

Wringing Out the “Whitewash”: Confronting the Hegemonic Epistemologies of Social Work Canons (Disrupting the Reproduction of White Normative)

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Abstract: *In the 21st Century context of violent racial divides, dismantling racism in social work education requires deep trust that social transformation and healing is possible. “Wringing out the whitewash” metaphorically captures the heavy labor of interrupting the rigid Eurocentric epistemological hegemony undergirding the pedagogy, research, and praxis canons of social work. It requires rigorous attempts to unsettle and decenter entrenched white supremacist ideology, assumptions, and values. In this labor, we create space for the multiple identities and worldviews that students and professors occupy to reshape educational encounters. In this paper, we present our critical pedagogical approaches as Black social work educators committed to liberation and healing. We articulate how our positionalities as Black cisgender women at urban universities, one a Northeastern Historically Black College and University (HBCU) and another at a Northeastern public university, facilitate our intentions to honor truth-telling and intergenerational interdependence. We present differences and similarities in how we use assignments to disrupt the institutional reproduction of racism, provide solace for repair and healing, and re-center collective identity as strength. We present transdisciplinary frameworks shaping our pedagogical choices, namely historical trauma and urban womanist social work pedagogy. Implications for the future of social work education will be discussed.*

Keywords: *Anti-black racism, womanist, historical trauma, dismantling white supremacy*

“...the function, the very serious function of racism...is distraction. It keeps you from doing your work. It keeps you explaining, over and over again, your reason for being. Somebody says you have no language and you spend twenty years proving that you do. Somebody says your head isn’t shaped properly so you have scientists working on the fact that it is. Somebody says you have no art, so you dredge that up. Somebody says you have no kingdoms, so you dredge that up. None of this is necessary. There will always be one more thing. (Morrison et al., 1975)

What is predominantly known as mainstream American social work education is often focused upon the contributions of the founding White mothers of social work, such as Jane Addams and Mary Richmond (Carlton-LaNey, 1999; Johnson, 1991). Their stories, while significant, do not represent the full story; it’s part of a historical “whitewash” of social work to be wrung out to see the full legacy of social work education and practice, while reimagining what is possible today. Schools of social work

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Copyright © 2021 Authors, Vol. 21 No. 2/3 (Summer 2021), 566-587, DOI: 10.18060/24475



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at the turn of the 19th century in the U.S. were primarily designed by White women to address the social ills promulgated by White men who were early capitalist industrialists (Carlton-LaNey, 1999; Reid-Merritt, 2010; Reisch, 1998). Educational practices in these institutions were informed by the cultural values, priorities, religious bents, assumptions and interests of White women, presented as universal and objective, centering a medicalized model (Bowles et al., 2016; Reisch, 1998). Additionally, these institutions were mostly inaccessible for Black, Indigenous, and other racial groups due to de facto and de jure racial and class segregation (Reisch, 1998).

The concept of social work birthed through the Black community centers the ideas of health, wealth, and well-being through a cultural lens of principles, values, and purposes (Carlton-LaNey, 1999). Social work developed by Blacks was a form of mutual aid which promoted collective efficacy for community survival, racial pride, and advancement (Carlton-LaNey, 1999; Crewe et al., 2008; Gary & McLure, 1969). The legacies of Black and Indigenous people, and People of Color (BIPOC) in social work and social work education emerged from a need for not only representation but grounding in values, practices, and ways of knowing that reflected these ethnic and racial groups. The marginalization of these historical contributions is a loss for contemporary practice.

In this paper, we explore the use of historical (Carlton-LaNey, 1999) and contemporary frameworks created by Black social workers to disrupt white supremacy in social work education. Through our duoethnography we discuss how womanism (Maparyan, 2012; Phillips & McCaskill, 1995) and historical trauma frameworks (Brave Heart, 1998) as well as Black liberation pedagogy (King, 2017; Jennings & Lynn, 2005; Perlow et al., 2018) can support social work educators to deconstruct, antagonize, reconstruct, and re-center narratives of social problems. As Black cisgender women who are social work educators, we utilize the collective intellect of lived experiences, public scholarship, cultural history, and transdisciplinary knowledge to “wring out the whitewash” of the educational process that attempts to erase the contributions of Black and Brown lives.

We present differences and similarities in how we alchemize the social work classroom in our respective institutions through assignments and activities at Northeastern urban universities, one a historically Black college and university (HBCU) and the other a public urban research university. We discuss examples of how we create transformative spaces for interrogating institutional reproduction of racism, provide solace for repair and healing, and re-center collective identity as strength to (re)locate power and knowledge production through a mutually-engaged space (Dillard, 2016; Huckaby, 2013; Jennings & Lynn, 2005; McGee & Stovall, 2015). We explore how students navigate and respond to the core content of social work education juxtaposed alongside their lived experiences of systemic violence, historical trauma, and anti-Black racism (McLane-Davison, 2017). In sharing how we honor truth-telling and intergenerational interdependence within the classroom, we explore how lived experiences become products of knowledge and power. Lastly, implications for the future of social work education will be discussed.

