

## De-Centering Whiteness Through Revisualizing Theory in Social Work Education, Practice, and Scholarship

Chandra Crudup  
Chris Fike  
Claire McLoone

**Abstract:** *Institutions that frame social work education and prepare future practitioners are firmly rooted in hegemonic philosophies and practices that perpetuate colonization, oppression, and white supremacy. In recognizing that white supremacy is a mechanism of social control, that our current social structure is grounded in liberal-patriarchal capitalism, and that social work conforms to prevailing social norms, we, as social workers, must acknowledge our complicity in perpetuating a white supremacist master narrative (Pewewardy & Almeida, 2014). The white supremacist ideology inherent within Western social work literature, teaching methodologies, and practice strategies only serves to perpetuate an oppressive system. This structure does not envision social workers as agents of change, but rather as essential cogs of the status quo who foster client dependence on a system that is inherently marginalizing. One mechanism for disrupting the white supremacy that has become a master narrative in social work is to create a counter-narrative (Pewewardy & Almeida, 2014). This paper creates a counter-narrative by using the pyramid of white supremacy framework (Safehouse Progressive Alliance for Nonviolence, 2008; Tuzzolo, 2016) to critique social work and deconstruct post-racial fallacies ascendant within the profession, and re-visualizes ecological systems framework as a mechanism for de-centering whiteness in social work scholarship, practice, and education.*

**Keywords:** *Antiracism; de-centering whiteness; White supremacy; ecological systems framework; counter-narrative; pedagogy; practice; scholarship*

As a profession informed by such lofty values as service, social justice, dignity and worth of the individual, integrity, competence, and the importance of human relationships (National Association of Social Workers [NASW], 2018), social workers often become so infatuated with the idea of helping or saving “people who are vulnerable, oppressed, and living in poverty” (NASW, 2018) that we fail to acknowledge the ascendancy of white supremacist norms in our profession. We become socialized by the same hegemony we claim to fight against. This often leaves us blinded to issues of internalized white ideology within the profession and resistant to race-based self-critique (Pewewardy & Almeida, 2014). We must name white supremacy and intentionally work to disrupt it. As Kendi (2019) notes, “the only way of undoing racism is to consistently identify and describe it, and then dismantle it” (p. 9).

White supremacy is a mechanism of social control (Pewewardy & Almeida, 2014). Shannon (1970), Longres (1972), and McMahan and Allen-Meares (1992) identified how white supremacist norms became a master narrative in social work practice, research, and education. One mechanism for disrupting the white supremacy that has become a master

---

Chandra Crudup, PhD, MSW, Associate Clinical Professor, School of Social Work, Arizona State University, Phoenix AZ.  
Chris Fike, MS, LLMSW, Clinical Social Worker with McDowell Healing Arts Center, Saginaw, MI. Claire McLoone, LMSW, Lecturer, School of Social Work, Arizona State University, Phoenix, AZ.

Copyright © 2021 Authors, Vol. 21 No. 2/3 (Summer 2021), 654-671, DOI: 10.18060/24120



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/).

narrative in social work scholarship, practice, and education is to create a counter-narrative (Pewewardy & Almeida, 2014). This article serves as a public counter-narrative to that normative white supremacist narrative in social work. We, as authors, outline how the three core pillars of social work (scholarship, practice, and education) perpetuate white supremacy, critique white supremacy frameworks ascendant within social work, deconstruct post-racial fallacies within the profession, and re-visualize ecological systems framework.

We, as authors, acknowledge that we are part of a history and profession of social workers, who are collectively responsible for doing the work of decentering whiteness in social work education, practice, and scholarship. Therefore, we will use “we” and “us” to acknowledge that as a profession this work must be done by all who educate, practice, organize, are activists, and do research in the name of social work.

### **Pyramid of White Supremacy in Social Work**

As an arm of colonization, social work has foundational roots of racism centering whiteness, maleness, elitism, and anti-immigrant ideals. The most commonly taught origin story of social work- friendly visitors- consisted of white upper-class women that deemed poverty as a moral deficit and aimed to assimilate immigrants, by othering them and infiltrating their communities (Maylea, 2020; Park, 2008). Similarly, today well-intentioned social work scholars, practitioners, and educators do not always recognize the ways we have inadvertently ascribed to the ideas of white supremacy because the profession is functioning by design in centering whiteness. The pyramid of white supremacy created by Safehouse Progressive Alliance for Nonviolence (2008) and then adapted by Tuzzolo (2016) helps us identify how socially acceptable practices (covert) and socially unacceptable practices (overt) are all forms of white supremacy and counter to what we say we value in the profession. Visual depictions like the pyramid assist us in recognizing how our narrative does not match our actions. Connecting covert actions with socially unacceptable forms of racism, we acknowledge the pervasiveness and danger of all forms of white supremacy. Realizing the connection of social work’s legacy of oppression guised as moral forms of helping is vital to a path towards an anti-racist narrative forward. Moving beyond a critique of our existing frameworks into a true paradigm shift requires reimagined foundations and theories – ones that acknowledge the reality of systemic racism within our own profession.

