SHAPING IDENTITIES: HOW SOCIAL WORK EDUCATION MADE ME WHITE

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the reproduction and resistance of whiteness in social work education

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LAY ABSTRACT

This thesis aims to understand how whiteness is reproduced and resisted within schools of social work. Whiteness refers to the made-up system that governs and dictates societal norms. Those who follow those norms can be given certain privileges, and those that do not can experience disadvantages. It is a complicated system that affects everything in society, like how we think, what we think is normal, what we value, and how society works. Whiteness does not refer to white people, anyone can embody whiteness. This study explores how certain parts of social work education can influence the people involved with it through teaching or learning, to adopt certain aspects of whiteness. Participants identified how this was happening and offered how solutions to resist the adoption of whiteness while being involved with social work education.

ABSTRACT

During my Bachelor of Social Work studies, I noticed I was changing to fit the mould of a "social worker." As I questioned what that meant, I recognized that the whiteness of the institution was also teaching me to embody whiteness. This is a complex issue as all social work students, regardless of race, acquire the power and privilege of a social worker upon graduation, yet these aspects are transient, as explored further in this thesis. This thesis explores how social work education contributes to and resists reproducing whiteness. Grounded in critical race theory and operating from the understanding that whiteness does not equate to white people, meaning that anyone can embody whiteness, this study asks whether participating in social work education can make you white. Guided by grounded theory, this study examines the influence of whiteness on the identities, self-perception and academic experiences of individuals engaged in social work education, encompassing both teaching and learning. This exploration was conducted through in-depth interviews with five individuals representing diverse levels of teaching experience within Canadian schools of social work. It concludes with methods used to resist and challenge whiteness within education. The findings of this study suggest that the power dynamics within social work schools, relationships with knowledge, program structures and cultures contribute to enforcing the reproduction of whiteness and that participating in it can make you white. However, participants identified methods for resistance such as community building, diverse learning approaches, and curriculum decolonization. The reproduction of whiteness is not confined to schools of social work, it is embedded in many parts of higher education. Many of the methods of resistance identified within this thesis can be applied to other parts of the academy.

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

WHAT MY THESIS IS ABOUT

My experience during the completion of my Bachelor of Social Work has inspired my research question. Throughout my four years, I noticed that I was changing and conforming to fit the mould that I was being presented as a "social worker". Over time I began to question what it means to be a social worker, what new characteristics I must take on, and which old ones to disregard to succeed in this new role. I recognized that I was being taught an overwhelmingly white curriculum in which it is all but expected that a social worker is a white person and that the client or service user will be "othered," whether racially or through another form of social categorization. This combined with being taught by people that strongly embodied whiteness in various ways, led me to realize that not only was I being trained to be a "social worker," I was being taught to be white. This is a very complex discussion because while all students may enter social work education with differing levels of privilege and marginalization, regardless of race, it is all but expected that once we graduate and enter the field, we will all have the power and privilege that comes with being a social worker. But just like whiteness, this power and privilege is transitory, which will be discussed later in this thesis.

The self-discovery that I was being conditioned to be white led to many discussions with classmates, professors and social workers in the field about how their role and education to become a social worker has altered their identity and sense of self. These thoughts were solidified recently during my experiences as a service user with Children's Aid. On leave from my masters of social work, I gave birth to my daughter and within a few weeks, Children's Aid contacted me for refusing a voluntary home visit from the Healthy Babies program. On the

report, I was labelled as a caregiver with a problem for being a young, racialized mother with historic use of cannabis. The treatment I received from the social worker before and after she found out I, too, was a social worker, was not surprising but still disappointing. It was interesting to note that she was also black. This demonstrated two lessons: the first, that the privilege that comes with being a social worker is not consistent and can be removed as quickly as it comes, and the second is that regardless of race, everyone can embody and uphold whiteness. These discussions and experiences confirmed, to different extents and in different contexts, that there is a foundation of whiteness within social work education and the field. The works of many racialized scholars, such as Carter Woodson, Jason Arday and Heidi Safia Mirza, confirm that the racialized student experience of exchange of self for whiteness is not just something that occurs within schools of social work but rather higher education as a whole (Arday, 2018; Mirza, 2018; Woodson, 2010).

The whitening effect of education is a problem, especially in social work. The Canadian Association of Social Workers' Code of Ethics is integral in Canadian social work education, two highly emphasized values are the pursuit of social justice and service to humanity. The social work academy provides a unique environment to explore the phenomenon of becoming white through higher education, as the ethical value of social justice, in combination with the specific knowledge held and taught in the school of social work, creates an environment where, on the surface, we seem to challenge whiteness. This prompts the question, how is it that whiteness can evade our attempts and intentions and still reproduce? Within social work education, we learn about whiteness and are encouraged to explore and challenge it to an extent, as long as it does not disrupt the academy.

This research aims to examine the ways social work education contributes to and resists the reproduction of whiteness. The study looks at the ways social work education and its relationship to whiteness impacts one's identity, sense of self and relationships with power as experienced by social work educators. The purpose of this research is not only to understand how whiteness is being perpetuated but also to explore how we can challenge it and create lasting, meaningful change in our pursuit of an equitable society. I chose to explore this with social work educators because of their insider knowledge of the institution, influence over classroom culture, social work values and potential experience with naming and addressing institutional whiteness. They hold knowledge of the inner workings of the institution and the broader academic world, and due to their focus on social work and the integration of social work values, it is suspected that they could have the knowledge to critically analyze this phenomenon. Additionally, their position within the academy and the amount of time spent being involved with the institution could provide insight into patterns that people less connected to the academy may miss. Moreover, with the pervasiveness of whiteness within higher education, I suspect that they would have experiences of it within the institution and opportunities to potentially address it. The power over the culture of their classrooms, a crucial place where this phenomenon occurs, means that they may be trying to address it or have found methods to mitigate the impacts of whiteness within their work. This perspective allows them to provide nuanced insights into how whiteness operates within social work education.

Ultimately, my research program will examine how schools of social work reproduce, perpetuate, and resist whiteness. The focus of this thesis will be on the experience of social work educators; I explore several questions. Do they feel that their own social work education made or tried to make them white? To what extent do they recognize whiteness in social work education

and in themselves as social work educators? What strategies and interventions can be identified to effectively challenge and dismantle the perpetuation of whiteness in social work education?

INTRODUCTION TO WHAT I'M TALKING ABOUT

Whiteness, as understood by scholars such as W.E.B. Du Bois and other critical race theorists, refers to a socially constructed system that has historically conferred privilege, power, and dominance to individuals who are perceived as white. It encompasses a set of social, cultural, and institutional practices that reinforce and maintain the racial hierarchy, where people that embody whiteness are positioned at the top. It must not be conflated with white people as anybody can embody whiteness (Jennings, 2018). Whiteness is not merely an individual identity but a complex system that permeates all aspects of society, shaping norms, values, and social structures. It operates through both explicit and implicit mechanisms, perpetuating inequality and systemic racism as it is used as a tool for domination and control. Understanding whiteness involves critically examining its historical, cultural, and political dimensions as it permeates every system.

The post-secondary education system has been critiqued for maintaining and enforcing whiteness through its curriculum, processes, and overall culture, as literature suggests that the academy is the heart of whiteness (Mirza, 2018). The curriculum often reflects a Eurocentric perspective, focusing on the achievements and perspectives of white individuals while neglecting and dismissing the contributions and experiences of people of colour (Arday, 2018; Peters, 2018). This erasure reinforces the idea that knowledge and expertise are predominantly created through whiteness, effectively maintaining the myth of white supremacy because they, the institution, choose what is valid and scholarly (Duhaney, 2010; Wagner & Yee, 2011).

Additionally, the lack of diversity among faculty and administration perpetuates a predominantly white power structure, making it challenging for students of colour to find mentorship and support, forcing students to adapt or assimilate to feel a sense of safety and belonging (Arday, 2018; Duhaney, 2010). Furthermore, racial discrimination persists within the campus climate, as incidents of bias, micro-aggressions, and exclusionary practices continue to be reported (Bonilla-Silva & Peoples, 2022; Phillip, 2022). These factors collectively contribute to a system that maintains and reinforces whiteness, resulting in educational inequities and limited opportunities for marginalized communities within higher education. Moreover, even when opportunities are presented, we risk our identity and sense of self for a false sense of inclusion, as it is merely an inclusion into whiteness because in order to exist in this space, we must embody whiteness to an extent. Addressing these issues requires a comprehensive examination and transformation of policies, curricula, hiring practices, and campus cultures to foster inclusivity, equity, and representation. This thesis will focus specifically on the ways social work education contributes to, enforces, and challenges whiteness.

In a class, I encountered the following questions that served as prompts for this introduction: Why was this topic my choice? What makes me "qualified" to pursue this? Which aspects of my identity and experiences shape this research? As I sit here, contemplating the core aspects of my identity that inform and justify my work, I cannot help but feel that this process reflects the influence of whiteness. It is challenging to summarize my entire being on paper, and attempting to do so feels reductive. I am so much more than what can be expressed in a paper or a thesis. Throughout my thesis journey, I have grappled with how to remain true to myself and resist the pressures of whiteness in my everyday life and education while also producing work that is scholarly and "worthy" of being published, as we are encouraged to do so. This

introduction, in my own way, signifies my refusal to be reduced to the trauma inflicted by the education system.

I cannot explain the deep anger I feel as I try to determine which aspects of myself should be presented to establish my qualifications. I am qualified to discuss this topic based on my personal experiences as a black individual within the education system. I was drawn to this research not solely out of passion but because it forcefully presented itself to me due to the body that I am in. I recognize that this is something that is woven into the structure of every system within society, and to work towards an equitable society means exploring the core of whiteness. Personally, I feel that not doing so means that the work I do will lack meaning because it will always be distorted and inauthentic due to the pervasiveness of whiteness, as one of its tools for reproduction is co-opting methods of resistance and using it for its own benefits as can be seen with the current trend of equity work. Understanding whiteness, for me, has become an avenue to understanding life itself.

There are many other areas of research I would love to explore but I feel that the pervasiveness of whiteness within the institution limits the ability to explore what I would like to in a way that would be deeply meaningful to myself and my community. Do you understand what I mean? Regardless of what I do, this system will continue reproducing whiteness and harm. I feel I must confront it head-on, whether it's through this work or through living as my authentic self, which can be difficult as a black/mixed person living in an overwhelmingly white community.

CHAPTER TWO: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Critical race theory offers a framework for understanding how whiteness reproduces itself in social work education. Founded in legal studies, critical race theory follows the understanding that there is no such thing as objectivity or neutrality in the law or the broader structure of society (Delgado & Stefanic, 2017). One key understanding of critical race theory is that racism is deliberate and embedded in society's structure to benefit the dominant (Delgado & Stefanic, 2017). Furthermore, CRT rejects essentialism, meaning that it recognizes that intersectionality is critical to understanding diverse identities and how the system oppresses them (Delgado & Stefanic, 2017). As Grier and Poole explain, the way a middle-class black woman with a disability experiences the world will not be the same as a working-class Asian woman that is able-bodied (2020). Factors such as economic status, sexuality, race, citizenship status, ability and class impact one's ability to have or gain access to resources and spaces; thus, all intersections must be considered to see a fulsome picture of one's reality.

A common misunderstanding of CRT is that it focuses too heavily on racism, thus neglecting other forms of oppression, such as those mentioned above. However, a core tenet of CRT is the understanding that people do not exist within monolithic identities (Constance-Huggins, 2012). While there are key elements that are considered staples in critical race theory, different scholars may value each element differently and may choose to focus on certain ones over others (Delgado & Stefanic, 2017). The four elements that are central to the framework used in this paper are the ordinariness of racism, material determination, differential racialization and the value of voice (Delgado & Stefanic, 2017).

ORDINARINESS

Ordinariness touches on the understanding that racism is so deeply ingrained in the structure of society that it has become the norm, making it difficult to name and address, as it was intended to be (Delgado & Stefanic, 2017). The implication that this could have on the research is tied to the difficulty of identifying and addressing whiteness due to its ordinariness (Constance-Huggins, 2012). Like racism, whiteness is the norm, which makes the resistance and identification aspects of whiteness difficult, this explains why in institutions, even those where resistance may be found, whiteness is still difficult to address.

MATERIAL DETERMINATION

The second element is material determination otherwise known as Interest convergence, which suggests that the dominant will often make decisions that appear to be in the best interest of an oppressed group. However, they will only do so if it benefits the dominant group (Delgado & Stefanic, 2017). This suggests that when a decision is made one must be critical of the motivating factors behind it, posing the question of did this change occur in the name of justice or out of self-interest (Delgado & Stefanic, 2017). This is important because it highlights the tensions that remain between the dominant and the subordinate, in which the dominant holds the power to determine the outcome for the subordinate. This is tied to whiteness in academia because the dominant still has control of the academic sphere and what is taught, thus, they are still able to reproduce whiteness. This leads to the question of whether having a diverse staff and student body makes a difference in the reproduction of whiteness or if diversity work is done to enhance the image of the institution.

DIFFERENTIAL RACIALIZATION

The third element is differential racialization which is the understanding that not every race is treated equally and treatment changes over time (Delgado & Stefanic, 2017). Examples of differential treatment can be seen in the way that East Asian communities are stereotyped as the model minority (Constance-Huggins, 2012). This means that people are going to experience whiteness in academia differently based on their identity and perception of differential racialization, which will be explored in the literature review (Grier & Poole, 2020).

VALUE OF VOICE

The final element is the value of voice and the telling of stories. CRT recognizes that the methods and frameworks often used in academia and research are colonial tools that often do not have the depth or ability to address or analyze racism and whiteness (Grier & Poole, 2020). One of the goals of CRT was to challenge the dominant ideology that reproduces whiteness; thus, CRT allows for space to challenge and analyze what has been established as the norm (Grier & Poole, 2020). Moreover, the deliberate intention to hear the voices of people of colour and to acknowledge that Western, dominant perspectives are disproportionately represented and valued in academia, acts as a method of resistance while bringing non-traditional ways of knowing to the forefront. A part of whiteness in academia is using traditional tools and methods to minimize the voices of the marginalized, thus, CRT makes a deliberate effort to ensure that the voices of the marginalized are heard.

While it may have been developed through legal studies, CRT fits particularly well with social work due to its social justice roots and commitment to addressing oppression (Constance-Huggins, 2012). Furthermore, a central premise of CRT is that it prioritizes looking to the broader structures that govern our everyday lives to deepen the understanding of oppression and

how it is perpetuated (Delgado & Stefanic, 2017). However, despite the apparent similarities

between CRT and social work values, it is crucial to take into account the reality that social work

has often been used as a colonial tool for oppression, as seen through the sixties and millennial

scoops. Thus, when analyzing the reproduction of whiteness through social work education,

rather than looking at the values and intentions of social work education, one must look at the

real outcomes. In order to disrupt the constant cycle of whiteness in academia, we must

understand how it is embedded at the core of academia. A key component of CRT is that it

suggests looking to history to understand the origins of the issue, as it is understood that in order

to find a solution, we must first find the source (Delgado & Stefanic, 2017). Using critical race

theory as a framework has guided my research by making it clear that it is crucial to develop a

historical understanding of the relationship between whiteness and education. This will hopefully

increase the chance of finding a key source of whiteness that can be addressed in order to make

tangible change in social work academia.