Our Positionalities

Our Blackness Embodied in Academic Spaces

As Black women in the academy, confronting white supremacy is embodied in our very existence. Our positionalities, defined as factors influencing our identities, social locations, access to power, targeting for oppression, cultural legacies of strength, and dynamic historical compositions, inform our definition of education. Black women's positionalities are shaped by the material consequences and rewards of their lived experiences at the intersection of critical race, class, gender, and power constructs. Neither monolithic nor mutually exclusive, a collective identity is molded through historical resistance of oppression and domination as a result of colonialism, imperialism, slavery, apartheid, and other forms of white supremacy. Positionality affords a sense of consciousness that intentionally centers Black women's agency of self-definition and worldview (Collins, 1998; Huckaby, 2013; Mullings, 2000).

Our pedagogical approaches and the histories that we lean upon to engage and prepare our students is informed by our positionalities. Who we are, as represented in our positionalities, shapes why and how we teach and the aspirations that move us beyond the classroom or institutional walls.

Ortega-Williams: I identify as a Black, queer, cisgender woman with family lineages stemming from Greensboro, North Carolina and Barbados. My family roots, by way of the Great Migration of Southern and Caribbean Blacks to New York City (NYC), brought my people to Harlem and the Bronx, NY, where I was born and raised in low-income public housing in the late 70s and 80s. My heritage is relevant as an educator because people like me were often clients, not social workers. My mother, labeled a "recipient" of public assistance, carried the War on Poverty on her back. Our encounter with subpar institutions and systemic violence, including wage theft, labor exploitation, and divested dilapidated housing was not theoretical. My grandmother, who worked as a maid in high-rise hotels in Manhattan, migrated to NYC from the South at 13 years old without her parents; we never fully knew her story or the harm she encountered during segregation, her silence about racialized terror was common--she was taught, like so many others to keep going to survive. As an organizer and activist, education for me is alchemy--it is a key ingredient for how we decalcify, heal, and transform the world in which we are living.

McLane-Davison: **I create Freedom Fighters!** My teaching pedagogy is centered in Black Feminist/Womanist/Africana (BFWA) epistemologies and informed by my positionality as a first-generation college graduate from the streets of Chicago's South Side. My teaching pedagogy is furthermore enhanced and developed through my research, scholarship, and professional service to both the National Association of Black Social Workers (NABSW) and the Council on the Role and Status of Women in Social Work Education, with the Council on Social Work Education. Graduation from the NABSW's African-Centered Academy in 2001, where I learned culturally-specific methods of social work practice by African American scholars, as well as teaching and contributing to the curriculum of HIV/AIDS through the American Red Cross (1993-

2000) are essential benchmarks in my understanding of the unique strengths of adult learning.

Our Professional Contexts

Ortega-Williams works at a large public school of social work in NYC. The student body there, in particular in the bachelor of social work program (BSW), is majority working-class. Our students are resilient, vocal, and powerful. Often they are juggling many responsibilities while managing coursework, internships, and family obligations. Racially, ethnically, and financially diverse, many students are also international, leaving their home countries and support networks. Some students have physical, mental, and developmental health needs or are facing food and housing insecurity. Many students transfer from associate degree programs and describe fighting their way into a BSW or masters of social work (MSW) program and are proud of their accomplishments. Most express that they want to give back to the communities and countries from which they come, inspired by their personal and collective legacies of survival, power, and historical contribution.

McLane-Davison teaches at a 153-year-old HBCU (Historically Black College & University) in the heart of a northeastern urban community which boasts an abundance of Black and Brown neighbors. The 45-year-old School of Social Work prioritizes the alleviation of human suffering through ethically proficient services grounded in the strengths of its urban residents both locally and throughout the African Diaspora (McLane-Davison, 2017; Wells-Wilbon et al., 2016). Graduates of the BSW, MSW, and PhD programs champion the intergenerational resilience, research, and strength-based strategies which promote social justice, and improve the quality of life for diverse urban populations. While the campus faculty and staff have become more ethnically and racially diverse over the years, the majority of the students in the MSW social work program self-identify as first-generation college students, cis-gender females of African ancestry, and from working class families. Most recently, the global reach of the university as a “premiere urban research university” has produced a welcoming home for social work students also self-identifying as non-binary, LGBTQ, Latinx, veterans, and recent immigrants from African and middle eastern countries. The signature competency of urban social work advances ethically inclusive concepts and theories of the African-centered perspective, cultural competency, empowerment, and advocacy, and also strength and resilience as critical concepts and theories (Wells-Wilbon et al., 2016). Undergirding the concept of urban social work is the implied accountability of disrupting the nuances of race, gender, and class divisions which have reproduced systems of policies that reproduce historical discrimination.

Literature Review

White supremacy within social work education is a self-reproducing whitewash deeply woven into the content and approach to learning. Our strategies for wringing out the whitewash are to situate our social work pedagogy within the legacy of BIPOC social work scholars, researchers, and freedom fighters. For the scope of this paper, we focus

on the contributions to our educational approaches of 1) the historical trauma framework, 2) principles and practices of Black historical social work leaders, 3) womanist social work pedagogy, and 4) Black liberation pedagogy.