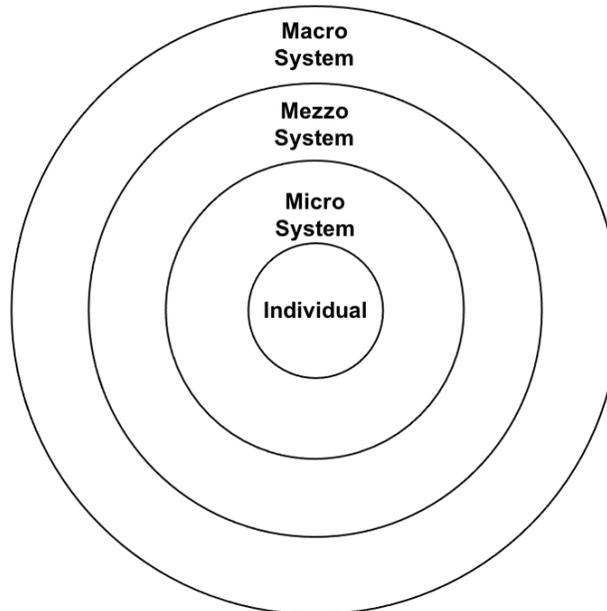
### **Re-visualizing Ecological Systems Framework**

The ecological systems framework is foundational to social work research, practice, and pedagogy. It is used by practitioners to better understand how a client and their multiple environments influence each other. Bronfenbrenner (1986) created a five-level model of personal and environmental influence to address his concerns that developmental psychologists were neglecting the impact of environmental factors on human development, specifically focusing on children (Renn, 2003; Seshadri & Knudson-Martin, 2013). His model focused on influences placed upon an individual by their environment, their responses to their environment, and the context of the socially constructed time (Renn,

2003). To decenter whiteness from the pillars, we must critically review the ways it has seeped into our foundational theories and frameworks.

The traditional social work understanding of the ecological systems framework is often depicted visually by layered circles with macro systems representing the outside circles moving towards a circle in the middle representing the individual at the center of the systems. Nesting systems surrounding the individual represent the process and outcomes that each system has on the individual at the core of the system (Stormshak & Dishion, 2002). This bullseye depiction of the model was created to help better understand the framework. After reviewing the literature, Crudup (2014) found the traditional conceptualization (see Figure 1) of the ecological systems theoretical model does not seem to accurately depict the interactions among and between systems. Though each circle looks embedded, the solid lines of each circle or system visually depicted in the traditional visual model do not allow for the permeation and overlap that often occurs between and among systems. The ecological systems model encompasses both processes and outcomes by placing an individual at the center or origin of development with nested systems surrounding the individual or couple, increasing in distance between the singular self and the self as a component of a much larger community (Stormshak & Dishion, 2002).

Figure 1. *Traditional Visual of Ecological Systems Framework*



This visual representation puts focus and responsibility on the individual to overcome years of historical trauma and social constructs created to prevent them from succeeding rather than a community's responsibility of supporting humanity. Distancing the individual from the community is consistent with a systemic structure that puts the pressure on an individual to pull themselves up by their bootstraps, perpetuating a myth that avoids recognition and solutions to deal with societal constructs that do not make that possible for

historically marginalized populations. It centers the idea that one is functioning within a system that sees them and is created for them. This model was created for a system that centers whiteness and maleness, therefore, the model really only functions as originally visualized if the individual at the center is white and male. Not only does this reinforce the systems of white patriarchal supremacy and how it works, it visually shows the barriers with the bullseye image. Though one could argue that if you are a white person in the middle of this system all of the lines between the individual and each surrounding circle are gray, the fact is the entire model was built with a white person being in the middle. Therefore, whiteness is centered, literally.

Having a relational focus rather than an individual focus could be one way to reimagine how a framework such as the ecological systems framework could de-center whiteness. The individual is by themselves in the middle, with a sole focus, with barriers between them and the systems around them. What would happen if the community was at the center rather than the individual? What if the role individuals play within their community was the focus to balance the importance of an individual's contributions to their society and society's responsibility to support the individual was more clearly depicted?

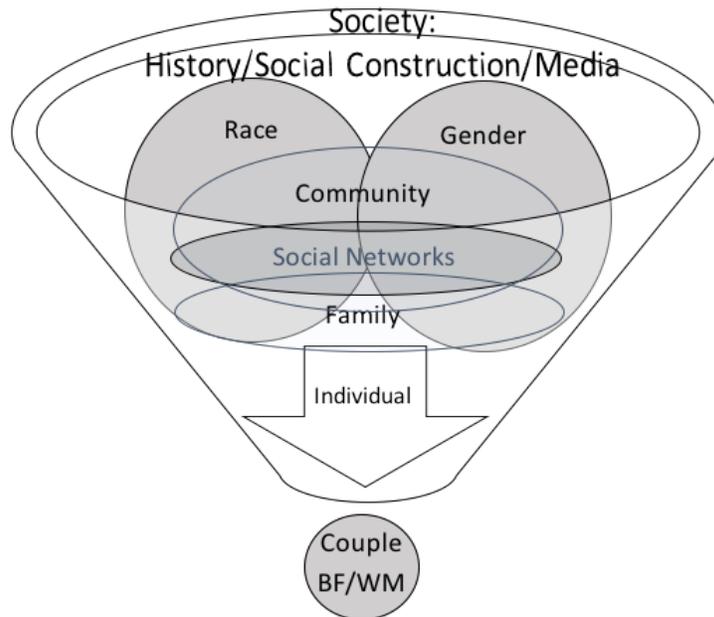
This framework directly informs social workers' Person-In-Environment understanding of working with individuals (Karls & Wandrei, 1994). Focusing on the person rather than the community and how the individual contributes and receives from the community is by design in line with white supremacist ideology. Social workers must reconstruct this inherent individualism and focus on how an individual's health, wellbeing, and sense of self is a direct result of how they contribute to the community, as well as how a community's overall well-being then gives back and contributes to the individuals well-being and health.

This relational focus as opposed to the individualistic focus has seeped into social work pedagogy, practice, and scholarship, the three pillars, in ways that have made our profession complicit with oppressive white supremacy. We teach multiculturalism rather than racism because it feels better for the individual rather than addressing racism – a more uncomfortable topic, but racism is the core of what we need to address. In scholarship, quantitative research is valued despite it stripping humanity and context from individuals and turning them into manipulatable numbers. In practice, we perpetuate the system by focusing on what the individual can do for themselves and take from society or gains from systems rather than how they can contribute to their community for a mutual individual and collective benefit.