LIMITATIONS OF CRITICAL RACE THEORY

CRT takes into consideration the complex realities of intersecting identities and the ways

in which intersecting oppression impacts one's access to resources and opportunities (Delgado &

Stefanic, 2017). Furthermore, it requires an understanding of how oppressive structures or

foundations are developed and maintained by looking at the historical and often colonial roots of

said structure (Delgado & Stefanic, 2017). While CRT has its benefits, there are limitations. Its

ability to look at the structural component of oppression is a benefit; however, in the ways I have

seen it taken up, I feel that it lacks the ability to completely address the complexity of the lasting

impacts of colonization, specifically by failing to explicitly acknowledge that marginalized

people can also play into the recreation of whiteness in academia and the upholding of

oppressive systems. As such, I feel that CRT paints a more black and white image, in the sense

that one is either oppressed or the oppressor but lacks the space for critical reflection on how

whiteness is upheld by more than just the dominant class. In this case, the dominant is white,

able-bodied, middle-class Christian identities. While one may suggest that this comes into play

with the attention paid to intersectionality and differential racialization, this framework led my

attention to the ways in which the marginalized are oppressed rather than the understanding that

regardless of one's identity, we can all uphold whiteness in different ways. Overall, I still believe

this to be the strongest framework for addressing whiteness in social work education.

CHAPTER THREE: LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature review is divided into three sections. The first section explores the concept

of whiteness, including various definitions, core components and how it operates. The second

section examines the relationship between education and whiteness. Finally, the third section

explores the intricate relationship between whiteness, social work, and education. This review

will serve as the cornerstone of this thesis, as it significantly influenced the research design,

particularly in terms of formulating questions and identifying gaps in this field of research.

WHAT IS WHITENESS?

While the reproduction of whiteness has little to do with one's race, it is impossible to

talk about whiteness without mentioning racialization. Race is a socially constructed concept,

yet, racialization has real implications for people's political, economic, and social lives

(Duhaney, 2010). Throughout human history, there have always been different forms of socially

constructed human stratification, similar to any other stratification, race has been used as a tool for division, whereby we are too busy fighting against each other to turn on the ruling class (Christian, 2019; Yee & Wagner, 2012). Race was developed for the purpose of racism, to capitalize by exploiting the racial "other" who, through the concept of race, are deemed lesser than, for the benefit of Europeans (Christian, 2019). With the creation of race came the creation of white supremacy, which has been used to justify genocide, colonialism, enslavement, and other forms of violence, often for capital gain (Christian, 2019). People of colour became a commodity to be used and then disposed of. A sentiment that remains today through migrant, immigrant, and prison labour (Almeida et al., 2019; Myers, 2019). This indicates that whiteness and economic prosperity are inseparable, as the core of whiteness is capitalism (Douds et al., 2019; Green et al., 2007).

Whiteness can refer to 'white culture', history, beliefs, and practices being centred as the primary way of operating in many parts of the world, particularly the 'developed' world (Jeyasingham, 2012). Being centred as the dominant means that it is viewed as the correct and standard way of being, leading to everyone, including those not considered white, being measured against it. One's proximity to whiteness, or how much whiteness they embody, can determine what privileges are afforded, when and where. Being white does not mean you are afforded all the privileges that come with whiteness, as there is far more to one's social location than just their race (Green et al., 2007). For example, being white without the ability to speak English in the Western world, could strip one of their privileges and render them 'othered' (Gardaphé, 2002). This is referred to in the literature as the migrant penalty. However, it is also an indicator of Du Bois' colour line, as the issue of white dominance moves beyond colour and can include many aspects of identity (Du Bois, 2006; Li, 2018). An example of this is Italian

immigrants moving to North America who were regarded as other in some geographic regions, but through adopting parts of whiteness and upholding it, they have become "white," which is also known as differential racialization (Delgado & Stefanic, 2017; Gardaphé, 2002). While there is not a singular definition of whiteness, there are core tenets that many current academics agree on, one of the most crucial being that whiteness is not to be conflated with white people; anyone can embody whiteness (Jennings, 2018; Jeyasingham, 2012). It must be noted that the opposite of whiteness is not blackness or racialization but liberation and self-determination (Reid-Merritt, 2010).

Knowledge of the creation and maintenance of domination is required to understand the systems of whiteness. Domination refers to the power used to create and uphold oppression; this power is self-perpetuating in the sense that it leads to access, which leads to more power and so forth (Dumbrill & Yee, 2019). For dominance to occur, a group must be dominated, thus creating a dominator versus subordinate dynamic, referred to in the literature as oppressed versus oppressor, the colonizer versus the colonized or first-class citizens versus second-class citizens. However, this dichotomy is a drastic oversimplification of oppression; the reality is far more nuanced as one can simultaneously be a part of either side (Dumbrill & Yee, 2019).

Specific parts of one's social location position them closer to or further from first-class citizenship in any given context. These include one's gender, sexual orientation, age, economic status, religious affiliation, race, class, physical or mental ability and position as a service user or provider. While people's identities cannot be reduced to this categorization, they play a role in how we experience life as they come with privileges, advantages, disadvantages, and differing levels of power (Almeida et al., 2019; Dumbrill & Yee, 2019). These experiences of power can

be very transitory; while one can access it in a particular place, one may not have the same

access in a different place or time (Duhaney, 2010; Jeyasingham,2012; Li, 2018). It is

situational, and its meaning and experience vary (Green et al., 2007). The power I am referring to

is whiteness. Dumbrill and Yee provide a topography of what literature refers to as the matrix of

domination, matrix of oppression or matrix of power. What is highlighted as the dominant social

space in the image is also referred to as whiteness (Dumbrill & Yee, 2019). Like social location,

whiteness is fluid, not fixed, meaning that over time different categories can be brought into and

removed from the dominant social space (Jeyasingham, 2012). I have found it helpful to view the

topography offered more as an atom, where power and privilege are at the core and social

location identifiers are constantly moving around and in and out of the centre, sometimes

bringing us closer to a place of privilege and sometimes further from it.

Figure 4.1 A topography of oppression
Source: Based on Dumbrill, 2003, 2012
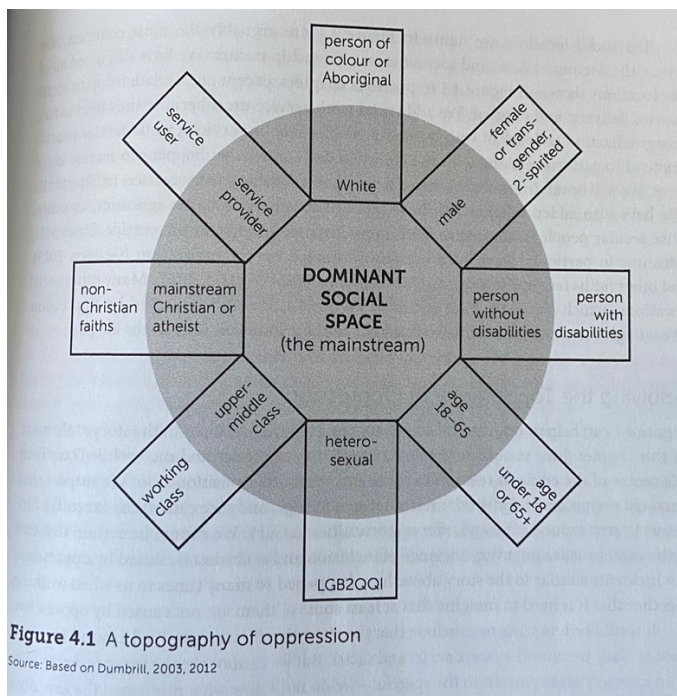
(Dumbrill & Yee, 2019, pg. 89)

Intersectionality is essential to understanding domination and whiteness. It is often reduced to understanding how parts of our identities and experiences intersect, but it must also be applied to systems; everything must be looked at with a holistic perspective with context and in relation to positionality (Johnson & Joseph-Salisbury, 2018). There is no such thing as a single-issue struggle since every system that impacts life is deeply intertwined and cannot be separated, just as aspects of our identity are intertwined to create our realities (Almeida et al., 2019; Collins, 1990). This intersection is the matrix of domination. The matrix of domination, also referred to as the matrix of power, is where the patterns of oppression, such as sexism and racism intersect and are bound together by the systems that govern society in a non-hierarchal way (Collins, 1990; Mirza, 2018). The matrix of domination exists on varying planes, such as systematic or social institutions, community or group context, and in individual consciousness (Collins, 1990). Despite matrix of domination, matrix of power and matrix of oppression being used interchangeably, power is not synonymous with oppression or domination, and to believe so is to uphold whiteness, as it assumes that the only experience of "power" is to have power over someone else, which is the way domination operates (Collins, 1990).

Whiteness is not just a thing; it is an operating system that maintains the power relations in much of the world, it is continuously operating and constantly reproduces itself (Christian, 2019; Dumbrill & Yee, 2019). It is what is defined as normal, correct, and natural, those in the dominant social space have been the ones to create those definitions, and they have done so in their own image. Through hundreds of years of oppression and exploitation, they have maintained the normalcy of whiteness. Knowledge production is a huge tool used to maintain whiteness, as who controls the knowledge controls the mind (Christian, 2019; Green et al., 2007). It is a long-standing method of control to go after any institution that creates and

circulates knowledge, such as the media and schools (Leistyna, 2012). Because of this, whiteness is considered invisible for those who embody it; however, the intention was always for it to remain unseen (Green et al., 2007; Jennings, 2018). We are taught that whiteness cannot be named or seen but that is just a part of the epistemology of ignorance, as whiteness can be named and seen quite easily if you are paying attention (Dumbrill & Yee, 2019; Johnson & Joseph-Salisbury, 2018,). Whiteness is reproduced through systems of hierarchies, systems of knowledge and societal systems (Almeida et al., 2019). Systems of hierarchies include division based on class and race. Systems of knowledge refers to the control over knowledge production and dissemination. Societal systems are the systems that regulate and control everyday life. While my research focuses on the reproduction of whiteness in education, each of these systems intersects and impacts one another.

WHITENESS AS A SYSTEM:

Whiteness can be understood in many ways. The literature tends to break it down into the following categories that overlap and intersect to form a system of stratification (Jeyasingham, 2012): a belief system, a currency, a tool, and a persona.

A Persona:

Whiteness is falsely considered to be the universal human experience because it is how we understand value, morality, aesthetics, and advancement, as it is directly linked to power, status, success, development, and desirability (Christian, 2019). Through colonization and globalization, whiteness and white supremacy have had an international reach, meaning local hierarchy is deeply influenced by global white supremacy as it has been embedded in the individual and communal consciousness (Christian, 2019). It can be bought into, meaning that

one can earn it through success or from performing it through behaviour (Christian, 2019). It is recreated through social identity construction. It can be gained through agreeing with the dominant ideologies or aligning oneself with them (Pyke, 2010). Its link to success and domination causes everyone, including people of colour, to internalize white supremacy, which leads to adapting to fit the mould of normalcy. Willie Jennings (2018) says we can all be white, which is true, however when you are racialized; the whiteness does not stick the same, it is like a cloak that can be removed, meaning that it is even more transitory, so it can be worn in specific places and be taken off in others, often not by one's own will (Pyke, 2010). It is an entitlement through white privilege that white people have the power to strip others of their whiteness (Li, 2018). White privilege is described as the perceived inheritance of the earth, of the systems of power and domination that were built on human flesh (Myers, 2019). In my experience in academia, this statement tends to be watered down by saying it was built on a colonial legacy. However, by doing so, we are trying to make the reality that racialized and indigenous people have been slaughtered to create this system, more palatable for white people. Thus, whitening global history.

A Currency:

Since whiteness is transitory, like a wage, it can be earned through achievement and just as easily removed (Christian, 2019). Like currency, it may be more valuable in one place and time than another. This currency is also called cultural capital, which can be held through knowledge, behaviour and social or physical characteristics, this cultural capital is power that creates opportunity for more power and advancement (Green et al., 2007).

Belief System:

Whiteness as a belief system can also be called white supremacy. White supremacy is the belief that white people are entitled to the world due to their moral and intellectual capabilities being superior to that of the rest of the world (Myers, 2019). This belief fueled and justified colonization and the matrix of domination (Myers, 2019). This ideology has maintained the academy's whiteness (Bonilla-Silva & Peoples, 2022). Du Bois' argues that whiteness was created by ruling-class white people not just to oppress and exploit people of colour, but to continue to oppress and exploit lower-class white people (Myers, 2019). White supremacy was then used as compensation for white people exploited by capitalism, thus maintaining the power and dominance of the ruling class (Myers, 2019). The currency of whiteness and whiteness as a belief system are intertwined, as white people were given a stake in the system to reduce the likelihood of revolt. The easiest and most effective way to maintain power is through division and creating an us versus them narrative, the "them" being the marginalized other (Almeida et al., 2019).

A Tool:

It is an exclusionary tool meant to uphold white supremacy (Duhaney, 2010). Whiteness maintains the status quo through things like policing, comments, and setting controlled parameters around how we think and behave (Jeyasingham, 2012). Its ability to adapt through time and place has made it an automatic system in which it reproduces itself, Du Bois argues that each time it is challenged, it simply becomes more embedded or deep (Bonilla-Silva & Peoples, 2022; Myers, 2019). An example of this is the abolishment of slavery in the United States; while black people were technically freed, Jim Crow simply replaced it to maintain power, each time it is challenged, it is reinstituted (Myers, 2019).

WHY WHITENESS?

When discussing racial oppression, the responsibility for change is often pushed onto those experiencing it (Green et al., 2007). White people tend to assume a moral high ground in which they claim to not contribute to racism thus, they do not need to be involved in anti-racism for two reasons, one, they are not racialized, and two, they are not racist (Green et al., 2007). Or they admit to their role and attempt to gain absolution by claiming they are still learning, to avoid responsibility for their actions or lack thereof. White supremacy comes with the idea that whiteness is the centre of the universe, it craves dominance, and scholarship on whiteness centres that dominance as the core issue in racism and other forms of oppression. As a theory, whiteness has the possibility to hold on to that accountability, since we all perpetuate whiteness to some degree, we are all responsible for challenging it (Dumbrill & Yee, 2019). Moreover, through whiteness, we can see that only the ruling class truly benefits from the current system, which could create an incentive for change.

HOW IS EDUCATION LINKED TO WHITENESS?

Education has long been considered an avenue to freedom and liberation that comes with a promise of access to privilege and success. While that is a possibility, it is also true that education has been used as a tool to indoctrinate and oppress. Growing up in a Caribbean household, I was always encouraged to do well in school and pursue post-secondary education. I was told that once I have my education, no one could take it away from me. However, I now believe that it is not necessarily education that empowers me, but the knowledge I hold. Although education comes with privilege and power, it is not a degree that makes me valuable, despite what I have been taught. Society places education on a pedestal without speaking of how

pursuing education takes away from one's identity or sense of self, it also comes with a unique set of struggles when you are from a marginalized community, Li terms this the ethnic penalty (2018; Reid-Merritt, 2010). Peters contributes that being a part of the academy comes at the cost of internal colonization or colonization of the mind, in which dominant ideologies are internalized through years of compounded learning that begins the moment one enters the education system (2018; Wagner & Yee, 2011). This contributes to internalized oppression and can create an engrained sense of inferiority (Pyke, 2010).

Bonilla-Silva and Peoples (2022) take up Carter Woodson's 1933, The Miseducation of the Negro, in which they explore the use of education to indoctrinate black people and to prepare them to enter the white world while upholding whiteness. Essentially, the purpose of educating a black person was to make them white, while this may or may not be the intended outcome, it is a reality for many marginalized people that entering higher education means giving up parts of oneself (Bonilla-Silva & Peoples, 2022; Mirza 2018). This is not due to weakness, instead, it is an adaptation required for survival that comes with a promise of success (Pyke, 2010). As aforementioned, whiteness and economic prosperity are intrinsically linked, we are told that to succeed in this world, we must be white, if not by skin, then through the persona. However, taking on this persona does not mean that the marginalized parts of our identity disappear (Reid-Merritt, 2010). Whiteness was created for European domination, which resulted in colonialism, thus, every system created with a link to colonization will reproduce whiteness, including the education system (Christian, 2019). Whiteness is so normative that it is reproduced under the guise of neutrality and objectivity. To understand how deeply whiteness is embedded, one must look at the system's history in its entirety, not just a single institution (Christian, 2019).

