The Cost of Being Black in Social Work Practicum

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Abstract: *The social work profession is not exempt from fueling institutional racism, which affects the provision of social work practicum education for Black social work students. This article highlights how the historical and current social cost of being Black in the United States presents itself within social work education's signature pedagogy. Social workers who hold bachelor's degrees in social work (BSW) are more likely to be Black than those holding master's degrees in social work (MSW; Salsberg et al., 2017). It takes Black students longer to earn an MSW degree though they are more likely to hold a BSW while also having work experience related to the social work profession; this is indicative of a flawed system. The implications of this are explored by highlighting social work's historical context and the role privilege holds within a profession charged with working towards social justice. Critical Race Theory (CRT) is utilized to unearth how the current state of social work practicum upholds a culture of white supremacy through covertly racist requirements and practices. Case examples are utilized to demonstrate the challenges Black students face as social work practicum mimics oppressive practices and perpetuates disparities in the social work landscape. Additionally, this article explores oppression's role in treating vulnerable social work students and how that treatment is reflected in the workforce, ultimately informing service delivery.*

Keywords: *Critical race theory, social work practicum, social work education, antiracism*

Racism has been shown to interrupt the success of Black people in colleges and universities (Kirp, 2019; McDermott et al., 2020) and has become an area of inquiry in social work research (Beck, 2019; Tisman & Clarendon, 2018). To further illuminate our understanding of racism and social work education, social work researchers have begun to incorporate Critical Race Theory (CRT) to help address the profession's gaps in recognizing privilege and oppression (Kolivoski et al., 2014; Sulé, 2020). Legal scholars founded CRT in the 1970s to combat the subtlety of racism through analysis and transformation (Bell, 1980; Crenshaw, 2010). CRT examines the role of race and racism in society by highlighting the ingrained "normalcy" of racism as a means to structurally sustain privilege and oppression (Masocha, 2015). As various disciplines have adopted CRT, its themes also provide a lens through which the social work profession can critically analyze its role in upholding racist ideals (Kolivoski et al., 2014; Sulé, 2020).

The use of CRT for analyzing pedagogical practices is increasingly vital to social work's progress towards social justice during times of political discord (Constance-

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Huggins, 2019); an exemplar being the *Executive Order on Combatting Race and Sex Stereotyping* ordered on September 22, 2020, by President Donald J. Trump. This order required that all federal contractors and subcontractors refrain from conducting workplace trainings that incorporate the following concepts:

a) One race or sex is inherently superior to another race or sex;
b) An individual, by virtue of their race or sex, is inherently racist, sexist, or oppressive, whether consciously or unconsciously;
c) An individual should be discriminated against or receive adverse treatment solely or partly because of their race or sex;
d) Members of one race or sex cannot and should not attempt to treat others without respect to race or sex;
e) An individual's moral character is necessarily determined by their race or sex;
f) An individual, by virtue of their race or sex, bears responsibility for actions committed in the past by other members of the same race or sex;
g) Any individual should feel discomfort, guilt, anguish, or any other form of psychological distress on account of their race or sex; or
h) Meritocracy or traits such as a hard work ethic are racist or sexist, or were created by a particular race to oppress another race. (White House, 2020, Sec. 4)

The effects of Executive Order 13950 were immediate as Stanford University immediately issued a directive to all faculty cautioning the use of the phrases "systemic racism" and "racial humility" within training programs (Bagdasarian, 2020). Although a federal district court issued a preliminary injunction in December 2020 (United States District Court, 2020) and on January 20, 2021, President Joe Biden issued an Executive Order 13985 overturning Executive Order 13950 (White House, 2021), we were given a snapshot into how easy it was to muzzle the necessary efforts of social movements and dismiss the oppression experienced by racialized people. This set a precedent for future attacks on CRT, including passing legislation in states like Florida and Kentucky that restricts comprehensive instruction on race-related topics with hefty consequences, not limited to financial fines and demotions (Boyles, 2021; Florida Department of State, 2021). This conflict between CRT and the political climate breeds an opportunity to highlight the relationship between the main propositions of CRT and the values and practice of the social work profession.

