values of the social work profession to confront oppression. However, for me, there is no denying the

approach to questioning that occurred with each candidate. I also felt compelled to say something to the faculty about my observations of how they continue to promote and reinforce whiteness through the faculty hiring process in the department. To do this, I called on one of the two White female faculty I consider allies. I wrote my reflection (much of it included here) and asked them to share it with the faculty. I invited the faculty to critically explore the dynamics of what transpired through the lens of white supremacy and white privilege in the academy and the White racialized space of the department. As DiAngelo urges, the question is not if you are a racist but how is your racism showing up in this situation?

The faculty agreed to collectively read DiAngelo's (2018) and Anderson's (2016) books and brought in a Black male expert to discuss racism with the faculty. And then, in the subsequent two faculty searchers, they hired two White men and one Black woman. From my perspective, they essentially went through the motions of performing diversity (Davis & Fields, 2021), and then they continued their pattern of reproducing whiteness. I felt betrayed again and isolated myself from them emotionally, physically, and collegially.

"Diversity of Thought" and Collusion

The last straw for me in trying to hold out hope that my White colleagues would "own up" to their whiteness and how it shapes the way they show up in the department was broken when one of the newly hired White male faculty stated, "Well, I bring diversity of thought to the department." We were on a committee and considering adding a new diversity and inclusion question for the application process for students interested in our program to answer. I was puzzled and somewhat irritated by his declaration. I thought, "You know that ordinarily, being a White, cisgender, heterosexual male would hardly be considered diverse, so you had to come up with 'diversity of thought' to assuage your conscious? Wow! That is just pathetic." Later in the week, at a faculty meeting, the other White newly hired male made a comment about something, and a White female faculty lauded him publicly, explaining "how valuable it is to experience 'diversity of thought' among the faculty." "There it is again!" I thought to myself. "Where are they getting that from, and why now?" I thought, "It must be a thing," so I contacted one of my friends outside of the academy, and she looked it up. We found that it is a "thing." It is a thing that is used to maintain the status quo (Kim, 2018) and serves as a distraction from doing the actual work of breaking down racial barriers (Bastian, 2019). After I understood what was meant by this phrase, it felt like yet another alienating nail in the coffin for me in feeling betrayed. Par for the course in my department.

After several days of sulking about this latest experience, I decided to say something to my colleagues about their use of the phrase. I do not know what motivated me to act. Was it conditioning, disappointment, anger, frustration, or a desire to squelch the possibility of the phrase catching on with others in the department? Who knows? In any case, I emailed the two colleagues who had used the phrase "diversity of thought," the department chair, and the DEI committee chair and shared my thoughts and experience of hearing them use that phrase and what I found out. However, I first explained my intent in contacting them, stating, "Given the history of how my comments regarding DEI matters in the program have been received, I want to make clear that it is not my intent to undermine or dismiss the work of this committee, but it

is to get some clarity and raise critical questions for reflection regarding our collective efforts to create a more equitable work environment." Referencing the two instances in which I heard the phrase used, I stated, "I cannot say that I have heard it used and could not help but wonder if it is the coded language used to justify (of course not consciously or intentionally) the fact that the program continues to hire cisgender White males (and White females for that matter) at a disproportionately higher rate than it does racially minoritized faculty?" I continued with, "I also wondered if the DEI committee has identified hiring for 'diversity of thought' as a top priority and if, unconsciously, of course, the program's faculty think non-White individuals cannot contribute 'diversity of thought' quite in the same ways White faculty, particularly White male faculty, can?"

Looking at my correspondence now, I believe I was motivated mainly by recognizing that we are all in different places along the learning curve. However, I was also angry and disappointed. I couched my anger and disappointment in sarcasm. I told them, "I am reading Isabel Wilkerson's (2020) book *Caste* about the arbitrary hierarchical divisions in this country that have placed and maintained cisgender White males at the top of our society for centuries and research that suggests that this hierarchy is so engrained in our psyche that we have internalized it and find ways to maintain it without realizing it." I decided to risk sharing the impact of the phrase on me. So I told them, "The phrase disturbed me so much (as it did when I first heard it from a colleague) that this evening I also decided to do an internet search of the phrase to see if there is something I am missing or not truly understanding about the use of it. I shared three articles with my colleagues that I found informative and affirming regarding the use of the phrase 'diversity of thought.'" I explained to them, "I share them in the spirit of recognizing that we are all on a learning curve in undoing white supremacy and patriarchy (I hope) and with the hope that one day the program will truly reflect racial diversity." By the end of my email, I was less angry and wanted them to think critically about what they were communicating.

Both of my colleagues responded graciously and professionally to my email correspondence. One colleague thanked me for my "insights, wisdom, and honesty" and said they "learned a great deal" from the articles I shared. The colleague acknowledged that they were "not aware of the impact of those words and practices" and committed to doing "more research and exploration into this topic and related topics" and assured me that "diversity of thought" was not a hiring priority. This colleague stated that they "plan to read *Caste*" and thanked me for the recommendation; although, I had not recommended the book, I just informed them that I was reading it. This colleague concluded their response with, "I share your desire that the program will truly reflect racial diversity." The other colleague whom I had first heard use the phrase responded that my correspondence "served as a welcome reminder that [their] internal biases are always lurking and for the need to challenge them more consistently." This colleague had been on a hiring committee and shared that they had immediately recognized when a candidate used the phrase "diversity of thought" when suggesting that the candidate's conservative ideas would contribute to the diversity of the program and that candidate became a no, for my colleague, right on the spot. My colleague continued their correspondence with, "Today, I sit amazed at my ability to easily see how this phrase can be so used by others to offer some sort of faux contribution to diversity or helping produce equity while having so blatantly disregarded that same behavior from myself. The mental/rhetorical gymnastics one uses to distance oneself from

complicity in perpetuating the status quo of white supremacy are often difficult to admit. So again, I appreciate you taking the time to question the notion of 'diversity of thought' as a legitimate contribution to diversity and to share your thoughts, as they are absolutely something I needed to hear."

Taking in my colleagues' responses, particularly given that they could have ignored my email altogether, I was appreciative but leery about whether their gracious and acknowledging words would translate into anything more than that. In fact, since that email correspondence, my colleagues have never broached the subject with me, nor did I initiate another conversation with them. I also noticed that they rarely say anything in our faculty meetings anymore. I will not take credit for their decisions to remain virtually silent throughout our faculty meetings. I also do not think I allowed myself to get too hopeful that one email exchange would result in any tangible changes in our department's White hiring practices. By the way, the chair I included in the correspondence did not respond … so much for leadership with a vision of racial equity.

Conclusion

After 20 years of watching many White social work educators' complicity and complacency in perpetuating anti-Black racism, I have concluded that the reproduction of whiteness in social work education is a "thing" that Black faculty will experience in White universities and colleges. It will not be dismantled or eradicated anytime soon, especially if White faculty are unwilling, incapable, dismissive, in denial, or only gracious and acknowledging how they routinely reinforce and perpetuate white supremacy in the academy. Therefore, the best solution for Black faculty is to prepare for the reproduction of whiteness and strategize around it to achieve their career goals. It is exhausting and self-defeating for Black faculty to spend their precious limited time, psychological and psychic energy, and emotional and physical labor trying to eradicate a White structure operating precisely as intended. Instead, my recommendations are offered to support Black faculty surviving and thriving despite the structural and individual barriers and traps designed to limit Black progress and achievement. Therefore, my recommendations are directed to Black faculty to support their survival and efforts to achieve their professional goals.

Recommendations

This list of recommendations is intended for Black faculty, especially Black female faculty in predominantly White social work education programs. They are recommendations I practice now, and I find them very helpful in maintaining my sanity and sanctity in the academy. I realize now that I am not responsible for what my White colleagues know or do not know about race and racism, and I was not hired to teach them how to be anti-racist. Now I focus my time and energy on my scholarship and structure my life so that I am minimally involved, or not at all, in service-related events and activities beyond what is required based on my workload percentage. I feel more energized and focused when I do say "yes," and I get "more bang for my buck" because now I only say "yes" to activities that benefit my research or my teaching as well. I am less inclined to do it if I do not get anything from the service activity to advance my scholarship or teaching. It feels healthy and wise to take care of myself this way, and it

minimizes the department, college, and university from exploiting and tokenizing my labor, gender, and race. I have a few White allies that I trust, and we support each other and have candid conversations about anti-black racism, white supremacy, and how they can challenge the program in promoting racial equity and stop the reproduction of whiteness in the program's DEI and hiring practices. Here are my recommendations:

1. Do not waste your time teaching your White colleagues about racism, anti-black violence, or anything about your experiences with racial microaggressions or trauma. It is an exhausting waste of your time and energy needed to focus on your productivity.

2. Do take the time necessary to observe which of your White colleagues might be true allies. They can help you navigate the White culture and avoid common pitfalls, like teaching White faculty about anti-black racism; overextending yourself regarding service projects; or saying "yes" to too many invitations to serve the department, college, university, or community. They can also confront their White peers when racial microaggressions are made in group settings and save you the emotionally exhausting work of doing this alone.

3. Once you believe you have a true ally among your White colleagues (it can take a long time for this to happen), talk to the person, be explicit about what being an ally means to you, and find out what it means to them. Have explicit conversations regarding how you would like them to support you as an ally providing specific, likely scenarios, and tell them explicitly what you would not like them to do.

4. Keep track of your service work at the beginning of the academic year. Once you meet the requirements of your department for service, start saying "no" to requests unless it can benefit you in other areas of your career, like teaching and producing scholarship or publishing.

5. Read or listen to *You Are Your Best Thing: Vulnerability, Shame Resilience, and the Black Experience,* edited by Tarana Burke and Brené Brown (2021).

6. Other resources to consider reading:

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    b. Bell, M. P., Berry, D., Leopold, J., & Nkomo, S. (2020). Making Black lives matter in academia: A Black feminist call for collective action against anti-blackness in the academy. *Gender, Work & Organization*, *28*(S1), 39–57. https://doi.org/10.1111/gwao.12555

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In My Own House: Experiencing Racism and Discrimination as a Black Academic in a School of Social Work

D. Crystal Coles

Abstract: Schools of social work often postulate that they are rooted in social justice and affirmed in the values and ethics of the social work profession. However, the lived experience of being a Black social work educator is oftentimes inclusive of working within an oppressive and toxic work environment, that is also a school of social work. My reflection describes the discriminatory practices exhibited in a school of social work faced by me as a Black social work educator and researcher within a research one institution. These experiences of discrimination include excessive critique, microaggressions, microinsults, and microinvalidations from senior colleagues, as well as a lack of action taken to address these discriminatory practices by administrators within the school. This piece identifies how emotionally overwhelming and mentally exhausting being a Black academic within a school of social work can be when colleagues and administrators demonstrate the actions of the oppressor.

***Keywords*:** Black faculty, racism, discrimination, microaggression

> Caring for myself is not self-indulgence. It is self-preservation, and that is an act of political warfare.
>
> —Audre Lorde, *From a Land Where Other People Lived*

I have had many experiences with racism and discrimination throughout my life; however, the most disheartening experiences of discriminatory practices and inequities have been in schools of social work within the academy. As a Black social work academic at a Historically White Institution (HWI), my story is not uncommon, nor is it special. But it is tough. Though I attended a top tier research institution for my doctoral program, I was unprepared for what being a faculty member of color would be inside and outside of the classroom.

My first position as an academic was not a good fit. Not because of my colleagues or the students, but because I wanted to do more research and the institution had an emphasis on teaching. So, I transitioned to a top tier school of social work at a research one institution. Admittedly, I felt a sense of imposter syndrome when I first began working at the second institution for a few reasons. First, many of my colleagues had secured significant amounts of funding, and though I had received grants, I felt that I needed more of a substantial amount of funding. Second, I had spent two years developing a research agenda and solidifying my teaching skills; however, I knew I would need to shift my skillset at a research one institution. Despite these insecurities, I knew it was important to be in a more research-oriented space to secure substantial funding—and honestly, I was excited to be there. The school of social work was very different from my first institution because both faculty and students were primarily White and there were no Black faculty members other than myself. The school had one senior professor of color who was of Asian descent, and two biracial faculty members of Asian and White descent who were junior faculty. So basically, I was on my own.

What I mean by "on my own" was that there was no support regarding navigating the environment and politics as a person of color who was also a junior faculty member. Unbeknownst to me there were no identified mentors of color that had successfully obtained tenure; no potential spaces for a supportive community of other social work academics of color; thus, no ability to convey, process, or discuss discriminatory issues when they occurred because of the differing power dynamics between me, my colleagues, and the administration. *I was on my own.* And initially, I thought I could navigate those troubling aspects because I had successfully completed a doctoral program in a predominantly White institution. However, being a doctoral student is in no way similar to being a faculty member.

The toxic and discriminatory behavior demonstrated by faculty began during the first two months of my employment. During a job search process, senior colleagues were increasingly focused on diversifying the representation of faculty. Within the search interview process, demeaning comments regarding ethnically diverse applicants occurred. Comments such as, "Well, we need color on our website, so we need to hire someone, even if we think they won't work long term," and "He may not make tenure, but we can have him here for at least three years. A Black man can help other Black people feel more comfortable applying here," were made in front of me. Sometimes these comments were made in my office. Senior colleagues would ask me, "What do you think would make someone Black accept a position?" I was not asked about the other eight applicants who were interviewed who were of White descent: only the two Black applicants. The questions and statements placed me in awkward positions. I felt uncomfortable with senior faculty members demonstrating microaggressions towards Black applicants, while also knowing that those comments were potentially reflective of their thoughts towards me.