Higher education, or the academy, is often referred to in the literature as the heart of whiteness as it is not only where whiteness lives but where it is reproduced (Mirza, 2018). With that in mind, let's discuss how the education system has enforced and reproduced whiteness. In 1917 Queens University expelled all 15 of their black medical school students so that the university could join the American Medical Association, following this decision black students were not admitted until 1965 (Factor-Inwentash Faculty of Social Work, 2021). Queens was not the only Canadian university to do this, many followed their example. What does this mean today? Well, in 2021, the University of Toronto had the largest population of black students in a medical school graduating class, in Canadian history. There were 26 students. 26. (Factor-Inwentash Faculty of Social Work, 2021). Moreover, Queens did not formally redact the decree that prohibited black students from attending, until 2018, over 100 years later (Factor-Inwentash Faculty of Social Work, 2021). In Canada, a narrative of peace, unity, and inclusion is often taught. We paint the United States as this place where the atrocity of racial inequity occurs, while Canada is this benevolent force that has done no wrong. This is clearly not so; when one examines the data, I would argue that the reality is that Canada has been better at hiding or erasing its history in the popular imagination than its friend and partner in crime to the south.

Schools have been a tool of colonization, as whoever has control over education has control over society (Li, 2018). Bonilla-Silva et al. share the case of Harvard, which they argue was weaponized to push forth the colonial agenda (2022). Harvard was funded by slave masters who lent their enslaved labourers to construct its original buildings. These same slave masters became the institution's leaders, creating the school's foundation (Bonilla-Silva & Peoples, 2022). The cultures of many institutions are born out of white supremacy and enforced by exclusion under the guise of prestige (Bhopal et al., 2018). These institutions were built on the

values of their day, and the integration process did nothing to change that, as it was essentially throwing black people into these white institutions with no prior change to the school policy to ensure safety or equity. Meaning that the deeply embedded whiteness remains regardless of what the current demographics of the institution look like, as whiteness exists even when there are no white bodies (Christian, 2019). Furthermore, the changing of institutional policies does very little when the overall culture is not addressed (Bhopal et al., 2018).

Policies may be in place to encourage diversity, but what meaningful change is able to occur when people within the academy must trade parts of themselves for institutionalization, to succeed? In other words, reproducing the ideologies that dominate the institution (Bhopal et al., 2018). The call for diversity without support for diverse students and staff and active institutional commitment to change beyond their own ideas of how to go about making change and what requires change, reinforces the tokenization. The call for people of colour in the academy is being responded to by allowing the presence with the condition that their values reflect that of the institution, thus actively enforcing the reproduction of whiteness (Mirza, 2006). There is an idea that if there is a policy in place to allow people of colour and other marginalized people within the academy and claim an outright commitment to equity, diversity and anti-racism, then there is no possible way that the culture still exists within the institution (Mirza, 2006). Instead of supporting change, institutional policy is used in place of it (Wagner & Yee, 2011).

Whiteness is so embedded into every part of the education system that we do not see it (Factor-Inwentash Faculty of Social Work, 2021; Bonilla-Silva & Peoples, 2022). One way that whiteness is preserved is through the names, monuments and statues at these universities, an example in Canada is Ryerson University, now Toronto Metropolitan University (Bonilla-Silva

& Peoples, 2022). Egerton Ryerson, the university's former namesake and the father of modern education in Canada, provided the racist, colonial foundation that the Canadian Indian Residential School system was built on (AEC, 2020). An example of this in an American context is the "Silent Sam" statue at the University of North Carolina. The statue, erected by the United Daughters of the Confederacy and the University of North Carolina, depicted a Confederate soldier holding a gun, to honour alumni who fought in the Confederate army (Levenson, 2020). Despite years of protesting, the university refused to remove the statue, it was toppled by protestors in 2018 (Levenson, 2020). The statue and the name of the institution may appear minuscule, but they represent the deeply embedded white supremacy that every part of the academy is soaked in (Arday, 2018). While the names of these institutions can be changed, and the statues and plaques can be removed, the legacy and embedded whiteness remain as the past morphs into modern practices (Joseph et al., 2020). Bonilla-Silva and Peoples share the idea that space is a social product, meaning that it is not just a blank space open for anyone to occupy, it holds the history of that place which in turn leads to the same patterns being produced repeatedly (2022; Mirza, 2018). Within the academy, certain bodies are designated as the natural occupant of a space and to be within the academy as an unnatural occupant is to fight against the resistance of your presence actively. Often, I have felt that my mere existence in these spaces is an act of defiance, and it has led me to question who am I and what am I doing in this place, or as Willie Jennings eloquently words, "who am I in this place?" While he argues that this is a question that everyone should ask, the reality is that the whiteness of these institutions and society have pushed that question onto Black, Indigenous and people of colour (2018).

It must be noted that marginalized people engaging in higher education are not to be viewed as passive sheep or without the ability to recognize or challenge the reproduction of

whiteness within these institutions, but the system does such a great job of enforcing the adoption of whiteness. Being marginalized, specifically being black or indigenous, comes at a personal cost, one must choose between their safety and their voice, as often to ensure safety, survival or success, whiteness must be adopted (Arday, 2018). There is an idea that educational spaces must be safe. But safe for whom? Places of higher education have never been safe for people of colour, one person's safe space Is not another's (Yee & Wagner, 2020). Education being a microcosm of society means it is unsafe unless you are a white upper-class man (Yee & Wagner, 2020). Being marginalized within the academy is to be appropriated, objectified, and commodified (Mirza, 2006).

The reality of being marginalized in an institution embodying whiteness is challenging, as many feel that there is a constant fight to even be recognized as belonging in this place, regardless of the work it took to get there (Bhopal et al., 2018). This means feeling like no matter what you do or how much you "succeed", you do not belong, as Simone Akila argues, it is white supremacy being internalized and manifesting as imposter syndrome (Akila, 2020). For many marginalized educators, it means not only questioning yourself and your place within the academy but also having the legitimacy of your presence constantly being questioned, this leads to an erosion of confidence (Johnson & Joseph-Salisbury, 2018; Yee & Wagner, 2020). Being marginalized in higher education, you have two options, become the educator and act from the place of the expert or disappear into the whiteness of the institution, which is accompanied by a loss of self that is not easy to retrieve (Johnson & Joseph-Salisbury, 2018; Arday, 2018). These realities often push marginalized people out of the academy or force conformity (Arday, 2018).

Those in positions of power within the academy get to decide what knowledge is valid and who gets to create that knowledge, essentially, they get to be the gatekeepers of knowledge production (Johnson & Joseph-Salisbury, 2018). Racial exclusion in higher education directly benefits the dominant class as limiting who may attend university limits competition, which supports the white supremacist myth that white people have a greater chance for advancement due to their hard work, as opposed to marginalized people who do not (Bonilla-Silva & Peoples, 2022).

Educators often believe that they teach from a point of neutrality, but neutrality does not exist; in fact, what is believed to be normal within the Western context is just whiteness, thus they teach from a point of whiteness (Johnson & Joseph-Salisbury, 2018; Wagner, 2005). Furthermore, neutrality, meaning to be without bias, is impossible and to pretend that educators teach without bias is harmful (Datta, 2018). Almeida et al. suggest that an example of the harm this causes can be found in psychology, which created a fictitious idea of what it means to be human through the normalization and universalization of whiteness as the human experience (2019). The guise of neutrality and objectivity removed the historical and social context in which life exists that impacts ones subjective "human experience" and the implications that follow, leading to psychological assessments being steeped in whiteness and white supremacy (Almeida et al., 2019; Green et al., 2007). Our practices for "healing" are developed through Western epistemology and fail to answer the question of the marginalized regarding if it is depression or oppression at the root cause of their struggles (Almeida et al., 2019).

Research and theoretical development have operated from the same false notion of neutrality that holds whiteness central (Datta, 2018). The theories central in the social sciences,

specifically sociology and psychology, have been developed by white people only looking at white people, yet, we are taught, even in social work, to apply these biased ways of knowing to everyone (Bonilla-Silva & Peoples, 2022). Moreover, when people of colour and marginalized people have been included in the research, they are positioned as the other. When we use these theories, we inadvertently center whiteness (Bonilla-Silva & Peoples, 2022). Many theories were developed through prejudiced research and with harmful intentions, such as eugenics and phrenology, have been rebuked, however, these are the same institutions that have produced theories that we still use today and claim as "objective" (Bonilla-Silva & Peoples, 2022). Additionally, many of the theories used in the social sciences and social work were developed prior to notable events that shifted perspective and life within the Western world, such as the civil rights movement or the women's movement (Wagner & Yee, 2011). This is not to say that there is no benefit to using such theories but to highlight that many of them have been adapted over time to conceal the oppressive foundation they were built on. However, the white supremist and colonial ideologies still exist within them (Wagner & Yee, 2011).

Research comes from a place of privilege, as to be considered qualified to do it, one must receive permission from an institution embedded in whiteness, power, and privilege, otherwise known as gatekeepers (Datta, 2018). Additionally, in many indigenous communities globally, research is seen as a theft of knowledge; Datta likens academic research to a bloodthirsty mosquito, in the sense that the researcher takes what they want, then leaves when they want with no regard for the people who are at the centre of their exploration, often with a wound in place (2018). As mentioned, the ownership and control of knowledge production is a colonial tool, and engaging in research for the production and ownership of knowledge that one gained from someone else is no different (Datta, 2018). This highlights the dynamic of the knower versus the

known, where the knower is on top looking down at the known (Douds et al., 2019). The academy, viewing itself as the holder of the objective truth, positions itself as the knower and anyone outside as the known, mirroring the matrix of domination (Green et al., 2007).

It must be noted that whiteness is present and reproduced in every part of education. These institutions and the system are founded on whiteness. Johnson and Joseph-Salisbury ask on what and on whose terms we are accepted into higher education (2018). The people who run the institutions get to choose who is present within the academy as both an educator and a student. They dictate what knowledge is valid by gatekeeping. What does it mean to be scholarly when they control the journals and the journals that they do not, they have the power to deem inconsequential (Wagner & Yee, 2011). Whiteness is engrained as the single objective truth, to 'know' anything is to know whiteness (Green et al., 2007). To succeed in the education system, one must embody or centre whiteness to a certain extent as they define what it means to be scholarly and hold that as a requirement for advancement (Pyke, 2010; Wagner & Yee, 2011). This has been made very clear through my exploration of the literature, as even when a marginalized person writes about their experience, it feels as though it is directed toward educating a white audience. One article suggests that students avoid doing historical or political analyses that may challenge their worldview because they do not want to leave a place of comfort (Yee & Wagner, 2012. I would disagree as it is my reality as a black student, that this is required of racialized people, and to write from our true worldview results in being dismissed, invalidated, punished, and deemed unscholarly. As I write this review, I too, am focused on crafting it in such a way that does not disrupt the whiteness of this institution too much, or I risk my position within the academy. I question how much of myself I put on these pages, if any, but

to not do so would mean that I am simply playing the game and feeding into the assumed sameness of education.

HOW IS SOCIAL WORK LINKED TO WHITENESS? HOW IS IT NOT?

Compared to other parts of the academy, social work education is somewhat unique as we learn about systems of oppression and, often indirectly, the matrix of domination. This is to say that social work as a profession and a school would appear to have the strongest ability to address whiteness in the academy, yet we still struggle. We have anti-oppression somewhat embedded in the program design, we have life-altering conversations about changing the system, at its core, social work is supposed to be committed to social justice, and we see societal issues in ways other parts of the academy do not. Nevertheless, the white colonial foundation of social work, combined with the whiteness of the institution, makes decolonizing and challenging whiteness within social work programs very difficult. The Canadian Association of Social Work Education (CASWE) has included anti-oppression as a requirement for accreditation, but as we know, policy does not equate to change (Brown, 2012). It is evident in the experiences of black social work students across Canada that just because we claim to be dedicated to social change as a profession, does not mean that social work education does not reproduce and enforce white supremacy (Phillip, 2022). Furthermore, some academics argue that an issue with AOP is that there is too much focus on identifying oppression and not enough focus on understanding positionality, or the ways identity intertwines with power in specific spaces (Brown, 2012; Yee & Wagner, 2012). In social work education, we often talk about how we are oppressed as if we can work through them and move past them, as though it is expected that once we graduate from the program, we are no longer marginalized (Brown, 2012). Thus, preparing us to take on the

position of the oppressor. The reality is that we have just added another layer to our experiences, the duality of being oppressed while simultaneously contributing to someone else's oppression is rarely discussed (Brown, 2012). The focus on identifying oppression without providing context and meaningful discussion based on how the matrix of domination upholds these dynamics, supports the dichotomy of the oppressed versus the oppressor while creating space for accountability to be avoided (Yee & Wagner, 2012).

Social work has long been a profession chosen by those seeking social change, yet social work is failing to be at the forefront of the shift because of its deep ties to oppressive institutions and systems (Reid-Merritt, 2010). Social work was a colonial tool created to address the symptoms of the issue rather than the issue itself (Almeida et al., 2019). An example of this is the sixties scoop, where rather than looking at the generational impact of the genocide of indigenous people and culture that social workers largely contributed to through their own forms of policing, they continued to remove children from their families and communities, furthering the colonial agenda. This highlights that whiteness and white supremist discourse are long-standing parts of social work (Hackett, 2019). Let's look at a person who directly contributed to the colonial agenda but is still considered an influential figure in the field, Charlotte Whitton. She was an early leader in the social work field who lectured at McGill University and the University of Toronto and published in a few journals (Moffatt, 2001). She was the executive director of the Canadian Council on Child Welfare, the head of the immigration and child welfare committees of the Imperial Order of the Daughters of the Empire (IODE) and eventually the mayor of Ottawa in 1953 (Hackett, 2019). The IODE at the time was a group of white upper-class women who promoted white settler values, otherwise known as white supremacy. Whitton also advocated for eugenics and racial purity (Hackett, 2019). It is clear from both historical

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contexts and through the people who contributed to the current practices that social work in Canada was built on whiteness and colonial ideologies that cannot be separated from our present reality (Joseph et al., 2020).

This is not a distant past, given Whitton's influence at the time, it would be reasonable to assume that there would be a lasting impact on the social workers she educated, which leads me to question what harm they then contributed to. In my experience as a social work student, we may talk about how social work contributed to residential schooling and the 60s scoop, but we have rarely spoken about the history of the welfare system in Canada as a whole. By leaving the complete history out of social work education, educators are erasing the contemporary experiences of people interacting with the system and reproducing the same harmful outcomes, as can be seen through the current millennial scoop (Hackett, 2019). Moreover, this is not the only part of history missing from social work education. While there has been a call to include indigenous voices, and rightly so, there is still a gap in the teaching of Canadian history regarding the ways colonization has impacted arrivant's in Canada, the global impacts of colonization and a global contextualization of national issues (Hackett, 2019).

Instead of learning how the system operates and how to challenge it, we learn how to be social workers. In social work education, the concerns of the market are centred, so we focus on how we do this work so that we can graduate and start a career (Wagner & Yee, 2011). We do not focus on how we do this work so that we can challenge the root of oppressive systems and make lasting change. This would also require future and current social workers to acknowledge that we are essentially the system as we uphold it by following their policies and procedures with the false belief that we are doing it for good (Ahmed, 2006). This is another example of

education being a microcosm of society, as both reflect the desire for capital gains over social change. This capitalist focus centres learning surrounding practice and theory while excluding deep exploration of knowledge and reflective practices (Wagner & Yee, 2011). Wagner and Yee suggest that this deeper learning does not occur because it creates a space where privileged students do not feel safe, as it would require leaving the position of the passive learner, which comes with emotional risk and self-implication (2011). This deeper learning would come with critiquing the social work profession, exploring our own cultures and world views, which impact how we engage with others and abandoning the position as an innocent bystander in the field and education (Wagner & Yee, 2011). Education is no longer about the pursuit of knowledge since its adoption of corporate models (Yee & Wagner, 2012). Even when we are aware of the whiteness and coloniality of a system, thanks to capitalism and neoliberalism, we as social workers must adhere to the rules and values of our workplace, thus abandoning the pursuit of social justice (Yee, 2016).