Social Work Education and Racism

The Initiative Task Force on *Weaving the Fabrics of Diversity* translated the 2005 Social Work Congress and the National Association of Social Work (NASW) racism policy statement as a call to action to address institutional racism not only in society but within the social work profession (NASW, 2006, 2007). Jaschik (2019) described how institutional racism is activated in the lives of Black people who attend schools and programs (not all programs are in schools of social work) of social work in the United States. The article described an incident where a white social work student reported that

the perceived threat that "Black presence" poses in the classroom made it uncomfortable for them to lead discussions. The University was able to clearly recognize that there were some long-standing issues of institutional racism at this school of social work, mainly in the classroom. This recognition seems consistent amongst social work professionals focused on addressing racism issues in the classroom and curriculum. There remains a limited emphasis on racism issues in field education, identified as *social work practicum* throughout this article to interrupt the use of terminology with a racially oppressive association (Rzack, 2001; Weng, 2017). Approximately 17 years ago, Smith College School of Social Work recognized no substantial efforts in the social work practicum process to address anti-racism (Donna & Miller, 2006). In response to this, an anti-racism practicum assignment was added to the curriculum to allow students to add anti-racism skills to their social work toolbox to be utilized later in their social work professional endeavors (Basham et al., 2001). Based on the results of the training, it was recommended that there be increased anti-racism training and support for faculty practicum advisors and supervisors. Ladhani and Sitter (2020) conducted a literature review and proposed that an anti-racism approach in social work education is not enough if it does not include assessing the institutional culture, policy, and standards. They argue that addressing institutional racism in social work classrooms through anti-racism education can attend to the reality of marginalized people's oppression. Singh (2019) argued that there is a dearth of empirical evidence that shows how social work education programs are preparing social work students to work with issues regarding racism.

Failure to address racism in social work practicum serves as a detriment to the social work profession since the Council on Social Work Education (CSWE) recognized "field education" as the signature pedagogy in the Educational Policy and Accreditation Standards (EPAS) for schools of social work; affirmed in 2008 and reaffirmed in 2015 (CSWE, 2008, 2015). Social work education requires both academic and professional training, which has been associated with higher stress for social work students than those in traditional academic programs (Hemy et al., 2016). The social work educational stress is associated with the requirements of academic and professional skill development coupled with meeting all the demands of the social work practicum (Dziegielewski et al., 2004; Rosenthal & Baum, 2010). Anxiety regarding competency and its future impact on career trajectories was a common occurrence at practicum placements (Hemy et al., 2016; Razack, 2001). Balancing social work practicum and course requirements with competing responsibilities and the financial cost of education often served as barriers to degree completion, with barriers experienced at greater rates for Black students (Masocha, 2015).

Nonetheless, the social work practicum continues to serve as the signature pedagogy and the central focus of social work education where students are instructed and socialized, primarily outside of the university, to "think, to perform, and to act ethically and with integrity" (Shulman, 2005, p. 52). However, Black social work students reported exposure to pervasive covert and overt affective (prejudice), behavioral (discrimination, microaggressions), and cognitive (stereotype) components of racism (Ostrom, 1969) while in their social work practicum (Razack, 2001). Racism has been identified as a significant chronic stressor (Clark et al., 1999; Paradies et al., 2015), leading to *racial battle fatigue*—physiological and psychological strain of pervasive coping strategies to alleviate effects of

microaggressions and racism (Franklin, 2019; Smith et al., 2007) and symptoms of posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD; Williams et al., 2018). The cumulative effects of these biopsychosocial disorders seem to spill over into Black students' academic processes and may serve as a barrier to successful completion of academic social work programs (Rajan-Rankin, 2014; Salsberg et al., 2019).

Since racism is embedded in every facet of Black people's lives and is known to affect their well-being (Paradies et al., 2015; Sulé, 2020), the social work profession is not exempt from fueling racism. The authors propose that it is time to acknowledge how institutional racism affects the provision of the social work practicum. In this article, we argue that CRT can address the institutional racism faced by Black students while in their social work practicum. Utilizing the lens of CRT, the authors challenge the social work profession to consider the extent to which the racial concerns of Black students go undetected during the practicum process. Three case examples are presented to illustrate the process of using CRT to uncover white-supremacist practices in the social work practicum. We propose that social work can fight against white supremacy by providing an enhanced critical analysis of our practices by examining the social work practicum's process through the lens of CRT. CRT is presented as a means of analyzing the use of race (e.g., Black) and place (practicum agency) in the pedagogical practices of the social work practicum to begin to destabilize white-centric ways of thinking about and engaging Black students' differences and identities.