Focusing on Black applicants within the hiring process and discussing candidates as commodities who would struggle to be successful in the space was reprehensible. The action of hiring people of color who represent marginalized communities in academic communities with the knowledge that those individuals would not succeed is a discriminatory practice. Further, to have these actions occurring in a school of social work that is supposed to be rooted in social justice, racial equity, and equality is inexplicably problematic. Senior faculty members placing a junior faculty member of color, who is the only Black faculty member, in a space to defend and support the acquisition of other Black applicants within the bounds of toxic and discriminatory practices, is beyond unjust. It was mentally taxing to see how my colleagues engaged within the search process, particularly given how new I was to the faculty and environment. In my mind I thought, these were the conversations they had about me. This was how they potentially viewed me. The experience was enlightening, and it provided a glimpse into my future within the school.

Promotion and Tenure Is Not the Same for Me

Because I had a previous tenure track position at another university for two years, I was able to negotiate bringing my years with me to my second institution, so I came in as a third-year faculty member. Initially, I thought coming in as a third-year was perfect because I would only be able to be judged on my work as there was minimal time to have any political issues or

problems with my colleagues. This thought process was naive on my part. My experience with the third-year review was one the most discriminatory experiences I have encountered professionally. Even without my naivete, I could not have foreseen how different the rules of promotion and tenure would be for me.

It is important to note that all promotion and tenure processes are stressful. However, it was naive of me to think that I could simply submit my materials and be reviewed equitably as a colleague. Upon submitting my materials according to the School and University policies, the committee requested extra materials that were not required for the promotion and tenure process within the School or the University. When I inquired about the request, senior faculty insisted that the extra materials would be used for context only because I was a new faculty member. I talked with other junior faculty (none of which were people of color) who had gone through the third-year review process in the previous three years, and none of them were required to provide extra materials. The request for supportive materials appeared to only apply to me. As I suspected, the extra materials were scrutinized and became the primary focus of the review.

During the meeting for the third-year review, I met with the promotion and tenure committee in its entirety, along with an assigned faculty mentor who was also a member of the committee. Prior to the meeting, my faculty mentor had made it clear that I was being treated unfairly in the review process, as a result of submitting extra materials, and that I should prepare to defend my materials. As I sat in the room with the committee, I thought I had prepared mentally for the discussion; however, I was unprepared for what emerged. I had provided the traditional elements for the review process required by the School and University policy, as well as over 100 documents of support to ensure there would not be any question regarding my productivity. I expected that there would be inquiry into my materials regarding providing more context for my research agenda or further explanation regarding my pedagogical space. However, questions regarding those topics were never asked.

Senior faculty asked me questions regarding grammatical errors on my personal curriculum vitae and made the following allegations regarding my scholarship: “The title of the journal where this article is published is not italicized. If you can’t pay attention to things like that, then how do we even know you wrote this?” “I think it is interesting that you were able to write and publish at a high level, given your previous institution’s teaching load. Are you sure you wrote and contributed to these publications?” “Would you mind if we contacted your collaborators on this piece and verify your contributions?” Regarding my funding section, comments were made such as, “You know, it’s interesting you were able to receive all this funding so far. Are you sure you led the studies and weren’t just added on to these projects?”

I had maintained an overall average 4.5 out of 5.0 for all 15 of the teaching evaluations provided, yet questions regarding my teaching evaluations were also similar to the inquiry regarding scholarship. “Why do you have a 4.8 for your course evaluation?” My answer was that in all courses, there is a student or two who may be unhappy with their grade or my teaching style and teaching evaluations can reflect that frustration. However, as evident by the high ratings, the overwhelming majority of the class provided positive evaluations for their course experience. A senior colleague then noted, “I think it’s interesting because most Black

professors struggle to have high teaching scores on their evaluations." Another senior colleague noted, "I think we should all note that Dr. Coles is remaining calm during this discussion. Which can be difficult for Black women in situations such as these."

On the inside, I was irate. Internally, I had never felt such disrespect from colleagues in my entire career. I was being gaslighted in a space with senior faculty without any ability to respond in a manner to address the concerns that would not have political implications for me in the future. I had to sit, be disrespectfully questioned, and answer to accusations that I had not completed the work represented on my curriculum vitae. Further, I was forced to endure comments regarding how my performance as a scholar and teacher were misaligned with how senior faculty viewed Black academics. And I had to do it calmly. Inside I wanted to cry, scream, and yell at this group of people; however, I sat calmly, received the excessive criticism, the demonstration of implicit bias, and overt racism from my senior colleagues. I had no other choice. My career depended on it.

It was then I realized, I was never going to be successful in the School.

Talk to Your Dean…

Directly after the review, I scheduled a meeting with my dean. "Maybe they are just hazing you." This was the response of my dean when I brought the concerns of racial discriminatory practices regarding my third-year review process. The experience within the third-year review was not the norm, and my White colleagues were not experiencing the same level of criticism. My dean had received feedback from senior faculty that the review process had been problematic and unfair; however, only two of the six faculty members believed there were any racially discriminatory practices undergirding the process. The inability to identify that engaging in differential criticism for faculty members of color is indeed a racially biased practice is a problem. Excessive criticism is not hazing when it only applies to faculty members of color; it's racial discrimination. At the end of the conversation, my dean agreed that I had experienced discrimination with the School, and I left thinking some form of administration action would be taken, but nothing was done.

Over the course of my employment at the School, I met with the dean eight times regarding the racial bias, discriminatory practices, and microaggressive actions that were demonstrated by senior colleagues towards me, and no actions were taken by my administrator. The overwhelming obstacles that Black faculty face in academia regarding racism, lack of mentorship, and its impact to productivity are well documented (e.g., Aguirre, 2000; Allen et al., 2018; House et al., 2007; Schiele, 1991; Schiele & Francis, 1996). In schools of social work, deans and directors have a primary responsibility of maintaining the day-to-day high standards of an academic program, with a specific emphasis in the focus on the provision of education (House et al., 2007) for future social workers. However, deans are also responsible for leadership regarding the pursuit of common goals that are important for the safety and welfare of a group (Bargal, 2000) that also motivate and inspire others to execute actions that support the mission and goal (Thomas & McRae, 2016) of the school of social work. Thus, the lack of action by my dean, in addressing the wrongdoing of discriminatory practices being implemented

by senior faculty, reinforced and supported their actions. The inaction by my dean was another level of demonstration that not only was I alone, but I would continue to experience discrimination in the School because our lead administrator was afraid to take a stand with me against the faculty within the School.

In HWIs, White women are representative of the dominant status group, yet also maintain a protected minority status (Banks et al., 2018). Within the context of social work education, this provides a level of complexity that is compounded by power. Thus, the sustainability of power and privilege can also be rooted within the preservation of Whiteness (Banks et al., 2018) through the reinforcement of racism and discrimination in the lack of action to address discriminatory practice or the silence demonstrated by a dean. Most leaders of social work education protest to practice social justice and to lead through the lens of social work ideology; however, equality, equity, and justice cannot be addressed in spaces where leadership is silent regarding the discriminatory practices that Black faculty are experiencing inside of a school of social work. Efforts to address instances of social injustice cannot and should not be contextually dependent; wherever social injustice exists, it should be addressed, especially in cases where those in power have the ability to address it.

Understanding the Context of Blackness as a Faculty Member in White Spaces that Should be Socially Just

"We can get diverse faculty here, but we can't keep them here." This was how my dean commented regarding the issue regarding retaining faculty members of color within the School. First, the School had a history of racial issues within the collective faculty community that were felt by previous faculty members of color and the students within the program. In fact, there had been a history of discriminatory practices towards faculty members of color that had prevented the promotion and tenure of any person of color for over a decade. As a result of the negative experiences the faculty members had in the promotion and tenure process, they had all decided to leave the School, which colleagues termed "Black Flight."

This history of discriminatory practices within the School was not something I was fully aware of prior to accepting the position. The experience of being scrutinized more harshly, devalued, and rejected more frequently is commonplace for Black faculty members in schools of social work (Allen et al., 2018). Literature has demonstrated that the racialized trauma experienced by Black faculty and Black students within HWIs has been present since the desegregation of higher education (Thompson, 2020). *Racial battle fatigue*, the consistent microaggressions, racial discrimination, microinsults, and microinvalidations that cause physiological and psychological strain on racially marginalized groups (Smith, 2004; Smith et al., 2007; Thompson, 2020), causes increased amounts of stress and impairs emotional and physical distress.

Now, one would think that a school of social work would be a socially just environment. Afterall, schools of social work promote that social justice, equity, racial justice, and equality are the foundation of the teachings implemented throughout the social work curriculum (Schiele, 1991). However, I would argue that this is not the lived experience of Black social work faculty

members and other social work faculty members that represent marginalized groups. Faculty members of color are experiencing multiple marginalities within their intersectional identities (Hirschfield & Joseph, 2012). In education fields that are largely dominated by women, such as social work, women who are double minorities face issues such as isolation from collegial networks, lack of institutional/departmental support, forced positionality into the role of mentorship for students of color, and increased visibility and bodily presentation concerns (Allen et al., 2018; Hirschfield & Joseph, 2012). Then, on top of the increased marginalization, Black women in social work education are subject to an environment of racial discrimination that, in many ways, mirrors the larger culture which we teach our students to adamantly fight against … a paradoxical situation having substantial implications for Black women in social work education fighting for social justice.

Anti-Racist Social Work Education? Highly Doubtful

Racism exists in academe (Coleman, 2005; Ladhani & Sitter, 2020). This was something that I knew to be true; however, I never considered what it would mean for me that racism exists in social work education. Being a Black faculty member within an HWI that is a top school of social work and having to engage with social workers whose actions reflect the oppressor I thought we all fought against was not an experience I viewed as possible. I was wrong.

Social work education promotes the importance of social justice and serving humanity (Ladhani & Sitter, 2020). As a result of the increased racial violence and racist narratives in society, social work education has made statements regarding its dedication to increasing antiracist pedagogy and methods (Council on Social Work Education, 2021). The revival of antiracist pedagogical practices in social work education are ironic, given the fact that oftentimes those same faculty proposing to utilize these strategies of teaching can also potentially perpetuate racist practices with their colleagues of color. Schools of social work continue to perpetuate increased burden for faculty members of color and have not devised strategies to ensure that faculty members representing marginalized communities are safe from discrimination in school policies and practices. Consequently, how can social work education engage in antiracist pedagogy, yet engage in discriminatory practices towards faculty members of color?

Where Do We Go from Here?

Systemic racism is not just a concept perpetrated within society; it is alive and well within the processes, practices, and work environments within schools of social work. Faculty members of color communicate the experiences with leadership, and performative practices such as mandating faculty to attend diversity, equity, and inclusion training may occur. However, what happens when the individuals receiving the training are the ones developing the training content or even conducting the training themselves in other spaces? How do you educate social work faculty members regarding their oppressive behaviors and practices towards their colleagues of color? And what does this mean for those faculty members of color who are impacted by the strain of discriminatory practices on a daily basis?

We have real issues in schools of social work. Was it naive for me to think I could work in a school of social work and not experience racial discriminatory practices? Yes it was. Racial discrimination exists everywhere, but it is more painful to experience the cycle of racial bias and discriminatory practices in schools of social work. Though education is not social work practice, those faculty members demonstrating racial bias in their policy practices towards faculty members of color within schools will not acknowledge that they too are oppressors. But how can they, when administration and other faculty members who are aware of these practices are complicit through silence? Schools of social work cannot fight social injustice and perpetuate practices that disenfranchise faculty members of color.

Thus, until leadership and faculty members in *all schools of social work* can take a critical step in acknowledging that there are indeed practices that perpetuate the cycle of racial bias and discrimination within their own walls, we cannot purport to be a just profession. In conclusion, let me be clear: Faculty members of color are experiencing racism and discrimination on a daily basis in schools of social work—no matter what school you are in. And as long as these discriminatory practices are present, reinforced, and not addressed by leadership or other colleagues, schools of social work contribute to the oppression of faculty members of color on a consistent basis.

Conclusion

Ultimately, I decided to leave the School. The resources. And the racism. I should not have had to quit my job and take a hit to my career for my own ability to survive. I should not have had to experience the stress and trauma that racial discrimination brings to any person of color. I should not have had to experience oppression within a school of social work from those "fighting" for social justice. But I did. Faculty members within schools of social work need to be held accountable for their actions and administrators must take the initiative to address any discriminatory practices that occur within the school. If faculty members of color are unsafe from discrimination within schools of social work, imagine what is occurring in the classroom for students of color. These issues of racial discrimination need to be at the forefront of being addressed within social work faculties. Enough is enough. Social work faculty members of color should not have to fight injustices in the streets and within our own house. Though this was my story, it is not unique and it not special. This is the experience of being a Black doctoral social work educator in a school of social work.