I believe educators may not be prepared for the conflict that comes with teaching about topics that could challenge whiteness, and because they either cannot handle such conflict or lack the understanding themselves, thus they choose not to do so (Wagner, 2005). When these topics naturally come up, as they should in social work, the hesitation, the fear of conflict or the lack of knowledge on behalf of the professor not only diminishes the experiences of marginalized students in their classrooms but actively reproduces the normalcy of white supremacy in that moment (Phillip, 2022). Instead of an understanding of the matrix of domination being embedded in the curriculum, the work of addressing the oppression that whiteness created is siloed and pushed off onto marginalized educators and when there is not one present, that responsibility falls on the students (Wagner, 2005). This can recreate trauma as this is something

that marginalized students face in every aspect of their life, particularly in education, due to the severe lack of representation in positions of power (Phillip, 2022). In social work, we use the language of Anti-Oppression and Equity, but we do so without any actual tangible change, thus, the language of the oppressed is co-opted and used to maintain power (Wagner & Yee, 2011; Ahmed, 2006). The fact that we use this language creates a false notion that this is a safe place for racialized people to challenge whiteness when the reality is that the culture of the classroom and institution is steeped in whiteness, meaning that these challenges are met with hostility and fear by peers and professors. This looks like being met with silence and their experiences disregarded, leaving racialized students with the choice of being silenced or ostracized (Phillip, 2022). Jason Arday refers to this as the wall of fragility where progress is dead-ended by white insecurity, where accountability is not only avoided but fought against, with the weaponizing of white tears, power displays and re-centring their experiences over others (Arday, 2018). This is a constant reminder that white comfort is not only "linked to our pain and suffering" but is more important than it, which will continue to uphold the matrix of domination and white supremacy (Leonardo, 2007, pg. 22).

Many authors agree that the answers to addressing whiteness can be found in decolonization. While I agree with this, I have a few concerns. In Canada, when we speak about decolonization, the focus is quite micro, as we fixate only on the experiences of colonization on Turtle Island. Ignoring colonization's global impacts, we miss valuable tools and methods for decolonization (Hackett, 2019). Moreover, when any oppressed group speaks about their experiences, the responsibility for making change is placed on them and communal accountability is avoided. This is currently being done in conversations of decolonization in Canada. It needs to be clear that there is a difference between centring the voices of the

marginalized and leaving it entirely up to them to solve the issue. To decentre whiteness, we need to see the power that comes with community and collectively resist recreating the same patterns of domination that are seen with whiteness, with just another group at the centre (Bonilla-Silva & Peoples, 2022). Given that the most powerful tool of whiteness is the ability to control the systems that produce history, knowledge, health, and justice, how do we dismantle whiteness in social work education without further embedding it (Almeida et al., 2019)?

CHAPTER FOUR: METHODOLOGY

METHODOLOGICAL FRAME:

As this study aims to dive deep and explore social work educators' personal and perhaps unique experiences of whiteness in the academy, I decided on qualitative rather than quantitative methods. As well, given the sensitive nature of the questions I will be asking about the reproduction of whiteness within the participant's workplace, I opted for one-on-one interviews as the data collection method, as this approach offers a confidential environment, encouraging participants to share their personal experiences openly. As such, the interview format facilitated in-depth exploration, as questions could be tailored based on each participant's responses, ensuring an understanding of their perspectives. Moreover, the flexibility of the interviews fostered a sense of collaboration and trust between the participants and myself, helping to establish a safe and supportive space for sharing sensitive information. This rapport was crucial in eliciting candid insights into the complex phenomenon of whiteness reproduction.

Grounded theory and one-on-one interviews are particularly well-suited for this exploratory study, as they facilitate hypothesis generation and enable a deep understanding of the

topic from the participants' viewpoints. These qualitative methods have proven to yield valuable insights that quantitative approaches may not achieve due to their ability to capture the depth and richness of individual experiences and perspectives. Of course, in this study, the full scope of grounded theory cannot be used, as this requires interviewing to the point of data saturation and the emergence of a core category from which robust theory is then derived. Nonetheless, smaller studies, such as this one, benefit from being informed by grounded theory to map, explore and begin to make sense of people's experiences, which is what I set out to do. Such studies provide a useful foundation for future research on the topic and my hope is that mine will do the same.

Throughout the evolution of grounded theory, originally introduced by Glaser and Strauss in 1967, various approaches have emerged, each aiming to comprehend social processes (Levers, 2013). In contrast to the traditional grounded theory, which emphasizes objectivity and aims to generate theories that represent an external reality, Charmaz's constructivist grounded theory acknowledges the subjectivity of researchers and participants (Levers, 2013). It views knowledge as socially constructed and influenced by the interaction between the researcher and the data, suggesting that researchers cannot be entirely objective and neutral, and their backgrounds, experiences, and values inevitably shape the research process and findings (Charmaz, 2016; Levers, 2013). I recognize that complete objectivity is unattainable, and due to my lived experience and personal involvement with the subject matter, I do not claim to be objective. Consequently, I gravitated toward the constructivist version of grounded theory.

Charmaz's constructivist grounded theory advocates methodological self-consciousness, urging researchers to maintain awareness of their subjectivity (Charmaz, 2017). Moreover, embracing this approach allows for adapting the research process as new insights emerge.

Informed by this approach, I modified the interview structure after the first interview took place to begin by sharing a bit about what inspired the research, fostering a more open and collaborative dialogue with participants.

RECRUITMENT:

Approval from the McMaster Research Ethics Board was obtained prior to initiating participant recruitment. Multiple methods were used for recruitment. The first was sharing the research poster on Dr. Dumbrill's Twitter account. Next, the poster was shared with McMaster's School of Social Work instructors asking them to share the poster with anyone that may be interested in participating. From there, the poster was shared with the Racial Ethnic and Cultural Issues Caucus and Thunderbird Circle of CASWE. During initial contact with prospective participants, I shared the letter of information and consent form, I asked that they email me if they have any questions regarding the research. If they wished to continue, the consent form was signed, and an online interview was scheduled. An online platform was used to increase accessibility for participation, as the study was open to anyone with experience teaching in a School of Social work in Canada.

I personally conducted each interview privately, over Zoom, and each lasted between an hour and an hour and a half, depending on the length of answers from participants. The interviews were recorded for the purpose of transcription. The interviews were semi-structured to allow space for elaboration on topics unique to each participant's experience. An interview guide was used for structuring the interviews and ensuring some consistency. Prior to the first interview, a question was removed from the guide because I felt that it was not relevant to the core question of the research. Following the first interview, the guide was adapted to include

another question regarding imagining the school without whiteness. This was done to allow space for creativity and to support the compiling of methods for resisting whiteness within the academy.

PARTICIPANT SAMPLE:

In total, five interviews were conducted with people with varying levels of experience with teaching in schools of social work across Ontario. All five participants identified as women. In terms of ethnic background two participants identified as Asian, One identified as indigenous, and two identified as white, in order to protect their identities, countries and nations will not be specified.

Each participant had a different level of experience. One had one year of experience teaching within their respective school of social work and has experience teaching in other parts of the academy and community. One participant was a PhD student at the time of the interview, with two years of experience teaching within a school of social work. Another participant had three years of teaching experience at three different universities. The fourth participant had ten years of teaching experience, some of that time spent as a program director. The final participant had approximately twenty-two years of experience teaching with a social work program. To ensure the confidentiality and privacy of the participants, all identifiable characteristics will be anonymized and dissociated. No specific participant will be linked to their ideas or contributions. This precautionary measure is essential as participants' stories, when correlated with factors like ethnic background and teaching experience, could potentially lead to their identification.

ANALYSIS:

As mentioned above, data analysis was informed by grounded theory. Each interview was reviewed in its entirety in order to identify overall themes. Following this review of the data, an initial open code set was created and added on to as I analyzed each transcript line by line. Through this process, patterns began to emerge across all interviews. Next, axel-coding was used to identify connections between the open codes, finishing off with the selective coding and categorization used in the findings and analysis chapter of this thesis.

CHAPTER FIVE: KEY FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

In this chapter, I delve into the research findings, presenting an integrated discussion and analysis. Through this process, I aim to unravel the intricacies and nuances present in the data, explore insights they offer and critically reflect on the implications. The following sections will examine the key themes that emerged from the participant's responses, providing a deeper understanding of the implications of whiteness within the academy. In this data, four themes emerged: Power, impacts of institutional whiteness on identity and sense of self, manifestation of whiteness in social work education, and methods of resistance.

POWER

The research findings underscore a central theme of power in education, mirroring its prevalence in various systems. Through the interviews, it became evident that power plays a pivotal role within the academy, shaping the dynamics and interactions within the educational landscape and enforcing whiteness. Each interview touched on the significance of relationships between power and knowledge, power dynamics between educators and the institution, educators and their power over the classroom, students and power and the power of division.

POWER AND KNOWLEDGE

A participant pointed out that knowledge is power as it can facilitate personal growth and social progress, meaning that often, seeking knowledge is seeking power. While not all that we regard as knowledge is produced within the academy, quite a bit is. A few participants agreed that the academy has become the gatekeeper of what becomes mainstream knowledge. This finding suggests, that through the use of "knowledge," the academy has considerable control over what narratives are endorsed through things like research funding, the process of peer review, publishing, controlling who gets to create and share knowledge, the inaccessible language used in communicating that knowledge, and also bolstering the journals that represent and support the dominant voice of the institution.

The peer review process was pointed out for its lacking sufficient accountability, enabling individuals to obstruct work they do not comprehend or agree with. Three participants shared that diplomacy is crucial for academics, as they must calmly explain and defend their ideas, even in the face of reviewers' ignorance or lack of understanding, as the reviewers hold the power to establish barriers, especially when the subject matter challenges dominant knowledge.

All participants agreed that within academia, active roadblocks hinder work that seeks to challenge whiteness. One participant shared that scholars engaged in dismantling whiteness often face pressure to tone down their work, making it more acceptable and comfortable to the mainstream. Another participant expanded by sharing that, the hierarchical ranking of scholars reinforces and perpetuates whiteness. Adding that academics' rankings are determined by factors such as the frequency and prestige of their publications, a system that strengthens whiteness when journals endorse whiteness by elevating scholars whose ideas align with dominant

discourses, granting them greater prestige and influence. These practices pose significant obstacles to change.

The above findings resonated with me, in my own academic journey, I have encountered similar situations where teaching assistants (TAs) marking my assignments have disagreed with my arguments due to differences in worldview or experience. Despite being supported by literature, they deemed my arguments incorrect. When I raised my concerns and presented my sources (respected in Black communities), one TA suggested using work from popular or high-ranking publications. However, I found that these publications did not represent voices and experiences similar to mine and the community I am a part of. This left me feeling silenced and invalidated, as though my perspectives, based on my own lived reality, were being dismissed by the TA's authority which was backed up by academic norms. What added to my distress was the realization that the grade I received from this TA indicated their power over my academic career, it seemed as though I had to choose between conforming to their preferences and expectations, even if it meant compromising the authenticity of my work or continuing to speak my truth and risk a lower grade. This experience made me keenly aware of the power dynamics at play within academia, where gatekeepers can dictate what is deemed acceptable and significant, leaving marginalized voices at a disadvantage and actively blocking their ability to advance within the academy. Some participants argued that instructors or TAs may not have the power to create large-scale change within the academy. However, even a person with limited authority in the grand scheme of things, can still draw upon certain knowledge norms to either oppress or uplift students. This power should not be taken lightly, as it can reproduce or challenge the existing systems of whiteness.

Two participants expressed their belief that society pressures individuals to pursue higher

education in order to acquire knowledge to gain recognition for it in a systematic manner.

Consequently, education is viewed as a means for individuals to gain more financial and social

opportunities. One of the participants added that the education system does give more

opportunities for advancement, because it is designed to be a gatekeeper of success. The

professionalization of certain careers such as social work, feeds the idea that one must attend

university to be successful as a social worker. The same participant shared on the matter, stating:

"I really need some training. Like for example, how you communicate with people, how you
analyze the policy that's particularly about the social justice theory. This distribution of you
know, if I do not study, I don't have that knowledge, and the other thing is practically I cannot do
social work without the license if I don't study."

Three participants acknowledge that they would not have some of the knowledge they do

without attending university. Two added that their first experiences learning about systems of

oppression and whiteness were in an academic setting which, to them is an indicator that this is a

place where these structural issues are discussed and as such can open the potential for whiteness

to be dismantled. Moreover, attending the university provides access to much more than just

knowledge, as two participants thought that it provides access to relationships with like-minded

people from different communities you may not have otherwise, while simultaneously

acknowledging that in the academy, only specific knowledge and voices are recognized and

legitimized through control over what is regarded as scholarly.

Two participants shared that they felt schools of social work are just as elitist as the

broader academy because they can dictate who is allowed into the academy through admissions,

the cost of education, and the program's structure. Unpaid placements, inflexible structuring and

lack of support were the most discussed issues concerning program structure. They were

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understood as contributing to barriers interfering with marginalized groups accessing social work education, further supporting the reproduction of whiteness. Adding that, students have to pay for living costs, transportation, childcare, and tuition, and they will not have access if they cannot. Moreover, if students do not fit the dominant learning style, there are additional barriers to accessing education. If they can access it, there are barriers to getting the support needed, such as student accessibility services, which can be culturally inappropriate. A participant explained that, as seen through the pandemic, schools can be more flexible in offering course content— however, the realities of operation costs within the academy impact how teaching is allowed. Participants felt there are different ways to educate and create space, but the institution does not encourage, support or allow them to do so.

Despite this, there was a theme of gratitude toward the academy among a few participants, for having been the site of learning that informs their current practices. However, one participant explained that this is only because the knowledge is gatekept from broader society. There was also an acknowledgement that while we have had the opportunity to gain knowledge through the current system, the knowledge that can be produced and recognized within the institution is confined by its oppressive nature.

The data highlights the Academy as a valuable learning environment; however, it also reveals gatekeeping practices that perpetuate white supremacy and reinforce the whiteness of these institutions. It becomes evident that knowledge production within the Academy is limited to what is accepted by those in power. This gatekeeping restricts recognizing certain voices and perspectives, often favouring those rooted in whiteness. Consequently, the institutional reality

marginalizes alternative perspectives and reinforces the dominance of whiteness in academic knowledge production.

POWER DYNAMICS BETWEEN EDUCATORS AND THE INSTITUTION:

Participants said that as a professor, the access to knowledge from the academy and the validity of voice from the institution's backing, creates great power. The participants noted that this sense of power manifested in two primary ways, a tool of empowerment, amplifying voice with the ability to demand change, or it can create a sense of fear and reliance on the system, which reduces the likelihood of speaking out, similar to any job because of fear of losing income. This fear can be amplified when a professor does not have tenure.

