Getting to the heart of it: A Reflection on the Importance of Community Psychologists Developing an Anti-racist Practice

Leigh Rauk[1]

Author Biography: *Leigh Rauk* received her PhD in Community Well-Being from the University of Miami in 2021. As a researcher she is focused on issues of school discipline, school safety, and the ways youth organizing can address these issues. As a researcher she considers herself to be a community-engaged, activist scholar who uses critical theory, reflexivity, and participatory methods to examine and understand the ways power and oppression negatively impact young people of color. Through collaboration and a transformative paradigm, she strives to stand in solidarity with community partners to expose subvert, and challenge injustices to cultivate healthy and just communities.

Recommended Citation: Rauk, L. (2021). Getting to the heart of it: A Reflection on the Importance of Community Psychologists Developing an Anti-racist Practice. *Global Journal of Community Psychology Practice, 12*(3), 1 - 17. Retrieved Day/Month/Year, from (http://www.gjcpp.org/).

Corresponding Author: Leigh Rauk, Postdoctoral Fellow, Firearm Safety Among Children and Teens (FACTS) Consortium, University of Michigan, School of Public Health, 1415 Washington Heights, Ann Arbor, MI 48109-2029. Email: lmrauk@umich.edu

---

[1] University of Miami

Getting to the heart of it: A reflection on the importance of community psychologists developing an anti-racist practice

Abstract

Reflexivity is an introspective practice of becoming aware of personal biases, values, and assumptions related to our positionalities as researchers (Case, 2017; Fernández, 2018a). This paper responds to the call by Langhout (2015) for community psychologists to engage in more personal writing about the ways in which affective politics impact feelings and emotions surrounding our work as scholar-activists as well as critiques the core community psychology values of social justice and diversity. Through a framework of *head, heart,* and *hand work,* I connect my own identity, experience, and reflexive process to critical theories of whiteness and racism, which has helped to inform my engagement with a Black-led youth organization and development of an anti-racist practice. I conclude by providing recommendations for how community psychology programs can better train white graduate students to engage with racialized communities in ways that are grounded in ethical reflexive and anti-racist practices (Fernández, 2018a).

Community psychology as a field has a deep and longstanding commitment to social justice (Prilleltensky, 2001; Watts & Serrano-García, 2003). As discussed by Langhout (2015), empirical literature indicates that social justice activists engage their work with their entire bodies (Gould, 2009; Warren, 2010). Through interviews with anti-racist white activists in the U.S., Warren (2010) conceptualized engagement as involving the head (i.e., knowledge and interests), heart (i.e., values and emotions), and hand (i.e., relationships and actions). When we connect our theorizing (head work) to our heart work, we can develop anti-racist practices that guide and inform our action (hand work) to better collaborate with, support, and show up for our community partners (Fernández, 2018a; Langhout, 2015). If we are attuned to the emotions that arise when engaging in research with communities, Case (2017) asserts that it becomes possible to recognize times of solidarity with research participants and times when we have colluded in their oppression. For the past two years, I have been in partnership with a Black activist group and, as a white emerging scholar-activist, I see reflexivity as necessary to support my own process of unpacking unearned privileges, as well as to understand how affective responses that arise during my work with community partners may serve to maintain the status quo and thus be out of line with my values as a community psychologist (Cruz & Sonn, 2011; Langhout, 2015).

The purpose of this paper is to respond to the call for community psychologists to engage in more personal writing about the ways in which affective politics impact feelings and emotions in our research and partnerships with communities (Langhout, 2015). As well as to interrogate community psychology values and roles in conjunction with the racial justice work white community psychologists should be taking up. In this paper I am explicit about speaking to white community psychologists because I am addressing a common white dynamic of retreating in the face of discomfort around the ways we uphold systems of white supremacy (DiAngelo, 2018). I hope this reflection on my own work to develop an anti-racist practice will

be useful to other graduate students and also serve as a call in to my fellow white community psychologists to conversations about white privilege and race.