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We Have Some Reconciliatory Work to Do: Kitchen Table Conversations Between Black and Brown Scholars about Racial Hierarchy in the Canadian Academe

Maryam Khan and Ciann L. Wilson

Abstract: This critically reflexive, conversation-based paper traces the lived intersectional experiences of systemic racism of two racialized women educators (Black and Brown-South Asian settler) at a Canadian university located on the traditional territories of the Anishnawbe, Haudenosaunee, and Neutral peoples. We discuss experiences of navigating whiteness in relation to "model minority" status and the discourses of diversity that permeate academe. We reflect on how racism, and specifically anti-Black racism and whiteness, are embedded in research. Some key questions we wrestled with are: How are the conversations about model minority status really about white supremacy and proximity to whiteness? How are Brown bodies played against Indigeneity and Blackness to further disenfranchise the latter and serve capitalist interests? How have academic institutions co-opted Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) policies to benefit the status quo? The spirit of the paper encapsulates the two authors' building solidarity by resisting racist hierarchies enshrined within academia.

***Keywords*:** community psychology, social work, racialized communities, education institutions, resistance

Systemic "-isms"

Racism, sexism, whiteness, and white supremacy go hand-in-hand. One cannot exist without the others. These key ingredients have been used in flavoring and building the Canadian nation-state and settler society. This is imperative to discuss because the broader colonial context is what frames academic institutions' lack of responses to their inherent subscription to white supremacy and perpetuation of racist practices such as research processes. The *dish with one spoon* covenant first struck between Indigenous (First Nations, Inuit, and Métis) people and white settlers in Southern Ontario was trampled upon by white settler societies through colonialism and genocide of Indigenous people, land, and sovereignty. The dish with one spoon characterized the land as an alive entity that needs to be respected and shared. The land was not meant to be instrumentalized for capitalist interests, personal greed, and private ownership. The land provides for everyone and cannot belong to any one white man (Kennedy-Kish (Bell) et al., 2017). Over time, systematically through legislation, paternalistic benevolence, and state sanctioned violence, Indigenous people and land continue to be violated through various mechanisms: for example, the use of residential schools to assimilate, indoctrinate, and abuse Indigenous people, while simultaneously denying them educational and social mobility within the western system; the 60s scoop, millennial scoops, and other efforts that contributed to the overrepresentation of Indigenous children in the child welfare system; and the ongoing sterilization of Indigenous women, among other atrocious population control interventions (Rao, 2019). Despite these historical and ongoing events, Indigenous people have and continue to resist against oppression: advocating for Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls; taking the Canadian government to court to follow through on treaty claims, independence and

sovereignty through land back campaigns; and fighting for sustainability and against the depletion of natural resources (Kennedy-Kish (Bell) et al., 2017; Pieratos et al., 2020; Truth & Reconciliation Commission of Canada, 2015; Tuck & Yang, 2012).

It is within this context of colonial violence that institutional racism and intersectional oppression are experienced by BIR (Black, Indigenous, Racialized) people in Canadian academic institutions; this specific oppression is shaped and fashioned through the colonial dominance of Indigenous land and people through white supremacist discourses (Thobani, 2007; Tuck & Yang, 2012). White supremacy is the mechanism through which norms, ideologies, discourses, and practices uphold and prioritize the white race's belief and value in white superiority and so-called "rightful" domination and oppression of racialized "others," that is BIR bodies and perspectives (Beck, 2019). Whiteness denotes the privileging and adopting of practices, discourses, and beliefs of the dominant norm in everyday life and interactions in academe: for example, privileging of the research, work, and perspectives of white cis-male heterosexuals who are able-bodied and Christian through official institutional recognition. Any analysis of white supremacy and whiteness needs to consider the unjust power relations which exist between white and BIR people due to socioeconomic, historical, cultural, political, and social racisms (Ahmed, 2012).

There is considerable literature which discusses social work's willful ignoring of racism and whiteness embedded in its discipline and practice despite calls to action from racialized Indigenous groups to rectify these issues (Blackstock, 2017). One of the core principles of social work and its code of ethics is to work towards social justice and equity (Canadian Association of Social Workers, 2005). Social work as a practice and discipline needs to reconcile with its long history of participating in inflicting state-sanctioned violence upon and uprooting and disenfranchising BIR families and communities, and intentionally engage in the long-term work towards eradicating systemic injustices that marginalize BIR students, faculty, and staff (Briggs et al., 2018; Corley & Young, 2018; McMahon & Allen-Meares, 1992). Social work is not alone however, as many academic disciplines have problematically labelled and engaged with BIR communities around the world. For instance, the history of racism in psychology dates back as far as 1843 when the founders of the American Psychological Association (APA) implemented segregation policies in psychiatric care facilities (APA, 2021). In 1851, then-renowned psychologist Samuel Cartwright pathologized Blackness and the human need for a sense of autonomy in coining the term *drapetomania* as the "madness" of enslaved Black people running away from their captors (APA, 2021). In fact, well into the 20th century, the APA oversaw the misdiagnosis of BIR patients as schizophrenic (APA, 2021). This history coupled with the institutional silence on the pressing issue of police brutality towards Black people led to the public call-out in 2020 of the central association for community psychology—the Society for Community Research and Action (a division of the APA)—by BIR and allied scholars for its participation in anti-Black racism and white supremacy (Thomas et al., 2020).

Academic institutions, especially universities, practice token "diversity" by hiring BIR individuals. Over the past few years we have witnessed a proliferation of Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion departments, policies, and the targeted hiring of BIR scholars across Canada. However, post-secondary institutions have not done the work necessary to shift university

cultures and are thus unequipped to address systemic white supremacy and racism, which results in the tokenization, marginalization, and oppression of the very BIR scholars they mean to attract and retain (Ahmed, 2012). Microaggressions are very common against racialized individuals in academic institutions, especially in social work and health sciences departments (Harrison & Tanner, 2018; Park, 2005; Pon, 2009; Sharda et al., 2021; Zamudio-Suarez, 2016).

> Academic culture also fails Black, Indigenous, and people of colour (BIPOC) faculty, who receive fewer federal grants due to systemic bias and topic area. BIPOC faculty are most likely to invest substantial time in activities that promote diversity, which are devalued in the tenure and promotion process. BIPOC faculty are further disadvantaged in tenure decisions through cultural taxation of unequal service and mentoring demands. Given these burdens, BIPOC faculty cannot be expected to be the primary agents of institutional change. Instead, those most empowered to make change—non-BIPOC faculty—must join BIPOC faculty in their efforts to prioritize recruiting, supporting, and championing diversity. (Barber et al., 2020, p. 1441)

Multiculturalism and Model Minority

Academic disciplines cannot be separated from the social, political, historical, and cultural context of the Canadian nation-state. Academic institutions and disciplines are informed by multiculturalist discourses which are evident in both Canada and the US, with varying historical significance and emergence (Goldberg, 1994; Gordon & Newfield, 1996; McLaren, 1997). A notable difference between US and Canada is that Canadian multiculturalist discourses are state-sponsored, historically rooted in anglophone-francophone relations, and part of common parlance (i.e., "diversity as our strength") in the building of Canadian national identity. However, in the US context, this term's use is mainly voluntary and individual in nature (Bannerji, 2000). In many ways terms such as multiculturalism, diversity, and people of colour (POC) serve as markers of difference based on skin colour, ethnicity, corporeal-based characteristics (i.e., hair colour, facial features) and concentrate on efforts to include the "other," while not really taking into account the problematic nature of the dominant norm (i.e., white settler society).

These terms propel the myth of meritocracy, which is grounded in the free-rational individualism discourse stipulating that all are equal participants in the market economy and through meritocracy everyone can achieve the Canadian dream through hard work. This myth does not take into account systemic injustices experienced by BIR people, the way in which racism and intersectional oppression are wrought into the fabric of North American society, or the fact that over 500 years of white settler appropriated colonial wealth has produced such disparities between white settlers and Indigenous and Black communities that cannot be undone in a lifetime. These arguments are often devoid of an analysis of the unequal power relations due to unjust resource allocation (local and geopolitical) based on colonial legacies and neo-liberal capitalism (Bannerji, 2000; Little Bear, 2000).

Furthermore, multiculturalism and other such terms do not account for nuances in the experiences of systemic injustices experienced by Black individuals and communities, yet paint

everyone *of colour* as same or similar in their understanding and experiences. Anti-Black racism, for instance, is prejudice, attitudes, beliefs, stereotyping, dehumanization, and discrimination that is uniquely directed at people of African descent and demarcates them as "inferior" to individuals higher in the racial hierarchy (Bowden, 2021). Anti-Black racism in Western society is deeply rooted in the belief that Black people are genetically, evolutionarily, and intellectually inferior, and thus somehow devoid of full humanity. This dehumanizing and racist thinking justified for colonists the enslavement of people of African descent across the Atlantic in the largest transnational human trafficking scheme in recent history, and their treatment likened to livestock and property. Anti-Black racism is systemically entrenched and deeply embedded in Canadian institutions, wrought from the free labour of enslaved African peoples (Centennial College, 2021). Much like the entire British North American empire, Canada would not have the wealth and privileges it continues to enjoy today were it not for the free labour of stolen African peoples on stolen Indigenous land (Amadahy & Lawrence, 2009).

Model minority is a term that refers to typically Japanese, Chinese, other Asian, and South Asian communities who have developed several resource capitals within society (i.e., economic gains) over the years and, at times, more cultural and social currencies than Indigenous or Black communities in Canada (Dennis, 2018). This development of resource capital is a result of privilege due to such groups' proximity to whiteness and ability to partake in the spoils of neo-colonialism and capitalism: for example, migrating with some degree of affluence or educational elitism and/or having privileges to accumulate some resource capital (i.e., socioeconomic gains) since migration (Hartlep, 2017). These socio-economic gains provide these groups a mix of systemic privileges within the social and racial hierarchy.

One only has to look at the history of the United States, where, at different points, groups of people who were able to build capital wealth were either given the privileged title of being labelled white, or they went to court to argue for the legal status of whiteness (i.e., Armenian and Japanese Americans) (Hartlep, 2017). So powerful and quality of life-defining was the status of whiteness, as juxtaposed to Blackness which was systemically made synonymous to poverty and socio-economic disenfranchisement as a result of the exclusion of Black people from participation in the very institutions established through the enslavement era. Black communities have been systemically excluded from home ownership, participation in the banking and education systems, and thriving Black communities have been bombed, burned down (i.e., Tulsa, Oklahoma), and bulldozed (i.e., Africville, Halifax, Nova Scotia; Hassen, 2021). We see similar trends in Indigenous communities, which were annexed from their territories to make way for white settler development. Indigenous reservations continue to be systemically deprived of resources, services, educational, and healthcare institutions. As recently as 2020 in Nova Scotia, thriving Indigenous businesses such as Indigenous fisheries were burned down as a result of white rage.

In this competing market society, marginalized groups are pitted against one another. Often, this racist question is posed: If the South Asian community can make it somehow in Canada, then what is morally and inherently wrong with Black and Indigenous communities—why can't they make it? There is enough evidence of systemic racism against Indigenous and Black individuals in education, employment, housing, and healthcare (Kohli & Pizarro, 2017; Love, 2014). Model

minority and multiculturalist discourses are often deployed to further locate the "social issues" experienced by Black and Indigenous communities as personal failings, rather than recognizing systemic anti-Black racism and Indigenous erasure in Canada.

> The idea was used by opponents to the civil rights movement who said if Black people shifted their values and focused on education, they could succeed too. Pitting races against each other has been a common strategy used by colonizers: divide and conquer. To this day, it serves the same purpose: reinforcing a system of racism that keeps white people at the top. (Francis, 2021, para. 4)

Our Process

In the section below, we engage in a reflective and dialogic exchange that centers our lived experiences as a queer, Muslim, South Asian scholar and a Black woman scholar who've had similar, different, and intersecting experiences within academia. As outlined above, these conversations are nested within a larger context of conversations and critiques about white supremacy, colonialism, systemic oppression, racial hierarchy, model minority status, anti-Black racism, and Indigenous erasure.

We chose to engage in this dialogic model that centers our personal stories as a humanizing and decolonial approach to writing about these topics that we have direct knowledge of as the nuances of intersectional oppression, racial hierarchy, and white supremacy are not merely concepts, but forms of power that pervade our realities.

Our Experiences of Othering

Maryam: As someone who identifies as a South Asian Muslim queer woman, my marginality and resistance are very much tied to my positionality. I am often chosen to be a part of research grants and committees due to the varying intersections I carry, as if I can speak for all of those intersections in a wholesome way. For example, I am called upon if there is a need for a "racialized other" to be a part of these events and committees within academe because somehow it is seen that I can speak for all queer Muslims. In a white settler society, token representation is important and, therefore, I usually find myself selected for committees based on my physical appearance and the cultural and ethnic stereotypes about South Asian Muslim women (passive, need to be saved from brown Muslim men, and oppressed by faith). Because of my straight brown hair, lighter complexion, having no accent, and embodying queerness, I am considered more proximate to whiteness. I am less threatening. Yet, my ethnicity, race, and religion make me unacceptable. My racial and ethnic construct is situated in Orientalist, Islamophobic, civilizational discourses that make me less threatening than Black and Indigenous bodies. I am not a visible Muslim, but my name gives me away. Even though I am a threat to academe because of my identity facets and politics, I am not considered "dangerous."

I recall being politely "voluntold" to sit on a committee due to the "representation issue." The representation issue is code for "we have too many white people" and are in desperate need for a tokenized ethno-racial body. At the very first meeting, upon entering the meeting room, one of

the white male committee members jokingly said, "I thought you were bringing the samosas!" My response to him was: "'No, I left those on the boat." Everyone laughed, and my satirical retort went unnoticed.

