Title
An Exploration of Whiteness in Social Work

Author
Gregory, Joshua

Publication Date
2023

Peer reviewed|Thesis/dissertation

An Exploration of Whiteness in Social Work

by

Joshua R. Gregory

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the

requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in

Social Welfare

and the Designated Emphasis

in

Critical Theory

in the

Graduate Division

of the

University of California, Berkeley

Committee in charge:

Professor Tina Sacks, Chair
Professor Linda Burton
Professor Robert Kaufman

Spring 2023

Abstract

An Exploration of Whiteness in Social Work

by

Joshua R. Gregory

Doctor of Philosophy in Social Welfare

Designated Emphasis in Critical Theory

University of California, Berkeley

Professor Tina Sacks, Chair

This study explores whiteness in social work, starting from the root of whiteness as a social problem; namely, how we understand the phenomenon of whiteness in the first place—an issue that remains contested, notwithstanding oversimplifying claims to the contrary and tendencies both within and beyond social work to rush to ostensibly multi-cultural or anti-racist projects despite never having established foundational understanding of the central definitional issue to begin with. Specifically, this study raises the question of how whiteness manifests in contemporary social work according to social workers who do *not* identify as white.

Research and scholarship on the topic of whiteness are grounded overwhelmingly in the perspectives of white people and institutions. The present study sees this as a problem and seeks to ascertain the long misconceived, always evolving, immediately relevant phenomenon of whiteness from a vantage point *outside* of whiteness by relying upon the interpretations of people who do *not* identify as white. To that end, this study interviews a national sample (n=30) of U.S. social work master's students, doctoral students, and faculty who do not identify as white in order to collect data capable of clarifying how to understand whiteness in social work in the present moment. Participants report their experiences with and perceptions of whiteness in social work curricula, in their own work, and in their institutions. The results of these interviews, therefore, incorporate viewpoints from previously overlooked and excluded populations; voices without which whiteness cannot be fully apprehended.

Through individual, semi-structured, in-depth, qualitative, interviews, participants' reports cohere inductively around three categories of experience: the "what" of whiteness (i.e., description), the "why" of whiteness (i.e., interpretation), and the "how" of whiteness (i.e., explanation). Taken together, and scaffolded by existing sociological and psychoanalytic theories, these categories render a typology by which to better understand whiteness in social work today. In response to this newly articulated framework, participants outline implications for a social work profession at a historical crossroads, including needs for curricular reform, increased practical emphasis, and collective politicization. These broad changes, participants assert, are imperative in order for social work to meet the contemporary challenge of the social problem of whiteness.

To Payton, Poppy, Winnie, and François

Table of Contents

Acknowledgements

I owe the greatest thanks to my wife, Payton—for giving so much of herself for my benefit over the course of my doctoral education. Getting a Ph.D. is as much a personal as a professional endeavor. We share a life, so Payton shared the work that went into earning this degree. This dissertation is only the final step in a half-decade process during which she joined with me unconditionally to face challenges and to find joy while our life together was impacted so greatly by my commitment to this educational undertaking. I could not have done this without her. And to the other members of our family—I owe thanks to my daughter Poppy for being my truest inspiration and motivation; to Winnie for her companionship; and to François for begrudgingly, but lovingly, tolerating the unpredictability that this journey often entailed.

Thank you to Donna and Geoff Gregory for supporting me in more ways than one and for insisting—even when they might not have actually known whether this was really the case—that I chose the right path. And thank you to Matt Gregory for seeing a role model in me even when I thought least of myself.

In this world of academic social work, thank you most of all to Tina Sacks—for being a scholar who leads with who she is as a person and makes the academy a better place for anyone lucky enough to experience that grace. Important people told me not to apply to doctoral programs to study whiteness, but to study race, instead. Tina advised me that certain things are worth doing right or not doing at all. She modeled for me that one can succeed in academia without sacrificing courage and authenticity. And thank you to Linda Burton, who so generously volunteered more of her time and energy to join me in this pursuit even when she had none of either left to give.

I am immensely grateful to Rob Kaufman for the defining role he played in shaping my experience of The Program in Critical Theory, making my time at Berkeley immeasurably more enriching, rewarding, and enjoyable. My thinking as both an intellectual and a human being is forever changed for the better because of his enthusiastic, inviting, and rigorous mentorship, which expanded my world of understanding and showed me the centrality of art to life.

Lastly, I am thankful for certain people who consistently and selflessly extended me encouragement, partnership, and kindness during my time at Berkeley—Susan Stone, Erin Kerrison, and Brenda Mathias. The academy would be a wonderful place if it were filled with people like them.

Chapter 1: Introduction

How Did I Get Here?

I am writing this section after the fact. I have formulated the question, designed the study, conducted the research, analyzed the data, and written the report. All of that took place over the course of the 2021–2022 and 2022–2023 academic years. Most of the design and implementation occurred during the former, with analysis and writing happening concurrently throughout the latter. The end product spanned the text that follows, from the *Problematization* section below through the *Final Summary* section of the last chapter. In addition to this very brief section, *How Did I Get Here?*, I am adding another ex post facto section, *Where Do I Go From Here?*, which will appear at the very end of the final chapter.

My intention for bookending the dissertation with these retrospective passages is to draw attention to a shift in my own thinking that occurred between the start of this project and the end; a transition that, as an object of reflection, can yield material germane to whiteness research that is at least as generative for developing insight and awareness as the formal components of this study. The process of writing this dissertation produced change in me that is not reflected in—and is in many ways even at odds with—the text itself. That change needs to be acknowledged explicitly in order to make this project whole.

I arrived at this place of productive tension as a result of the fact that writing is really a process of learning, a means of working through problems, despite the academic pretense that writing happens after problems are solved and publications disseminate conclusions. Rather, texts are themselves attempts to reach conclusions. Regarded as such, the value of this text lies in the extent to which it catalyzes the process of getting to whatever comes after reading, and getting there with greater understanding of the social problem of whiteness. This text is a hope that my own struggle to make sense of whiteness will help any reader to become a more effective agent of social and material change. I recommend that anyone who identifies as white read the very last section of the final chapter first.

Problematization

It is difficult and uncommon to attempt to locate the historical origin of whiteness with much specificity. Social construction can be so complex as to feel as if it eludes parameters like time, place, or person; and, as biological determinism has both been disproven and fallen out of favor (Obasogie, Harris-Wai, Darling, Keagy, & Levesque, 2015), whiteness is increasingly—and rightly—defined as just that: a social construct. Social constructionist definitions of whiteness now prevail in academia. They were pioneered in Du Bois' (1899/1967) systematic critique of race as immutable heredity, have since been reinvigorated by the critical study of whiteness that emerged in the 1990s (e.g., Ignatiev & Garvey, 1996; Kincheloe, Steinberg, Rodriguez, & Chennault, 1998), and are sustained today by myriad scholars across disciplines (e.g., Hughey, 2012; Leonardo, 2009; Painter, 2010). Even mainstream articulations of race have come to endorse whiteness as a social construct with the popularization of publications by authors like Robin DiAngelo (2018) and Ibram X. Kendi (2016, 2019) on white self-help, histories of racism, and how to "be an antiracist" today—topics that have gained both sincere

public interest and performative social currency in the wake of what became commonly known as the "racial reckoning" that resulted from the murder of George Floyd.

But growing consensus—whether due to intellectual persuasion or moral compulsion—that whiteness is, in fact, socially constructed, carries the risk of obscuring the historical, material origin of whiteness; it invites the overcorrected fixation on social dimensions of race and, consequently, inattention to the roots of racialization in history and materiality. An either-or resolution (i.e., if race is not hard science, it must be immaterial fiction) is tempting for its promise of a simple answer to the race problem, though the issue demands a both-and conceptualization that holds social life in constant relation with its historical, material counterpart. After all, the swing from one extreme to the other has already given rise to colorblind racism (Bonilla-Silva, 2017) and the attendant façade of discursive equality layered on top of substantive inequity, arguably the now-dominant strain of racial injustice that persists as the status quo which pervades most institutions—or at least those institutions with considerable power (Omi & Winant, 2015).

Perhaps it was amid this collective shift over the last 50 years from race biologism toward more socially constructed definitions of race that most conceptions of whiteness let go of concern for an etiology that accounts for things like domination and labor as much as social convention and political motive (the standout exception to this being Roediger, 1991, 2005). Whatever the reason for the widespread omission, the undeniable fact of the matter remains that contemporary projects of all kinds (e.g., scholarly, journalistic, social, clinical, popular, etc.) which focus on whiteness do not attend to the historical origin of that with which they concern themselves. Yet, despite this normative inattention, it is imperative to begin at precisely this blind spot. To misapprehend the history of whiteness is to abet, knowingly or not, a relationship to whiteness in the present that is ahistorical; and for as long as contemporary whiteness persists *a*historically, the obscurantist paradigm of *trans*historical whiteness prevents any interruption to the hegemonic agenda of white supremacy that it supports, tacitly or outright.

The Historical Origin of Whiteness

Theodore W. Allen (1994–1997) notes, "When the first Africans arrived in Virginia in 1619, there were no 'white' people there. Nor, according to colonial records, would there be for another sixty years" (p. x). The shift began around the time of Bacon's Rebellion, which occurred in Virginia, 1676. Interracial cooperation among the white poor and Black slaves generated an uprising so profoundly destabilizing to the nascent colonial social fabric that the minority of landholding European aristocrats, in a self-interested panic, hurried to sow division between the majority populations of landless European peasants and enslaved Africans, deterring them from united rebellion against class oppression (Allen, 1994–1997; Kendi, 2016). "The answer to the problem, obvious if unspoken and only gradually recognized, was racism, to separate dangerous free whites from dangerous slave blacks by a screen of racial contempt" (Morgan, 1975, p. 328).

In response to the imminent material threat to their class interest, the colonial European aristocracy invented the social construct of whiteness, which they gradually converted to a de jure and then de facto signifier of identity with legal and institutional protections (Hening 1823;

Neill, 1875; Thandeka, 2000) in order to grab power and privilege at the direct expense of Blackness (see also Anderson, 2016 on whiteness and U.S. history). The Virginia colony concocted a panoply of laws to materially effectuate and solidify social control as a function of white-skin privilege, black-skin degradation, and racial animus. For example, beginning in 1680, the law stated that newly "whited" colonists "were free to give 'any negroe or other slave' who dared to lift his hand in opposition to a Christian thirty lashes on the bare back" (Thandeka, 2000, p. 42-43), while shortly thereafter, Virginia enacted legal prohibitions to forbid masters from "whip[ping] a Christian white servant naked" (Thandeka, 2000, p. 43). In 1705, *An act concerning Servants and Slaves*, served to effectively preclude further entry of white persons into the condition of slavery and to modify the enslavement of Africans to a life long, hereditary institution (Hening, 1823). A subsequent act, passed in 1723, disenfranchised Africans, denying them access to legal recourse through which they might contest the imposition of this new form of slavery. Formally implemented as *An Act directing the trial of Slaves, committing capital crimes; and for the more effectual punishing conspiracies and insurrections of them; and for the better government of Negros, Mulattos, and Indians, bond or free*, this act stated that "no free negro, mulatto, or indian whatsoever, shall have any vote at the election of burgesses, or any other election whatsoever" (Hening, 1823, p. 133-134).

"Dangerous free whites," as it turned out, would indeed settle for intraracial class inequality so long as they could expect comparatively greater social and material entitlement than was afforded Blackness; and so they joined with the very people responsible for their economic deprivation in collecting the newly minted interracial exchange value of whiteness, or what Du Bois (1935) famously characterizes as a "public and psychological wage" (p. 700). This sort of wedge could only have been possible in the sort of emergent society that constituted the colonial American socioeconomic topography—a comparatively blank historical slate, a laboratory for social experimentation that would have been inconceivable and no doubt unacceptable from within the fold of an established nation state. In fact, when word traveled abroad that the notion of whiteness as a social identity was being introduced in the colonies to justify a vast array of inhumanities, British attorney General, Richard West, wrote to the colonists, "I cannot see why one freeman should be used worse than another, merely upon account of his complexion" (Neill, 1875, p. 296).

Nonetheless, this turning point for the soon-to-be United States marked the beginning of the transition in global history from isolated albeit consistent instances of colorism (Dyer, 1997) to systematic and violently defended racism (Lipsitz, 1998); the former maintained benefits of white *skin*, and the latter upholds, even today, the hegemony of white*ness* (Roediger, 1994). These events, taken together, situate the origin of whiteness with the greatest amount of precision possible. Yet, these historical, material determinants and sociopolitical developments, which began in colonial Virginia, have since evolved so extraordinarily and spread so globally as to manifest today in forms of hegemonic whiteness irreducible to—indeed, almost unrecognizable according to—the sources from which they originated.

Whiteness in Recent History

In his 1920 essay, *The Souls of White Folk*, Du Bois writes, "The discovery of personal whiteness among the world's peoples is a very modern thing,—a nineteenth and twentieth

century matter, indeed" (p. 184). Even though the discovery of personal whiteness, or the *invention* of whiteness as Theodore W. Allen (1994–1997) puts it, turns out to actually have begun as a seventeenth and eighteenth century matter, Du Bois' discrepant estimation is understandable given the greater obstacles he surely faced in accessing archival resources (Morris, 2015) than Allen encountered in preparing his incomparably precise history of whiteness. And the penetrating insight, which Du Bois arrived at first, remains—whiteness is, indeed, a modern phenomenon in the context of human history.

The fact that Du Bois qualifies the whiteness he observes as *personal* is significant, too. Colorism—specifically, colorism in the form of discriminatory preference for light over dark—existed long before the seventeenth century (Gilroy, 1993; Saxton, 1990), and was in many contexts extrapolated to human phenotype (i.e., skin) in systematic attempts to rationalize all sorts of sociopolitical machinations (Goldberg, 1993), including, but not limited to, the enslavement of one human being by another (de Zurara, 1963). This is not, though, to say that anyone who benefited from this sort of thinking thought of themselves as embodying "whiteness" or as being "white." Notwithstanding the secondary importance of skin color in certain relations, prior to the seventeenth century, people differentiated themselves in socially meaningful ways mainly according to socioeconomic class, religious affiliation, and geographical location (Seshadri-Crooks, 2000); to impute social significance to whiteness as identity would have made little sense to these people. So, for Du Bois to note the personalization of whiteness as salient in the manifestation of racialization that he observes in the transition from the nineteenth to the twentieth century is important for the fact that he registers one iteration in an evolutionary sequence marked by certain defining inflection points, this instance being the contested solidification of white dominance that began during Reconstruction and extended into the Jim Crow era. Several such shifts comprise the recent history of whiteness—"recent," of course, referring here to a view that encompasses the whole of human existence.

Chattel Slavery (1619–1865)

Concurrent with the origin of whiteness described above, the first major development in the historical progression that would lead to white hegemony as it exists today was the mass subjugation and dehumanization of Africans forcibly transported to the North American colonies and consigned under the institution of chattel slavery. This atrocity had two main effects integral to the project of eventually establishing white identity: It precluded, at the outset of the new society's formation, the ability of the entire Black demographic therein to obtain even the minimal material resources necessary to physical health and safety in the immediate present (Stampp, 1956), let alone to acquire the capital requisite for the accumulation of wealth, and therefore intergenerational security, in the long-term (Genovese, 1989). Further, chattel slavery normalized the baseless cultural assumption that social inferiority was innate to Blackness (Du Bois, 1903/2014). Each of these developments—material denial and social relegation—reinforced the other, upheld by a circular rationale that whites in power imposed as both societal norm and institutional logic; a rationale which insisted that forced African immigrants were fit for enslavement because they were socially inferior and that they were socially inferior because they were fit for enslavement (Allen, 1994–1997). The inaugural foray into systematizing a *white* racial identity thus began from a campaign waged both physically and symbolically to concretize the terms of what it meant, in the so-called new world, to be *Black*.

Reconstruction (1865–1877)

Speaking to exactly this centrality of the conditions of Black life to the boundaries of emergent whiteness, David R. Roediger (1991) writes, "The existence of slavery … gave working Americans both a wretched touchstone against which to measure their fears of unfreedom and a friendly reminder that they were by comparison not so badly off" (p. 49). Obviously, then, the end of enslavement shook the stability of whiteness, which had been defined mainly in reference to what it was *not*—namely, slavery. The emancipation of four million Black persons delivered a shock to white racial identity that brought about the second significant development in the evolution of whiteness. This unfolded throughout Reconstruction, the period of bitterly contested national re-stabilization that followed the American Civil War.

If, under chattel slavery, Blackness equaled enslavement and whiteness equaled *not* Blackness, then the twofold task for whites during Reconstruction was to shift the terms of the racial calculus such that, first, Blackness could hinge upon some definitional criterion by which it would remain subordinate to whiteness, and, second, this relation could be framed as entirely natural and unchangeable. To this end, formerly enslaved Black persons were recast as free but not citizens, while citizenship remained a status reserved for white Americans (Goldberg, 2008). This distinction was both social and legal. Black persons were denied cultural acceptance in the post-bellum United States by means of racist vitriol and violence (Foner, 1988), as well as kept from recognition under the law by denial of the franchise (Gerteis, 1973)—and, once that was won, manipulation of the ballot (Cimbala, 2005). These arrangements effectively recalibrated U.S. racial normativity to equate whiteness with American citizenship vis-à-vis Black exclusion by both informal convention and rule of law.

Jim Crow (1877–1954)

Whiteness in the Jim Crow era underwent two major processes in racial formation. First, and as is most commonly known of this historical period, Jim Crow legal and social policy codified post-slavery expectations and practices regarding race *in* space and race *as* space—that is, during these years, laws and social norms drew strict lines of demarcation to prescribe exactly who was permitted to access and who was forbidden from entering public spaces (Hale, 1999), and in so doing, implicitly constructed these spaces as entitlements belonging to, and extensions of, the very racialized bodies to which they were intended to correspond. To use a famous example, to the same extent that Black bodies were not allowed at the lunch counter, the lunch counter was enshrined in collective consciousness as an inherently white space, as white property (see Harris, 1993), and as a symbol of white sanctity. The U.S. material and social landscape was thus partitioned to preserve anti-Blackness (quite literally) as the linchpin of whiteness.

At the same time, amid the greatest influx of immigration in U.S. history, whites in power selectively rearranged ethnic social stratification in keeping with racial domination, situating newly arrived groups in relation to whiteness in ways that protected white supremacy. Prominent historical instances of such identity gerrymandering are observable in disparate outcomes amid waves of Irish and Jewish immigration, where constituents from these demographics were conditionally regarded as white *if* and *when* such classification suited the

political and economic objectives of whites within a given context (Allen, 1994–1997; Brodkin, 1998; Ignatiev, 1995); and, unsurprisingly, these objectives were typically contingent upon Black subjugation. Essentially, during these years, one was white insofar as one was anti-Black; and one could *become* white insofar as one could accept anti-Blackness (Roedgier, 2005).

Black Liberation, Assimilation, and Colorblindness (1954–2015)

Beginning in the mid-1950s and continuing until around the mid-2010s, whiteness acquired a distinctive race-avoidant reflex, or colorblindness, as it came to be known (Bonilla-Silva, 2017). Toward the earlier end of this span of U.S. history, the overarching Black liberation movement was sustained by both assimilationist initiatives like the civil rights movement and separatist campaigns like the Black Power movement. To distill each to its characteristic orientation: The civil rights movement sought Black equality in a society defined by white hegemony; the Black Power movement insisted upon Black equity through a redefinition of society that rejected the terms which gave rise to white hegemony in the first place (Bell, 2014). The historical record and state of affairs today suggest the civil rights movement to have more enduringly shaped race relations in the United States. Likely both a main cause and effect of this outcome, whites were and are more willing to accept the idea of equality (which is not to say *actual* equality) than the goal of equity, the latter of which would entail correcting for the outstanding racial imbalance imparted by the course of history (Sullivan, 2014). Assimilation is more tolerable to whiteness precisely because it does not correct this imbalance, but requires only an ideological (certainly not material) commitment not to openly and intentionally worsen it—a disavowal of outright racism, or, in effect, colorblindness. Notwithstanding flagrant white racism, which persisted outside of mainstream view during these colorblind years and even today, whiteness as colorblindness prevailed in the wake of the Black liberation movement and through the turn of the twenty-first century.

Rising Neo-Conservatism, Progressive Resistance (2015–Present)

A half-century or so of popular and institutionalized colorblindness has proven sufficient to expose the inefficacy of the tenuously fabricated racial détente of professed socioeconomic equality as a supposed remedy to centuries of inequity (Chetty, Hendren, Jones, & Porter, 2020; Oliver & Shapiro, 1995). With racial injustice still undeterred and, so it would seem, often worsening, the accusation has been renewed with heightened urgency that white supremacy is at the heart of the contemporary United States, which is itself the metropole of a globalized network of racial domination (Lake & Reynolds, 2008; Obasogie, 2020; Watson, Howard-Wagner, & Spanierman, 2015). In this context, public pressure forces a critical accounting of whiteness and its effects, which colorblindness cannot satisfy. Various forms of whiteness always vie for hegemony at any given historical moment. Today, competition on the U.S. national stage is active and undecided between what appear to be neo-conservative whiteness and, less cohesively, some brand of progressive whiteness (Hochschild, 2016). The former distinguishes itself from past variants of conservatism because it does not champion individualism and free market principles from a position of strength, but decries, from a performatively besieged positionality, an ostensible deterioration of norms that once upheld church, state, and family and ought to once more as an imperative of nationalism (read: de facto white supremacy) (Doane, 2020); the latter consists of a somewhat ambivalent and disoriented

commitment among liberal whites (some more sincere than others) to advance anti-racism beyond colorblind multiculturalism and toward genuine equity by beginning with whiteness as the cornerstone of the larger problem of racial injustice (Ryan & Brunsma, 2020). The struggle between these two possibilities for contemporary whiteness remains contested, with neither having a secure hold on national hegemony. Only time can tell how these countervailing forces will ultimately find balance in determining whiteness as a mode of being, or how much longer whiteness will remain a meaningful, even viable, identity.

The Historical Origin of (White) Social Welfare

Having reviewed the origin and recent history of whiteness, it is important to turn now to the historical relationship between whiteness and social welfare. First, the study to be introduced later, which is motivated by this relationship, will be situated in a social work context. Second, and perhaps more importantly, the evolution of social welfare leading up to the emergence of professional social work in the United States can be shown to have developed as both a product and project of whiteness. For this reason, whiteness is more fully conceptualized in drawing a connection to social work. Social work, though, cannot be accurately or honestly conceived without tracing the influence of whiteness as a formative catalyst that gave rise to the profession.

Colonial Anglo-America

The colonial period contains scant history of social welfare per se, other than that some colonies, at some times, adopted the Elizabethan Poor Laws of Great Britain (Day, 2013), but formulated no ideology or practices of social welfare unique to Anglo-America. That does not negate the relevance of this era to social welfare. The historical developments previously described (e.g., chattel slavery, Bacon's Rebellion, etc.) laid the material and social foundation for the institutional and ideological antecedents to social welfare that would emerge in the antebellum U.S. It would be impossible to accurately comprehend social welfare absent this history. Colonial American history thus illuminates crucial preconditions of social welfare that are unquestionably rooted in whiteness, and that are too commonly and too comfortably dismissed.

The Antebellum United States: Social Welfare Before Social Work

Scholars typically define the antebellum era in the United States as beginning with the conclusion of either the American Revolutionary War or the War of 1812. For the purpose of the discussion at hand, the former definition proves fitting for the sake of breadth and continuity. There is consensus that the U.S. antebellum era ends with the start of the American Civil War. During this period, the U.S. experienced a groundswell of republicanism, the sea change of industrialization, the intermarriage of class and race, and the cultivation of new ideas and practices in social science and social welfare.

Republicanism, Industrialization, Class, and Race. Following the American Revolutionary War, the republican ideology that predicated the separation of the United States from Great Britain informed domestic philosophy and labor. Men and women—specifically, white men and women—internalized the belief that individual freedom and entitlement to self-

actualization should guide their personal and professional lives. The ideal vision was a nation of small farmers and artisans who coexisted in equal liberty and opportunity. Rapid industrialization, however, complicated the plausibility of an uncompromised realization of this republican ideology in practice. The emergence of factories yielded a capitalist class that owned the means of production, while the processes therein were overseen by managers, themselves outranking the laborers in their employ. What began as an ideology of equality quickly materialized as a labor hierarchy, which in turn gave rise to corresponding social stratification that contradicted the promises of republicanism (Roediger, 1991).

In attempts to recapture agency and dignity once expected as their fair share of the republican ideal, laborers and burgeoning unions often found themselves more effective in contesting the ideological parameters than the structural determinants of freedom and self-actualization. In other words, if the new working class could not subvert the material constraints that denied them certain tangible rewards, they could at least reconceive social constructions of freedom and self-actualization to reposition themselves as full beneficiaries of these privileges of republicanism. In order to do so, laborers defined themselves according to what they were not—slaves. While upward comparisons to managers or capitalists rendered the working class as victims cheated out of the spoils of the republican ideal, downward comparisons to slaves provided a contrast that emphasized the relative extent to which laborers did enjoy independence and selfhood. And since, in 1820, 86.8% of African Americans were slaves, and in 1860, 89% (Roediger, 1991), self-definition as a non-slave was synonymous during this period with self-definition as non-Black—that is to say, as white. By this process, whiteness became an essential and ardently defended fixture of working-class identity, and more broadly, notions of race and class came to inextricably constitute each other in social, political, and labor discourses.

Antebellum Social Science and Early Naturalism. Social science of the United States antebellum era, not surprisingly, differed dramatically from its modern descendant forms. Methodologically, early naturalists—who sought truth in observable phenomena rather than spirituality or subjective knowledge—employed many of the practices of measurement and comparison characteristic of scientific empiricism today. However, a distinct scientific racism permeated the purpose and focus of antebellum U.S. social science. Gould (1996) describes the modus operandi of the period, stating that "a priori commitment to [racial] ranking fashion[ed] the 'scientific' questions asked and even the data gathered to support a foreordained conclusion" (p. 63). The foreordained conclusion in reference was that of white supremacy. Two native U.S. strands of social science that took as their mission the pursuit of evidence to support white supremacy were polygeny and craniometry, the former spearheaded by Louis Agassiz and the latter by Samuel George Morton (Gould, 1996).

Polygeny refers to the belief that different types of humans can be classified as separate species. Craniometry describes the practice of measuring physical differentiations among human skulls as supposed empirical evidence of this natural division of humans into separate species. With these racist scientific tools, Agassiz became the foremost proponent of the theory that white- and Black-skinned humans comprised categorically different species, while Morton amassed a collection of human skulls whose disparate physical dimensions he interpreted as indicators of relative superiority or inferiority. Of course, each of these scientists subjectively read social meaning into physiological differences between white and Black populations in a

systematically racist manner to justify white supremacy. Their collective work contended that white and Black were separate species, and that the marginally larger average skull size of white humans relative to Black humans verified that white humans were, in fact, superior (Gould, 1996). Society heeded this "scientific" wisdom, finding comfortable rationalization for the existing racial stratification that facilitated white supremacy and dehumanized African Americans.

Early Ideas and Practices of Social Welfare. The antebellum United States developed ideas and practices of social welfare indicative of the distinct *needs* and *beliefs* of the fledgling independent nation. During this era, the *need* was to ensure the wellbeing of the sick, poor, and otherwise afflicted who were judged to be deserving; the *belief* was that deservingness could never extend beyond whiteness. Social welfare mirrored the trends in republicanism and scientific racism in broader society, taking as central philosophical pillars the Protestant ethic and Christian charity (Leiby, 1978). The former represented the meritocratic conviction that the individual was rewarded for hard work with good fortune—a contingency implicitly reserved for whites, per antebellum working-class mores and social identity. The latter entailed the scriptural obligation of the fortunate to donate from their abundance to the needy—the needy understood strictly to be white. Leiby (1978) summarizes this dominant outlook:

> The plight of Indians and blacks did not enter into anyone's thinking about social-welfare institutions in these formative years. Reformers who contemplated the problems of the dependent, defective, and delinquent classes assumed that they were dealing with people who shared the Anglo-American culture. (p. 11)

Social welfare championed state-legislated poor relief, health, education, and crime policies designed to improve the overall well-being of society. Additionally, social welfare gave rise to hospital and prison reform movements, as well as the establishment of schools for the deaf, blind, and disabled (Leiby, 1978). All of this was executed, though, without compassion for anyone who was not white.

It might be tempting to regard the expressly white supremacist nature of antebellum social welfare as a symptom of societal racism rather than a distinguishing feature of social welfare in and of itself. Perhaps social welfare considered non-white persons to be undeserving simply because larger society did. But such a mischaracterization denies agency and moral intuition elsewhere attributed to social welfare. For example, as mentioned, the antebellum U.S. social welfare agenda included prison reform initiatives, which advocated for more humane treatment of prisoners (Leiby, 1978). By aligning with this cause, social welfare exhibited a clear willingness and ability to side with classes of people disdained by society. In this light, the collective decisions of social welfare to abide overarching racism and abet white supremacy were by no means foregone conclusions, but active and intentional choices. Further, a sympathetic attitude toward African Americans and other non-white demographics would not have been entirely unprecedented or altogether radical given the contemporaneous organization of substantial—albeit non-majority—coalitions of public support for the abolition of slavery (Allen, 1994–1997; Roediger, 1991). Antebellum social welfare must, therefore, be held as a product of whiteness for its capitulation to societal white supremacy, and as a project of

whiteness for its exclusionary distribution of social and material aid for the benefit of whites alone.

Reconstruction and Early Jim Crow: Social Welfare Becoming Social Work

The post-Civil War years of Reconstruction and early Jim Crow ushered in a continuation of preexisting societal racism, as well as novel iterations of systemic, institutional white supremacy deployed through science and social welfare. Reconstruction, the federal occupation of the southern states as a means of scaffolding post-war regional stability and restoring national unity, lasted roughly from 1866 to 1877. The Jim Crow era commenced in 1877 and continued well beyond the turn of the century, during which time state and local laws, predominately in the south, mandated segregated public facilities and services for Black and white populations. The period of Reconstruction and early Jim Crow bears critical significance to the present discussion for the fact that this historical moment signifies the transitional stage when social welfare ideas and practices began to gradually coalesce under the cohesive social and professional domain from which formalized social work would later emerge (Reisch, 1998).

(Social) Darwinism and White Social Science. Reconstruction began in the wake of the shockwaves precipitated by, among other things, the 1859 publication of Charles Darwin's seminal and iconoclastic book, *On the Origin of Species*. The enormity of the social, cultural, and scientific shift catalyzed by Darwin's work cannot be overstated. Darwin eschewed prevailing Creationism, positing instead the evolution of a single, diverse human species through natural selection. He demonstrated that intra- and inter-species variation in biological traits conferring adaptive advantage affected the relative odds of survival, and subsequently the comparative likelihood of reproduction and intergenerational transmission of those traits. Darwin did not, however, impute social value to biological traits. In fact, he anticipated not that his theory would be seized to sow social division, but that his findings might rebuke the racism of polygeny and "deliver a blow to the apologists for slavery, who held that blacks were a separate species" (Graves, 2003, p. 58).

The social appropriation of Darwin's theory of evolution, a strategy formally known as Social Darwinism, was advanced during this same era by Herbert Spencer, much to Darwin's chagrin. Though widely misattributed to Darwin, Spencer actually coined the infamous phrase, "survival of the fittest," suggesting sociocultural competition with these words rather than biological variation. Social Darwinism claimed that social outcomes, such as the dominance of one culture or society over another, could be explained as a natural product of the inherent superiority of the triumphant group, with said superiority being evidenced in phenotypic differences between the victors and the conquered. This logic leveraged the name of science and of Darwin himself to rationalize colonial imperialism, white supremacy, and capitalist exploitation as the predestined, evolutionary course of nature (Graves, 2003).

Social science quickly aligned itself with Social Darwinism, particularly in the United States, where social Darwinism resonated as a welcome affirmation to a nation keen to preserve a white supremacist social order following the abolition of slavery. Anthropology, the founding social science, organized itself as an apparatus seeking empirical support of the existing racial hierarchy as a natural phenomenon, lending scientific authority to justifications for Jim Crow

segregation and institutional racism (Baker, 1998). The social sciences more generally, at this time, were populated exclusively by, and for the benefit of, white men (Zuberi & Bonilla-Silva, 2008). This largely explains the concurrent incorporation by the social sciences of statistical methods developed by Sir Francis Galton, the leading eugenicist, whose unsubtle racism directly informed his "central insight . . . that a population can be normed . . . divid[ing] the population into standard and nonstandard subpopulations" (Davis, 1997, p. 14). In the same way that Social Darwinism functioned as a device of scientific racism to the U.S., so too did social science serve Social Darwinism, and statistical methods work in a similar capacity for social science.

Solidification as a Product and Project of Whiteness. During Reconstruction and the early Jim Crow years of the late nineteenth century, U.S. society railed against the tide of increasing racial equity that followed the abolition of slavery, and doubled down on efforts to preserve white supremacy through segregation and institutionalized racism. The social welfare movements of this era, which began to converge as the precursor to the organized social work profession, likewise operated in a manner that white hegemony. To this point, Wilensky and Lebeaux (1965) astutely observe that "American social work is part and product of the larger social and cultural setting in which it lives. While it helps to shape the larger society, social work reflects more than it determines the nature of the whole" (p. 13).

As social welfare advocates progressed toward understanding themselves as social workers, they embraced Social Darwinism. Charity organization societies—community-based coalitions of social welfare acolytes devoted to alleviating individual and social problems—employed a "peculiar synthesis of evangelical community service, positivism, Social Darwinism, and social control" (Wenocur & Reisch, 1989, p. 31). In so doing, they adopted a guiding rationale that regarded white supremacy as natural and therefore unproblematic. In the day-to-day work conducted by charity organization societies, this manifested as a generally paternalistic campaign against the individual and social problems afflicting white communities, non-white groups summarily relegated beyond the purview of charitable concern. On occasion, charity organization societies were guilty of more flagrant and volatile expressions of Social Darwinism, as illustrated by the support offered by some societies to the avowedly racist and anti-Semitic Immigrant Restriction League (Wenocur & Reisch, 1989). This is hardly surprising given the primacy of white affluence within the ranks of the charity organization societies. Although, even some prominent Black pioneers of early social work were moved by their class interests to endorse social Darwinism, as in the case of Mary Church Terrell (Peebles-Wilkins & Francis, 1990). Whiteness is, after all, an ideology that can be reinforced by people of any color.

The settlement house movement—another social welfare initiative led by some of the forerunners of the social work profession—targeted family socialization by providing recreation and education, researching the nature of family and community need, and mobilizing coalitions for political and legislative reform (Axinn & Levin, 1982). Settlement houses were, on the whole, more progressive than charity organization societies. While charity organization societies utilized an individualistic approach to social welfare, the settlement house movement conceptualized social problems according to their structural origins and developed interventions designed to effect change across systems and within institutions. Despite the promise of their enlightened thinking, however, settlement houses neglected to directly challenge systemic racism, arguably the most profound and pervasive structural problem of the late nineteenth

century. As a matter of fact, Jane Addams, the most renowned figure of the settlement house movement, occasionally exposed her limited capacity to engage topics of racial injustice, on one such instance publishing an article in the *Chicago Tribune* in which she failed to comprehend the innocence of lynching victims (Peebles-Wilkins & Francis, 1990). In the end, it may not have been relational shortcoming, but class obligation that prevented the settlement house movement from substantively grappling with issues of race. Many of the benefactors who provided funding and resources to the settlement house movement were precisely those who stood to lose the most from any disturbance to the status quo that positioned whiteness atop the apex of the social and material hierarchy that governed U.S. society (Wenocur & Reisch, 1989). Beholden to these conditions, the settlement house movement may well have jeopardized its very existence with any act of dissent toward white supremacy.

Considered from this perspective, not unlike the antebellum period before it, the era of Reconstruction and early Jim Crow bore witness to a brand of social welfare and emergent social work that functioned in many ways as a product and project of whiteness. The charity organization societies and settlement house movements constituted themselves as social innovations conceived predominately by and for white individuals and communities. While perhaps not explicitly pro-white, these concomitant branches of late-nineteenth-century social welfare and early social work were far from anti-racist. As such, they tacitly reified systems of institutional racism by placating societal white supremacist norms.

Social Work and Whiteness in Recent History

Since emerging as a formalized profession from antecedent trends in social welfare thought, policy, and practice, social work has taken an ambivalent stance in response to white entrenchment during the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. On the one hand, social work has subserviently provided droves of foot soldiers to the implementation of certain racist practices such as 1940s Japanese internment (Park, 2019) and tacitly racialized policies like President Ronald Reagan's 1976 campaign against "welfare queens;" on the other, social work has aligned with and appropriated progressive theoretical, ideological, and practical advancements like intersectionality (e.g., Crenshaw, 1991) anti-racism (e.g., Hughey, 2012; Phillips, 2010), and anti-oppressive practice (e.g., Applebaum, 2012; Sakamoto, 2007). Social work has even welcomed critical reflection upon white privilege (Abrams & Gibson, 2007) and white fragility (DiAngelo, 2018). Yet, the constraints of prevailing neoliberalism in the profession have "deradicalised" even ostensibly radical social work, "making it safe, even respectable" (Hearn, 1982, p. 20). As recently as the turn of the twenty-first century, Janice Andrews and Michael Reisch (2002) presciently lamented, "Radical social work would require a transformation—of theory, status, educational models, and professional goals—in which most social workers are unwilling or unable to engage" (p. 26).

Social Work Practice

Social work research, practice, and pedagogy still manifest innumerable practical incongruences that result directly and indirectly from collective avoidance of critical engagement with whiteness. Again, contemporary social work has embraced intersectionality (see Crenshaw, 1991), anti-oppressiveness, and anti-racism as staples of the profession for their functional utility

and symbolic meaning. Each operates as a framework to orient the social worker to their professional world. Too often, though, the relationship between the prescriptions of the chosen framework and the outcome of the social worker's effort is moderated by whiteness, usually for the worse, and normally in a manner preventable with self-reflection.