Historical Trauma and Social Work Education

Students and educators enter the educational space carrying not only their lived experiences, but also the journeys of their people. Educational frameworks that acknowledge the collective historical pain, strength, and hopes that inform students and educators create a wider frame for growth and deep learning. Historical trauma has been defined as a soul-wound, cumulative trauma, unresolved grief, and compounded losses experienced at the collective mass group-level, such as a racial and ethnic group, during oppression (Brave Heart, 1998). Dr. Maria Yellow Horse Brave Heart, a Lakota social worker, sought to theorize why there were disparities in health among the Lakota (Brave Heart, 1998). She extended the social determinants of health framework by accounting not just for proximal factors, such as lack of access to sustainable housing, but also distal factors such as intentional genocide, exploitation, and purposeful cultural disruption (Brave Heart, 1998). One of her contributions with the historical trauma framework was that the collective harm experienced at the mass group-level from subjugation had negative impacts intergenerationally upon the psychological, spiritual, physical, behavioral, and social well-being of Lakota people (Brave Heart et al., 2011). Empirical evidence is emerging about the consequences of historical trauma upon health and well-being. For example, psychological and physiological distress connected to the loss of language and access to cultural lands has been documented through measuring historical loss and unresolved grief (Whitbeck et al., 2004). Additionally, disruption of original instructions for diet during subjugation has impacted diabetes rates (Walters et al., 2020). As measures and frameworks continue to be developed, the connection between distal factors such as historical traumas upon proximal factors in stress process models can be explored (Walls & Whitbeck, 2012). Lastly, more robust interventions can be designed, including supporting community connectedness and land reclamation to address the harm from historical trauma (Harvey, 2018; Kaur, 2020; Schultz et al., 2016; Walters et al., 2011).

The historical trauma framework is an important lens for social work education to support transformation among students and faculty. In particular, it makes social work education more responsive to the needs of African Americans and other racial and ethnic groups that have experienced racial subjugation and oppression. In the historical trauma framework, contemporary injustices from systemic racism compound the pain of an intergenerational trauma response (Brave Heart, 1998; DeGruy-Leary, 2005; Walls & Whitbeck, 2012). The intergenerational impact of historical trauma is maintained socially. Sotero (2006) conceptualized that there are four primary social pathways that initiate and maintain a historical trauma response, which are segregation, systematic physical and psychological violence, economic destruction, and cultural dispossession. Additionally, colorism, discrimination based on skin tone, and in particular conferring social privileges for phenotypical proximity to Whites including skin color and facial features, is theorized to be a key mechanism of historical trauma and racism (Ortega-

Williams et al., 2019). For example, several studies found patterns suggesting that African Americans with what is considered deeper skin tones are more likely to experience increased racial discrimination, which has been associated with psychological distress, increased school pushout, harsher prison sentences, and increased likelihood of being killed by police (Alexander, 2012; Crutchfield et al., 2017; Hunter, 2007; Viglione et al., 2010).

The historical trauma framework offers an additional lens for understanding patterns of systemic violence and social injustice, as well as the intergenerational harm from oppression. The historical trauma framework disrupts the dominant social work educational canon, which primarily trains social workers to respond to contemporary environmental stressors or psychological harm within the lifespan (Hutchinson, 2015). Preparing social workers to investigate the intergenerational patterns of oppression and mechanisms that sustain intergenerational harm shifts the focus, pedagogically. It also offers social workers who identify with racial and ethnic groups that have experienced historical trauma a new frame for self-understanding and healing.

The historical trauma framework within social work education shifts the purpose of the educational encounter. In a White supremacist context, education is not fundamentally designed to support the power and healing of BIPOC, who have been historically subjugated and marginalized. Social work education, as an institution founded within a White supremacist, heteronormative, patriarchal context, has assumptions, values, practices, and priorities that also reflect a racist paradigm. Often, the legacy of social work which prioritizes and emphasizes the contributions of White foremothers simultaneously erases the strengths, cultural resources, and leadership of BIPOC social workers (Carlton-LaNey & Burwell, 2014; Johnson, 1991; Schiele, 2017). Social work education has the opportunity to not only interrupt white supremacy ideologically, but also work to repair the harm social workers have been trained to enact, which violates our stated ideals. White supremacy within social work education “distorts, erases, excludes, stigmatizes, stereotypes, renders invisible, impotent, or makes [BIPOC] hypervisible while Whites are depicted as noble, brave, innocent, and establishes rationale for the current order” (King, 2017, p. 96). Dismantling white supremacy within social work education, using the historical trauma framework, encourages educators to interrogate how our pedagogical approaches maintain systemic violence and reinforce historical trauma. Emphasizing the historical contributions of BIPOC within one’s curriculum is a strategy to disrupt white supremacy while embracing cultural strengths and resources.