Crudup (2014) developed a new visual representation that portrays a more accurate reflection of the systems encountered by interracial couples in her study as a means of understanding how systems and social constructions impact their couple identity. Crudup's (2014) Ecological Systems Framework for Understanding Interracial Marriage (see Figure 2) used the concept of a funnel rather than the traditional bullseye visual representation previously associated with the ecological systems framework. The funnel represented the social constructions that have been created throughout history, shaping society and influencing history, policy, popular media, and other macro level systems of which individuals and couples are a part. Within the funnel there were the two major socially

constructed systems that impacted Black female/white male interracial couples: race and gender. The “structural power constructed by whiteness and maleness” has influenced the construction of both concepts and its function within community, social, and familial systems (Root, 2001, p. 11). Race and gender have socially constructed known roles, boundaries, and expectations that have become understood in society. The overlapping race, gender, community, social networks, and family systems capture how neither acts alone, but each intersects and impacts the other resulting in individual and in the case of Crudup’s (2014) research, couple identities.

Figure 2. *Ecological Systems Framework for Understanding Interracial Marriage*

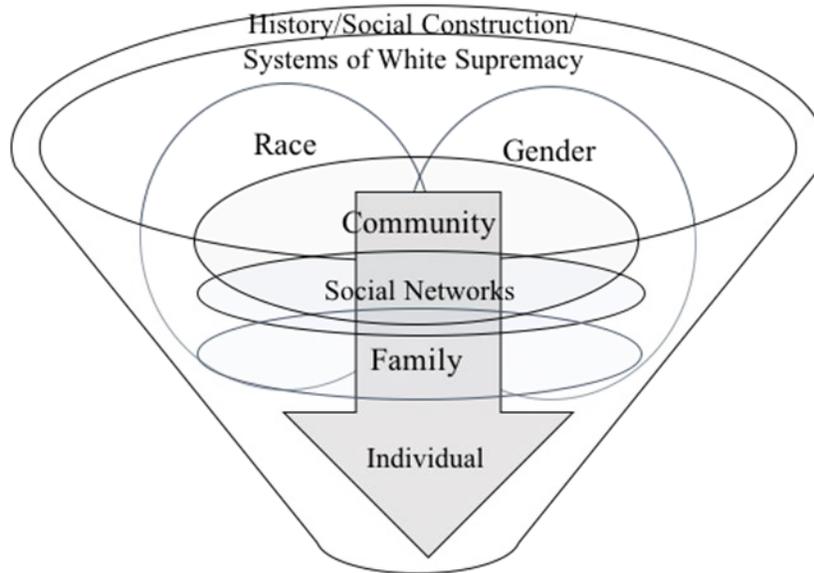


Crudup (2014) used the funnel conceptualization and its incorporation of social construction of the systems framework to understand how Black female/white male interracial couples navigated their experiences as an interracial couple. Recognizing that the bullseye visual centers whiteness, describing how it perpetuates systemic oppression, and then re-visualizing the ecological systems framework is an example of the work that is needed by the profession to de-center whiteness.

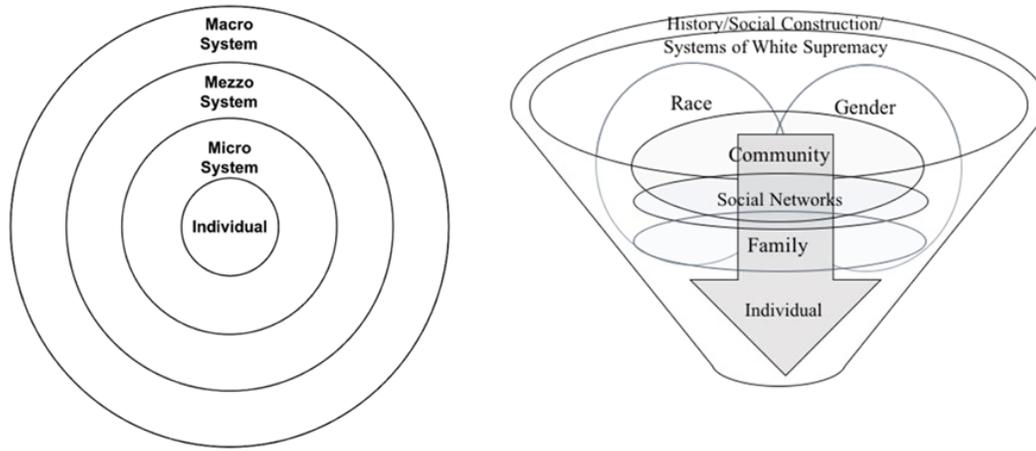
If the profession continues to value social justice, we need to be willing to do the work of reconceptualizing a world and a way of practicing that is antiracist. This work is difficult because of how conditioned we have been by whiteness. Challenging a core component of a profession, such as ecological systems framework, is difficult not only because of how it has been established within the profession, but also because of the linear way of thinking that was used in the original design. Linear notions of understanding are similar to white systemic ways of knowing. We can counter this linear narrative by focusing less on the individual and how they fit within an exclusionary system, and focus more on narratives, testimonials, oral histories, and other ways of knowing that can create a community that

focuses on the actual strengths of every person. Adding a racial justice lens and reconstructing the model is an invitation to move back to humanity, at the same time embed and expand our strengths perspective to include the power of both community and individual identities. Building on Crudup's (2014) original image we are able to see the systems perspective in a way that more accurately represents how the framework applies to all populations, not just white people, with the Revised Ecological Systems Framework (see Figure 3).

Figure 3. *Revised Ecological Systems Framework*



The Revised Ecological Systems Framework converts Crudup's (2014) image that focused on understanding interracial couple identities to a visual that can be applied similarly to the bullseye depiction of the ecological systems framework. This illustration depicts the overlapping systems that have been influenced and constructed through historical and social constructs, while taking into account the strong implications of race and gender at every level and its impact on an individual moving within those systems. The individual therefore is influenced by and interacts with each system while also holding on to their unique self (self-determination). The individual is a part, but not the sole center of the worlds surrounding them.