Intersectionality, for example, was developed as way to conceptualize identity as infinitely multiplicative, not additive (i.e., a Black woman's lived experience is not a linear amalgam of Blackness plus womanhood, but a unique existential product irreducible to the individual factors that inform her identity) (Crenshaw, Gotanda, Peller, & Thomas, 1995). Yet, social workers regularly err toward the reductive, additive application of intersectionality (Baines, 2008), which seems a predictable misstep given social work's demonstrated habit of simplifying conceptualizations of identity, evidenced by routine omission of whiteness from collective scrutiny.

Anti-oppressiveness has become popular as a discourse and socio-political project intended to sensitize social workers to the reciprocal relationships between structural and interpersonal dynamics that maintain systemic inequity. Here, too, unexamined whiteness obstructs otherwise well-intentioned social work by throwing anti-oppressive action off course. Deployed uncritically, anti-oppressive rhetoric can create or uphold a climate of social control (Millar, 2008). The propensity to inadvertently effectuate mechanisms of social control even in attempts to accomplish the exact opposite is exacerbated by ignorance of the ways in which the embodiment of whiteness refers directly to histories of imperialism, colonialism, enslavement, racism, and capitalist exploitation (Allen, 1994–1997; Roediger, 1991).

Modern social work and public activism in general have experienced a veritable explosion of anti-racism action and advocacy. Many of the groups that take anti-racism as their flagship cause consist partly or entirely of individuals who identify as white. Hughey (2012) brilliantly portrays the ways in which white affinity groups with explicit missions of anti-racism and social justice often recreate the very same hegemonic whiteness constructed by white nationalist groups. When this occurs—not uncommonly—within social work, Black social service beneficiaries, providers, students, and educators experience overt racism (Dominelli, 1989). Within the pedagogical setting, such reification of hegemonic whiteness results in the fetishization of non-white people and their subsequent reduction to a commodity produced to satiate white curiosity and paternalism (Matias, 2016).

Even radical social work, the most likely branch of social work to take up criticism of whiteness, as noted above, runs up against contradiction and dissonance in practice. Mullaly & Keating (1991) identify a common recognition of "the myth of white superiority" (p. 57) across diverse sects of radical social workers, spanning those who identify variously as critical, Marxist, progressive, socialist, and structural social workers. However, Cherry (2018) notes social work's tendency, despite recognizing such myths as white superiority, to mediate rather than remedy the inequities wrought by racial injustice, capitalism, and democracy as pillars of modernity, calling in response for social work to "decolonize [its] imagination" (p. 54). To the degree that whiteness buttresses the injustice imbricated within systems of capitalism and democracy, this decolonization of social work's imagination must consist in part of the expropriation of whiteness from the collective consciousness of social work.

Social Work Theory

Moving from the practice-focused literature to theoretical writing and research, social work's engagement with whiteness throughout the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries was limited and conflicted. Social work during that time demonstrated neither an ability nor willingness to adopt anything more than a hesitant posture, increasingly recognizing whiteness within and outside of the profession to be a problem, but uncertain how to respond in a decisive and sustained manner. This collective skittishness still permits the "invisible presence of whiteness" (Gustafson, 2007) to permeate normative standards and expectations of social work, shaping theory in the mold of ubiquitous but unnamed white hegemony (de Montigny, 2013; Jeffery, 2005; Lee & Bhuyan, 2013; Maurer, 2016; Todd, 2011) and reenacting the racial oppression that typifies overarching U.S. society (Dominelli, 1989).

Social work theory's tendency to recreate systems of oppression in the process of engaging with whiteness stems from dependence upon modes of critique that fixate upon the *effects* rather than the *existence* of whiteness. Some social workers even explicitly contest the feasibility of moving past this conceptual barrier, asserting that whiteness is here to stay and that to suggest otherwise entertains a "simplistic understanding of social construction" (Jeyasingham, 2012, p. 673). But frameworks that accept that position begin from an ontological starting point that presumes whiteness to be an ineradicable fixture of social and material existence, and are restricted therefore to a capacity to render only social realities that include some degree of oppression by hierarchical racialization.

Well-intentioned interventions in social work theory oriented toward racial equity and social justice transmit racial oppression by leaving whiteness intact through a variety of mechanisms, including sentimentalism, colorblindness, and transhistoricism. For example, David Nylund (2006) calls for the development of critical multiculturalism and oppositional whiteness, but stops short of disavowing whiteness, deploying sentimentalism by citing discomfort as a justification for refusing to become a "race traitor" (p. 32). To allow discomfort to preempt serious consideration of any racial justice movement is surely to doom the prospect of racial equity entirely. In another case, Laura Abrams and Priscilla Gibson (2007) make a similar effort to directly confront whiteness by incorporating scrutiny of privilege into multicultural models, but prevaricate with the misleading but predictable colorblind contention that "students of all racial and ethnic backgrounds can learn how to more effectively deal with [white privilege]" (p. 158). Certainly, anyone can uphold whiteness as an ideology, regardless of race or ethnicity. To make no distinction, though, among the degrees to which different racial and ethnic groups participate in and need to "deal with" whiteness obscures the responsibilities of particular populations and minimizes the reality that non-white people often must independently become proficient in such "learning" as a prerequisite of success, if not of survival, in U.S. society. Further, Catherine Phillips (2010) observes the proclivity of social work—even anti-racist social work—to construct transhistorical conceptions of white identity that elide temporal and contextual specificity. This leads to a notion of whiteness that is omnipresent, yet detached from historical or material origin, and thus nebulous enough to escape any direct threat or organized opposition.

Social Work and Whiteness Today

Over the last few years, in line with the general sociocultural shift toward public awareness of race that has accompanied the aforementioned "racial reckoning," there has been a definite uptick in the production of social work research and scholarship concerning whiteness, either directly or as one factor in the social problem of racial injustice. The most notable interventions in this area—which, taken together, account for the vast majority of new material—include a special issue of the journal, *Advances in Social Work* (AISW), on "dismantling white supremacy in social work education" (Yearwood, Barbera, Fisher, & Hostetter, 2021) along with a symposium titled, *Social Work, White Supremacy, and Racial Justice*, whose paper presentations are currently being published as an edited volume (Abrams, Crewe, Dettlaff, Williams, 2020). The former contains 43 articles on whiteness and related subjects in social work, with a focus on pedagogy, curricula, and educational processes and institutions. The latter consists of an expansive range of 47 scholarly projects grouped according to four categories: social work's historical legacy of racism and white supremacy, reflections addressing past and present racism within social work, envisioning and antiracist future from practice to policy, and strategies for achieving racial justice in social work education. Both the AISW special issue and symposium represent important, meaningful social work contributions.

Across the works included in the AISW special issue on dismantling white supremacy in social work education and the symposium on social work, white supremacy, and racial justice, there is considerable overlap in authorship, methodological orientation, and topical focus. These factors make the special issue and symposium well suited to be considered together for their combined intention and impact. Taken jointly, the AISW issue and the racial justice symposium illustrate the following four trends in social work that, collectively, represent a turning point for the profession: First, racial injustice in the twenty-first century has motivated social work, methodologically, to look to its past, allocating time and resources to revisionist history projects that restore and center founding contributions from outside the exclusionary narrative that white hegemony once imposed as a purportedly comprehensive origin story (e.g., Park, 2020; Wright, Carr, & Akin, 2021). Second, social work efforts toward racial justice seem to accept as their analytical starting point the premise that white supremacy was, and often still is, integral to the profession's structural and institutional formation (e.g., Del-Villar, 2021; Guz, 2020). Third, consensus has grown that modern social work generally handles matters of racial injustice ineffectively, if not in ways that arguably worsen the harms wrought by whiteness and racism (e.g., Aguilar & Counselman-Carpenter, 2021; Whitaker, 2021). And fourth, social workers increasingly articulate the viewpoint that today's race problems cannot be adequately, even honestly, addressed through incremental changes to existing methods, but demand a radical, holistic transition to liberatory praxis that rejects the assumptions about race endorsed by inherited principles of social work theory and practice (e.g., Polk, Vazquez, Kim, & Green, 2021; Sarantakos & Silva, 2021). These emergent themes in recent social work scholarship showcase novel insights into the intersections of social work, whiteness, and racism. Above and beyond that, though, and maybe more significantly, they suggest a spreading collective acknowledgement of and commitment to the unavoidably obvious, extensive racial justice work that remains, and which hinges upon whiteness as the crux of the truly dire problem.

The Present Study

This project originates from and speaks directly to one simple fact, which the history just reviewed makes clear: whiteness is a social problem. White privilege (McIntosh, 1989) is not a social problem; white fragility (DiAngelo, 2018) is not a social problem; white silence (Smalling, 2015) is not a social problem; but, more accurately, each is a *symptom* of one underlying social problem—namely, whiteness. This is not to deny that white privilege, fragility, and silence are pervasively and severely harmful, but to point out that dwelling upon any or all of these misses the etiological priority of whiteness as the root cause from which they stem. Whiteness is, by its most honest historical-material definition, wholly constituted by and inseparable from white supremacy (Ignatiev, 1997; Ignatiev & Garvey, 1996). Or, as Roediger (1994) puts it, "It is not merely that whiteness is oppressive and false; it is that whiteness is *nothing but* oppressive and false" (p. 13). Whiteness is, therefore, not just a social problem, but a categorical social problem.

Social work's orientation toward whiteness as a categorical social problem should be easily predictable and unwavering. Other unambiguously harmful social problems make their way quickly onto social work agendas as injustices to which the profession stands unequivocally opposed and that legions of social workers rally fervently to combat. The normative course of action in such cases is never hesitant or partial, but imperative and absolute—total elimination, or, to use the popular language of rising social work generations, abolition. Social work has historically aimed to completely end categorical social problems like hunger, crime, violence, and poverty (the notions of aspiring to alleviate *most* hunger or to prevent *some* violence would undoubtedly register with most social workers as falling short of their professional mandates and as abandonment of moral responsibility). Further, growing numbers of prominent social work scholars, activists, and practitioners are pronouncing the need to abolish prisons (e.g., Chandler, 2018; Richie & Martensen, 2020), and have recently taken to even more controversial abolition projects targeting the police (Abrams & Dettlaff, 2020) and the child welfare system (Dettlaff et al., 2020), all of which are arguably more difficult to classify as categorical social problems than hunger, crime, violence, poverty, or whiteness. A burgeoning national social work collective and infrastructure has even recently progressed to the point of formal institutionalization as the Network to Advance Abolitionist Social Work (NAASW), focusing foremost on carcerality, but also promoting abolitionist social work praxis more broadly (see Network to Advance Abolitionist Social Work, 2021). The historically consistent, socially just, and increasingly accepted position is thus for social work to commit, as it has in relation to other categorical social problems, to the abolition of whiteness.

But social work has not embraced or even seriously entertained the abolition of whiteness, instead preoccupying itself with treating the aforementioned symptoms of whiteness rather than rooting out their cause (e.g., Jeyasingham, 2012; Lee & Bhuyan, 2013; Nylund, 2006), in effect thereby endorsing only half-measure solutions to the most insidious and impactful categorical social problem facing the United States today (see also de Montigny, 2013; Dominelli, 1989). The disconnect is glaring and unexamined, calling into question how whiteness manifests and is understood to begin with in the field of social work. This study takes up the task of beginning to explore this incongruity by asking, then, without imposing any particular interpretation or agenda, how social workers experience whiteness in their field today.

It falls ultimately to the individual to either reach the theoretical inference that whiteness is nothing but oppressive and false or to ascertain and navigate whiteness differently altogether. Regardless, in order for social work to address whiteness as a social problem, the first step is to apprehend how it manifests and is perceived in the profession according to constituents in the present moment.

Specifically, this study raises the question of how whiteness manifests in contemporary social work according to social workers who do *not* identify as white. Research and scholarship have responded to the disordered state of knowledge on the topic of whiteness with analyses grounded overwhelmingly in the perspectives of white people and institutions. The present study sees this as a problem and seeks to ascertain the long misconceived, always evolving, immediately relevant phenomenon of whiteness from a vantage point *outside* of whiteness; namely, by relying upon the interpretations of people who do *not* identify as white. To that end, this study interviews social work students and faculty who do not identify as white in order to collect data capable of clarifying how to understand whiteness in social work in the present moment. Participants report their experiences with and perceptions of whiteness in social work curricula, in their work, and in their institutions. The results of these interviews incorporate viewpoints from previously overlooked and excluded populations; voices without which whiteness cannot be fully apprehended, and whose lived experiences constitute an informational resource that is essential to the task which social justice demands—that we make sense of and respond accordingly to whiteness today.

Chapter Overview

Chapter 2 articulates the methodological frameworks and technical methods utilized in this study, as well as key assumptions that support them. The chapter also addresses an important point on terminology and takes account of my own racial identity and its implications for the research and authorship processes. The reason for allocating space to the latter task is that, from both a procedural and an epistemological perspective, data collection and analysis cannot be honestly, fairly, or accurately completed without incorporating the effects of my subjectivity upon this type of project—and my subject position is white. After all, whatever my personal feelings regarding whiteness, given the current state of things, white racial identity is a phenomenon from which I likely will not find a way to justly extricate myself in this lifetime. It is important to qualify this discussion by emphasizing that it will not serve as an apologia for privilege, but an intentional effort to integrate—for better *and* for worse—the unavoidable moderation that my identities exert on the ways I perceive and produce.

Chapter 3 analyzes interview themes using the tools of dialectical sociology, particularly as delineated by Theodor Adorno (2000) in the lectures that have been transcribed as his Introduction to Sociology. Dialectical sociology of this sort offers a strategic apparatus capable of tracing the "what" of whiteness as it may emerge in participant responses. Crucially, dialectical sociology and critical theory can render a picture that neither fixes whiteness rigidly to white persons, nor reifies it as an artifact external to the social milieu, but remains sensitive to the contingencies of whiteness as a constantly changing phenomenon that reacts and adapts by consisting in the dialectical mediation between person(s) and society, where its contours become legible in the social *and* the material.

Chapter 4 applies a psychoanalytic perspective to interview themes. Namely, this chapter employs elements of Freudian, Fanonian, and Lacanian psychoanalytic theories in order to organize and interpret interview data. Psychoanalysis provides a useful set of tools for deciphering the motivations that underlie whiteness, whatever those motivations might turn out to be. Therein lies the purpose of this chapter—an attempt to read, psychoanalytically, the "why" of whiteness, however it manifests in the testimony that participants provide in recounting their lived experiences with whiteness in curricula, in practice, and in the institutions that they navigate.

Chapter 5 draws from Louis Althusser's philosophy of the state, Pierre Bourdieu's sociology of the habitus, and diverse, contemporary theories of the philosophy and politics of language in order to interpret interview themes. These theories form the scaffolding by which to construct a conceptualization of the "how" of whiteness using the materials generated from interviews with study participants. This chapter aims to round off the trajectory developed over the course of chapters 2 and 3, bringing the narrative arc to an end by following discussions of the "what" and the "why" of whiteness with an analysis of the "how" of whiteness. Such a discussion necessarily gets into the everyday institutional and interpersonal mechanics of whiteness and the processes by which it continuously maintains and refashions itself through symbolic systems that interact in order to produce the nebulous and omnipresent media to which we refer in shorthand as culture or discourse.

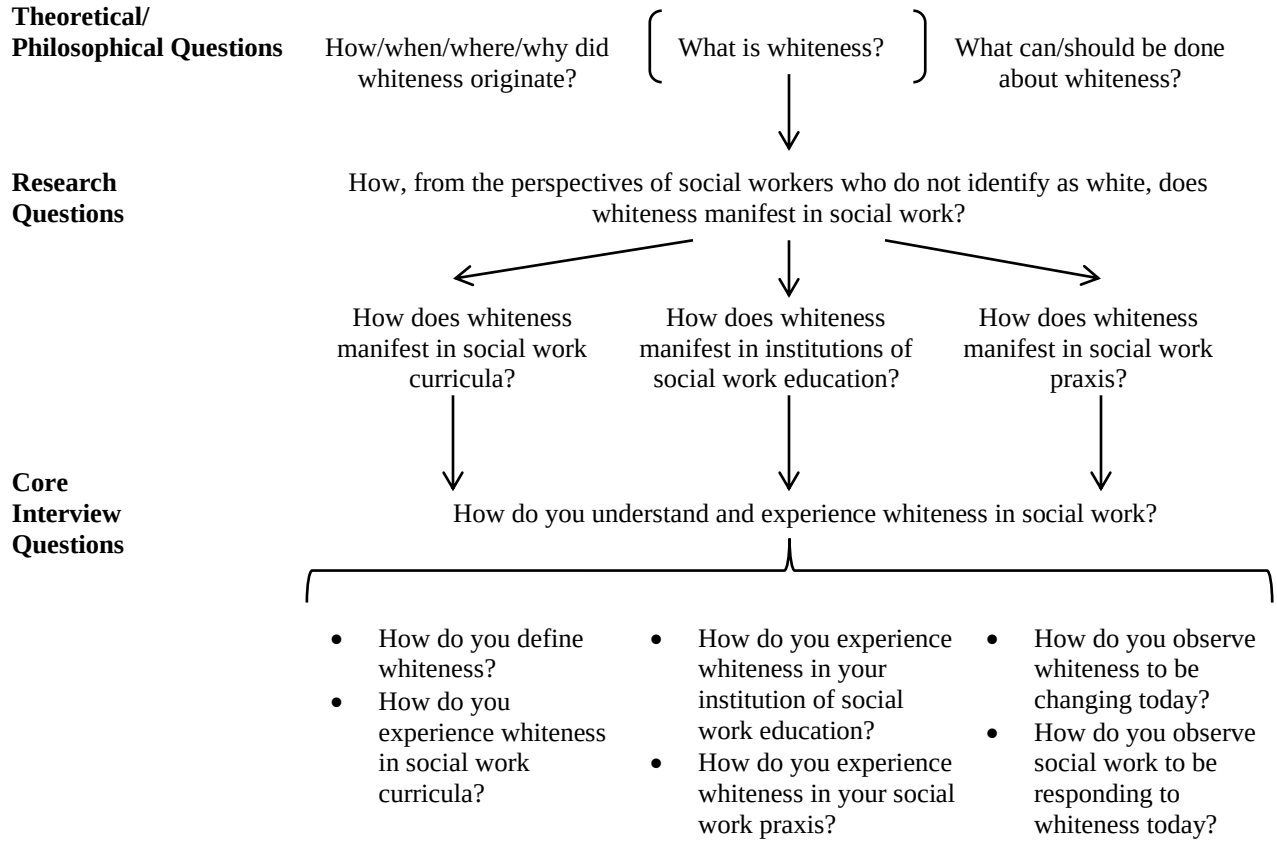
Chapter 6 brings closure to the preceding work by extracting from the foregoing findings implications that are clearly actionable for social workers and for those otherwise invested in racial justice. Methodologically, the concluding chapter approaches this task not authoritatively, but in deference to the wisdom of participants and as a facilitator amidst the ongoing collective attempt to understand and come to terms with whiteness and its consequences today. The chapter emphasizes actionable implications—summarizing points that logically lead directly to a suggested shift in thought or behavior, individual or collective, which the average social worker reading the text could readily understand and subsequently decide to adopt, disregard, or modify as appropriate according to context. This is accomplished by centering the voices of participants in gathering recommendations concerning what social work and U.S. society in general should do in response to whiteness right now and moving forward.

Chapter 2: Methods

This study asks the following guiding research question: How, from the perspectives of social workers who do not identify as white, does whiteness manifest in social work? The matrix below (see Figure 1) situates this research question in relation to the overarching theoretical and philosophical questions from which it is derived and in connection to the more specific core interview questions by which it may begin to be answered.

Figure 1

Whiteness Question Matrix



In the preceding chapter, I laid the groundwork for this study by addressing questions of how, when, where, and why whiteness originated. Epistemically, these questions must—or at least should, for the sake of contextual awareness—precede any attempt to ask what whiteness is. After all, whiteness once did not exist, and subsequently came into being immersed in the same historical-material mediation from which all else emerges. Now, I turn to an exploration of whiteness, today. This line of inquiry falls within the broad domain that encompasses variations of questions asking, generally speaking, some form of the query, "What is whiteness?" Different sources and competing views suggest divergent answers to this question, as certain tensions already discussed reveal (e.g., ongoing contest for hegemony between neo-conservative and progressive variants of whiteness; discrepancy between historical nature of whiteness and

contemporary social work response to whiteness). So, at any point that the issue might appear settled—as even certain lines of evidence in the introductory passages, here, may imply—it is always worth asking anew what whiteness is, knowing full well the limitation that any answer is contingent upon context. And speaking of context, I raise this question, now, from within the field of social work. This is, in part, simply because I am a social worker and I believe that this study is valuable to social work. Beyond, that, though, social work perspectives on whiteness are crucial to understanding whiteness within the profession and more broadly because of the historical intertwinement between whiteness and social work. With all that in mind, I pursue answers to this study's stated research question by asking social work master's students, doctoral students, and faculty who do not identify as white how whiteness manifests in social work curricula, institutions of social work education, and their own praxis. Findings, conclusions, and implications will lead, later, to consideration of potential answers to the related category of theoretical and philosophical questions that attempt to ascertain what can and what should be done about whiteness, and how such interventions might take form.

Assumptions

Certain assumptions that enable me to even ask the above questions in the first place should be made explicit in order to ensure methodological transparency, rigor, and reflexivity. First, the qualification that the research question is directed toward social workers *who do not identify as white* requires an additional note of justification beyond what was offered in the introduction. As mentioned, methodologically speaking, the extant research and literature on whiteness exhibits a serious shortcoming in that it consists almost entirely of white persons conceptualizing and testifying to the lived experience of whiteness. Further, in terms of theory, there is a strong argument to be made that, given the denial and delusion historically intrinsic to whiteness, on average, the most accurate concurrent reporting on whiteness at any given moment is less likely to come from those who identify as white than those who do *not*. Possible debate on this theoretical point aside, at the very least, a well-rounded conceptualization of whiteness ought to equally take stock of perspectives from within and outside of whiteness. This study's engagement of the latter will merely begin to correct the standing imbalance which unduly privileges whiteness and erases the perspectives of those who do not identify as white—precisely those who, throughout history, have been forced, often as a matter of survival, to develop intimate and incisive understanding of whiteness. But because it is beyond the purview of this study to empirically assess between-group trends in firsthand reporting on whiteness among white respondents and non-white respondents, or to demonstrate that increased diversity in viewpoints from which an object of knowledge is conceptualized leads to greater understanding of that object, these will both remain mere assumptions upon which my work is forced to rest. Hopefully stating these directly at least establishes clear parameters for what this work is and is not, and what it can and cannot do, which are important criteria if the goal is a more accurate and honest account of whiteness.

Second, while I will say more about my positionality in greater detail later, I should mention up front, from a more technical and methodological angle, what is perhaps the greatest and potentially most consequential assumption upon which this entire research process and subsequent study depend; that is, the assumption that non-white research participants can and will speak openly and honestly about whiteness to me, a white researcher. This was, is, and will

remain an assumption because it would be impossible to test the present study against the counterfactual scenario in which everything remained exactly the same except for my race—a study in which a version of myself who is not white conducted the same interviews with the same participants under the same circumstances. Intuitively, the probability that non-white participants and would speak to a white researcher about whiteness without any measure of self-censorship or misrepresentation of their actual perception, intentional or not, may seem low; but, contrary to what many might believe, there is no reason to presume that any such interpersonal dynamics necessarily *would* arise to an extent sufficient to substantively alter participant responses in this study. While the literature on racial concordance mainly examines the relationship between physician and patient, and to a lesser extent the relationship between medical researcher and patient, findings in those areas are inconsistent and inconclusive (Sacks, 2019), sometimes even suggesting benefits to racial discordance (Mindlis, Livert, Federman, Wisnivesky, & Revenson, 2020). The dyadic relations observed in these findings are likely similar to those inherent to the researcher-participant interactions in the present study, given the personal nature of questions asked in both cases. What no previous study examines, though, is the effect of racial concordance when the researcher is asking the participant about an issue that directly implicates the researcher in a critical or even negative way, as was the case with me asking questions designed to elicit critical perspectives on whiteness. Participants may have moderated themselves because of my identity as a white researcher, and there will never be any way to know for sure whether and to what extent this occurred. This represents the methodological boundary at which point I can only assume openness and honesty among participants. To mitigate the effects of this limitation, at the end of every interview, I asked, "How do you feel this interview process has been influenced by my whiteness?" No participant reported a negative or even significant effect of my whiteness upon the interview process. Positive responses to this question (which I will discuss in greater detail later) can provide some reassurance as to the validity of the data collected; but if a participant had decided not to speak openly and honestly, there is no reason that their testimony would be any less tainted by this fact in speaking to a question designed to detect precisely such an issue. So, ultimately, in the same way that I implicitly asked for every person who participated in this study to trust my good faith, I must trust theirs by assuming the integrity of their answers.

Design

For this study, I conducted 30 hour-long, in-depth, semi-structured, individual interviews. Interviews took place virtually using Zoom, and participants were guaranteed anonymity. Interviews were audio-recorded for transcription and analysis purposes. The in-depth interview design was selected in order to address a major methodological deficiency in the study of whiteness; namely, the near total absence of empirical inquiry into whiteness (notable exceptions being Ruth Frankenberg's (1993) *White Women, Race Matters* and Matthew Hughey's (2012) *White Bound*, as well as, somewhat indirectly, Eduardo Bonilla-Silva's (2017) *Racism Without Racists*). The overwhelming majority of studies on whiteness to date have been either theoretical interventions or retrospective works that rely on historical and/or archival rather than original data. This study addresses that neglect which, although born in method, terminates in an unnecessarily narrow understanding of whiteness as an object of knowledge for lack of attention to the immediate present.

The interview process focused on the core question areas mentioned above and contextualized in the question matrix (see Figure 1), and accommodated follow-up dialogue on topics either directly following from or peripherally related to these initial points of entry. In addition to asking questions directly about experiences of whiteness in social work curricula, in institutions of social work education, and social work praxis (praxis being defined by each individual according to the nature of their own work, be that research, practice, teaching, advocacy, etc.), I also asked participants about the following: their sociodemographic characteristics, their earliest memories of race, the meanings of their racial identities, their definitions of whiteness, their observations regarding changes in whiteness today, and their observations of ways that social work is responding to this change. Before closing with the checking question about the effects of my own whiteness on the interview process, I also asked participants what they thought social work's response to whiteness today *should* be, my intention being to gather data that might begin to outline a theory of practice capable of forming next steps beyond this study and the current historical moment. Lastly, I asked each participant whether they wanted to share anything at all that I had not asked about, or anything related to my questioning that they had not had the opportunity to articulate fully. Appendix A contains the full interview schedule, which, given the semi-structured nature of the interviews, covers the content discussed very extensively but not exhaustively. Idiosyncratic, meaningful topics that emerged will be discussed as relevant throughout my later analysis.

Sample

The sample for this study consists of 30 participants. Participants are social work master's students, doctoral students, and faculty, some of the latter also holding administrative positions as deans, vice presidents, and other leadership roles. No participants identify as white. Taken together, these attributes—status as a social work master's student, doctoral student, or faculty and racial identification as a person non-white—represent the study inclusion criteria. Within the study population of social work master's students, doctoral students, and faculty, the sole exclusion criterion, of course, was racial identification as white. Verification of student or faculty status was, for all intents and purposes, self-evident during the recruitment process and verifiable during the interview. Racial identity was operationalized according to participant self-report. Table 1 presents sociodemographic characteristics of the final study sample.

In order to acquire this study's sample, I utilized a combination of purposive and convenience sampling. As an initial sampling frame, I accessed the publicly available *U.S. News & World Report* (2022) ranked list of graduate schools of social work. This list allowed me to identify schools with social work programs. From here, I repeated the following sequence of steps, beginning with the first and proceeding through the listed schools one by one as necessary, in order to recruit doctoral student and faculty participants: 1) Visit the school's social work program website; 2) locate publicly available contact information for doctoral students and faculty; 3) based on pictures and names, identify doctoral students and faculty who I assumed were not white; 4) e-mail identified persons soliciting study participation. In order to recruit master's students, because their contact information is generally not publicly available in the same ways as doctoral students' and faculty's, I had to replace steps 2 and 3 with ad hoc processes of searching program websites for mentions of master's students in announcements, news stories, committee listings, and other online content.

I began the recruitment process intending to reach the predetermined quota of 30 interviews. In order to complete 30 interviews, I sent 111 individual e-mails. Obviously, 30 people responded, expressed their willingness to participate, and fully completed the consent and interview processes. Making up the majority response, 71 people gave no reply to my e-mail solicitation. A small fraction of 6 people initially showed interest but did not respond to follow-up communications. Lastly, 4 people responded to express that they did not wish to participate.

I should explicitly note three caveats regarding the sampling process for this study. First, some may regard it as a limitation that I worked through my sampling frame in order of the school ranking assigned by *U.S. News & World Report*. This critique rightly points out that perspectives from so-called elite research institutions are overrepresented, which consequently also implies the presence of certain systemic sociopolitical and class-based biases. To a minor extent, this is simply true and I cannot deny the theoretical limit—however minimal it may be—that this fact imposes. In terms of real impact, though, any such potential bias is mitigated by the high level of within-group diversity among this cohort of institutions in terms of constituents' racial, gender, and class identities, which master's students, doctoral students, and faculty all reported, and which will be apparent in greater detail in my analysis. Perhaps most importantly, though, this potential limitation is just not that much of a problem because the goal of this study is not generalizability, but rich description of a purposive sample, whatever biases that sample may reflect. I estimated any representational downside to be a small cost for the methodological benefit of centering the recruitment process within a network of schools similar to my own, which I assumed would increase the overall participation rate through a shared prioritization of academic research.

Second, and also related to the possibility of shared priorities among the institutions from which I sampled, there exists an unavoidable threat of selection bias. In other words, among the study population of potential participants to whom I gained access as a result of my sampling frame and recruitment strategy, it could be that those who opted to participate in this study are those already most predisposed to want to speak openly about their experiences of whiteness in social work; and, given that I sampled non-white participants only, those most likely to agree to discuss whiteness would, in theory, also be more likely to hold critical views of whiteness. To the extent that such selection bias is operative, then, the sample represents not the perspectives of simply social work students and faculty who do not identify as white, but those non-white social work students and faculty most willing to publicly critique whiteness. This threat to selection bias would have been impossible to eliminate entirely by any strategy of study design. However, the risk is mitigated by the condition of anonymous participation, which was implemented primarily in order to offer safety and invite participants who may, in fact, not be among those most likely to speak out about whiteness in social work or to do so critically. Further, even if this form of selection bias does affect the study sample, that does not invalidate the contents of the interviews or their implications. In fact, injustice often comes to light through the testimony of those most impassioned to share their stories in spite of the risk that vocal criticism entails.

Finally, this recruitment procedure left room for me to incorrectly assume someone's racial identity. That is, someone I perceived to be phenotypically something other than white, or someone I judged to have a name with ethnolinguistic markers that do not typically connote

whiteness, might identify as white. This only happened once. When this person expressed, at the beginning of the interview, that they identify as white, I proceeded as usual. They were not, however, counted as a part of the final sample.

Table 1

Sample Sociodemographic Characteristics

Characteristic[a]	Master's students		Doctoral students		Faculty		Full sample	
	n	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%
Age								
20–29	3	50.0	4	26.6̄	0	0.0	7	23.3̄
30–39	0	0.0	7	46.6̄	2	22.2̄	9	30.0
40–49	3	50.0	3	20.0	4	44.4̄	10	33.3̄
50–59	0	0.0	1	6.6̄	1	11.1̄	2	6.6̄
60–69	0	0.0	0	0.0	2	22.2̄	2	6.6̄
Race								
Black	2	33.3̄	5	33.3̄	5	55.5̄	12	40.0
Latinx	2	33.3̄	4	26.6̄	2	22.2̄	8	26.6̄
Asian	1	16.6̄	2	13.3̄	2	22.2̄	5	16.6̄
Middle Eastern	0	0.0	2	13.3̄	0	0.0	2	6.6̄
Mixed	1	16.6̄	2	13.3̄	0	0.0	3	10.0
Gender								
Female	4	66.6̄	11	73.3̄	5	55.5̄	20	66.6̄
Male	2	33.3̄	4	26.6̄	3	33.3̄	9	30.0
Non-binary	0	0.0	0	0.0	1	11.1̄	1	3.3̄
Socioeconomic status[b]								
Working class	1	16.6̄	3	20.0	1	11.1̄	5	16.6̄
Lower middle class	2	33.3̄	3	20.0	0	0.0	5	16.6̄
Middle class	2	33.3̄	5	33.3̄	6	66.6̄	13	43.3̄
Upper middle class	1	16.6̄	4	26.6̄	2	22.2̄	7	23.3̄
U.S. Region								
Northeast	0	0.0	2	13.3̄	0	0.0	2	6.6̄
South	0	0.0	2	13.3̄	1	11.1̄	3	10.0
Midwest	2	33.3̄	2	13.3̄	3	33.3̄	7	23.3̄
West	4	66.6̄	9	60.0	5	55.5̄	18	60.0

[a]All characteristics aggregated using terminology provided in participants' own words.
[b]Operationalized qualitatively according to participant self-report.

Data

Data collected for this study consists of interview audio and transcripts (no video was recorded), as well as contemporaneous interviewer notes. For centralization, preservation, security, and anonymity, all of these forms of data were and are stored electronically on my personal laptop computer under password protection. Interview audio was contemporaneously recorded using Zoom. Transcripts were subsequently produced by running audio files through Otter.ai transcription software. Transcripts were reviewed and edited by hand as needed to ensure accuracy following software transcription. Following transcript finalization, audio recordings were deleted. Only transcripts and interviewer notes remain, the former being stored

under password protection, still, and the latter containing no information by which any participant could be even indirectly identified.

Analysis

Demographic data across participants was aggregated for descriptive analytical purposes and for sample presentation (see Table 1). This was not used to posit any inferential conclusions, but merely to give supplemental context through which to provide a more informed rendering of the qualitative data collected. Beyond that, I analyzed the narrative contents of participant interviews. I conducted said analysis using qualitative coding techniques, supported by the Otter.ai and NVivo software programs. In developing my analysis past the point of general thematic and in vivo coding, the grounded theory methodology provided a framework with which to rigorously and comprehensively scaffold the coding process. To be clear, this analysis did not follow the grounded theory method as a whole, strictly speaking. However, I utilized coding procedures prescribed by grounded theory, if not in total alignment with the means or ends that the orthodox grounded theorist would endorse. These consist of initial coding, focused coding, axial coding, and theoretical coding, each of which essentially represents a sequential step in inductive progression from data observation and organization to the formulation and formalization of novel conceptualizations (Charmaz, 2014).

As a short, illustrative example, take the following statement from Natasha (40, Latinx, female, working-class, faculty), in which she attempts to define whiteness: “I don’t know if I can define it, but it’s everywhere, if that makes sense.” During the initial coding stage, this passage was identified as belonging to the category of the “what” of whiteness, which consisted of descriptive attempts to define or situate whiteness as an object of understanding. Through focused coding, it was grouped with other excerpts sharing the theme of whiteness being in some way undefined, difficult to define, or impossible to define. By way of what could be compared to the axial coding process in grounded theory methodology, Natasha’s words were separated out, more specifically, as a case exhibiting criteria indicating both definitional ambiguity and participant ambivalence. Ultimately, Natasha’s comments were assigned to the theoretical code group that coalesced, in the end, in a notion labeled as indefinable whiteness, which supported a theory of whiteness as a paradoxically ahistorical object of knowledge seeming, to participants, to be both everywhere and nowhere all at once.

Terminology

Obviously, this study relies heavily upon the use of racial terminology—it did throughout the design and implementation phases and continues to do so out of necessity in the analysis and reporting stages that give form to this text. Wherever possible, my word choice reflects the terminology used by the participants themselves. In the absence of any universally applicable system that prescribes in advance the racial adjectives and identities attributable to one person and not another, I choose to let participant autonomy and self-expression serve as the guiding principle. Frequently, though, I am forced, in my own narration or analysis, to resolve terminological ambiguities in making references to multiple persons or groups. Since whiteness is the focus of this study, this referential indeterminacy typically arises in selecting the terms to describe people who do not identify as white. Most often, I am able to simply describe that

people do not identify as white. However, sometimes this does not work for grammatical reasons. The popular way to resolve this issue is to refer to people who do not identify as white as people of color. Rather than uncritically follow that convention, I opt instead to refer to such people as non-white when either sentence structure requires me to or the point that I am emphasizing is not association with a particular racial identity but dissociation from whiteness. I do so because participants did not unanimously endorse identification as a person of color. In fact, many problematized the label, citing its historical tendency to perpetuate the misconception of whiteness as racelessness, and white people as therefore transcending race. Others pointed out that the label was never chosen by those it purportedly describes, but imposed by white persons and institutions as a tool of oppression, marginalization, and cultural erasure. While it may feel awkward, unfamiliar, or even derogatory to describe anyone as non-white in a conversation about race, in the context of the present study, all participants agreed that whiteness is something they would absolutely rather not be.

Capitalization

As I have so far, continuing throughout this study's analysis, I will capitalize "Black" and all its forms as racial identity descriptors, but I will not capitalize "white," "whiteness," or the like. Particularly in the wake of the murder of George Floyd, debate has increased concerning race and capitalization, with *The New York Times* and *Associated Press* recently making the decision to capitalize "Black" but not "white" (Coleman, 2020). Given the visibility and reach of these institutions, their decision will undoubtedly shape the standards and practices of countless other written media outlets, along with the minds and behaviors of readers. Many laud the shift as a formal recognition of shared history and culture, and thus a tangible advancement toward racial justice (Eligon, 2020). Others claim, also in the name of racial justice, that the move is misguided—knowledgeable and certainly well-intentioned others like Kwame Anthony Appiah and Nell Irvin Painter, for instance. They make the case that "White" should be capitalized along with "Black," basically because lowercase whiteness allows whites to position themselves as unraced, a move which, historically, has been integral to the insidious advancement of white supremacy, especially in the post-civil rights era (Appiah, 2020; Painter, 2020).

