

# How Racism Against BIPOC Women Faculty Operates in Social Work Academia

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**Abstract:** *In this article, we seek to highlight the ways in which we, as two female social work faculty members whose racial/ethnic identities fall into the categories of Black, Indigenous, and other People of Color (BIPOC), have experienced racism and White supremacy within predominantly White institutions in the United States. We seek to clarify that these experiences are not unique to any particular institution or university, but rather reflect systemic racism and the upholding of White supremacy in higher education in social work throughout the United States. We highlight the differential vulnerability faced by BIPOC women in academia, which are often unaddressed in the pursuit of what is seen to be an egalitarian or colorblind merit review. Bearing in mind our reflexivity on our positionalities, we share personal narratives regarding our own marginalization within White spaces and the emotional labor that we are often asked to carry for the institutions within which we work. We will elucidate experiences of tokenization or assumed intellectual inferiority by our peers. Given the current sociopolitical moment and the heightened awareness of diversity, equity and inclusion efforts within universities, we also reflect on how institutions of higher education, and particularly schools of social work, can move beyond simply hiring more people of color or conducting diversity trainings to ensuring that BIPOC women are more fully included in their roles within universities as faculty, administrators, staff and students.*

**Keywords:** *Racism, social work, academia, faculty, women of color*

Disparities regarding the treatment and pay of women have been well documented in scholarship on higher education in the United States (U.S.; Burke et al., 2005; Johnson & Stafford, 1974; Porter et al., 2008; Renzulli et al., 2006). Campuses have been depicted as having a “chilly professional climate” for women (Sandler & Hall, 1986, p. 3). Women are less likely to be tenured or promoted compared to male faculty; and women faculty earn less than their male colleagues (Winkler, 2000). Men are more likely to hold higher academic ranks and administrative posts and will therefore occupy positions that evaluate, reward, and punish women (Barbezat & Hughes, 2005; Bellas, 1999).

Similarly, Black, Indigenous, and other People of Color (BIPOC) faculty also have experienced hardships in recruitment, hiring, tenure, and promotion within universities (Arnold et al., 2016; Garrison-Wade et al., 2012; Ware, 2000; Williams & Williams, 2006). Systemic racism entails recurring and unequal relationships within institutions (Feagin, 2013). Political agendas within institutions may engage Black and Brown bodies implicitly as property, enforcing what has been called “a direct model of plantation politics” (Dancy et al., 2018, p. 187).

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University administrators may claim that the lack of diversity within faculty is caused by a dearth of qualified minority candidates. Yet, according to the National Science Foundation (2015), in the past decade enrollment in doctoral education by U.S. citizens or permanent residents who are Black has increased by 31% and enrollment by those who are Latinx has increased by 71%. As Gasman (2016) noted, “The reason we don’t have more faculty of color among college faculty is that we don’t want them. We simply don’t want them” (p. 1).

Higher education in America is largely reflective of a deep commitment to the degradation of people of color as fundamental to the maintenance of a colonial or imperial order (Dancy et al., 2018). As Dancy et al. (2018) argue:

Anti-Blackness as a framework also extends beyond the construction of the Black body as property. The notion of Black fungibility describes the ways in which settler colonialists use Black bodies as symbols, signifiers, and means to settle space and expand territories. The space-making practices of settler colonialism require the production of the Black body as a fungible (exchangeable or replaceable) form of property. (p. 181)

Notably, universities in the U.S. were initially created to educate the offspring of colonizers and may implicitly still serve to recreate the settler colonial state (Thelin, 2004).

Black and Brown faculty are more likely to be treated unfairly in the areas of promotion and training opportunities; are more likely to be targets of workplace discrimination; and are more likely to have difficulty in accessing informal professional networks (Durr & Wingfield, 2011; Phinney, 1990). These connections and social networks help to shape, fund, and advance scholarship, making it easier for some faculty to navigate and succeed in academia.

BIPOC women faculty within predominantly White institutions (PWI) experience additional tensions in academe (Menges & Exum, 1983; Rideau, 2019) as oppression is based on both axes of race and gender (Turner, 2008). While the overall number of female faculty has increased within institutions of higher education, the number of BIPOC female faculty has remained a small proportion (National Research Council, 2013). BIPOC women account for only about a tenth of faculty members at four-year institutions (National Center for Education Statistics, 2018). Even BIPOC women who come from socioeconomic privilege or wealth experience the detrimental mental health impacts of being in work settings that may be unwelcoming to them. Implicit assumptions of superior intellectual and professional competency are automatically assigned to White men and women (Turner & Gonzales, 2011), disadvantaging BIPOC women faculty in multiple spheres of academic mobility. BIPOC women faculty are the lowest paid demographic among faculty, earning less per dollar than White men (67 cents), White women (81 cents), and BIPOC men (72 cents; McChesney, 2018).