Rinsing the Stain of Racism: A Black Social Work Historical Attempt

Black social workers, from the pioneers of the Progressive Era (Bowles et al., 2016; Carlton-LaNey, 1999; Martin & Martin, 1985) to those active in the Black Lives Matter Movement today, have understood the dynamic production of oppression as a result of racialized capitalism and patriarchy (Gilbert, 1974; Howard, 2017; Schiele, 2017; Brice & McLane-Davison, 2020). Training social work students in the legacy of Black social

workers strategically decenters the narrative of white supremacy within the profession (Harvey, 2018).

The 1968 Position Statement of the NABSW challenged the directional impact of social work at the National Conference on Social Welfare's (NCSW) 95th Annual Forum and Exposition Program (Jaggers, 2003; Johnson, 1978; Reid-Merritt, 2010). NABSW demanded "Black people who speak, write, research and evaluate be Black community and be Black people who are experts in this area" (Jaggers, 2003, p. 20). This assertion of self-determination represented academically trained professionals, as well as the collective resistance of community stakeholders, government and non-profit representatives, social welfare experts, faith leaders, and social workers addressing structural racism (Reid-Merritt, 2010; Brice & McLane-Davison, 2020). Additionally, NABSW confrontationally addressed the governing of NCSW's dual loyalty to the political state of social welfare systems under the Nixon administration as simultaneously serving "as a tool for oppression of Black people as well as social workers providing services" (Jaggers, 2003, p. 20).

NABSW in its 1968 founding operationalized its earlier position statement by insisting on the integration of the Black perspective (Johnson, 1978; Reid-Merritt, 2010) into schools of social work curriculum as a national priority. This content was to include "The Black Community and Social Policy, the Black Community and Behavior, the Black Community and Methods, and the Black Community and Research" (Chunn, 1975, p. 5) as sequential areas in methods, behavior, policy, and research (Chunn, 1975). The significance of these demands captured the urgency of the social work profession to recognize the unique cultural resilience and competency of populations external to European Western values and norms. The NABSW declarations especially called attention to the critical ways that social welfare and public policies intersected with Black lives to reinforce messages of pathology and systems of structural racism (Jaggers, 2003; Martin & Martin, 1995; Reid-Merritt, 2010).

Whitney M. Young, Jr., Executive Director of The National Urban League at the 1968 NCSW meeting affirmed the position of NABSW through his closing address, "*Reason and Responsibility in the Elimination of Bigotry and Poverty*" (Young, 1968, p. 141). He asserted the need for social workers to redirect their attention from "pathologies and problems" and "the stereotyped projection of Black people throughout history; the lack of inclusion of Black people in a dignified and correct place in history" (Young, 1968, p. 144). Young (1968) insisted that the social workers and social service systems take seriously the findings of the 1968 Report of The National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders, also known as, "The Kerner Commission Report" which specifically names "white racism" as both the perpetrator and weapon. "White racism means that the large majority of White people in this country do, in fact, believe deep down inside in a concept of White superiority" (Young, 1968, p. 144). Young furthermore attends to the impact of White racism and its devastating impact on essential welfare agencies of education, housing, and economics for populations caught in the crosshairs. Notably social workers are called out as an enabler in the reproduction of systems of oppression which locate the problem in person without social accountability. Young, similar to the NABSW, called for an atonement of the profession to recognize

the dignity, worth, and rights of poor people, “Mexican Americans, Indians, Puerto Ricans, Appalachian whites” (Young, 1968, p. 146) and Black Power by aligning with their need for social and political action.

In summary, historically Black social workers maintained a collective resilience by insisting on their right to self-define and determine their path towards liberation. As professionals entering a field with financial loyalty to a political system of structural racism, they knew that they would need to preserve the narrative about Black humanity, by disrupting pathologizing messages imbedded in the training and practice of social work (Bowles et al., 2016; Jagers, 2003; Reid-Merritt, 2010; Brice & McLane-Davison, 2020).

Womanist Social Work and Black Liberation Pedagogies

Womanist pedagogy emboldens the practice wisdom of lived experiences along with the cultural research and theory that antagonizes the normalcy of oppression (Collins, 1998; Marr, 2015; Phillips & McCaskill, 1995). Womanist pedagogy privileges “her” voice as the authority of “her” narrative (Marr, 2015). This transformative pedagogy nestles itself in the human liberation of Black women’s labor, struggle, leadership, and knowledge production at the intersection of multiple structures of inequity (Phillips & McCaskill, 1995). Honoring truth-telling through multimedia forms of communication, womanist pedagogy invites an interconnected and intergenerational way of capturing the rituals, values, tradition, and heritage of producing education (McLane-Davison, 2017).

Black liberation pedagogy, like womanist social work pedagogy, prepares Black people to not just participate in society but transform it and oneself in the process towards collective healing and freedom (Fanon, 1963). Education in a white supremacist social context serves to maintain the status quo; it is not benign, innocent, neutral, universal or objective (King, 2017). Education, as a social institution, reproduces society, including its hierarchies of power. Historically, the dominant educational values and priorities in the United States justified and served the interests of enslavement and oppression (Asante, 1991; Schiele, 1996; Williams, 1987; Zinn, 2003). Ideologies of racial inferiority and superiority were reified in the canons taught to all children, no matter how detrimental (Asante, 1991). Therefore, Black liberation pedagogy is a requirement for true education for Black people in a White supremacist context; it creates the conditions to recover from miseducation that distorted one’s people’s history, legacy, contribution, power, and even existence (Byrd, 2016; King, 2017).