There are compelling reasons for each of the different combinations by which races may be capitalized or not (the exception being uppercase "White" and lowercase "black," which really can only be justified as an artifact of outright racism; but then again, some might find this compelling, which I suppose just makes my point about the relativity of it all). My goal is not to settle any debate, here; and, frankly, I think that even the noblest attempts to resolve the disagreement largely miss the point and perpetuate a serious problem. The problem I am referring to is that we routinely mistake the standardization of language as anything other than an exercise of power. There is no objectively right answer to be found, yet objective correctness is what a standard purports to codify. Power, rather, is what motivates and situates standards. Even if the standardization of uppercase "Blackness" is an escape from white hegemony, it is, itself, still an exercise of power—a groundswell of power from below rather than imposition from above, perhaps, but power nevertheless. So, to align oneself with any standard at all, regardless of which letters are capitalized or not, is really an attempt to intervene in the distribution of power by giving the weight of consensus to a desired order of things. The only honest position to take, then, is not to defend one standard as better than another on supposedly objective grounds,

but to disclose one's subjective rationale for choosing a particular convention. Rather than attempt to justify my system of capitalization in this study, I should simply be clear about how my understanding has led me to this approach.

As I see it, one cannot define whiteness in positive terms, but only in negative relation. What is at stake in the distinction between asserting a positive definition and interpreting a negative relation is the difference between decontextually reifying white *persons* and historically recognizing white*ness*. Whiteness, according to my understanding informed by lived experience and research, is pure relational negativity. Whiteness is not an identity, but a *mode of identifying* that lacks any positive form or content. In any given historical moment, whiteness has varied according to context; and in any given context, whiteness has varied according to historical moment (Dyer, 1997; Frankenberg, 1993; Gregory, 2020; Kendi, 2016; Roediger, 2005). In terms of form, whiteness has been determined inconsistently using phenotypical, geographical, ethnic, religious, political, or cultural markers, to name only a few criteria (Lipsitz, 1998); and, within these forms, whiteness (or lack thereof) has been judged variably in reference to content, with, for example, Irish sometimes being counted as white and other times not (Ignatiev, 1995), and Jews similarly occupying a precarious and fluctuating membership status in relation to whiteness (Brodkin, 1998). Without consistency—or, indeed, coherence—across time, context, form, or content, the only stable referent by which to discern some legibility among the myriad possible meanings invoked by whiteness is negativity—not affirmation of what one *is*, but negation of what one is *not*. Whiteness, in actuality, has only ever been the rejection of the Other. If, for complete absence of continuity, whiteness does not and has never referred to a viable self, and if such an utter lack of self equally destabilizes the possibility of a fixed Other, then the only unifying feature throughout the history of what we call whiteness is neither any enduring notion of self nor other, but the relational assertion, "I am not you." It is, again, not an identity, but a mode of identifying. As such, to put it simply, I cannot consider whiteness a proper noun deserving of capitalization, strictly speaking.

I can, however, think of Blackness in a way that warrants capitalization. David R. Roediger (1994) makes my view on this distinction poignantly clear:

> We speak of African American culture and community, and rightly so. Indeed the making of disparate African ethnic groups into an African American people … is a genuine story of an American melting pot … There are Irish American songs, Italian American neighborhoods, Slavic American traditions, German American villages, and so on. But such specific ethnic cultures always stand in danger of being swallowed by the lie of whiteness. Whiteness describes … not a culture but precisely the absence of culture. It is the empty and therefore terrifying attempt to build an identity based on what one isn't and on whom one can hold back. (p. 13)

This description renders a historical portrait that exemplifies the translation of whiteness from ideology to materiality, where negation manifests as oppression, and the definitively white declaration, "I am not you," is transposed as the injunction, "This is not yours." More importantly, this description fleshes out—quite literally—the ways in which Blackness takes positive form very differently than whiteness, and in so doing, demands capitalization as a proper noun that represents shared (though not monolithic) history and culture. This is my view, at least,

and the understanding that is reflected in the standard of capitalization I ascribe to, myself. I make no claim that my (or any) usage is authoritative, but hope only to be clear about what my writing implies so that it may be judged in a fully informed manner.

Positionality

My Whiteness

As I have mentioned by now, I am white. And, to restate the qualification that I also emphasized earlier, my intention in addressing my racial identity, here, is not to offer an apologia for unearned privilege, but to intentionally highlight the unavoidable moderation that my whiteness imposes on the ways I perceive and produce. Specifically, this is to give a general sense of how I navigated my whiteness during the interview and data collection processes, as well as the possible range of effects that my subjectivity might exert on and through subsequent presentation, analysis, and discussion of this study's findings.

It is far from unprecedented to offer critical self-reflection on race as a white author. Perhaps the most voluminous and most known subgenre among the literature on whiteness, in fact, is the reflective whiteness literature. Since Peggy McIntosh (1989) came onto the scene in the late 1980s with her "invisible knapsack" of white privilege, there has been a veritable deluge of reflective writing on whiteness (e.g., DiAngelo, 2018; Gustafson, 2007; Kincheloe, Steinberg, Rodriguez, & Chennault, 1998). Most, but not all, of this is written by, for, and about white people. The favorite form is a sort of white confessional—an autobiographical account of an epiphany whereby the author belatedly realizes and is forced by an ostensibly noble conscience to come to terms with the implications (or, at least the most obvious and severe consequences) of their own whiteness. The self-prescribed first and most important step toward repair, so the reflective literature would have it, is written public contrition that doubles as a vehicle for sharing accounts of whiteness with other white people. The figurehead of this market (indeed, the return on investment for this written act of humility has been literal financial gain for those who flocked to racially repent earliest and most profusely) is undoubtedly Tim Wise (e.g., 2004), who laid much of the groundwork for the now flourishing industries of "woke capitalism" that have since proliferated as entrepreneurs and corporations have identified the potential for profit in professed social values as branding and marketing tools. As may be obvious, the reflective literature on whiteness is most valuable for the critiques that it generates. It is important for me to gesture toward this literature as a backdrop, though, because it informs my own approach to critical self-reflection, providing me with a roadmap of mistakes to avoid.

To be completely honest, my general approach to this sort of critical self-reflection is to put very little of it, if any, in writing directed toward an audience. This is a personal choice. My feeling is that the act of distributing self-reflective writing on whiteness for public consumption implicitly ignores the fact that non-white people have, for centuries, apprehended and attempted to promulgate all that there is to know about the nature of whiteness, to very little success and even less social or material benefit (Roediger, 1998). To purvey this very information as if it were novel insight is to disregard that history and that credit to non-white people, knowingly or not, and even worse, to seek validation and acclaim as a reward for that negligence. But the circumstances of the present study seem, to me, to uniquely involve interracial power dynamics

that separate this research context from prevailing norms and practices of white self-reflection in such a way that obligates me to explicate the thought process by which I navigated my own whiteness vis-à-vis study design and implementation. Specifically, I feel compelled to do so because this study involves human subjects. My previous critique that most literature on whiteness is either theoretical or historical applies to my own previous work, too. This is, indeed, the first time that I have undertaken to systematically investigate whiteness in a way that does not draw only from inferential theorization and secondary data analysis, but from the lives of other people with all their attendant vulnerabilities and insecurities, many of which can only be exacerbated for their gracious willingness to aid me in my pursuit. For that reason, this moment warrants self-reflection on my own whiteness as a both a component and output of the research methods used to conduct this study.

In particular, I am called to speak to how, by undertaking this study, I am anything other than yet another participant in the regrettably overpopulated and shamefully enduring tradition of white researchers—some well-meaning and others exploitative—who extract resources from non-white communities for their own benefit and for the enrichment of white institutions at large. Yet, paradoxically, if I were to preemptively claim to have laid any foundation by which to eliminate any such possibility from my research entirely, that would only serve to infect my approach with the very self-serving denial that enables exactly this injustice. This is really to say that, on the one hand, because my best intentions do not guarantee their impact, I should not pretend to be and could never actually be one to judge the measure of my work according to this criterion. If my project serves at all to subvert white hegemony, it will not be because I say that it can, but because others found that it did. On the other hand, and to this point, I have done the best that I could, with the information that I had, under the circumstances in which I worked, to avoid the oppressive pitfalls that legacies of racist and colonizing research methods still impart today as "best practices" (Zuberi & Bonilla-Silva, 2008). My primary strategy for accomplishing this was, and continues to be, to engage this study's participants as experts on whiteness—not as victims of whiteness, not as pluralistic informants speaking from one of many equally privileged racial vantage points, but as authorities who embody singularly incisive subjectivities of non-whiteness that allows them to understand whiteness with a level of insight unattainable to whites. Moreover, I have attempted, and will continue to strive, to allow these participant voices to determine the processes and products of this study more than my own inclination, turning to my interpretation only insofar as I can remain faithful to the direction dictated by their testimony. I consider myself a facilitator of and participant in the conversation at hand rather than author of any unitary narrative.

Notwithstanding these limitations, I can at least be clear about my intentions and certain inevitable obstacles as related to my whiteness. My primary intention throughout this study is to produce research with implications that are actionable. As my review of the reflective whiteness literature and indication of the prevalence of this subgenre within the larger literature on whiteness suggest, interventions into the social problem of whiteness very often do little, if anything, to further racial justice in any substantive or material way. (Here, too, I include much of my own previous work among the projects that have struggled to bridge the critical study of whiteness in theory to genuinely helpful anti-racist practice.) This is not to say that the path from analysis to discussion to action will necessarily become clear or even can be readily discerned by me as a product of this study, but that I will always attempt to reconnect conversation—which

will undoubtedly become densely theoretical at times—to practice as a means of sustained effort toward interrupting the harm that hegemonic whiteness inflicts if unchallenged in everyday life.

But, as I said, certain barriers to this end are unavoidable; and as a matter of adherence to critically self-reflective research methods, all I can do is defer to these restrictions up front. Namely, by virtue of the fact that study participants universally do not identify as white, I, as a white researcher, can only grapple with certain qualitative pieces of racialized interview data as intellectual objects, despite their reference to phenomena that reside in participants' lived experiences as much more richly inhabited and contextualized moments of subjectivity. Of course, this kind of empathic limit manifests in the relation between any researcher and participant to some extent, but whiteness presents a uniquely severe and entrenched interpersonal rupture, which systemically distorts whites' abilities, most of the time, to come to honest terms with the racial realities faced by those who do not identify as white (Mills, 1997; 2007). For this reason, in my later analysis and discussion, there will simply be instances in which I cannot grasp the full truth; there will even be times when, as future reception may show, I just get it wrong, no matter my good intentions or earnestness.

My Understanding

Finally, before moving on to the real substance of this study, I want to say a word about an issue that arose repeatedly in feedback that I received as I was designing and revising my approach to the research question at hand; an issue that might occur to anyone reading now; an issue summarized, essentially, by the following question: "It seems like you have made up your mind about whiteness, so why would you ask about whiteness now?" Admittedly, my discussion of history, my review of the whiteness literature, and the inferences that I consequently posit may give the impression that I have settled upon an understanding of whiteness and it is therefore unusual, at this stage, to ask any question about whiteness. Though it is beyond the purview of the present conversation to address this fully, I think that the notion that anyone ever asks a research question without some predisposition toward a particular answer is untenable, and that fact ought to be at least named, here. More to the point, though, I would emphasize to anyone inclined toward the above critique that my assessment of history, synthesis of existing literature, and intellectual engagement with critical theories of whiteness *to date* do not preclude any possible answer to the question of how whiteness exists *today*. Put succinctly, my understanding of whiteness is only ever provisional, and my mind can always be changed. Why not, when whiteness itself is always changing? My orientation to whiteness, in fact, is to resist reifying it as a concept at all (recall: whiteness is not an identity, but a *mode of identifying*). So, though I may have arrived at what I take to be some very important truths about whiteness so far, and while I believe for personal and political reasons that it is important to state these truths unequivocally, especially in professional writing, I remain wholeheartedly open to whatever (re)definition of whiteness might emerge in the present moment when articulated by the perennial authorities on whiteness who have so seldom been recognized as such—those who do *not* identify as white. Whatever understanding I bring to this study, I offer it in service to amplify the insight that exists by and in their wisdom.

Chapter 3: The "What" of Whiteness

As I outlined earlier, the three main chapters of this dissertation explore the "what', the "why," and the "how" of whiteness in social work, respectively; that is to say, each takes up, in turn, one of the queries in the following sequence: What is whiteness? Why is whiteness this way? How is it that whiteness is this way? These are addressed, of course, from the field of social work and through the perspectives, specifically, of social workers who do not identify as white.

This structure is broad enough that it should come as no surprise that it both emerges inductively from participant interviews, and also turns out to align with my own unavoidable deductive preconceptions that I carry with me in this study. Participants consistently detailed their encounters with whiteness by utilizing descriptive (the "what" of whiteness), interpretive (the "why" of whiteness), and explanatory (the "how" of whiteness) schemas and terminology, often in overlapping and sometimes even in self-contradictory ways. I, too, have before found value in the practice of aggregating perspectives from these complementary approaches in order to more comprehensively ascertain the nature and consequences of whiteness (see Gregory, 2022). As epistemically non-specific as this admittedly general framework happens to be, it nonetheless draws important conceptual demarcations within the experiential whole that, together, offer a rubric against which to ensure attention to as many of the myriad facets of whiteness as possible. Research on whiteness tends to stop short at description, only occasionally venturing toward explanation, and almost always skipping entirely over any attempt to interpret the underlying factors that indicate why this phenomenon exists, and exists in particular ways. Perhaps that is because almost no research to date has prioritized empirical data on whiteness in the form of firsthand interviews with those who do not identify as white. This study's participants suggest, though, with their testimony grounded in lived experience, that a complete picture of whiteness incorporates descriptive, interpretive, and explanatory data.

As a word of orientation to all that follows, it is crucial to emphasize the fluidity inherent in this framework of the "what," the "why," and the "how" of whiteness. Throughout the chapters that follow, instances will undoubtedly arise in which, to some, whatever has been classified as a "what" might read as a "why" or a "how;" a "why" as a "what" or a "how;" or a "how" as a "what" or a "why." There is undeniably some subjective interpretation that goes into maintaining the boundaries of this system and perceived context and reader positionality certainly influence that process. I have coded participant interview data along their self-reported lines of what are very admittedly fine distinctions. What is important, in the end, is not to insist on a single, authoritative determination of one thing or another as an exclusive "what," "why," or "how," but to acknowledge the inevitable and contested interchangeability among these categories and to engage in rigorous deliberation over possible conceptualizations of whiteness according to their criteria, nonetheless.

Under the heading of describing what whiteness is—whiteness in social work, especially—this chapter begins by first establishing participants' understanding of race in general. The assumption behind this starting point is that participants can speak to whiteness most meaningfully, and maybe can only speak to whiteness at all, in relation to the ways that they make sense of race in their own lives and as an organizing concept. Against this backdrop,

whiteness may later come into focus as alike or dissimilar from other notions of race. Whiteness is, after all, situated amidst innumerable, contested processes of racialization, and its contingency is imperceptible without first highlighting the constellation of conceptual diversity that populates the larger field of race. Next, this chapter engages its focus head-on through participants' responses to direct questions about what whiteness is, in and of itself. In addition to being valuable for anchoring subsequent exploration of whiteness across later considerations of why and how whiteness exists as participants, in fact, describe it, this line of inquiry is illuminating for the simple reason that it is unsettlingly novel—despite the frequency and seeming facility with which participants referenced whiteness throughout preceding parts of the interview, most grew unsure how to define whiteness when the issue was put to them explicitly. Lastly, this chapter asks about the ways in which whiteness, according to the terms used by participants to define it, shows up in social work, as well as how this both mirrors and diverges from the hegemonic whiteness that structures the U.S. society where the participants interviewed live and practice. This rounds off a descriptive operationalization of what whiteness is and how it is conceptualized among social workers who do not identify as white. I conclude this chapter, first, by offering my analysis of the rich data volunteered by study participants, using the principles of dialectical sociology articulated by Theodore Adorno to do so; second, I take provisional stock of progress made toward answering this study's guiding research questions.

Conceptualizing Race

Early Racial Insulation

Participants all began their descriptive accounts of race by recounting the processes that comprised their own racialization—the processes by which they came to understand themselves as racialized subjects and through which they developed attunement to race as a concept with far-reaching implications for social and material life. First among these formative experiences, 50% of participants (n=15) described an early period of racial insulation that they could only retrospectively say turned out to be crucial to their eventual understanding of race for the fact that it allowed them to contrast a context without racial tension against the norm of division that they would later come to know as both one of the primary functions of race as an organizing concept and a dominant feature of U.S. society.

Participants reported that they "didn't really think of race too often until maybe high school" (Chad: 27, mixed-race, male, middle-class, doctoral student), or even college in the case of several participants, at which point they "started to hear more explicit conversations about race and who [they were] and who others [were]" (Lorene: 32, Latinx, female, upper-middle-class, doctoral student). For a while—quite a long while in most cases, actually—race, as they know it now, was not salient in participants' individual lives and senses of self. And as the mentions of high school and college suggest, the sparseness of racialized forms of thought and action in these participants' lives extended well beyond the duration when this infrequency may have been attributable to participants themselves still developing proficiency comprehending abstractions like race. Some participants described this sort of latency period almost as a pre-race Eden:

> I guess I would situate myself within the context of being fortunate to be a part of a large family in a community setting where I was surrounded with people who look like me. So I didn't have early childhood experiences of feeling or looking vastly different than my community or my surrounding, which I think plays a significant role because I certainly felt comfortable in my skin and being who I am … I didn't recognize whiteness.

Others characterized this time not so much according to the presence of positive experience, but the absence of conflict:

> Growing up in the city of Oakland, coming of age in the 80s, I didn't grow up around many white people … I didn't associate with too many white folks until I started to work as a teenager at a grocery store and stuff like that, where I started to better understand diversity and whiteness, if you will. And it wasn't 'till much later in life that I got a more formal understanding of white supremacy.

This founding criterion as an initial point from which to conceptualize race allowed participants to conceive of race as something both unessential and socially mediated, given the clarity with which they recollected a time prior to race in their lives and a shift when it entered their lives through social processes. Interestingly, participants also frequently connected become aware of race with becoming aware of whiteness, the latter seeming to function for them as the catalyst that ultimately forced the issue of coming to terms with racial categorization and stratification.

It is important to note at this point, though, that although race as a concept may be unessential in some regards, this is not to say that race as an identity is unwanted or unvalued. Indeed, all participants, most of whom referred at the start of our interviews to early unawareness of race in one moment and to race's devastating consequences in the next, still took pride in their racial identities and communities, whatever those happened to be. Notwithstanding participants' descriptions of ambivalence toward race that accompanied their early insulation from race and racial difference, they were quick to qualify their descriptions of that phase with eager emphasis on the ways that they consider their racial identity, now, to be "so dope" (Stacy: 38, Black, female, middle-class, faculty), a "source of love" (Calvin: 45, Black, male, middle-class, faculty), a "banner of empowerment" (Lonnie: 29, Black, male, lower-middle-class, doctoral student), and a "strength and a core value" (Krista: 31, Asian, female, upper-middle-class, doctoral student), among other things, each being generally positive, resilient, life-affirming, and sincerely grateful. Following early insulation, pride and joy were, and still are, clearly integral to participants' working concepts of the ways that race manifests in their subjective sense of self and within their lived experience.

Racialization as Conflict

All this being said, no participants described their coming to think of themselves as racialized subjects without reference to some form of conflict. In fact, for 63% of participants (n=19) in this study, racialization itself occurred by, in, and as conflict, making a sense of conflict a central element of the their concepts of race in general. This conflict, as described by participants, took various shapes; and, unsurprisingly, just as whiteness recurs as an impetus toward the transition out of racial insulation throughout participants' early memories, whiteness

appears again, here, as an oppositional, if not outright oppressive, social antagonist. Hattie (45, Black, female, middle-class, master's student) shared her experience of this racialization taking a very literal form of conflict:

> I mean, yeah … I remember Donnie [Smith]'s mother called me a nigger when we were on a trip to Chicago. I think that was fourth or fifth grade. I remember having sand thrown over my head for some reason and having my mom, like, flip out because she had just had my hair braided. And so the process was unclear to everybody except for her, because I was a child. There were no other, like, Black families or educated white families in the group, you know, like at the school, so no one understood this as an economic problem … because it's, you know, you have to unbraid all the hair, right?

For this participant, conflict—inhumane, vitriolic conflict at that—pervades her earliest memory of the developmental transition when she began to acquire awareness of particular forms of systematic social difference between herself and others, along with nascent understanding that this difference would comprise race as a concept and as the experiential substance with which to foster racial identity. Both racism and cultural unawareness were inflicted upon her, and, in the end, she and her mother were left alone to bear the costs of time and money required to rebraid her hair, consequences unknown and unacknowledged among the white peers and parents in her school community. Through this conflictual encounter, and with the help of her mother's mediation both overt and unspoken, this participant internalized the hate and harm that she and her mother suffered as interwoven with the social processes by which race is systematized, in this case according to Black and white skin—and, more importantly, hair.

Other participants described racialization as transpiring through more symbolic conflict. Take, for instance, the memory that Bethany (47, Black, female, working-class, doctoral student) recalled, in which she confronted the realities of race by means of discrepancy between holiday traditions in her home and those traditions normalized by holiday commercialization industries:

> But one of the most particular memories that I have is that I grew up in a house that celebrated Christmas, and we had a Santa Claus that was Black. And that immediately brought up a whole lot of questions for me, because everything that was being produced in society had a white Santa Claus. And I just know, like, looking at the Black Santa, I'd stare at him for a while and then just struggle with reconciling, like, 'What does this mean? Why is it here?' Yeah, so, that was my first initial memory of [race].

As she would go on to explain, this participant did not perceive the difference between these two versions of Santa as neutral, nor could she reconcile the contrast without situating the two in terms of their relative value within the social hierarchies that structured society—Santa is a person, too, after all; and given mainstream insistence on *a* Santa rather than *some* Santas, it only made sense that one or the other had to be the *right* Santa. The marketing all around her portrayed white Santa to be right Santa. So, in becoming aware that the popularized version of Santa was not her family's version of Santa, and being acutely sensitive to the fact that she did not look like white Santa, this participant first came know the social difference she would later comprehend as race through a symbolic conflict that situated her and her family as unwanted and therefore inferior.

Race and the United States

In addition to describing early racial insulation as an antecedent to race and detailing racialization as conflict, 60% of participants (*n*=18), immigrant and non-immigrant alike, qualified the conceptualizations that they articulated by situating race in a global context as a phenomenon unique to the United States—unique at least in terms of salience and intensity, if not as a qualitatively singular U.S. product. Participants described race as "sort of, like, what's advertised to us in the States" (Harry: 37, Black, male, middle-class, faculty); as "an imagination … a creation, I'll say, of the United States" (Antoinette: 34, Black, female, lower-middle-class, doctoral student); and as "the thing upon which our current [U.S.] society is structured and valued" (Calvin: 45, Black, male, middle-class, faculty). One participant, Naomi (28, Middle Eastern, female, middle-class, doctoral student), grew up in Bahrain and moved to the United States as a young adult. She spoke directly to the distinction between life within and outside of the United States vis-à-vis race as a concept and as a feature present in aspects of everyday life such as language:

> I grew up in a much more racially homogenous place where, like, whiteness doesn't carry the same weight that it does in the U.S. … The way that we think and talk about race didn't' happen until I moved to the U.S.

This participant captures the broader analysis offered by most participants that race matters more in U.S. society than it does outside of the United States, but notably does so by linking this fact to the "weight," so to speak, of whiteness. If her experience is any indication, this suggests that social and material life may adhere more closely to racialized organization in societies structured by white dominance. That is a possibility to return to in subsequent analyses; for now, suffice it to say, this participant at least reintroduces the theme, which has continued to resurface so far, that whiteness seems to play some important role in the etiology of race in general.

Most participants among the majority who discussed the ways that their conceptualizations of race are grounded in the U.S. context did so in manners similar to the instance quoted above—by mention of finding themselves among more prevalent racial discourses in this country than elsewhere. A few participants, though, testified to a more consequential relationship with this context by divulging stories, not without some sense of anguish, in which they suddenly and non-consensually found themselves *as* and *in* racial discourses—rather, racial discourses found(ed) their selves. Robin (57, Latinx, non-binary, middle-class, faculty) summarized the experienced bluntly, reflecting, "I grew up a white person in Brazil; I became brown … a person of color in the United States." This was said with sadness, not for no longer being considered white or for becoming a so-called person of color, but for the subjective experience of social agency and autonomy being stripped from their sense of self amid the transition to U.S. society and the attendant imposition of racial categorization and stratification. For this participant and for others who shared similar stories, the centrality of U.S. influence to race as a powerful organizing concept was not abstract but deeply personalized. Where others observed the capacity of race in the United States to arrange persons according to a particular order, participants who lived through this sort of experience grappled directly with the propensity of racialized life to alter and even create personhood. By either measure, the evidence

provided by participants tells a story of an overarching concept and lived experience of race in general that is strongly inflected, if not determined, by U.S. ethnocentrism.

From Race to Whiteness

The themes identified so far make up participants' collective definition of race: an organizing concept preceded by insulation; a concept introduced by, in, and as conflict; and a concept whose organizing intentions and effects are strongly determined by U.S. society. These constitute, for the participants interviewed, race in and of itself—what race as a concept descriptively conveys above and beyond the extent to which it often functions as a proxy by which to aggregate signifiers that refer to other phenomena like phenotype, ethnicity, culture, or nationality, all of which participants also discussed in relation to race, but not *as* race. This definition tells a story that coheres around a common trajectory of participants' experiences encountering, understanding, and identifying according to race, regardless of what their racial identity happened to be.

The whole point of detailing participants' descriptions of race, as I mentioned earlier, has been to allow us to eventually juxtapose this overarching conceptualization with the specific case of whiteness as a racial category. Of course, per this study's exclusion criteria, no participant identified as white. But as we have seen, many participants still chose to refer to whiteness in order to map the contours of their racial histories and identities, and concepts of race in general. A few participants, though, felt that they *had* to reference whiteness in order to clarify their perspectives on race. These participants, while they made up a small subgroup of 20% (n=6), shared insights that strikingly elucidated the connections between race and whiteness. Their commentaries reinforced the commonalities across other participants' descriptions of race, but went further to suggest that whiteness may operate according to different parameters as a race, if it can indeed still be classified as a race, at all. Tasha (30, Middle Eastern, female, upper-middle-class, doctoral student) struggled to think through both race and whiteness, expressing the following in terms of what she sees as the relationship between the two and how they come to bear on her own identity and sense of self:

> I don't feel comfortable identifying as white. I don't know how else to identify—like, I know I'm not Black, I'm not Latinx, I'm not Asian … I'm none of those things but I'm not white … I guess I'm not sure what I am.

Naomi (28, Middle Eastern, female, middle-class, doctoral student) spoke with greater detail to her experience of how she, in addition to the above participant, might feel simultaneously uncertain of her place within the U.S. racial typology and yet unequivocally sure of not being white. Her reflection offers an incisive point of entry from which to transition from conceptualizing race to discerning the nature of whiteness and its relationship to other racial categories. She positioned herself as follows:

> I definitely don't feel white; and, more importantly than what I feel, I don't think people experience me as white … My name is not white sounding, I don't have what people would think of as, like, white person features. So, it's hard. I say person of color … It's more like the absence of whiteness than the presence of any particular thing, if that makes

> sense. And then, also, sometimes I feel like these categories are imposed on me, like, essentializing me, like, you know, 'You're exotic, you're allowed' … So, um … this identity of mine feels like the absence of things that characterize whiteness in America.

To be clear, when this participant spoke about the "absence of things that characterize whiteness," she did not do so in such a way as to communicate sadness, anger, or envy over this fact, but relief and gratitude. This orientation was largely afforded by her having immigrated to the United States, and her consequently being secure in her holistic identity within a global context, regardless of how U.S. society may racialize her as a person. More importantly, though, her perspective points to the conceptual and analytical need to interrogate whiteness separate from and in relation to the category of race because it is experienced, by this participant and others, as unique from other races in its composition and effects.

Apprehending Whiteness

For all of the pride that participants expressed in their own racial identities, the most passionate moments during the course of this study's interviews came when participants described whiteness. Among many such instances, a few stand out as the most powerful and moving. Stacy (38, Black, female, middle-class, faculty) opined:

> Whiteness is a pox; whiteness is a virus, I think. I think it seeps in; I think it makes us really unwell. I think we are unprotected from it, because it's a hot surface we can't stop touching. I think it's a last resort, but somehow still a first one. I think it trips us up. I think it's unregulated. I think whiteness is a chore; whiteness is really tedious.

Casey (40, Black, female, upper-middle-class, doctoral student) put it in less poetic and more direct language, emphasizing whiteness's effects on all of our lives. According to this participant, "[Whiteness] is, I mean, perniciously damaging for all of society … It's epically, destructively damaging to all the corners of the earth. I mean, not even just for people who aren't white—for people that *are* white." And still another paraphrased her take on whiteness with a bit more levity. The dark humor through which she imparted her message, though, drove home a point that she regarded as entirely serious. She joked with an air of familiar exhaustion, "But I think, like, if I were to summarize just the way that [whiteness] comes up in, like, my circles—both, like, in friendships and even professionally—it's like … this thing that ruins things." As is clear by now, most participants referenced whiteness while conceptualizing race and their own racial identities, and many were moved to emotional testimony in recounting experiences of whiteness. To those interviewed over the course of this study, it was always clear that whiteness was central to our discussion of race, and a great deal hinged upon how we handled it.

Indefinable Whiteness

Despite the centrality of whiteness to participants' responses as they reconstructed racial histories and explored facets of their racial identities, something curious routinely occurred when I would ask a participant, "How do you define whiteness?" As I mentioned earlier, even though participants referred to whiteness often and assuredly throughout early portions of our interviews, 73% (n=23) became unsettled by the prospect of how they ought to define whiteness

when I explicitly raised the issue. Their perplexity took many forms: “I don’t know if I have a specific definition” (Kristine: 49, Black, female, working-class, master’s student). “I really don’t think about whiteness as a specific thing” (Freda: 61, Black, female, middle-class, faculty). “I never thought about defining it before” (Casey: 40, Black, female, upper-middle-class, doctoral student). “That’s a hell of a question … how do you even define it as a thing?” (Harry: 37, Black, male, middle-class, faculty). “I don’t know if I can define it, but it’s everywhere, if that makes sense” (Natasha: 40, Latinx, female, working-class, faculty). Asked how she would define whiteness, Antoinette (34, Black, female, lower-middle-class, doctoral student) simply replied, “Um, I really wouldn’t.”

These kinds of responses are notable mainly because of the confidence and proficiency with which participants wove mentions of whiteness throughout their dialogues with me immediately prior. And regardless of the question being on my interview schedule, the context naturally made it suitable to ask participants for their thoughts on the specifics of whiteness, given the prevalence of the subject throughout each conversation. However the question came to be asked, the dissonance apparent in the answers gives some indication as to where and how the differences between whiteness and race in general manifest in participants descriptive accounts of what they take each of these phenomena to be. Where participants told stories of race as discernable through things like cultural practices or national ties, they regarded whiteness as singularly surreptitious and opaque; and if they portrayed race as coherent, albeit complex, they rendered whiteness uniquely self-contradictory and inconsistent. The particulars of participants’ descriptions of whiteness shed light on a pattern of difference that sets whiteness apart—by no means in the traditional sense of white supremacy—from other phenomena to which we have grown so accustomed to ascribing the label of “race.”

Normative Whiteness

In some sense, it might be more accurate to say that the *lack* of particulars set whiteness apart, among participant’s descriptions, from other races and from their broader conceptions of race. Fifty-seven percent of participants (n=17) described whiteness first and foremost as normativity: “Mainstream attitudes, assumptions, belief systems, values, you know … that kind of are floating around that we all subscribe to, consciously or not, or are encouraged to subscribe to” (Ashley: 43, Asian, female, upper-middle-class, faculty); “the ideals in terms of what is considered the standard in terms of how you navigate this world” (Dawn: 42, Black, female, upper-middle-class, faculty); "everything is sort of, like, measured against this norm in some ways” (Harry: 37, Black, male, middle-class, faculty); “whiteness is … that’s a great question … status quo” (Toby: 63, Asian, male, middle-class, faculty). But no participant went into much detail about what exactly, in concrete terms, they meant by “norm” or “status quo.” To them, whiteness represented a sort of negative normativity; not a framework of positive norms in the sense of those that are prescribed or mandated, like driving on the right-hand side of the road; normativity that is simply *not* change; normativity that asserts itself not so much as *being* any particular thing, but as *not being* anything particularly different than what already is. This is why participants struggled to define whiteness in positive terms; this is why whiteness seemed, to them, simultaneously indefinable and everywhere, as they put it. It is not surprising, then, that such a system of normativity as this, which participants attributed to whiteness, actually exists as a sort of unstructured systematicity—oxymoronic as that may sound—and would be, according

to any logic, quite difficult to define concisely, if at all. Without saying this with words, participants communicated this through their puzzled expressions, hesitations, and silences when confronted with the request to define whiteness.

To complicate things further, still, participants all attested to what they perceived to be the insidious nature of whiteness. "[Whiteness] is," as Casey (40, Black, female, upper-middle-class, doctoral student) stated, "a lens that can be on even without you knowing it's there." Tasha (30, Middle Eastern, female, upper-middle-class, doctoral student) lamented, poignantly, "[Whiteness] is no one questioning why these things are happening. It's that ability to just go through life without questioning." The "dominant normativity of whiteness," as Naomi (28, Middle Eastern, female, middle-class, doctoral student) described it, surely relegates inquiry into the definition of whiteness to the epistemic stratum of all that goes unquestioned. If white normativity does, in fact, dominate, then the task of defining whiteness is precisely that which we are neither conditioned nor equipped to skillfully navigate.

As far as the "what" of whiteness, participants' descriptions of this whiteness as ubiquitous and prevailing, yet elusive, normativity go as far as giving form to whiteness, but not yet content. If white normativity dominates, something must be dominant. If no one is questioning why these things are happening, what exactly are the "things" in reference? If a status quo implies a certain state of things from which white normativity resists deviation, what is that state? Surely, it is not so simple as to say that what dominates is white people and the status quo toward which normativity moves is the state of having white skin. After all, the issue of how to define whiteness presented quite a complicated problem for this study's participants. No one answered that whiteness is the aggregate effect of white people's actions or that whiteness is one in the same with phenotypical whiteness. (In fact, many participants spoke about widespread internalized whiteness among people who do not identify as white.) This begs the question of whiteness's content today within the form delineated so far. To address that issue, 70% of participants (n=21) located whiteness today not as an isolated moment, but as a product of material history.

Historical-Material Whiteness

"There's this aspect of whiteness," as one participant aptly captured, "that has a lot of historical association with it." What this participant was referring to, as a matter of fact, is exactly the content mentioned just above, which inheres within the theoretical conceptualizations and material projections that we understand as whiteness, or the content that accrues through the historical-material dialectic of whiteness—whiteness as sedimented history manifesting in contingent, contested relation to the present moment. In other words, the whiteness to which white normativity orients is nothing more—but also nothing less—than the history of whiteness insofar as it is mediated by, in, and as a given context, be that context anything from the individual perception of a single subject to the collective organization of an entire nation.

This history is many things. This history is the myth of genetic race—"My perception of whiteness is phenotypically light skin with the assumption that there is some genetic connection to what we understand as being white" (Robin: 57, Latinx, non-binary, middle-class, faculty); it is the heritage of imperialism—"This Eurocentric model embedded within the very fabric of our

working institutions" (Juan: 29, Latinx, male, middle-class, master's student); it is the legacy of colonialism—"I think of whiteness as, like … a middle-class Christian man" (Naomi: 28, Middle Eastern, female, middle-class, doctoral student); and it is the inherited legal system—"You know, places where white people have oppressed people who are not considered to be white have gone through a lot of trouble defining, legally, what whiteness is" (Robin: 57, Latinx, non-binary, middle-class, faculty). This history that gives content to whiteness is many things, irreducible to a concise synthesis, but, if we give credence to the unifying thread that I offered in my introduction, it is always the rejection of the Other.

The interviews corroborate this. One participant, Maxine (25, mixed-race, female, upper-middle-class, master's student), broached the issue quite directly, drawing from the past in an attempt to make sense of whiteness in the present. They were most successful attributing content to the "what" of whiteness by setting parameters around what whiteness is not; or, more accurately, what the history of whiteness has insisted that it is not and can never possibly be:

> "[Whiteness] is like an umbrella term that we use to describe certain cultural components that are kind of informed by white people's history and, like, white people's behavior in reaction to people of color, which dictate white behavior and also white people's, like, mindsets. And I think, like, as a corollary to it, if we think of, like, anti-Blackness … well, whiteness is just, like, anti- people who are Black and Black culture and Black history and everything."

The participant refers implicitly to U.S. chattel slavery as the core of anti-Blackness at the center of the history of whiteness, but histories of indigenous extermination, restricted immigration, forced deportation, and even internment in the United States contend that most non-white races could justifiably replace Blackness in this working definition.

But, of course, material effect contributes equally to give content to the historical-material dialectic of whiteness, as nearly every participant pointed out. Whiteness as normativity that is "anti- people who are Black and Black culture and Black history and everything" registers as material mediation; simply put, it registers as white relative racial advantage. Arturo (48, Latinx, male, working-class, doctoral student) succinctly conjoined the most obvious signifier of white history, white skin, with the material bearing of that history on the present, describing whiteness as, "a skin tone that has a certain economic attachment to it." Kristine (49, Black, female, working-class, master's student) positioned this advantage comparatively, situating white people among other races as "a group of people who have resources that many other cultural groups of people do not have." Robin (57, Latinx, non-binary, middle-class, faculty) offered a more comprehensive analysis, relating history to materiality through the social relation of exploitation:

> But we have gotten to a point where it is no longer legal and no longer easy to hide free labor extracted from people of color. So we have all kind of hidden ways where that labor is required and produced with the person being exploited. So it's still happening, you know—the labor that one gives to the structure of whiteness is still present around us.