Figure 4. *Comparison of Traditional and Revised Ecological Systems Framework.*

When viewing the two images side by side (see Figure 4), it is clear the Revised Ecological Systems Framework image is more intersectional. This aspect alone helps in understanding the true influence and relational nature of all systems demonstrating how they converge and impact each other. The individual moves through and is impacted by the community, and thus the community is impacted by the individual. This relational impact helps better depict the Person-in-Environment that is a hallmark of the social work profession. The revisualization of this framework allows us to move from a siloed framework that lends to deficit assumptions to a more inclusive focus on strengths. This neutralizes the model to be strengths focused for all communities, not just those benefiting from white privilege. Simply reflecting on and revisualizing a core framework in the profession, through a decentering lens, we create a counter-narrative that should start a ripple effect across the pillars that has a long lasting and sustainable impact on our communities.

### Creating a Counter-Narrative

In crafting a counter-narrative we recognize that antiracist approaches to social work require us to challenge professional hegemony through deconstructing, disrupting, and dismantling traditional ivory tower conceptualizations of social work scholarship, practice, and education (Tamburro, 2013). We further acknowledge that, historically, antiracist perspectives have fallen short because they “promote equity and parity within a hierarchical system that has been re-inscribed following every movement to dismantle white supremacy” (Pewewardy & Almeida, 2014, p. 234). To reinforce the urgency of the need to de-center white ideology in social work we must also contextualize this counter-narrative within this moment in history, a juncture characterized by the acceptance of Black Americans dying at the astoundingly disproportionate rate of nearly 1 in 1,000 (or 97.9 per 100,000) as a result of a global pandemic (APM Research Lab, 2020) and by the normalization of a President of the United States failing to condemn white supremacy during a presidential debate (National Public Radio, 2020). As Pewewardy & Almeida

(2014) concede, there is “no better way for people to develop the skills and determination to interrupt white supremacy than to be unsettled by anger, fear, and/or guilt” (p. 231). The counter-narrative outlined herein is one that leans into this revolutionary moment, taps into the emerging racial disquietude, and brings to bear our experiences as social workers, educators, scholars, organizers, and activists.

James Baldwin spoke of witness, “witness to what I’ve seen and the possibilities that I think I see” (Lester, 1984, para. 25). Sparked by public witness to the murders of Ahmaud Arbery by armed vigilantes and of Botham Jean, Atatiana Jefferson, Breonna Taylor, Sean Reed, Tony McDade, and George Floyd at the hands of police, brands, companies, businesses, sports teams, universities, and schools of social work all publicized their support for the movement for Black lives. But we also witnessed the emergence of an antiracist narrative that not only failed to challenge the white supremacy master narrative, but served to reinforce it (Monteiro, 2020). We saw rich white capitalists donate millions to Black Lives Matter, while at the same time funding and praise were being heaped upon racial justice and antiracist narratives that remained grounded in conservative ideologies and the existing hegemonic structure (Monteiro, 2020). Then we witnessed the social work profession double back its investment in that white supremacy master narrative while feigning antiracist intentions.

For example, we saw the NASW (2020) issue a statement in support of strengthening social worker and police partnerships in response to the ongoing racist violence perpetrated by law enforcement. We even saw an emergence of performative antiracist messaging among other social work institutions, some of which seemed to acknowledge the need to “address the social ills, inequities and systematic disparities that have divided American society” (Special Commission to Advance Macro Practice in Social Work, personal communication, 29 June 2020) while others seemed to recognize that social work has, “not yet reckoned with the racism and anti-Blackness that exists among ourselves and our key social welfare institutions” (Adams & Dettlaff, 2020, para. 2); very few actually were willing to name white supremacy. Fewer were willing to address the equally destructive nature of oppression perpetuated by fields most closely associated with social work, such as child welfare. The child welfare system is another system complicit with white supremacy across the pillars that the profession must reckon (Dettlaff, 2020). This “well intentioned” system historically has perpetuated and caused harm to individuals and communities of marginalized populations in the name of “helping” (Mulzer & Urs, 2017). The process of moving from witness to action requires us to name and disrupt white supremacy and to craft a counter-narrative that intentionally and specifically de-centers whiteness.

### **Three Pillars of Social Work**

We, as authors, conceptualize social work as consisting of three interlocking pillars: pedagogy, practice, and scholarship. The pillars of social work serve as a system of checks and balances on the profession. Each pillar of the profession is important to ensure the profession is meeting its charge to “promote social justice and social change with and on behalf of clients” (NASW, 2018, para.3). The convergence of pillars outlines the

overarching narrative of what social work aspires to be: practice informing pedagogy and scholarship, scholarship informing practice and pedagogy, and pedagogy informing practice and scholarship. Each pillar must move beyond cultural awareness and individualistic approaches and deconstruct Western ivory tower conceptualizations of pedagogy, practice, and scholarship by holding each linking pillar accountable to do the same. It is also important to highlight that two of the three pillars mostly fall within academia. Those teaching future generations of social workers and advancing social work scholarship must begin doing the work to truly shift the narrative of our racist profession.

McMahon & Allen-Meares (1992) posited the question of whether social work was racist. Their content analysis focused on interventions with historically marginalized populations. They found that the social work profession was superficial in its attempts to be antiracist because of its colorblind approach, its normalized oppression of clients by centering awareness of social workers, its intense focus on the individual rather than the structural systems that need to be addressed to assist the client, and its repetitive nature of normalizing the status quo (McMahon & Allen-Meares, 1992). Despite concluding that, “programs will require a more advocating, proactive, organized, and antiracist stance from the profession” (McMahon & Allen-Meares, 1992, p. 538), the profession continues to struggle with how to actually de-center racist white patriarchal ideologies that infiltrate our pedagogy, practice, and scholarship.