In summary, the historical trauma framework, the principles and perspectives of historical Black social work leaders, and the womanist social work and Black liberation pedagogies can be used for a multidimensional liberatory lens. In our experience, the lenses can be integrated into the explicit and implicit curriculums to disrupt white supremacy in social work education that fulfills the Educational Policy and Accreditation Standards (EPAS), see Table 1.

Table 1. *Pedagogical Approaches to Shift White Supremacy in Social Work Education*

Pedagogical Approach	Principles and Priorities	Assignment Example	Social Work Competencies
Womanist Social Work Pedagogy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Confronting the hegemonic epistemology of social work canons. • Interrogate the dominant theories written by White men, often prioritized in social work. • Collectively elevate students' lived experiences as authoritative knowledge-bases. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nommo assignment is an autoethnographic assignment which invites students to engage in the exploration of their birth through the origin of their name. • Self-determination & self-naming are explored as we talk about the multiple interpretations of parenthood, Black motherhood, & family. • Unpacking the fear of being “too Black” through a name & the invitation of discrimination. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Engage with Individuals, Families, Groups, Organizations, & Communities</i> (CSWE, 2015, p. 8). • Apply knowledge of human behavior & the social environment, person-in-environment, & other multidisciplinary theoretical frameworks to engage with clients & constituencies.
Grounding in Historical Education about Black Social Workers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Non-oppressive social functioning • Economic development • Political empowerment • Institution building • Self-determination • Mutual aid • Pan-Africanism • Black alliances & national coalitions • Civic engagement • Strength of Black Families • Liberation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Exploring the significance of “The Black Experience” through voice & labor. • Social workers' complacency in White racism through the definition of “problem & pathology” of Black & poor lives & any group outside of whiteness. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Engage Diversity & Difference in Practice</i> (CSWE, 2015, p. 7). • Apply & communicate understanding of the importance of diversity & difference in shaping life experiences in practice at the micro-, mezzo-, & macro-levels.
Black Liberation Pedagogy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create the conditions to recover from miseducation that distorted Black people's history, legacy, contribution, power, & existence. • Eject white supremacist values, priorities, & practices • Rediscovering, restoring, & remixing Black cultural resources & technologies to advance collective healing & freedom. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review Erik Erikson's psychosocial developmental theory in juxtaposition to Kimberlé Crenshaw's intersectionality theory to explore implications of discrimination upon development based on race, class, gender, & orientation. • Investigate culturally-rooted practices & heritage, especially when working with those who are BIPOC. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Advance Human Rights & Social, Economic, & Environmental Justice</i> (CSWE, 2015, p. 7) • Apply their understanding of social, economic, & environmental justice to advocate for human rights
Historical Trauma and Social Work Education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Acknowledge distal & proximal social determinants of health, beyond the lifespan (intergenerational) • Expand awareness of historical trauma: mass group-level harm from oppression & mass group-level strengths from survival & healing. • Identify social work's historical & contemporary role in perpetuating white supremacy & oppression. • Work to undo these practices & policies to interrupt the historical trauma response within the classroom. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Build historical timelines to challenge white supremacist dominant narratives. • Investigate the time period when theories gained popularity to understand their role in the social environment. • Visibilize & examine positionalities, including power & privilege of the theorists. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Intervene with Individuals, Families, Groups, Organizations, & Communities Competency</i> (CSWE, 2015, p. 9) • Critically choose & implement interventions to achieve practice goals & enhance capacities of clients & constituencies

Confronting the Hegemonic Epistemology of Social Work Canons

The labor of “wringing out the whitewash” as Black social work educators requires a systematic and intentional approach to the selection, cultivation, and development of knowledge. It is a process in which educators and students: 1) interrogate the dominant theories written by White men, often prioritized in social work, and 2) collectively elevate students’ lived experiences as authoritative knowledge-bases. The activities and assignments used in our respective educational contexts, applying the theoretical perspectives described, will be presented below with brief examples.

Interrogating the Dominant Theories Written by White Men

"A pedagogical activity that supports wringing out white supremacy is interrogation. For example, the dominant theoretical perspectives in Human Behavior and the Social Environment (HBSE) such as the developmental, social constructionist, psychodynamic, humanistic, behavioral, systems, exchange and choice, and conflict perspectives, are rooted in the theorizing of White men (Hutchinson, 2015). Whitewashing erases and marginalizes BIPOC contributors and universalizes White male theorists.

In HBSE, using theories, worldviews, values and perspectives that are rooted in BIPOC scholarship, research, and lived experiences de-centers white supremacy. For example, when reviewing Erik Erikson’s psychosocial developmental theory, Kimberlé Crenshaw’s (1991) intersectionality theory is used in juxtaposition to explore the implications of discrimination based on race, class, gender, and orientation on development (Hutchinson, 2015). Students investigate structural racism’s impact at micro-, meso-, and macro-levels to further their understanding of development, which is not commonly addressed in Erikson’s theory.