Journey to Practicum

The current state of social work practicum is a result of the social work profession's historical foundation. Embedded in this foundation are the elements that support current labor and economic disparity: oppression and exploitation. Massive economic problems and displacement caused by the Civil War set the impetus for the social work profession (Day & Schiele, 2012). Charity Organization Societies (COS) were established as a means of welfare reform by providing case management services via "friendly visitors"; untrained white, wealthy women volunteers tasked with determining the worthiness of need. The use of moral reform – worthiness of provisions based on work ethic – incentivized labor through stigmatizing relief. Perceptions of minorities as morally inept supported the absence of provisions for Black people and further substantiated a hierarchy within the labor force, a necessary element of capitalism. Day and Schiele (2012) explain that COS existed to uphold industrial capitalism through subduing dissension among the poor and maintaining a low-wage workforce. Similarly, the Settlement House Movement upheld oppressive practices by excluding Black residents, further expanding social work's foundational racism (McCutcheon, 2019).

Gary and Gary (1994) discuss that the divisiveness and discrimination apparent in the foundation of the social work profession is inherent to social work education. While the COS founded the Summer School of Philanthropic work in 1898 as the first social work program, it primarily served white students (Gary & Gary, 1994). During that time, segregated school systems denied Black people access to white social work programs. Much like the denial of service provision, Black people were forced to meet their own

educational needs by establishing the first Black social work program at Fisk University in 1911 (Gary & Gary, 1994). Black higher educational institutions were, and remain, underfunded and under-resourced, hindering the training needed to thrive in the profession (Daniel, 2016). For instance, in 2015, Black higher educational institutions received approximately $2.2 billion in funding from federal, state, and local sources, while predominantly White institutions (PWIs) received more than $94 billion from these same funding sources (Williams & Davis, 2019). To put this into a greater perspective, in 2014, four PWIs received more revenue from federal, state, and local grants and contracts than all four-year Historically Black Colleges and Universities collectively (Toldson, 2016). This lack of funding increases vulnerability to low student retention rates, technology and infrastructure deficiencies, lack of vital resources, the decline in enrollments, and threats of closures (Gasman & Commodore, 2014; Richards & Awokoya, 2012). This makes it difficult to sustain the disproportionate number of predominantly first-generation Black student populations from low-income backgrounds (Saunders et al., 2016). Consequently, upon graduating, many Black social workers could not afford to further their education, accrued higher rates of educational debt, and had to solidify employment immediately; forcing them to settle for lower-paying positions (Masocha, 2015; Salsberg et al., 2020; Saunders et al., 2016). This exploitation exemplifies capitalism by filling labor needs at the lowest possible costs by limiting professional specialization, thus ensuring a division of labor that favors the privileged.

Initially, social work programs operated without a unified governing organization (Day & Schiele, 2012). The CSWE was established in 1952 to create an accrediting body for social work programs, standardizing social work education programs (CSWE, 2021). Mandates for social work practicum were established approximately 30 years later through CSWE's Council on Accreditation with the intent to integrate theory and practice; practicum hours were designated at 400 hours for Bachelor's level students and 900 for Master's level students (Raskin et al., 2008). The impetus for these requirements was to support social work programs in requesting additional funding and resources, though they lacked empirical validity (Buck & Sowbel, 2016; Raskin et al., 2008). Consideration was not given to the feasibility of students to meet such requirements; rather, the assumption of availability was made and remains intact.

Current practicum requirements mirror past practices of professional volunteerism by demanding students to work for free, a privilege few can afford. Today, funding for college is an issue for students of many ethnic and racial backgrounds, given increases in fiscal responsibilities (Owens et al., 2010). However, Black students are more likely to incur substantially higher educational debt rates than their white counterparts; Black students incur an average of $92,000 in total educational debt compared to the average debt of $57,000 for white students (Salsberg et al., 2020). Bachelor's degrees allow social workers admittance to the profession with employment opportunities in direct practice "frontline" positions earning low salaries. Master's degrees serve as the terminal degree for the profession, granting social workers access to leadership and supervisory positions in practice settings. Black students take longer to earn an MSW degree though they are more likely to hold a BSW while also having work experience related to the social work profession (Salsberg et al., 2019). Maintaining the status quo keeps the current

demographic makeup of social workers within their current positions; Black social workers are more likely to be employed at the BSW level than at the MSW level (Salsberg et al., 2019). This serves capitalism while being in direct opposition to social work values and tenets.

Social Work Practicum Process Through Critical Race Theory Lens

The effects of the practicum process on the ability of Black social work students to successfully complete BSW and MSW programs are not fully understood. However, the disparities in degree attainment and published research results are evidence of race-based issues within social work education. The basic tenets of critical race theory are outlined in Table 1 and explored below to illuminate these issues, particularly how social work education's claims of objectivity and neutrality normalize and perpetuate racism. These tenets frame how this is accomplished through the structural inequalities that permeate the requirements of the signature pedagogy of social work education — practicum.