The academic system is based on competition to aspire to whiteness standards and norms through performance (dress, talk, work, appearance, and so on). I use the Orientalist discursive constructions to play the system—my personal and professional politics are different and that's how I challenge white supremacy.

Ciann: It is so interesting to hear your testimony of navigating being a model minority. I feel I can relate to that on some level in that although I am of Afro, Indo, and Euro-Jamaican ancestry, I phenotypically pass as Black and have a Black politic in terms of my analysis on the world. As such, in the simple white mind I am categorized and taken up uni-dimensionally as being Black. However, being multi-racial, in many ways I am the "exceptional negro" they allowed into their fold. As a young and emerging scholar, there were aspects of my mannerisms and my physical appearance that were unassuming, non-confrontational, and clearly unthreatening enough at the time for my hire to be the result of a unanimous vote. In a work environment with a history of friction between white cis men and white cis women, my hire was considered a "unifying decision" that was boasted about often.

I now look back at that and all that has transpired, from the blatant white fragility by both my white male and female counterparts, to the racialized sexism exhibited by all but mostly by a white queer colleague who proclaimed to be an ally only to expose themselves as a fragile and undermining ball of insecurity. Throughout my first few years, I often wondered, at what point are these white folk going realize that this isn't just a deep tan, that I am Blackity Black and I didn't come here to be their "yes person"? And that I have thoughts and opinions of my own that are likely incongruent with their perspectives on the world?

While there are handfuls of racialized people scattered throughout the Faculty of Science, I remain the first Black faculty hired. In 2022, we hired the first person of mixed Indigenous and Black ancestry in the Faculty. However, I know if I were not here, even those strides would not have happened because that is the level of complicity to white supremacy of the broader academy. Hiring anyone who isn't white still seems to some like a "hand-out" under the guise of affirmative action, or more recently Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion policies. Let us ignore the over 355 years of cluster hiring almost exclusively white faculty in the history of the Canadian academe—no critiques or issues raised by the status quo there. It doesn't matter how many awards I win, how many grants I bring in, how "excellent" I am. My accomplishments still just make me an exception to the rule, the exception to the norm of what is expected of people who look like me.

To be Black is to disrupt, or at least that is what the long history of political activism led by brave and bold Black people has taught me. While people from other cultures have trained themselves to turn the other cheek, Black folks—and especially those in diaspora throughout the middle passage—have had to fight for our survival so long it has become a way of life. It is our bodies and lives that time and time again have been put in the line of fire. Whether that was

fighting for our freedoms as formerly enslaved subjects, to Civil Rights struggles, to the more recent Black Lives Matter protests. Time and time again, our bodies and lives are put on the line and the benefactors of those struggles (i.e., Affirmative Action policies and more recently, EDI policies) have been by and large non-Black folks. For years it was white women who were hired under Affirmative Action and in large part due to second wave white feminism and then non-Black and non-Indigenous POC who were palatable to white hiring committees.

We recently had the opportunity to work together on a research project led by a white, gay man wanting to do work with racialized queer newcomers. For me, I knew I was brought onto that project as the token racialized person at the time, and I told them about you, Maryam, which is when the Principal Investigator (PI) reached out to you. In fact, to be totally truthful, the PI of the study ended up submitting the grant to the funding agency, and I was the only investigator on the team who was not asked to review the grant before it was submitted. Mind you, I was the only investigator on the grant at the time of its submission that had any lived experience of being a racialized newcomer. When the issue was pointed out, the PI apologized profusely for his oversight. In the end he got the grant. Lo and behold! You don't have to respect the perspective of, know, or belong to racialized communities in Canada to be funded as a researcher to do work on our communities because you know, that's Canadian white supremacy in the academy for you. My Blackness in addition to my outspokenness meant that I was shut down and ignored at almost every turn in the project. I was labeled problematic. I was brought on for the optics, not for any substance, analysis, or content I could offer the project. That would be too inclusive for the white leads of the project. I'd love to get a sense of your experience of that project. Could you share?

Maryam: I was hired in July 2018, and being a new faculty member, I was trying to establish my research program in order to pursue the tenure dream. So, it was really helpful when a white gay colleague asked me to be a part of the research project. I was really excited because this work was right up my alley. Primarily my research program involves working with and creating critical knowledges about racialized sexually and gender diverse people and communities that exist at the intersections of religiosity and spirituality. I did not know at the time that it was you, Ciann, who had suggested my involvement. I didn't know anything about the history of the project or the power dynamics between the research team members. I was a bit naive I must say. I readily accepted. However, after joining and attending some meetings, it was very clear to see that there were two camps, one racialized and the other white. The differences in approaches and perspectives were evident in discussions about recruitment strategies, theoretical orientations, and just basic praxis on how to work in solidarity with racialized communities.

I was excited about an intersectional approach which would permeate all areas of the research. Unfortunately, intersectionality was used in a very token and minimalist sense. It was just there to look good. A buzz word. There was little to no engagement with the critical ontological and epistemological underpinnings of intersectionality and what it meant to use this in research with racialized queer participants. The critical positionality aspects which value intersecting lived experiences of everyday acts of resistance and agency that come from interactions with systemic whiteness and racism, everyday injustice and marginalization, and everyday success was daringly absent. Essentially intersectionality as situated in the everyday lives of Black women

and people, knowledges that are grounded in Black communities, as well as the responsibility to communities was absent. How can intersectionality be used in any research without acknowledging the fact that intersectionality is grounded in the blood, sweat, tears, joys, and the lived experiences of Black people, especially women? Would the use of intersectionality as a vacant concept removed from its history, ethics, and politics be considered cultural appropriation? Who has the right to research with racialized queer communities? Who can speak on their behalf? What is the accountability of white and racialized researchers to the racialized queer community when using an intersectional analysis?

Ciann: These are all such important questions. I recall very early on in the project having to raise for the PI that he could not strip intersectionality from an analysis of race. Boy, that conversation did not go over well! A lot of white fragility and then he went on to do whatever he pleased. Which, quite frankly, is often how this plays out. White entitlement.

I genuinely feel that a movement as pivotal as that spawned by intersectional theory in and amongst the lives and legacies of queer Black, Indigenous, and racialized people genuinely loses its heart, soul, and effectiveness when these ideas are co-opted in an academic space that sanitizes them and strips them of their realness. I look at the work of EDI, which is this institutionalized and sanitized version of anti-oppressive and anti-racist practice, and the way it is being co-opted in university institutions to "civilize" BIR scholars and students, professionalize us. I have a colleague and fellow academic who has had not one but two EDI consultants write reports that essentially say she needs to learn to "behave and act more civilly." What kind of 21st century colonial racist BS is that?

Inferred throughout these expressions but never actually named is the trope and stereotype of the angry and mad Black woman who is "hostile," "abrasive," and "aggressive"—these are all racist pathologizations and stereotypes that have been uttered about me by some of my white peers. To be clear, these stereotypes are deeply rooted in racism where Black people are always imagined to be aggressors. These very stereotypes are still used to justify police killings of unarmed Black people because the colour of our skin makes us a threat in the white imagination. One white colleague referred to me as a "hazard to white men" as if I were made of nuclear material or something. This is all incredibly dehumanizing and reeks of anti-Black sexist violence. It always amazes me the number of negative connotations and attributes that are ascribed to my name by some of my peers—many of whom have had minimal to no interactions with me since I started at this university.

To vividly illustrate the insidiousness of racialized sexism here I want to share one pointed example: This situation left me depressed and discouraged. I took the time to painstakingly and candidly share with one of my colleagues over the course of a three-hour conversation the ways he had played on his power and privilege to overstep and undermine my right to self-determination, and frankly my academic integrity, over the years I'd worked with him. These instances mainly revolved around him essentially pushing me to artificially inflate the grades of the students he supervised, even when it was super clear a student didn't earn a given mark. All of the students I was asked to do this for were white students, not that this would have been any less problematic were they BIR students.

When I finally mustered up the courage to share with him my experiences over the years and highlighted the problematic nature of this behaviour, my colleague tried every way to avoid being held accountable and take responsibility for his actions. Devastatingly, he then resorted to re-narrativizing our conversation, problematizing me with other colleagues, typecasting me as essentially a "crazy Black woman" who accused him of racism and was aggressive in tone and temperament (harkening on the angry and mad Black woman stereotypes), thereby effectively silencing and disempowering me and allowing him leverage to dismiss and undermine the validity of the very serious nature of the concerns I had raised about his actions over the time we'd worked together.

For daring to challenge his authority, this was my white male colleague's way of reminding me of my place in the racial, gendered, and social hierarchy within the university infrastructure—which he was able to do without fear of repercussion because that is how white privilege and power operate in this space. Needless to say, this colleague continued to bully me by maligning me at every table he sat, revealing the true magnitude of his white rage and entitlement. This entire experience has been incredibly painful, triggering, and harmful to my mental health and left me depressed for months because it signified yet again, a huge loss of someone I trusted enough to confide in about my experiences as the lone Black person in my faculty, only to have that weaponized against me.

We often wonder why BIR people who do not have the social capital of our white counterparts remain silent about our experiences of oppression, even when confronted with harmful people who swear to the high heavens they can't possibly be guilty of racism, transphobia, xenophobia, and homophobia. Harms such as racism, transphobia, sexism, etc. are rarely about intention, they are about impact. The actions on the part of white faculty that serve to undermine, socially isolate, and stereotype racialized faculty contribute to our silencing and erasure.

I don't think folks fully appreciate the way white faculty have used their power and social capital in the professional space to run to their peers in ensuring their side of a situation is shared broadly in the workspace. Those one-sided narratives about the "white victim" and the aggressor who is often a minority are very palatable for a predominantly white audience in the academy. Black people rarely get the opportunity to just be human and vulnerable, always imagined as the magical, powerful, intimidating Black person. As a result, those narratives that weaponize and reinforce racist stereotypes quickly become "official facts," even when no actual evidence is presented, that lay a moral judgement on BIR students and faculty, and this fosters a toxic work and learning environment for many of us. Even worse is when the individuals spinning the problematic stories, rumours, and gossip mill about us are members of equity-deserving groups themselves (i.e., they are racialized, queer, trans, disabled, etc.).

Maryam: It is so important to value, truly listen, and bear witness to your experiences of anti-Black racism and colonialism. Your experiences mark the insidious ways that racism and whiteness operate and bond together for effective oppression and violence. Yet these also speak of your resistance and agency. "Talking back" to systemic injustices is taxing and all-consuming. For me in social work, there are a lot more racialized bodies. There is some faculty representation from Asian, African, Middle Eastern, and South Asian diasporas. Mainly this

diversity is evident in the part-time pool of instructors who carry approximately 60 percent of the teaching load. During faculty meetings, it is common to hear experiences of microaggression against the racialized faculty members, orchestrated by the largely white student body. These violent comments range from "you are the first queer Muslim instructor I've had" and have heard from my Black colleague "you are the first Black instructor." What is one supposed to make of this? These play out in faculty meetings and on committees. There are also pay inequities between whites and racialized faculty members. The list and go on and on. On top of this institutionalized violence, there is lateral violence which transpires and plays out between racialized bodies (i.e., Indigenous faculty further marginalized by non-Indigenous racialized faculty and racialized faculty oppressing other racialized faculty). An example is the diverging histories of colonialism pitted against one another: "India's colonization was not as bad as African colonization" or "All the queer people in South Asia are North American transplants." The list goes on.

Even though there are some small gains made at the faculty level to address systemic whiteness and injustice through EDI policies and issuing of statements against anti-Black racism, anti-Asian racism, these are a mere drop in the big soup pot. Organizational changes and structural changes need to be made. Where's the accountability of institutions of going beyond hiring Black and Brown token bodies to embrace cultural transformation?

Building Alliances

Institutional racism, whiteness, and white supremacy are activated and performed through multiculturalist, diversity, and model minority status discourses in academe. Our experiences are testimonials for the everyday and real existence of colonial discrimination and racism, which is based in race and ethnic discourses of difference and othering. All of these discourses fail to account how embedded white supremacy really is entrenched in everyday transactions and research activities (work) within academic institutions. In being a part of many BIR activist circles, we see time and time again Black and Indigenous folks—often the most vulnerable—putting themselves on the line to name uncomfortable truths. Meanwhile, non-Black racialized folks and white folks who consider themselves allies remain silent or in the background out of fear of confrontation or vulnerability and exposure. This dynamic can't keep playing itself out if solidarity work is to have grit, teeth, and movement.

It has been said many times before, and we are going to say it again. For Black and Brown people, building alliances in solidarity across colonialism, racism, among other *-isms,* is something which is fraught with many challenges. A main challenge remains that one cannot take anyone at face value. Since people who look like you can also be the oppressors. It is the politics and the ways in which one walks in this world that are important. Often, we have been sidelined by assumptions based on sameness as it relates to gender identity and expression, sexuality, race, ethnicity, and so on. Instead of assuming sameness under the larger umbrellas of Brown and Black, one way of building allyship and politics of equity can be to follow in Razack's (1998) footsteps. The author proffers that "patriarchy, white supremacy, and capitalism interlock to structure women differently and unequally" (p. 159). Therefore, the aim

here is to examine the unique ways racism, and anti-Black racism, structures Black women and Brown women in academe based on individual unique facets of identity and lived experiences.