According to the Council on Social Work Education (CSWE, 2017), women constitute the majority of students at the Bachelor of Social Work (BSW, 83.5%), Master of Social Work (MSW, 80.3%), Doctorate of Social Work (DSW, 87.4%), and Doctorate of Philosophy in Social Work (PhD, 75.7%) levels. Similarly, 75.2% of social work faculty

members are women. In terms of race/ethnicity, at the BSW level, 44.9% of full-time students are BIPOC; part-time BSW programs had an even greater proportion of BIPOC students (48.6%; CSWE, 2017). At the MSW level, proportions of BIPOC students are slightly lower (39.7%). At the DSW level, 50.0% are BIPOC students, and at the PhD level, 45.6% are BIPOC students. Although almost half of all social work doctoral students are of color, only 33.1% of full-time social work faculty members are of color (CSWE, 2017).

Drawing from Crenshaw (1991) and Collins' (2012) theoretical framework on intersectionality, we analyze how positionalities of race, class, and gender shape multiple dimensions of lived experience for BIPOC women who are social work faculty in the U.S. We draw from one of the central tenets of critical race theory (CRT), which argues that racism is an everyday American experience (Razack & Jeffery, 2002). As Bell (1995) argues, CRT recognizes that revolutionizing a culture begins with a radical assessment of it. However, the development of critical consciousness regarding the role of race in social work academia is hampered by the politicization of these ideas. In a Sept. 4, 2020 memorandum to the heads of federal executive departments and agencies, the Executive Office of the President of the U.S. (2020) outlined that all federal agencies were banned from engaging in training related to CRT or White privilege. Such attempts at educational censorship effectively reinforce the notion that Americans, and White Americans in particular, should not critically assess the ways in which race and racism play fundamental roles in this country, but should instead continue to deny the very existence of American racism at all. Under such a view, to engage in these discussions is not the realm of intellectuals and social change agents, but rather becomes the "divisive, false, and demeaning propaganda of the critical race theory movement" (Executive Office of the President of the U.S., 2020, p. 2).

Multiple states have passed laws that seek to ban the teaching of CRT in public education. In Tennessee, for example, Republican state representatives advanced legislation in May 2021 that sought to bar teaching critical race theory in public schools and universities (Folley, 2021). Similarly in Idaho, Governor Brad Little signed House Bill 377, which states that "the Idaho legislature finds that the tenets... often found in 'critical race theory'... exacerbate and inflame divisions on the basis of sex, race, ethnicity, religion, color, national origin, or other criteria in a way contrary to the unity of the nation and the well-being of the state of Idaho and its citizens" (Dewitt, 2021, para. 3). Clearly then, overcoming the politicization of CRT in the current sociopolitical environment remains an ongoing obstacle to the greater recognition of the role that racism plays in American life at large and American academia in particular.

### **BIPOC Women Carry the University's Emotional Labor**

There are several ways in which BIPOC women carry additional emotional labor for the university. BIPOC women professionals have reported feeling that they must transform themselves to be welcomed and accepted in the workplace; additionally, they may feel perpetually judged for their appearance, personal decorum, communication skills, and emotional regulation (Durr & Wingfield, 2011). BIPOC women often suffer from "race fatigue" (Harley, 2008, p. 19) as a result of being overextended and undervalued in the

areas of teaching, research, and particularly service (Thomas & Hollenshead, 2001). BIPOC women are sought out by administrators as instructors, mentors, and stars for diversity brochures. Padilla (1994) refers to this phenomenon as cultural taxation, or the additional service that falls upon BIPOC women faculty to serve their institution's needs.

Faculty of color often spend more time than their White colleagues in mentoring students (Rideau, 2019). Teaching and service generally entail substantial amounts of emotional labor, but this labor is not seen to be a valued skill and is therefore poorly rewarded by the academic merit system (Bellas, 1999). Students of color also seek out BIPOC women faculty for advising and educational/career counseling. While BIPOC women faculty are often strongly committed to supporting students of color, caring for marginalized students is another method by which we experience identity taxation (Rideau, 2019). While women of color faculty take pride and responsibility in supporting younger colleagues, these added mentorship expectations can be time-consuming and emotionally draining. The added burden of supporting marginalized students can also entail assuming added risks (Rideau, 2019) within university systems.

Additionally, women often bear the brunt of family caregiving responsibilities, both for children and for aging family members (Neufeld & Harrison, 2003). Women faculty, and particularly women of color faculty, are no exception to this gendered norm (Bingham & Nix, 2010; Carr et al., 1998; Gunter & Stambach, 2003; Hart, 2016). Prior to and through the COVID-19 pandemic, many BIPOC women faculty have been responsible for childcare, homeschooling of children, or caretaking of aging family members, a responsibility that differentially impacts the productivity of women over men (Breuning et al., 2021; Cress & Hart, 2009; Krukowski et al., 2021). Throughout the pandemic, distinctions between work life and home life have been blurred (Shillington et al., 2020) as faculty offer online Zoom classes and participate in service committees from their living rooms, sometimes while also providing care for family members or coordinating their children's online schooling at home. Interestingly, even in those instances where women of color faculty may begrudgingly take on additional service responsibilities through peer or institutional pressure, the narrative of the interaction may be recreated to portray women as naturally more giving, more altruistic, less concerned with their own career advancement, and more committed to collectivistic causes. These reductionist renderings of gendered roles and racialized expectations equate BIPOC women to be the *mammies* (Collins, 2000) of their universities, upholding moral virtuousness, but not necessarily demonstrating academic prowess.