Table 1. *Tenets of Critical Race Theory*

1. Color blindness
2. Interest convergence/materialist determinism
3. Race as a social construction
4. Differential racialization
5. Antiessentialism/intersectionality
6. Unique voices of color or counterstories

1. Color blindness

Racism is a pervasive, never-ending cycle of occurrences in the lives of Black people. It is rooted in the United States (US) social structures and practices and is so embedded in societal norms that the effects on Black people often go unnoticed by people with white privilege. This allows racism to permeate and grow from one generation to the next, thus ensuring current power structures are upheld. As a product of US society, social work practicum often displays color blindness masked by the profession's "good" intent and ethical obligations. It is inferred that a profession charged with advocating for social justice and the dignity and worth of a person is inherently equitable and anti-racist. Thus, the profession has existed without the necessary interrogation of its practices and practicum placements. Practicum instructors and supervisors serve as critical gatekeepers given their role within social work's signature pedagogy. In addition to signing off on student's competency for practicum requirements, they often provide recommendations for employment and further degree attainment. This power dynamic can impact the launching of students' careers and informs their overall professional self-concept.

Deferring to color-blindness due to discomfort in addressing race-related issues transfers a weighty responsibility from the instructor onto students (Milner, 2010). Black students must then negotiate between the risk of being labeled as lazy, angry and aggressive, or being silently complicit in the face of oppression. Regardless of the decision,

the experience shapes how students form their identity as social workers and their perceptions of the profession. The use of race-neutral pedagogical and administrative practices not only compromises student's learning outcomes and associated health outcomes but also denotes a lack of competence (Razack, 2001; Nebeker, 1998). Practicum instructors are encouraged to be culturally competent (knowledge-based) but not culturally proficient (action-based) (Cross et al., 1989). Therefore, most professional training on cultural awareness is insufficient in building that cultural proficiency due to the omission of institutional racism, power dynamics, and white privilege in the training curriculum (Shepherd et al., 2019). To shift from the current practice of color blindness, practicum instructors and supervisors should engage in trainings focused on color consciousness, a practice that considers the context of racial discrimination and privilege (Constance-Huggins & Davis, 2017). For example, the Color-Conscious Multicultural Mindfulness (CCMM) training allows for persons not directly impacted by racial oppression to enhance their perspective on race and culture through the use of mindfulness techniques (Lenes et al., 2020). The CCMM training has been shown to promote significant color-blindness changes related to privilege and institutional and overt racism.

2. Interest convergence/materialist determinism

Racism and oppression are economically and psychologically advantageous to the majority. It has been documented that Black workers spend an average of 38.7 hours weekly in the work environment compared to 38.9 for Whites (Bureau of Labor Statistics [BLS], 2020a). Although these working hours are comparable, Blacks have an unemployment rate of 6.5 versus 3.5 for Whites (BLS, 2020b). Despite the efforts of the Civil Rights movement, there has been no real change in the level of racial employment discrimination against Blacks over the past 25 years (Quillian et al., 2017). This has implications for the Black-student professional as they are initiated to social work employment through social work practicums. Social work employment is projected to experience a 13% increase by 2029 (BLS, 2020b). Hence, social work education programs must meet that need while considering the demographic shift towards a more racially and ethnically pluralistic United States (Olcoń, 2020). It is in the profession's interest to produce social workers representative of that demographic shift. Therefore, progressive change occurs when the majority's interests converge with the oppressed (Abrams & Moio, 2009; Bell, 1995). While progressive change is needed, the lack of interrogating the impetus for needed change ensures that current power structures are upheld.

For instance, social work practicum placements benefit from the free labor provided by students (Harmon, 2017; Unrau et al., 2020). This is particularly taxing for Black students as they experience more significant financial strain while enrolled in social work programs (Salsberg et al., 2020). Therefore, Black students are more at risk of missing work resulting in loss of income or practicum hours, resulting in prolonged matriculation. This further ensures that Black people are more likely to be in frontline social work adjacent positions that do not require advanced degrees, reassuring the success of capitalism and the continuation of privilege. Karl Marx pointed out that capitalism exploits working people by usurping their social value through their labor (Hollander, 2008).

3. Race as a social construction

Race is designed by society to place individuals in designated categories based on physicality and is not rooted in any biological or scientific reality. These categories are hierarchized as a means to support an economy that ensures privilege by way of disparity. The implications of racial hierarchization can be seen within the social work profession through its composition and service delivery. Black students matriculate through social work programs under a white gaze; the scrutiny of white peoples' perceptions is rooted in stereotypes of racialized people's inadequacy (hooks, 1992; Miehls, 2001). Under the measuring stick of white centeredness and privilege, Black students are to learn and perform. This can result in experiences of marginalization within practicum placements (Razack, 2001).