This gets straight to the content that makes up the "what" of whiteness, and also relates it to the form of white normativity, which many participants characterized using the language of domination. If the form of whiteness is ambiguous, shifting normativity, it is legible by its content according to moments in which it conditionally coheres to secure whiteness in the present that is continuous with the history of whiteness—namely white racial advantage; or, to put it more bluntly still, white supremacy.

Whiteness in Social Work

Seeing how this study's participants lived and worked as social work practitioners and scholars—master's students, doctoral students, faculty at all levels, and even deans—in addition to speaking on the topics of race and whiteness in society, participants contextualized themselves and these themes according to experiences within the field of social work. This approach rendered whiteness with a particular inflection—whiteness filtered through the enduring influence of social work's history on the profession today and refracted by the evolving and contested norms and expectations that circulate among contemporary social workers in community settings and classrooms. Ultimately, by virtue of their personal and professional roles being situated as they were, participants ended up collectively illustrating the state and nature of the peculiar ways that whiteness manifests in present day social work, as well as points at which whiteness in social work resonates with and diverges from whiteness as it is conceived in theory and actualized in practice elsewhere. Participants spoke most frequently and in greatest detail about whiteness in social work as it exists in the core educational curriculum, popular modes of practice, and, somewhat counterintuitively, efforts within social work designed with expressly anti-racist intent.

White Curriculum

When I asked participants about their experiences with whiteness in the social work curriculum, it often felt as if some miscommunication were occurring between us. What I initially perceived as a disconnect typically arose as a sense of tautology that could be paraphrased along the lines of something like the following question and response exchange: "So how have you experienced whiteness in the social work curriculum?" "Yes, the social work curriculum is white." That is to say, 77% of participants (n=23) viewed whiteness and the social work curriculum as so enmeshed that my inquiry regarding comparison between the two felt confusing, as if I were asking them to compare an object to that exact, selfsame object. These kinds of answers were still illuminating, though, and perhaps not a result of miscommunication, but a reflection of the gap between my expectations and participants' experiences. And not all participants identified the social work curriculum so wholly with whiteness; but nearly all did return insistently to the curriculum as an integral source by which whiteness is maintained within and deployed throughout the social work profession as a whole.

Many participants aired the grievances that are by now familiar in today's sociopolitical climate, certainly in mainstream discourses, and likely across most institutions of social work education and practice, maybe save among the very most insulated, conservative localities. They lamented, "I think the curriculum [is] still very steeped in whiteness—steeped in the values of whiteness, not very culturally responsive, not very culturally sensitive … those kinds of things"

(Calvin: 45, Black, male, middle-class, faculty); or, "We're reading literature and articles mostly from, like, white men … very old, old, old documents … and lots of white women. I think white women have really taken hold of social work for better or worse" (Maxine: 25, mixed-race, female, upper-middle-class, master's student). Yet, at the same time, most of these participants acknowledged at least a widespread rhetorical and symbolic commitment whereby governing social work bodies speak and act as if they are aware of and intend to change these curricular deficiencies and injustices, whether or not they actually do; and many, if not most, do not in participants' experiences (more on this point, which will turn out to be quite important, later). Ashley (43, Asian, female, upper-middle-class, faculty), an instructor herself, elegantly theorized this dissonant state, summarizing the position of whiteness in relation to the social work curriculum by asserting, "I think it's this thing that we are trying not to orient *to*, but we're still orienting *around*." Even where curricular content may not be designed explicitly by white people or for the benefit of whiteness, or so this participant implies, the underlying structure guiding the development and delivery of curricula is often informed predominantly by epistemic and practical models that either tacitly serve or merely avoid disrupting prevailing white dominance.

Another participant, Hattie (45, Black, female, middle-class, master's student), describing her experience at an admittedly more conservative school of social work, spoke with greater pain and severity regarding not the nature of whiteness in the social work curriculum, but the human impact of this curricular characteristic: "So, the poor pedagogy, the casual and rampant racism, it's legalities—the boards and code and the rules … It feels very frightening to me, actually. It feels very, like … very daunting." It is worth noting, for additional context, that this participant was the first non-white person to achieve full professor status at her college, only to reach a point at which she felt forced, by experiences of interpersonal and institutional racism, to leave her job for the sake of her own health and well-being. Many of these experiences, as she described them, played out over struggles for curricular reform and reactionary backlash that ensued. Her story, while it represents a more acute encounter with racism than many participants reported, does nonetheless capture the theme prevalent throughout these interviews of the centrality of curricular spaces—spaces for curricular content development, reform, and delivery, among others—to the means through which whiteness is negotiated in social work, both by way of dominant forms of whiteness and modes of resistance that arise in opposition.

White Practice

Seventy-three percent of participants (*n*=22) reported examples of whiteness occurring in and as the modes of practice that are popular today, as they are both taught in social work schools and implemented in the real world. When I asked participants for the details of what these instances look like, they most often cited two manifestations of what they consider to comprise white social work practice: white service preference and multiculturalism. The former refers to either services that prioritize white beneficiaries over others or services that compel people who do not identify as white—sometimes flagrantly, sometimes indirectly—to comply with social and material expectations that suit the needs and desires of whiteness and white people in power; the latter, of course, is a well-known paradigm of vague racial, ethnic, and cultural pluralism (not usually distinguishing clearly among those categories) that is popular throughout social work as an ostensible remedy to various forms of social injustice that are said to be rooted in discrimination and lack of inter-group awareness.

White Service Preference. That social workers based in the United States would testify that they have, in the past, experienced social services as prioritizing beneficiaries who identify as white over those who do not is not all that surprising; that they would describe this as an enduring attribute of social services that persists today, heading into the year 2023, is somewhat more alarming. "We would spend," Chad (27, mixed-race, male, middle-class, doctoral student) recounted, "I felt, longer on somebody who was white and experiencing homelessness." His feelings were corroborated by stories told by other participants, which often went into greater supporting detail. Calvin (45, Black, male, middle-class, faculty), a social worker in the area of public health, made one historical comparison to this end, revealing one such instance of how white service preference becomes institutionalized through policies that are enacted, as well as those that are not:

> Back in 2004, there was a taskforce that was jointly operated by the Chicago Department of Public Health and the AIDS Foundation of Chicago that was focused on methamphetamine use—specifically gay, white men at the time. Right, so, we, you know … we fast forward to nearly 20 years later, and this is an issue affecting Black and brown folks. There's no data. There's no task force.

Hattie (45, Black, female, middle-class, master's student), a clinical social worker, conversely, noted how such white service preference—again, perpetuated here through the institutional mechanisms, this time training policies and educational practices—can have deleterious effects at the interpersonal level, perpetuating racial injustice for non-white beneficiaries and practitioners alike:

> And then we trained for domestic violence. So, like, you would see on all of the training material … those were for light-skinned people. What is going to look like on a darker-skinned person? So I said that in my field placement, and they got really upset. They got really upset … And when I talked to the college about it, they said, 'Well, what would you have wanted them to do?'

Colorism can arise within or between racial groups, in the latter case operating as a form of racism. Here, light skin bias functioned as white skin bias, called out by Hattie as whiteness systematized and deployed through training materials for social work practice. And still other participants reflected on the often subtler phenomenon of another form of white service preference—the preference that services lead toward whiteness if they do not serve white beneficiaries—materializing by way of ulterior motives that reside in the help extended to persons and communities who do not identify as white. As Naomi (28, Middle Eastern, female, middle-class, doctoral student) phrased the matter, "The motivation for that help is to make people or families or communities more like something … and that something is how white people act, how white people live their lives." Putting the same sentiment a bit differently, Juan (29, Latinx, male, middle-class, master's student) framed issue a differently, emphasizing, "I think a lot of the services, like, push assimilation in and of itself, which is just the game that we have to play." Of course, the dominant force to which a beneficiary would be assimilating in such a scenario is whiteness. So, to the extent that social services abet that process, it is whiteness they bolster with validation and power.

Multiculturalism. Multiculturalism emerged as a theoretical framework and form of practice in the wake of the civil rights era. It asserts the central tenet of racial and ethnic pluralism, contending that each race or ethnicity should be accepting of every other, and that this is practicable through adherence to equality, both social and material. Since the time of its first popularization, aspects of multicultural logic have given rise to consequences that are, however, counterproductive if not antithetical to the aspiration of racial justice that multiculturalism espouses. Most notably, the difference between equality and equity shows that parity in the present does not erase the residual effects of past oppression, marginalization, and disempowerment; and the premise that cultural groups like races and ethnicities can be known as intellectual objects of understanding leads to commodification and fetishization and is readily coopted as a mechanism of social control by people and institutions in power—people and institutions that historically have very often turned out to be white.

Participants described the ways that, to them, whiteness shows up in social work as multiculturalism—or, at least, the brand of multiculturalism that social work has adapted as a longtime central tenet of the profession. This could be considered a variant of practice belonging to the aforementioned white service preference category of assimilationist compulsion evident as an insidious undercurrent of certain social interventions, but, arguably, multicultural paradigms have grown so formalized over many decades in social work as to warrant consideration as a standalone subject. Not to mention, multiculturalism varies slightly in that its deployment has the effect not so much to integrate, but to control, or so participants described it. Lonnie (29, Black, male, lower-middle-class, doctoral student) shared just such an analysis, covering multiculturalism as both a theoretical way of thinking and a consequential practical tool:

> [Multiculturalism] is manifested, I think, pretty readily as this idea that whiteness defines cultural diversity … as kind of like a creation of cultural caricatures that are then disseminated to students and faculty to memorize and somehow export to their practices in a way to affirmatively respect what whiteness defines as non-whiteness.

With his closing words, this participant aptly summarizes the sentiment conveyed by so many others throughout the course of these interviews; namely, that whiteness appears in social work through multiculturalism because the latter, as it is taught and practiced, really boils down to whiteness unilaterally defining those who do not identify as white *for* those who do not identify as white. Participants contended that this most often occurs without consent and without any prerequisite attempt to gain firsthand knowledge, thereby reducing them and their communities to intellectual objects prepared for consumption rather than human beings assumed to be worthy and capable of self-determination

White Anti-Racism

Lastly, odd as it may seem, 47% of participants (n=14) indicated that they observe whiteness in social work to materialize particularly in those instances of projects—policies, practices, events, initiatives—designed with specifically anti-racist intent. According to their recollections, this often has to do with the preponderance of white social workers participating in these supposedly anti-racist projects. Ashley (43, Asian, female, upper-middle-class, faculty)

noted her confusion and frustration over the incongruity between intent and impact in these cases:

> I think about all my white colleagues. For the most part, I think they feel aligned—that whiteness is something to be contended with. As a problem, they want to think about it, they want to highlight other things. But even in their efforts to do that, it sometimes feels like there's a lot of harm that happens.

While this participant went on to express uncertainty over how exactly to situate her feeling that harm is always likely when white social workers take up anti-racism, Juan (29, Latinx, male, middle-class, master's student) set this concern in relation to the profession's past in a way that may give clarifying detail to the theme of whiteness emerging from and overshadowing attempts at anti-racism in social work:

> Having white colleagues or white social work co-workers, there's not, maybe, like, direct tension, but there's just a historical context of white folks serving communities of color and, you know, maybe creating more harm than good without being aware of it. You can just still feel that context, even today.

Perhaps it is the juxtaposition of that very history with dynamics prevalent in contemporary social work that led Dawn (42, Black, female, upper-middle-class, faculty) to provide the following characterization when I asked her to elaborate on her depiction of anti-racism efforts today as an example of whiteness in social work. She gave the following characterization of what she described as a widespread phenomenon according to her observations as a faculty member in a school of social work:

> 'Okay, I'm white, I'm riding the wave, it's working to my advantage. I'm able to get things published and be a part of conversations that may not have materialized otherwise.' I feel like it's trendy to talk about these things. And that's what's promoted. So now it's acceptable. It's okay. But are you really doing the work?

This participant and several others attested to the fact that, whether or not it really is insincere, misguided, or driven by ulterior motive—and no doubt it very often is—white anti-racism in social work frequently feels disingenuous in light of the history of the profession's disinclination toward authentic anti-racist practice (see Chapter 1), especially combined with the increasing mainstream social currency of professed anti-racist commitment in the present moment. Understandably, participants widely reported great difficulty trusting anti-racism in social work. Amid varying takes on the problem, participants only agreed on one thing unanimously—that white participation in anti-racism is never uncomplicated. "There's also white folks who are, like, allies," Krista (31, Asian, female, upper-middle-class, doctoral student) began. But she went on, "I struggle with that word … I don't know why I said it." Anti-racism on any substantive scale in social work seldom does not entail at least some white participation, if not majority white participation, hence the shared perception articulated throughout interviews of anti-racism as a conduit for whiteness in social work.

Analysis: Dialectical Sociology, Non-Identity, and Whiteness

Quite intentionally, I will limit analysis in this chapter and keep citations of sources other than interview transcripts to a minimum; my goal being to allow participants to speak for themselves, I see this as the appropriate method—to refrain from inference that extrapolates liberally, and to stick close to the data as a presumably authoritative point of reference. My rationale for doing so is that this approach best suits the present task of description, laying a foundation of the "what" of whiteness, while subsequent chapters on the "why" and "how" of whiteness will likely demand more interpretation from me and greater use of external literature. Hopefully this restraint, here, yields a prudent strategy for setting the terms of the unfolding conversation with fidelity to participants' intended messages and allows for later theoretical analyses that generate insight while remaining conversant with the lived experiences that participants generously disclosed.

That being said, it is helpful, now, to touch upon one conceptual framework—or, sociological framework of conceptuality, to perhaps characterize it more accurately—which can serve to skillfully synthesize the descriptive data on whiteness deliberated so far. I am referring to what Theodor W. Adorno describes as dialectical sociology; and "describes" is the very specifically operative word, as Adorno (2000) goes to pains in his lectures on sociology not to veer into what may be misconstrued as the more reifying act of definition:

> Ladies and Gentlemen, I would now ask you not to write down and take home what I have told you as a definition of sociology … Exactly this kind of definition is a part of the traditional thinking which pins things down and organizes them in terms of rigid concepts. To criticize such thinking is the business of the [dialectical sociology] I am outlining to you here. (p. 15)

For Adorno's attempt to avoid it, one can at least infer the basics of what many might regard as a definition in his words. But, if critical rejection of rigidly conceptual modes of interpreting human experience makes up the means of dialectical sociology, which ascertains, instead, phenomena as contingent instances of mediation constellated by and as the dialectic of material history, that still leaves open the question of the object of this method. To Adorno, the object of this method, insofar as it does amount to dialectical sociology, is society. Unsurprisingly, this object does not refer society in the hard sense of the word, so to speak, but more in terms of the historical forms to which universally interrelated processes of socialization amount—often acquiring the temporary form of a society, this time in the more widely understood sense. And, crucially, for Adorno, society, as he advances it from within dialectical sociology, amounts to "more than the trivial observation that 'everything is connected to everything else." Rather, "society, in its 'socialized' form, is not merely a functional interrelationship between the socialized people … but is determined, as its fundamental precondition, by exchange" (2000, p. 31). Adorno goes on:

> What really makes society a social entity, what constitutes it both conceptually and in reality, is the relationship of exchange, which binds together virtually all the people participating in this kind of society … The abstraction in question here is really the

> specific form of the exchange process itself, the underlying social fact through which socialization first comes about. (p. 31)

Society, then, for the purposes of both Adorno's lectures and the present analysis vis-à-vis whiteness, manifests through the fundamental process of exchange abstracted in the form of a given historical-material constellation.

Bearing in mind the context of Adorno's admonition against definition and against rigid conceptuality in general, and in an attempt to respect the intention and technique with which he ventured to introduce dialectical sociology, it would be an errant disservice to force a singular dialectical-sociological rendering of whiteness in order to neatly satisfy the research questions posed by the present study. By way of touching upon examples, though, and by following the path taken through the data laid out so far, the contours of a dialectical sociology of whiteness are conditionally legible and cohere around an analytical perspective that distills the meaning mediated in and as the "what" of whiteness, as it has surfaced throughout participant interviews. Sure enough, over the course of these interviews, it is in the details of U.S. "society," the nuances of the exchange relationship abstracted as and sedimented in the historical-material constellation of socialization that we take for granted as society today, where whiteness emerges.

As Adorno qualifies his assertion, it is the "*specific form* [emphasis added] of the exchange process" that is central to this socialization. In the United States, the form of the exchange process that has socially manifested and materially endured over the course of history has two distinct features: it is 1) exploitative, as demonstrated by the commodification and extraction of surplus value from labor requisite to this country's devout capitalism, and 2) racialized, evident in the ways that said exploitation has been directed along racial lines, by whites toward non-whites. This specific form has been normalized (Mills, 1997), institutionalized (Omi & Winant, 2015), and codified (López, 2006) as the result of pivotal historical-material developments. These include, but are not limited to, the implementation of chattel slavery (Genovese, 1989), Bacon's Rebellion in 1676 (Allen, 1994–1997), the U.S. Civil War (Du Bois, 1935), Reconstruction and its failure (Foner, 1988), the ascendancy of Jim Crow segregation (Anderson, 2016), the U.S. civil rights and Black Power movements (Bell, 2014), and subsequent shifts toward neo-liberalism (Esping-Andersen, 1990) as well as more recently surging neo-conservatism (Doane, 2020). Consequently, by way of a dialectical-sociological analysis in these terms, whiteness exists as the binding force of socialization in the United States, the agent in this context of historical-material progress that exploits and which racializes, as the process of unequal exchange inherent in the attendant, enveloping interrelationship is abstracted and reified as society.

Study participants, albeit in different words, portrayed whiteness exactly as such—indefinable (i.e., dialectical, irreducible to reified definition), ubiquitously normative (i.e., immanent to the source of society, or the process of exchange), and bound up with history (i.e., mediated by, in, and as the historical-material dialectic constellated as forms contingently recognized as whiteness vis-à-vis stages and moments in history integral to the projects of capitalist exploitation and racialization, such as chattel slavery, racial segregation, and the like). It would certainly not be appropriate, based on participants' descriptions, to classify whiteness as a form of identity. The situation appears far more complex than that; and, as the both the

foregoing exploration of interviews and analysis just explicated reflect, it is on this point where this study's participants and Adorno's dialectical sociology converge to deliver a final synthesis (I will not call it a definition at this point, for obvious reasons), which provides important insight into the "what" of whiteness, and which will prove essential to carry forward. That is, whiteness is not an identity, but a mode of identifying. I visited this point earlier, but it reemerges here by a different path and according to another set of criteria. For participants, whiteness is an indefinable yet omnipresent normative force carried forward through material history that imparts racial oppression, especially in the United States; for dialectical sociology, whiteness is the process of exchange abstracted on exploitative, racialized terms, reified through material history as the concept of U.S. society; for either, the essence of whiteness as a form of dialectical movement is domination.

Summary: Emergent Findings

Recall, now, the guiding research question underlying this study, which I stated in the preceding methods chapter: How, from the perspectives of social workers who do not identify as white, does whiteness manifest in social work? I also situated this overarching line of inquiry in relation to certain sub-questions, which include the following:

- How does whiteness manifest in social work curricula?
- How does whiteness manifest in institutions of social work education?
- How does whiteness manifest in social work praxis?

Yet, having analyzed themes across interviews, as stated, participants spoke to their experiences of whiteness in ways that naturally organized along the lines of the three general, epistemic categories of the "what" of whiteness, the "why" of whiteness, and the "how" of whiteness, the first of which this chapter has already considered. Although participants set the terms of their individual testimonies in ways that turned out to collectively cohere around a slightly different organizational schema than the structure with which I set out as my guiding instrument for investigation, answers to research questions posed at the outset are still coming to the fore. The framing question—how, from the perspectives of social workers who do not identify as white, whiteness manifests in social work—has already received coverage in this chapter, as it surely will across subsequent chapters given its breadth. As for specific sub-questions, though, this chapter offers insights that apply to each of the delineated sub-questions; that is to say, in their commentary on the "what" of whiteness, participants spoke of social work curricula, institutions, and praxis insofar as they contribute to whiteness in social work as a profession.

How, then, does whiteness manifest in social work curricula? According to participants, the wisest answer to this query comes in the form of what might be a better question, which is to ask instead about the ways in which the social work curriculum is, in fact, itself an expression or extension of whiteness. For them, conceptually, whiteness and the core social work curriculum overlap considerably, to the point that separation between the two is more difficult to identify than areas of intersection. Consequently, most participants described the social work curriculum as, at best, struggling to function as an authentic and effective vehicle for racial justice; at worst, some participants retold stories of the social work curriculum inflicting grievous racial harm by way of its active participation in perpetuating—intentionally or not—white supremacy.

As pertains to the ways that whiteness manifests in institutions of social work education, participants lamented the unfortunately ironic fact that, in their eyes, explicitly anti-racist projects—policies, practices, events, initiatives—often serve to transmit whiteness. As they see it, this results from the history of social work as a profession, as it is passed down to contemporary social workers; it happens because of the increasing currency of ostensible anti-racism as a commodity, both socially and materially; and anti-racism in social work backfires because it is often, even mostly, coopted by a preponderance of social workers who uncritically reflect upon and embody whiteness in their everyday practice.

And how does whiteness manifest in social work praxis? Participants identified two main pathways by which they perceive whiteness to operate in social work praxis contexts: The first of these they conceived as a white service preference, and the second, the popular paradigm of multiculturalism. Participants detailed the former as either preferential service access and benefits for white recipients or, in any of a variety of ways, services functioning to impose whiteness on non-white beneficiaries; as for the latter, participants explained multiculturalism in social work as a mechanism serving mainly to, in effect, allow logics and methods that comport with whiteness to set the terms of what it means to be a person who does not identify as white.

Having now examined the "what" of whiteness and related findings back to the research questions that motivated this inquiry, it is incumbent upon this study to allocate equal scrutiny to the "why" of whiteness. For one thing, the phenomenon of whiteness cannot be fully understood without understanding why it arises, or what motivates its existence today. More importantly, without endeavoring to understand why it exists today, and why it exists in social work at this historical moment, social work cannot devise an intervention that addresses the causes that originate and perpetuate whiteness, making any truly socially just, anti-racist resolution to the social problem of whiteness unlikely, if possible at all. For that reason, this study now takes up the "why" of whiteness and its implications for social work.

Chapter 4: The "Why" of Whiteness

According to the schema introduced in the chapter on methods and outlined further at the start of the previous chapter, the qualitative data that participants shared in their interviews coalesced inductively around the three categories of the "what" of whiteness, the "why" of whiteness, and the "how" of whiteness. Put another way, participants reflected upon and analyzed their lived experiences from perspectives that correspond, respectively, to descriptive, interpretive, and explanatory accounts of whiteness. The foregoing discussion of the "what" of whiteness gave rise to a descriptive construction, based on participant-generated data, which apprehends whiteness as more of a process than an object. In considering the "why" of whiteness below, participants will go on to resituate whiteness as more of a reason than an objective, or more of a means than an end. This builds logically upon what participants have shared so far, and fills out this study's emergent conceptualization of whiteness today, whiteness in social work especially, and whiteness in the eyes of social workers who do not identify as white. Here, participants go still further to elaborate upon the ways in which whiteness exists through formal structures and mediated content far more complex than can be accommodated by any commonsense understanding of whiteness as simply a racial identity or category.

In order to facilitate the transition to thinking through the "why" of whiteness, it will prove helpful at a later point to begin, now, reconceiving certain nuances of whiteness in different ways than may feel customary, whenever possible. The first of these is to analytically position whiteness in terms of its impacts—to think of it less as what it is, and more as what it does. As Lonnie (29, Black, male, lower-middle-class, doctoral student) shared, "I typically think of whiteness in terms of its functions, not exactly in terms of its content." That is, for instance, it can often prove generative to focus not on the details of the fact that one might identify as white, but instead the social, material, and—particularly important for the purpose of this chapter—psychological effects of a subject or subjects identifying with whiteness as a socially constructed, historical-material dialectic.

Second, the significance and consequence of maintaining a sharp conceptual distinction between whiteness and whites, or whiteness as a social construction and persons who embody said whiteness, cannot be overstated. Drawing meaning from the participant data to ascertain the "why" of whiteness depends upon keeping this boundary clear and at the theoretical fore. Hattie (45, Black, female, middle-class, master's student) a faculty member and practicing social worker, saw exactly the importance of this intellectual task for both theory and practice:

> As I say to all my students, whiteness is not the same thing as white people. I'm not here to support people into whiteness in any way. And if there's ever a way for me to help someone out of whiteness, I will do it. But whiteness is, you know, a failure that insists that it's right … Even if I'm not right, I'm going to keep on this … this thing, right? And the system is very expansive. It's a very expansive system—really hard, I think for people to break out of … even people who are not white, you know what I mean? But it's not an identity, it's a system … But whiteness is not the same thing as white people.

Here, she addresses the difference between whiteness and white people, while also touching upon functionally defining whiteness, as well as the durability and pervasiveness of whiteness.

While deeper interrogation of internalized whiteness among people who do not identify as white is beyond the purview of this study, the mention of whiteness as expansive and as a phenomenon that does, in fact, infiltrate even those who do not identify (or are not identified) as white actually provides a fitting point of departure from which to embark upon the present excursion into the "why" of whiteness. Whiteness is, indeed, ubiquitous; it transcends social and material boundaries, and even permeates persons and communities along the full spectrum of racial identity. The underlying quality of whiteness that catalyzes this contagion is that part of it which arises and persists psychologically. The primary locus where the "why" of whiteness originates and begins to take hold—which is not to say where it exhausts or even predominantly exerts its effects—is psychological. As such, the "why" of whiteness is uniquely intelligible through the interpretive lens of psychoanalysis. Participants demonstrated this to be the case throughout their interviews, even when they did not formally designate their perspectives using this terminology.

This requires some additional explanation up front regarding structure, methodological parameters, and the analytical tools to be utilized therein, as the "why" of whiteness requires this chapter to take a different approach than guided the earlier inquiry into the "what" of whiteness. As far as structure, in delineating the "what" of whiteness, brief analysis followed a methodical review of participant interview data, and the two remained distinctly separate; here, analysis will, by necessity, be more interwoven with the process of sorting through the content that participants shared on the "why" of whiteness. Methodologically speaking, the preceding chapter adopted a sort of generalist orientation to parsing through participants' responses in the sense that it did not employ technical terminology requiring any specialized understanding specific to a given profession or discipline, drawing only from broad theoretical and practical proficiency easily accessible within the limits of foundational social work or social science; this chapter, however, ventures into psychoanalysis in such a way that will require certain specialized concepts to be incorporated along the way. These include elements of Freudian psychoanalysis, Lacanian psychoanalysis, and Fanon's sociogeny, each of which will be introduced as needed—and "needed" is the operative word, here, as each framework contributes only insofar as the contents of participants' interviews demand it as a hermeneutic capable of offering insight that might otherwise escape attention.

The choice to adopt the analytical orientation of psychoanalysis arose inductively from the language used by participants. As will be clearer below, participants explicated the "why" of whiteness using terminology immediately recognizable as clinical in nature (e.g., pathology, repression, etc.). In keeping with that approach, Freudian and Lacanian frameworks are applicable as general models of psychoanalytic thought. The decision to incorporate Fanonian psychoanalysis followed from its resonance with this study given Fanon's historically singular engagement with race among the field of psychoanalysts past and present.

Background: Psychoanalysis and Race

The widespread criticisms that psychoanalysis—particularly as it began and persists in its more Freudian variants—aims unabashedly toward a presumptively universalizable and therefore universalizing metanarrative (Spivak, 1999), and that psychoanalysis thereby betrays its very

own implicit (repressed, maybe) colonizing reflex (instinct, perhaps) (Derrida & Nicholson-Smith, 1991), are well-established, justifiable, and unsurprising. Notwithstanding the now largely overlooked precariousness of Freud's living relationship, being Jewish, to contemporaneous notions of whiteness that were informed predominately by German Aryanism and professional medicine's prevailing anti-Semitism (López, 2005), it stands to good reason that what is now known to have developed as a very male, mostly white, and typically bourgeois genealogy would endow psychoanalysis with at least a fraught relationship to critical interventions in race and coloniality. But the impulse, in response to this intellectual and sociocultural heritage, to conceive of psychoanalysis as necessarily antagonistic, if not outright antithetical, to liberatory praxis and a liberated subject elides the fine and admittedly blurry distinction between form and content in the psychoanalytic corpus; a distinction that demarcates the conceptual space of possibility wherein the opportunity arises to extricate the structural hypotheses posited by psychoanalysis from whatever universalist or colonialist proclivities they may have reflected or conditioned in circulation among their founding proponents. In the same way that the technical methods of structural anthropology (e.g., Lévi-Strauss, 1969/1983) need not serve—and, indeed, do not any longer always serve (e.g., Bauman & Briggs, 2003)—the civilized-man-meets-savage narrative through which they were initially formed and refined, psychoanalytic formulae might, in fact, be not only productively appropriated in ways that their original content did not anticipate (see Spillers, 1996), but turned decidedly against the very potentialities of racism and colonialism that critics have long protested reside insidiously in the subtext of psychoanalytic content if they are not part and parcel of psychoanalysis writ large (see Khanna, 2003).

One finds ready evidence-in-practice of this subversive prospect-in-theory by looking to the life and work of Frantz Fanon (see, especially, 1952/2008, 2015/2018). Azeen Khan (2019) argues just the same, herself reinstating Fanon as the exception first noted by Derrida to be the qualifying limit to his indictment of psychoanalysis, vis-à-vis the International Psychoanalytic Association, for its geopolitical myopia: For each, and now for this study, Fanon represents both what remains when the residue of Eurocentrism is cleared from the psychoanalytic field and what capacity psychoanalysis may offer in excess of its Eurocentric threshold. Fanon is suggestive in this way: As a once-practicing psychiatrist and radical opponent of twentieth-century imperialism who enlisted psychoanalysis as a means of each, the Martinican left a legacy of psychoanalysis with aspirations reaching beyond, if not quite fully eluding, the grasp of racial and colonial hegemony. He is simultaneously emblematic of progress and unrealized promise, leaving behind a pathbreaking program that gestures toward a broader emancipatory psychoanalysis, which is all the more hopeful for the uses to which it has not yet been put.

Any review of the intersection of race and psychoanalysis which aims also to apprehend whiteness ought to begin precisely from this dual situatedness of Fanon, a man as much a victor who transcended the racial problematic inflicted by the colonial context as a victim who never found a way out—or at least never convinced himself, before his untimely death from Leukemia, that escape was even possible. There is is a point of entry in the most striking omission from Fanon's work on Blackness; that is, any sustained attention to whiteness in and of itself—a gap which, far from representing a deficit in the Fanonian canon, actually delineates a negative definition of whiteness that, as mentioned earlier, is really the only kind of definition proper to any phenomenon that may rightly be called whiteness. One must read the irruptions *and* silences

in Fanon's work to ascertain the contours of whiteness contra Blackness, and from there the overarching machination of racialization in general.

Fanon's psychoanalytic engagement with race and colonialism abides no illusion of separability between individual mental life and the social environment—or between ontogeny and phylogeny, as Freud would have put it. Introducing a third schematic term in order not to merely triangulate the binary model of ontogeny and phylogeny, but more likely to rupture, altogether, this dichotomous interpretive frame, Fanon (1952/2008) writes:

> Reacting against the constitutionalizing trend at the end of the nineteenth century, Freud demanded that the individual factor be taken into account in psychoanalysis. He replaced the phylogenetic theory by an ontogenetic approach. We shall see that the alienation of the black man is not an individual question. Alongside phylogeny and ontogeny, there is also sociogeny. (p. xv)

Fanon's sociogeny "finds in the last instance … a new history of the human as a new object for theory" (Marriott, 2011; see also 2015). For Fanon, though, the history of the human starts from and ultimately returns to historical Blackness as his own autoethnographic locus and, more importantly, as the living record inscribed with the inverted projection of the instincts that have shaped the modern global landscape, characterized, as it is, by racialized imperial capitalism and (neo-)colonialism. That is to say, Blackness, as Fanon observes, bears the sociogeny of its own being and that of its Other in a way that its Other does not and cannot possibly reciprocate; it tells the sociogenetic story of Blackness and, unavoidably, that of whiteness, too (see Stephens, 2014). Sylvia Wynter (2011) further elaborates Fanon's sociogeny as a system of "nature-culture laws … ones whose processes of functioning, while inseparable from the physical (that is, neurobiological) processes which implement them, would, at the same time, be non-reducible, as the indispensable condition of what it is like to *be* human" (p. 32). Fanon's sociogeny, then, locates Blackness in the pscyho-historical dialectic, restoring the Black psychoanalytic subject as an agent who uniquely defines and is defined by history, thus recovering a dimension of specificity that traditional psychoanalysis tended, before Fanon, not to capture, and that it still struggles to sufficiently apprehend in its mainstream iterations today. It is only as the result of this adjustment that the contours of Black *being*—to use Wynter's phrase—become legible to psychoanalysis and that one may sociogenetically read whiteness, too, in negative relation to Fanon's sociogeny of Blackness.

The original sociogenetic rendering of Blackness articulated by Fanon, drawn in contradistinction to whiteness and differentiated from conventional understanding, puts the matter more aptly in its full form than any paraphrasing possibly could; likely, in part, because it sits heavy with the autobiographical pain that reverberates as Fanon reels in the wake of the interpellation, "Look! A Negro!"—pain that opens onto insight inaccessible by any self-driven pursuit because it follows from an absolute denial of the very autonomy in which the possibility of selfhood consists. Fanon (1952/2008) writes:

> In the weltanschauung [worldview] of a colonized people, there is an impurity or a flaw that prohibits any ontological explanation. Perhaps it could be argued that this is true for any individual, but such an argument would be concealing the basic problem. Ontology

> does not allow us to understand the being of the black man, since it ignores the lived experience. For not only must the black man be black; he must be black in relation to the white man. Some people will argue that the situation has a double meaning. Not at all. The black man has no ontological resistance in the eyes of the white man. (pp. 89–90)

Situated in sociogenetic terms—again, irreducible to either the constitution of the individual (ontogenetic) or the evolution of the species (phylogenetic) and historically inextricable from both—Blackness manifests in and as a certain relationship to whiteness. This analysis of Blackness against whiteness is paradigmatic of Fanon's thought. Here is the essence of Fanonian Blackness as a mode of existence whose necessary condition is its relation to whiteness ("he *must* [emphasis added] be black in relation to the white man"); as a form of subjectivity whose substance is (violently) determined by whiteness ("the black man has *no ontological resistance* [emphasis added] in the eyes of the white man"); and as an externalized, petrified (Marriott, 2015) singularity enveloped by a seemingly nebulous yet omnipresent whiteness that cannot be positively defined, let alone particularized—Fanon's rejoinder, "Not at all," preemptively refutes any suggestion that there might be "a double meaning" at work, or that whiteness must, in the same way, exist without ontological resistance in relation to Blackness. No one can, Fanon insists, square whiteness according to dimensions equal or analogous to those just settled upon as the parameters of Blackness.

That Fanon, one of the most brilliant scholars of Blackness to ever live, grappled so extensively with Blackness without formulating any correspondingly rigorous theorization of whiteness ought to indicate not that he failed to grasp the issue or cowered at the prospect, but that he understood exactly the implication of his abstention from any totalizing theory of whiteness. Fanon's psychoanalysis of Blackness recalls the conceptualization of whiteness delineated in earlier chapters; namely, that one cannot define whiteness in positive terms, but only in negative relation. To reemphasize the significance of this notion of whiteness, what is at stake in the distinction between asserting a positive definition and interpreting a negative relation is the difference between decontextually reifying white *persons* and historically recognizing white*ness*, which is of paramount concern, here. Whiteness is pure relational negativity. Again, whiteness is not an identity, but a *mode of identifying* that lacks any positive form or content. In any given historical moment, whiteness has varied according to context; and in any given context, whiteness has varied according to historical moment (Dyer, 1997; Frankenberg, 1993; Gregory, 2020; Kendi, 2016; Roediger, 2005). Whiteness does not develop from affirmation of what one *is*, but negation of what one is *not*; it is, and always has been, the rejection of the Other. And whiteness inaugurated the process of its sociocultural spread (see Goldberg, 1993), along with its subsequent legal and political institutionalization (see López, 2006), by violently rejecting the Other it contrived by and in Blackness (Allen, 1994–1997; Roediger, 1991), a project aided significantly by and enmeshed with European colonial imperialism, as Fanon (1961/2004) knew all too well.

Recall David Roediger's (1994) description of whiteness as "the empty and therefore terrifying attempt to build an identity based on what one isn't and on whom one can hold back" (p. 13). Roediger implies the way in which negative definition, derived from Fanon's psychoanalysis and coinciding with this study's findings so far, begets the transition from historical-material description of the "what" of whiteness to a psychoanalytic interpretation of

the "why" of whiteness when he invokes terror and when he relates it to externalized desperation in the form of an act whose potentiality consists entirely in foreclosing another's potential to act; that is, holding one back. The historicity of whiteness—in its historical crusade to dominate Blackness, foremost, along with all else whom it subjugates as Other—is terrorizing; it is a phantasm that has acquired corporeality only by rape, pillage, and plunder (Jacobs, 1861/1987). And to see whiteness, by and in that very historicity, as terrorizing and therefore terrif*ying* is to imply the "why" of whiteness, via psychoanalytic projection, as terrif*ied*. External terrorization belies internal terror—terror in the broadest sense possible, as a response to acute psychic disturbance. William J. Wilson first singled this out in 1860, writing the following about the whiteness of whites for the *Anglo-African Magazine* in an essay titled, "What Shall We Do With the White People?" All those years ago, presciently, he inquired:

> What is the cause of all this discontent, this unquiet state, this distress? This answer we think may be found in this, viz: *a long continued, extensive, and almost complete system of wrong-doing*. Like a man who commences the life of a pick-pocket and changes not his way, becomes not only an adept in the profession, but a hardened offender, and reaps the bitter fruits in the end thereof, so also this people. They commenced with the plunder of the Indian, theft of the African, followed by the grossest wrongs upon the Africo-American, and broils with their neighbors without, and stripes among themselves within, the fruits of which are thorough disaffection and agitation. (pp. 63–64)

In other words—psychoanalytic words, to use the present framework—whiteness as a mode of identifying both begins and finds its reason for being in a circuit of violence whose impetus is the unhappy, even fearful, destruction of ontogenetic stability that attends the unavoidable instinct toward violence in the first place, and which thereby elicits the repression of that instinct (see Freud, 1913/1955). And it is precisely the sociogenetic situatedness of this circuit of violence that gives rise to whiteness.