In the almost 30 years since the publication of the work of McMahon & Allen-Meares (1992), it seems as though there is a disconnect among the pillars. While there has been scholarship asking the right questions and determining that the profession needs to move towards being antiracist, there continues to be a struggle to de-center whiteness within each of the pillars (Kolivoski et al., 2018; Maylea, 2020; Pewewardy & Almeida, 2014). The profession itself continues to grapple with how to address the work that must be done to eradicate white supremacist ideologies from within the profession. It is the responsibility of social workers and allied organizations within each pillar to address ways in which we have been and continue to be complicit in perpetuating white patriarchal systems that are harmful to historically marginalized populations.

## **Contextualizing the Pillars**

### **Pedagogy**

The pillar of pedagogy is the foundation of the profession. It is within this pillar the journey of every social worker begins. This pillar is responsible for building a firm understanding of the ethics and values of the profession, the skill set of working with individuals, groups, and community settings, the value of ongoing learning and practitioner self-reflection, and all other aspects of quality related to the social work profession. It is within this pillar that we educate the next generation of scholars on what is valued in scholarship and practice. Field experience is a staple component of the social work pedagogical structure for the preparation and development of the practitioner (CSWE, 2008). Practice and scholarship directly influence what is taught, and what is taught directly influences practice and scholarship. Therefore, pedagogy is the place we often see the

perpetuating of white patriarchal ideas. It is here that much of what has been done in practice or scholarship is seen being repeated as the guide post on how social workers are supposed to practice or conduct research.

A critical conceptualization of social work education frames learning as a practice of freedom, wherein educators create spaces for students to critically and creatively engage reality to discover how to participate in sociocultural transformation (Freire, 1970). De-centering whiteness in social work pedagogy demands that we address underlying colonial philosophies rather than simply altering theoretical frameworks and choosing different methods (Crampton, 2015; Gray et al., 2013). As integrated members in institutions that perpetuate colonization, social work educators have a responsibility not only to decolonize and deconstruct or de-center whiteness in social work (Tamburro, 2013), but to amplify critical antiracist frameworks.

Ideas of “multiculturalism” and “cultural competence” stand in the way of a clear and untethered examination of white supremacy (Kolivoski et al., 2018; Pewewardy & Almeida, 2014). For example, critical race theory is discussed as a pedagogical answer to the shortcomings of social work’s flawed multiculturalism perspectives (Kolivoski et al., 2018), but is not quantified, assured, prioritized or required in standard practice. Doing so would no doubt be met with controversy given that social work tends to conform to prevailing social norms and that any work that counters those racist master narratives tends to be met with experiences of anger, fear, and/or guilt, particularly from white consumers (Pewewardy & Almeida, 2014). In order for pedagogical changes to hold any weight in our lived realities, we must connect them to tangible, material changes in our communities. Otherwise, pedagogical changes only exist to uphold the performance we seek to abandon.

Social work educators must teach students how to recognize and confront colonized approaches and spaces as a means of shifting the educational paradigm beyond colonial constraints. Inclusion of such approaches must move beyond superficial discussions but rather include in depth exploration and practice of how to disrupt generations of historical systemic trauma. New theories that abandon individualism and provide space for a realignment towards truly ethical social work are a starting point for the radical change this moment necessitates. Crudup’s (2014) model, along with the Revised Ecological Systems Framework (see Figure 3) creates a starting point where the true complexity of social problems can be captured, analyzed, and understood pedagogically.

Students in field must develop tools to define and operationalize colonization, decolonization, and deconstruction. Instructors must be able to teach these concepts and be able to critically examine colonized social work classroom spaces and pedagogical approaches. Pedagogy must move beyond the hollow fulfillment of vague accreditation criteria which frames antiracism as a linear objective focused on individual self-reflection, rather than a material reality that is imperative to the health of all of society. Historical context should frame the rationale for why we must deconstruct, disrupt, and dismantle traditional social work pedagogy in our current sociopolitical climate. Social work educators must learn to recognize and confront problematic ways in which we perpetuate educational models that are anti-Black and center whiteness. Social work pedagogy should transform classroom spaces (in-person and online) and shift the educational paradigm. This

would entail a radical reassessment of foundational theories, assessment methods, and institutional cultures. It necessitates that we are actively interrogating our own ideas, supporting one another in accountability, and changing harmful dynamics within our own organizations. We can begin this work by having guest speakers from historically marginalized populations share with our students about topics not directly tied to historically marginalized populations. This avoids the dehumanizing pitfall of tokenizing our colleagues and valuing them for their skill set. Social work educators must equip practitioners and scholars with the language and context to recognize and confront the ideology of white supremacy inherent within hegemonic conceptualizations of the profession. Educators must challenge and recognize ways in which they perpetuate colonized philosophies, pedagogies, and research methodologies. This means that instructors both in the classroom and in the field must name and address the ways racism is threaded through the systems and profession, rather than avoid discussions due to individual discomfort (Hair, 2015). It is imperative that educators can disrupt antiquated anti-Black and white-centered pedagogical practices and explore the role of individual and collective critical consciousness in deconstructing social work education. The Council of Social Work Education must intentionally hold programs accountable to the inclusion of such pedagogical practices and curriculum to ensure that the profession is actively dismantling the racism and oppressive ways that have nestled themselves within the preparation process of practitioners and scholars.

### **Practice**

The practice pillar is the heart of the profession. It is the central realization of the pedagogy taught and the lessons learned from scholarship. It is the practical application of theory that has lasting impact and change on communities and individuals we work with. Practice is the most public-facing, frontline aspect of the field. Social workers have been seen making changes in individual lives, within communities, and influencing policy at local, state, and national levels for almost 150 years. Practice is the profession. It is the implementation of skills taught in the pedagogy pillar and actualization of the evidence-based practices demonstrated in the scholarship pillar. The practice pillar interlocks with scholarship through practice-oriented research, using scholarship to inform practice, and teaming up with scholars to evaluate innovative new practices. This is where the opportunity to perpetuate or prevent harm is most tangible. It is within this pillar that individual social workers have direct contact with historically marginalized populations and are responsible for not invoking further trauma. Without the other pillars doing the work to address this, industry standards continue to gloss over true reparative work that social workers should be doing with individuals and communities. It is the role of licensing committees and regulatory boards to continue to identify, describe, and dismantle ways in which practitioners are held accountable to do no harm-including oppression. At the same time, we must recognize licensing boards are not immune from systemic racism, and may not be the only solution (Castex, 2019; Woodcock, 2016).