Participants explained that pursuing tenure requires dedication and service to the institution, but this commitment may lead to separation from their community and self. While tenure can provide security and empowerment, going for tenure was noted as strenuous and toxic as one is forced to perform and produce constantly. Multiple participants shared that they felt there is a sense of hesitancy surrounding addressing issues in the department because there are questions about who can be trusted and who may possibly stand in the way of reaching tenure. Some participants reported witnessing hazing and harassment of non-tenured professors in that process, with little to no repercussions, reinforcing the toxicity of power dynamics within the department. Pointing out that the tenure process can act as a control device, where they must play the institution's game by their rules or risk their job and career. The environment breeds a culture where untenured professors can be exploited by their colleagues and the institution with little pushback out of fear of reprisal. Participants noted that once people get tenure, they tend to be more vocal because there is job security and power that accompanies the position. In contrast,

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some people are willing to speak out pre-tenure, which usually comes with more thought and consideration of repercussions.

This further highlights the importance of community within the academy, as building those relationships is a method for resistance. They provide opportunities to learn from one another. Participants shared that having someone that supports and uplifts them while providing opportunities for strategizing or simply sharing similar experiences can help to resist the system and burnout. However, one educator noted that there was a difference between forming positive relationships and forming relationships with people in positions of power because, yes, there is strength in numbers and community, but there is also great strength in positional titles, as pointed out in the following quote:

"In the Academy, sometimes there's also those divides, and if you're not surrounded by people who share your critical approach, it can often result in a lot of tensions. Sometimes that can be very productive, and certainly, I mean, throughout my time I was able to find like-minded people but they weren't always in the positions where I needed them. Meaning, you know, when decisions were made. And actually, if I'm brutally honest, that's the reason why I retired early."

Critical race theory emphasizes the importance of using one's voice. Four participants noted, however, that it is essential to acknowledge that sometimes voice is not enough. Often, it needs to be accompanied by a certain level of power to gain results. The lack of support, power and results can lead to burnout. If that sense of community that can provide support or power is not there, it can be increasingly challenging to address issues and can stop it from moving up the chain of authority. Again, even if you have a community that provides support both in numbers and in strategizing, resistance can be difficult if the community members do not have power, such as tenured members. Participants added that finding that support can be hard, especially being the only racialized faculty or faculty with a specific background within a department. This

was noted as leading to isolation and tokenization as participants said there seems to be an expectation that hiring one racialized person will solve all the issues. Leaving racialized faculty/instructors to spearhead all initiatives regarding issues surrounding their social location, which will inevitably lead to burnout, especially as they fight for tenure. A participant explained that allowing racialized staff to take on such initiatives alone can be tempting because they may be seen as the expert. But also because there is an understanding that when the initiatives are led by someone without a personal connection to the issue, it lacks a sense of urgency.

A participant felt that there is some space being made for racialized professors and students in the academy right now. However, two others felt that very little is being done to support them wholeheartedly and mentor them in an uplifting way without the strings of adopting whiteness and playing the game being attached. A fourth participant added that it is essential to demonstrate that their voice is valid without building additional barriers, which the academy tends to do, because their presence disrupts the comfort of whiteness.

Based on the data, it is evident that professors within the academy wield significant power. However, this power seems to be constrained by the pressure to conform to certain expectations and behaviours enforced through the tenure process. The toxicity of this process compels professors to adhere to the academy's accepted norms, making it difficult to address institutional practices that perpetuate whiteness. Furthermore, it becomes apparent that initiating change at any level within the academy necessitates a certain level of power. This observation underscores the significance and intentionality of gatekeeping that power within the institution. Such gatekeeping appears to be driven by a sense of institutional preservation, aiming to maintain the status quo and uphold the whiteness of the institution.

These findings suggest that the institution's pressure aims to uphold dominant ideologies and practices. Going against these norms could lead to reprimanding and jeopardize one's career. The lack of support for professors in navigating the institution raises concerns, as any implemented practices may inadvertently reinforce and reproduce whiteness. The data calls for greater support for professors and instructors in navigating the institutional environment. However, the historical track record of the institution raises doubts about the effectiveness of such support and its potential impact on the continued perpetuation of whiteness within the Academy.

EDUCATORS' POWER OVER THE CLASSROOM AND LEARNING EXPERIENCES

Professors wield significant power over their classrooms and the curriculum they teach. While students undoubtedly influence the classroom culture, three participants felt it is ultimately the professor's responsibility to establish the tone within the learning space. It was explained that as an instructor, they can create environments where profound, life-changing conversations and learning can thrive. Empowering students to use their voices and engage in transformative discussions can have a profound impact on classroom culture, according to all participants involved. One suggested approach involves decentering the professor as the sole expert and authority figure in the classroom, which encourages a sense of community and inclusivity. Additionally, another participant added that inviting individuals from historically marginalized communities or institutions to share their knowledge and experiences helps to challenge traditional classroom power dynamics. I believe this can be a powerful means of resistance against gatekeeping in academia, as actively challenging the idea that knowledge only comes from the academy creates an opportunity for more diverse perspectives to be shared.

Although some instructors may lack the ability to create their own curriculum, many professors have the authority to shape it. However, three participants raised concerns that this academic freedom has been used to justify the neglect of important elements, such as indigenous knowledge, anti-oppressive practices, and anti-racism. Despite these ideas being essential to social work education, they have not been integrated and embedded into course content. Two participants highlighted that academic freedom and tenure can lead to a lack of accountability in creating inclusive spaces and addressing systemic oppression. Explaining that tenure was used to absolve professors of accountability and that academic freedom gave them the right to exclude certain narratives, which they felt creates an environment where whiteness grows. However, they also emphasized the importance of recognizing that educators do not have equal levels of power within the academy. For instance, sessional instructors may have limited control over the curriculum due to their contractual position.

Moreover, three participants shared that the pressure of the institution can burn out instructors, so when they are given a course to teach with a previous syllabus, it is easier to use the content already set out, which may not be grounded in a critical approach to AOP, decolonization and anti-racism. They found using a textbook easier than finding individual articles, videos, podcasts, and other alternative content. Explaining that, with the pressure and culture of the institution weighing on instructors, it can be much easier to do what has already been done or follow the outlines rather than create an entirely new syllabus.

Additionally, participants acknowledged biases in who gets help and whom the rules are bent for, both as students and educators, indicating that whiteness was rewarded within the academy. It often came down to knowing how to play the game which came with a cultural

advantage for the white people. One must be friendly with the right people, and embodying

whiteness often allowed for an easier time forming those bonds, especially when the person in

power embodied it. One professor explained:

"Depending on who a student was, and if they were friendly with the right decision makers, they were afforded more options than someone who hadn't formed that bond, and sometimes I think it was the privileged students either economically or racially who felt more comfortable being informal with profs and chatting with them, so forth, and so on, whereas other students may be saw professors more authority, figures, and we're demonstrating respect by being more formal with them. And sometimes, I felt that that really counted against them. And I thought that created barriers for them."

In some cultures, forming relationships with people of power is seen as inappropriate or

disrespectful. From my experience in my culture, we are taught to respect authority, such as

educators, which means not challenging or informally regarding them. That power differentiation

creates a barrier to forming relationships outside of the classroom. This provides more reasoning

for rethinking the power structure and the culture it creates within classrooms and the program.

They continued:

"I think if faculty don't put the effort into understanding what's going on, educating themselves about why these issues arise or to be attuned to the possibility that they'll arise, well, that's how these things then manifest the whiteness. And then they don't see that they're perpetuating whiteness."

The participant suggested that many educators fail to see this as an issue because they

believe they follow the rules and procedures. Explaining that for the power structure to change,

instructors must critically reflect on how all aspects of their relationships within the institution

can contribute to the culture of whiteness. This highlights that recognizing and utilizing the

power of community responsibly can foster empowering educational spaces where knowledge is

co-created, diverse perspectives are valued, and students are encouraged to voice their

experiences and ideas.

The findings indicate that while effecting change at the institutional level can be challenging, professors wield significant power over their classroom settings and the learning experiences of students. This power should not be underestimated, as my own experience has shown that professors can facilitate lasting change that extends beyond the confines of the classroom and influences social workers to seek and drive change in their field. Creating courses that challenge whiteness can be strenuous, as whiteness often operates as the default norm. Actively challenging and resisting it requires intentional effort. The data underscores that simply following procedures and policies without critical thought or questioning automatically reproduces whiteness. This suggests that whiteness is deeply ingrained in the institution and actively resisting it becomes essential to avoid perpetuating its influence.

STUDENTS POWER:

All participants mentioned that many students feel that their voices are not valued in the academy, and often feel reduced to a number. Two participants suggested that this is because universities prioritize profits and protecting their institutional image as businesses. They both added that this actually means that as paying customers, students have considerable power, especially when united in numbers because it is the education they are paying for that is at stake. They both went on to highlight the significance of fostering a strong sense of community for students, as when they are united they have the ability to push for change. Despite this, they observed that students often discuss feeling dismissed or invalidated when attempting to raise important concerns. One participant recalled their experiences as a PhD student working on their thesis, saying:

"You know, in the past, I mean as a student. When I brought it up I've been told that it wasn't part of my thesis; you know, that this wasn't something that they had asked for., So being really

dismissive of me, pointing things out.. it got to the point where I stopped pointing things out because I was putting myself in harm's way, and was really getting depressed and anxious, like just being in those spaces. So as a protective factor, I kind of stopped saying something to them, but then made sure, in my thesis I would write it all out, right, like I experienced this."

This emphasizes how both administration and educators' responses contribute to a culture where students feel voiceless and reduced to mere numbers. Consequently, some students choose to remain silent about their grievances, contributing to an unhealthy learning environment. Despite these obstacles, some students are determined to find alternative ways to express themselves. Resorting to creativity, forming communities, and fostering a strong desire for change when traditional avenues seem obstructed or unresponsive, act as methods for resistance.

Three participants explained that uniting in numbers offers students the potential for real impact. Adding that it is important to connect with others who share the same goals in order to make a significant impact towards positive change. Multiple participants acknowledged that students play a vital role as the heart of the academy, and their input is necessary to bring about institutional transformation. They recommended that students should actively provide constructive solutions to institutional and environmental challenges, allowing them to play a crucial role in shaping their educational experiences. Their contributions to the learning environment can create an atmosphere of openness and a free exchange of ideas where resistance and community can grow.

Furthermore, students' power extends beyond voicing their concerns and serves as valuable resources for instructors. Participants believe their diverse knowledge and lived experiences enrich the educational process, fostering a reciprocal learning dynamic that benefits students and educators alike. This highlights that students possess far more power within the academic realm than the culture allows them to believe. By embracing their collective strength,

voicing their perspectives, and collaborating towards meaningful solutions, they can influence institutional change, enrich the educational culture, and contribute to a more empowering learning environment.

POWER OF DIVISION:

The academy maintains a culture of division from the outside world and within its walls, as each department can act as an independent organism, making it hard for the progress within one section to permeate the rest. Participants noticed that these divisions lead to the avoidance of accountability and a lack of meaningful systemic analysis throughout the institution. This became clear when asking participants if they felt social work was doing a good enough job addressing systemic issues compared to the rest of the university. Many suggested that even if the work were being done in other parts of the academy, they would unlikely know about it due to the culture of division. While the potential for power through unity exists, we are often stuck working in isolation and unable to work together towards common goals effectively.

A participant highlighted that this is also seen through the perceived gap between the academy and the community, where the academy is viewed as an ivory tower that rarely engages with anyone outside of it, primarily due to the elitist barriers meant to preserve the prestige of the academy and control over the perception of what is valid knowledge. Inserting that, in social work specifically, there continues to be a gap between the academy and practice due to the difficulty translating theories and academic methods to the field, leading many social workers to critique the academy for inadequately preparing them for the field. This argument has also created a divide in the academy between a push for theoretical knowledge and professional development, with each side claiming priority. Moreover, some participants shared that they felt

the school of social work needed to be on the frontline for change. With their power, they need to be more deliberate about advocating for societal change. Elaborating that, while some professors have demonstrated a commitment to the community, it is a select few, not the majority. However, as a participant explained, the dedication and service to the academy required from their position often minimizes their ability to be present within the community, while maintaining some semblance of work-life balance.

The perceived oppression Olympics is another site of division within the social work academy. Two participants (both white) noted that they felt that when teaching about social location, students tend to get stuck on individual levels of oppression, which distracts from structural analysis and does more to divide the class than it does to unify. While I agree that this does happen, I feel like this creates an excellent opportunity to discuss differential racialization and acknowledge that one's reality can be deeply impacted by their race. Depending on the environment and context, different groups will have different experiences.

My concern lies in the potential misinterpretation of valid grievances as "oppression Olympics," which may overlook the genuine pain experienced by oppressed and marginalized groups. While unity is undoubtedly a powerful force for progress, we must not disregard the conflicts and hurt that exists between different marginalized communities. I believe that it is important to recognize that harm is not caused solely by the dominant group, as each group has its own history of causing pain, resulting in diverse experiences of suffering. Engaging in a comparison of who is more oppressed does not contribute to healing or unification. Instead, a crucial step towards healing and unity could be recognizing and validating the unique experiences of each group, acknowledging the pain they have endured, and taking responsibility

for the pain they may have caused others. By doing so, we create a foundation for meaningful dialogue, understanding, and solidarity among all communities. One participant suggested that a great way to reunify the discussion is by tying in whiteness' ability to be an ever-changing system of oppression that impacts us all, as discussed in the literature review of this thesis. Explaining that by focusing on social location, without a more profound understanding of systems and structures, identities are fragmented and continue to silo and divide people by their locations.

During a discussion about anti-racism work, a participant expressed concern about a divide between racialized individuals and white people, which they felt hindered progress in both the academic and wider community. Specifically, the participant noted that as a white person doing anti-racism work, they sometimes encountered distrust from racialized individuals who questioned their motives and agenda. Despite this, the participant believed in taking accountability for their role in systemic racism and saw themselves as part of the problem and the solution.

While I think it is fair to think that the distrust of white people being involved in movements centred on racialized issues can get in the way of progress, it must be noted that not everyone wanting to be involved in such movements has pure intentions. Furthermore, pure intentions do not negate the pain of feeling betrayed by an ally. When a group has experienced such violence, there will be defensiveness out of a need for safety. Moreover, being a self-prescribed ally or being regarded as an ally to a particular group in a specific setting does not give you access to every other group. While I do not disagree that the "oppression Olympics" can be a point of division, I believe that this issue is far more nuanced.

The data highlights that the "divide and conquer" strategy is as prevalent in society as it is within the academy. Groups are often pitted against each other, preventing the attainment of the true power of unity and community. The fragmentation of the school of social work and lack of connection to the community and other parts of the academy, contributes to the forced adoption of whiteness through isolation. Furthermore, it indicates that the social work academy must establish stronger connections with the community, recognizing the immense power it holds in terms of knowledge creation and the potential to drive meaningful change. As a crucial player in the field of social work, the Academy's ability to influence policies, practices, and social issues demands a closer relationship with the community it serves.

IMPACTS OF INSTITUTIONAL WHITENESS ON IDENTITY AND SENSE OF SELF:

The research findings shed light on the profound effects of institutional whiteness on individuals' identities and sense of self. This section explores how whiteness within institutions influences how individuals perceive themselves and navigate the academy, as two themes of altering identity and sense of self, and embracing authenticity, emerged from the interviews.

ALTERING IDENTITY AND SENSE OF SELF

The data shows that power dynamics within academia can profoundly affect professors and students, shaping their sense of self, identity, and ability to resist oppressive systems. Some participants felt that the power granted by the institution through positions and credentials can affirm identity and sense of self. However, others explained that it can also lead to their self-worth being tied to the institution, making pushing back against its practices difficult. The academy makes it difficult to challenge and speak out, to resist change. One participant explained that the emotional, mental, and spiritual toll it takes can cause one to question if the

resistance is worth the pain, which they explained, leads to the silencing of dissent and invokes a loss of voice. They elaborated that professors dedicate a considerable amount of time and effort to their institution, particularly if they have or aspire to have tenured positions. This dedication can become intertwined with their personal identity, making it difficult to push for change or resist it. This is because doing so may create obstacles to their success within the academic community. It becomes clear that adopting whiteness is the most unobstructed path to success.