Fairtlough and colleagues (2014) note that the differential access to social, cultural, and economic capital creates challenges for Black students' matriculation. These challenges pose a threat to degree completion, which sustains power structures of racial hierarchies. Stress related to the responsibilities accrued due to differential access impacts students' experiences and progress. Black students are more likely to have caregiving responsibilities, inaccessibility to reliable transportation, and financial responsibilities that require them to be employed while in school (Unrau et al., 2020); these stressors are compounded by the judgement and isolation often experienced within predominantly white placements (Fairtlough et al., 2014). The negative assessments based on discriminatory perceptions of nonverbal behavior and the assignment of tokenism towards a Black student who contradicts stereotypes indicate the power of the white gaze and the social construct of race. The penalization of students for not adhering to white norms and not having the resources for certain placements should be reassessed as a shortcoming of practicum placements and not that of students (Fairtlough et al., 2014).

4. Differential racialization

Differential racialization allows for practicum placements to assume a position of diversity and inclusion as the presence of members from one oppressed group can represent all minorities (Bonilla-Silva, 1997). The fluctuating attention given to racialized groups is attributed to shifts in economic and political climates (Campbell, 2014; Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). Historically, groups have been racialized and oppressed based on the needs of the majority at that time. While minorities of one group see progress, other minority groups find themselves at a more significant disparity. This ensures that capitalism can function as intended by way of exploitation. Additionally, it waters down the pervasiveness of racism by not overtly oppressing all racialized minorities simultaneously, thus hindering solidarity and collective action. In marginalized Black students, their experience with racism may be deflected, which increases feelings of isolation. As the intent to persist within educational programs is impacted by a students' sense of belonging and their relationships with faculty, the muting of experiences with racism can be damaging to academic success (Beadlescomb, 2019).

Schiele (2007) conceptualizes how the *equality-of-oppressions* – a paradigm that assumes no hierarchy in forms of oppression – weakens social work education's capacity to address race and racism effectively. It is critical to support all groups who feel oppressed, discriminated against, and marginalized. However, within the social work profession, this is often done at the expense of Black people by leveling the pervasiveness of racism with other oppressions regardless of the variance in risk and impact. For example, Graham and Schiele (2010) point out that the equality-of-oppressions paradigm takes a one-dimensional assessment of racism mainly focused on economic status. It does not consider the more contemporary face of racism that perpetuates benefits to the dominant population at the expense of the minority population. It also does not consider that there are varying degrees and differential ways that minority groups experience oppression. They posit that this increases the prevalence of color-blindness and increases the idea that racism is declining. They go on to recommend the use of differential vulnerability to determine risk and impact using Young's (1990) *five faces of oppression paradigm*: (1) marginalization; (2) powerlessness; (3) exploitation; (4) cultural imperialism; and (5) violence. In this paradigm, marginalization places minority populations at the most significant vulnerability based on the oppressive acts that place them outside of society.

5. Antiessentialism/intersectionality

A focus on the social construct of race often ignores the multiple identities of individuals who face different aspects of oppression and marginalization. Using a cookie-cutter response to oppression may force a person to prioritize one part of their identity, leaving other oppressed parts of their identity to go unacknowledged. Negating the full context of Black students' identity reinforces racial stereotypes, silences opportunity for self-advocacy, and limits the prospect to harness their greatest professional tool; the use of self. These experiences impact the cultivation of their social work professional identity as having to compartmentalize one's identity creates a level of dissonance. Additionally, it models behavior for white interns, which perpetuates the cycle of white supremacy and racist ideologies.

Not considering intersectionality allows for the misuse of Black students within practicum placements. Predominantly white placements whose client base is predominantly Black may overestimate Black interns' competence at rapport building. This monolithic assumption of Black people is harmful to the academic process and the outcomes of service delivery. Intersectionality allows for acknowledging all dimensions of diversity within the context of societal structures, oppression, and privilege (Crenshaw, 1989). Failure to instill this concept within students fails to teach students to "engage diversity and difference in practice"; an accreditation standard established by the Council of Social Work Education (CSWE, 2015; Olcoń, 2020, p. 215).