This entails a deep commitment to understanding the ways that we are each complicit in each other's oppression as BIR peoples, and how we can minimize harm to each other. For instance, how are Black and racialized people complicit in ongoing colonization on unceded Indigenous territories? In participating in the Canadian nation-state, how do non-Indigenous people benefit from the spoils of white settler appropriated wealth? How are racialized and Indigenous folks complicit in anti-Black racist violence, and a socio-economic system that excludes Black people? How might racialized model minorities benefit from the back breaking labour of Black people for rights, representation? How are Black and Indigenous folks complicit in Orientalist racism towards racialized folks?

Another way to foster a critical alliance is to practice what Cindy Blackstock (2017), a Gitxsan First Nation Indigenous woman refers to as *moral courage*. Blackstock (2017) argues for social workers to have moral courage in telling the truth about how the discipline and its rise (historical and ongoing) has played a role in the genocide and subjugation of Indigenous People on Turtle Island. Following Kidder (2003), the components of moral courage are about exposing lies and engaging in truth-telling about injustice. "[M]oral courage is the ability of an individual to take a public stand on an issue when he or she will likely experience some personal or professional harm" (Blackstock, 2017, p. 122).

It takes moral courage to share personal experiences of institutional racism and to challenge whiteness in all its forms in academe. Taking these actions and speaking out comes with costs, and building alliances across difference and sameness is not easy. If everyone had the moral courage to take a stand, wouldn't this work become easier? We hope this to be the case as we imagine possible futures.

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Reflections on the Climb to Promotion and Well-Being: Confronting the Discipline, the Department, and Drama

Jennifer A. Wade-Berg, Vanessa Robinson-Dooley, Naynette Kennett, and Carol Collard

Abstract: This article offers the narratives of four Black women in a department of social work at a research-intensive university. Through their eyes, attention is brought to the types of racial injustice that can exist and how each found a way to successfully navigate the experience. Using narrative from a critical race perspective, the authors hope that readers, especially faculty of color, can see themselves and find inspiration to navigate their own departments and daily experiences.

***Keywords*:** reflection, equity in academia, social work

Introduction

In the aftermath of COVID-19 and the murder of George Floyd, faculty of color across higher education are giving pause for reflection and introspection. While faculty in general celebrate our many accomplishments and contributions, we quickly realize there is much to be done as we still struggle for social and racial equity and in some circles for acceptance within our very social work and human services departments that are supposed to be upholding values of social justice, dignity, and self-worth, and integrity, to name a few.

The experiences felt by our faculty of color colleagues are exhausting. Yet, faculty of color continue to persevere by carrying the lessons of a generation before who taught us how to achieve equity, equality, and justice in systems designed to promote the opposite and challenge the nature of core being. The parallels of the types of racist behaviors and events between the greater society and higher education are too many to ignore. But where does one start to tackle and confront these challenges to produce viable change? Similar to Bonner et al.'s (2015) book, we use a critical race perspective along with counter-personal narrative to bring attention to the "truth" that exists within departments of social work when others want to often deny or gloss over the realities that often confront scholars of color. The authors subscribe to Ladson Billings' (1999) sentiments that "personal narratives and stories are important in understanding lived experiences and how those experiences may represent confirmation or counter-knowledge of the way society works" (as cited in Bonner et al., 2015, p. ix). Further, they emphasize Billing's ideas that "stories are used to analyze the myths, presuppositions, and received wisdom that make up the common culture about race" (as cited in Bonner et al., 2015, p. ix).

The Climb

> Academic duty resolves itself into a set of obligations that professors owe to others: to their undergraduate [and graduate] students, to the more advanced scholars they train, to their colleagues, to the institutions with which they are affiliated, and to the larger society. (Kennedy, 1997, p. 23)

When faculty of color, such as ourselves, entered the academy and the field of social work, we did so with the laudable goal of making significant contributions to dismantling systems and providing solutions for marginalized groups experiencing various kinds of social problems by contributing to the research, educating a future generation, and serving our community. Never did we expect to be met with the very antithesis of what the social work profession affirms in our daily experiences. This is further exacerbated by the unfortunate types of systemic oppression that exist for underrepresented faculty of color who enter into the academy. Racial stereotypes, isolation, occupational stress, institutional racism, the devaluing of research, and racial bias in recruitment, tenure, and promotion—does this sound familiar to our colleagues of color? Reflect briefly on our stories.

Reflection 1: Climbing from Field Director to PhD to Departmental Recognition: Power Plays & Pressure Days

The road from MSW field education director to PhD in social work was an arduous journey. Although it was rewarding, there were challenges and stressors that I was unaccustomed to as a clinical social work practitioner. I was an LCSW with over 10 years of clinical practice experience working in multiple settings with culturally diverse populations and over 5 years of teaching experience as an adjunct faculty. I felt professionally qualified to shift from practice to full-time teaching and starting a new role as the MSW field education director in the department. However, it at once became clear that I was ill-prepared on how to navigate and be successful in academia.

As a newly limited-term full-time faculty in the department, I felt powerless as a woman of color without a doctorate. After a couple of years as a lecturer, I became the interim MSW field education director and then permanent after one semester. While my role and responsibilities changed when I became the MSW field education director, the challenges and lack of respect intensified. My presence in the department was insignificant, and I had minimal involvement in the decision-making processes as the field director. I was voiceless and powerless, the norm for Black women faculty in academia. I experienced disrespect from students, observed micro-aggressive behaviors at departmental meetings, and recognized to have a voice and power in this department as a woman of color, I must obtain a doctoral degree. More specifically, a PhD degree, because any other doctorate would be discounted.

In 2015, I returned to school to pursue my doctorate degree full time and continued to serve in the role of field director and faculty member. In the role of field director and faculty member, I was excluded from the decision-making process as it related to my role and responsibilities as the field director. I would propose policies and procedures to enhance the program and was met with resistance from my white colleagues within the program. These experiences contributed to me feeling isolated, oppressed, and like an outlier. For example, at a field education meeting a white faculty member blatantly said he would help a student in filing a grievance against me because he did not agree with my recommendations for the student. During the meeting, I voiced my concerns about his comment yet no one else voiced any concerns about the comment and once again my voice was ignored. This behavior was demeaning, offensive, and oppressive and an example of the critical race theory tenet that racism is ordinary and not anomalous

(Delgado & Stefancic, 2012). This was a clear demonstration of the power and privileges white men hold in academia. Furthermore, racism is usually unseen to people of the dominant group or those with racial privileges (Constance-Huggins, 2012; Delgado & Stefancic, 2012). These experiences have reminded me that racism is a part of my everyday life as a woman of color, but they do not define me, and I will continue to speak up and challenge the status quo.

Although there were challenges and limitations in my role as the MSW field education director, my path from MSW field education director to PhD was also rewarding. It was valuable because of the mentorship, guidance, and support of the other Black faculty within the department. Their support and guidance were instrumental in my decision and accomplishment of achieving my doctorate in social work. Their leadership guided me in understanding the academic workplace, the importance of scholarly research, and the process to obtain tenure/promotion. The findings of Kelly and Winkle-Wagner (2017), in their longitudinal study of Black women in academia, also support my experiences in academia: They found when Black women can successfully assert their voice in their scholarship and receive support from their department and university, they remain in academia. After earning my PhD, I remained in the department. I am evolving because I am learning how to openly speak and share my opinions, so that I am heard, respected, and valued, in an environment where women of color are normally invisible and do not feel safe to thrive as faculty.

Reflection 2: Climbing from Assistant to Associate Professor: Stereotyping Microaggressions & Watch What You Wear!

Many years ago, I approached my first tenure-track position with a sense of confidence. I entered the academy having spent time at two larger institutions. They were both predominantly white institutions (PWIs) and they had large, somewhat diverse faculties. My first full-time teaching position was offered to me while I was a doctoral student and, at the time, I considered this a compliment to my teaching and the energy I brought to my work. Since I was not tenure-track, I did not have to attend faculty meetings and I was able to avoid much of the academic drama that I later learned was happening in this department. I received mentoring and support, but also believe I was shielded from much of the racism that existed in this space, shielded by more seasoned professors and leaders guiding me towards building my career. This experience was analogous to Black parents trying to keep their young children from having to learn about the ugliness of racism when they are young because they know that the world will show them the harshness of navigating a racist world soon enough. We want our children to live their lives in bliss before society shows them their "ugliness."

My next position was an opening at another PWI, and I was hired as a lecturer and asked to take over the position of Director of Field Education on an interim basis. This position was also one that included leadership by someone who supported my growth and had been a part of my development in my doctoral education. This position was not a tenure-track position and therefore my role posed no threat to those in tenure track or full-time professor faculty positions. There were no direct challenges to my role or to me because, in the hierarchy of academia, I was someone far down the food chain. A few years later, a position was posted at another PWI, one that was rapidly growing and making a name for itself in the state. The position was a tenure-

track position that seemed to be written for my skills. The Assistant Professor advertisement asked for someone with nonprofit experience, mental health– and health-related interests and someone wanting to work in community health. If offered the position, I would be joining a small faculty, a faculty working to build a young program at this university. The issues were obvious from the first faculty meeting.

The program was started by a small group of people, and the power structure and dynamics in the department were clear. I was hired as an Assistant Professor but competed for the position with a long-standing part-time instructor that the group clearly wanted to hire. I only have anecdotal information about how I ended up being made an offer, but my credentials and experience being equal with the job description had to make it difficult to justify not hiring me in a position that appeared to be written from my vita. It seemed from day one that I was stereotyped as an "angry Black woman." If I disagreed with something in a meeting (usually related to misapplication of policy or something detrimental to a student), it was clear that people took offense. There was a focus on "tone" and when the Black women in the room disagreed, there was an assumption of "attitude" or an angry tone. Constantine et al. (2008) found that faculty members of color are more likely to have to be mindful of tone, facial expressions, and body language. I observed that the Black women on this faculty only had two roles: "bully"—those who disagreed with the white faculty and were labeled aggressive—or "compliant"—those who agreed with white faculty and remained quiet even when they disagreed.

Another interesting experience as I navigated the tenure-seeking years, microaggressions were displayed in passive ways. Simple events that would not be remembered by most somehow became a benchmark for measuring the competence or evaluation of Black faculty. This was my "watch what you wear" experience. There was a long list of memories of inconsequential events. Typically, memories that were incorrect but sullied the image of the Black women. For example, at a meeting, someone commented on a white male faculty member being dressed "very casually" (in cargo shorts). I was not the person who commented, but the white male remarked "I've seen [author's name] in workout clothes." Interestingly, I was not even a party in that conversation but somehow became a victim of a "drive-by" microaggression. This person had seen me ONE time, in workout clothes, picking up my work clothes from my office, as I headed to the shower in our building after working out in the faculty gym! A one-time event became a long-lasting memory pocketed for use to discredit me later. He kept this memory long enough to bring it up when someone remarked on his casual dress. To what end did this serve? Underrepresented faculty can face unique challenges that question their competence, even with something as inconsequential as a dress (Constantine et. al, 2008; Lee, 2020; Rockquemore & Laszloffy, 2008).

As I reflect on my tenure-seeking experience, I am not surprised that the time was riddled with instances of microaggressions and stereotypes. Black women are not given the space to have individual personality traits or even a variety of responses. Instead, we are saddled with a stereotype of being "angry" when we disagree or a "bully" when we do not follow the party line. Our well-being is reduced to follow the leader or be labeled the problem. I chose to be labeled

the problem and let my work tell my story. I refused to relinquish my power to others based on their use of stereotypes, and I still wear my workout clothes to my office before I shower!

Reflection 3: Climbing from Tenure to Practice Integration: Serving Two Masters

Earning my PhD in Social Work in 2007 was the culmination of a cherished pursuit. It enabled me to fulfill one of my passions—teaching and inspiring future social workers. I have always felt like I would have a role in teaching, but it was not until I became a social worker that I realized what my contribution would be. Working in the nonprofit sector, I met many social workers. Most were caring professionals but there were always a few who did not seem to grasp the core social value of respecting the dignity and worth of the person. As the founder of a small nonprofit providing housing and social services to homeless individuals and families, I was keenly aware of the harm that perpetuating stigma and oppression could have on our clients and other vulnerable populations. I hoped that I could bring real-world experiences to my students in real time that would give dimension to the lived experiences of those we are called to serve and help them see the importance of embracing those social work values (Feldman, 2007).

I was fortunate to secure a tenure-track position soon after graduation. Since my children were grown and on their own, I decided to try to manage both roles and not leave the nonprofit work that I loved. It is well known that many professors often have multiple pursuits so I did not think that my continuing my work with my nonprofit would be an issue, especially since I disclosed my affiliation before I was hired. In fact, I learned that other tenure-track colleagues in the department were doing the same thing. What I noted soon after, however, was that there was a difference in how we were treated by certain tenured faculty. After a comparison of experiences, it soon became clear that the most discernible difference in the way our external pursuits were viewed was that I was Black.