Through the framework of *head*, *heart*, and *hand* work (Fernández, 2018a) I situate my own identity, experience, and reflexive process in critical theories of whiteness and racism which has helped to inform my engagement with a community organization and development of an anti-racist practice. I conclude with recommendations for how to train graduate students to engage in solidarity work with racialized communities so that we can build a future of community psychology that not only values social justice and diversity, but also values being critical of whiteness and our complicity in systems of white supremacy; as well as commits to practicing anti-racism to dismantle oppressive systems within our field and the communities we serve.

Head Work

Defining Whiteness

Community psychology's expressed concern with social justice has inspired important racial justice work. However, Coleman et al. (2020) critique community psychology's focus on social justice as being largely devoid of conversations critically examining whiteness as a dominant system. I uplift their assertion that the field could better address the value of social justice by interrogating whiteness more deeply (Coleman et al., 2020). Frankenberg (1993) defines whiteness as "the production and reproduction of dominance rather than subordination, normativity rather than marginality, and privilege rather than disadvantage" (p. 236). This definition identifies whiteness as something that places

people in dominant positions, granting white people unfair privileges, while also rendering these positions and privileges invisible to white people themselves (Green et al., 2007; Sonn, 2011). This invisibility of the positions and privileges associated with whiteness means white people do not experience the world through an understanding of their own racial identity or culture, but rather experience whiteness as normative, natural, and universal (Bergerson, 2003; Green et al., 2007). This allows white people to distance themselves from conversations of race and racism because it is seen as a problem for Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) rather than for white people.

As a white, middle class, cis gender, woman who grew up living in small, majority white, Midwestern towns, I have had to acknowledge and understand the ways in which my own whiteness remained mostly invisible to me. Growing up, the significance of my race or what it means to be white was never explained to me. Any time race was the topic of conversation, it was talked about as something other people have. In this way, without me being conscious of it, my whiteness was formed in relation to what Green et al. (2007) call the oppressed 'other'. Neighborhoods that were predominately Black were described to me as bad places where violence and crime occurred, which was antithetical to the neighborhoods where I lived which were characterized by orderliness and safety. I am able to connect my own experience to Bonilla-Silva (2003) theory of color-blind racism, characterized by scholars as unawareness of various forms of racism and white privilege. Growing up I had no understanding of the ways I was privileged because of my white identity. Color-blind ideology reflects a discourse of

"racelessness" which allows white people (myself) to have a race-neutral view of society (Coleman et al., 2020). However, the result of this thinking is the tendency to not see important racial differences as well as differences in lived experiences due to structural racism (Coleman et al., 2020). This tendency to not see racial differences between groups reifies hegemonic whiteness by making it challenging for white people to recognize the privileges afforded to them based on race (Coleman et al., 2020). Hegemonic whiteness is defined as social and cultural practices that position those who are white as different and superior from those who are non-white (Hughey, 2010). White cohesion is reinforced by "essentialized performative practices of white ideals" (Coleman et al., 2020, p. 6; Hughey, 2010). One such performative practice, described by Hughey (2010), is affective whiteness.

Affective Whiteness

A study by Todd et al. (2010) examining white university student's emotional responses after reflecting on their whiteness found that challenging students' color-blind racial attitudes may result in strong emotional responses, particularly feelings of anger, distress, and guilt. Similarly, my first experience reflecting on my own whiteness came from a class I took in college focused on the historical and systemic nature of race and racism. I remember feeling surprised by what I was learning, and angry that no one had taught me this before. I also felt guilty that I always thought of race as something outside of myself. I was dismayed by the fact that what I had learned about the history of racism in high school was incomplete. Nelson et al. (2013) work on the *Marley hypothesis* is useful here as it provides evidence demonstrating that a lack of critical

historical knowledge about racism leads to white peoples' denial of racism. Growing up I wasn't taught the history of U.S. racism from a critical or perhaps even accurate perspective. As Coleman et al (2020) suggest, learning the critical history of racism in the U.S. helps to boost white peoples' acknowledgement of systemic racism. Learning that history as well as being reflexive about my own identity have been crucial steps in understanding my complicity in dominate structures of whiteness and oppression.