6. Unique voices of color or counterstories

History is told from a dominant worldview through a white-centered lens and regularly excludes the Black perspective. Jane Addams and the Hull House are marked as the birth of social work. However, it is rarely acknowledged that the Hull House was segregated

until the 1930s. Black settlement houses like the Phyllis Wheatley settlement house in Minneapolis, Minnesota; the Wendell Phillips Settlement House in Chicago, Illinois; and the Lincoln Settlement House in New York, had limited autonomy on how Blacks could be serviced as the Board of Directors were all white members. This control over service delivery supported the "do-gooder" narrative while maintaining power structures and social control. Controlling the narrative is essential to upholding white supremacy, as evident in the erasure of the contributions of Black people to the profession. This is done through a social work education that is racially ahistorical. Settlement houses that were established and run solely by Black people are rarely discussed in classrooms. Mutual aid and self-help have historically been fundamental to the Black community, with roots in the African Tradition, transferred in the Transatlantic Slave Trade, and honed during the American enslavement period (Carlton-LaNey, 1999). The contributions of Black social work pioneers such as Mary Church Terrell, Lugenia Burns Hope, or Willie Gertrude Brown are often overlooked. The Black historical context is limited to discussions of the contemporary implications of discriminatory policies.

Carlton-LaNey (1999) apprises that the profession fails to acknowledge the contributions of Black people, evidenced by their lack of interest in researching, attaining, and understanding Black pioneers' historical imprint on the profession. By not acknowledging what Black people did for themselves and the overall profession, the current narrative supports racial hierarchies and stereotypes by highlighting whites as givers and Black people as needy. The centering of the white voice in social work education limits the full context of the profession and disallows Black students from seeing themselves within the profession. CRT maintains that the use of voices of color is essential as racial minorities have a level of assumed competence on topics of race and racism. A marginalized stance can lend itself to a position of strength and radical possibility (Collins, 1990; hooks, 1992). Defining student success by the ability to conform to established norms negates the experiences of students who have succeeded from a stance of resistance as a means to transform systems (Solórzano & Villalpando, 1998). Considering these counterstories is to consider and acknowledge students' active participation in social justice while also illuminating the social work profession's role in upholding injustice. This process would require social work professors and supervisors to interrogate their level of competence with diversity.

Case Examples

The following case examples are based on the accounts and descriptions of student experiences by a social work practicum administrator who is one of the co-authors. The nature of the social work practicum, in its current form, requires a sacrificial commitment by students that often forces them into similarly precarious circumstances as the clients they serve in their placements. How can the social work profession mandate a requirement that nearly forces students to divest from their own intention to succeed? How do we reflect dignity and worth of the person and social justice as professional values, while devaluing Black students through our inattention to systemic challenges that impact their matriculation? The following case examples highlight the practicum experiences of Black students through a CRT lens.

Case Example 1

A 35-year-old Black man enrolled in an MSW program at a predominantly white institution comes to meet with the social work practicum administrator to discuss his placement options. He requested to meet with the social work practicum administrator to discuss his options for a change in placement that will help to diversify his skillset. He has over 10 years of experience working at a Juvenile Justice Center, where he reported that he will remain employed full time while in school. During the meeting, it was determined that his job, home, and the university he attends are within a 5-mile radius. However, he is placed at a children's center for court-ordered youth located 45 minutes away from his home. The social work practicum administrator responds to his inquiry by saying, "this really is the best placement for you because the clients need people that are like them who they can connect with." While the social work practicum administrator meets with the supervisor and reflects on her case notes, it emerged that there was limited consideration for the student's desire to expand his competence in areas of social work that were not related to criminal justice. The final decision was made that he would remain placed at the children's center because the practicum supervisor reported that there was a need for Black male interns to connect with their current client population.

Interest convergence allowed for this Black male student to be used for free labor at the expense of his educational experiences, making it more beneficial for the practicum than the student (Abrams & Moio, 2009; Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). Using race as the qualifier for assigning practicum placements is an inherently prejudiced essentialist practice that assumes competence based on a social construct. It implicitly infers Black clients' inability to work with white providers and white providers' incompetence with anyone who is not white. Additionally, it upholds a limiting narrative that Black social workers should only work with Black clients; a population most often underserved. This can create a false *just-like-me* social work labor force using the bodies of Black student-professionals, which may decrease overall self-efficacy related to social work skills. Black students who may find it difficult to relate to their clients in a way that is expected by their practicum supervisor may develop an adverse reaction to their practicum experience. An adverse reaction may include experiencing *impostor syndrome*, coined by Clance and Imes (1978)—which are internalized feelings of fake intelligence despite ample object evidence of their high level of intellectual capacities. This is a complicated issue for Black students as they may already have been treated as impostors in other work environments managed by the white majority. Cokley et al. (2013) found that there was a positive association between Black college students reporting anxiety and discrimination-related depression and their positive identification of experiencing impostor syndrome. Homogenizing Black students in the social work practicum environment is beneficial to fill the workforce gaps of many agencies in response to the needs of many of their underrepresented and oppressed clients. However, treating Black students as if they have a single shared experience maintains racial hierarchization, power, and privilege.