Historical timelines are also critical when challenging white supremacy within the classroom. Collectively students and faculty investigate the time period when certain theories gained popularity and examine the positionalities of the theorists. Additionally, the class analyzes macro- and meso-level events that mark the time period inside and outside of the United States. For example, when our White-centered texts talk about the White-led Settlement House movement, with Jane Addams at the forefront, students were asked to compare this with the mutual aid societies that were Black-led institutions, such as the National Association of Colored Women Clubs (Carlton-LaNey, 1999; Carlton-LaNey & Burwell, 2014). A White middle- and upper-class historical narrative of social work is insufficient and destructive when analyzing the roots of contemporary issues, especially regarding the outcomes of white supremacist and elitist priorities, nationally and internationally.

In our classrooms, macro-level contemporary patterns are examined to explore relationships to colonialism, genocide, displacement and enslavement. It helps students understand that the past informs the present and using a person-in-environment perspective requires that it reaches beyond the lifespan or individual. In this type of investigation, an intersectional womanist lens disrupts the championing of whiteness and anti-Blackness as “normative,” which stems from the eugenics movement (Garver &

Garver, 1991). Interrogating these theories that are often unquestioned and memorized as facts supports our students to de-center whiteness.

Elevating Students' Lived Experiences as Authoritative Knowledge-Bases

Creating Sanctuary and Inviting Discourse

"Being too smart is to invite trouble"- bell hooks (hooks & West, 1991, p. 149)

"Smart-mouth," "you think you're smart," "too smart for your own good" are common childhood taunts synonymous with being abnormal or outside of one's peer group. To be smart, to think for oneself and have dreams exceeding one's societally defined place, in a white supremacist context, has erroneously been associated with whiteness (Kelley, 2002). Historically, to be perceived as too smart and Black could invite consequences of physical harm or marginalization from one's family and community, separated from spaces of safety and comfort (i.e., busing Black children to White schools). Therefore, a survival strategy through Black identity, female gender, and low economic status includes not being perceived as "too smart" for fear of being outcast (hooks & West, 1991). However, in a womanist-centered educational environment (Marr, 2015; McLane-Davison, 2017), authentic engagement and delight in learning for the sake of edification is welcomed and rewarded.

The student experience is a portal through which students engage in the liberatory practice of finding their voice and testing their intellectual prowess (Bostic & Manning, 2013; Jones, 2015; McGee & Stovall, 2015). Learning is mutually exclusive to taking tests as validation of self-worth. In this space, learning signifies the resistance of assigning intelligence to one's ability to regurgitate and conform to epistemologies with limited relevance to liberation for Black and Brown communities (Carter & College, 2005; Marr, 2015; McGee & Stovall, 2015; Vakalahi et al., 2007). In fact, to be a lifelong learner as a component of education is reclaimed through the cultural production of intergenerational knowledge that centers Black and Brown scholarship, research, and ontology as pathways to healthy Black and Brown ecologies.

Our students arrive at the classroom eager for restorative and transformative strategies to disrupt centuries of damage caused by social-political policies (Bostic & Manning, 2013; Carter & College, 2005; Stevens, 2003). "I want to help people" is a familiar outcome statement. Social workers help. Social workers identify the problem, and they fix it. Social workers are saviors. Yet, rarely have Black and Brown students been offered an opportunity to locate the source of the problem outside of individual failure (hooks & West, 1991; McGee & Stovall, 2015). For many urban students this requires a delicate deprogramming of harmful messages about their racial identity and their community (Kelley, 2002; Sy, 2013). Locating the origin of the problem external to their biological or moral fabric has not been their understanding. In fact, issues of poverty, crime, violence, sexual abuse, school failure, under- and unemployment, substance abuse, and dysfunction have all been a product of their "inner city" living and "ghetto life" (Gilbert, 1974; Marr, 2015; Young, 1968). These internalized messages are

consistently reinforced through person-to-person communication and the powerful tools of social media and entertainment (McLane-Davison, 2017).

Drawing from the cultural ethos of Black church traditions, in the classroom students are able to collectively “name” the antagonist of their lived experiences. Oppression, addiction, poverty, shame, disease, brutality, unworthiness; these terms are deconstructed and neutralized as threats to well-being and self-determination (Marr, 2015; McGee & Stovall, 2015; Phillips & McCaskill, 1995). Through storytelling (Baker-Bell, 2017), research, investigating primary documents, and including community cultural scholarship, we are “wringing out” the “robotic” memories of how it feels to have Black life defined as “the problem” (Bent-Goodley et al., 2017; Dillard, 2016; Jagers, 2003; McGee & Stovall, 2015; Brice & McLane-Davison, 2020; Wells-Wilbon et al., 2016; Young, 1968). Through our indigenous rituals of call and response (Bostic & Manning, 2013), we resist and replace a pathology diagnosis. Our truth opens the opportunity to reimagine communities that include a new world order and center power and control in our communities of origin. The title of scholar is located parallel to the title of friend, family, and community as educators (Bostic & Manning, 2013; Huckaby, 2013; Phillips & McCaskill, 1995). These scholars broker a lifelong lesson of how to navigate a world that does not welcome your humanity, and definitely not your right to determine your life path (Phillips & McCaskill, 1995; Young, 1968). These communal scholars are fortified with the strength and resilience to “re-image” spaces of joy, celebration, and success which the academic community has defined as deficit (Carter & College, 2005; Mullings, 2000; Phillips & McCaskill, 1995). Therefore, combined with the formal education of academe, the classroom is transformed into an incubator for creating new memory of problem solving, defining family, and understanding equations of power.