The violent instinct arises, meets repression, eventually returns, and finds some degree of release, either in full expression as violence or partial expenditure as the closest approximation to violence permitted by prevailing limitations, those limitations usually being imposed by the societal norms that accompany civilization (Freud, 1930/1961). The circuit recurs when the portion of the violent instinct that fails to reach an outlet elicits repression in kind all over again (Freud, 1933/1964). Because this violent ontogeny proceeds in a manner that is inseparable from its sociogenetic milieu, the externalized excess of the violent instinct that escapes repression is sociohistorically inscribed. Whiteness is an artifact of this sociogeny. Specifically, whiteness is the phylogenetic residuum of the ontogenetic instinct toward violence after it is sociogenetically refracted by historical conditions; the major points of inflection being, first, the accidents of climate and geography that conferred early agricultural and technological advantage on global inhabitants who happened to possess lighter skin (Diamond, 1997), and second, the emergence of capitalism, which seized upon and amplified the tradition of imputing supposed social meaning to these happenstance disparities, particularly as this unfolded under the institution of chattel slavery in the Anglo-American colonies and eventual United States (Genovese, 1989).

With this requisite psychoanalytic background in mind, participants' interpretations of the "why" of whiteness in terms of the white psyche make all the more sense for the shared

etiology and historical-material context to which they directly and implicitly refer. Understanding, now, the mediated form of whiteness as a the sociogenetic product of the violent instinct and the circumstance of material history, it is only logical that participants grounded their accounts of whiteness in concepts like disorder, avoidance, and repression—or, pathology, resistance, and ignorance, as they more colloquially phrased their interpretations. With keen insight, participants brought lessons from Fanon's psychoanalysis of race into the contemporary historical moment in order to capture the motivation behind whiteness today, as well as its persistence within and effects upon the social work profession.

Psychoanalytic Whiteness

Within the frame of psychoanalysis, participants spoke to the "why" of whiteness along the three thematic lines of pathology (33%, *n*=10), resistance (67%, *n*=20), and ignorance (50%, *n*=15), vis-à-vis whiteness. Each of these is mutually constituted by, and constitutive of the others. Taken sequentially, these three psychoanalytic dimensions of the "why" of whiteness, as articulated by participants, cumulatively render a compelling picture of the driving psychic force that serves as the impetus for white racial identification.

Pathology

Hattie (45, Black, female, middle-class, master's student) spoke with singular poignancy and incisiveness to whiteness as a form of pathology. She used an illustrative metaphor to make clear what is, for so many, a stubbornly elusive fact of racialized social life; namely, the contrived, deceptive, ontologically empty nature of whiteness. Her unabridged testimony offers a wealth of material through which to psychoanalytically engage whiteness as pathology:

> Whiteness is a failure of the imagination. Whiteness is a failure of empathy. Whiteness is a failure of intellect, a failure of analysis; it's just a failed sense of rightness, in that 'I am always right,' you know? It's just a failed sense of rightness. It would be like me saying that [blue] shirt you're wearing is green, and I will fight you to the end of the earth, because that shirt is green. And you know that shirt is not green. And you would imagine that I would know that shirt is not green. But really I don't. And I continue to incorporate people … my children, people I work with … with euphemisms. But the thing I need to get them to do is to insist with me that that shirt is green. And white children will look at you and say, 'That shirt is clearly not green.' And then they are punished into whiteness, because that's how we keep the system, you know … And it's gone completely wrong. Like, we've just … we believe in a thing that … it's just not real.

Right away, this participant locates the "why" of whiteness as internal, thereby psychoanalytic, and as pathology, evident in her repeated emphasis on the failures of whiteness in imagination, empathy, intellect, and analytical cognition. She integrates connections to consequences that might be more accurately categorized under the "what" of whiteness for this study's purposes (e.g., fighting, punishment, and social arrangements), but maintains a focus foremost on the *cause* behind those consequences—the intrapersonal failure of whiteness that is sustained by belief in a thing that is just not real. Her assessment is echoed and perhaps even amplified by Casey (40, Black, female, upper-middle-class, doctoral student), who delivered her evaluation of

whiteness in more directly psychoanalytic terms by employing the language of pathology explicitly:

> It's a false sense of self. It's a very strong false sense of self, which means you're not living in reality, to think you're supreme. Right? And you're dominant; you're best, you know? Like, someone's, like, pathological. Yeah. Not that I think that all white people think that way, but for those who do … yeah, I think that's pathological.

Notably preserving the fine distinction between whiteness and white people in the process, this participant picks up on the thread of pathology and goes so far as to say that, at best, whiteness creates a disordered sense of self in those who identify as white; at worst, whiteness may even distort the self so seriously as to compromise the ability to attune objectively to foundational aspects of the shared historical-material milieu that is socially construed as reality. While the latter might manifest only in the most intense expressions of whiteness, both forms fit the etiological model of whiteness as motivated from a place of ontogenetic destabilization, to put it in terms that Freud or Fanon would have used, or born out of pathology, to state the diagnosis more succinctly for the purpose of the present study. However one might describe it, the valence is undeniably psychoanalytic, with the predominant feature that motivates whiteness being some sort of internal, pathological dysfunction, be that failure of certain social faculties, delusional belief, a false sense of self, or disconnection from reality in crucial ways that manifest in and as processes of racialization.

Resistance

Continuing with their psychoanalytic interpretation of the "why" of whiteness, participants spoke of resistance in relation to whiteness (resistance or, what, according to orthodox psychoanalysis, one might term avoidance). Participants shared their accounts of both whiteness as characterized by resistance and persons exhibiting resistance as a characteristic form of embodied whiteness; each of which, of course, suggests a reason or means to an end rather than an objective in and of itself—each indicates a "why." After all, resistance serves the purpose of precluding, preventing, or forestalling change. In this case, thought, feeling, and action related to race and racialization, especially vis-à-vis whiteness, would collectively make up the object of said change. Participants recounted their experiences of whiteness and what they perceive as a widespread "refusal to talk about race at a deep level … to actually look in the mirror and be like, 'Hmm, let's reflect on how whiteness is present in my life'" (Florence: 37, Asian, female, middle-class, doctoral student). This resistance, to them, enabled, disseminated, and sustained whiteness and its social and material effects. To this point, Ashley (43, Asian, female, upper-middle-class, faculty) noted:

> You still don't know what whiteness is. But you've been living with it uninterrupted, you know? So it just feels like a thing that continues to hold power, really. Because people refuse to interrogate it and understand it more deeply.

This participant highlights the complex situatedness of the "why" of whiteness just alluded to, by which the reason behind whiteness becomes self-perpetuating—whiteness becomes identifiable according to a resistance to critically looking at race, which reinforces the racial status quo,

which secures the conditions by which whiteness came into being and seized racial dominance in the first place. Resistance to raising race and whiteness to conscious level does not just serve to avoid psychic discomfort (although that may play a role among many who identify as white), but, as this participant observes, it serves to protect power accrued by and as race—power seized by race (say, through colonization, segregation, or the like) becomes power preserved as race when white-identifying people act themselves to resist any change to racial normativity, usually some form of white hegemony. "The people that should be doing the work," Lorene (32, Latinx, female, upper-middle-class, doctoral student) lamented, "who have these positions of power, who are white people, are not doing that." Harry (37, Black, male, middle-class, faculty) told of an instance when resistance arose in just this way. Subsequent to this participant voicing a critique, in front of a committee of donors and board members, of their school's attitudes toward and practices related to race and anti-racism, the following occurred:

> Well, my dean calls me in the office and he gives me an implicit warning … oh boy … actually, it's not even implicit, it's a warning. This is a direct quote: 'Your career success is based on what folks in those types of rooms have to say about you.'

This type of externalized resistance—at a top school of social work, not to mention—gives specific form to Molly's (35, Latinx, female, working-class, doctoral student) description of "whiteness in social work sort of present as resistance … resistance to change … to honoring different experiences of Black and brown social workers or students." What, in psychoanalytic terms, begins as resistance against conscious consideration of race and whiteness within individuals or among groups, as depicted here, eventually exerts itself socially and materially as a means by which to preserve power in the form of prevailing racial normativity.

Ignorance

Many participants used language connected to the concept of ignorance to put the "why" of whiteness in perspective—what, analogously, psychoanalysis would technically designate as repression, as referenced in the foregoing background on the repression of the violent instinct according to Freud, and the ways in which Fanonian sociogeny can trace the effects from the interplay of this instinct with repression to the evolution of whiteness as the cornerstone of racialization. By either conceptualization, and in contrast to resistance or avoidance, ignorance does not manifest as a reluctance to act despite knowing, but a real sense that one does not know, even if circumstance may dictate that one reasonably ought to or, on a subconscious level, one actually does. Participants detailed accounts of ignorance underlying whiteness not in the sense of willful negligence, but more commonly as the privilege of not having to know—recusal from the embodied imperative of gathering information necessary for survival because the structural organization of racialized society enables not only their social and material survival, but oftentimes inordinate success, even in the partial or sometimes complete absence knowing such information, whatever that might be in a given context (e.g., forms of relational awareness such as cultural relativity). "It's kind of like that ability to just go through life without questioning—like, 'Why do some people experience life differently than me?'" as Tasha (30, Middle Eastern, female, upper-middle-class, doctoral student) put it. "This was the privilege of whiteness," began Bethany (47, Black, female, working-class, doctoral student); "It was that you have had an opportunity to have time and solace to yourself and I'm here surviving for my life." Or, as a very

direct participant, Dwayne (29, Black, male, middle-class, doctoral student) contextualized the issue, "They're acknowledged and praised for mediocre work … and they are oblivious to it." The common feature of these depictions is the prevalent lack of understanding, or absence of any need to understand, by which whiteness is sustained.

Lonnie (29, Black, male, lower-middle-class, doctoral student) recounted his experience with the ignorance of whiteness in the social work education environment:

> A lot of my students would be, like, totally shocked and excited to hear something new. But then, as weeks went by, I felt as if I was having to do a lot more foundational work, and some of the things felt very obvious … I began to confront kind of, like, an embodiment of how whiteness had exerted itself on my entire class … Like, a lot of these students had no idea of social determinants of health. And in a lot of their ideas of what a solution looked like, it was very much so just kind of intra-psychic responses.

Whiteness, in this participant's time as a social work educator, showed up by way of intra-personal (i.e., psychoanalytic) deficit in the form of a maladaptive lack of awareness (i.e., ignorance), which, in turn, reinforced whiteness through a continued focus on individualism and avoidance of structural interpretations capable of apprehending racial injustice as a systemic problem caused by more than isolated bad actors.

Freda (61, Black, female, middle-class, faculty) shared how ignorance showed up, in her view, as a source of whiteness among her colleagues within a social work practice setting serving structurally disadvantaged individuals, most of whom were not white:

> My coworkers could never imagine themselves in that kind of situation and thought it was all due to their good choices. And it was like, 'No, if you had gone down a particular street on a particular day, you would have been just as vulnerable.' You know? It was like, 'The reason you're not addicted to crack cocaine is that no one ever offered it to you.' It is not some superhuman moral code.

Here, in a manner similar to preceding examples, ignorance gives rise to the externalized behavior that this participant perceives as a notable manifestation of whiteness; specifically, the lack of awareness of any empathic, structural perspective that might, in effect, discount success ostensibly attributable to whiteness and mitigate blame historically ascribed blanketly to non-white populations for disadvantage and injustice they encounter. In the form of ignorance that consists in constitutive lack of awareness, participants' depictions of the "why" of whiteness focused as much on the absences that motivate and sustain whiteness as they did any feature readily discernable according to its presence.

Analysis: Lack of/as Color

Toward a theory of the "what" of whiteness, Adorno's dialectical sociology proved useful as a framework with which to synthesize the implications drawn from participant interviews; similarly, here, it is helpful to turn to certain existing psychoanalytic conceptualizations in order to cohesively bring together conclusions that follow from the

portraits of the "why" of whiteness that participants have rendered. That rendering, so far, depicts the psychoanalytic motivation behind whiteness as beginning from pathology, asserting itself through resistance, and persisting in ignorance. Within the existing psychoanalytic literature, and situated at the even more narrow intersection of psychoanalysis with the study of whiteness, the racialized variant of Lacanian psychoanalysis posited by Kalpana Seshadri-Crooks offers a critical, theoretical intervention into whiteness that tracks a parallel structure to that aggregated collectively among participants—a structure by which the "why" of whiteness exists, essentially and psychoanalytically, as a maladaptation which refuses to recognize itself as such and is able to endure precisely because that refusal is relegated, both knowingly and unwittingly, to remain outside of collective conscious awareness.

In analyzing the "why" of whiteness, the structural-linguistic apparatus of Lacanian psychoanalysis can go further toward establishing the motivation behind whiteness than one could otherwise advance by remaining committed to a purely Freudian approach, and thus to the Oedipus complex as an explanatory mechanism. Accordingly, this trades the Oedipal object and the Oedipalized subject for the master signifier and the signifying subject; not, though, exactly as theorized by Lacan (1966/2002), but rather adapted to the sociopolitical field of race where whiteness itself operates as the master signifier and racialized subjects signify—indeed, only acquire subjectivity insofar as they do signify—just as Fanon postulated, "in relation to the white man." Kalpana Seshadri-Crooks' (2000) penetrating Lacanian analysis of whiteness is authoritative on this topic, and still stands alone as really the only thoroughgoing psychoanalytic excavation of whiteness, Lacanian or otherwise. She summarizes the situation as follows:

> [T]he structure of racial difference is founded on a master signifier—Whiteness—that produces a logic of differential relations. Each term in the structure establishes its reference by referring back to the original signifier … this master signifier, which itself remains outside the play of signification even as it enables the system. (p. 20)

This adheres to the present study's working understanding of whiteness assembled so far. Whiteness exerts a unilateral, determinative and differentiating (read: violent) effect on those signifying subjects who do not or are not able to identify wholly with the master signifier of whiteness; and this transpires from a nexus of power that is simultaneously everywhere and nowhere, defining and indefinable, outside even as it enables.

Seshadri-Crooks' definition implies, however, a motivation—the "why" of whiteness—that goes further than the preceding discussion of the "what" of whiteness. The definitive characteristic of a master signifier—racial or not—in Lacanian psychoanalysis, is its denial of the constitutive lack that founds entry into the symbolic order of signification, and subjectivity therein. This lack is coterminous with the gap between the real and the imaginary, specified for the subject in the irresolvable discrepancy between need and demand, and navigated symbolically—as it only can be—in the medium of desire (Lacan, 1966/2002; see also Grosz, 1990). And this lack is founding for subjectivity because it delimits the separation that is necessary to the individuating realization that consciousness is not coextensive with all that it perceives, which reflexively gives rise to subjectivity as an object in and of itself, which is to say as a self. For whiteness to assume the position of master signifier, then, is to deny this lack—which is not actually to resolve the lack, of course—and, in so doing, to substitute an illusion (or

delusion) of wholeness which insists, in spite of itself, on preserving the fiction of a white subject who does not lack; who, in effect, takes the imaginary as their real and their demands as able to be satisfied in the same way as needs. “Whiteness puts itself in the very place of being; it attempts through a purely symbolic mandate to signify the very thing that is lacking” (Seshadri-Crooks, 2000, p. 43). For its ostensible lack of lack, whiteness cannot exist as coherent subjectivity. It is a maladaptive response to the lack that constitutes subjectivity in that it denies the universality of this lack in a desperate attempt to fulfill the impossible desire for wholeness. Whiteness casts those it designates not to be white as lacking; but, in fact, it is precisely because these very people, through their disaffiliation from whiteness, embody a mode of subjecthood that does not feign to refute subjectivity’s constitutive lack that they possess the inherent capacity to be more whole than one could ever become in the Name of Whiteness.

It is worth noting a caveat plainly acknowledged by Seshadri-Crooks, herself; something perhaps secondary, in her estimation, to her work, but an important point of clarification not to be glossed over for the purpose of this study. She admits, “I have assumed Whiteness in its historicity to be the master signifier of the logic of race without any explanation of this heuristic choice,” (p. 46) after which point she passes briefly over a “highly speculative genealogy of Whiteness” (p. 46) designed to sketch a minimal historical justification of the claim that its historicity does, indeed, make whiteness the self-evident master signifier of the logic of race. Seshadri-Crooks’ structural hypothesis is correct, but the historical evidence to which she turns for support in the last moment is not. The question she puts to herself—“Why did Whiteness emerge at a particular historical moment?” (p. 46)—is answerable with historical-material evidence; but not satisfactorily with an examination, vis-à-vis Hannah Arendt (1966), of intra-European nineteenth century political rivalry, where Seshadri-Crooks erroneously localizes the genesis of whiteness as a byproduct of Franco-German contestation over continental hegemony. As reviewed at the outset of the present project (see Chapter 1), whiteness developed concurrently and in symbiosis with Anglo-colonial modernity, not reactively and as a tool of European nationalism. That fact is important for anchoring the argument at hand. To misapprehend the history of whiteness is to abet, knowingly or not, a relationship to whiteness in the present that is ahistorical; and for as long as contemporary whiteness persists *a*historically, the obscurantist paradigm of *trans*historical whiteness prevents any interruption to the hegemonic agenda of white supremacy that it supports, tacitly or outright. It is imperative to recalibrate collective relation to the past in order to actualize the potential for the future to be anything different than what the present already is.

Psychoanalytic Opportunities for Clinical Practice

Psychoanalysis may offer a useful hermeneutic for deciphering the “why” of whiteness, but it is all the more useful, still, if it can map out some actionable orientation by which clinical social work might *respond* to these specifications. A reinterpretation of the Freudian juxtaposition of mourning and melancholia delivers just such a promising scaffold from a psychoanalytic theory of whiteness to viable practice concordant with that theory. Freud (1917/1957) theorizes mourning as the gradual, emotionally painful process of divesting attachment (i.e., libidinal cathexis) from an object once loved but, as reality would confirm, no longer present; it is, for most intents and purposes, the process of grief in the wake of loss. Melancholia, on the other hand, Freud construes as the neurotic (narcissistic at its core) inability

to detach from the absent love-object; it is, essentially, a continual and repeated failure to bring to completion the same shift toward libidinal withdrawal that underlies mourning. The fact that Freud pathologizes melancholia as he does seems to be based primarily on what he views as a normative temporal relationship of subject to history in which the former is and must remain resolutely subsequent to the latter. There is no place, other than under the discreditable heading of neurosis, for attachment to the lost object, the object that has supposedly passed into history. Put another way, Freud sees the misfire in melancholia as a chronic refusal of historical closure.

David L. Eng and David Kazanjian (2003) engage this problematic differently, seizing on the guiding ethos of Walter Benjamin's *Theses on the Philosophy of History* to chart a more psychoanalytically informed but functionally parallel course by which to "brush history against the grain" (Benjamin, 1955/2019, p. 200). Starting from the diagnostic judgment—which Freud, himself, could not have disputed—that the ego is born from the remains of abandoned object-cathexes, Eng and Kazanjian upend the orthodox conception of mourning and melancholia to posit that, actually, "melancholia is the precondition for both the ego and the work of mourning" (p. 4). They attribute a productive capability, rather than neurotic disability, to attachment that inverts Freud's prescribed normativity: "The ability of the melancholic object to express multiple losses at once speaks to its flexibility as a signifier, endowing it with not only a multifaceted but also a certain palimpsest-like quality" (p. 5). Elaborating further on the implications of this relationship *to* the past upon a politics *in* the present and *for* the future, Eng and Kazanjian promise that "[a]vowals of and attachments to loss can produce a world of remains as a world of new representations and alternative meanings" (p. 5). History—always as much a repository of subject(s) projected from a *now* as object(s) imprinted on and as a *then*—becomes the recursive wellspring of the present and every potential future, imbricated in an expansive, dialectical chronology that is inassimilable to linear temporality. Generativity is restored to—in fact, emanates from—what is dead, abandoned, gone, lost in some way to sensorial (which is not always to say perceptual) immediacy.

Herein lies the opportunity to devise a strategy for honestly and meaningfully responding to whiteness. The most fitting response to whiteness might be to give none at all, to leave whiteness to wither and perish in neglect. But this is certainly implausible and likely impossible. So, if one must respond to whiteness, then one must respond to whiteness as an object of loss—as an object that does not exist as anyone once believed that it did (which is to say nothing of whether it ever actually existed as many claimed that it did), but an object, nonetheless, that still informs. And if one must respond to whiteness as an object of loss, it is not in mourning, but in relation to whiteness as a melancholic object. Participants' descriptions of whiteness—shot through, as they are, with negativity, denial, and repression—confirm that whiteness has never really been, never will be, and can never possibly be all that it has operated as if it already were. Whiteness has always been a lost object.

Perhaps detecting precisely this absent presence of whiteness as a melancholic object, Cheryl E. Matias (2016) asserts that "whites seemingly love their whiteness so much that they are willing to undergo a kind of spiritual death to sustain it and reap what they believe are its material and psychic rewards" (p. 58). Thandeka (2000) observes a similar phenomenon in her case studies of persons young and old who self-identify as white. She tragically echoes the undeniable if unnerving (to some more than others) motif of the sort of existential decay and

dissolution which does not befall so-called whites exogenously but makes them such by and in their voluntary consignment to and as moribund whiteness:

> [C]hildren and adults who learned how to think of themselves as white … achieved their wish but at a price: the quiet breakup of their core sense of themselves … so quiet that no one noticed that the wholehearted presence of the child or adult was gone. (p. 20)

Articulated through the lexicon of mourning and melancholia, whiteness is nothing other than an object of veritable loss; an object that has only ever been dying or dead, whether or not anyone knew it or cared to admit it. The productive response to whiteness, then, is to recognize, endorse, and cultivate this reality as a point of reparative and constructive departure. Whiteness as a melancholic object does not perform as a master signifier, but—to reemphasize Eng and Kazanjian—as an immanently flexible signifier. The multitudinous, melancholy signification of whiteness cedes the obsolescence of its hegemony without erasing its history, and in so doing foresees liberation by the historical-material dialectic that tends toward humanistic plurality. Melancholy whiteness at once finds itself and disavows historical closure because closed history is an illusion maintained in service of all that whiteness once claimed to be and now, as a melancholic object, instead rejects. Call it white melancholia: an irresoluble sense of loss, not over the disappointed prospect of all that whiteness made itself out to be, but all that whiteness precluded from being by averring always to be other than it really was; a sense of loss which, further, engenders inexhaustible hope by constant reference to its indeterminate other, the unbounded possibility beyond whiteness.

James Baldwin opined, “As long as you think you are white, there’s no hope for you” (Thorsen, 1989). Not one to misread the racial dilemma, Baldwin’s indictment nevertheless wants for a feasible mechanism of change. So-called whites cannot simply cast off their whiteness. Perhaps, though, they might explore alternative relations to whiteness from a relational psychoanalytic perspective; they may undertake a Lacanian excavation of the elements of fantasy that uphold the illusory, delusory master signifier of whiteness; or, instead, endeavor in Kleinian fashion to relocate the repressed violence of whiteness from the paranoid-schizoid to the depressive position (see Muñoz, 2006); each of these strategies representing hopeful possibility, but also an underdeveloped area of intervention whose potential psychoanalysis has yet to substantively appreciate and which could aid significantly in meaningful work upon melancholic whiteness. White melancholia provides a psychoanalytic off-ramp from hegemonic whiteness, leading to a realistically inhabitable mode of identifying that is capable of reclaiming white historicity as a vehicle for progress rather than violence.

White Sociogeny and Implications for Social Work

Fittingly, Fanon’s sociogeny provides a lens through which to meaningfully and productively arrange the ways that participants gestured toward the implications of the internal “why” of whiteness and the ways that these consequences outwardly impose their effects upon and within the social work profession. The etiology—and the diagnostic criteria, so to speak—of pathology, resistance, and ignorance according to which participants conceptualized their encounters with the psychoanalytic impetus and sustaining psychic force of whiteness inevitably encounters the historical-material dialectic previously discussed. Put differently, all of this

matters for social and material life in the worlds that social workers navigate on a daily basis and within the contexts which comprise professional social work in the complementary and overlapping areas of education, research, and practice. Participants shared their understandings of these sociogenetic outgrowths of the "why" of whiteness in social work in terms of two predominant themes: individualism and power.

Individualism

One way that participants (33%, *n*=10) conceived of the effects propagated by the externalization of the psychic "why" of whiteness was through the most proximal experiential layer to that internal process, the very construction of the notion of self. In keeping with the Lacanian analysis discussed earlier, participants told of encounters with whiteness that impressed upon them not only a distinct pattern of interaction among social actors within spaces influenced by whiteness, but, even prior to that, a sense that certain among these actors who embodied a white racial identity oriented to their own selfhood as necessarily and definitively individual, and therefore committed to individualism. Participants described these effects as manifesting in "an individualistic … competitive orientation to the social order" (Lonnie: 29, Black, male, lower-middle-class, doctoral student). One participant, Casey (40, Black, female, upper-middle-class, doctoral student), recalled her experiences running up against the ramifications of this characteristically white relation to social and material life in social work education. She had the following to say about her graduate education and transition toward entering the job market:

> The competition … it's very steeped in whiteness … quantifying every number so I can look the best I can, appear the best I could. I mean, it's just really steeped in very pernicious things that do not promote a communality … I think it just is destructive. It's harmful.

Harry (37, Black, male, middle-class, faculty) echoed this sentiment, drawing attention instead, though, to the converse of this perception of prevailing, individualistic whiteness in social work; that is, the relative absence of and sense of aversion to communality. Drawing from her own history as a social worker, she summarized the effects of the "why" of whiteness in social work with her very direct assessment: "In social work, I think of that sense of community and being connected to each other as the exact polar opposite of what whiteness represents." To these participants, the external effect of the internal catalyst of whiteness—the collective force of pathology, resistance, and ignorance—filtered through the social and material milieu of social work as a profession by disseminating and reifying individualistic normativity, which participants felt in their interpersonal relationships in general and in more concrete instances like applying for jobs.

Power

"It has nothing to do with race," Antoinette (34, Black, female, lower-middle-class, doctoral student) asserted; "I think that it has to do more with power." She was talking about the ways that the internal motives which subtend whiteness acquire social and material form as they interact with history, past and present. More specifically, she was rejecting the idea that what many call whiteness as a form of racial identity really has anything to do with race; rather, as her

comments suggest, she would contend that the "why" of whiteness is really about power, though it masquerades as a signifier that ostensibly refers to shared histories and cultures similar to those which give meaning to something like Blackness. Fifty-seven percent of participants (*n*=17) spoke extensively and insightfully to this idea that to respond to certain internal dynamics (i.e., psychic pathology, resistance, and ignorance, as delineated) by externally identifying with the racialized concept of whiteness is really about power, insofar as this process unfolds by and as mediation with social and material life (in the dialectical stratum where Fanon situated his understanding of sociogeny and its centrality to race). Participants described "a certain perceived notion of power or authority" (Arturo: 48, Latinx, male, working-class, doctoral student); "a cultural spirit or kind of cultural framework of, you know, domination and power" (Lonnie: 29, Black, male, lower-middle-class, doctoral student); "power in society or over people" (Lorene: 32, Latinx, female, upper-middle-class, doctoral student); "power of decision making in our world" (Juan: 29, Latinx, male, middle-class, master's student); and, getting more directly to the material side of the issue, "a structure of power and oppression that is in place to destroy … to use labor for free" (Robin: 57, Latinx, non-binary, middle-class, faculty). Framing this with more emphasis on the temporality of the "why" of whiteness as a historical-material dialectic, Dawn (42, Black, female, upper-middle-class, faculty) contextualized this mediated process as the following:

> "what is considered the standard … a tool that has been used as a form of oppression … a way of creating a social hierarchy or structure in terms of categorization … and the power to be able to define that from one generation to the next"

Indeed, an important aspect of whiteness across the myriad facets reviewed so far, as conceptualized by both participants and sources from external literatures, is the capacity of whiteness to surreptitiously secure the conditions necessary for its own reproduction.

An especially vulnerable and forthcoming participant, Freda (61, Black, female, middle-class, faculty), shared what they consider to be quite a traumatic, recurring injustice suffered specifically within social work—both educational and practice settings—which illustrates how the underlying dysregulation that becomes projected as whiteness exerts a social and material effect that registers as an exercise of power:

> If a colleague starts to cry, and she's white, doesn't matter what my role is, it doesn't matter about rightness or wrongness, there's a power definition and she can weaponize her whiteness at any moment … If I really think about whiteness, I think about the ability to weaponize your identity, to bring harm and consequences to another person.

To the contrary, Molly (35, Latinx, female, working-class, doctoral student) spoke to the possibility of how social work might begin to unravel this aspect of whiteness from the social and material dynamics that uphold the profession in its current form—she said, "so, to have less whiteness, more inclusiveness and belonging, you have to let go of your power, which is really scary for some people. Her point feels crucial to emphasize given social work's perennial struggle to identify concrete ways to intervene in internal problems stemming from something so nebulous as whiteness: Redistributing power *in general* toward a more communal, collectivist structure is, in effect, to also reallocate the power *of whiteness*. This is an actionable insight in

the midst of a complex social issue that can understandably feel very often too pervasive and ambiguous to tackle directly and effectively.

Summary: Building Upon Findings

Returning again to the research question guiding this study, the present investigation is framed according to inquiry into the ways that social workers who do not identify as white perceive whiteness to manifest in social work. Structured by certain sub-questions stated previously, this undertaking asks, also, how whiteness manifests in social work curricula, how whiteness manifests in institutions of social work education, and how whiteness manifests in social work praxis. In the previous chapter focusing on the "what" of whiteness, provisional findings began to emerge in relation to these questions. Participants conceptualized the "what" of whiteness as an indefinable yet ubiquitous social construct that dictates prevailing U.S. notions of normativity and exerts itself through historical-material mediation. Further, they identified the impact of this upon social work by asserting that, first, the core social work curriculum is largely enmeshed with whiteness; second, specifically anti-racist projects within social work are, in various ways, characterized and co-opted by whiteness; and, third, white service preferences and multiculturalism function as vehicles by which to maintain and propagate whiteness within and as a product of mainstream social work praxis.

Turning to the "why" of whiteness, participants spoke in ways that reveal, with help from the psychoanalytic literature, intra-psychic origins from which whiteness arises and ultimately acquires historical-material force through mediated processes of externalization. Participants identified these as pathology, resistance, and ignorance. They conceived of pathology as a generalized kind of psychic dysfunction, particularly as relates to orientation toward the self and social life; they explicated resistance as avoidance of thinking about and otherwise engaging with race and racialization; and, lastly, for participants, the ignorance catalyzing whiteness and white racial identification consisted in lack of awareness, especially concerning the historical, structural, systemic nature of both race as a socially constructed concept and racism at large.

Given participants' assertions that the primary effects of the "why" of whiteness, collectively conceptualized as such, materialize as competitive individualism and power concentrated in and as whiteness in social work, certain implications for this study's main and subsidiary research questions begin to emerge—that is, it is apparent that the "why" of whiteness plays an important role in determining the ways that whiteness manifests in social work curricula, education, and praxis. Above all else, participants' analyses vis-à-vis the "why" of whiteness imply an insufficiency of and dire need for collectivity in social work curricula, education, and praxis. This is what is suggested by repeated testimony regarding the oppressive pervasiveness of individualism and concentrated power (most concentrated in whiteness, of course) throughout each of these aspects of the social work profession. To take participants' experiences seriously would be to concertedly reflect on whether social work, which makes itself out to be different from other professions and disciplines for its purportedly integral commitment to justice, is, in fact, as social as it ought to be.

This point signals a need for change, which urges rigorous understanding of the mechanisms through which whiteness operates in social work. In other words, having proceeded

through the “what” and the “why” of whiteness, this study must address the “how” of whiteness in order to elucidate actionable opportunities for intervention. Subsequently, this study turns next toward a new type of analysis, anchored again in participant interview data, which, this time, foregrounds *how* whiteness exists in social work today and might be changed tomorrow.

Chapter 5: The "How" of Whiteness

Having explored the "what" and the "why" of whiteness as conceptual facets of whiteness that emerged from participant interviews, this chapter brings the present study's trajectory of discovery to its final topic: the "how" of whiteness. The first chapter of findings (the "what" of whiteness) laid the foundation of the descriptive contours according to which participants experience whiteness as an identifiable phenomenon in the first place; the second chapter on study findings (the "why" of whiteness) discerned participants' interpretations of the psychic impetus from which whiteness originates and due to which it asserts itself socially and materially as an extension of individual and collective motive and desire; and in this chapter, the final grouping of study findings offers participants' explanatory accounts of the mechanisms whiteness employs as means of maintenance, propagation, and domination. Now, with some aggregated understanding of what whiteness is and why it is the way(s) that it is, assembling information on how it exists as such and persists accordingly is necessary for the sake of both comprehensive theorization and, perhaps more importantly, practical intervention designed to effect change capable of rendering whiteness in the future something other than what it is right now—the cornerstone of racialization and attendant racial injustice and oppression.

Participants spoke to the "how" of whiteness as anchored around the three major themes of institutional entrenchment (87%, *n*=26), performative anti-racism (93%, *n*=28), and racializing language (77%, *n*=23). In this chapter, I begin by reviewing the content of these emergent themes and situating each in the context of the corresponding lived experiences that participants shared from the field of social work. Subsequently, I present an analysis that relates institutional entrenchment, performative anti-racism, and racializing language to existing theories of institutional state apparatuses as conceived by Althusser, habitus as developed by Bourdieu, and the philosophy and politics of language as articulated by various relevant theorists. I conclude with a summary of study findings, bringing takeaways from preceding sections into conversation with the results of the present chapter's analysis.

Institutional Entrenchment

For 87% of participants (*n*=26), the context of social work as an institution (e.g., educational institution, professional organization, standard of accreditation, bureaucratic infrastructure) characteristically exhibited entrenchment that functioned as a component of the perceived "how" of whiteness. Participants apprehended this institutional entrenchment as not only a contemporary orientation, but an intergenerationally inherited predisposition of professional social work; one stemming from that very qualifier, "professional." The institutional resistance to change, as they saw it, began with the founding commitment to professional identity, which consequently structured social work's development, philosophy, and practice according to rigidly prescribed norms and expectations. Referring accordingly to social work's history, Hattie (45, Black, female, middle-class, master's student) asserted:

> Start with the history of, you know, social work and how it sort of had to professionalize itself. And it felt like the field had a crisis of identity because of professionalization … And so impressing upon the curriculum and impressing upon people, this sort of, you

> know, what it means to be professional … Professionalization is a whiteness construct because it doesn't necessarily speak to competence, it speaks to what things look like.

To draw out more explicitly what this participant glosses over, the "what things look like" that has historically been impressed upon social work and persists today all in the name of professionalization is also that which upholds white hegemony—to name just a few highlighted by the existing literature, these include hierarchical administrative organization and power concentration among white persons (Bell, 2014), direct responsibility for and complicity in the fetishization, objectification, and criminalization of non-white people (Fox, 2019; Gustafson, 2009), and historical erasure of both white supremacy in social work and foundational contributions to social work from sources other than white persons and institutions (Wright, Carr, & Akin, 2021). Each of these has served to solidify the notion of social work as professionalized, establish it formally and socially as an institutional entity, and therefore set the precondition of a collective professional identity against which to judge institutional entrenchment in terms of change (or lack thereof) from the corresponding shared concept of a profession. All this despite the shared sentiment, articulated by Casey (40, Black, female, upper-middle-class, doctoral student), that "social work has to redefine professionalization, not try to step into professionalization and try to make that outfit work with social justice hats on. It's just not working."

Naomi (28, Middle Eastern, female, middle-class, doctoral student) delineated a connection to professionalization in order to lay the groundwork for subsequent consideration of institutional entrenchment with a focus on social work education and the social work academy. They shared:

> I like social work because it has these [anti-racist] commitments … or at least it has the potential to enact these commitments. And that potential is not served by drawing boundaries around the field of social work and saying, 'This is what social work does.' Because as soon as you start to professionalize in that way, that flexibility of responding to social and political problems and economic problems in more creative and interdisciplinary ways starts to go away.

This participant was speaking to her perceptions of whiteness in social work—academic social work specifically—and identifying a strategy for maintaining whiteness (i.e., the "how" of whiteness) in systemic, institutional resistance to any shift away from the status quo. For her, this showed up in the form of entrenchment vis-à-vis professional and disciplinary boundaries. Commenting similarly on social work education as an institution entrenched in a particular order, Arturo (48, Latinx, male, working-class, doctoral student) emphasized a different aspect of this phenomenon as manifest in bureaucratic politics and pressures toward conformity and appeasement:

> I've been the chair of the department, for example, right? BIPOC folks who are in positions of power might come in initially with the intentions of changing whatever, but then they kind of fall into the status quo with things where they realize, like, 'Fuck, this is much bigger than I thought. But I like the pay, so I'm just gonna go ahead and appease some of the folks down here … you know, make it seem like I'm doing my best.' But

> they're just maintaining the status quo. I've experienced that with policymakers, people within academia, the chair, the dean … You know, they might say the right things when you're in the meeting, but they're not doing anything to challenge the system that continues to create inequities … 'Oh, well, let's put together a committee,' or 'let's create this support.' That kind of thing. But that's not enough.