Without understanding the impact of colonization, social workers are not prepared to engage in the social justice work that guides our professional values and ethics (Tamburro, 2013). Further, institutions that prepare future practitioners – namely, academia and

professional associations-remain firmly rooted in hegemonic philosophies and practices that perpetuate colonization, oppression, and white supremacy (Gray et al., 2013; Pyles, 2016). The white supremacist ideology inherent within the majority of Western social work literature, teaching methodologies, and practice strategies only serves to perpetuate an oppressive system. This structure does not envision social workers as agents of change, but rather as the cogs of the status quo who foster client dependence on a system that is inherently marginalizing. Social work practice must move away from this dynamic if we ever want to move beyond the lip service of what our value statements are to actualizing an anti-racist and anti-oppressive profession.

Recognizing and dismantling colonized professional practices aligns with anti-oppressive critical theory as well as with critical constructivism (Eketone & Walker, 2013). Practice methodologies that integrate a decolonizing framework focus on critique and deconstruction of and resistance to the dominant Western structures that create and maintain oppression and exploitation while also acknowledge the inherent validity of accumulated knowledge within oppressed societies, particularly socially constructed values, cultural ethics, and language (Eketone & Walker, 2013). Decolonized practice methods are often grounded in a grassroots perspective on professional engagement, looking to community members as experts of their own experiences, strengths, and needs-informed by Native American traditions, worldviews, and practices (Eketone & Walker, 2013).

De-centering whiteness from social work practice requires us to challenge professional hegemony through deconstructing, disrupting, and dismantling Western ivory tower conceptualizations of practice. This work demands that we address underlying colonial philosophies rather than simply altering theoretical frameworks and choosing different methods (Crampton, 2015; Gray et al., 2013;). Practitioners must recognize and confront colonized approaches and spaces as a means of shifting the practice paradigm for working with individuals and communities beyond colonial constraints. Practitioners must become accustomed to dismantling notions of white patriarchal systems that permeate micro, meso, and macro levels of social work. The Revised Ecological Systems Framework is a catalyst to begin this work, which is non linear and a continuous process.

Social workers must be able to identify language and context to recognize and confront the ideology of white supremacy inherent within hegemonic conceptualizations of social work practice. Practitioners must recognize ways in which they perpetuate colonized philosophies, strategies, and practice methodologies, and disrupt antiquated colonial practice approaches. They must learn to move beyond the individualized nature inherent in the core frameworks from which they work to approaching their work through collective critical consciousness that is able to deconstruct social work practice. Organizations like NASW and Association of Social Work Boards (ASWB) must revisit their purpose to not only advocate for communities and social work practitioners but to also ensure that social work professionals are held accountable with service protocols, hiring standards, funding sources, and addressing personal bias.

## Scholarship

The scholarship pillar has legitimized the profession. Through establishing sound evidence to support the work that is done by practitioners, social work researchers provide the evidence needed to justify funding to continue work supported by government and other funding agencies. Social work scholars serve as members of interdisciplinary research teams that impact every aspect of human well-being from the individual to influencing policy change. Beyond evaluating and building knowledge to inform social work practice, the scholarship pillar assesses and evaluates the other two pillars.

While social work scholars have started to recognize and acknowledge the ways in which traditional Western research methods perpetuate colonialism (Gray et al., 2013; Pyles, 2016), the institutions that employ scholars – namely academia, professional associations, and research centers – continue to encourage hegemonic philosophies and practices that promote the perpetuation of oppression and white supremacy. An antiracist social work framework requires that the profession must acknowledge its complicity in colonizing practices and research projects and condemn past and ongoing effects of colonialism (Gray et al., 2013). Evidence based practice – a term social work borrowed from the medical profession (Jenson & Howard, 2013) – is one mechanism that social work scholarship has used as a gatekeeping mechanism. Though gatekeeping is not inherently something to be avoided, we must be cautious on how it is used intentionally or unintentionally to exclude. One way of doing this is to move towards evidence based Africentric practice that ensures a comprehensive scope of the practice when working with our complex society (Gilbert et al., 2009).

De-centering whiteness within the pillar of scholarship means deconstructing oppressive aspects of research from design, implementation, analysis, and dissemination. Decolonized research methodologies align with anti-oppressive critical theory as well as with critical constructivism (Eketone & Walker, 2013). Research methodologies that integrate decolonization frameworks tend to focus on critique and deconstruction of the dominant Western structures that create and maintain oppression and exploitation (Eketone & Walker, 2013). Decolonizing methodologies demonstrate hegemonic resistance through acknowledging the inherent validity of accumulated knowledge within oppressed societies, particularly socially constructed values, cultural ethics, and language (Eketone & Walker, 2013). Social work scholars who integrate decolonized research methods recognize that research involves more than simply visiting a community, doing the work, and leaving (Gray et al., 2013). Gray et al., (2013) reference community-based participatory research (CBPR) as a methodological example, wherein scholars are expected to spend time with participants, become a part of the community, and learn “through direct experience and sustained interaction with people in the community” (p. 15). Decolonized research methods are often informed by a grassroots perspective on scholarship, looking to community members as experts of their own experiences, strengths, and needs.