My third-year review commended me on my scholarship and teaching but spoke of "conflict of commitment" with no examples to substantiate the claim. My tenure review, though ultimately successful, began at the department level with recommendations for denial of tenure and promotion, not based on my record of scholarship which exceeded the threshold nor my teaching which included me being chosen "Professor of the Year" by our students, but by questioning why students were not allowed to intern at my organization—a potential conflict which from my perspective should have been obvious. Despite my prolific service at university and in the community, despite my never missing a faculty or committee meeting in five years, and my efforts to be a collegial, team player, there remained a few individuals who could not see me as a worthy colleague. My white female counterpart who was also operating a nonprofit agency never experienced the same treatment or characterizations. Her loyalty to the department and the university was never questioned. She sailed through the process.

That experience taught me that excellence in teaching or the number, significance, or impact of publications could be trumped by personal agendas (Constantine et al., 2008; Lee, 2020; Rockquemore and Laszloffy, 2008). I had more publications and had publications in more prestigious journals at the time we both went up for tenure but that was ignored to focus on petty differences. Fortunately, I had the support of the Dean and was ultimately successful in my

tenure pursuit. In the end, in 2013 I became the first African American to secure tenure and promotion in my department. While I am proud of the accomplishment, it is a sad testimony for a department whose focus is supposed to be centered in teaching social justice that it took that long. It also speaks to how challenging it is for Black women to live our truth while surrounded by those who only talk the talk about equality (Constantine et al., 2008; Lee, 2020; Rockquemore and Laszloffy, 2008). That said, my dream to pursue two passions was not deterred by racism or narrow-minded interests.

Our current challenges with the pandemic and the racial unrest that has been unleashed has given us more time and opportunity to reflect and to grow. I have a history of taking the "high road" and never letting others drag me to their level. Events of recent years have been a poignant reminder that although there is value in that approach, sometimes you must speak up and speak out. If I am truly loyal to the department—and to the social work profession!—I must call out colleagues who may not see their microaggressions and implicit bias for what they really are. It is ironic that I thought the only students I would need to teach about racism would be in the classroom, but my tenure journey has shown me many of my colleagues were also "students" in need of a lesson.

Reflection 4: Climbing from Assistant to Associate to Full Professor: From the President's Office to Department Target … Hazing that Never Ended

I never knew that changing jobs early career would feel like an ongoing hazing ritual. I left my tenure track job to pursue a new opportunity closer to home to link my love for administrative work with that of being a faculty member. Additionally, it was the right time to make such a move from my research one university given a myriad of reasons including just completing my third-year review, becoming a new mother, and having my then-current Dean retire from the academy. On my former Dean's advice and recommendation, she encouraged me to dive into the water and apply for the position which would have me reporting directly to the University's President on Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion activities as well as serving as a faculty member on a reduced teaching load. I received the offer, and my mentor gave me advice on acceptance: This work can be challenging but without the support of leadership from the top it will be impossible.

On day one, I was well-received by most of the faculty and staff. The first few months went well as I became accustomed to the workings of the university. I was given my departmental workload which was doable. Yet I was told by senior leadership on my first review that although I am 10 percent time teaching—10 percent time researching—80 percent time in service (which includes administration), I would be expected to produce as if I was carrying the normal workload of faculty (with the weight being in research). How is that possible? So, we are now ignoring workload to "prove" myself worthy of being a faculty member? I also quickly discovered that I was the lowest-paid person on the President's Cabinet by a significant margin. Wow—talk about equity issues, and it was my job to fight for equity for the entire campus. These challenges intersected with the emerging problem of a senior official not following search committee rules and being out of policy on a few issues affecting women on campus and a lack of university response. Caught in the middle, I began to surround myself with data to prove the

case and craft solutions. I infused best practices into my recommendations and quickly learned how to be my best advocate and lead with integrity. This led to a confrontation with the senior official and my ultimate request to change departments after he threatened to block my tenure and promotion to Associate.

In my new department, I once again began to "pledge" and pay my "cultural taxation" (Myers, 2000). I was well-received by the leadership in the college and the department due to my expertise in a niche area they were trying to grow. I felt I could be a benefit to the work being conducted given my knowledge and community connections. Additionally, I believed things could not be that bad given their focus on social justice and grounding in areas of cultural competence. I did not realize what an oxymoron this was. I eventually stepped down from my administrative position but kept parts of the administrative portfolio (this is a whole different story) which gave me a new workload of 30 percent time teaching–21 percent time researching–49 percent time service.

Again, I was told that I would need to overproduce myself to prove myself worthy among the senior faculty who in some respect did not appreciate administration coming in and "telling" them that I was joining their ranks. I was reminded on more than a few occasions that I was not "chosen" and I "did not interview like traditional faculty." It felt like I was enduring a whole new "hazing" ritual, coupled with similar experiences of microaggressions and stereotypes of being "angry" because I followed policy.

This came to a head during my actual tenure and promotion process, where I met the standards but for one member voting I did not. While granted tenure by unanimous vote on the department level, I incurred a split vote on promotion. I found out later that the vote was not reported accurately and even though this was disclosed to the chair of the department, nothing was done to change the record as my portfolio went up through the ranks until the Dean's level where he disagreed with the department vote.

Now, as I prepare for the journey to full professor, I find myself at a crossroads of once again having to prove myself worthy. Although some of the players and leadership within the department have changed for the better, there is still an undertone, among the same senior faculty, of the need to prove oneself worthy. This is evidenced by the same colleague (you remember—the one who did not report my vote accurately the first go-around) announcing in an open departmental meeting that he would "vote how he wanted regardless of what the tenure and promotion guidelines say." I do not think those in the majority realize the kind of tone this sets for minority faculty like myself who contribute and give of themselves day-in and day-out. I ask myself, when does playing by the rules become enough? When does being smart enough translate into acceptance instead of a type of jealous passive aggression?

My solutions to dismantling the departmental system were to dismantle the system that caused strife to faculty of color by writing a new set of promotion and tenure guidelines for future colleagues and to continue to lead with excellence. Although I will not benefit from the work, the clarity in the new policies will help my future colleagues and hopefully lead to systems of greater accountability for those voting. My father always taught me to be "excellent" in all that I

do. Even though others may not want to accept me, they will not be able to speak ill of my work produced and the contributions made. The work leads to change and time continues to be my greatest ally.

Conclusions and Implications: Our Collective Lessons Learned

As more narratives such as these emerge, faculty members and administrators need to seriously reflect upon them with a goal to increase the dialogue around these issues for organizational and departmental change. These dialogues will not be easy and can require a shift in the ways we traditionally think about the "academy." These shifts include the need to update promotion and tenure guidelines to allow for diversity of thought while also upholding, protecting, including, and strengthening racial diversity, and ways to disseminate information both in the classroom and in research—and moreover, to examine department culture and hold colleagues accountable for their use of language, lack of respect, and unspoken power dynamics and differentials that manifest themselves due to rank and other factors.

Survival for us meant adopting the very advice given by Frierson (1990, as cited by Turner and Myers,2000): "Current [B]lack faculty members [must] support one another and create professional networks" (p. 53). Amongst ourselves, we were able to share narratives, compare injustices, and discover that through a study of university policy and procedure, we could create more intentionally ways to call for change and be better positioned to advocate for ourselves. Our internal network was extended to other allies including staff and faculty. Our new informal network allowed for the emergence of a "new collective and supportive voice" to generate opportunities for the voiceless (e.g., staff, junior faculty) to speak up when confronted with microaggressions. Black female faculty and other women of color in the department began to be empowered in a system where they were once silent for fear of retaliation retribution. The resounding message is one that calls for institutional and departmental action where the "presence of racism should be acknowledged as a reality and addressed forthrightly when it is raised as an issue" (Turner & Myers, 2000, p. 53). Inaction on our part cannot be tolerated if change is to occur even when we know our actions will first be met with consternation and probable inaction by those in authority who either do not share or recognize our perspectives as being authentic or are afraid to call for change given their personal need for preservation. Nevertheless, we continue to place pressure on the system and make incremental change to policy as we find the opportunity.

> Institutions of higher education reflect society to itself, and at the same time challenge that self-image by asking different questions: What have we become? Why don't we do things differently? Not surprisingly, the university thus sometimes finds itself seemly at odds with society, especially during a period of rapid social change. (Kennedy, 1997, p. 265)

This reality is heightened in departments of social work given they operate within an elevated cadence characterized by the profession's values of service, social justice, dignity and worth of the person, the importance of human relationships, integrity, and competence (National Association of Social Workers, 2021) When faculty of color experience these types of social and

racial inequity by colleagues who consider themselves to be upholding these very principles, it is not only perplexing but, exhausting. Yet, the yearning to remain "above" the fray and commit to overcoming barriers are what keep us invigorated and vigilant in our academic and personal duty.

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Resistance to the Academy: A Call to be a Disrupter

Lakindra Mitchell Dove

Abstract: This personal narrative provides an account of my path to academia as a Black woman. I recall the initial hesitation and resistance that I battled as a result of my observations, experiences, and uncertainty about my place in the academy. I discuss my non-traditional approach to securing a tenure-track position and how I have come to view my role and my presence within academia as a form of resistance to and disruption of racism. In this personal narrative, I present strategies that I have used to thrive despite racism and oppression, in addition to the challenges posed due to the pandemic. I also highlight the importance of amplifying the voices of Black women and women of color within the literature.

***Keywords*:** social work, academia, faculty, racism, Black women, women of color

Over the past year and a half, I have been thinking about how I ended up here in academia, occupying this space. I used the disruption caused by the pandemic to pause and consider the journey and all of the checkpoints that contributed to my critical decision to join the academy. I realized that this had been a journey in the making before I even knew it, that these moments would surely come to pass. My great-grandfather was the first person to recognize my gifts as a young child. He noted my curiosity, love of reading and writing, and natural leadership abilities. As a child, I would always carry a pencil and paper and was always journaling about daily life events and documenting my observations. My grandmother and father would periodically remind me of his vision and words. He prophesied that one day I would become a teacher. This revelation was taken seriously by family members. My great-grandfather called me his little professor. As a child, I did not realize that this work was bigger than me, a calling to be in this space was an aspect of my soul's mission. This became apparent over time. During the course of my academic journey, I received signs pointing me toward a path that I resisted. Now that I am on this path, I want to understand why I initially resisted. This narrative is an account of my journey, reviewing the checkpoints and critical milestones that occurred along the way. It also embraces a non-linear approach to storytelling, similar to the twists and turns that occurred on my journey.

I battled with myself for a few years. It was an internal tug of war. I knew that I was being called to occupy space in the academy, yet I did not see how my full authentic self could be supported in a place that espoused all of the things that I was yearning to detox from: productivity, "fake it till you make it," be a good worker, ignore the soul work, then I found myself at a crossroad. I heard the echo of bell hooks who so eloquently offered a different perspective to occupying space in academia. Hook's teaching trilogy, *Teaching to Transgress: Education as the Practice of Freedom* (hooks, 1994), *Teaching Community: A Pedagogy of Hope* (hooks, 2003), and *Teaching Critical Thinking: Practical Wisdom* (hooks, 2010), served as much needed manuals, the "how to authentically navigate academia" handbooks, as I referred to them. I had been stretching myself between two worlds, not wanting to make a concrete decision, thinking that by remaining in direct practice I was doing right by my community who so needed my presence and voice. I would consider this a splitting that many practitioners of color reckon with, knowing that there are not enough of us serving our own communities, and

not wanting to stifle our own professional growth and development. There is a cultural aspect of loyalty to your community and feelings of betrayal that surface when it is time to move on. I had convinced myself to believe this narrative because I had long ago reached burnout and I was in a state of denial, disconnected from the thoughts, emotions, and experiences in my body. My outlet became teaching, a lifeline, preventing myself from completely drowning. I was an adjunct instructor which fueled my passion and desire to engage in critical consciousness. I attempted to feed myself and fill my cup through teaching, an aspect of academia that I embraced.

At one point I thought that I would simply walk away from the academy once I earned my PhD. I considered myself an atypical doctoral student. In full transparency, it was my love of learning that brought me back into the world of academia. I never envisioned myself as a professor or researcher and in retrospect, this absence of vision relieved a lot of pressure to pursue opportunities tailored to the traditional pathway of a professor or researcher. I was a rebellious student. I displayed resistance through my body of work that centered the experiences of Black youth. I resisted the lore of quantitative research that was held as the standard and embraced qualitative methodologies that afforded a deeper engagement with people whom I was passionate about supporting and providing an opportunity to share their stories through research. I resisted the curriculum by using practice-based experiences to counter evidence-based practice. I did not enroll in the teaching practicum, although it was highly recommended. I did not attend conferences that felt too much like schmoozing, and I did not see spaces where my work felt welcomed or valued. I did not check many of the boxes on the checklist for doctoral students. I essentially created a lane for myself that focused specifically on defending my dissertation and obtaining my degree. So it was very surprising to me when I started to receive signs to consider academia as my next career move.

There were several excuses that I created to justify why this would not be the best fit for me. I leaned heavily on my fear of public speaking and disdain for being seen. I preferred to be behind the scenes, getting the work done, and flying underneath the radar. I reminded myself of my observations of professors whom I admired and respected and how they were mistreated by academia. My mentors often revealed aspects of academia that I otherwise would have been oblivious to, specifically the reality of academia being another harsh hierarchical system with the potential to cause great harm. I was definitely limited in my perspective as a student. They shared their struggles as professors of color, navigating spaces that were never created with them in mind. I did not want to partake in mental gymnastics by attempting to interpret and deflect messages, while preparing a rebuttal, or the emotional battle of combating microaggressions that would inevitably surface in classrooms. These are realities shared by my professors that I also witnessed as a student. My own experiences included incidents such as the time when a White student made a statement of coming a long way as a society, since the days of Martin Luther King Jr. As the only Black student in the class, I felt obligated to speak on the continued perpetuation of racism among Black people. There was also that time when I was minding my business walking down the hall and a White staff member asked, “are you lost, little girl?” As a result of these oppressive experiences, I often pondered if the joy of teaching was worth the risk.