Molly (35, Latinx, female, working-class, doctoral student) picked up on this thematic thread, bringing their posited root cause of institutional entrenchment in academic social work to the fore in formulating a comprehensive picture of the "how" of whiteness. They put their assessment of the social work academy bluntly, also making clear the racial politics of institutional entrenchment along with who stands to benefit from change and who suffers injustice under the reigning status quo:

> The academy is a white institution. It was always built for white people. And that's sort of how [social workers] have continued to create our education … as if our education is also meant to be for Black and brown people … Then our education has to change, right? And so do the politics and the policies. But they aren't.

From the founding historical moment of social work's professionalization to the reflection and reification of that professionalization in the procedures, bureaucracy, and inflexible infrastructure of education and the social work academy today, these participants convey the ways that institutional entrenchment takes hold in and as the observable (in)action which, in part, constitutes the "how" of whiteness.

Performative Anti-Racism

Study participants' structural interpretations of institutional entrenchment imply an additional, complimentary level of analysis—a relational conceptualization that situates entrenchment in contingent context, since resistance to change finds its endpoint as such through contested mediation among agentic persons and historical-material circumstance, not just through top-down imposition of a particular order. This leads to the next theme of performative anti-racism. Performative anti-racism does not occur in isolation. When a person or institution communicates a commitment to anti-racism that goes unrealized, this outcome is due at least in part to structural influences—forces like norms, constraints, prohibitions, dysfunctions, or other mediating mechanisms, both tacit and overt. Each analytical layer is necessary in order to understand the other.

To that point, the second theme concerning the "how" of whiteness, according to social workers who do not identify as white, focuses on performative anti-racism; that is, anti-racism that is only symbolically so, being ostensibly anti-racist in its self-portrayal (i.e., performance, so to speak), sometimes anti-racist in its intention, and, by definition, not actually anti-racist in its effect. Sarah Ahmed, who wrote in 2004 what has endured as arguably the authoritative inquiry into and commentary on the relationship between whiteness and anti-racist performativity, summarized this characteristically ineffectual brand of anti-racism as a mainstay of whiteness—typically integral to the neoliberal sort of whiteness, since flagrantly oppressive variants of whiteness make little if any attempt to even concern themselves with anti-racism. Much, maybe

even most, white anti-racism, according to Ahmed's observation, simply does not do what it declares; "the conditions are not in place that would allow such declarations to do what they say" (p. 1). This effect (or lack thereof), she claims, then subverts the professed purpose, when mere "'admissions' of 'bad practice' are taken up as signs of 'good practice'" (p. 1), an even more familiar trend today, almost 20 years after Ahmed formulated this critique. It is certainly in vogue for persons or institutions to retrospectively declare some degree of error or imperfection vis-à-vis issues of race and racism and to presume that doing so represents a laudable and effective act of anti-racism in and of itself; it is less common for meaningful, lasting, social or material anti-racist change to follow from such purportedly self-reflective pronouncements.

These kinds of declarations, to which Ahmed first called attention, are part and parcel of the performative anti-racism that 93% of participants (*n*=28) described. Participants' testimonials on this subject were particularly suffused with tones of indignation. Each participant did, after all, racially identify as something other than white, and the nature of performative anti-racism is essentially a false promise of racial justice extended to those who are not white. This supposed promise, in its falseness, serves only to further benefit whiteness and whites at the expense of precisely those who do not identify as white and who have been assured of some positive change—something which, understandably, provokes a negative emotional response. Worth quoting at length, Florence (37, Asian, female, middle-class, doctoral student) captured this phenomenon, contextualized it in relation to social work, and exemplified the emotional intensity evoked by the emergent theme of performative anti-racism:

> I mean, whiteness in social work academia, I think, is the same as all academia, except that social work has this fucked up thing where it's like, 'Oh, we, like, don't privilege whiteness,' but then it just does the same shit everybody else does. So if you want to be critical of whiteness but be engaged in social work academia, you have to be cool with kind of being a hypocrite in some ways. Like, we care about race, but then we're going to do everything with this, like … with the status quo. Like, we've got to keep up with econ, we've got to keep up with these other fields that don't give a shit about race or being critical about it, or thinking about how the dominant white perspective, like, infuses the work. Social work, like, outwardly, like, has posters. You know? It's like, 'Oh, we care about diversity.' But then, underneath that, they just do everything the same—the same white way that, like, everybody else does. And so I think that's kind of fucked up. Like, I don't think social work does anything uniquely infused with whiteness. I think it does everything the same as everybody else, but then outwardly says that it's going to do something different.

Similar to the way in which, for Ahmed, the relationship between whiteness and anti-racism comes down in large part to the impossibility of change under white hegemony to begin with, this participant registers the important qualification that, according to their observation of social work, performative anti-racism is distinguishable foremost according not to what it is, but what it is not—namely, any substantive shift away from the racial status quo. Performative anti-racism might claim to be a lot of things in theory—an affirmative action policy, a racial equity scholarship, a diversity committee, a community engagement plan—but it coheres as a category, in the end, around the definitional criterion that it does not turn out to be, in practice, whatever it said it would be. It reverts or defaults to the status quo. And when the status quo systematically

and systemically benefits whites at the expense of non-whites, inaction forges the connection between performative anti-racism and whiteness.

Even though whiteness may manifest in social work through performative anti-racism's inefficacy, participants delineated numerous processes through which this mode of *inaction* tends to unfold in patterned ways that are actually contingent upon specific forms of *action*, wherein the "how" of whiteness becomes legible. In other words, by this recurring cycle, whiteness is reinforced when anti-racist claims are routinely espoused but not translated into results (which is not necessarily to assume anything—anything generalizable across all instances, at least—about why this disconnect arises). By and large, participants described this action-toward-inaction as transpiring mostly through different forms of public messaging that make up the bulk of performative anti-racism in social work, which consequently preserves prevailing whiteness within the profession. Ashley (43, Asian, female, upper-middle-class, faculty) reflected:

> When people say, 'We're an anti-racist institution,' often it just stops at saying that. You know? Or when they make statements about being, you know … 'We believe Black lives matter.' Okay, that's great. But what policies have you actually enacted in this practice, or in this agency to really embody that?

Chad (27, mixed-race, male, middle-class, doctoral student) connected this issue directly to whiteness, commenting likewise:

> I feel like we address [anti-racism]. It is mentioned. But is it executed in a certain way? I'm happy that it is being addressed, but I guess I'm still wondering … I feel like I have issues with the execution, how the profession is maybe addressing whiteness.

Calvin (45, Black, male, middle-class, faculty) shared a similar memory, and even went a bit further to recall their experience of not only inaction, but difficulty surmounting the obstacle of that inaction, specifically within the field of social work. For them, performative anti-racism reified whiteness by forestalling initiatives toward diversity, equity, and inclusion, and change was perceived as challenging more so than just absent:

> They talked a lot about the plans, you know, for the future, and what was currently underway, but what was coming in terms of diversity, equity, inclusion … But I just didn't realize how tough change would be in that space.

Beyond the sort of general communications circulating throughout the field of social work like those addressed so far, participants also described messages amounting to performative anti-racism transmitted through more formal channels. For instance, Hattie (45, Black, female, middle-class, master's student) recounted how, in switching careers to become a social worker, she was thrilled to see what she thought entailed a commitment to anti-racism in social work's code of ethics; yet, upon making the transition, the promise conveyed by that governing document went unrealized in practice:

> The social work code [of ethics] has social justice pretty high up and pretty … you know … several places in the code. And so I went, 'Oh, perfect—these are my people. No problem, it's going to be fine.' And it was not that.

Harry (37, Black, male, middle-class, faculty) recollected how performative anti-racism can happen through public communications in social work when it manifests not only through more formal channels, but *as* more formal channels such as, in this case, a professional conference:

> Ultimately, academics are … they're trapped in the situation of, like, producing … having to produce tangible things to show and prove that they're doing work. Sometimes this type of [anti-racist] work does not really fall into something that they can, like, quantify, so it ends up falling by the wayside. I think there's a lot of talk about these types of things. And that conference … there was a lot of good talk. Yeah, like, maybe it resulted in, like, a book, a book chapter or something for people ultimately. But, yeah, I mean, like, other than that, I mean, I think it was kind of like spinning your wheels.

This participant also situates his commentary within a reference to a larger problem facing social work academics and academia in general; that is, the pressures toward incrementalism and careerism imposed by the demands of production that set the terms by which success or failure is judged for tenure-track professionals. These pressures may underlie the disconnect between declaration and outcome which manifests so often in and as performative anti-racism. Yet, Robin (57, Latinx, non-binary, middle-class, faculty) touched upon this very possibility, sharing one story of the numerous ways that ulterior motives related to professional success and legitimation can coopt initiatives that may seem like anti-racism on the surface but fall short in their ability to effect lasting, meaningful, racially just change:

> [Anti-racism] is a space that has been hijacked by white individuals who have been funded very well for the past many decades, who now actually have the power to say so-and-so is my associate director and I'm going to pay that person's summer salary, right? So it creates that … that visual diversity, but everything else stays the same. So I'm not very hopeful.

As each of these participants suggests, these patterns of performative anti-racism—in some ways quite complex, but each really a variation of simply saying one thing and doing another—all employ similar means to communicate a commitment to anti-racism that is never actualized, which comprises part of the "how" of whiteness in social work.

Racializing Language

The last theme relating to the "how" of whiteness, shared by 77% of participants (*n*=23), involves the use of language to create and maintain—or, more accurately, enforce—the network of racialized concepts (e.g., group categories, individual identities, hierarchical relations) through which whiteness historically originated and preserves relative racial advantage today. It is increasingly accepted by the field of social work that discourse does not simply communicate ideas of race which, themselves, precede that communication, but constitutes racialized subjects and the relations among them by and in the very act of communicating (DiFranks, 2008;

Gregory, 2020a; Jayaratne, Croxton, & Mattison, 2002). As with any aspect of identity, be it race, gender, class, or any of the other innumerable component parts of lived experience that we ascribe to our senses of self (and corresponding notions of others), ultimately, we are because we say we are. Or, perhaps, we are (or are not) because others say so; the process of identity formation mediated by, in, and as language is unavoidably contested and charged with sociopolitical power and commitment (Butler, 1997). In determining the racial landscape, whiteness has most often set the terms of the discourses that assign racialized identities at both the individual and population levels (Cohn, 1996). This intervention through language makes up a far-reaching and critically consequential strategy inherent to the "how" of whiteness, which is reflected in participants' accounts of their professional experiences and observations of the larger contexts surrounding social work.

Arturo (48, Latinx, male, working-class, doctoral student) shared a story illustrating this innate power of language to construct racialized subjects as such, doing so in ways dictated by whiteness and white actors, often against the will of the subject being racialized and contrary to their previous self-perceptions. His story is so similar to stereotypes depicted over time in mainstream popular media as to be almost cartoonish, but nonetheless makes up a very real part of his formative racialization and a salient episode still etched in his memory today:

> And we were riding [bikes] in front of Mrs. Ball's house … And she came out in her robe and stood on the porch as we were riding by and she just yelled, 'You Black kids get off my lawn! I'm going to call the cops!' And I was confused because I didn't know at that time. I didn't know what my race was. I thought I was just some Mexican kid who spoke mostly Spanish. I didn't realize I might be Black.

It is important to know, for the sake of this story, that Mrs. Ball was, as one might rightly assume, a white woman. Because of the relational distribution of power along lines of race, she, a white woman, was able to stir racial self-doubt (i.e., "…I might be Black) with her use of language (i.e., "You Black kids …"). It is impossible to know for sure given that Mrs. Ball did not participate in this study, but it is likely that her verbalization reflects the tendency of Blackness, particularly in the U.S. context, to loom largest as the counterpart to whiteness in the American imagination, whereby any racial category other than whiteness is overshadowed by (pun very much not intended) or subsumed by Blackness. Absent whiteness, Mrs. Ball perceived Blackness, and her language exerted sufficient force to bring that perception, at least in part, into reality—the participant considered the possibility that he actually might be Black.

A recollection from Calvin (45, Black, male, middle-class, faculty) shows the converse to play out very differently; that is, when Blackness attempts to set alternative terms for whiteness, the consequences do not follow in quite the same manner:

> I was watching The Jeffersons, and on The Jeffersons, George would call his neighbor, Tom, a 'honkie'. I didn't understand the significance of it, or, like, I really didn't even know what the word meant. But I remember using it in class, and my teacher, who was white, was very offended. Of course, I got in trouble.

Whereas Mrs. Ball's proximity in relation to whiteness afforded her the power to authoritatively categorize the group of boys on her lawn as Black despite their understandings of themselves otherwise, this participant's distance from whiteness, as a young Black boy, precluded him from using language to situate whiteness with a more negative connotation in the presence of his white teacher. Interpreted another way, a linguistic rendering of whites as "honkies" represented a threat to the prevailing narrative of white hegemony, and as such, elicited reflexive suppression from a signatory to the social contract which upholds whiteness. The language of race, as these participants attest, makes the reality of race, but does so generally in keeping with the established distribution of power among racialized subjects, or else backlash follows to buttress the existing hierarchical order.

Analysis: Theoretical Models of Whiteness's "How"

In the first findings chapter, Adorno's dialectical sociology provided a useful framework with which to synthesize the emergent conceptualization of the "what" of whiteness as an indefinable, normative, historical-material object; in the second findings chapter, psychoanalytic theories posited by Fanon, Lacan, and more recent scholars and practitioners of psychoanalysis offered generative schemas for interpreting the underlying "why" of whiteness vis-à-vis a nexus of pathology, resistance, and ignorance; and now, to build analytically upon the findings presented so far in this chapter, sociological theories conceived by Althusser and Bourdieu, along with work on the theory and philosophy of language from past and contemporary interlocuters, make for intellectual tools from the existing research and literature that help to tie together and contextualize the foregoing nascent explanation of the "how" of whiteness according to institutional entrenchment, performative anti-racism, and racializing language. In the sections that follow, these elements of whiteness are considered in relation to Althusser's concept of the ideological state apparatus, Bourdieu's notion of habitus, and existing scholarship on the theory and philosophy of language in order to incorporate new material capable of further elucidating and elaborating upon the "how" of whiteness as first articulated by participants during their interviews.

Whiteness and Institutional State Apparatuses

To explain the "how" of whiteness in terms of institutional entrenchment is to posit an analysis that aligns closely with French Marxist philosopher, Louis Althusser's (1971), theory of ideological state apparatuses (ISAs) and interpellation. But before going any further, this necessitates an aside on the related concept of ideology. As developed most famously by Marx, ideology is best understood in opposition to what one might colloquially refer to as that which is real or true (Marx & Engels, 1932/1970; see also Ricoeur, 1986). Thinking or acting ideologically, therefore, is for one to be guided not by that which is real or true (again, in the informal sense), but by one's *idea* of that which is real or true, which, of course, is subject to any and all sorts of subjective deviations. And it is a characteristic of ideology to substitute itself *as* that which is real or true rather than a subjective relation to it. This should sound readily familiar to U.S. social workers living amid the political climate of the year 2023, who likely encounter quite regularly the experience of a struggle to reach consensus with differently minded others, not over opinions related to facts, but over facts themselves. This slippage in agreed-upon reality and truth depending upon subjective position is ideology at work.

Continuing now to Althusser (1971), ISAs are those institutions (e.g., the school, the church, the family, etc.) that the state depends upon to disseminate its dominant ideology, but which are not always identified entirely with that function (i.e., the family is clearly more than just a state propaganda machine). Althusser proposes that, in capitalist society, the educational institution has surpassed the church as the primary ISA. Interpellation, he further asserts, is the process of recognition by which the dominant ideology constitutes individuals as "always-already subjects" (p. 176). Though quite complex and impossible to elaborate in full without diverging too far from the focus of the present study, this ideological corollary of interpellation essentially theorizes that, by the mere fact of living in social contact with society as it is organized by the state, it is *always* the case that one can only be recognized by others and recognize oneself in terms *already* compatible with the dominant ideology. This abstract description will become clearer in the following summarizing example.

In the United States, the ISAs—educational institutions, first and foremost, those belonging to social work included—facilitate the dominance of an ideology that is inextricably conditioned by whiteness (though it is, of course, also bound up with other determinants such as capitalism, nationalism, and heteronormativity). This ideology interpellates individuals as subjects assimilable to whiteness, meaning that individuals always recognize themselves and are recognized by others in terms of whiteness. Since, again, whiteness is coextensive with white supremacy, these terms imply that recognition as white entails recognition as not a raced person, and recognition as a raced person entails recognition as not white, the former having the effect of ideological supremacy, the latter of ideological oppression. And these ideological relations exert material consequences.

With this theory in mind, it is not surprising that participants described social work institutions—social work educational institutions, foremost—as seeming resistant to becoming anything other than, or at least substantively different from, that which they already are. Understood as ISAs, social work institutions' present constitutions are largely determined for them by their existence in relation to and under the influence of the overarching structure of the state—the United States, in this case, with whiteness being integral to the operation of the state. Further, it makes sense that even those social work institutions that are not themselves strictly educational in purpose—community organizations, policy centers, clinical practice settings—would also be perceived by participants as inseparably bound up with the production and reproduction of the dominant ideology of whiteness when, as discussed, social work adheres so eagerly to standards of professionalization and accreditation, which themselves depend upon collective commitment to a professional constituency of social workers who have passed through and internalized the expectations of educational institutions of social work.

Whiteness and the Habitus

The predominance of formally institutionalized social work education within the profession more broadly leads to the second point of analysis relating the existing literature to participant conceptualization of the "how" of whiteness. This follows from French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu's theories on pedagogy and cultural reproduction (Bourdieu, 1991; Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990). If the dominant U.S. ideology is produced by and produces whiteness, and if

this process depends largely upon schools and interpellation therein, there is still room to more concretely specify the mechanics of how the social works students who go on to become professional social workers are continuously constituted and reconstituted as always-already subjects indissolubly related to whiteness. So far, the question of "how" has not been answered beyond it being located somewhere in the immersion of the social work student in the environment of the institution of social work education. Bourdieu goes further, explicating the roles of pedagogy and language in these institutions as means of reproducing subjects of the dominant ideology. To summarize his theoretical position, Bourdieu claims the following regarding pedagogy and language: The ideologically presumed, authoritative pedagogue (i.e., social work educator) inculcates the student with understanding that comports with the dominant ideology; this understanding cultivates in the student a subjectivity that is dialectically related to the dominant ideology—neither purely individual nor ideological, but necessarily a synthesis of both, which Bourdieu calls *habitus*; the habitus guides the student's material practice in such a way as to guarantee the reproduction of the objective structures that, in the first place, secured the culture of the dominant ideology by which, among other things, the aforementioned pedagogue was presumed to be an authority. And this cultural, pedagogical reproduction of the dominant ideology and its subjects transpires in the medium of language—a sign system with the capacity to inflict what Bourdieu calls the "symbolic violence" of assimilating an individual to the dominant ideology, even interpellating an individual as a subject of that dominant ideology, in direct contradiction with their best interest and autonomy (see also Vološinov, 1986).

The point, as it relates to the "how" of whiteness in social work and in general, carries forward from the preceding discussion of ISAs and interpellation, but increases in specificity. Social workers acquire the dominant ideology through pedagogy and as a product of language. And given the already established coincidence of whiteness with the dominant U.S. ideology, it follows that students in the United States are recruited as participants in whiteness through the content of the schooling they receive and the language of their lessons. As such, despite symbolic performance to the contrary, embodied practice remains difficult to enact in a way that is anti-racist in social and material effect. Performative anti-racism is compatible with a habitus informed by the dominant ideology of whiteness, but a mode of being that would actually impart an anti-racist effect is not. This conclusion aligns with the growing body of evidence of the myriad ways that whiteness thoroughly pervades education in professional schools and beyond (e.g., Allen, 2004; Applebaum, 2017; Bonilla-Silva & Zuberi, 2008; Leonardo & Manning, 2017). Students—social workers-to-be—are inscribed with the ideological imprimatur of whiteness not by diffuse absorption of something nebulous in the ether of the school environment of the educational institution of social work, but by direct transfer of the very instructional substance that is part and parcel social work education. Performative anti-racism is, in this way, modeled by, in, and as the white habitus and passed along to them.

Whiteness and the Theory and Philosophy of Language

A case analysis of the National Association of Social Workers (NASW) Code of Ethics serves as a perfect illustration of the theme of racializing language, which emerged from participant interviews. This case analysis takes that theme, grounds it in a specific example, and draws connections to existing principles from the theory and philosophy of language in order to exemplify in greater detail the "how" of whiteness in the field of social work. This first

necessitates a brief refresher on relevant historical context. As previously indicated, whiteness was and is invented (Allen, 1994–1997), and whiteness exists as the relational center from which subsequent processes of racialization and attendant stratification unfurl. Or, as Leonardo (2009) puts it, "Without a privileged center, there can be no denigrated margin" (p. 71). Yet, whiteness, as this center, this linchpin of racial ordering, has never rested upon stable or coherent definition. Whiteness has variously stood for, at times, republicanism, and at others, proletarianism (Roediger, 1991, 2005); during certain eras, the native-born Anglo-American colonist, but later, the Irish immigrant, too (Ignatiev, 1995); for some periods, Gentiles alone, and eventually, Jews, as well (Brodkin, 1998). Even the avowedly objective and judicious United States legal system has inconsistently and unpredictably delivered conflicting interpretations of what exactly it means to be white, shifting with flagrant irrationality across verdicts, attempting to parse whiteness from what it means to be, among other things, Japanese (see *Takao Ozawa v. United States*) or Indian (see *United States v. Bhagat Singh Thind*) (López, 2006). The only consistent pattern discernable in the historical definition of whiteness, in fact, is what Thandeka (2000) terms a relation of negation—whiteness only ever *is* what it *is not* (i.e., not African American, Mexican, Japanese, Indian, etc.). And in an ironic tautological turn, only whites possess the power to determine what, and thereby whom, whiteness *is not*.

Whiteness renders the entire socially constructed system of race opaque (again, no pun intended). Social work does not escape this convolution. Popularly circulated narratives of the origins of social work predominantly neglect the unsettling truth that social work began and evolved in a temporally and substantively symbiotic, co-constitutive fashion alongside whiteness during the 19th century (Gregory, 2020b). More historically proximal accounts suggest that social work has continued to struggle to shake the fetters of whiteness, leading to iterations of social work theory and practice that are insensitive, at best, and overtly racist, at worst (Dominelli, 1989). Unsurprisingly, then, in its considerable demographic, administrative, and ideological whiteness, social work struggles to ascertain and respond to the phenomenon of race at large in a measured, meaningful way.

The NASW Code of Ethics (2017) reveals as much through its use of racializing language. In a subsection, *Cultural Awareness and Social Diversity*, the Code prescribes the following as a standard: "Social workers should obtain education about and seek to understand the nature of social diversity and oppression with respect to race, ethnicity, national origin, color, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, age, marital status, political belief, religion, immigration status, and mental or physical ability" (p. 50). The mention of race as the first signifier of identity implies that the Code affords it paramount importance among the unwieldy list of signifiers that follow, but this language fails to connote any clear conception of what the Code means by race, and actually obscures the possibility of deciphering an intelligible picture of race at all. With this standard, the Code articulates an idea of race that is inhered with implied sociopolitical gravity, and that is separable from "ethnicity, national origin, [and] color." Two questions follow, here, from the Code's linguistic treatment of race: (1) If *not* ethnicity, national origin, color, or some combination thereof, what *is* race? (2) Absent a rigorous definition of race, why is it important to "seek to understand the nature of social diversity and oppression with respect to race?"

Set aside the fact that the Code foregoes its self-imposed obligation to "seek to understand" by omitting any serious attempt to derive a sophisticated definition of race. The answers to the two questions posed are straightforward, but their implications are comparatively complicated. Taking the two questions in turn, the answer to the first is that the Code simply does not know. Nowhere in its text does it endeavor to define race, but repeatedly deploys the linguistic term without any clear referent. Resultantly, the answer to the second question must be that the Code is unsure of a rationale for "seek[ing] to understand the nature of social diversity and oppression with respect to race," but the Code evidently is sure of the import, or at least the desirability, of *claiming to* "seek to understand the nature of social diversity and oppression with respect to race."

An analytical degree of remove from the text of the Code can bring some interpretive clarity to this predicament. Put another way, it will be helpful to ask not what the text says through language, but what the language tacitly, reflexively says about the text itself. Gregory Bateson first theorized this property of language in his work with Jurgen Ruesch (1951). To describe this property, he coined the term "metacommunication," or "communication about communication . . . all exchanged cues and propositions about (a) codification and (b) relationship between the communicators" (p. 209). Bateson's purview, in this case, was psychiatry. Later, Barbara A. Babcock (1977) appropriated this theoretical principle in her analysis of narrative, framing the matter in a way perhaps more accessible and more resonant with the Code, which deals more in everyday human affairs, and less in the technicalities of language. "Metanarrative," Babcock called it, is "the *reflexive* or *meta*-dimension of all storytelling situations and, more generally, of all sign systems" (p. 62). Metanarrative, as such, is the story about the story, always already within the story, perceptible through the sign system of language, and, as Bateson asserted, through the relationship between the communicators involved in the transmission of that story.

The language within the Code says nothing incisive about race, but it says a great deal about the Code as a text through its linguistic treatment of race—that is, in its racializing language. In other words, the narrative is muddled, but the metanarrative is clear. The Code does not compose a narrative about race, but a metanarrative about itself vis-à-vis race. What, then, does this metanarrative say?

At its core, the Code's metanarrative is anchored by the conviction already mentioned; namely, that it is important, or at least desirable, to *claim to* "seek to understand the nature of social diversity and oppression with respect to race." This metanarrative must be read in dialogic relation to the Code's narrative. The narrative, uncomplicated and ahistorical in its treatment of race, denies the relational contest and historical violence upon which the very emergence of race as a viable signifier always was and still is conditioned. Putting this narrative in dialogue with a metanarrative that nonetheless foregrounds the priority of ostensible attunement to race, the Code imparts the message that *one must not necessarily understand race, but one must be sensitive to race*.

This oxymoronic thesis benefits those who identify as white, while harming those who do not. In this way, the Code, through narration and metanarration, upholds hegemonic whiteness. When anyone, social workers included, fails to understand race, its etiology, and its inherent

violence as a category, the harm—epistemological misrepresentation and invisibility, historical erasure, physical and psychological dehumanization, institutional oppression—falls upon those heuristically, popularly perceived as "having a race"—those who do not identify as white. To leverage the reputational benefit of professed sensitivity to race despite this misunderstanding—or more accurately, ignorance—is an attempt to preemptively situate oneself beyond culpability for the racial harm that said ignorance will inevitably continue to inflict. These strategic maneuvers, exemplified in the Code, thus represent the abdication of ethical responsibility and a presumptive transcendence of the lived experience of race that is only available in whiteness.

In the foregoing paragraphs, the inclusion of anthropomorphic language to describe the NASW Code of Ethics (e.g., "the Code simply does not *know*," "the Code evidently *is sure*") was an intentional linguistic choice, designed to allude to the analysis now to be developed. The Code states, "Social workers' decisions and actions should be consistent with the spirit as well as the letter of this Code" (p. 20). This notion of the Code's "spirit" warrants closer examination, and may, in fact, reveal more than what is conveyed through the "letter," alone.

Kate Parker Horigan (2018), in her study of public disaster, posits the salience of "implicit narrative" in the circulation of discourse. That is to say, discourse disseminates more than what is articulated merely in its letter. One theoretical repercussion that results from this conceptualization, which Horigan does not explicitly draw out, is the dependence of implicit narrative upon an implicit *narrator*. Discourse does not circulate independent of, but rather through, bodies and subjectivities. Implicit narrative, consequently, demands an implicit narrator. In the case of the Code, an implicit narrator emerges precisely through its self-identified "spirit"—something (indeed, some*one*) speaking beyond and in concert with the letter of the text. A narrator who can "know" and "be sure."

This begs the questions of how, exactly, to elucidate the contours of the Code's implicit narrator, what they say, and where this speech registers in relation to the text. The analysis so far lends credence to the contention that whiteness is the implicit narrator of the Code—whiteness as a *who* rather than a *what*, for although whiteness operates as an overarching logic and ideology, it is dialectically constitutive of and constituted by the embodied and enacted agency of its signatories. The plausibility of designating whiteness as the implicit narrator of the Code should hardly elicit objection, given the enduring, recalcitrant hegemony of whiteness as a sociopolitical and cultural force in domestic United States affairs and global relations, from which social work and the NASW cannot possibly consider themselves removed or exempt. Further, ample evidence has been laid out here tracing the imprimatur of whiteness inscribed in the language and the text of the Code. Take, for the moment, then, whiteness as the implicit narrator, the "spirit," of the Code.

Whiteness, as the narrator of the Code, serves primarily to dress uncertainty in confidence, shield unscrupulousness with authority, mask ignorance as knowledge—". . . an ignorance that resists . . . an ignorance that fights back . . . an ignorance militant, aggressive, not to be intimidated, an ignorance that is active, dynamic, that refuses to go quietly . . . not at all confined to the illiterate and uneducated but propagated at the highest levels of the land, indeed presenting itself unblushingly as knowledge" (Mills, 2007, p. 13). This is how Mills theorizes white ignorance. In the Code, whiteness, through its ignorance, functions to summon an air of

institutional legitimacy in spite of grasping for, and falling short of, any significant intervention in the ethical problematic of race. As the implicit narrator of the Code, whiteness recognizes the imperative of outwardly taking an ethical position on race. Race integrally informs and mediates social life and political economy (Sullivan & Tuana, 2007), social justice organizing (Hughey, 2012), psychology and therapeutic intervention (Fanon, 1952/2008; Kovel, 1970), research methods and praxis (Zuberi & Bonilla-Silva, 2008), gender and intersectional identity (Frankenberg, 1993), and expanding globalism (Fanon, 1961/2004), over each of which social work claims some professional purview. The Code's implicit narrator is caught in the bind of the obligation to believably comment on race without demonstrating any critical insight into race. The Code seeks an implicit narrator capable of asserting authoritative command over race in the absence of any well-developed explication of race. No narrator other than whiteness could accomplish this feat.

Whiteness, as the implicit narrator of the Code, linguistically treats race in the manner that most whites characteristically, discursively, treat race—through blindness, or, more appropriately, color-blindness (Bonilla-Silva, 2018); a blindness that is not literally visual, but more pervasively epistemic, erasing race from what is known and what is knowable. In the entire text of the Code, race is mentioned five times. Every time it is mentioned, it is obscured, couched within a litany of identity qualifiers (e.g., ethnicity, national origin, color, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, age, marital status, political belief, religion, immigration status, and mental or physical ability), which reads more as frantic disclaimer than balanced consideration. The negligible linguistic and textual space and time allocated to the treatment of race in the Code by the implicit narrator blinds the Code's audience to the magnitude of race as a problem in the social and material world where the "everyday professional conduct" that the Code purports to guide manifests in the interactions and exchanges among social workers, beneficiaries, and institutions. The result is a rendering of race that resonates with whites, and otherwise, delivers only unsatisfactory dissonance. The Code exhaustively delineates standards pertaining to practical considerations ranging from dual relationships, to confidentiality, to professional training, to collegiality, to political responsibility, but grows conspicuously reticent when it comes to elaborating on race. Race finds its place in the Code in perfunctory recognition as a problem deserving of attention, but attention clearly to be paid at another time and in another place. Closing with a hollow supplication like only whiteness can, the Code's implicit narrator implores social workers to "act to prevent and eliminate domination of, exploitation of, and discrimination against any person, group, or class on the basis of race," (p. 141), issuing a call to arms in the battle against race and racism, having only just declined to furnish any of the weapons necessary for the fight, so to speak. In the same way that participants referred over the course of this study to the power of language to create, maintain, enforce, and recreate all over again a social milieu that pervades U.S. society in the form of hierarchical racialization, this case analysis shows the power of racializing language to act through and as whiteness within the context of a doctrine foundational to the social work profession.

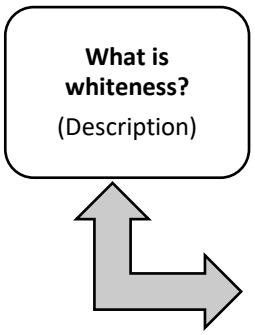
Summary: Cumulative Study Findings

By following the epistemic trajectory induced from participants' experiences with and resultant understandings of whiteness, this study has now mapped whiteness according to the three major areas that emerged from the interview data: the "what," "why," and "how" of

whiteness. Along these respective lines, participants collectively articulated a working conceptualization of whiteness entailing description of whiteness as indefinable, normative, and historical-material; interpretation of whiteness through pathology, resistance, and ignorance; and explanation of whiteness as a function of performative anti-racism, institutional entrenchment, and racializing language. These findings have been repeated throughout, layered one upon the other, in the order that they surfaced through participant dialogues. Woven into the context of participant quotations and study analysis, though, they can at times seem muted or obscured. For organization, clarity, and emphasis, these main, high-level findings are presented as a visual model, below, in figure 2. The bidirectional arrows connecting the epistemological clusters that cohered around the "what," the "why," and the "how" that participants discerned in and as whiteness are crucial to explicate: They do not represent only conceptual connectivity between the respective areas that they join, but free movement among all of these moments of experience (e.g., normativity, resistance, institutional entrenchment, etc.) across epistemic modes (i.e., what, why, and how), such that whiteness may constellate through the relation of the subject to any of these moments. Further, the arrangement of "what," "why," and "how" reflects the sequence in which these areas most commonly emerged during conversations with participants, but this order need not necessarily remain fixed in apprehending whiteness, and should not be taken to express a uniformly generalizable rule. As evidenced by the most commonly occurring form of participant testimony, there seems to be an intuitively logical flow, when seeking to understand an object of knowledge, to ask what one perceives, why one so perceives, and, in following up on these initial impressions, how such perception comes to be. Yet, there is nothing to preclude someone otherwise oriented from first asking why or how, leaving the question of what something might be to a subsequent stage of knowing. The model below is, of course, not exhaustive, but a heuristic, summarizing device; it is limited in that it represents only a cross-section of experience, bound as it is to this study's participants.

Figure 2

Participant-Informed Model of the "What," "Why," and "How" of Whiteness



These constitutive elements are not necessary but likely, and may be sufficient to any of the myriad social or material constellations through which whiteness might manifest under given circumstances, especially in those contexts connected to the field of social work. Below, Table 2 presents participant excerpts that are representative of just these kinds of contexts in order to recap some of the ways that whiteness showed up in relation to social work as the object of this study and, although not generalizable, to at least suggest pathways for extrapolation by which lessons learned here might be applied over other populations, places, and times. (For example, although norms vary across settings, the abstract concept of normativity could be applied to another context—perhaps in another country or alternative timeframe—as a starting point from which to begin to decipher contours of whiteness specific to a different locality.)

Table 2

Representative Participant Excerpts

Feature of Whiteness	Participant Description Exemplar
The "What" of Whiteness	
Indefinable	"I don't know if I can define it, but it's everywhere, if that makes sense."
Normative	"The ideals in terms of what is considered the standard in terms of how you navigate this world."
Historical Material	"A skin tone that has a certain economic attachment to it."
The "Why" of Whiteness	
Pathology	"It's a false sense of self. It's a very strong sense of self, which means you're not living in reality."
Resistance	"It just feels like a thing that continues to hold power, really. Because people refuse to interrogate it and understand it more deeply."
Ignorance	"It's kind of like that ability to just go through life without questioning—like, 'Why do some people experience life differently than me?'"
The "How" of Whiteness	
Performative Anti-Racism	"[Social work] does everything the same as everybody else, but then outwardly says that it's going to do something different."
Institutional Entrenchment	"Then our education has to change, right? And so do the politics and the policies. But they aren't."
Racializing Language	"'You Black kids get off my lawn!' … I didn't realize I might be Black."

The following chapter will look in detail at conclusions and implications based on these findings and will draw connections to social work theory and practice for the present moment and looking toward the future. At a high level, though, suffice it to say that the provisional conceptualization of whiteness rendered through this study paints a much more complicated picture of whiteness than any of today's popularized understandings would suggest—whiteness as simply skin color, race, ethnicity, ancestry, or nationality. The situation appears significantly more complex than any one-dimensional interpretation could possibly accommodate.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

Conventionally, a final chapter such as this should be used to present conclusions that I have drawn based upon the main study findings which follow from interview data; conclusions that, further, I ought to support by articulating direct connections to relevant existing research in order to both defend my arguments and, ostensibly, to verify the extent to which this project amounts to a novel and meaningful scholarly contribution. While I will not deviate entirely from that traditional scope, it is not my priority—neither in purpose nor method. As I stated at the outset of this study, an intention that I regard as critically important is that I bring closure to my work, here, by identifying implications that are clearly actionable for social workers and for those otherwise invested in racial justice. I also expressed, at the beginning, a desire to situate myself—and to construct this whole study, in fact—not as an authority, but as a facilitator amidst the ongoing collective attempt to understand and come to terms with whiteness and its consequences today. Each of these points warrants a word of further explanation, which will help to frame the form and content to follow in this chapter.

For the purpose of this study, I take the idea of an actionable implication to mean a summarizing point that logically leads directly to a suggested shift in thought or behavior, individual or collective, which the average social worker reading this text could readily understand and subsequently decide to adopt, disregard, or modify as appropriate according to context. Too often, racial justice interventions and initiatives are couched in platitudes in order to generate strong emotional appeal, or posited in the form of theoretical aspirations that have yet to reconcile themselves with the unpredictability and imperfection of material, day-to-day struggle. While understandable and perhaps sometimes helpful as an opening salvo in the long-haul campaign for progress, these approaches ultimately leave the steps toward actual change vaguely operationalized and therefore difficult to realize. Admittedly, even stretches of analysis throughout this very study have veered into densely theoretical exploration and explanation, which have at times felt far from actionable. These analytical moments do not represent ends in and of themselves. Rather, they will derive their value only now to the extent that they prove to have been helpful to the process of arriving, here, at a clearer course for racially just action than existed previously. It is one task of this chapter to realize that potential as part of the overarching project of drawing actionable implications from the present study.