Additionally, participants note that younger or newer professors may feel added pressure to prove themselves, which can lead to questioning their capabilities, impacting their sense of self by causing self-doubt in the validity of their presence and voice. Three participants shared that they thought the academy increases the difficulty of processes so that a sense of accomplishment and pride accompanies completion and thus can more easily be positively attached to one's sense of self. Moreover, credentials tend to be accompanied by power as they can indicate validity and authority for one's voice, strengthening the sense of self. However, another participant explained that this is also tied to the institution, creating a dynamic where one fills that self-doubt by subscribing to its ideologies, basing their self-worth on productivity and academic achievement. Adding that this is exacerbated as an instructor, as financial reliance becomes involved since the academy now influences one's identity, sense of self, and livelihood, which can act as a cloud looming over one's ability to speak out against the academy if they wish to. This reliance on the institution can isolate professors from other aspects of life, affecting relationships, community connections, and self-care. Two participants shared that establishing boundaries and self-worth becomes essential to protect oneself from the potential negative impact of institutional affiliation.

This suggests that the institutional culture of silencing and the constant pressure to excel in the academy create an environment where adopting whiteness appears to be the only viable path to success. While alternative approaches may be attempted, they are often met with resistance or obstacles. This pressure to perform results in neglecting one's own well-being and life outside of the academic setting. Interestingly, it appears that as one progresses further in the Academy, the pressure to conform intensifies, yet with greater power comes the possibility of expressing one's authentic self—if it remains intact after undergoing such a transformative process.

Conversely, a participant also felt that professors also contribute to adopting whiteness as their assumptions surrounding what it means to be a social worker or an academic, inevitably seep into their teachings and lessons, covertly or overtly. This can be seen in ways the class is addressed, such as regarding the class in a manner that would suggest they view all social workers as white or as having equal amounts of privilege. Every participant also pointed this out as being very present in the literature, as it tends to be directed towards educating privileged and white people, especially when matters of oppression arise. This becomes a silent way of adopting or pushing the adoption of whiteness, but it also helps to enforce the idea that the academy was meant for white people and that to belong in that space, you must adopt parts of whiteness. This adoption of whiteness may begin in the academy, but it was noted as seeping into other parts of one's life due to the dedication to the institution and the fact that knowledge can alter one's worldview.

Also emerging in the data is the idea that within the academic environment, there is pressure to conform to certain norms and expectations, including aspects of whiteness. A

participant explained that this process can transform their identity, likening it to being

"assembled" in a factory to meet institutional standards. Three participants felt this process made

them adopt whiteness either entirely or partially. Noting that failure to perform as expected or

showing up in non-traditional ways may result in belittlement, questioning academic abilities,

and feeling undervalued, ultimately contributing to burnout. This was compounded by the

academy only valuing specific ways of writing, speaking, and being. Explaining that these

experiences can negatively impact mental health, including anxiety, depression, and self-neglect,

hindering professors' ability to engage fully in their work, research, and teaching. One participant

shared that they felt people who desire change or have a strong voice or sense of self are pushed

into academics to be tamed and moulded into something safer for the system. They explained

that:

"In Hong Kong, if you are an activist, they put you in prison. In Canada, they put you in NGO or
academia so that you can be part of it, right? Then they take away your power and take away
your voice. And take away the way of what you do. They make you have this struggle because
they really want to change; you become part of it."

This suggests that the purpose of the current education system is not simply to produce

and control knowledge but also to alter identities and act as a method of control. They also

shared that they felt like the system was designed to oppress, to push conforming to the system,

and if one does not, the system instills a sense of failure at their fault so that the academy can

maintain power. It was explained that this is not unique to higher education. It begins when a

child enters primary school and compounds throughout their time in the education system. Even

while acknowledging the system being used as a control mechanism to break down systematic

opposition and force adoption and compliance, they shared that the creation and dissemination of

knowledge within this system is still powerful. They suggested that the continued presence of

voices opposing and challenging systematic oppression acts as a method of resistance, and to leave the academy would mean allowing the system to reproduce whiteness without barriers. Speaking out and advocating for change can be challenging, especially when one's identity becomes intertwined with the institution. However, resisting this integration and maintaining a sense of separation from the institution can offer protection and courage to challenge oppressive structures.

The notion that the academy has a profound impact on shaping identities is not only evident in my own experiences but also echoed in the experiences of the participants. This data suggests that upon engaging with the institution, we are expected to conform to its established standards and prescribed notions of correctness and validity. This compliance is reinforced by the punitive measures of failing those who resist or establishing barriers to their advancement. The data indicates that when we, as unnatural occupants, enter this space, the Academy attempts to shape us into fitting the mould of the conventional occupants. This pattern does not seem coincidental, as outspoken individuals are often pushed into the academy. While society perceives education as a source of empowerment which could help to uplift one's voice, it is also evident that we are urged into this transformative process, the Academy, which can potentially shape us into instruments that uphold the system instead of challenging it.

A participant explained that giving up parts of yourself is inevitable as you do so along any journey, whether in education, a job, or a relationship. Noting that it can be felt through seemingly little compromises, such as silencing yourself and using code-switching as a safety mechanism, leading to identity fragmentation. This, coupled with a lack of support, representation, and cultural silencing, can contribute to the erosion of mental well-being, which

supports the adoption of whiteness as it becomes the most encouraged avenue to safety within the academy. This became clear as participants discussed that even with methods for resistance, there were many moments where they felt their only option was to 'play the game' set forth by the academy. As the culture of the institution encourages people to 'play the game'. It is something we learn as students that gets compounded and reinforced along the path of becoming an academic. We must adopt whiteness and conform to the system by 'playing the game.'

Another participant noted that teaching about systems of oppression can be liberating because students will see that some of the challenges they face are not individual issues or their own fault; it is because of the system's design. Once this recognition has been made, they feel empowered to continue challenging and resisting the system, providing hope for some educators and acting as their encouragement.

EMBRACING AUTHENTICITY:

Emerging in the data was the idea that entering a new space within the education system, especially as a non-dominant group member, raises questions about how to navigate it safely while remaining true to oneself. A participant said that a dilemma arises: should one perform to fit in or embrace their authentic self? Adding that this struggle is particularly pronounced for racialized individuals in academia, as they often face excessive questioning and belittlement, leading to doubts about the value of their knowledge. Explaining that despite the fear and potential danger of not conforming to the academic mould, fragmenting oneself can be more harmful. Therefore, showing up as one's authentic self becomes an act of resistance.

The participant added:

 "I think I actually, as much as I erased myself through all those years of education, I think that from the thesis on, I promised myself that I wouldn't do that anymore. It's a constant struggle to show up as myself, like I remember even thinking, 'Oh, no, I can't have my nose piercings, because I don't want to be perceived as this, I don't know, punky, stupid, or whatever bad things came to my mind when I think about how I've been received but now I'm just like, 'no I don't care, your perception, I have no control over, and if you want to judge me based on that like that's ridiculous.' So like, I try to really embody resistance just in how I show up, how I dress the way I talk, I just try to be authentic and who I am outside of the classroom, in the classroom. Because I don't think it helps to maintain separate identities in that way anymore. Right? That fracturing is really harmful, particularly for us as racialized women in the Academy, right? I don't wanna do that anymore. So for me, I think my sense of identity has gotten stronger the more I get more power."

This quote highlights the transformative impact that higher education can have on one's identity and sense of self. The participant reflects on how, throughout their years of education, they felt the need to erase parts of themselves, conforming to institutional expectations. However, as they worked on their PhD thesis, they promised themself to be more authentic. They acknowledge the constant struggle to present themselves as their true self, free from the fear of judgment or negative perceptions. They explained the need to let go of the urge to please others as they recognize that they cannot control how others perceive them. Moreover, they suggest that as they gain more power from their position within academia, they find that their sense of self grows stronger. The data on power suggests that the protection that comes with position and power within the institution creates a sense of safety that can allow people to show up as themselves. This revelation prompts a question: How can we create a greater sense of safety for both instructors and students to express their true selves.

The participant further explained that although the academy is not always safe or comfortable, finding pockets within the academic environment where one can be authentic can lead to personal growth. Expanding these spaces allows individuals to live more authentically and create room for themselves within the academic landscape. Concluding that ultimately, the

goal is to build a university culture where authenticity is embraced and hiding one's identity is no longer necessary. The participant offered the following advice:

"the more we can make those little pockets, the bigger they'll grow. And hopefully, you know, you don't have to show up and feel like you need to hide any part of yourself, because now who you are is just the main way of doing things in the university."

The participant explained that for the academy's culture to shift, we must show up as ourselves, which is easier with the help of community and relationships. Adding that, in the academy, having someone to talk to, strategize with, and relate to can be profoundly affirming, especially for those who often feel isolated in their experiences or while addressing specific issues. Another participant shared that walking the walk and consistently being true to oneself is challenging but essential. Embracing one's authentic self creates a singular version of oneself, free from the need to conform to others' expectations, even within the classroom. While other participants confirmed that safety concerns are valid, one participant explained that finding comfort in authenticity eventually makes this path easier to navigate. Another Participant shared that coming from communities where using your voice can get you killed; it is increasingly difficult to resist whiteness in the academy. But by speaking up, you are giving yourself more power, and it does not need to be perfectly crafted or articulated, but it needs to be said.

The theme of struggling to be true to oneself within the academy revealed in the data, is something I can personally relate to. I have been fortunate to find supportive spaces within the academy, particularly in the school of social work, where I can be my authentic self. However, I have also faced challenges when engaging with other parts of the academy that have instilled a hesitancy when it comes to venturing outside of the social work department. These experiences have been tough, with feelings of being belittled and shut down. This made me question if I truly

belonged in the academy and, honestly, impacted my sense of self and confidence. But, this data, highlights the importance of continuing to show up, resist whiteness and call for change within the academy.

A participant highlighted that my thesis topic can serve as an example that change is being made within the academy, stating this, on the pocket of support I have found:

"it's really inspiring to me that you're doing this because I think honestly, like as a student, this would have been something I would have been really interested in, but not anything that anyone would have supported. So, you know, really happy for you, and that you have people supporting you during this work."

The support I have received from certain faculty members for my thesis, along with the immense encouragement from my supervisor to express my truth, even if it might make some uncomfortable, indicates a shift within the social work Academy. It serves as an example of how the school can embrace diverse perspectives, which makes a significant difference in allowing individuals to be their authentic selves within the academy. This further emphasizes the power that instructors have over the cultures of schools of social work. Should another student writing their thesis read this, I would like to share a quote from a participant who has helped me ensure my voice is present and authentic in my work. They encouraged me to ask this of myself and my writing.

"what do I want it to represent? Do I want it to fit what I was told to do? Do I want to do something that you know will fit in with what the Academy expects? Or am I getting to use this as an opportunity to find my voice, to put myself in my work, and to actually say the things that are real and true to me"

MANIFESTATION OF WHITENESS IN SOCIAL WORK EDUCATION

As explored in the literature review, social work education reproduces whiteness in many ways. Every participant noted that they see whiteness permeating every aspect of the academy

and their school of social work. This section explores areas that every program could work on. Participants explained that some programs are doing a better job than others at decentering whiteness and decolonizing their programs. Participants identified the following areas of the social work academy as supporting the manifestation of whiteness the clearest. The identified areas were social work acting as a colonial tool, the connection between social work and community, knowledge of systems, and program structure and knowledge.

SOCIAL WORK AS A COLONIAL TOOL

Participants felt that as a school, we must address the uncomfortable truth that social work has functioned as a colonial tool and continues to perpetuate oppressive systems today as the profession operates within and upholds existing colonial structures. One participant explained that social workers are educated and trained by the system, thus, can be seen as agents who maintain the status quo by conforming to and relying on capitalist systems. They explained that social workers being paid to uphold the system suppresses any desire to challenge it and discourages creativity within the field. I feel that this begins in the academy from the lack of discussion surrounding social works involvement in colonization.

One participant explained that the academy tends to focus on the individual manifestation of oppression, neglecting the deep systemic analysis that would equip social work students with the knowledge to resist oppressive practices and promote social justice. Three participants felt that by avoiding critical examinations of social work's colonial history and the harm it continues to cause, we allow colonialism to persist. One noted that this avoidance could be due to the fear of critiquing the profession, as it has become a significant part of our identities. The data suggests that as a profession and academy, social work must overcome this fear, take

accountability, and confront uncomfortable truths. During my undergraduate studies in social work, the topic of colonial history was often glossed over. While it was acknowledged that social work is connected to the process of colonization, there was a lack of in-depth exploration into the extent of this connection. The few instances where colonialism was discussed mainly revolved around the sixties scoop and social work's involvement in eugenics. However, I noticed that outside of a few elective courses, the ongoing impact of colonization on social work was not adequately addressed in core classes. Apart from a few courses, we seldom talked about practical examples of social work tools and practices that promote colonization. As a result, when I entered the field, I realized that numerous social workers were unaware of the correlation between our actions and their contribution to colonization.

Additionally, it was noted that the curriculum's failure to explore Canadian contexts, especially concerning marginalized communities, supports the blind adoption of whiteness as students are not informed on the issues surrounding their potential profession. This omission perpetuates the myth of a white Canada, as we neglect the diverse histories and experiences of people living in this country. Two participants felt that our global perspectives are limited, focusing mainly on Western or 'white' countries, as if social work only exists in those regions, which is far from reality. This, however, should not be surprising considering the academy's continued exclusion of voice. When we exclude these perspectives, we miss vast amounts of knowledge, methodologies and potentially groundbreaking work, effectively upholding the white supremacist nature of the academy. It was not until I entered this graduate program that a thorough investigation of topics concerning communities in Canada that are not of white or indigenous backgrounds was embedded within a core curriculum class. While these subjects are occasionally introduced, they tend to be superficially covered or only briefly mentioned. I have

noticed a trend of these contexts being discussed in elective courses, which feels like they are pushed to the periphery of the program. This is concerning to me because it means that there is a potential that students will graduate without having engaged in this learning.

One participant explained that social work's role as a colonial tool is embedded in its education and employment systems, where individuals are moulded to conform to norms dictated by whiteness and capitalism. Despite a self-proclaimed 'dedication' to advocating for social justice and service in school mission statements, participants felt that the profession's and academy's actions often align with colonial practices, serving as agents of control over marginalized communities and acting on behalf of the system. Within my own school, we have statements on the website and in the course outlines surrounding our responsibility as social workers to be agents of change. I feel that these statements speak to hope and a goal for the social workers they educate to be a part of systemic change. However, I think this participant is highlighting an important point. Even though we have good intentions as social workers, we may be limited by the institutions and systems we work within. Which can lead us to perpetuate and reinforce whiteness by enacting policies and procedures.

The same participant pointed out that a clear example is the fear tactics used in many social work systems, coercing clients to comply with the prescribed norms. Failure to conform results in punitive measures, such as removing children, housing, or access to resources. Another participant explained that these tactics mirror the carceral system and reinforce the control of whiteness while masquerading as acts of "helping."

The first participant noted that:

 "social work still is a colonial profession. Right? Like we work in institutions, in organizations that essentially continue to engage in state, sanctioned violence towards black, indigenous, racialized and other marginalized groups of people, and I think, you know, we haven't really contended with the reality of, you know, what that means, right? But the control we have over others, over their livelihood, over their healing journeys… I think it's a really big issue."