### **Reflexivity Regarding Our Own Positionalities**

It may be helpful to first define how we are using the acronym BIPOC. We have explicitly chosen to use this acronym in this paper as it both refers to a wide swath of people of color, yet also keeps the experiences of Black and Indigenous people at the forefront of our consciousness. To be fully transparent about the ways in which our own identities may contribute to how we view social constructs regarding race, class and gender, we also wish to explain our own positionalities.

The first author identifies as an Indian, Muslim American woman, who has primarily worked in social policy and clinical social work practice pertaining to HIV, mental health and addiction treatment, as well as for city and state public health departments, in Oakland/San Francisco, Delhi, Philadelphia, Chicago, Hyderabad, and New York City. The second author identifies as a southern African American/Black Christian woman, wife, and mother who has practiced in the following areas: medical social work in rural and urban communities, counseling in a psychiatric hospital within the department of corrections, investigations with child protective services, evaluation of mental health system of care services, clinical counseling with sexual trauma services, as well as teaching in a few universities in both the northeast and southeast of the U.S.

While the two of us differ in our racial/ethnic identities, household compositions, religions, and institutional affiliations, our experiences as BIPOC women social work faculty remain unquestionably similar. We dissect these similarities and differences in our experiences as women of color in this paper. We do not seek to analyze these experiences from a deficit-based model that solely envisions people of color as being perpetually at a disadvantage. Instead we argue that operating from a bicultural perspective may equip women of color with skills that aid them in critically examining their institutions and moving beyond White-dominant notions of educational leadership to more culturally responsive approaches (Martinez & Welton, 2015).

### **BIPOC Women Are Tokenized**

A common thread for women of color faculty is the awareness of working within contexts that explicitly or implicitly promote the socially constructed myths of White male superiority. As Anderson (2015) noted, some spaces, including much of American academia, are perceived to be White spaces, which are informally off limits for BIPOC people, and even more so for BIPOC women. When a BIPOC woman enters a White space, others try to make sense of her, to determine whether they need to be concerned (Anderson, 2015) or threatened. Without regular contact with communities of color, stereotypes regarding BIPOC women become the norm, estranging us from our work settings and from our peers. Others describe us as hostile, aggressive, confrontational, entitled, argumentative, angry. Yet we do not notice the same critiques made of even our most outspoken White peers. Both authors have experienced exclusion from networks that not only teach unwritten cultural rules, but also help faculty build connections with other colleagues, university administrators, funders, and community members.

Often we, as women of color faculty, agree to take on additional mentoring roles (and their associated risks) as we see it to be “paying it forward” for those mentors who helped us navigate our own way. Since the pandemic, BIPOC pre-tenure faculty have carried additional emotional burdens from supporting students of color who are distressed, honoring requests for guest lectures, and providing consultations regarding current events (Shillington et al., 2020). But of course, that added labor goes unreflected in our annual merit reviews and remains unrewarded by tenure and promotion processes. There is also no way to quantify the pain we feel when hearing about the struggles of our students who are women of color because often those struggles are our own. Advocating for these

students of color often involves the kind of advocacy we wish we had received ourselves as graduate students. While women of color faculty are often asked to “step up” to support marginalized students, we may need to “step back” to ensure that we are able to meet our own research, teaching and service obligations at the university (Ventura & Wong, 2020).

An implicit bias permeates our interactions within university settings, depicting us as perpetually threatening or foreign to the existing social order. Both authors have been mistaken for secretaries and been asked to make photocopies for other professors. The second author has walked into academic spaces and been mistaken for a custodian and asked to dump the trash. Both authors have been told by multiple people, with genuine surprise in their eyes, how articulate we are or how well we speak English. Both authors have experienced moments when students are surprised to find that we are their instructors. A student has tersely told the second author to move her belongings on the front desk in the classroom to a different location to make way for the professor, only to be surprised to find that she was already speaking to the professor. The second author has had several incidents of students being taken aback with referring to her by the title of “Dr.,” while the same students do not express issue with referring to White faculty in the same manner. The first author has experienced multiple instances of sexual harassment at academic conferences, where senior faculty and search committee chairs wave job openings at their institutions as proverbial carrots on sticks for their unwelcome sexual forwardness. The first author has also had other scholars refer to her research as “exotic,” reflecting the perpetual Orientalization and fetishization that often permeates studies conducted in Asian contexts and particularly those involving women (Azhar et al., 2021; Said, 1979).

Women of color are also disproportionately asked to serve on committees (Bellas, 1999) and assigned greater clerical or administrative tasks within those committees. Committee service entails the need for communication skills and interpersonal skills, which often promote an emotionless notion of professionalism. Particularly when serving on diversity and inclusion committees for our institutions, we became painfully aware of how we may be perceived by others and may need to soften our criticisms of systemic flaws, lest they be misconstrued as entitled, privileged, or ungrateful. Faculty, administrators and staff who are women of color are often interrupted, ignored or unrecognized in meetings. Our education and current income may lessen how our White peers understand the ways that we too experience racism and sexism simultaneously. Over time, this may lead women of color who choose to remain in academia to either move from one academic institution to another to avoid systemic discrimination or resign themselves to dysfunctional racialized and gendered dynamics among university faculty and employees at multiple institutions. If they do remain at institutions for the longer term, they may continue to be shut down and their actions may be minimized by their White colleagues.