Thinking about the first course I taught shortly after completing my PhD, I was willing to take that risk. I had to pace myself, building my confidence and comfort level in the process. I started teaching one course, then two, then multiple courses per term, and before I knew it there was an opportunity for a one-year contract as an instructor. In retrospect, these were significant milestones in the making. I took this as a sign from the universe to make a move. I was straddling the fence, still engaged in direct practice full-time while teaching on the side. At that point, I was completely consumed by burnout and my soul was yearning for new and invigorating experiences. I concluded that I was no longer willing to tolerate the oppressive experiences I had encountered in the workplace, and I was eager for a new start, a different experience. I learned a very painful lesson about valuing my worth. I had allowed others within my place of employment to take advantage of my expertise. I fell for the illusion of upward mobility by accepting a supervisory role, and when I did not adhere to the ideas of how the role should be enacted, I felt scrutinized and disconnected from the role and a member of the administrative team. I eventually stepped down as a supervisor as I was not willing to compromise my integrity. My love of learning would carry me, or at least that was the new narrative that I convinced myself to believe. I left direct practice and joined the ivory tower.

My journey to academia was unique, yet serves as an example that we all have our individual paths and points of entry. I was taught that there is a foolproof model, and I doubted my chances of securing a tenure-track position because I did not check all of the boxes as a doctoral student. My approach was unconventional, and I wanted to prove a point, one being that I could do it my way and on my terms. To some extent, I did because I was offered a position as a tenure-track faculty member during the 2019–2020 academic year. This felt surreal. I had completed my PhD in 2015 with no desire to remain in academia, and four years later I was preparing to become an assistant professor.

I was not naive about what I was stepping into. I learned a lot about the fight through observations and experiences. I had to remind myself that I had a relatively good experience as a doctoral student in comparison to other students of color, and I am certain that my PhD cohort (majority students of color) had a significantly positive impact on my experiences. I did not experience egregious acts or blatant racism, yet I knew they existed. There were instances of experiencing microaggressive acts, second-guessing myself, suppressing my voice and viewpoints as a Black woman. These are common occurrences among Black women within academia, often with the goal of silencing their voices and positionality (Rodgers, 2021). For example, I questioned whether the several months that I spent waiting to see if my study would be approved by the research committee of a collaborating partner due to their research procedures, was truly related to my methodological approach or the focus of my study. It was also quite plausible that the fact that I wanted to explore the experiences of Black youth in a system known to cause harm to this population, and the potential illumination of the experiences of youth within the system, raised concerns. It is the not knowing or not being able to name, but feeling the impact of potentially racist and discriminatory acts that often creates a cumulative experience of racism. This time around I wanted to be strategic and methodical in my approach to academia. As a new faculty member, I did not want to begin this journey afraid of the horror stories that activated vicarious trauma. I did not want to assume that I would be in a constant fight with an invisible beast that was so often described and experienced by students, staff, and

faculty of color. A beast that delivered body blows, a beast whose energetic presence seeped into your pores, your psyche, then slowly began to feast off your energy and attempt to erode your soul. I would often ask myself, who would intentionally agree to such an experience? I was stepping into the ring with my toolkit, my armor. I was equipped with expertise, wisdom, coping skills, a strategic plan, resources, and most importantly my eyes wide open. I was alert, not afraid. My strategy was paying off.

As I assessed the first six months in my new role, things were going relatively well. Then this other beast, one foreign and unfamiliar, appeared and swiftly rendered a devastating blow that knocked me off my course and significantly altered my path. As the effects of the pandemic quickly settled in, I was now faced with attempting to wrap up my first year as an assistant professor in the midst of a global pandemic. There were many unknowns regarding what the future would hold, let alone the remaining months of the spring term of 2020. I found myself, like so many others, operating from a space of survival, assessing the bare minimum required to get through the day, the week, the month, the term, and so much more under these unbearable conditions. The pressing questions that remained were: How am I going to navigate my tenure trajectory with the added barrier of COVID? Will the effects of the pandemic be an indelible stain that significantly impacts my ability to receive tenure, or will it be an opportunity to create a new path and venture into uncharted territory?

The collective pause of the pandemic created multiple pathways: one being ongoing chaos and confusion, and another observing the space in between. While navigating the space in between, I was able to step back and further analyze my journey, reflecting on multiple points of disruptions along my path and how the current disruptions were shaping my view of self and of my role within academia. An unbelievable amount of change occurred very rapidly. Everyone seemed eager to respond to the pandemic, social injustice, and racism simultaneously. I often questioned what contributed to the spark of interest in this work. Is it that many were forced to witness what communities of color have been experiencing for decades, as a result of not being able to unsee or distract themselves, or are they now suddenly enlightened? What was the threshold and how did we get here? I also thought about the social work profession and the dance of how to respond, an obligation to respond, and whether the profession collectively is responding in a way that is sincere and genuine or performative. Scholars who engage in this work are, in the words of Fannie Lou Hamer (1964 as cited in DeMuth, 1964), “sick and tired of being sick and tired” (p. 549). There are many such as Trisha Bent-Goodley, Iris Carlton-Laney, Joy DeGruy, Jerome Schiele, to name a few, who have for decades been engaged in this work. These brilliant scholars amplify the experiences of African Americans, specifically within the field of social work, and serve as role models for how to do the work. There is a burgeoning interest to create space for this work and engage in critical conversations, and the invitation is being received with raised eyebrows, pursed lips, and heavy speculation. The works of these scholars and those engaged in anti-racism and social justice work were not as apparent pre-COVID, as the social work profession struggled to embody these perspectives. Yet, when the world seemed to come to a halt, there was an urgent need to address racism and social justice.

Over the past year and a half, I have come to realize that there are several ways that I disrupt racism in the academy. The primary way is my mere presence in an institution that was never

designed for me. So, the fact that I am here, occupying this space is a disruption. One of my roles as a disrupter is to support others by using my voice to affirm, not negate, their experiences in the academy. There is an inner fire that is ignited when I hear fellow colleagues question their visibility, place, and competency. I often feel compelled to dispel these thoughts with stern statements, such as "you are not an imposter, you were not hired as a token, you are here for a reason, and you must remember your why." This is not in a manner that is dismissive of their lived experiences, but rather supporting them in not believing these sentiments as the only narrative. In these moments I often feel an energetic shift as I search for the words to help others release baggage, purify thoughts and emotions, and cleanse the collective overwhelm that seeps into our pores. We begin to carry things that do not belong to us, and then carry them as our own. Racism is one of those things. It has become very apparent that these types of interactions are critical for sustainability. There is an element of I see you, I hear you, and I feel you. Validation of the experiences of other faculty and staff of color within the institution, in and of itself, is a disruption of racism.

As a disrupter, I give myself permission to go against the status quo. I know that it may be considered risky as an early career faculty member to say no and enforce healthy boundaries, but one of the realities of COVID is that I have felt more empowered in some instances to say hell no! I am able to do so by not overcommitting to service, but rather tuning into opportunities that resonate with a full yes, where my voice is valued and appreciated. I am also cognizant of not falling into the trap that working from home enhances productivity. I am adamant about maintaining boundaries and not extending work hours. As inequities, injustices, blatant racist acts, and lack of acknowledgement of emotional and invisible labor are further illuminated, my response to combating an institutional system that uses a bullhorn to chant "be productive, do more, business as usual," is to create and practice healthy boundaries, protect my energy, and protect my space. This approach has provided so much fortitude.

Another role as a disrupter is my style as an educator and presence in the classroom. I am a reflection of possibility for students of color, and I am the counter-narrative to non-students of color who otherwise may not have ever had an experience with a Black educator. I authentically and unashamedly embrace my Blackness and it is very much an aspect of who I am and how I show up as an educator. This is a gift and I treat it as such. I am intentional about incorporating diverse content in my courses and encouraging students to challenge what they have been taught about the construction of knowledge and how to engage in learning. This approach welcomes rich discussion about how social work education is situated in a system that has not done its due diligence at acknowledging and excavating its racist roots, entrenched within a system that maintains a hierarchy and emphasizes power, control, and domination.

I am learning that there is value in resistance, which is catalyzing and often an indicator of the need for change. I do not regret my decision to join academia, and I certainly did not anticipate navigating my first year during a pandemic. Yet, there is an aspect of it all that feels like par for the course, as my path has never been traditional. I feel equipped for upcoming challenges because I am accustomed to traveling a non-traditional path and anticipating the need to create my own lane. In the midst of so much chaos, I have found my way by remembering that I have done this before and was successful in the past, which gives me hope that I will be successful in

the future. Although many may perceive a disrupter as someone who creates challenges, goes against the grain, and resists assimilation, I see my role as a disrupter in the academy as a beautiful opportunity to contribute to the reconstruction of social work education. As a disrupter, I am willing to use my experiences to challenge the "business as usual" narrative and continue to illuminate an alternative path, one that is not rooted in oppression or contradictory to its very mission as a profession. There once was a time when I allowed just the thought of having to encounter racism to deter me from this path. I realize that in those moments I willingly gave racism undeserved power. I allowed it to be a critical factor in my decision-making. I have since learned to do the total opposite. I am able to choose how I respond to racism, and I most definitely respond from a space of personal empowerment. This is a critical lesson that I have learned on my academic journey, leading to my career choice as an academician.

For many women faculty of color there is an understanding that we exist at the margins within academia, some may even say we are outsiders. However, this perspective is shifting as we push back on these beliefs that are rooted in oppression and reclaim our roles and positions by using our collective voice and power to create change. I fully embrace my role as a disrupter, and I look to the guidance of the women who have come before me, forging a path to continue to amplify my voice and position. As Rodgers (2021) and Azhar & DeLoach McCutcheon (2021) have noted, the experiences and stories of Black women and women of color have gained little traction in the empirical literature. There is a critical need to enhance the body of knowledge regarding Black women and women of color within academia. More opportunities, such as this Special Call from *Reflections* for narratives for social work educators to confront and dismantle systemic racism within social work programs, are creating space to share stories and collective experiences and triumphs that recognize the rich scholarship and research regarding the navigation of racism within academia.

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White Like Social Work

Shena Leverett Brown

Abstract: This essay joins personal narrative with an unpublished book review expressing my skepticism about current anti-racism rhetoric within social work programs and the performative actions that often accompany it. Here, I revisit a critique of the personal narrative written by anti-racism educator Tim Wise in *White Like Me* (2011) completed during course work in a doctoral program. I use my reaction to Wise's reflection on his white privilege as material to explore and examine efforts to confront and dismantle systemic racism in social work programs and essentially throughout the profession. I challenge social work programs to think critically about the next steps towards their positions on anti-racism and their interactions with students, staff, and faculty. Finally, the conclusion summarizes the essay while offering opportunities for scholars to contribute to the conversation about dismantling, deconstructing, and divesting from racist ideology and policies in social work programs.

***Keywords*:** critical theory, white privilege, book review, anti-racism

> Do the best you can until you know better. Then when you know better, do better.
> — Maya Angelou (https://twitter.com/DrMayaAngelou/status/1028663286512930817)

Truth be told, I'm weary from thinking about, talking about, and experiencing racism in all of its forms. I'm also jaded and skeptical of the popularity of confronting and dismantling systemic racism in our social structures, including social work programs. It's as if we've suddenly become conscious of our responsibility to promote social justice and social change, to engage in self-confrontational awareness of our racial biases, and to work towards the deconstruction of policies that cripple individual and society's well-being (National Association of Social Workers [NASW], 2021). As a discipline, social work has been charged with this reminder at critical points in history before.

Black social workers have been doing this work for a long time. As early as 1924, E. Franklin Frazier wrote about the promise of social work improving race relations in Southern states and challenged a larger social work professional body against their policy of segregating the Black social workers in meetings (Platt & Chandler, 1988). By the mid-20th century, the push for professionalism and the differences between Jane Addams' social action and Mary Richmond's individualistic social diagnosis left opportunity for social work to re-examine its radical roots (Reisch & Andrews, 2001) and address injustices such as racism. Then again, in 1968 the National Association of Black Social Workers was founded as a direct result of institutional white racism in social work (National Association of Black Social Workers, 1968). There have been numerous opportunities for social work programs to confront and act on systemic racism as a body ensuring that their students who go on to practice are exposed to these historical facts and critically reflect on the policies and practices that need changing or creating with equal emphasis and in combination with micro- and mezzo-level social work topics. Yet, still we are faced with the question and solemn answer that social work is still racist (Corley & Young, 2018).

Current anti-racism practices hinge on decades of work from countless Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) that has been limitedly acknowledged in social work programs until recently: from notable scholars such as W. E. B. DuBois, Angela Davis, Derrick Bell, Patricia Hills Collins, and Kimberlé Crenshaw to others using critical theory lenses and radical feminism. Maya Angelou reminds us that when we know better we must act on that knowledge by doing better. Once again, we are reminded that social work knows better and has known better for quite some time. It's our efforts at "doing" better that are questionable. Social work programs and social workers: Let's do better!