Social work scholars must undo racism within their research by identifying, describing and dismantling the way it seeps into their work (Kendi, 2019). They must do this at every step of the research process, including examining and naming their own biases, beliefs, and ways of knowing. Critically examining methodologies, theories, and dissemination

practices is a challenge when confronting larger ways of knowing, but must be done to address embedded mechanisms of whiteness that infiltrate knowledge production and dissemination. This means utilizing case studies, participatory action research (PAR), video ethnography, and other methodologies that capture a holistic narrative that critically analyzes beyond the individual and captures more than the depersonalizing nature of solely reductive quantitative scholarship. PAR is viewed as an example of a decolonized approach, one in which people from the community are engaged from problem definition through to findings dissemination (Gray et al., 2013). Grounded in critical constructivism, video ethnography integrates elements of a decolonized research methodology by enabling researchers to reobserve, and analyze, the nuances of an interview that are not always captured, documented, or remembered through “re-living” a live account of the interview leading to greater accuracy and more information gleaned (Gottdiener, 1979).

One of the most notable organizations to advance and legitimize the scholarship pillar is the Society for Social Work and Research (SSWR). SSWR “advances, disseminates, and translates research that addresses issues of social work practice and policy and promotes a diverse, just, and equitable society” (SSWR, 2021, para. 5). Though this mission aligns well with the NASW Code of Ethics’ description of a profession that promotes social justice and social change, not one of the seven statements of its mission explicitly references the promotion of a diverse, just, and equitable society. Nor does the SSWR mission include the disruption and deconstruction of white patriarchal systemic ways of knowing through methodologies or dissemination. Social work scholars and organizations must deconstruct colonial ways of conducting and disseminating research to de-center mechanisms of whiteness with the social work profession. This includes acknowledging ways of complicity and reflecting on the ways scholarship impacts the other pillars by shackling knowledge production through perpetuating white patriarchal norms within the profession. Rather than being a resource for social work practitioners, responding to the needs in the field, institutions separate themselves and create barriers for collaboration. One example of this includes exorbitant conference fees. Another is scholarship published behind a paywall, where it often remains within academia, inhibiting the ability for meaningful scholarship to reach the people who need it most.

## Conclusion

*...it is absolutely too late for you to be an ally. At this moment in history, as we move to abolish racism, it calls for you to either be an accomplice or completely get out of the way. ~ Rev. Dr. Stephany Rose Spaulding (Spaulding, 2020, para. 1)*

In recognizing that white supremacy is a mechanism of social control, that our current social structure is grounded in liberal-patriarchal capitalism, and that professional social work tends to conform to prevailing social norms (Pewewardy & Almeida, 2014), we have to acknowledge social work’s complicity in perpetuating a white supremacist master narrative. If the social work profession is going to continue forward with such aspirational values such as service, social justice, dignity and worth of the individual, integrity, competence, and the importance of human relationships (NASW, 2018), then we have to

be intentional about de-centering whiteness in scholarship, practice, and pedagogy. There must be an immediacy to this work. The interlocking pillars create an accountability system that can and should hold the profession accountable in decentering whiteness. Each pillar has a responsibility to do their part and not leave it to another pillar to pick up and lead, we all must be leaders in actualizing the values of our profession. It is time to move beyond identifying and describing the ways that white supremacy have infiltrated the three pillars of social work and move to dismantle this master narrative. Counter-narratives, such as re-visualizing the ecological systems theory, de-center whiteness by centering humanity. In replacing archaic structures with reimagined, multidimensional models, we, as authors, offer a new narrative for social workers that reflects both lived reality and a future grounded in community centered healing, change, and power.

### References

- Adams, L., & Dettlaff, A. (2020, June 18). *An open letter to NASW and allied organizations on social work's relationship with law enforcement*. <https://medium.com/@alandettlaff/an-open-letter-to-nasw-and-allied-organizations-on-social-works-relationship-with-law-enforcement-1a1926c71b28>
- APM Research Lab. (2020, September 16). *The color of coronavirus: COVID-19 deaths by race and ethnicity in the U.S.* <https://www.apmresearchlab.org/covid/deaths-by-race>
- Bronfenbrenner, U. (1986). Ecology of the family as a context for human development: Research perspectives. *Developmental Psychology*, 22(6), 723-742. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0012-1649.22.6.723>
- Castex, S. (2019). Microaggressions and racial privilege within the social work profession: The social work licensing examinations. *Journal of Ethnic & Cultural Diversity in Social Work*, 28(2), 211-228. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15313204.2018.1555498>
- Council on Social Work Education. (2015). Educational Policy and Accreditation Standards. [https://www.cswe.org/getattachment/Accreditation/Accreditation-Process/2015-EPAS/2015EPAS\\_Web\\_FINAL.pdf.aspx](https://www.cswe.org/getattachment/Accreditation/Accreditation-Process/2015-EPAS/2015EPAS_Web_FINAL.pdf.aspx)
- Crampton, A. (2015). Decolonizing social work “best practices” through a philosophy of impermanence. *Journal of Indigenous Social Development*, 4(1), 1-11.
- Crudup, C. N. (2014). *A multi-decade look at Black female/White male interracial marriages* (Unpublished doctoral dissertation). Arizona State University, Tempe.
- Dettlaff, A. (2020, October 29). *Dismantling oppressive systems: Toward a new society powered by our moral imagination* [Keynote address]. 2020 Virtual Legislative Education and Advocacy Day: Reimagining Social Work. Lansing, MI, United States.
- Eketone, A., & Walker, S. (2013). Kaupapa Maori social work research. In M. Gray, J. Coates, M. Yellow Bird, & T. Hetherington, *Decolonizing social work* (pp. 259-270). Ashgate Publishing Limited.