### **BIPOC Women Are Seen as Complainers**

BIPOC women are discouraged from speaking out about these instances for fear of retaliation from faculty at their current institutions or from being blacklisted from potential employers at other institutions. “This will ruin your career” and “It’s a small world in academia” are mantras that have been used to instill fear and encourage silence in voicing

a complaint. The fear of an unknown future is used to justify uncomfortable working conditions. When women of color do in fact make a complaint or vocalize a grievance about inequitable treatment, their issues are often dismissed and demeaned. As Sara Ahmed (2020) notes:

A complaint that you do not belong can be used as evidence that you do not belong. The more you are treated as a stranger, not from here, not really from here, the harder it is to complain. And the harder it is to complain the more vulnerable you become. (para. 2)

Affirmation bias permeates the social structure of the work environment for faculty who are women of color. Formal complaints by women of color are likely to be deemed irrational, hypersensitive, and emotional. BIPOC women faculty are subtly reminded that we should just be happy to have “a seat at the table,” but refrain from desiring full inclusion. Our justified emotions of frustration are heralded as the hostile and aggressive rants of angry women of color (Duncan, 2014), reinforcing old and damaging tropes. This leads to the upholding of White supremacy as people in positions of power often do not like to be made uncomfortable through the recognition of their own privilege. Defensiveness may also ensue as faculty members and administrators assume that by making a critique of systemic oppression, we are individually accusing them of racism. A lack of differentiation, indeed the ecological fallacy at play, is made between saying, “This university system is racist” and “You, individual White faculty member, are racist.”

Beyond explicit discrimination, our more common experiences with racism are everyday microaggressions at the workplace. Microaggressions are defined as race-specific interactions with themes of criminality and incompetence directed toward African Americans and themes of perpetual foreignness and invisibility directed toward Asian Americans (Sue et al., 2008). Among a racially diverse sample of color, a greater frequency of racial microaggressions was significantly associated with greater traumatic stress symptoms; further, school or workplace microaggressions were the type of microaggressions most associated with traumatic symptoms (Nadal et al., 2019). In academic settings, microaggressions may take the form of White faculty confusing the few women of color faculty or students with one another through seemingly naïve comments like, “You look just like [insert name of the other woman of color in the department].” It is demonstrated when the achievements of BIPOC women are intentionally or unintentionally absent from group recognition. Even the very usage of the term *microaggression* may serve to minimize the scale and impact of these perpetual insults against us because the usage of the prefix “micro” may be misinterpreted to refer to the magnitude of the interaction, rather than the frequency and routineness with which these insults occur.

During moments of crisis, like the current pandemic, inequitable service expectations are also often conferred on BIPOC women faculty. Refusing to accommodate these service requests can be misconstrued as a lack of desire to be a “team player” or to be seen as ungrateful for one’s privileged place as a faculty member of color in a PWI. As Audre Lorde (1984) poignantly stated in 1979:

It is a particular academic arrogance to assume any discussion of feminist theory in this time and in this place without examining our many differences, and without a significant input from poor women, Black and Third World women, and lesbians. And yet, I stand here as a Black, lesbian feminist, having been invited to comment within the only panel at this conference where the input of Black feminists and lesbians is represented. (p. 10)

Audre Lorde's experience summarizes well how many women of color within academia are treated—both as tokens and as ignorable members. Some 40 years after Lorde's poignant statement, the state of racism and bias within American academia remains essentially the same. Diversity, equity and inclusion trainings are increasingly popular in the current moment, but typically only occur in one time and at one place, serving as the implicit justification for ongoing acts of systemic racism that permeate institutional structures. More importantly, these trainings have largely been proven to be ineffective at changing racial attitudes and behaviors within institutions in the long term (Anand & Winters, 2008; Cocchiara et al., 2010; Holladay & Quiñones, 2005). Their presence is more likely to serve institutional interests in protecting liability from workplace discrimination than actually fostering an environment that promotes race and gender equity.

Additionally, many institutions of higher education have created what have been termed "safe spaces" or "brave spaces" (Arao & Clemens, 2013; Palfrey, 2017) for people of color to more freely discuss those issues that impact them. But a rebranding of the name of the space does not make it any safer nor braver. Indeed these spaces can serve as a refuge for students of color in an environment that can be perpetually hostile. But as Ahmed (2012) notes, the very creation of these relegated spaces serves as the rebuttal for the fact that social exclusion and marginalization permeate all other social interactions for people of color. Indeed the creation of an anti-racism task force is the validation that systemic racism does in fact exist within the university.

### **Social Workers' Complicity With White Supremacy**

Social workers have had a long history of being complicit in structures that have ultimately served to promote White supremacy. A notable critique of child welfare social workers is their involvement in systems that have historically served to separate families of color and punish poor women of color for social conditions that have been caused by centuries of slavery, colonization, and social exclusion. Social workers have an equally disdainful past with Indigenous communities. From the 1880s to the 1950s, child welfare workers removed American Indian children from their families and placed them into government boarding schools and Christian missionary programs that were meant to assimilate them into White culture, labeling Native American families as savages (George, 1997). These histories are often ignored or minimized in American social work education. Our profession needs to be held accountable to both its past and present horrors.