Nommo and Bleaching Out Blackness

A key activity for dismantling white supremacy in McLane-Davison’s culturally-centered classroom is starting with the “nommo” of racism as a bleaching of Black heritage, rituals, and traditions. Students are introduced to the West African term “nommo,” meaning to name through the Dogon culture to understand the essence of the practice (Diop, 1974). Imagine being so fearful of the power of White supremacy for future generations that you avoid names that may be associated with your human identity. As a result of their lived experiences Black parents have already imagined spaces where their child’s name will not obstruct them from opportunities in school, employment, and the rights of full citizenship. Through this assignment we begin to reclaim the joy of Black motherhood, fatherhood, and the nommo of family. “Who dreamt of you before you were you?” “How have you grown into your name?” We talk about how their names are derived from popular celebrities, family and friends, TV shows, music, and the influence of Black spirituality.

As an initial assignment in a course on social work clinical practice with Black families in urban environments we center Black lives in love, culture, and futurism (McLane-Davison, 2017). This assignment requires the application of an

autoethnographic methodology to describe the application of “nommo” to their life. The first task is to tell the story of their parents’ courtship and their mother’s pregnancy. Through these first two questions students reveal rituals of relationships, family traditions, folklore, and descriptions of family. Students are then asked to talk about the ontology of their name, including “who named you?” or “describe your birthing process and the day you were born.” Similar to the intimate stories of their parents’ courtship and their mother’s pregnancy, they speak to the legacy, and sometimes funny narratives about their names.

As we unpack these powerful narratives through primary documentation, as well as family and friend interviews, students unpack the significance of heritage and the filaments of whiteness. This assignment requires a great amount of trust and confidentiality. Students aren’t pressured to share information that they aren’t comfortable sharing. Surprisingly for many students, including those who were adopted, they have little knowledge about this part of their life. Some students elevate the shame of being born to teen or unmarried mothers, while others tell stories of their parents being high school sweethearts. Other students reveal the grief of parents dying due to drug addiction, incarceration, violence in their community, as well as through service in the armed forces. But more often, students talk about how their families were afraid to name them something “too Black.” I listen as students recall being told by teachers and peers that their names were “ghetto” or “hood.” For many of my African immigrant students they share how they are given generational family names and also “Christian” names so that they might better assimilate into the White “American” culture. Nommo invites the correct naming through cultural symbols, self-identity, self-definition, and self-naming to “capture the life force that causes spirit into being” (McLane-Davison, 2017, p. 477). In the Dogon culture, nommo signifies the ancestral connections of expectations, value, and power (Diop, 1974). This one exercise opens the opportunity for students to name the strength of their families, the resilience of their communal networks, and the manifestation of their parents’ dreams. Through their autoethnography students express a sense of power in connecting the generational fortitude of their families to will them into their present time and space to become the first person in their family to have a graduate degree.

Honoring, Validating, and Debunking Our Worldviews

Pedagogically, once the White male canon is interrogated and whiteness is de-centered as the cornerstone authority in the classroom, there is literal and energetic space for the curriculum to hold the wisdom and insight of our students’ lived experiences. Students are actively invited to center their insights as immigrant, Black, Indigenous, trans, femme, Latinx, Asian diaspora, people of color, queer, disabled, international global citizens to not recede, to assert, to question, and to uplift their great-grandparents’ wisdom. They are also invited to call sources of knowledge into question as well, bringing a critical lens to the schemas and paradigms that have shaped their worldviews. It creates space to validate as well as examine and debunk. Rigorous liberatory education invites transformation while unearthing assumptions.

For example, students explored the person-in-environment perspectives in Ortega-Williams' HBSE class, which emphasizes the impact of the environment upon a person's behavior and well-being, as parts of an ecosystem (Hutchinson, 2015). After examining the personal, environmental, and time dimensions, students watched a film clip about the Indigenous-led movement against the Dakota Access Pipeline at Standing Rock (Rivas, 2017). They heard community members from various Indigenous nations speak about water being life and relatives including the water itself as well as the four-leggeds and insects. They expressed deep curiosity as we identified that the person-in-environment perspective did not represent this community's worldview, priorities or values, since it imposed an assumption of separateness of human beings from other living creatures and nature. Upon further examination, they were able to see that the person-in-environment perspective is estranged to communities that saw the physical environment as intimately related to their cultural ways of life. It was jarring for some because they saw the theory as universal and applicable. The exercise inverted the usual educational paradigm of text as authority, to incorporate their ways of knowing, which embraced methods that were not only constricted to thinking (McLane-Davison, 2017). The investigative approach that was taken validated what community members sensed, felt, experienced, and intuited as a valuable part of knowledge development (McLane-Davison, 2017).