The second participant also provided a similar analysis regarding social work's role as a colonial tool, stating:

"They do not only use prison, they do not only use police, the policing of people, the power of social work even much greater than other like, carceral system because they are using the notion of helping. 'I am helping you'. For example settlement service. They already need you to see what kind of food you need to give your children. Right, that is whiteness. And that is, what kind of childcare, you need to play with children that means love. But in our culture, giving food to the children means love, right? […] thats why people need to work in certain ways and performed in certain ways. Like all the reasons social work gets funding decided because they want to control the people. In the name of protection, right? That's the surveillance"

This participant's observation highlights that social work's control and surveillance mechanisms often exceed those of the carceral system due to the perceived benevolence of "helping." Explaining that settlement services, for instance, can dictate aspects of clients' lives down to how they feed their children, imposing whiteness upon them under the guise of assistance. Adding that, in becoming social workers, we are taught to enforce these practices, often letting go of our cultural understandings of the world. Whiteness is deeply embedded at all levels of the profession, and they felt the culture of professionalization plays a significant role in perpetuating these harmful practices. As to become social workers, we are conditioned to adopt these ways, reinforcing the colonial foundations of the profession as the survival and existence of social work are tied to the oppression of marginalized communities.

When questioned about their decision to pursue social work, every participant expressed a strong desire for social or societal change and a heartfelt urge to offer assistance. I think this is something that draws many people to the field. However, I believe that this noble aspiration,

coupled with the lack of acknowledgment regarding social work's historical ties as a colonial tool and how it influences controlling practices today, creates an environment where we are unintentionally perpetuating the harmful realities that social work has long been associated with, thus highlighting the importance of sharing social works true history.

SOCIAL WORK AND COMMUNITY:

According to participants, social work professors need to fully integrate with or provide enough support to the communities they teach and research about and particularly the organizations and causes they are involved with. This presents a significant issue, as professors possess both voice and power, which could be utilized to advocate for the change they claim to desire. However, a participant felt there is often a lack of active involvement on the frontlines to support and uplift these causes. The data indicates that the social work Academy must establish stronger connections with the community, recognizing the immense power it holds in terms of knowledge creation and the potential to drive meaningful change. As a crucial player in the field of social work, the academy's ability to influence policies, practices, and social issues demands a closer relationship with the community it serves. It must be noted that some schools of social work are attempting to address this.

One participant pointed out that this is increasingly difficult because the realities of working with communities, mainly when you belong to the same community, are not adequately addressed within social work education. They felt that as social workers, we are taught to engage in a specific manner that can detach us from our identities, leading us to comply more readily with the existing system. Adding that the system deliberately shapes us to fit a "white" mould so that we maintain its structures. They shared that:

"white students are expected that they could integrate into absolutely any setting and work with any group of people, whereas people who are identified as belonging to a certain group are often assumed that they're going to work with that group and no other."

Nonetheless, another participant shared that working within one's own community under this new role is not often discussed, which was suggested as coming from teaching staff possibly not having experienced this issue, possibly due to a predominantly white teaching staff. They added that the impact that taking on the social work identity has on one's connection to their community must be explored, as this is a reality many social workers from marginalized communities have to contend with. Noting that the focus around these issues tends to be centred on ethical practice. However, another participant shared that they feel what is considered ethical practice is deeply rooted in whiteness and reinforces it by dictating how we should navigate our communities if we choose to work within them. This aspect significantly influenced and inspired my research as I struggled to figure out how to separate my work as a social worker versus what I do as a community member. This data suggests that for social work to move beyond being a 'white profession', students of colour and students from marginalized communities need to be supported in many ways, especially in regards to navigating their role as a community member and a social worker.

KNOWLEDGE OF SYSTEMS

Two participants argued that social work education regarding systems of oppression often lacks a comprehensive perspective on the institutions that perpetuate control and injustices and how they intersect. Explaining that while the subject is touched on, the curriculum falls short in providing a thorough structural and systemic analysis, leaving the dialogue incomplete and insufficiently embedded in the program structure. Noting instead, we are often told that we can make changes from within the system without fully understanding how the system operates. This

naivety may lead to burnout as students are discouraged by the belief that the system will not change in their lifetime, causing doubt surrounding the impact of this work.

A participant argued that social work education predominantly focuses on teaching how to function within the system rather than how to challenge it. As a tool of the system, it produces workers who will uphold and enforce the system, stifling creative thinking that could potentially question and reshape the existing structure. This lack of understanding regarding systems was pointed out by a participant through the following example. As social workers, there is a tendency to attribute the failure of social programs to neoliberalism and lack of funding, thus failing to critically examine how the system the program upholds contributes to the problems we aim to address. For example, if one looks at reintegration programs not having enough funding to support people after they have left prison sufficiently, the chance to imagine a whole new system is ignored. Rather than focusing on the lack of funding from the government, system analysis provides an opportunity to move beyond the confines of the current system. If we had a different or no criminal system, we would not require funding for services to rebuild a person's life after incarceration. This would eliminate the need to spend $60,000 to $100,000 per person per year on the prison system. Instead, we could focus on addressing other parts of the system that contribute to these issues in the first place. The lack of macro systemic analysis perpetuates a narrow worldview, causing the curriculum to reflect and sustain the dominant perspective of whiteness. The participant also shared that it is critical to be realistic and acknowledge that while we need to imagine and work towards a better system, we also need to find ways of working within the current structure because people are engaging with these systems whether we agree with them or not, thus change also needs to be made from inside.

Specific social work programs were noted as attempting to replicate clinical psychology programs, prioritizing individual issues over systemic and structural analysis. This neglect of social justice-centred approaches was noted as alienating people of colour and other marginalized groups while contributing to an environment where their voices are excluded and invalidated. Moreover, as mentioned, the emphasis on individual oppression and identity in our education sometimes leads to a competition of "oppression Olympics," diverting attention from the broader systemic issues and how they continue affecting communities and individuals. One participant felt the institution tends only to endorse or integrate these alternative methodologies if it serves its interests. Adding that while it may wish to portray itself as an equitable and inclusive space, the academy remains rooted in whiteness and benefits from its foundation. As a result, it hesitates to incorporate teachings that challenge this status quo, as they have the potential to disrupt the structure of whiteness upon which it thrives.

Interestingly, many participants noted that their deeper understanding of systems, anti-oppressive principles, and decolonial learning came from outside the academy rather than being ingrained in their formal education. These learnings were often self-initiated or acquired through community engagement and experience. Two participants shared that academic freedom allows some educators to teach without comprehensive knowledge of these critical subjects. Additionally, while accreditation guidelines by CASWE offer some guidance, they felt there is insufficient accountability to ensure these issues are thoroughly embedded in every course. This resonated with my own experience, once, a social work professor told me that the system would not provide us with the necessary tools to dismantle it. This could be the reason why schools of social work often shy away from teaching about systems of oppression, as they uphold the system. However, based on the data, it becomes evident that comprehending systems of

oppression and their perpetuation is vital not only for dismantling the system but also for bringing about a transformative shift in the way social work is practiced.

PROGRAM STRUCTURE AND CULTURE

A theme that emerged is schools of social work operating within a larger institution of higher education, and the need to recognize that the academy functions as a for-profit, capitalistic business. Two participants observed that financial considerations and filling seats take precedence over creating an environment conducive to critical learning. Adding that university administration tends to prioritize the financial side of things, often neglecting the importance of fostering a better learning environment.

One participant explained that as programs expand, driven by the administration's wishes, compromises are made that can undermine the program's integrity. Larger class sizes, reduced quality of placements, and limited student support were noted as some of the consequences of this expansion. Additionally, the structure of some programs does not align with the type of learning required. Three participants pointed out that the lack of student support and the fast-paced programs hinder the potential for deeper understanding and exploration. Inserting that taking more time for thorough investigation is necessary to cultivate critical thinking skills.

A participant added that social work is often perceived as a professional degree, which can overshadow the emphasis on critical analysis. As aforementioned, there appears to be a divide between professional development and the need for a deeper critical approach. The data suggests that both aspects are necessary and should complement each other, fostering a well-rounded education. However, the university's standards play a significant role in shaping program structures, meaning that the overall culture of the institution will infiltrate the program.

Meaning that the dedication to capitalism infiltrates, as a participant pointed out, challenging the structure and culture at the program level often requires navigating through professors and instructors. They explained that if there is no culture of desiring a fundamentally different way of knowing and being within the faculty, advocating for necessary changes becomes challenging. Adding that professors must have sufficient power and influence to ensure their voices are heard and taken seriously. As discussed, tenure provides a level of security that allows professors to advocate for change without fear of job insecurity, but perhaps all the time and tasks faculty need to undertake to get tenure, ensures that they are socialized and tamed before they get that powerful privilege.

Every participant shared that they believe whiteness to be embedded in every part of social work and social work education, and to begin to address it would require anti-oppression, anti-racism, and indigenous knowledge to be centred. However, they continue to be pushed to the periphery, only present in specific courses and lessons. Two participants felt that introducing topics related to whiteness and systems of oppression often occurs too late in mainstream education. When they are introduced, it is taught from the lens of schooling white people who have never engaged with these realities. This enforces that the program was designed for white students, alienating black, indigenous, and other people of colour. It was also noted as limiting the opportunity for BIPOC students to engage in a way that contributes to their learning and growth, essentially shutting down the opportunity for healthy cross-racial conversations. Participants felt that when white supremacy is decentred in these conversations, they can be restorative, especially for racialized students. It appears that what is absent from this discourse is the acknowledgment that everyone, in some capacity, embodies aspects of whiteness. These manifestations might vary but they all contribute to the support of this systemic structure.

However, not all individuals from racialized backgrounds are aware of their own connections to whiteness, and this lack of awareness influences the capacity to address the concept of whiteness within academic settings. As articulated by Willie Jennings, we can all be white (Jennings, 2018). Consequently, by overlooking this aspect, we overlook a critical component of perpetuating whiteness.

All participants acknowledged that the curriculum in schools of social work reflects whiteness and nullifies knowledge that does not support the narrative of the academy. Interestingly, two participants noted that much of the research conducted in schools of social work revolves around marginalized communities, meaning that they take their words and use them in their academic writing, furthering careers rooted in the oppression of these communities.

Moreover, two participants agreed that issues of whiteness are often only addressed when they become popular or receive substantial funding. This selective exploration of whiteness underscores the institution's tendency to prioritize financial considerations over a genuine commitment to social justice and anti-oppressive work. Consequently, the institution's gatekeeping practices control the knowledge that can be produced, leading to tokenization and a disregard for the genuine perspectives of marginalized voices.

A professor shared a crucial example, revealing how she was discouraged from pursuing her desired research topics. Instead, she was pressured to focus on a subject currently in the media spotlight and required research to support it. Notably, this issue pertained to a section of the BIPOC community. She felt that because she is racialized despite not being a member of this specific group, she was recommended for this work, which tokenized her role within the research

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process. Explaining that, in instances, it felt as though her voice and thoughts only mattered when they aligned with the pre-established narrative sought by the institution.

This tokenization perpetuates a performative notion of dedication to anti-oppression and anti-racist work while silencing and erasing genuine expressions of dissent or alternative perspectives. As a participant added that this systemic bias that guides research priorities effectively undermines the agency and authority of researchers who want to address the underlying structures of whiteness and its implications for marginalized communities. Additionally, the insistence on rigid writing formats, like APA, were identified as contributing to institutional gatekeeping by enforcing such limitations in expressing knowledge and ideas. This standardized approach was argued as hindering the expression of diverse perspectives and voices, stifling creativity and critical thinking. These practices contribute to the academy's co-optation of knowledge production and reinforce the dominance of hegemonic ideologies.

The participant added:
"The knowledge and the way in which we share knowledge is still very much based on like a Eurocentric and archaic model of doing things. From everything, to the classroom set up to the assignments to, you know, imposing white supremacist ways of being on students, right? Like, you need to get this done by this time, or you're going to fail, like this sort of punitive way of approaching learning that actually then forces students to focus more on performance and excelling rather than 'am I actually learning things I need to learn to do a good job when I do eventually work in the field' so I think just not having enough honest conversations in the classroom about stuff."

This suggests that the education system's punitive culture and adherence to Eurocentric and outdated knowledge-sharing models hinder the development of critical thinking and meaningful learning experiences. This perpetuates a focus on performance and grades rather than genuine understanding and application of knowledge. This approach to education shapes future social workers to conform and comply with institutional norms rather than challenging existing

systems. Consequently, these students carry these patterns into their professional practice, potentially reinforcing a compliant and unquestioning approach within the institutions they work for.

The culture of an institution is deeply influenced by its people. Thus, as identified by a participant, establishing a program founded on social justice and decolonial values becomes challenging when the individuals within it lack a genuine commitment to systemic change. Adding that the presence of dedicated change-makers within an unsupportive environment can lead to even more significant harm as the culture actively resists those challenging the system. Racialized participants recounted being told to toughen up if they wished to succeed in academia, demanding that they tolerate the toxic culture to thrive as academics. This sentiment suggests that they should remain silent and passive within the institution.

Furthermore, a participant pointed out that racialized individuals are often advised to "choose their battles," dismissively belittling their struggles and implying they are not worth fighting for. However, one cannot dictate the worth of these battles without fully understanding the experiences and challenges those affected face. For change to be made, voices of the marginalized need to be integrated into the academy and culture needs to be allowed to change. However, a participant pointed out that the university operates on a hierarchical structure, with limited representation of indigenous or racialized individuals in top positions. Highlighting that progress in creating space for racialized people within the academy is slow.

METHODS FOR RESISTANCE:

This section will explore methods for resisting whiteness. Every participant suggested that one of the answers for decentering whiteness is to decolonize education. Decolonization can

sound like a daunting task, however, participants were able to break it down into concrete actions that can be applied in any school of social work. The following areas will be addressed: community building, accountability and the learning environment, emotional ties to learning, sense of self, supportive learning, and knowledge of systems and ends with rethinking education and imagining an alternative approach. While some of these methods may be specific to social work, I believe that it offers direction for decolonizing education as a whole.

COMMUNITY

Community was identified as serving as a vital method for resistance, as it was a recurring theme observed throughout each interview. The significance of relationship building and creating spaces for open dialogue cannot be underestimated in dismantling whiteness within social work education. It was explained that the academy's isolating nature makes a support system essential, and finding a community that uplifts voices and allows individuals to be their authentic selves becomes a vital healing mechanism, countering the negative impacts on self-identity caused by the institution.

Participants consistently recounted their experiences of isolation within the academy, and for some, this loneliness led to contemplating leaving and, in some cases, actually leaving. Explaining that engaging in anti-racist work alone can lead to feeling like an outsider, fostering tension and an unsafe environment. The burden of tackling systemic issues in isolation inevitably leads to burnout, highlighting the necessity of collective support.

All participants agreed that community plays a pivotal role in navigating the system and identifying areas where anti-racist work is being done and supported. This minimizes exposure to violent spaces that might arise when attempting to navigate the complexities individually.

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Moreover, being part of a community provides affirmation and a sense of belonging, as individuals recognize that they are not alone in their struggles.

Acknowledging that although no individual can single-handedly dismantle every aspect of whiteness, collective efforts as a community can make significant strides. Communities bring together diverse knowledge, encompassing institutional, communal, and structural perspectives, empowering collective action.

It was suggested that building community can be fostered by encouraging students to support each other, share knowledge, strategize, exchange ideas and advocate for one another. It was noted that creating spaces where joy and laughter are embraced and encouraged can also serve as a healing force. Recognizing the exhaustion that accompanies resistance, community relationships provide opportunities for rejuvenation and self-preservation.

Mentorship also plays a crucial role in community-building. Many participants expressed that their relationships with students are why they continue their work within the academy. Moreover, participants routinely referred to lessons taught by their mentors and how they helped them navigate their education and careers, further underscoring the importance of community in sustaining the resistance against whiteness.

THE LEARNING ENVIRONMENT AND ACCOUNTABILITY:

Professors hold significant power in academia, particularly those with tenure who can advocate for change. However, as one participant explained, regardless of tenure, if one is teaching, they are role models and must consider the impact of their actions on students who look to them for guidance. Adding that instructors can create affirming and uplifting spaces for

students struggling under the weight of the institution's whiteness. Multiple participants shared

that it is unrealistic to believe that an instructor will never cause harm or unintentionally

reproduce whiteness, but it is essential to constantly reflect on how they can improve as

educators and learn from uncomfortable moments.