Following the recent widespread protests regarding the murder of George Floyd at the hands of Minnesota police over the summer of 2020, institutions across the country—from police departments to schools to prisons—have been forced to recognize the multiple forms

of systemic racism that they have historically sanctioned. Women of color who are clinical social workers must deal with both the psychological effects of powerlessness and the concrete problems in their clients' lives (Gutierrez, 1990). As we begin to conceive of social work services, social work departments, universities, and institutions that are more inclusive of BIPOC women faculty, social workers, staff and students, we have a few insights and recommendations for meaningful social change.

### **Recommendations to Address Racism in Social Work Academia**

In the final section of this paper, we provide recommendations for meaningful social change in social work academia and provide action-oriented suggestions for how to work towards accomplishing these goals.

Table 1. *Recommendations to Address Racism in Social Work Academia*

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Reaffirm Social Work's Commitment to Addressing Racism</li> <li>▪ Infuse Anti-Racist Content into Social Work Curricula</li> <li>▪ Recognize the Role of White Supremacy in Academia</li> <li>▪ Assess the Institutional Climate</li> <li>▪ Encourage Critical Reflection and Counter-Storytelling</li> <li>▪ Critique How Racial/Ethnic Minority Populations Have Been Pathologized by Social Workers and Psychologists</li> <li>▪ Encourage Institutional Support and Mentorship of BIPOC Faculty and Students</li> <li>▪ Reconsider Faculty Workloads and Tenure Expectations</li> <li>▪ Give Space for BIPOC Women Faculty, Students and Staff to Grieve and Recover</li> <li>▪ Appreciate That the Pursuit of Social Justice is the Hallmark of Our Profession</li> </ul> |
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### **Reaffirm Social Work's Commitment to Addressing Racism**

Compared to other disciplines and professions, social work has a unique commitment to address issues of racism. The National Association of Social Workers' (NASW, 2017) Code of Ethics explicitly states that social workers respect the inherent dignity and worth of the person. The NASW Code of Ethics mandates that social workers treat each person in a caring and respectful fashion, mindful of individual differences and cultural and ethnic diversity. Social workers are responsible for having a knowledge base of their clients' cultures and to be able to demonstrate competence in service provision that indoctrinates cultural humility. We are expected to seek understanding of the nature of social diversity and oppression with respect to race, ethnicity, national origin, color, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, age, and other social identity markers.

A noteworthy consideration in anti-racist work within our profession is the very realization that social workers themselves have historically contributed to mechanisms of social control that have served to punish communities of color for their poverty and social marginalization. These social hierarchies stem from the portrayal of the histories of some of the first American social workers, who were White, affluent, "friendly visitors" and settlement house workers, largely providing "charity" to ethnic minority immigrants and

working class families in urban centers (Lasch-Quinn, 2017). An ahistorical representation of the contributions of social work reformers and progressives as only White women is also evidence of the centering of Whiteness in social work history (Hounmenou, 2012) and the linchpin to the centering of Whiteness throughout social work education. Addressing ahistoricism in social work education is one approach in decentering Whiteness, dismantling White hegemony, and addressing racism throughout the curricula. To address racism, the profession must first promote a historicity that is robust, comprehensive, and punctilious, one which would need to include counternarratives of BIPOC social workers, advocates, activists, and community organizers, such as Willie Gertrude Brown, Janie Porter Barrett, W. E. B. Du Bois, Fred Korematsu, Fannie Lou Hamer, and Sojourner Truth, alongside the conventional narratives of social work reformers and progressives, such as Jane Addams, Helen Gates Starr, Mary Richmond, Helen H. Pearlman, and Edith Abbott.

The inclusion of counternarratives would facilitate dialogue on the ways racism has historically impacted the field of social work. The profession should be resolute in including these counternarratives, given the deference given to the Social Work Code of Ethics that governs practice and professional interpersonal behavior for social workers (NASW, 2017). By addressing the centering of Whiteness throughout social work education, we examine the assumptions buttressing these narratives, the lack of critical analysis regarding the ahistoricism of social work history, the ways that White supremacy has infiltrated the profession (DeLoach McCutcheon, 2019), and the marginalization and omission of the contributions of women of color in social work education (Spanierman & Soble, 2010). This process would lend itself to substantive discussions regarding the long-term, systemic effects of racism, and its pervasiveness throughout formal and informal institutions in the social work profession. Social work advocacy organizations are increasingly recognizing the importance of the development of future social workers who embrace diversity and difference within their practice (CSWE; 2015) and who are culturally competent (NASW, 2017).