I am a Black cisgender female. I had been a social work practitioner for eighteen years post-MSW before returning to earn the PhD. During those practice years, it had not occurred to me to critique my profession or the social work programs that had produced me for their part in perpetuating racism. Perhaps it was because of the exhaustion from the day-to-day practice that monopolized my time, preventing me from critically examining the actual practice as a whole. I was busy checking my individual biases as I should, but not that of my craft. Perhaps it was because the social work programs and the individuals within them were not equipped to prepare me to do so. After all, they had been educated by the same social work programs we are currently indicting and many of the BIPOC faculty faced challenges of their own in the academy. Perhaps it was because I forgot all that I learned on the subject of racism as a social justice issue and was left to lean on lived experience. After all, it had been almost two decades ago and a different time. Whatever the reason, entering a doctoral program gave me the time and the space to learn some missed history, revisit some with a new lens, and contribute my voice to the change that is inevitable in our programs that educate new social workers.

In this essay, I will share some of the convictions I believe necessary for social work programs to grapple with and then consider my reactions to a required reading for a social justice course during my doctoral program. I desire that the reader be willing to replace the critique of the author and his experience, with that of social work programs and the individuals who administer them.

Confronting: Calling Out, Calling In

I want to hold social work programs accountable for what they (we) say that we do.

Social work educators have a great responsibility to "ensure a well-educated social work profession equipped to promote health, well-being, and justice for all people in a diverse society" (Council on Social Work Education, n.d., Vision section). The "attention to the environmental forces that create, contribute to, and address problems in living" (NASW, 2021, Preamble section) is inherent to the profession of social work itself. I fundamentally believe the conditions that make up systemic racism and allow it to thrive hurt all within the society, even those historically and currently benefitting from it. NASW (2007) has acknowledged what we've known for a long time by identifying itself as a "predominantly white association" in its call to action on institutional racism (p. 12). And so, it is essential that we work to confront and dismantle systemic racism whenever possible in our society and where we are readily available to work and are charged to make a difference: starting in our social work programs.

I understand social work programs are not islands. We must first acknowledge that social work programs are situated within larger higher education structures that view education as a product. Schwartzman (2013) examines education as a commodity and explores some of the implications of managing students as consumers, justifying a sound argument as to why education is not compatible with the profit-seeking enterprise. The main argument is the impact of educational theory and practice devaluing "intellectual challenge and exploration by reducing knowledge to quantifiable, job-oriented results" and instead being driven by the consumer's "momentary pleasures" (Schwartzman, 2013, p. 41). Thus, for social work programs to confront systemic racism they need to develop strategies to balance intellectual rigor/critical thinking with that of providing a skill set that makes the student marketable. Social work programs will also have to examine their practices within the tenure-track faculty following the market demand and momentary pleasures for specific types of research.

Secondly, social work programs will need to readily embrace more critical forms of theory to explain systemic racism and its relationship with other social problems. For example, Neo-Marxian Theory forms a structural, historical, and economic explanation for oppression (Robbins et al., 2019). This lens forces us to take a look at economics and political ideology's role in continued inequality and oppression. Furthermore, the history of race in the United States is heavily influenced by the economic growth due to African slave labor and the exploitation of poor whites. This history has created hundreds of years of conflict between these two groups. This can be most recently seen in the racial and political lines drawn during the presidential elections of 2016 and 2020. Conflict theory in general is an uncomfortable and compromising position for social workers to take in practice. Many social workers who use critical theory do so in a philosophical way and not in practice. Social work practitioners proposing to explain oppression in this manner face critique and being seen as "too political" and are at times suggested to be unprofessional. Social work programs must insist that social work students and faculty become more political as the *Code of Ethics* (NASW, 2021) suggests, despite the societal preference to stay neutral. To exact change and dismantle unjust structures one must risk these consequences and move forward with what the profession considers structural social work (Hick et al., 2009; Weinberg, 2008). Advocating through this lens requires a radical stance and a willingness to take economic and political risks. The question to be asked is: Can social work programs afford to do this within their positions in the larger higher education structure? Additionally, social work programs must examine their policies and practices from hiring and dispersing work among tenure-track and non-tenure track faculty to the admission of students.

Dismantling, Deconstructing, and Divesting

To rid systemic racism of its power, we must challenge white supremacy. The rise in popularity of Critical Race Theory (CRT) among the mainstream can likely be attributed to more and more people exploring their multiple identities and being asked to attend to their privilege, particularly white privilege (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017). However, if I'm being honest, this emphasis on anti-racism work is somewhat uncomfortable. I recalled having read and reviewed Tim Wise's (2011) *White Like Me: Reflections on Race from a Privileged Son* and it helped me to explain some of the discomforts I experience with anti-racism work. Social work programs must acknowledge that they too have perpetuated systemic racism and not ignore it as if it is

something outside of us that needs to be removed, when in actuality, it's happening inside of our walls. So, what did a book review articulate for me about racism and social work?

It was a good time in my life and profession to be reading about a Southern white male affirming his privilege. As an accomplished mental health professional with over 20 years of practice experience, pursuing the doctorate placed me in a position of dual occupancy. As a full-time student, I had given up practice but I wasn't quite an academic yet although I was being socialized to think, speak, and behave as such in a predominantly white institution in the conservative South. Being in a field like social work that is loaded with diversity, inclusion, and multiculturalism talk but a questionable walk, we are uniquely positioned for confronting major -isms as par for the course. Still, the placement of one's academic ventures and the political climate it exists within speaks volumes about how that task will be carried out.

Here's what I wrote:

> Thanks go to the author for letting those of us on the other side of racial privilege in on the benefits of whiteness. Often known in our gut, but unable to articulate, it validates our many experiences of recognizing the reality of what some historical scholars have called the color line (Douglas, 1881; DuBois, 1903). While none of it is surprising, there is so much about it that is intrinsic to the fabric of our world and we often fail to document these experiences as symptoms of racism. Tim Wise seeks to dispel this notion of color-blindness and calls out what many people of color have done for many years only this time from a privileged perspective. It is frustrating to know that some people will never recognize the truths the author speaks of despite the color of the person speaking it. Moreover, it is equally frustrating to recognize that some will never be able to hear it from a person of color but miraculously "get it" from a Tim Wise. (Brown, 2018, p. 2)

As I read the book, I kept coming back to these questions: Who is responsible for the fight for racial justice? Who is responsible for the justice of the oppressed? Is it the responsibility of the oppressed themselves to fight for their liberation? Is it the responsibility of the oppressor to right a wrong? Is it the combination and alliance of two groups working together for overall justice? The unspoken burden of advocacy falls upon whom?

Relevance for Social Work

Wise (2011) mentions working in a poor Black community in New Orleans where he was likely seen as "either a cop or a social worker, neither of which they were too likely to want to mess with" (p. 174). At the mention of social work, I reflected upon this common assumption that social workers are child welfare workers seeking to remove children from their homes even though it is a quite diverse profession. Nonetheless, this statement rings true, and the fact remains people who live in such communities have no other frame of reference for social workers.

It is because of this assumption and the sheer power and privilege that goes along with that role that this book is of relevance to those seeking to work with and on behalf of oppressed people. If

social work did not have such an incestuous relationship with the system disseminating the oppression, it might be the discipline that could tackle racism directly without resistance. Embedded within its code of ethics lies the social work value of "social justice" and its "primary mission … to enhance human well-being and help meet the basic human needs of all people, with particular attention to the needs and empowerment of people who are vulnerable, oppressed, and living in poverty" (NASW, 2021, Preamble section). Therefore, I see the work of anti-racism advocacy as one of opportunity for social workers.

This book would serve as an excellent colloquium-style course for white social workers confronting their privilege before entering into a profession designed for encounters with marginalized underprivileged populations. Even though there is the ever-powerful internalized racism to address as well, the benefit to social workers of color might provide more opportunity to hand off the responsibilities of anti-racist activism to those who benefit from it and perhaps focus more on healing and developing protective factors.

Insights

While reading the book, there were several times when I questioned if the author's work might be better utilized in the very settings where he would not be welcomed. Is Tim Wise preaching to the choir? For sure, those who know of his work and ideology choose to attend his speaking engagements, read his books, or watch him engage in political discourse are doing so with motivation to change themselves or to indict him in some way. What happens to the people who haven't assessed their privilege or who even recoil at the terminology itself? It is clear that the author has done much internal reflecting and likely continues to do so in this area, but who is his true audience?

After reading the book, I struggled with being convinced that the reading expresses racial privilege as harmful to white people. I believe not enough emphasis has been spent communicating with especially poor and working-class white people who systemically have more in common with their marginalized counterparts. It appears that conversations are happening in liberal spaces where blatant racial ignorance has not been tolerated very well. Although it may not be his aim, Wise has work to do if he wants to change the minds of people who have been manipulated by a system that encourages them to believe people of color are their enemy. In my idealism, I find poor and working-class white people to benefit the most from this kind of social advocacy which would include and change their narratives. I do not find Wise to be an effective voice for such persons.

There were several places in the book where I found the author to be especially off-putting and similar in spirit to the racists he speaks of. For example: "some of us [white people] are just too damned stupid to save," (p. 168) "rich white women all look alike to me," (p. 118) and making a mockery of the Easter bunny while referencing "Christ's proclaimed resurrection" (p. 169). I wonder if these are blind spots for the author and if he has not fallen prey to "romancing resistance" (p. 92) as he warned against earlier in the book. The voice of the book resounds with a bit of arrogance that can only come from privilege, balanced with humility that often seemed patronizing instead of authentic.

I struggled with finding insight for myself as a Black woman and found it to be more taxing than helpful. I found myself trying to make sense of feeling grateful that someone who identifies as privileged can speak such truths and, at the same time, trying to disconnect myself (a Black woman) from the outcome and allow white people to figure out how to fix themselves.

Recommendations

I will keep the book on my shelf as a reference for anti-racism efforts, accounts of privilege, and because of its seminal nature. I would recommend it to white social work students to assess their racial privilege. I would also recommend it to other social work students to introduce them to one of the players in anti-racism rhetoric for its use and/or critique. The practice of social work and social work education has a responsibility to contribute to social justice advocacy as a commission. It might be best practice to incorporate *White Like Me* and readings of its kind into required reading for individuals seeking to engage in this work. It is up to us in the profession to figure out how to bring that about in practice and research through our advocacy for what we need to be better social workers.

Conclusion

In summary, my takeaways from reflecting on what it means for me to charge social work programs with confronting and dismantling systemic racism include acknowledging complicity and not living up to the overall mission of social work. This written critique of someone else's narrative represents the ongoing internal monologue and sometimes dialogue I've had with myself since reading the book and writing this piece. I can remember the day that I read the feedback from the professor who had given the assignment. Their words were positive, affirming, and dare I say unlike anything I had received up until that point from scholars in my own discipline. Did I fail to mention that the class was taken in a different department at the university? I have quite often made the statement that other disciplines are beginning to "out social work social work." That perhaps is a topic of another reflection.

So much of the current landscape for research and expanding knowledge in social work has been in the area of racism as of late. Major funding sources for health-related research initiatives are placing significant emphasis on minority health disparities, including ethnic and racial disparities. National conferences and major journals are calling for special submissions and presentations regarding the topic of racial justice. For example, for the last two years, the Council on Social Work Education's annual program meeting has attempted to lead critical conversations about racial justice and diversity, equity, and inclusion. Additionally, professional organizations and even schools of social work are leading with position statements and designing programs with objectives to name and confront racism and white supremacy head-on. Not having a full understanding of the outcomes of these initiatives, we must ask: How are we ensuring that this momentum is not performative and will not disappear when the topic is no longer a target on the mainstream radar?

We are at a potential turning point in the field of social work research. During my time as a doctoral student studying racism and racial microaggressions, I found that much of the literature

and research regarding racism comes out of disciplines other than social work. Regardless of epistemological leanings, social work scholars have the opportunity to investigate these outcomes and add knowledge and understanding as to how or to what extent our racial justice initiatives have been effective. Qualitative and mixed-methods researchers have a great variety of tools to allow for more immediate change such as the empowering and collaborative methods of participatory action research and focus groups (e.g., Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018). Likewise, quantitative research offers privilege in the use of pre-existing data, quantifying participants' experiences, and the emphasis on measurement and generalizing the impact of anti-racist interventions. As mentioned previously, there is huge interest in funding projects about race and racial disparities right now and it is imperative that social workers take advantage of such opportunities to work toward the mission of social justice.

Finally, teaching and administrative roles should share the burden of managing anti-racism policies in social work education programs. Despite the challenges programs will face within the larger structures of academia, it is expected that we will take a position towards social action and partner with oppressed populations to offer resistance. Because racism is exhausting, I charge programs to radically change who is responsible for teaching racialized topics and initiating diversity, equity, and inclusion activities—taking some of the burdens off of those most affected by racism. Even as a doctoral student teaching in my program, I noticed the number of Black professors teaching cultural diversity-related courses versus our white counterparts.

As a former practitioner and current educator of future practitioners, I must recognize that change is a slow and difficult process and therefore, I must pace myself and accept help. I must also encourage and charge my white colleagues to move out of neutrality and take responsibility for the problem of white racism and the "fixing." Remember that we are not in this trench alone. There have been many before us and will be after us. But most importantly, there are so many right here alongside us. Let us use each other and take care of each other. Let us do better!

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