Case Example 2

> A 24-year-old Black woman is in the final year of an MSW program. She is assigned a child welfare placement at a predominantly white organization located in a predominantly Black urban environment. Most of the interns at the placement attend the same predominantly white university. The student is one of two students who attend a Historically Black University. While the interns and supervisors collectively watch the inauguration of President Barack Obama in the conference room, the student voices her excitement for the new President. The director of the organization shakes his head and says, "this is a bad move for the country." The student attempts to professionally engage the director about his comment. During the discussion, the student uses research from Black scholars to support her statements; the director denounces the validity of the research because "people have never heard of them." Later that day, the director requests a meeting with the student. He states to her, "your arrogance may not go over well in some spaces." For the remainder of the semester, she receives lower ratings on her performance reports without any evident changes in behavior or productivity.

Centering the white voice helps to maintain power. By denouncing the credibility of Black scholars, the director in this example attempted to erase the contributions of his Black colleagues while also implicitly trivializing the future contributions of a Black student. He modelled prejudiced behavior for white students, which could result in them upholding such ideals throughout their careers. Additionally, through labeling the student, he helps to shape her social work professional identity and forces her to choose between self-silencing or the consequences of advocacy.

Case Example 3

> A 27-year old Black woman enrolled part-time in an MSW program also works as an Assistant Director of a local homeless shelter. The student commuted to class from a distance of 4 hours round-trip, once per week. The MSW program approved an employment-based placement, since decreasing her full-time work hours posed financial difficulties for her. She also had financial caretaking responsibilities for her grandmother. The student worked at the shelter from 7am - 3pm and worked at her practicum placement from 4pm - 9pm, Monday through Friday. She slept an average of 4-5 hours per night to successfully complete her coursework, which impacted her health. She had emergency surgery mid-semester and had a sudden close family death weeks after. The surgery and the sudden loss required her to miss practicum hours and course deadlines, which she worked to make up. She discussed leaving the program with her Black professor after her white practicum director indifferently reminded her of her requirements to graduate.

Black students are often involved in practicum assignments that create chronic stressors and are a burden on their time and finances without opportunities to negotiate. Due to the effects of internalized oppression, many students have not fully developed the agency to assert their discomfort and seem to relieve their stress through the process of John

Henryism Active Coping (JHAC; James et al., 1983). Black students engaged in social work practicum may use this type of coping strategy to alleviate the stress stimuli associated with racial discrimination by adhering to a sustained intense commitment to hard work and success. In doing so, Black students intend to dispel the work-stereotype threat of "laziness" by intensely focusing and increasing practicum task performances. Unfortunately, the high-effort strategies used to accomplish JHAC in the workplace have been found to be positively associated with a greater likelihood of health issues (Hudson et al., 2016; Kramer et al., 2015).

Discussion

Understanding the current climate, which highlights ongoing racism and social justice issues and the noted historical oppression that permeates the social work profession, it is imperative that the profession engages in an in-depth exploration from an education and practice perspective. Attention should be given to how racism and oppressive practices are upheld within social work's "signature pedagogy" and its impact on students and the growth of the entire profession. As highlighted in this article, Black students often face many challenges as they navigate their social work education. These challenges can lead to early career burnout (Amir et al., 2018), the reduction in workforce diversity (Salsberg et al., 2017), increased behavioral health challenges (Cokley et al., 2013), and as previously mentioned, increased time to obtain their Master's degree (Dinnerson, 2019).

To reduce and protect Black students from the many challenges highlighted in this article, social workers and the profession must move towards increasing anti-racist practices (Ladhani & Sitter, 2020). It is no longer enough not to be racist; social workers must commit to making unbiased choices and being anti-racist in all aspects of their lives. As a profession, it is crucial to be intentional with our efforts and change the current practices. In keeping in line with the tenets of the CRT, the following are offered as suggestions to help reduce the oppressive nature of practicum at the individual and institutional levels within social work education. In particular, we offer practical suggestions which can be implemented immediately by schools of social work.