- Freire, P. (1970). *Pedagogy of the oppressed*. Continuum.
- Gilbert, D. J., Harvey, A. R., & Belgrave, F. Z. (2009). Advancing the Africentric paradigm shift discourse: Building toward evidence-based Africentric interventions in social work practice with African Americans. *Social Work, 54*(3), 243-252. <https://doi.org/10.1093/sw/54.3.243>
- Gottdiener, M. (1979). Field research and video tape. *Sociological Inquiry, 49*(4), 59-65. <https://doi.org/10.1093/sw/54.3.243>
- Gray, M., Coates, J., Yellow Bird, M., & Hetherington, T. (2013). *Decolonizing Social Work*. Ashgate Publishing Limited.
- Hair, H. (2015). Supervision conversations about social justice and social work practice. *Journal of Social Work, 15*(4), 349-370. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1468017314539082>
- Jenson, J., & Howard, M. (2013). Evidence-based practice. *Encyclopedia of Social Work*. <https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780199975839.013.137>
- Karls, J. M., & Wandrei, K. E. (1994). *The PIE manual*. NASW Press.
- Kendi, I. X. (2019). *How to be an antiracist* (1st ed.). One World.
- Kolivoski, K., Weaver, A., & Constance-Huggins, M. (2018). Critical Race Theory: Opportunities for application in social work practice and policy. *Families in Society, 95*(4), 269-276. <https://doi.org/10.1606/1044-3894.2014.95.36>
- Lester, J. (1984, May 27). James Baldwin-reflections of a maverick. *The New York Times*. <https://movies2.nytimes.com/books/98/03/29/specials/baldwin-reflections.html>
- Longres, J. (1972). The impact of racism on social work education. *Journal of Education for Social Work, 8*(1), 31-41. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00220612.1972.10671900>
- Maylea, C. (2020). The end of social work. *The British Journal of Social Work, 51*(2), 772-789. <https://doi.org/10.1093/bjsw/bcaa203>
- McMahon, A., & Allen-Meares, P. (1992). Is social work racist? A content analysis of recent literature. *Social Work, 37*(6), 533-539. <https://doi.org/10.1093/sw/37.6.533>
- Monteiro, A. (2020, September 2). *The invention of Ibram X Kendi and the ideological crises of our time*. Black Agenda Report. <https://blackagendareport.com/invention-ibram-x-kendi-and-ideological-crises-our-time>
- Move to End Violence. (2016, September 7). *Ally or co-conspirator?: What it means to act #InSolidarity*. <https://movetoendviolence.org/blog/ally-co-conspirator-means-act-insolidarity/>
- Mulzer, A., & Urs, T. (2017). However kindly intentioned: Structural racism and volunteer CASA programs. *CUNY Law Review, 20*(23), 23-76. <https://ssrn.com/abstract=2924920>

- National Association of Social Workers [NASW]. (2018). *Code of ethics*.  
<https://www.socialworkers.org/About/Ethics/Code-of-Ethics/Code-of-Ethics-English>
- NASW. (2020, June 15). *Social workers cooperate with police forces*.  
<https://www.wsj.com/articles/social-workers-cooperate-with-police-forces-11592255480?>
- National Public Radio. (2020, September 30). *From debate stage, Trump declines to denounce white supremacy*. <https://www.npr.org/2020/09/30/918483794/from-debate-stage-trump-declines-to-denounce-white-supremacy>
- Park, Y. (2008) Facilitating injustice: Tracing the role of social workers in the World War II internment of Japanese Americans. *The Social service review*, 82.3(2008), 447-483. <https://doi.org/10.1086/592361>
- Pewewardy, N., & Almeida, R. (2014). Articulating the scaffolding of White supremacy: The act of naming in liberation. *Journal of Progressive Human Services*, 25(3), 230-253. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10428232.2014.940485>
- Pyles, L. (2016). Decolonising disaster social work: Environmental justice and community participation. *British Journal of Social Work*, 47(3), 630-647. <https://doi.org/10.1093/bjsw/bcw028>
- Renn, K. A. (2003). Understanding the identities of mixed-race college students through a developmental ecology lens. *Journal of College Student Development*, 44(3), 383-403. <https://doi.org/10.1353/csd.2003.0032>
- Root, M. P. P. (2001). *Love's revolution: Interracial marriage*. Temple University Press.
- Safehouse Progressive Alliance for Nonviolence. (2008). *Building a multi-ethnic, inclusive & antiracist organization: Tools for liberation packer*.  
<https://www.safehousealliance.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/10/Tools-for-Liberation-Packet-SPAN.pdf>
- Seshadri, G., & Knudson-Martin, C. (2013). How couples manage interracial and intercultural differences: Implications for clinical practice. *Journal of Marital and Family Therapy*, 39(1), 43-58. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1752-0606.2011.00262.x>
- Shannon, B. E. (1970). Implications of white racism for social work practice. *Social Casework*, 51(5), 270-276. <https://doi.org/10.1177/104438947005100503>
- Society for Social Work and Research. (2021). *About SSWR*.  
<https://secure.sswr.org/about-sswr/>
- Spaulding, S. R. (2020). White folks: It's too late for 'allies' [op-ed].  
<https://www.colorlines.com/articles/white-folks-its-too-late-allies-op-ed>
- Stormshak, E. A., & Dishion, T. J. (2002). An ecological approach to child and family clinical and counseling psychology. *Clinical Child and Family Psychology Review*, 5(3), 197-215. <https://doi.org/10.1023/a:1019647131949>

- Tamburro, A. (2013). Including decolonization in social work education and practice. *Journal of Indigenous Social Development*, 2(1), 1-16.
- Tuzzolo, E. (2016, August 14). Now... where do you draw the line? [Facebook post]. <https://www.facebook.com/photo.php?fbid=10155008422952523&set=a.85127512522.81621.626002522&type=3&theater>
- Woodcock, R. (2016). Abuses and Mysteries at the Association of Social Work Boards. *Research on Social Work Practice*, 26(2), 225-231. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1049731515574346>

**Author note:** Address correspondence to Chandra Crudup, School of Social Work, Arizona State University, Phoenix, AZ, 85004. Email: ccrudup@asu.edu

**Acknowledgment:** Some content within this article was previously presented in the unpublished doctoral dissertation *A Multi-Decade Look at Black Female/White Male Interracial Marriages* (Crudup, 2014).