As far as the method by which to do so, I intend, with this chapter, to bring actionable implications to the fore not by relying upon my own inferential analysis, but by centering the voices of participants. While academic norms would have me use this opportunity primarily to stake my intellectual claim—an exercise that makes my degree of expertise the main concern—this common practice reinforces hierarchy in the production of knowledge and would minimize or erase entirely the embodied wisdom that participants graciously and vulnerably made available through their study participation. I want to try to redistribute some power and authority, not only through the message that this text imparts after the fact for any given reader, but in the very act itself of creating this text. To that end, I seek to offer a different orientation to arriving at the end of this text; an alternative expectation of the point in the knowledge production and dissemination process that usually makes its way into academic writing as a sort of “I’ll take it from here” moment.

As it turns out, along with their accounts of the "what," "why," and "how" of whiteness in social work, participants also shared their recommendations concerning what social work and U.S. society in general should do in response to these features of whiteness. Sometimes I asked participants to follow up on their comments with further details of the course of action implied by their diagnosis of racial injustice today. Other times, questions of "what, "why," or "how" could not help but spill over into contemplating solutions to the social problem of whiteness, charged as participants' answers were with such intense insistence that the current status quo is intolerable if not uninhabitable for people who do not identify as white.

Across vastly different conversations, participants' shared sentiment became clear that they felt they, as those outside of whiteness, possessed qualitatively unique and singularly valuable insight into the contemporary state of whiteness and, for that reason, stood to offer indispensable guidance in shaping solutions to the racial injustice inflicted by whiteness. To be clear, they did not mean for this to be misinterpreted as a claim that they wanted to or should have to be responsible for the labor and sacrifice such a solution would entail, but that their testimony should carry a certain authority. Because I agree with participants on this point, and because this point is more often than not dismissed as political in the name of what might be called science, I choose to let participants' words themselves, rather than my take on participants' words, lead this study to its close by bringing theory and reflection (i.e., the foregoing chapters of description, interpretation, and explanation, along with corresponding analyses) to actionable implications.

This decision does not represent a choice to incorporate political commitment as method, but an assertion that method is always inherently political, despite erroneous claims to the contrary that support the myth of scientific objectivity (which, itself, is rooted in histories of whiteness and colonialism, coincidentally) (Bauman & Briggs, 2003; Trouillot, 1995; Young, 1990). It would be disingenuous, if not outright racially oppressive, therefore, for me to pretend at this point that my own whiteness does not matter; even worse, for me to pretend that it is not enormously consequential given my exclusive focus on non-white participants. It just is undeniably different for me to be in the position of researcher and author at this juncture than it would be for someone who does not identify as white. In the historical context where I find myself, there is a high level of risk that I, through this work, could recreate patterns of white supremacy and colonialism through, as a white researcher, objectifying and commodifying participants who do not identify as white, extracting their knowledge, telling their stories with my own words, and doing so for my own intellectual achievement and professional advancement. Precisely because methodological procedure always involves navigating political positionality, it is imperative that I not shirk the responsibility to account for my own whiteness in this process of research and knowledge production; for if I did, it would be hard to regard this text as anything other than hypocritical. I cannot shed or overcome the constraints of academic norms and expectations entirely. I can, however, at least try to arrange this concluding chapter with greater sensitivity to the ways that racial power relations are challenged or reified depending on the construction and delivery of the final word. Here, I would like to relinquish some control over that final word and do what I can to let participants speak for themselves. I would like to assume that those who participated in this study really are the experts. I would like to resist the urge to insert my learned understanding in place of their firsthand knowledge.

With that in mind, this chapter will bring the present study to a close by using the information gathered to address the following questions—not so much to establish answers (or claim that definitive resolution is even possible), but to take a position that hopefully leverages greater insight than existed at the start, and from which future inquiry may proceed productively in the pursuit of increasing both understanding and racial justice: How do findings speak to the research questions posed at the outset of this study? How do findings improve awareness of the present historical moment as it exists for both social work and U.S. society? Having situated findings in relation to the present historical moment, what are the implications for social work? Lastly, knowing these implications, where does social work go from here? After exploring these questions related to study findings, I will end by considering the study itself—addressing limitations, recognizing points of innovation, offering methodological reflections, and making recommendations for future research.

Revisiting the Research Questions

At its intellectual conception, this study was guided by one overarching research question: How, from the perspectives of social workers who do not identify as white, does whiteness manifest in social work? Along this line of investigation, the conceptual framing of the study and the interview process therein engaged sub-questions probing three related points of inquiry—namely, the issues of how whiteness manifests in social work curricula, how whiteness manifests in institutions of social work education, and how whiteness manifests in social work praxis. This organization arose organically from the existing literature and research on whiteness and through the relation of this material to scholarship broadly touching upon social work history, curricula, education, generalist praxis, and social work's treatment of race. Of course, to be more accurate, this structure actually formed out of my subjective reading of these sources. Regardless, though, data gathered from participant interviews grew inductively to be arranged according to a different schema than that originally charted; one informed by a logic acquired through lived encounters with whiteness rather than the study of whiteness. Participants did not make sense of their experiences with whiteness in terms of social work curricula, education, and praxis, but through a more experiential and less technical epistemology centered upon the "what," the "why," and the "how" of whiteness. That being said, participants covered themes which, in unanticipated, creative, and innovative ways, both spoke to this study's originally stated research questions and rendered a picture of whiteness more powerfully informative and generative than any preconceived query could have elicited. Below, I revisit each of this study's sub-questions that anchored the larger question of how whiteness manifests in social work, identifying points of overlap and opportunities for synthesis with participant interview data; not to subsume the latter under the former, but, if anything, to reorient the epistemic angle of this study's inquiry to more closely align with the working model of whiteness collectively formulated by participants.

Social Work Curricula

Initially, this study asked social workers who do not identify as white how, from their perspectives, whiteness manifests in social work curricula. Refracted through their collective lens of the "what," the "why," and the "how" of whiteness, participants mapped a depiction of whiteness in social work curricula. As mentioned in an earlier chapter, participants perceived

such enmeshment between whiteness and the mainstream, core social work curriculum (the "what" of whiteness vis-à-vis social work curricula), that the two seemed almost coextensive to them. The better question, in their minds, would have asked in what parts of social work curricula whiteness does *not* manifest. Participants also touched on social work curricula as exhibiting whiteness through ignorance (the "why" of whiteness in social work curricula) in so far as, in their experience, curricula systematically and systemically exclude critical engagement with issues including but not limited to the roots of the social work profession in white supremacist ideologies, practices, and institutions; robust class-based analyses and material critiques of capitalist hegemony; and ways of knowing derived from histories and communities external to whiteness, particularly Black, indigenous, and native to the Global South. Additionally, participants testified to the mechanics of whiteness operating through social work curricula (the curricular "how" of whiteness in social work) when they explained the deleterious effects—for students, faculty, practitioners, and beneficiaries—of the fact that the core social work curriculum persists as a site of notable institutional entrenchment where progressive and radical content and methodologies are incorporated only incrementally over the course of protracted and taxing struggle.

Institutions of Social Work Education

This study also asked social workers who do not identify as white for their perspectives on how whiteness manifests in institutions of social work education. As one dimension of their collectively formed schema of the "what," the "why," and the "how" of whiteness, participants did touch upon institutional whiteness in social work. They framed institutional whiteness as belonging mainly to the "what" and the "how" of whiteness, with institutional whiteness being mediated by the "why" of whiteness to the extent that this "why" catalyzes the forms of individual and collective consciousness, which, themselves, become sedimented within the social fabric of institutional life. Put another way, the "why," based on participants' interviews, matters secondarily to institutional whiteness because it motivates people, and it is people who motivate institutions. The "what" and the "how" of whiteness bear more concretely, though, upon the whiteness that participants described as manifesting through institutions of social work education. As for the former, participants identified institutions—including but not limited institutions of social work education—as representing one of the categories of sites where, over time, the social construction of whiteness becomes reified as a historical-material force (a "what") through its effect upon and transmission as tangibly consequential forms like cultural norms, regulatory policies, or even laws; and as far as the latter, the obvious connection of the "how" of whiteness to the question of the manifestation of whiteness in institutions of social work education emerged in participants' explanations of institutional entrenchment where they located whiteness in and as the institutional tendency to resist change in such a way as to adhere to a status quo that has historically benefited and continues to secure the social and material hegemony of whiteness.

Social Work Praxis

The third sub-question of this study inquired as to the perspectives of social workers who do not identify as white concerning how whiteness manifests in social work praxis. Here, again, participants gave their answers in terms of the "what," the "why" and the "how" of whiteness,

but in so doing, both shed light on the question of whiteness in social work praxis and repositioned the issue in a way that resonated more with lived experience than detached, intellectual query. First, participants' accounts traced patterns of thought and behavior in social work praxis that amount to a sort of white social work praxis (a "what" of whiteness in social work praxis)—interventions that either favor white beneficiaries or, in effect, tacitly coerce non-white beneficiaries into participating in systems or social arrangements that buttress the prevailing societal order imposed by whiteness. Next, participants deciphered an impetus underlying much of whiteness in social work praxis (in other words, a "why" behind whiteness in social work praxis) in their observations of externalized symptoms attributable to psychological resistance—that is, forms of both social work theory and practice (i.e., praxis, taken together), which enable and perpetuate resistance to directly confronting white supremacy by opting, instead, for modalities like multiculturalism, cultural competency, or anti-racism, which only indirectly problematize the role of whiteness in racial injustice. Finally, participants. detected the whiteness of social work praxis in performative anti-racism and racializing language (in this case, the "how" of whiteness in social work praxis)—which is to say, for participants, social work praxis registered as whiteness when it took a stance against racism only symbolically and when it deployed language that recognized subjects according racial terms compatible with the reigning logic of hierarchical social order that positions whiteness at the pinnacle of unearned social and material privilege.

The Present Historical Moment

The foregoing summary of findings—which returns to this study's framing questions but reviews the responses aggregated in terms of the somewhat different schema induced from participants interviews—is helpful to the conclusion process in part because of the synthesis that it yields for the sake of understanding, but more so as a touchstone for reflection that can facilitate increased awareness of the present historical moment. To reiterate: I intend, here, to follow participants' lead in presenting exactly what it is that these findings say about the present historical moment, and specifically what they say about the state of social work today; my plan is not, conversely, to advance my own interpretation of what anyone ought to take away from all that participants shared.

As a word of additional context, and because the topic at hand is the recent history, it is important to note that the 2020 murder of George Floyd pervaded these interviews as a ubiquitously understood historical point of reference and cultural symbol, sometimes implicitly and sometimes as the explicit topic of conversation. Casey (40, Black, female, upper-middle-class, doctoral student) drew the connection directly from George Floyd's murder to this study:

> And I think that … especially since George Floyd's murder and the murder of many other people of color that we've seen recently … I think that the civil unrest has caused for there to be, on a lot of different levels, and even among people who don't necessarily agree with each other, an awareness of what I classify as toxic whiteness and how it has affected our society.

Indeed, the present study likely would not even have come together in the way that it did had the murder of George Floyd not happened when it did (i.e., during the Trump presidency), where it

did (i.e., in the United States), and how it did (i.e., violently and publicly). As this participant makes clear, the connections between Floyd's murder and any contemporaneous issue of race—whiteness, especially—are ubiquitous and undeniable, and therefore an indisputable influence on this study, whatever mediated form that might take.

All that considered, participants articulated what they believe their interviews say about the present historical moment and the attendant salience of racial injustice in the United States and in social work. As a result of the racial toxicity inherent in the "what," the "why," and the "how" of whiteness that participants portrayed—and sometimes in spite of it—participants pointed to four complex and often conflicting racial dynamics that, to them, manifest most prevalently today: anger (77%, *n*=23), pride (57%, *n*=17), fatigue (67%, *n*=20), and polarization (60%, *n*=30).

Seventy-seven percent of participants (*n*=23) expressed anger at the state of whiteness today through reference to many different examples. A unifying theme that ran throughout, though, was a sense of anger specifically over the fact that racial injustice has even had to progress to this point in the United States in order to draw widespread attention. Tasha (30, Middle Eastern, female, upper-middle-class, doctoral student) spoke to this in a way that captured a sense of anger that was specific to social work but also inseparable from the profession's relation to the societal context in which it operates:

> And then I get angry. Why didn't anyone talk about whiteness? Why didn't we talk about this when I was an MSW? Why are we just talking about it now? Was it because it made people feel uncomfortable? Was it because our faculty weren't trained to be critical of our curriculum? It just makes me angry.

Despite that anger, though, and often directly in the face of the injustice causing it, 57% of participants (*n*=17) simultaneously exuded racial pride through explicit celebration of their identities. After depicting the recent evolution of whiteness as more growing more bold, more cunning, and more dangerous today to those who do not identify as white, participants did not hesitate to assert with equal force how proudly and joyfully they experienced their racial identity as, of course, other than white, whatever that happened to be. "I love it," Stacy (38, Black, female, middle-class, faculty) shared. "I don't want to be anything else. I feel so lucky … It means a lot to me. It makes me happy. I feel really lucky." Calvin (45, Black, male, middle-class, faculty) this feeling of self-love in a more developmental context of self-discovery:

> The older I get, the more I love Blackness and being a Black man and what it means to be a Black man. I was about to say the older I get the more I appreciate being Black, but I've always appreciated being Black. I think I just, you know … you learn more about history, you learn more about culture, roots, and those kinds of things; and the more I've learned, the more fascinated I've become and certainly appreciative of the Black experience.

Lonnie (29, Black, male, lower-middle-class, doctoral student) linked pride directly to the very challenges that, at the same time, functioned as a source of the anger only just discussed. The two emotions, for him and for others, were opposite sides of the same emotional coin, so to speak:

> It's a matter of empowerment to me. When I reflect on being Black, I consider the fact that, you know, my line has survived circumstances that are bent on their erasure. And I take pride in that fact. You know, my line has survived as long as it has through really debilitating circumstances, and so it's empowering.

Pride, for these participants, was bound up with hardship, and for that reason a definitive feature of the present historical moment, characterized as it is by racial reckoning.

The third theme, apparent in 67% of participants' (*n*=20) discussions regarding implications of their rendering of whiteness today on the present historical moment is a widely shared sense of fatigue—fatigue over countless effects of whiteness, some of which include egregious, isolated instances of racism, and others more surreptitious, systemic, relentless injustices that arise as a product of simply navigating life day to day in U.S. society right now. Stacy's (38, Black, female, middle-class, faculty) account of this particular implication of whiteness today stands out as poignant. Her experience also illustrates the manifestation of this whiteness fatigue in social work education.

> It ages me; absolutely ages me. It's been horrible. It fucking hurts; absolutely hurts. I have to pick between those two: shrinking myself and not having nightmares. I just have gone for the nightmares. So, yeah, it's just really exhausting. It makes showing up really tough. Standing up in front of the room and then not being supported by my colleagues. There's no recourse necessarily … This is a space, for all its wokeness, of opposition to folks who are not white. The violence that I experience as a Black woman—particularly one who's queer and fat and disabled and abolitionist—is a hostility that's very familiar to me, and it's one that's derived from whiteness and white supremacy … I'm guilty until proven innocent. That's white shit. I'm exhausted. I hate teaching in this space like that.

Others, too, identified this sort of existential fatigue as a difficult problem to mitigate because the very sources that it stems from are those that demand sustained energy to combat. Arturo (48, Latinx, male, working-class, doctoral student) described the situation in which he felt somewhat trapped:

> I guess I could speak up more. I could also, you know, support the folks that are speaking up in another way, you know what I mean? It just depends, but it's draining. It's exhausting. It's difficult and easy to lose focus.

And Calvin (45, Black, male, middle-class, faculty) shared his story about the intersection of this cycle of exhaustion with institutional bureaucracy and politics, providing a more specific example of whiteness fatigue as an implication of contemporary whiteness:

> I hired the first openly transgender person at [my university]. It took nine months to get a contract. I literally had to pose these questions to the administration: 'Is this because I'm Black? Is this what it is? What is it? I need you to tell me.' I can't keep … you know … that's draining. It's exhausting. It's unproductive and it makes me unproductive … counterproductive. It just was a horrible experience.

Lastly, 60% of participants (*n*=18) argued that their perceptions of whiteness suggest the present historical moment to be defined by whiteness itself growing polarized. Participants echoed the assessment offered in the introduction to this study that constituencies within whiteness are becoming socio-politically more conservative and more progressive, respectively, with moderate whiteness less frequently appearing as a viable racial identity when race is considered explicitly. That is, it has become more difficult in the current U.S. climate to embody a neutral stance toward whiteness, and even those identify as white cannot escape that difficulty. As Calvin (45, Black, male, middle-class, faculty), again, put it:

> There's this absolute sort of pushback against whiteness … like, this liberal anti-white movement. And then there's this … how [whiteness] is showing up is sort of just more bold. I never, in all of my life, would have imagined what happened on January 6 … This is almost a sort of like, protect white culture at all costs even if it means tearing the damn democracy down.

Different people have different reasons for choosing to identify with whiteness and as white. George Lipsitz (1998) famously characterized this phenomenon as a "possessive investment in whiteness." But this is not generalizable to everyone who identifies as white. Robin (57, Latinx, non-binary, middle-class, faculty) assessed the current situation accordingly:

> I think that people who are attached to the idea of whiteness are becoming even more attached to the idea of whiteness, and those who are not attached to the idea of whiteness, I mean, they are doing all kinds of things.

By this logic, which reflects participants' largely shared assessment that the present historical moment indicates polarization within whiteness, the distance between the extremes is increasing, destabilizing the continuity that binds the spectrum of possibilities according to which one might identify as white. If, consequently, a rupture of white racial identity is imminent—that is, if it has not already happened—then the present historical moment could be a critical point of inflection for the evolution of race and for racialized societies.

Social Work at a Crossroads

Participants' conceptualizations of the "what," the "why," and the "how" of whiteness led them, consequently, to portray the present historical moment as identifiable by anger, among those who do not identify as white, toward whiteness and over racial injustice; non-white racial pride in the face of adversity; fatigue, in non-white persons and communities, from having to endure whiteness and the harm it inflicts; and increasingly apparent polarization within whiteness as a racial category and embodied form of identity. These participants drew upon both personal and professional experiences, the two often being difficult to separate; but, so far as the latter, they suggested that social work, in comparison to other fields and in relation to society more generally, faces a distinct pressure to reconcile its philosophy and practice with the demands of the present racial reckoning in the United States given its supposed founding commitment to social justice.

The conclusion that follows from all that participants discussed throughout their interviews over the course of this study, so 90% (*n*=27) argued, is that social work finds itself at a crossroads in its existence as a profession. Having catalogued the "what," the "why," and the "how" of whiteness within and outside of social work as so thoroughly pernicious, participants employed a variety of perspectives to substantiate claims that the trajectory that the profession has historically followed, and to which it remains committed in many ways, is untenable—at least to those who do not identify as white, both for social workers and those with whom they engage. The crossroads of this moment, therefore, necessitates a choice between either radical reform, on the one hand, or the status quo of conservative incrementalism, on the other. Stacy (38, Black, female, middle-class, faculty) addressed this dilemma head-on, getting right to the heart of the matter by going so far as to implicate professional social work's flagship initiative, the Grand Challenges (see Barth, Messing, Williams, & Shanks, 2022):

> Let's just start over again. We're not going to 'Grand Challenge' our way out of it. I think, like, a serious reimagination and reconfiguration of how to self-study is going to require lessons from people outside of this space, and accountability to people outside of the space … We're not going to 'Grand Challenge' our way out of it, right? I think those are noble, nice things. But social workers, either as researchers or practitioners, can't be the only ones to guide us out of whiteness. And I don't even know if it's possible. I think the overlaps are inextricable.

Lorene (32, Latinx, female, upper-middle-class, doctoral student) took a similar view, also testifying to a sense of irreparability, but citing more specific problems that she perceived to afflict the social work profession in such a way as to demand a complete overhaul:

> Just bring it all down and start from the beginning … I don't even think it's about acknowledging the history of the social work profession. Our student interns need to be paid … Licensure is just so expensive. Higher education is so expensive. We're like, literally gatekeeping the profession; yet, we're constantly saying there's not enough people. Social work is supposed to meet the needs of the community; yet, we're not funding them or giving them access.

Pragmatically speaking—but notwithstanding the validity of these participants' claims, and despite my agreement with them in principle—social work almost certainly will not and realistically could not "start over again" or "start from the beginning." The point of urgency regarding transformative rather than reformative change, though, is well taken in light of the wholly damaging way in which participants conceived of whiteness during their interviews.

Taking a more measured approach than the preceding two participants, most others built the case that social work has arrived at a crossroads by pointing to indicators that evidence social work's pressing deficiencies resulting from adverse effects of whiteness in the profession; deficiencies which, to these participants, cannot remain if social work is to retain any viability or legitimacy whatsoever. Many participants focused on disparities in social work educational outcomes between students who identify as white and those who do not:

> The white students tend to be the top achievers with all of the academic institutions they've been through. They tend to have better relationships with the faculty. They tend to be afforded opportunities that other students are not. And, like, what metric is that guided by?

Casey (40, Black, female, upper-middle-class, doctoral student) contextualized this educational inequity within the context of social work's ostensibly guiding principles:

> I think the experience of what it's like to be Black student in social work—or in higher education, period—shows that there is a ridiculous amount of disparity and it's extremely inequitable. Especially for the field that says it's founded on social justice. It just can't stay like this and take itself seriously.

Geraldine (39, mixed-race, female, middle-class, doctoral student) went on to discuss the ways in which the burden stemming from this imbalance falls directly upon non-white students in the form of disproportionally increased workload if they seek any kind of redress:

> As a mixed-race Black woman, it has historically been up to me to supplement my own study … not having a lot of faculty who take my approaches, it feels a little bit more self-driven in that way. And so it's kind of like, knowing that there are ways I need to study and seeking out mentors but not really having them in the same ways that my white peers do. So I'm always having to advocate for that. The whole thing is just not really sustainable in the long term.

Again, these participants highlighted such deficits to give context to the present crossroads; to emphasize that this state of things is uninhabitable for them as students if they are to succeed and as human beings if they are to be valued and respected.

In the end, some participants acknowledged, it may just be the passage of time, the gradual but inevitable, perpetual shift from one generation of social workers to the next, which ushers in the most reliable opportunity for change on the kind of scale necessary for the profession to come close to any serious kind of collective redefinition. After all, the effects of bygone history persist, for better and for worse, through the persons of which they are part and parcel; their social and material influence extend into the present through living beings with an efficacy that artifacts and institutions, however consequential, cannot replicate. Casey (40, Black, female, upper-middle-class, doctoral student) located this phenomenon, for social work and for U.S. society, in a generational shift that is growing salient at this point in time:

> The fact that the baby boomer generation was alive during legalized segregation shows. They were alive when, you know, it was legalized, it was codified. I think that millennials and younger … I just see whiteness changing. Millennials and younger have not been siloed as much as boomers have been racially from each other.

And Harry (37, Black, male, middle-class, faculty) traced the effects of this shift to the setting of social work education, noting that, although this process cannot ultimately be stopped, it rarely proceeds uncontested:

> We hired a few different faculty who taught from some different perspectives and who did some revising of the curriculum themselves. You know, we had folks who were not just younger from, like, a chronological age perspective, but also younger in how they viewed the field of social work … There were people who were pushing back on that, but I think that's how things have changed.

If, as participants have described, whiteness in social work has brought the profession to a crossroads, it is not to suggest that this moment represents an endpoint, or even a lasting stage in collective development. Rather, a crossroads implies the need, first, for choice, and subsequently, for action. The choice that this study's participants have made is evident in their conceptualizations of whiteness and its effects upon social work and society today—they choose to see change as imperative in the wake of the racial injustice that whiteness continues to inflict. In their interviews, participants gave input as to how this change ought to take shape.

The Way Forward

Obviously, to simply await gradual change as a product of generational transition would not make for a substantive plan by which to combat racial injustice. Participants, in fact, gave quite direct guidance regarding their vision of the actionable implications that follow from their conceptualizations of the "what," the "why," and the "how" of whiteness in social work and in society. As planned earlier, I present these actionable implications, here, using participants' own words and ideas, not my own interpretations or theories from existing bodies of research and literature. I do so in order to position non-white social workers as authorities on the state of whiteness in social work and the way forward, as well as to relinquish any unearned expertise that I might otherwise be assumed to possess as a white researcher. To that end, in response to the ways that whiteness manifests today, participants identified three main areas of actionable implications for social work: curricular reform, practical emphasis, and politicization. These are explicated below and listed along in Table 3 along with initiatives from which they are comprised.

Curricular Reform

Fifty-seven percent of participants (*n*=17) asserted a need for curricular reform in response to whiteness in social work and society. One recommendation for such reform promoted the importance of prioritizing critical understanding of the political economy in which U.S. social work operates as a central tenet of the core curriculum. Speaking to this point, Arturo (48, Latinx, male, working-class, doctoral student) articulated the rationale for this proposed priority in connection to the pressing social problem of whiteness:

> I have ideas … We've got to start also including capitalism and, you know, neoliberalism, because that's all integrated with whiteness, right? Especially if it's used to dominate and, you know, oppress certain groups, exploit them, then we need to start understanding those relationships. We need to understand the relationships among capitalism, neoliberalism, etc. … and what relation does that have with social work?

This reform would incorporate greater curricular focus on cultivating rigorous critique of the economic and related political processes whose cumulative effects have given rise to the current historical-material form in which U.S. society exists with all its attendant social problems.

Participants also counseled that social work education could benefit from pedagogical decentralization as a means by which to mitigate the effects of whiteness. Pedagogical decentralization refers to the idea and practice of shifting the educational process away from a centralized, hierarchical order of power distribution, toward a more democratic and participatory structure of both thought and action. Krista (31, Asian, female, upper-middle-class, doctoral student) described pedagogical decentralization in her classroom:

> I invite guest speakers into the classroom because I think having more than one voice, not just my voice, is important. And so it is my intention and my priority to invite community organizers, people from community organizations, folks who are engaging in reproductive justice work … My students are doing such great work, so even asking them if they ever want to speak about their work.

Participants noted, as study findings mentioned in a preceding chapter, that concentrated power and social stratification, which typically inhere in education through the traditional teacher-student relationship, reinforce the logic through which whiteness secures domination. Pedagogical decentralization, as a concrete change to implement in the physical or virtual classroom, subverts this reification. Participants saw this shift, along with more critical study of political economy, as a program of reform to be implemented across all levels of social work education—undergraduate, master's, and doctoral—and not something to be reserved only for small seminars of doctoral students as newer, less established, more radical content and methods can often be in schools of social work.

And, as a final component of curricular reform, participants conceived of the need for change as extending beyond degree completion for practicing social workers. As Geraldine (39, mixed-race, female, middle-class, doctoral student) made clear, it is actually social workers in the field who are often in greatest need of exposure to more recent educational content and whose actions deliver the most impact:

> I think that there really does have to be like an internal kind of restructuring of some of the curriculum, but also, like, for all of the social workers who are already practicing and who haven't had exposure to any of that social justice curriculum. Being required to do some of the CEUs … I know some states require that, but that isn't, like, a universal thing. And knowing the harm that can be done by clinicians, case managers, administrators, policy people … like, think about how important that is.

Gains from curricular reform would, indeed, expire quickly without equal attention to continuing education requirements for social workers. All of the above taken together, participants envisioned a reformed future for social work education that assigns greater value to material critique, decentralizes its pedagogy, and reconceptualizes continuing education requirements as essential rather than supplemental to the theoretical and practical constitution of the social work profession.

Practical Emphasis

Fifty-three percent of participants (*n*=16) contended that social work must place greater emphasis on practical thinking and intervention in response to whiteness in social work and society. Along this line of thought, they did not express any need or desire to eschew or relegate theory in favor of practice, but to focus, in each area, on that which is practicable, meaning readily translatable to action—put differently, participants adopted an orientation toward actionable implication in the very same way foregrounded here, in this concluding chapter. They did not assume this to be clear or easy, though. As Maxine (25, mixed-race, female, upper-middle-class, master's student) acknowledged, "I think that it's a really long and difficult and iterative process to eliminate indicators of white supremacy culture, especially in something grounded like practice." If anything, the heightened expectation of movement from abstract consideration to action adds complication, especially when that capacity may somewhat exceed the collective readiness demonstrated by social work—white social workers, mainly—for executing espoused intentions, as Ashley (43, Asian, female, upper-middle-class, faculty) lamented:

> Whiteness just feels like a problem that is really not up to people of color to solve … I really wish there were, like, a handbook for white social workers as to, like, what to do … It seems like they just need to know more concretely what to do and what are the signs because we need to meet people where they are—and where they are is very concrete still in their understanding.

Nonetheless, participants urged a push toward the practical—or, what they considered practicable—as an actionable strategy by which to meet the challenge of whiteness both within and outside of the social work profession.

As components of the larger agenda of emphasizing practical goals in order for social work to combat whiteness, participants pointed toward two areas of opportunity that they considered generative targets for intervention. The first, they described as white divestment, or deliberate withdrawal from commitments to forms of thought and action known to reinforce whiteness either overtly or implicitly. Naomi (28, Middle Eastern, female, middle-class, doctoral student) went to great pains to differentiate between what she considers meaningful divestment from the logic of whiteness and the perhaps more common practice of claiming to distance oneself from whiteness in a superficial, often counterproductive way:

> I think the next step should be, like—and I mean this in a practical sense—divesting from the logic of whiteness. I don't mean this in a lazy way. Like, sometimes people will say, you know, 'A sense of urgency is white supremacy culture,' but I think that those kinds of statements are actually not that helpful. They are too essentializing. I think that a sense of urgency can be very much a practical tool and very much anti-white supremacy. For example, social workers should very much have a sense of urgency about climate change. And I think you would find that people of color, people in the global south who are going to be most impacted by climate change, have a sense of urgency about it. I'm saying the next step should be divesting from whiteness by moving away from things that we know

> are products of whiteness in social work—hierarchy, careerism, gatekeeping, financialization, competitiveness … you know, all that.

Per the instruction of this participant and others, this practice of white disinvestment need only start with vigilant willingness to seek out vestiges of white logic in theory and practice and commit to exploring reparative alternatives; it does not need to begin from a place of knowing in advance what that alternative will be or even what possible alternatives exist. The goal, again, is to keep things practical.

The second area of opportunity that participants viewed as a productive point of intervention is licensing reform. They talked about making licensure processes for those with social work graduate degrees more streamlined and affordable; and a few participants even considered the possibility of expanding licensure eligibility beyond only those with graduate degrees or those with training specific to professional social work. Summarizing the general thinking and sentiment behind this proposed type of reform, Antoinette (34, Black, female, lower-middle-class, doctoral student) leveled the following broad criticism at the field of social work:

> It's going to take more than just a little change to licensing. It's going to take more if we actually mean that we want to get more social workers into the field. There need to be some pretty substantial and substantive changes to professionalization … I mean, who we consider a professional … who we consider one of us. The way licensure is now, it prevents the supply of social workers from meeting the demand for social work.

Licensing reform certainly exemplifies a foothold for practicable action in service of fighting the social problems that manifest through whiteness in social work. Making licensure more inclusive for those who possess a genuine commitment to social justice but not the disposable time or money that schooling, supervised training, and test-taking demand can only serve to diversify social work's constituency in a way that will erode the historical, class-inflected stranglehold of institutionalized whiteness over the composition and direction of the profession. As a form of practical action, this means would, in and of itself, contest the logic of whiteness; and insofar as the expected end may be realized, so participants hope, additional victories would be possible against the harms of racial injustice wrought by and in the name of whiteness.

Politicization

Fifty-three percent of participants (n=16) insisted that social work has to politicize itself in response to whiteness in social work and society—that is, shed investment in the notion that social work possibly can be, or ever was, apolitical, and redefine itself in its foundational institutions as a profession that unabashedly shares interest in and participates fully in political processes. As a clearly operationalized, actionable first step, participants recommended that the normalization of politicization become a clarion call to be broadcast as standard messaging throughout social work institutions, organizations, and groups. The message, to these participants, must be simply that social work is political, and that that is a good thing. Naomi (28, Middle Eastern, female, middle-class, doctoral student) put succinctly how this proposed political mandate connects directly to and works against whiteness:

> There's a serious concern about, like, coming off as too political in professional social work and in academia, which is, I think, a clear manifestation of the cowardice of whiteness. And it's also a sort of, like, privilege thing—it's the ability to just, like, distance yourself from the social problems that you're studying because you don't experience them in the same way.

Normalizing politicization in social work serves a dual purpose, then: as a practice in and of itself, it exposes the illusion of apolitical neutrality as a figment of the white imagination; and as a means to an end, it allows social workers to vie for their best interest in the political arena.

To this latter point, participants conveyed their assessment that social work needs to build up an apparatus for engagement with specific political issues. For them, this means going beyond the kinds of position statements (see National Association of Social Workers, 2022) to which social work has historically restricted itself going back as far as the early twentieth-century settlement house movement (Bell, 2014). Lonnie (29, Black, male, lower-middle-class, doctoral student) talked through the kind of change he envisions in this area:

> So, there's a long standing cliche, I think in social work practice and social work, research, that social work can't be political. And it's always been funny to me, because social work, the discipline, some of the faculty that ascribe more to the biomedical model of research … they think that compliance isn't already political. I think we're going to have to stop pretending and get political—I mean, we will have to get overtly political. We're going to have to get away from this platitude that being non-political means we're being objective and we're being 'sciency' ... that because you aren't defining yourself as a Republican or Democratic institution you're not political. I think we're going to have to join arms with the community partners that we prey on so much in our research agendas; we're going to have to fight with them for the political change they need.

For this participant and others, issue engagement as an integral part of politicizing social work means, to put it in clearly defined terms, not just taking a stance, but taking action—directly contributing oneself and one's resources to political issue work.

Lastly, many participants pointed to the value of lobbying as a tool for social work to utilize in politicizing itself as a means of adequately responding to the harms of whiteness today. Some might consider lobbying to be a specific form of the kind of political issue engagement just described, but participants mentioned it often enough (30%, n=9) as its own unique form of intervention that it deserves consideration on its own as an actionable implication that might guide future developments in social work reform. Geraldine (39, mixed-race, female, middle-class, doctoral student) described lobbying as important not only for political issue-based impact, but as necessary for preserving the kind of action-focused orientation that is integral to the social justice commitment by which social work defines itself:

> I think there needs to be a reevaluation of how we do things like lobbying in order to make sure that social work identity becomes, or gets back to, something that's really practiced. It's not even a priority in education and you can definitely get away with not

> doing some of that kind of work in the field. And lobbying can be something that brings together broad coalitions of social workers—students, faculty, clinicians, organizers administrators … we have the numbers to make a political difference if we want to.

For this participant and for others, lobbying represents a form of social work intervention that resonates powerfully because it is occupies the unique stratum of sociopolitical activity where, in theory at least, individual effort at the micro level—or the aggregate of many individual efforts, rather—unifies with and exerts force upon the structural mechanisms (i.e., political processes) by which macro-level change happens.

Table 3

Actionable Implications for Social Work

Implication	Description	Action Areas
Curricular Reform		
Material Critique	Increase focus on economic and political conditions underlying historical and contemporary social problems.	Undergraduate and graduate educational content
Pedagogical Decentralization	Redistribute power and authority in social work education to be more inclusive of student and outsider knowledge.	Undergraduate and graduate educational policy; faculty and instructor practice
Continuing Education Review	Ensure that policies and infrastructure are in place to require practicing social workers to receive continuing education on contemporary social justice issues.	Licensing and accreditation regulations; post-graduate educational content
Practical Emphasis		
Action Orientation	Identify modes of theory and practice that translate readily to actionable steps toward intervention in social problems.	General social work theory and practice
White Divestment	Withdraw commitments to policies and practices known to support white social and material domination.	General social work practice and theory; educational content and policy; licensing and accreditation regulations
Licensing Reform	Reform licensing criteria to remove or reduce undue burdens of time and money necessary for licensure.	Licensing and accreditation regulations
Politicization		
Political Normalization	Incorporate acknowledgement that social work is political and emphasize commitment to remain so in messaging and principles.	General social work practice and theory; educational content and policy
Issue Engagement	Allocate time and resources toward working directly to address political issues relevant to social justice and social work.	General social work practice and theory; educational content and policy
Lobbying Development	Commit social work persons, organizations, and institutions to building political lobbying apparatuses and to lobbying work.	General social work practice and theory; educational content and policy; community organizing and coalition building

Final Summary

It has by now been emphasized and re-emphasized, maybe more than necessary, that participants conceptualized whiteness in social work and in society according to the "what," the "why," and the "how" of whiteness. The over-emphasis is intentional, and hopefully beneficial in the end, because the study of whiteness is too often ambiguous and ambivalent for all kinds of epistemological, historical, and sociopolitical reasons, which have been discussed throughout. When whiteness takes focus as the direct object of inquiry itself, operationalization tends to be unclear. So, having now presented both study findings and, in this chapter, implications of these findings according to participants, it is prudent to draw the connections through, one last time, all the way to the end.

Participants described the "what" of whiteness as indefinable, normative, and bound up with material history; they interpreted the "why" of whiteness as motivated by pathology, resistance, and ignorance; and they explained the "how" of whiteness as operating through performative anti-racism, institutional entrenchment, and racializing language. As in the case of any study, having reached this understanding of whiteness as a product of participant-generated interview data, the question arose: So what? Subsequently, participants collectively made the case for why these study findings matter. They first asserted that study findings provide insight into the present historical moment by illuminating themes of anger at injustice, racial pride among non-whites, fatigue over whiteness, and polarization within whiteness itself. Second, participants contended that study findings suggest social work to be at a crossroads today in its historical evolution as a profession, which will demand a choice about how to respond to whiteness and racial injustice, followed by action. Lastly, based upon study findings, participants identified the following actionable implications for social work: a need for curricular reform through increased emphasis on historical-material critique, pedagogical decentralization, and continuing education review; prioritization of practical intervention through a reorientation in theory and practice to what is actually practicable, white divestment, and licensing reform; and politicization of social work through normalizing political activity within the profession, political issue engagement, and lobbying development. Taken together, these points represent the ways in which this study's inquiry, implementation, findings, and implications cohere as a step toward increasing understanding and the capacity to act in an informed way, among social workers and those interested in racial justice, in response to the ways that whiteness manifests today.