White supremacy, when internalized, shapes one's ability to be culturally responsive (King, 2017). In educating social work students, we train them to undo racist socialization beginning with unearthing the stereotypes that block one from seeing assets and strengths. BIPOC cultural norms that have been marginalized, vilified or co-opted can be reclaimed as strengths fueling community survival, resistance to annihilation, and ability to create futures that we deserve (Bent-Goodley et al., 2017; McGee & Stovall, 2015; Richards, 1994). We train students to detect and interrupt the hypnotic lure to value and regurgitate whiteness on the path to professionalization, while surveilling and criminalizing BIPOC family structures or communities. Students get to feel the pride, joy and power from discovering their strengths while ejecting the debilitating impact of white supremacy, fostering a more robust view of contemporary issues.

In summary, interrogating the White male canon, de-centering whiteness, and elevating students' lived experience as authoritative knowledge bases facilitates not only a brave space within the social work educational environment, but also a healing and authentic space. Our approach to wringing out the whitewash in social work education prepares students to interrupt white supremacy in their lives and agencies, boldly, when no one is looking. It pushes the profession toward the radical ideals within the NASW *Code of Ethics* (NASW, 2017) and the type of practice communities deserve.

Implications for Social Work

The complexity of structural racism and white supremacy are like washing clothes in the latest automatic washing machine. The mechanism has been updated but the function of scrubbing and wringing are the same. The historical trauma caused by white supremacy and structural racism creates the same functional impact on each generation, yet the delivery and language are what is updated, automated, and repackaged. The social

work classroom, reimagined, can be a space of repair, joy, reconciliation, liberation, and uplift. White supremacy ideologically constricts the flow of ideas and critical thinking, while truncating the possibility of authentic relationships. White supremacy as the foundation of oppression in our society operates like a “virus” for which critical consciousness along with committed action can be an “antidote” (Freire, 1993; Jemal, 2018). Fulfilling the NASW (2017) *Code of Ethics* and the EPAS (Council on Social Work Education [CSWE], 2015), as well as the *NABSW Code of Ethics* (NABSW, n.d.) requires a commitment to undoing white supremacy in the implicit and explicit curriculum (CSWE, 2015).

A concerted daily commitment to anti-racism as social work educators is fundamental to preparing social work students for the profession. Racism is pervasive and has a deleterious impact at the micro-, meso-, and macro-level across the lifespan and intergenerationally. Wringing out the whitewash as educators creates the possibility for our students and ourselves, to transform who we are in social work practice, and in our everyday lives. Social work is an applied field. The evidence-informed practices that we use must be relevant and connected to people’s actual lived experiences of survival. Implementing the pedagogical priorities articulated here creates the opportunity for students to be equipped for the actual demands of their 21st Century global context. Classrooms committed to undoing white supremacy are creative spaces, open for the redistribution of power and restoring balance. Shared power, voice, and intellect with our students, while incorporating historical and contemporary frameworks created by BIPOC, is pivotal. As social work educators, we can tap into the technological tools and cyberspaces that can invigorate social work education, if we are willing to risk our positions as authorities, including that of our most longstanding canons. Transforming social work education brings into view the solutions our volatile times require, from ensuring communities survive COVID-19 and future pandemics to conceiving policies able to interrupt the normalcy of police brutality. The time for shifting our educational priorities is now.

Conclusion: Hanging Out the Wash to Dry

The hour has come for everybody, for all institutions of the public sector and the private sector to work to get rid of racism. And now if we are to do it we must honestly admit certain things and get rid of certain myths that have constantly been disseminated all over our nation. (Martin Luther King Jr., Remaining Awake Through a Great Revolution, 1968, p.270)

Generational knowledge has provided a toolkit and blueprint of resistance and transformation. How do we get rid of the stain of racism? We work continuously to rub out ideologies that invite us to trade our humanity. We utilize the collective historical wisdom of coalition building and positionality to demand action. In the 1800s less than 20 years into freedom, Black women became the backbone of the Black economy as “Washerwomen” (St. Julien, 2020). Scrubbing and scouring, pushing and pulling, wringing and twisting, to restore the garment back to its original state with handmade lye soap, a tub, and a wooden board. As Betye Saar depicted, washboards were also “sites

of insurrection” (Small, 2018, para. 1). They self-defined and affirmed their worth as they endured long hours of domestic work in unsanitary and often hostile spaces for little pay in order to provide for the welfare of their families (Wang, 2004). In Atlanta in 1881, 3000 Black washerwomen held a strike and won better wages as well as autonomy over their labor (St. Julien, 2020).

We pay homage to Black washerwomen who challenged the violence of white supremacy in their fight to make their labor and humanity visible. It is our hope that social work educators continue this historic fight to wring out the whitewash as we prepare social work students to do the same.

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