One participant shared:

"I think it's really important to also remind ourselves that how we address any singular student in
the classroom, it's being watched by everyone else because by happenstance it could have been
them, so if you're shutting down a student or making them feel uncomfortable or their
contribution was unwelcome. They're going to be so many other students thinking that they're
going to have to defend themselves now, and they're going to shut down. I'm sorry, we're social
workers. That's the department. So I think the accountability is even higher. I'm not saying that
not all faculty are accountable. I think they are, but in social work, I find it atrocious if people
aren't undertaking that work."

Addressing students with care and respect is crucial, as others observe their interactions,

and shutting down one student can have a ripple effect on the entire class. A participant

explained that accountability and an inclusive and supportive environment are vital in social

work. The data suggests that building relationships and fostering open dialogue is crucial to co-

creating a supportive learning environment. It requires being responsive to issues of racism,

having deliberate methods to address harm, and ensuring accountability for the classroom

atmosphere. It was suggested that students should be involved in co-creating classroom rules,

thus extending responsibility for their presence. Adding that when harm inevitably occurs,

addressing it should focus on restoration rather than punitive measures, encouraging learning and

growth for everyone involved. This can look like asking the student who experienced the harm

how they felt, what could be done to repair the situation and then engaging in an opportunity to

learn with the person who caused the harm. Participants suggest that this needs to happen at least

partially with the involvement of the class as it is unlikely that only those seemingly directly

involved would be the only people impacted by the situation. Moreover, everyone can learn from moments of dissent, and teaching healthy mechanisms for resolving issues is essential, especially within schools of social work. All participants believed that relationships must be established within the classroom for this environment to blossom.

In addition to relationship building, creating space for creativity and critical thinking is considered essential. Encouraging students to explore new perspectives and create meaning for themselves is a vital part of a critical approach to education. A participant identified that this approach aligns with the idea of abolitionist social work, imagining a world beyond the existing systems and finding ways to work towards that vision. Suggesting that, fostering relationships, accountability, and creativity are powerful tools to resist whiteness and create transformative educational spaces in social work programs.

EMOTIONAL, TRANSFORMATIVE LEARNING

Each participant agreed that emotional and transformative learning stand as powerful methods for resistance within the academy. Students are often seen as mere numbers or productive machines rather than individuals with emotions and feelings. Noting that engaging with the whole student, not just their academic intellect is essential for genuine and profound learning experiences.

Participants highlighted that creating spaces for vulnerability is crucial, as it promotes courage and ignites a sense of urgency for change. Emotional experiences within the learning process were cited as providing an opportunity for transformation, leaving students with new perspectives and a changed outlook on the world. Three participants believe visceral experiences are particularly impactful, as they connect learning to emotions and feelings, deepening the

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learning experience and evoking passion and interest. In doing so, students are more likely to remember and internalize these experiences, as they have a profound effect at an emotional level. One participant shared that if education touched an emotional level: "They would remember those experiences because they felt them."

Two participants explained that incorporating experiential learning outside of placements is paramount. While placements are critical, they were also observed as perpetuating the values of other institutions, often entrenched in whiteness and exploitation. Adding that what students take with them long after leaving the academy are the emotional connections they form with the content and people. A participant explained that when learning experiences matter and resonate personally, students feel a sense of ownership over their education, leading to meaningful and lasting impacts.

I connected with this idea as it resonated with my own experiences. Some of the most profound lessons I learned were during field trips to various places, like child welfare agencies, where I had discussions with directors, parents, and children involved in child protection. Other great trips also offered opportunities to connect with the land and myself, emphasizing the significance of embracing 'non-traditional' methods of learning and decolonizing education.

SENSE OF SELF:

Two participants observed that the changes in one's identity or how they present themselves can sometimes be perceived as adopting a "white" persona. Factors like speaking, dressing, and acting can sometimes lead others to make such assumptions. For instance, one professor recounted being told they were the "whitest Asian person" someone knew. Although hurtful, this experience prompted critical self-reflection. It made her question how she was

showing up and what aspects of her identity were being influenced or adapted in the academic setting. This introspection is an example of critical reflexivity. Additionally, three participants shared that their social work education made them white. One participant shared that their education affirmed their whiteness, and one said that their concrete sense of self and connection to their community was why they could resist becoming white within the academy.

According to four participants, resisting whiteness involves holding onto one's authentic voice and actively challenging prevailing norms. By showing up, being present, and using their voices, individuals can fight to produce meaningful and relevant knowledge for communities traditionally marginalized in the academy. This means embracing and expressing their true selves, including their language, dress, and cultural practices, without feeling inferior or out of place. One participant felt that achieving this level of authenticity requires a significant shift in the institutional culture.

Another method of resistance identified was maintaining a sense of detachment from the institution, not allowing one's entire identity to be wrapped up in their academic career. This mindset prepares individuals to leave if they no longer feel safe or the institution's culture remains unreceptive to change. A participant explained that sometimes, despite giving their all, the lack of progress or alignment with personal values may lead them to consider leaving rather than compromising their authentic selves.

SUPPORTING LEARNING:

Participants mentioned that in some schools, there is a preference for academic expertise over practical experience. As a result, individuals who have little to no real-life experience in particular subjects may still teach it. An example of this, shared by a participant, was advocacy

work. They observed that this discrepancy becomes apparent in the student's learning experiences, as they can significantly benefit from instructors who possess firsthand knowledge and practical expertise in the field, as opposed to purely academic insights, as they can provide concrete methods and examples for doing the work.

To enhance the integration of theory and practice, efforts should be made to bridge the gap. Current approaches, such as having a placement seminar and a field instructor, might not be sufficient. One participant suggested that a more effective strategy could involve providing additional support through sessional instructors or other personnel who can intimately guide students throughout their placement learning journey in addition to the two current support methods. Stated that Individuals who can navigate both the community and academic domains would be instrumental in this process. Having instructors who deeply understand theoretical knowledge and practical application would create a more holistic and enriching learning environment for students. Noting that such instructors can effectively blend academic concepts with real-world experiences, leading to a more well-rounded educational experience that prepares students for the challenges and complexities of their chosen field. Unfortunately, they recognize that financial constraints and the institution's profit-oriented focus may create a barrier to implementing these support systems.

KNOWLEDGE OF SYSTEMS:

Participants indicated that to create meaningful change, we must begin by deeply understanding the systems that underpin and govern society, such as capitalism, whiteness, dominance, and control. This foundational knowledge forms the basis for fostering imagination and creating space where power can be distributed more equitably. Participants mentioned that

by providing an environment that encourages open discussions about systems of oppression in every class, we can comprehensively address their impact on social work practice. Frequent and honest dialogues about issues like white supremacy can help us move beyond individual guilt to focus on dismantling the system itself. A Participant explained that this will require an understanding that when discussing many issues of oppression, the focus is on the system rather than the individual; yes, the system is comprised of people, but these systems existed long before those of us upholding it. Getting to this point may take time, but it is necessary. One participant shared this on the matter:

"I try to be humble and talk about like how I'm complicit in these systems as well. Right? And getting everyone to recognize that it's not about you are complicit. I'm not. We're all complicit because we live in this settler colonial nation-state. We're working in a colonial institution, like, of course, we are complicit to a certain degree. And so I think getting people to recognize that alleviates some of that defensiveness and pressure because then you understand that, regardless of who you are, we're participating in these systems, which means we're complicit. So if we can recognize that, then we could think of, okay, well, how do we collectively resist these institutions if we're going to be a part of them?"

Participants believe recognizing how the system works empowers social workers to reduce harm while actively working towards dismantling oppressive structures. It is not just about abolishing or rebuilding existing institutions; true transformation requires reshaping society's foundations. By making small changes, we can begin to imagine a different system. However, education must embrace imagination and creativity alongside knowledge for it to be truly transformative and not mere indoctrination.

Acknowledging our complicity in the systems we live and work within is crucial. We can alleviate defensiveness and pressure by fostering humility and recognizing that we are all complicit in settler colonialism and institutional oppression. Understanding our collective participation in these systems enables us to collectively resist and challenge these institutions

from within while simultaneously working towards dismantling these oppressive systems. Participants acknowledged that this would require coming together to envision a path challenging the status quo.

RETHINKING EDUCATION AND IMAGINING AN ALTERNATIVE APPROACH:

When participants were asked what education would look like in their ideal world, there were many creative answers, and the following were outlined as key differences. There was a shared perspective that it would include far more views and voices, becoming a truly diverse space both in people and knowledge. Two participants explicitly hoped the marker of expertise would not solely rely on obtaining a Ph.D. Instead, we would emphasize the importance of mentorship and self-discovery in shaping one's learning journey. This approach would encourage diverse perspectives and prevent perpetuating the dominance of whiteness in knowledge dissemination.

Class sizes would be significantly smaller, capped at around twelve students. Recognizing the significance of building relationships and meaningful connections, smaller class sizes would allow for more intimate interactions between educators and learners. This way, students can engage with the material and each other more deeply. Moreover, participants hoped that knowledge sharing would not be considered one way; students' knowledge and experiences would be held in similar regard as the educator, decentering the current power structure.

The program's pace would slow down to provide time for thoroughly exploring subjects. Instead of constant information cramming, students would be encouraged to delve deeply into topics to enhance understanding and retention. A few participants shared that the focus should shift from high-pressure exams primarily assessing memorization and performance to a more

holistic evaluation approach supporting the learning process. Assessments would prioritize critical thinking and comprehension.

All participants envisioned that education would evolve into more than just a class setting. It would encompass shared experiences that foster development, open conversations, and build a sense of community. Activities and communal gatherings, including shared meals, would contribute to shifting the culture of the learning environment.

Another key difference would be the increased flexibility surrounding support for students, where, as a learning community, we would come together to support each other in our journeys, whether through childcare or alternative access to knowledge. In essence, rethinking education involves moving away from a one-size-fits-all model and embracing an inclusive, diverse, and supportive approach that focuses on genuine learning and personal growth.

Participants all agreed that the space of a university campus enforces whiteness and colonial power dynamics. The reimagined education approach would include opportunities for physical movement of classes, such as field trips or engagements outside the institution. More broadly, knowledge would not be ensnared in the academy, and instead, learning would happen on the land and with the community, giving the opportunity to decolonize not only the ways we learn but the ways we produce knowledge. By doing so, we can nurture both intellectual and emotional development.

CHAPTER SIX: CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

I began this research to explore if what I had experienced as becoming white through social work education, was being experienced by other people. If it was, can it be resisted, and if so, how? The data suggests that social work education perpetuates whiteness and colonialism. As such, this research shows that participating in social work education can make one white. This operates through various relationships with power within schools of social work, such as the relationship between power and knowledge, professors and the institution, professors and the classroom, students and the institution and division and power. Whiteness manifests in various ways within schools such as social work's role as a colonial tool, the relationship with community, program structure and culture. Inevitably, whiteness embedded in higher education, the social work academy, and the field, can alter the identities and sense of self of those involved with the academy either as a student or instructor. Nevertheless, it is important to recognize that there is opposition to whiteness and its reproduction within the social work academy, community and beyond. As highlighted within this thesis, there are many methods of resistance that have been working for those aiming to decenter whiteness in the academy, such as, developing and supporting a sense of community, engaging in different ways of viewing and supporting learning, and embedding knowledge that supports decolonization within their curriculum.

Although this research was conducted within schools of social work, many of the issues and challenges discussed by participants resonate across the broader academic landscape. The gatekeeping of knowledge and access to education is not exclusive to this context. It is a pervasive cultural phenomenon within education. Therefore, the methods of resistance outlined in this research could potentially be applied to decenter whiteness in the broader education system. Even though it may seem daunting to depart from centuries-old educational practices steeped in whiteness, it is essential to challenge the conventional and be open to innovation.

Colonization and whiteness are tied together; thus, decolonization and decentering whiteness go hand in hand. Both are tangible goals, not merely abstract thoughts. Even if the system cannot be changed in its entirety, the data demonstrates that actionable steps can be taken to foster change. Before addressing decolonization and anti-oppression, it is essential to have a thorough understanding of what whiteness is and how it is connected to all systems that operate within society. Next, we need critical reflexivity to understand how we are all implicit in upholding whiteness. Once we have these core understandings, we can begin to dismantle and decentre whiteness in education.

CRITICAL REFLEXIVITY

Critical reflexivity is essential in decentering whiteness because it encourages educators and those designing curricula to engage in self-awareness, introspection, and critical analysis of their beliefs, values, biases, and positions of power. By critically reflecting on their perspectives and assumptions, they can better understand how these factors shape the curriculum they create and the learning experiences they facilitate for students. The following are questions, inspired by participants, that one may ask themselves as they attempt to decentre whiteness within schools or classrooms.

CONTENT:
What types of materials are being included, and what materials are not? Who does this support, and who does it not?

Whose voice is present? Whose is not?

How are students with different lived experiences going to relate to this content? How am I going to support them?

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How much am I going to lecture? How much space is allocated to discussion?

Will I have guest speakers? Who and why? What voices and perspectives do they support?

ASSESSMENT:

What are the purposes of the assignments? What do they teach? How and what is this being graded, and why?

Are the assignments flexible? Can the same lesson be learned with an alternative assignment? Is that an option? Is there space for creativity? Does the project require critical thought?

How is this relevant to the work we are trying to do?

Are deadlines flexible? Why or why not?

ENVIRONMENT:

What is the structure of your classroom saying? The typical all students in rows facing the instructor enforces the dominant power structure.

Am I prepared to handle conflict within the classroom? What methods can I use?

How will I handle students sharing painful things and experiences within the classroom while validating them and tying it back to the course content?

PROGRAM/DEPARTMENT STRUCTURE:

Is AOP and decolonization woven into the core of the program? How does that show up in the curriculum?

Is there accountability for ensuring that these topics are engrained in the curriculum?

Where are these issues discussed? Is it embedded in the core curriculum, or is it only in elective courses? Is there a possibility that a student will graduate without gaining deeper learning about systems of oppression?

Is there support for staff? What does that look like? What is still needed, and how do we know?

Who has opportunities for advancement? Who does not? Who has tenure? How are we supporting those on the tenure track? Are there trends within either group?

How are we supporting students? Who are we bending the rules for? Who are we not?

Much of the above may already be undertaken by instructors and credit must be given for that work, this research suggests though, that there is further to go. It is beyond the scope of this study to suggest how that can be done. This study set out to understand how whiteness was being reproduced in social work education and how it can be resisted, and findings from this study underscores the significance of having a comprehensive understanding of whiteness not only within the context of education but society as a whole. However, it's important to recognize that this understanding, in isolation, is not enough. The true potential lies in combining this knowledge with tangible changes and some ideas about how these may be achieved are presented within this thesis, such as community development, fostering relationships, engaging in emotionally transformative learning, and supporting the sense of self. Beyond these suggestions, perhaps the most important way to resist being made white by the academy, is to be open to rethinking and reimagining how we do education, and by creating a learning environment where whiteness is not the only avenue for success.

I believe that social work has the potential to promote social change and challenge the dominance of whiteness, allowing for diverse perspectives to thrive in academia, because of the wisdom and hope shared by the participants. However, historically, the responsibility for driving social change has predominantly rested on the shoulders of the oppressed. Even when solutions are provided, the implementation often falls short of addressing the issues. This thesis stands as a call to action for schools of social work to be at the forefront of change. This isn't a passive request but a demand to take bold steps toward dismantling whiteness within the academy. These institutions must embrace their unique position and relentlessly champion change, setting a precedent that resonates far beyond the confines of academia.

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