Where Do I Go From Here?

Most studies conclude with a brief discussion of limitations and directions for future research. The major epistemological, methodological, and technical constraints impacting this study were identified and deliberated in the methods chapter; they are primarily academic and intellectual in nature. As for future research directions that the results of this study might suggest, the prospects are far more complicated; they are unavoidably more personal and political (and, as it turns out, happen to lead back to the matter of limitations anew). The future of research on whiteness in social work, and that of research on whiteness in general, is something that I have an obligation to speak to with this study now behind me, and it is something that I can only and should only speak to from my white subject position.

It is easy to spot opportunities for new research that would build upon this study and that could begin to engage some of the questions that this study does not address. To name just a few of such clear and potentially generative research questions: How do white social workers experience whiteness in social work; how do experiences of whiteness in social work change over time; how do variables other than race—class, age, gender, nationality, geographical location—moderate experiences of whiteness in social work; and how are experiences of whiteness in social work similar to or different from experiences of whiteness outside of social work? Yet, these are not the most important questions to ask in considering future research if I seriously and sincerely accept the findings and implications of this study. Rather, the more critical and consequential issue to raise is not which question to research, but whether any of them *should* be researched, and by whom. More pointedly, should research on whiteness even have a future, and, if so, should white researchers be doing it?

This is the real question to ask about future research that might follow from this study, and it is one that this study—both tacitly by its very existence as well as in its text—may have neglected to weigh with due thoroughness. That is, it is a question that I, as the researcher and author, may have failed to interrogate sufficiently. Early on, I offered intellectualized analyses intended to mitigate the potentially deleterious effects of my own whiteness on what stood to be an otherwise methodologically sound and substantively productive inquiry into whiteness. I defended that I *could* do this, bypassing whether I *should* do this. This is a question that the majority-white, flourishing academic enterprise of the critical study of whiteness does not pose to itself; first, for the obvious reason that the answer stands to negate its reason for being, and second, because the question can only be answered in subjective terms unsuited to peer-reviewed publication or dissemination as purportedly objective knowledge. Bearing all that in mind, and taking full account of everything that I have learned from the entirety of the research process that produced this study, the most honest answer I can give concerning the question of future research on whiteness in the context of this historical moment is that I think it should have some future in which white people play only a supporting role to the extent that they are asked to. There is clearly theoretical and practical value to continuing to better understand historical and contemporary whiteness. Research to that end ought to continue. But the way in which future research on whiteness proceeds will affect whether or not whiteness persists as a social problem worth researching to begin with. For as long as whiteness research is led by white researchers, whiteness is reified as authority in a context whose express purpose is to challenge that very tendency. Whatever the intention, the effect is counterproductive, if not hypocritical. Only when whiteness research is led by those who do not identify as white can it be genuinely transformative. That is the direction toward which future research on whiteness must aspire.

If it sounds as though I am calling into question everything I have produced over the course of this study, it is because I am. In the methods chapter, I wrote the following:

> My feeling is that the act of distributing self-reflective writing on whiteness for public consumption implicitly ignores the fact that people of color have, for centuries, apprehended and attempted to promulgate all that there is to know about the nature of whiteness, to very little success and even less social or material benefit. To purvey this very information as if it were novel insight is to disregard that history and that credit to

> people of color, knowingly or not, and even worse, to seek validation and acclaim as a reward for that negligence.

At the time I wrote that, I wish it had struck me how easily the same logic could apply not only to self-reflective writing on whiteness, but also research on whiteness by white researchers (e.g., my own research). The problem with such writing, after all, is not that it is reflective as opposed to scientific, but that it is *self*-reflective; which is to say that the problem arises from the specific case of the white author being the one to produce scholarship on whiteness and the attendant social and material gain that accrues to them and thus amplifies racial stratification in spite of rhetorical opposition to just this inequitable distribution of power.

If an example can help make the concluding point that future whiteness research should not be led by white researchers in order to effect truly transformative change, then perhaps my own will serve that purpose. I often tell people that my time as a social worker on the south side of Chicago led me to my conviction that the greatest social problem facing U.S. society—the social problem at the root of all other social problems—is whiteness. That this came to me as an epiphany was surely only ever possible because of my own whiteness. I could have responded by seeking some form of work through which to directly intervene in order to redistribute social and material power and resources away from whiteness and into the hands of those who do not identify as white. Instead, I applied to doctoral programs to study whiteness. By normative academic standards, I have been quite successful. I have authored nine sole-authored publications and collected original data in completing an independent research study. Looking at it differently, though, I invested half a decade and prohibitively expensive sums of tuition payments not in others, but in myself; my work produced timely and polished written scholarship that likely very few people will ever read and which, consequently, will probably never have much material impact; I gained exclusive credentials that will benefit me personally and professionally, while non-white persons whom I mentioned in my writing and who participated in my research obtained no kind of compensation; and I told myself and others that the purpose of all this was social justice. Some might say that my work contributes meaningfully to combatting white supremacy; others might call it failing up. The future potential of whiteness research depends on recognizing the difference. If whiteness is a social problem that whiteness research intends to solve, then white researchers should not be the ones to gain power from that process.

It might sound like I am recommending that people who do not identify as white carry the burden of addressing the social problem of whiteness. I am not. I am pointing out that a wide variety of different types of work collectively make up the struggle against whiteness. There is low-impact, high-reward work (e.g., writing academic articles about whiteness) and there is high-impact, low-reward work (e.g., standing on the front lines of public protest), along with myriad possibilities for involvement between those extremes. What I am recommending is that whiteness research, and white whiteness researchers in particular, remain vigilantly mindful of the ways in which the social hierarchies that reinforce white supremacy are solidified or contested based on the ways that we choose to—or are forced to—distribute ourselves across these types of work. Despite pronouncements to the contrary, a distribution of labor in which white academics publish while Black bodies confront police brutality face to face does not challenge the social arrangement that originally created and now perpetuates the problem of

whiteness. This is my takeaway from the study that I have conducted, the sum of everything spoken and all that was left unsaid; it is the most direct understanding that this study can pass along to the future of whiteness research in social work and elsewhere. Speaking as a white researcher, how would I research whiteness knowing what I know now? Well, as Antoinette so bluntly and so perfectly put it in Chapter 3: I really wouldn't.

References

Abrams, L. S., & Dettlaff, A. J. (2020, June 18). An open letter to NASW and allied organizations on social work's relationship with law enforcement. Medium. https://medium.com/@alandettlaff/an-open-letter-to-nasw-and-allied-organizations-on-social-works-relationship-with-law-enforcement-1a1926c71b28

Abrams, L. S., & Gibson, P. (2007). Teaching notes: Reframing multicultural education: Teaching white privilege in the social work curriculum. *Journal of Social Work Education*, *43*(1), 147–160. https://doi.org/10.5175/JSWE.2007.200500529

Abrams, L. S., Crewe, S., Dettlaff, A., & Williams, J. H. (2020, November 12–13). Welcome to the symposium. In L. S. Abrams, S. Crewe, A. Dettlaff, & J. H. Williams (Chairs), *Social work, white supremacy, and racial justice: reckoning with our history, interrogating our present, re-imagining our future* [Symposium]. University of Houston Graduate College of Social Work, UCLA Luskin Social Welfare, Arizona State University School of Social Work, and Howard University School of Social Work, jointly sponsored virtual symposium.

Adorno, T. W. (2000). *Introduction to sociology*. (C. Gödde, Ed., E. Jephcott, Trans.). Stanford University Press.

Aguilar, J. P., & Counselman-Carpenter, E. (2021). 'The mirage of action': Exploring the social work professions' perpetuation of white supremacy through 'well-intentioned' actions. *Advances in Social Work*, *21*(2/3), 1020–1044. https://doi.org/10.18060/24400

Ahmed, S. (2004). Declarations of whiteness: The non-performativity of anti-racism. *Borderlands E-Journal*, *3*(2), 1–22.

Allen, R. (2004). Whiteness and critical pedagogy. *Educational Philosophy and Theory*, *36*(2), 121-136. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1469-5812.2004.00056.x

Allen, T. W. (1994–1997). *The invention of the white race* (Vols. 1–2). Verso.

Althusser, L. (1971). Ideology and ideological state apparatuses: Notes toward an investigation. In L. Althusser (Ed.), *Lenin and philosophy and other essays* (pp. 85–126). Monthly Review Press.

Anderson, C. (2016). *White rage: The unspoken truth of our racial divide*. Bloomsbury.

Andrews, J., & Reisch, M. (2002). The radical voices of social workers: Some lessons for the future. *Journal of Progressive Human Services*, *13*(1), 5–30. https://doi.org/10.1300/J059v13n01_02

Appiah, K. A. (2020, June 18). *The case for capitalizing the B in Black*. The Atlantic. https://www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2020/06/time-to-capitalize-blackand-white/613159/

Applebaum, B. (2012). Reframing responsibility in the social justice classroom. *Race Ethnicity and Education*, *15*(5), 615–631. https://doi.org/10.1080/13613324.2012.674028

Applebaum, B. (2017). Comforting discomfort as complicity: White fragility and the pursuit of invulnerability. *Hypatia*, *32*(4), 862-875. https://doi.org/10.1111/hypa.12352

Arendt, H. (1966). *The origins of totalitarianism*. Mariner.

Axinn, J., & Levin, H. (1982). *Social welfare: A history of the American response to social need*. Harper and Row.

Babcock, B. A. (1977). The story in the story: Metanarration in folk narrative. In R. Bauman (Ed.), *Verbal art as performance*. Waveland Press, Inc.

Baines, D. (2008). Everyday practices of race, class and gender: Struggles, skills, and radical social work. *Journal of Progressive Human Services*, *11*(2), 5–27. https://doi.org/10.1300/J059v11n02_02

Baker, L. D. (1998). *From savage to Negro: Anthropology and the construction of race, 1896-1954*. University of California Press.

Barth, R. P., Messing, J. T., Williams, J. H., & Shanks, T. R. (Eds.) (2022). *Grand challenges for social work and society* (2nd ed.). Oxford University Press.

Bauman, R., & Briggs, C. L. (2003). *Voices of modernity*. Cambridge University Press.

Bell, J. M. (2014). *The black power movement and American social work*. Columbia University Press.

Benjamin, W. (2019). Theses on the philosophy of history. In H. Arendt (Ed.), *Illuminations* (pp. 196–209). Mariner Books. (Original work published 1955)

Bonilla-Silva, E. (2017). *Racism without racists* (5th ed.). Rowman & Littlefield.

Bonilla-Silva, E. & Zuberi, T. (2008). Toward a definition of white logic and white methods. In T. Zuberi & E. Bonilla-Silva, E. (Eds.), *White logic, white methods: Racism and methodology* (pp. 3-27). Rowman & Littlefield.

Bourdieu, P. (1991). *Language and symbolic power* (J. B. Thompson, Ed.; G. Raymond & M. Adamson, Trans.). Harvard University Press.

Bourdieu, P., & Passeron, J. (1990). *Reproduction in education, society, and culture* (2nd ed.). Sage Publications.

Brodkin, K. (1998). *How Jews became white folks and what that says about race in America*. Rutgers University Press.

Butler, J. (1997). *Excitable Speech: A Politics of the Performative*. Routledge.

Chandler, S. (2018). Social work, feminism, and prison abolition. *Affilia*, *33*(1), 5–7. https://doi.org/10.1177/0886109917750961

Charmaz, K. (2014). *Constructing grounded theory* (2nd ed.). Sage.

Cherry, K. (2018). Critical thoughts on American social work and the crisis of modernity: Lessons from theory and current events. *Journal of Progressive Human Services*, *29*(1), 40–60. https://doi.org/10.1080/10428232.2017.1334286

Chetty, R., Hendren, N., Jones, M. R., & Porter, S. (2020). Race and economic opportunity in the United States: An intergenerational perspective. *Quarterly Journal of Economics*, *135*(2), 711–783. https://doi.org/10.1093/qje/qjz042

Cimbala, P. A. (2005). *The Freedmen's Bureau: Reconstructing the American South after the Civil War*. Krieger.

Cohn, B.S. (1996) *Colonialism and its Forms of Knowledge: The British in India*. Princeton University Press.

Coleman, N. (2020, July 5). *Why we're capitalizing Black*. The New York Times. https://www.nytimes.com/2020/07/05/insider/capitalized-black.html

Crenshaw, K. (1991). Mapping the margins: Intersectionality, identity politics, and violence against women of color. *Stanford Law Review*, *43*(6), 1241–1299. https://doi.org/10.2307/1229039

Crenshaw, K., Gotanda, N., Peller, G., & Thomas, K. (Eds.) (1995). *Critical race theory: The key writings that formed the movement*. The New Press.

Davis, L. J. (Ed.). (1997). *The disability studies reader*. Routledge.

Day, P. J. (2013). Social policy: History (colonial times to 1900). In *Encyclopedia of Social Work*. Retrieved from

http://socialwork.oxfordre.com/view/10.1093/acrefore/9780199975839.001.0001/acrefore-9780199975839-e-608

de Montigny, G. A. (2013). The essentialism of whiteness: Abandoning empirical engagement. *Journal of Social Work*, *13*(6), 633–651. https://doi.org/10.1177/1468017312475279

de Zurara, G. E. (1963). *The chronicle of the discovery and conquest of Guinea* (Vol. 2; C. R. Beazley & E. Prestage, Trans.) [Ebook]. Burt Franklin. https://www.google.com/books/edition/The_Chronicle_of_the_Discovery_and_Conqu/1RpzAAAAMAAJ?hl=en&gbpv=1&printsec=frontcover

Del-Villar, Z. (2021). Confronting historical white supremacy in social work education and practice: A way forward. *Advances in Social Work*, *21*(2/3), 636–653. https://doi.org/10.18060/24168

Derrida J., & Nicholson-Smith, D. (1991). Geopsychoanalysis: "…and the rest of the world". *American Imago*, *48*(2), 199–231. https://www.jstor.org/stable/26303831

Dettlaff, A. J., Weber, K., Pendleton, M., Boyd, R., Bettencourt, B., & Burton, L. (2020). It is not a broken system, it is a system that needs to be broken: the upEND movement to abolish the child welfare system. *Journal of Public Child Welfare*. Advance online publication. https://doi.org/10.1080/15548732.2020.1814542

Diamond, J. (1997). *Guns, germs, and steel: The fates of human societies*. Norton.

DiAngelo, R. D. (2018). *White fragility: Why it's so hard for white people to talk about racism*. Beacon Press.

DiFranks, N.N. (2008). Social workers and the NASW Code of Ethics: belief, behavior, disjuncture. *Social Work*, 53(2): 167–76. https://www.jstor.org/stable/23721105

Doane, A. (2020). Post-color blindness? Trump and the rise of the new white nationalism. In C. D. Lippard, J. S. Carter, & D. G. Embrick (Eds.), *Protecting whiteness: Whitelash and the rejection of racial equality*, (pp. 27–42). University of Washington Press.

Dominelli, L. (1989). An uncaring profession? An examination of racism in social work. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, *15*(3), 391–403. https://doi.org/10.1080/1369183X.1989.9976127

Du Bois, W.E.B. (1920). The souls of white folk. In D. R. Roediger (Ed.), *Black on white: Black writers on what it means to be white* (pp. 184–199). Schocken.

Du Bois, W.E.B. (1935). *Black reconstruction in America*. The Free Press.

Du Bois, W.E.B. (1967). *The Philadelphia Negro: A social story*. Reprint ed. Schocken. (Original work published 1899)

Du Bois, W.E.B. (2014). *The souls of black folk*. Millennium Publications. (Original work published 1903)

Dyer, R. (1997). *White*. Routledge.

Eligon, J. (2020, June 26). *A debate over identity and race asks, are African-Americans 'Black' or 'black'?* The New York Times. https://www.nytimes.com/2020/06/26/us/black-african-american-style-debate.html

Eng, D. L., & Kazanjian, D. (2003). Introduction: Mourning remains. In D. L. Eng & D. Kazanjian (Eds.), *Loss: The politics of mourning* (pp. 1–25). University of California Press.

Esping-Andersen, G. (1990). *The three worlds of welfare capitalism*. Princeton University Press.

Fanon, F. (2004) *The wretched of the earth* (R. Philcox, Trans.). Grove Press. (Original work published 1961)

Fanon, F. (2008). *Black skin, white masks* (R. Philcox, Trans.). Grove Press. (Original work published 1952)

Fanon, F. (2018). Psychiatric writings (S. Corcoran, Trans.). In J. Khalfa & R. J. C. Young (Eds.), *Alienation and freedom* (pp. 165–530). Bloomsbury. (Original work published 2015)

Foner, E. (1988). *Reconstruction: America's unfinished revolution, 1863–1877*. HarperCollins.

Fox, C. (2019). "The line must be drawn somewhere": The rise of legal status restrictions in state welfare policy in the 1970s. *Studies in American Political Development, 33*(2), 275–304. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0898588X19000129

Frankenberg, R. (1993). *White women, race matters: The social construction of whiteness.* University of Minnesota Press.

Freud, S. (1955). *Totem and taboo* (J. Strachey, Trans.). Norton. (Original work published 1913)

Freud, S. (1957). Mourning and melancholia (J. Strachey, Trans.). In *The standard edition of the complete psychological works of Sigmund Freud: Vol. XIV. On the history of the psychoanalytic movement, papers on metapsychology, and other works* (pp. 243–258). The Hogarth Press and the Institute of Psycho-Analysis. (Original work published 1917)

Freud, S. (1961). *Civilization and its discontents* (J. Strachey, Trans.). Norton. (Original work published 1930)

Freud, S. (1964). *Introductory lectures on psychoanalysis* (J. Strachey, Trans.). Norton. (Original work published 1933)

Genovese, E. (1989). *The political economy of slavery: Studies in the economy & society of the slave south* (2nd ed.). Wesleyan University Press.

Gerteis, L. S. (1973). *From contraband to freedman: Federal policy toward southern blacks, 1861–1865*. Greenwood Press.

Gilroy, P. (1993). *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and double consciousness*. Harvard University Press.

Goldberg, C. A. (2008). *Citizens and paupers: Relief, rights, and race, from the Freedmen's Bureau to workfare*. University of Chicago Press.

Goldberg, D. T. (1993). *Racist culture: Philosophy and the politics of meaning*. Blackwell.

Gould, S. J. (1996). *The mismeasure of man*. Norton.

Graves, Jr., J. L. (2003) *The emperor's new clothes: Biological Theories of Race at the Millennium*. Rutgers University Press.

Gregory, J. R. (2020). Social work as a product and project of whiteness, 1607–1900. *Journal of Progressive Human Services, 32*(1), 17–36. https://doi.org/10.1080/10428232.2020.1730143

Gregory, J. R. (2020a). Procelain ethics: A critical linguistic analysis of the treatment of race in the National Association of Social Workers Code of Ethics. *Critical and Radical Social Work*. Advance online publication. https://doi.org/10.1332/204986020X16031175122442

Gregory, J. R. (2020b). Social work as a product and project of whiteness, 1607–1900. *Journal of Progressive Human Services, 32*(1), 17–36. https://doi.org/10.1080/10428232.2020.1730143

Gregory, J. R. (2022). Whiteness and/as war. *Psychoanalysis, culture & society, 27*(2), 300–316. https://doi.org/10.1057/s41282-022-00305-0

Grosz, E. (1990). *Jacques Lacan: A feminist introduction*. Routledge.

Gustafson, D. L. (2007). White on whiteness: Becoming radicalized about race. *Nursing Inquiry, 14*(2), 153–161. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1440-1800.2007.00365.x

Gustafson, K. (2009). The criminalization of poverty. *Journal of Criminal Law and Criminology, 99*(3), 643–716. https://scholarlycommons.law.northwestern.edu/jclc/vol99/iss3/5/

Guz, S. (2020, November 12–13). The response of school social work to racial segregation and desegregation in American public schools. In L. S. Abrams, S. Crewe, A. Dettlaff, & J. H. Williams (Chairs), *Social work, white supremacy, and racial justice: reckoning with our history, interrogating our present, re-imagining our future* [Symposium]. University of Houston Graduate College of Social Work, UCLA Luskin Social Welfare, Arizona State University School of Social Work, and Howard University School of Social Work, jointly sponsored virtual symposium.

Hale, G. E. (1999). *Making whiteness: The culture of segregation in the south, 1890–1940*. Vintage.

Harris, C. I. (1993). Whiteness as property. *Harvard Law Review, 106*(8), 1707-1791. https://www.jstor.org/stable/1341787

Hearn, J. (1982). Radical social work—Contradictions, limitations and political possibilities. *Critical Social Policy, 2*(4), 19–34. https://doi.org/10.1177/026101838200200404

Hening, W. W. (Ed.) (1823). *The statutes at large; Being a collection of all the laws of Virginia from the first session of the legislature, in the year 1619 [Ebook]. R. & W. & G. Bartow. https://catalog.hathitrust.org/Record/009714930*

Hochschild, A. R. (2016). *Strangers in their own land*. The New Press.

Horigan, K. P. (2018). *Consuming Katrina: Public disaster and personal narrative*. Jackson, MS: University Press of Mississippi.

Hughey, M. W. (2012). *White bound*. Stanford University Press.

Ignatiev, N. (1995). *How the Irish became white*. Routledge.

Ignatiev, N., & Garvey, J. (Eds.) (1996). *Race traitor*. Routledge.

Jacobs, H.A. (1987). *Incidents in the life of a slave girl, written by herself*. (L. M. Child & J. F. Yellin, Eds.). Harvard University Press. (Original work published 1861)

Jayaratne, S., Croxton,T.A. & Mattison, D. (2002). Race, practice behaviors and the NASW Code of Ethics. *Journal of Social Service Research, 28*(3): 65–89. https://doi.org/10.1300/J079v28n03_04

Jeffery, D. (2005). 'What good is anti-racist social work if you can't master it'?: Exploring a paradox in anti-racist social work education. *Race Ethnicity and Education, 8*(4), 409–425. https://doi.org/10.1080/13613320500324011

Jeyasingham, D. (2012). White noise: A critical evaluation of social work education's engagement with whiteness studies. *British Journal of Social Work, 42*(4), 669–686. https://doi.org/10.1093/bjsw/bcr110

Kendi, I. X. (2016). *Stamped from the beginning: The definitive history of racist ideas in America*. Bold Type Books.

Kendi, I. X. (2019). *How to be an antiracist*. One World.

Khan, A. (2019). The subaltern clinic. *boundary 2, 46*(4), 181–217. https://doi.org/10.1215/01903659-7859189

Khanna, R. (2003). *Dark continents: Psychoanalysis and colonialism*. Duke University Press.

Kincheloe, J., Steinberg, S., Rodriguez, N., & Chennault, R. (Eds.) (1998). *White reign*. St. Martin's Griffin.

Kovel, J. (1970). *White racism: A psychohistory*. Columbia University Press.

Lacan, J. (2002). *Écrits* (B. Fink, Trans.). Norton. (Original work published 1966)

Lake, M., & Reynolds, H. (2008). *Drawing the global colour line: White men's countries and the international challenge of racial equality.* Cambridge University Press.

Lee, E., & Bhuyan, R. (2013). Negotiating within whiteness in cross-cultural clinical encounters. *Social Service Review*, *87*(1), 98–130. https://doi.org/10.1086/669919

Leiby, J. (1978). *A history of social welfare and social work in the United States*. Columbia University Press.

Leonardo, Z. (2009). *Race, whiteness, and education*. Routledge.

Leonardo, Z., & Manning, L. (2017). White historical activity theory: toward a critical understanding of white zones of proximal development. *Race Ethnicity and Education*, *20*(1), 15–29. https://doi.org/10.1080/13613324.2015.1100988

Lévi-Strauss, C. (1983). *The raw and the cooked* (J. Weightman & D. Weightman, Trans.). The University of Chicago Press. (Original work published 1969)

Lipsitz, G. (1998). *The possessive investment in whiteness: How white people profit from identity politics*. Temple University Press.

López, A. J. (2005). *Postcolonial whiteness: A critical reader on race and empire*. State University of New York Press.

López, I. H. (2006). *White by law: The legal construction of race* (2nd ed.). New York University Press.

Marriott, D. (2011). Inventions of existence: Sylvia Wynter, Frantz Fanon, sociogeny, and "the damned". *CR: The New Centennial Review*, *11*(3), 45–89. https://www.jstor.org/stable/41949756

Marriott, D. (2015). The racialized body. In D. Hillman & U. Maude (Eds.), *The Cambridge companion to the body in literature* (pp. 163–176). Cambridge University Press.

Marx, K., & Engels, F. (1970). *The German ideology*. International Publishers. (Original work published 1932)

Matias, C. E. (2016). *Feeling white: Whiteness, emotionality, and education*. Sense Publishers.

Maurer, K. (2016). The invisibility of whiteness in clinical practice: Case commentary on "becoming visible: The case of Colette." *Clinical Social Work Journal*, *44*, 351–356. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10615-016-0598-x

McIntosh, P. (1989, July/August). White privilege: Unpacking the invisible knapsack. *Peace and Freedom*, 10–12. https://nationalseedproject.org/Key-SEED-Texts/white-privilege-unpacking-the-invisible-knapsack

Millar, M. (2008). "Anti-oppressiveness": Critical comments on a discourse and its context. *British Journal of Social Work*, *38*, 362–375. https://doi.org/10.1093/bjsw/bcl336

Mills, C. W. (1997). *The racial contract*. Cornell University Press.

Mills, C. W. (2007). White ignorance. In S. Sullivan & N. Tuana (Eds.), *Race and epistemologies of ignorance* (pp. 11–38). State University of New York Press.

Mindlis, I., Livert, D., Federman, A. D., Wisnivesky, J. P., & Revenson, T. A. (2020). Racial/ethnic concordance between patients and researchers as a predictor of study attrition. *Social Science & Medicine*, *255*, 11309. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.socscimed.2020.113009

Morgan, E. S. (1975). *American slavery, American freedom: The ordeal of colonial Virginia*. W. W. Norton.

Morris, A. D. (2015). *The scholar denied: W. E. B. Du Bois and the birth of modern sociology*. University of California Press.

Mullaly, R. P., & Keating, E. F. (1991). Similarities, differences and dialectics of radical social work. *Journal of Progressive Human Services*, *2*(2), 49–78. https://doi.org/10.1300/J059v02n02_04

Muñoz, J. E. (2006). Feeling brown, feeling down: Latina affect, the performativity of race, and the depressive position. *Signs*, *31*(3), 675–688. https://doi.org/10.1086/499080

National Association of Social Workers (2017). NASW Code of Ethics (Guide to the Everyday Professional Conduct of Social Workers). NASW Press.

National Association of Social Workers (2022, December 14). NASW commends President Biden, Congress, for enacting the Respect for Marriage Act. *National Association of Social Workers*. https://www.socialworkers.org/News/News-Releases/ID/2570/NASW-Commends-President-Biden-Congress-for-Enacting-the-Respect-for-Marriage-Act

Neill, E. D. (1875). Notes on American history. *The New England Historical and Genealogical Register*, *28*, 295.

Network to Advance Abolitionist Social Work (2021). *What is abolitionist social work?* https://www.naasw.com/about

Nylund, D. (2006). Critical multiculturalism, whiteness, and social work: Towards a more radical view of cultural competence. *Journal of Progressive Human Services*, *17*(2), 27–42. https://doi.org/10.1300/J059v17n02_03

Obasogie, O. (Ed.) (2020). *Trumpism and its discontents*. Berkeley Public Policy Press.

Obasogie, O. K., Harris-Wai, J. N., Darling, K., Keagy, C., & Levesque, M. (2015). Race in the life sciences: An empirical assessment, 1950–2000. *Fordham Law Review*, *83*, 3089–3114. https://ir.lawnet.fordham.edu/flr/vol83/iss6/9/

Oliver, M., & Shapiro, T. (1995). *Black wealth/white wealth: A new perspective on racial inequality*. Routledge.

Omi, M., & Winant, H. (2015). *Racial formation in the United States* (3rd ed.). Routledge.

Painter, N. I. (2010). *The history of white people*. W. W. Norton.

Painter, N. I. (2020, July 22). *Why 'White' should be capitalized, too*. The Washington Post. https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/2020/07/22/why-white-should-be-capitalized/

Park, Y. (2019). *Facilitating injustice: The complicity of social workers in the forced removal and incarceration of Japanese Americans, 1941–1946*. Oxford University Press.

Park, Y. (2020, November 12–13). Tracing absent critiques: Racism and white supremacy in social work's discourses of immigration. In L. S. Abrams, S. Crewe, A. Dettlaff, & J. H. Williams (Chairs), *Social work, white supremacy, and racial justice: reckoning with our history, interrogating our present, re-imagining our future* [Symposium]. University of Houston Graduate College of Social Work, UCLA Luskin Social Welfare, Arizona State University School of Social Work, and Howard University School of Social Work, jointly sponsored virtual symposium.

Peebles-Wilkins, W., & Francis, E. A. (1990). Two outstanding black women in social welfare history: Mary Church Terrell and Ida B. Wells-Barnett. *Affilia*, *5*(4), 87-100. https://doi.org/10.1177%2F088610999000500406

Phillips, C. (2010). White, like who? Temporality, contextuality and anti-racist social work education and practice. *Critical Social Work*, *11*(2), 71–88. https://doi.org/10.22329/csw.v11i2.5825

Polk, S. A., Vazquez, N., Kim, M. E., Green, Y. R. (2021). Moving from multiculturalism to Critical Race Theory within a school of social work: Dismantling white supremacy as an

organizing strategy. *Advances in Social Work*, *21*(2/3), 876–897. https://doi.org/10.18060/24472

Reisch, M. (1998). The sociopolitical context and social work method, 1890–1950. *Social Service Review*, *72*, 161–181. https://doi.org/10.1086/515748

Richie, B. E., & Martensen, K. M. (2020). Resisting carcerality, embracing abolition: Implications for feminist social work practice. *Affilia*, *35*(1), 12–16. https://doi.org/10.1177/0886109919897576

Ricoeur, P. (1986). *Lectures on ideology and utopia*. G. Taylor (Ed.). Columbia University Press.

Roediger, D. R. (1991). *The wages of whiteness: Race and the making of the American working class*. Verso.

Roediger, D. R. (1994). *Towards the abolition of whiteness*. Verso.

Roediger, D. R. (2005). *Working toward whiteness: How America's immigrants became white*. Basic Books.

Roediger, D. R. (Ed.) (1998). *Black on white: Black writers on what it means to be white*. Schocken.

Ruesch, J., & Bateson, G. (1951). *Communication: The social matrix of psychiatry*. W. W. Norton & Company, Inc.

Ryan, M. K., & Brunsma, D. L. (2020). Solidarity and struggle: White antiracist activism in the time of Trump. In C. D. Lippard, J. S. Carter, & D. G. Embrick (Eds.), *Protecting whiteness: Whitelash and the rejection of racial equality*, (pp. 240–254). University of Washington Press.

Sacks, T. (2019). *Invisible visits: Black middle-class women in the American healthcare system*. Oxford University Press.

Sakamoto, I. (2007). An anti-oppressive approach to cultural competence. *Canadian Social Work Review*, *24*(1), 105–114. www.jstor.org/stable/41669865

Sarantakos, S., & Silva, S. (2021, March 4–5). Social work for social movements: Using movement lawyering as a frame for action. In L. S. Abrams, S. Crewe, A. Dettlaff, & J. H. Williams (Chairs), *Social work, white supremacy, and racial justice: reckoning with our history, interrogating our present, re-imagining our future* [Symposium]. University of Houston Graduate College of Social Work, UCLA Luskin Social Welfare, Arizona State University School of Social Work, and Howard University School of Social Work, jointly sponsored virtual symposium.

Saxton, A. (1990). *The rise and fall of the white republic: Class politics and mass culture in nineteenth-century America*. Verso.

Seshadri-Crooks, K. (2000). *Desiring whiteness: A Lacanian analysis of race*. Taylor & Francis.

Smalling, S. E. (2015). Silence is not an option. *Reflections*, *21*(3), 50–52. https://reflectionsnarrativesofprofessionalhelping.org/index.php/Reflections/article/view/1563

Spillers, H. J. (1996). "All the things you could be by now if Sigmund Freud's wife was your mother": Psychoanalysis and race. *Critical Inquiry*, *22*(4), 710–734. https://doi.org/10.1086/448814

Spivak, G. C. (1999). *A critique of postcolonial reason: Toward a history of the vanishing present*. Harvard University Press.

Stampp, K. M. (1956). *The peculiar institution: Slavery in the Ante-Bellum South*. Vintage.

Stephens, M. A. (2014). *Skin acts: Race, psychoanalysis, and the black male performer*. Duke University Press.

Sullivan, S. (2014). *Good white people: The problem with middle-class white anti-racism*. State University of New York Press.

Sullivan, S., & Tuana, N. (2007). Introduction. In S. Sullivan & N. Tuana (Eds.), *Race and epistemologies of ignorance* (pp. 1–10). State University of New York Press.

Thandeka (2000). *Learning to be white: Money, race, and God in America*. Continuum.

Thorsen, K. (Director). (1989). *James Baldwin: The price of the ticket* [Film]. Nobody Knows Productions.

Todd, S. (2011). "That power and privilege thing": Securing whiteness in community work. *Journal of Progressive Human Services*, *22*(2), 117–134. https://doi.org/10.1080/10428232.2011.606528

Trouillot, M. R. (1995). *Silencing the past: Power and the production of history*. Beacon Press.

U.S. News & World Report (2022, May 1). *Best schools for social work*. https://www.usnews.com/best-graduate-schools/top-health-schools/social-work-rankings/21775470034_variation

Vološinov, V. N. (1986). *Marxism and the philosophy of language* (L. Matejka & I. R. Titunik, Trans.). Harvard University Press.

Watson, V., Howard-Wagner, D., & Spanierman, L. (Eds.) (2015). *Unveiling whiteness in the twenty-first century: Global manifestations, transdisciplinary interventions*. Lexington Books.

Wenocur, S., & Reisch, M. (1989). *From charity to enterprise: The development of American social work in a market economy*. University of Illinois Press.

Whitaker, T. (2021, January 28–29). Calling out racism in social work: Why we should and why we don't. In L. S. Abrams, S. Crewe, A. Dettlaff, & J. H. Williams (Chairs), *Social work, white supremacy, and racial justice: reckoning with our history, interrogating our present, re-imagining our future* [Symposium]. University of Houston Graduate College of Social Work, UCLA Luskin Social Welfare, Arizona State University School of Social Work, and Howard University School of Social Work, jointly sponsored virtual symposium.

Wilensky, H. L., & Lebeaux, C. H. (1965). *Industrial society and social welfare*. Free Press.

Wilson, W. J. (1998). What shall we do with the white people? In D. R. Roediger (Ed.), *Black on white: Black writers on what it means to be white* (pp. 58–66). Schocken. (Original work published 1860)

Wise, T. (2004). *White like me: Reflections on race from a privileged son*. Soft Skull Press.

Wright, K. C., Carr, A. C., & Akin, B. A. (2021). The whitewashing of social work history: How dismantling racism in social work education begins with an equitable history of the profession. *Advances in Social Work, 21*(2/3), 274–297. https://doi.org/10.18060/23946

Wynter, S. (2011). Towards the sociogenic principle: Fanon, identity, the puzzle of conscious experience, and what it is like to be "Black". In M. F. Durán-Cogan & A. Gómez-Mariana (Eds.), *National identities and sociopolitical changes in Latin America* (pp. 30–66). Routledge.

Yearwood, C. C., Barbera, R. A., Fisher, A. K., & Hostetter, C. (2021). Dismantling white supremacy in social work education: We build the road by walking. *Advances in Social Work, 21*(2/3), i–vii. https://doi.org/10.18060/25652

Young, R.J.C. (1990). *White mythologies: Writing history and the West*. Routledge.

Zuberi, T., & Bonilla-Silva, E. (Eds.) (2008). *White logic, white methods: Racism and methodology*. Rowman and Littlefield.

Appendix

Interview Schedule

Thank you for choosing to participate in this study. This shouldn't take longer than an hour. Please remember that you can refuse to answer any question, for any reason, and you may end the interview at any point without having to explain your decision to do so. I'm going to begin by asking you some questions about yourself and about race in general, and then move on to discussing whiteness in social work. You are welcome to interrupt me at any time if you do not understand a question or would like additional clarification. Do you have any questions before we begin?

- How old are you?
- Where did you grow up?
- Where are you located now?
- How would you describe your racial identity?
- How would you describe your gender identity?
- How would you describe your socioeconomic background?
- How would you describe your current position within or in relation to the field of social work? This can be in terms of professional roles, feelings of identity, or anything else you consider important.
- Is there anything else you would like to share about yourself that might be relevant to this study?

- What is your first memory of race—a memory in which you recall your earliest thoughts or feelings about race and what it meant for you?
- What does your racial identity mean to you today?

- How do you define whiteness?

- How have you experienced whiteness in the social work curriculum?
- How has whiteness in the social work curriculum affected you?
    - Professionally?
    - Personally?

- How have you experienced whiteness in your academic institution?
- How has whiteness in your academic institution affected you?
    - Professionally?
    - Personally?

- How have you experienced whiteness in your own work, whether that's research, practice, teaching, advocacy, or something else?
- How has whiteness in your own work affected you?
    - Professionally?
    - Personally?

- In what ways do you observe whiteness to be changing today?
- In what ways do you observe social work to be changing today in relation to whiteness?
- What do you think ought to be social work's next steps concerning whiteness?

- How do you feel this interview process has been influenced by my whiteness?

- Is there anything else you would like to share that might be relevant to this study?