### **Infuse Anti-Racist Content Into Social Work Curricula**

Currently, much of what is examined in social work education consists of generalized knowledge of different Westernized cultural group customs, norms, and experiences (Adams et al., 2007) with a focus on “multiculturalism.” However, multiculturalism, in the absence of collective anti-racist struggles, can reproduce the ontologies, epistemologies, and practices of White supremacy (Bery, 2014). While cultural competence and cultural humility are current buzz words in our profession, rarely do these perspectives involve the analysis of Whiteness; the systemic effects of the legacy of genocide and massive deportation of Indigenous people in the settling of the U.S.; the chattel slavery of Africans in the U.S. circa August 1619; the recruitment of Chinese immigrants as indentured laborers on cotton plantations and railroad projects; the denigrating practices of sharecropping for Black farmers in the Mississippi Delta post-Civil War; the internment of Japanese people during World War II; the clandestine, forced sterilization of Puerto Rican women factory workers in the 1950s; the growing attacks on Muslims in the U.S. post-9/11; the continued colonization of the U.S. territories of American Samoa, Guam,

the Northern Mariana Islands, Puerto Rico, and the U.S. Virgin Islands; ongoing American military intervention in Afghanistan, Syria, and Iraq; the periodic attacks on Black churches and synagogues by white supremacists; the killing of unarmed Black and Latinx individuals at the hands of police; and numerous other atrocities committed against people of color, including redlining, racial profiling, and predatory lending.

Incendiary acts of modern-day racism need to be examined through a critical theoretical lens in social work education. Without such an approach, this lack of knowledge leaves clinical social workers ill-equipped to engage in therapeutic treatments that address the biopsychosocial functioning of client systems, who continue to face the by-products of these atrocities. Similarly, this lack of knowledge leaves macro-practice social workers unprepared to engage in social activism, community organizing, and policy-making that promotes the changes necessary to dismantle the effects of these human rights violations and prevent their recurrence.

To develop culturally competent social workers, counter-narratives must be added with intentionality, accuracy, and purpose within social work education. Social work educators must therefore accept that Whiteness and all of its effects pervade social work education, institutions of higher education, human service agencies, and social and economic institutions. Recognizing and holding the field accountable for these racist histories and ongoing tensions is an important first step to creating more equitable spaces within social work.

While calls for “decolonizing the curriculum” have been widespread, social work education in particular needs to include more content related to anti-racism and anti-oppressive social work practice, including readings from BIPOC scholars. Emerging research shows that diversity coursework has an overall small but positive association on behavior, behavioral intent, affect, cognition, and diversity (Denson et al., 2020). By examining the curricula to assess the content and the extent to which Whiteness is centered explicitly and implicitly, we can broaden curricula to include counter-storytelling (Ortega & Feagin, 2016). An assessment of the curriculum would help identify the contributions of people of color within social work syllabi (Hikido & Murray, 2016) and develop strategies for centering missing contributions of people of color to create a more holistic teaching paradigm.

Although it is not universally mandated, some schools of social work have required anti-racism courses during the first year of graduate study for Master of Social Work students. However, this practice is by no means standardized. One way to address this lack of uniformity in social work education is for CSWE, the body which maintains standards for accreditation for schools of social work in the U.S., to establish anti-racist curricula as a national requirement for competencies of graduating social work students. There are multiple letters and online petitions that are currently being circulated to CSWE to broaden the second competency for social work that addresses diversity to explicitly require the instruction of anti-racist content. This would be a strong move in the right direction.

For the training of students intending to focus on clinical social work, counseling competencies that are not ethnocentric in nature can help social workers integrate structural issues of inclusion into their interactions with racial/ethnic minority clients (Vera &

Speight, 2003). Moving in this direction, the National Association of Deans and Directors of Schools of Social Work (NADD; 2020) recently signed a statement, denouncing racism and structural oppression that allow violence, hatred, and brutality to persist. Further they have committed to stop racism and injustice as they see these to be the cause of disparities in health and wealth, mass incarceration, political disenfranchisement, and multi-generational trauma (NADD, 2020). While the NADD reflects a commitment to creating more equitable social work education, their future steps for action are somewhat vague and speak broadly to the importance of self-reflection, providing anti-racist professional education, and partnering with national social work advocacy organizations. To truly move anti-racist initiatives forward in social work schools, specific, outcome-oriented plans need to be made at the national, state, local and institutional levels.

### **Recognize the Role of White Supremacy in Academia**

An emerging group of activists within our profession are working to educate social workers on the recognition that White supremacy has been a historical component of social work. The Social Work Coalition for Anti-Racist Educators (SWCAREs), is an organization created by a group of social work educators who seek to actively dismantle the systemic racism and oppression created by White supremacy culture (SWCAREs, 2020). One of their main activities is compiling resources for anti-racist education within social work classrooms. SWCAREs seeks to identify and acknowledge the ways in which White supremacy culture exists in social work education, including hiring practices, leadership, competencies, implicit curriculum, accreditation requirements, funding, ethical principles, and gaps in equity (SWCAREs, 2020). Similarly, the organization SWHelper (2020), held a two-day virtual summit in September 2020 to address ways in which social workers can more actively engage in anti-racist practice. Another group of social workers connected via Twitter using the hashtag #SWeduActs. The hashtag was created in response to a call for social work educators to collaborate on anti-racist efforts. The collective held a national social work teach-in online October 2020, addressing issues of police brutality and structural racism (Stoelker, 2020). More widespread approaches like these should be adopted by social work schools to address the multiple facets in which racism permeates social work education and practice.