Programs can start with the recognition and open discussion among social work programs regarding the role of privilege and microaggressions within and among the existing faculty and staff. It would also require a deep dive into the explicit curriculum to better understand existing practices of covert oppression, discrimination, and racism (Brown et al., 2019). One such example of this exploration could be around language, understanding what language is used and how it is perceived by minority and marginalized groups. An example of this is the widely used term "*field education*" for the social work practicum or internship experience. This term is used without considering its unintentional traumatic associations, among Black students, with the terms *field slave* or *field Negro*, who worked outdoors often in very harsh and oppressive conditions. This is supported by DeGruy's (2005) theory of Post-Traumatic Slave Syndrome (PTSS). PTSS is a theory that provides a conceptual explanation for the etiology of psychosocial disorders among Blacks as a consequence of slavery in the form of multigenerational oppression of Africans and their descendants; stereotypes that Black people were inherently and genetically inferior to

whites; and institutional racism. While this may not be the intent of the social work practicum, exploring alternative words such as internship, externship, practicum, residency, etc. should be explored to remove the possible negative impact on Black students.

In addressing the aspect of color blindness, practicum instructors and supervisors should engage in more culturally responsive training that focuses on increasing their understanding regarding contextual factors of discrimination and privilege. This would highlight the importance of seeing an individual's race and the multiple points of intersectionality that could influence various interactions within the placement. Moreover, instructors and supervisors should also be open to and embrace the process of storytelling, counter-storytelling, and naming one's reality. To engage in this practice, social workers need to look internally at their understanding of diversity, oppression, and racism. Addressing this tenet would mean placing value on the voices and stories of students and their experiences. This includes the negative experiences that may arise from their participation in the program as a whole or within the practicum placement (Davis & Livingstone, 2016). Ongoing assessment of the implicit curriculum must take place using a CRT lens to capture these stories better and determine the appropriate corrective actions needed to alleviate oppressive practices.

As social work education starts to address racism within the profession, it is imperative that an anti-racist lens be engaged for an active process of understanding race and racism. Understanding race as a social construct and taking actions to end racial inequalities is essential. Another suggestion for social workers to take an active role in understanding this approach is to understand better the placements' sites with which they partner. This would involve practicum placements identifying the needs of their organizations so that students can better understand what is required of them. This would also involve an active process of students engaging in the placement process rather than being "placed" at the will of the program. This approach would alleviate the negative impact of students not being able to fully meet the agency's needs due to lack of resources or additional obligations, which Black students often express. This would also help practicum instructors gain a better understanding of the agency's view of differential racialization. Often, Black students feel isolated because they cannot identify with the agency and are placed in roles that highlight the agency's ideas of "diversity." Understanding how differential racialization impacts Black students would allow for increased storytelling and possible counter-narratives (Davis & Livingstone, 2016).

Moreover, through a process of in-depth exploration and assessment, social work programs can better understand and recognize the role of interest convergence and materialist determinism which promotes the use of student practicums as a means for real-world training but fails to acknowledge the "free labor" aspect that is provided to practicum agencies. This "free labor" is often touted as a metric for promoting "community service" and other altruistic themes social work programs promote without recognizing that this significantly affects Black students as a result of race and economic responsibilities. As mentioned, Black students often experience barriers to degree completion, such as employment obligations that perpetuate capitalism through exploiting the labor force (Beadlescomb, 2019).

One last consideration for social work programs is to adopt an approach that centers on anti-racist education. This approach supports the idea of exposing oppressive systems and unequal power within institutional practices. In their book, Henry and Tator (2009) proposed nine key traits of anti-racist education, which highlight the importance of considering class, race, and gender inequity at the center of conversations:

1. Examining the historical roots and contemporary manifestations of racial prejudice and discrimination.
2. Exploring the influence of race and culture on one's own personal and professional attitudes and behaviors.
3. Identifying appropriate anti-racist resources to incorporate into the curriculum in different subject areas.
4. Developing new approaches to teaching children using varying cognitive approaches to diverse learning styles.
5. Identifying and counteracting bias and stereotyping in learning material.
6. Dealing with racial tensions & conflicts.
7. Identifying appropriate assessment and placement procedures and practices.
8. Assessing the hidden curriculum and making it more inclusive and reflective of all student experiences.
9. Ensuring that personnel policies and practice are consistent with equity goals and that they provide managers with the knowledge & skills to implement equity programs.

Incorporating these elements of anti-racist education throughout social work programs voices a commitment to adhering to the profession's ethical code in intent and action.

Conclusion

Examining the impact of racially-based inequity within social work practicum is a step towards bridging the profession's intent with its practices. The social work profession cannot afford to remain complicit in upholding structural racism, privilege, and oppression while the world is on the precipice of change. Doing so is a commitment to stagnation with negative implications for the future of the profession. Actualizing the code of ethics is essential to social work's legitimacy. It can only be achieved once we interrogate and change current educational practices to ensure equity amongst all members of the profession.

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