### **Assess the Institutional Climate**

In order to analyze the psychosocial, environmental, economic, cultural, and structural conventions that uphold White supremacy and marginalize faculty, staff and students of color (Cabrera et al., 2016), social work departments, schools, and universities need to conduct an assessment of their institutional climate. Part of this critical assessment would require examining recruitment, hiring, mentoring, retention and promotion efforts, and the extent to which these efforts include BIPOC students and faculty members (Kaplan et al., 2017). Such assessments must also involve honest evaluations of leadership and the ways in which institutional management has potentially contributed to the maintenance of White supremacy. For social work departments/schools, some forms of this work may have already been conducted during the CSWE accreditation self-study, so departments/schools

may expound on this existing work to delve deeper into these issues. During the climate assessment, questions that focus on social conventions, processes, supports, resources, attitudes, interactions, and organizational culture may reveal findings that would otherwise go unnoticed. Following an assessment, the next steps would include examining how Whiteness plays out in the school's strategies for program marketing, admission criteria, and graduation trends for students of color (Russell et al., 2019).

### **Encourage Critical Reflection and Counter-Storytelling**

A function of social work education is to promote critical thinking, which should include efforts to decenter Whiteness within institutions in order to promote diversity, difference, and inclusivity. Given the cardinal values of social work and the ethical underpinnings of the profession, one might question what has prevented the profession from having already engaged in such decentering efforts. The American Academy of Social Work and Social Welfare (AASWSW, 2020) only recently added Eliminating Racism as the 13<sup>th</sup> Grand Challenge to the profession, following criticism regarding its absence.

A possible explanation for social work's relatively slow adoption of anti-racist principles may be what Bourdieu (1986) termed *miscognition*, or the active set of social processes that anchor accepted assumptions in social and cultural life. This anchoring creates a collective false consciousness based on routinely unnoticed and unchallenged conditions, in this case, the pervasiveness of Whiteness throughout social work education, policy and practice (Feagin, 2020). This false consciousness may be attributed to pushing the contributions of women of color to the sidelines, not only within the social work profession, but throughout society. The inclusion of counternarratives may begin to correct this false consciousness and begin the process of establishing a new perception of reality.

The adoption of counter-storytelling, or the practice of using alternative stories regarding communities of color, can also be an effective tool to challenging dominant narratives among faculty (Solórzano & Yosso, 2001). A diverse faculty strengthens any institution through the adoption of a richer curriculum and deeper engagement on race and gender in faculty committees and meetings (Gasman, 2016). A diverse faculty can hold the university accountable in ways that uplift people of color (Gasman, 2016) and decenter Whiteness. People of color are often told that their perceptions regarding racism are incorrect and that their assertions lack empirical validity (Sue et al., 2008). University leaders need to critically examine how racism, sexism, and gender-based oppression are reproduced within institutions (Patton, 2016) and have often been the historical precedents to the very creation of these institutions.

### **Critique How Racial/Ethnic Minority Populations Have Been Pathologized By Social Workers and Psychologists**

Anti-oppressive approaches towards social work education should include the widening of our lens to include minoritized voices not only within the U.S. context, but also across global contexts (Azhar et al., 2020; Aziz & Azhar, 2019). American imperialism within the field of clinical social work, stemming from the profession's

dependence on validation from the culturally biased Diagnostic and Statistical Manual (DSM; American Psychiatric Association, 2013), continues to remain largely unquestioned. The reliance on criterion-construct validity of mental illness categorizations is highly problematic given the dominant-majority group influence on determining which behaviors, attitudes, thoughts, and emotions constitute normalcy and which constitute pathology (Kaufman, 2006). Research has documented the limitations of clinical utility and construct validity of criteria from the DSM-5 diagnostic categories of Somatic Symptom Disorder (SSD; Häuser et al., 2015), Schizoid Personality Disorder (Hummelen et al., 2015), and pediatric Bipolar Disorder (Galanter et al., 2012). Even after controlling for symptoms, people of color, and in particular Black men, are more likely to be diagnosed with schizophrenia and Antisocial Personality Disorder (Feisthmel & Schwartz, 2006). Similarly, Black children and adolescents are more likely to be diagnosed with Oppositional Defiant Disorder and Conduct Disorder, reflecting implicit biases regarding the perceived psychology and behavior of people of color (Atkins-Loria et al., 2015) who are assumed to be more aggressive, violent or resistant to authority.

### **Encourage Institutional Support and Mentorship of BIPOC Faculty and Students**

BIPOC women faculty need unique support and resources that are designed to address the isolating effects of being the only person of the color in the room, on the committee, or in the department (Hitchcock & Sage, 2020). Providing support to BIPOC faculty and students also requires an appreciation for mental health disparities among racial/ethnic minority students. Recent research has shown that people of color are at increased risk for both experiencing discrimination and experiencing mental health issues (CDC, 2020; Ruiz et al., 2020). Black and Latinx people report higher rates of depression, anxiety, and trauma-related symptoms as a result of the pandemic than White people (CDC, 2020). Moreover, greater than 30% of Asian-American adults say they have experienced interpersonal racism since the pandemic began (Ruiz et al., 2020).

Similar trends impacting racial/ethnic minorities have existed long before the pandemic. Students of color are more likely to report feeling overwhelmed at college, yet keep these concerns to themselves (Lipson et al., 2018). In a 2018 study involving in-depth interviews and focus groups with a convenience sample of Black college students at a PWI in South Carolina, students reported experiences with everyday racial discrimination that contributed to feelings of anger, loneliness, social isolation, and invisibility (Lewis, 2018). BIPOC students are also less likely to seek out mental health care. In one study of university students, 23% of Asian-American students, 26% of Black students, and 33% of Latino students with mental health problems sought treatment vs. 46% of White students (Lipson et al., 2018).

Students have also revealed that they perceived their university's approach to diversity and inclusion to be superficial, ultimately benefiting White students while continuing to marginalize Black students (Lewis, 2018). To address these disparities within social work departments and schools, we must make greater efforts to conduct mental health outreach to racial/ethnic minority students, including doctoral students. These students must also be provided opportunities to be actively involved in the design and change of school policies

that directly impact them. A focus on systemic discrimination is important to develop a deep understanding of the holistic mental health needs of minority students (The Steve Fund, 2020).

### **Reconsider Faculty Workloads and Tenure Expectations**

Expectations for bi-annual and tenure/promotion reviews must consider structural inequities by gender and race/ethnicity (Shillington et al., 2020). Recent discussions regarding one or two year extensions to the tenure clock acknowledge the challenges to productivity elicited by the pandemic, but only do so by delaying the decision of *when* faculty will be evaluated for tenure. These extensions may provide extra time to adjust research efforts, but may affect faculty and administrator perceptions of whether pre-tenure faculty members are “on track” for academic success (Shillington et al., 2020). Ultimately, the standards by which faculty are assessed for tenure and promotion decisions remain the same, albeit delayed. If faculty take the additional year in their tenure review, this essentially equates to a pay cut as junior faculty are prevented from assuming the salary increase associated with receiving tenure and being promoted to the level of Associate Professor, which typically follows the seventh year of university service. This too may arguably serve to maintain standards that ultimately uphold White male supremacy as universities are unable to adequately respond to the differential burdens that the pandemic has placed on BIPOC women, and in particular BIPOC women who serve as caregivers. Additionally, several universities do not offer affordable childcare services to faculty, staff and students, again creating a greater burden on women who are parents, particularly of young children. Perhaps a better way to adjust work expectations is to adjust tenure expectations by a year, such that women can still be promoted on time and without being forced to sacrifice a promotional salary increase. Efforts can also be made to identify and reduce pay disparities across faculty rank by race and gender.

### **Give Space for BIPOC Women Faculty, Students and Staff To Grieve and Recover**

In the midst of one of the most tumultuous political years of our lives, it is important for university faculty and administrators to give women of color faculty, students and staff opportunities to grieve, rest, recover, rejoice. Experiencing joy is an act of resistance against the narratives that tell us that we are destined to fail, fated to be oppressed, and condemned to subjugation. Allow for the expression of joy in the classroom, joy in the field, even joy in the committee meeting. This is not to say that we simply smile and withstand our agony. But we “must include feelings of pleasure such as laughing and experiences of joy even within the traumatic existence of exploitation” (Shimizu, 2016., p.319).

### **Appreciate That the Pursuit of Social Justice Is the Hallmark of Our Profession**

Ultimately, as social work faculty members, we are deeply committed to the pursuit of social justice, which we define here to be equity and fairness in the distribution of social resources (Fouad et al., 2006). Social justice refers to how advantages and disadvantages

are distributed to individuals in society (Miller, 1999). Operating from a perspective of social justice emphasizes structural issues, namely equity, interdependence, and social responsibility (Bell, 1997). Given that the notions of equity and fairness are highly subjective within institutional settings, operationalizing these terms can be challenging. But we must stand ready for this challenge. And we must stand ready to face the institutional obstacles and risks that advocating for these changes will inevitably entail.

As we have already outlined, one of the fundamental ways to help create a paradigm shift is the development of critical consciousness amongst our faculty, staff and students regarding the nature of power relationships within society and how these dynamics shape individual perceptions and biases (Gutierrez & Lewis, 1999) within university settings. It would be irresponsible for social workers to ignore the ways in which we may act as agents of social control, rather than agents of social change (Saugeres, 2000). Social workers working in mental health, criminal justice, and child welfare settings need to confront the ways in which juvenile justice systems, jails, prisons, psychiatric hospitals, homeless shelters, and foster care systems have contributed to racial disparities in health, education, housing, and employment. We need to move beyond giving credit for our good intentions to acknowledging our bad consequences. In order for us to engage in meaningful and lasting social change, social workers must come to terms with the ways in which our profession has participated in historical systems that have normalized and institutionalized racism and White supremacy, often blaming racial/ethnic minority groups for their own poverty and social marginalization. Our commitment as social workers has always been to the most vulnerable within society. To ignore the centrality of intersectional racism and sexism in determining social inequity would be a disservice to ourselves and to our beloved profession.

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