Further, Leonardo and Zembylas (2013) discuss the ways in which white privilege exists in affective forms. These affective forms of privilege include anger, fear, and sadness, some of which are reflected in my own story. Specifically, they describe that "racial matters and white privilege evoke a range of powerful emotions that can push scholars to take a more careful look at the relationship between whiteness and affect" (Leonardo & Zembylas, 2013, p. 151). This has been the case in my own experience as those feelings of anger and guilt propelled me on a path of deepening my understanding of race, racism, white supremacy, and my own whiteness. I've come to understand that I benefit from and uphold racist systems, even when my intentions are to work to dismantle them. Even now as I've committed to anti-racism and practices of reflexivity, it is important to understand how my affective responses intersect with racial practices and the white privilege I hold. Affective whiteness strategies, such as feelings of guilt, rage, fatigue, defensiveness, and fragility serve to maintain current race structures even as I educate myself against them.

Sonn (2011) utilizes a whiteness frame to exemplify the ways in which research,

teaching, and community-based work may lead to further marginalization if we as community psychologists, particularly those of us who are white, do not attend to the way whiteness shows up in the contexts we work. Additionally, Coleman et al. (2020) suggest that community psychologists should use critical reflexivity and critical awareness of how whiteness shows up in our theories, methods, and settings of practice to promote critical awareness of whiteness as a complex system of racial domination. Practicing reflexivity and paying greater attention to the relationship between our racialized ideologies and our practices would facilitate greater understandings of how whiteness shows up even in settings that are meant to be empowering and anti-racist (Coleman et al., 2020; Sonn, 2011). Community psychology as a field should become more critically aware of whiteness and work to expose it as a system of domination which shapes how we are socialized into the profession and the social worlds we aim to intervene (Coleman et al., 2020). Leonardo and Zembylas (2013) suggest that in order to understand whiteness, we must also account for the embodiment and affectivity of whiteness. In other words, connecting theories of whiteness and racism to emotions and affective responses can help redirect emotions for different political ends and help to establish ethical relationships with community partners that opens up space for solidarity.

Heart Work

Heart work, conceptualized by Warren (2010) and utilized by other scholars in community psychology (Case, 2017; Fernández, 2018a; Langhout, 2015), describes the ways emotions influence the research process. The inclusion of ethical reflexive practice as a community psychology competency alludes to this heart work by asking us to interrogate our values, assumptions, and privileges (Langhout, 2015). This process enables us to envision new community psychology values, consistent with recommendations by Wilson et al. (2020), that address systems of oppression; focus on dismantling power structures through anti-racist practices; and emphasize critical reflexivity to mitigate reification of oppressive structures and challenge the status quo within the field and in our work with communities.

Reflexivity and Embodied Subjectivities

Reflexivity is an important component of the research process because it disrupts power relations and creates space for understanding research as a dynamic process that transforms both the researcher and participants (Fernández, 2018a; Rice et al., 2019). As Case (2017) and Fernandez (2018a) suggest, reflexivity goes beyond being aware of biases; it is an introspective tool that helps the researcher navigate the implications of their biases and ultimately, helps us as researchers to interrogate and challenge problematic values and prejudices. Reflexivity requires us to constantly evaluate ways in which we as researchers contribute to liberation and oppression (Cruz & Sonn, 2011) and what we recognize and do not recognize given the positions we occupy (Rice et al., 2019).

Further, Fernández (2018a) draws on the epistemology of *theory in the flesh,* first conceptualized by Anzaldúa and Moraga (1981), to describe embodied subjectivities, which are defined by the lived experiences, identities, and positionalities that are felt throughout the body. When we engage in activism, we engage with our entire bodies

and our affective responses—longings, desires, fatigues, and intensities—are housed throughout the entire body, creating a visceral response (Gould, 2009; Fernández, 2018a). Fernández (2018a) urges us to document the ways in which our embodied subjectivities surface in our work and relationships with communities to help guide the development of community psychology competencies and practices that are more holistic and attend to heart-centered work. As community psychologists, we must make our heart work visible and engage in reflexive practices to help us confront the contradictions of privilege and oppression to problematize and deconstruct existing systems of power (Fernández, 2018a). As white community psychologists specifically, engagement in reflexivity to understand our embodied subjectivities helps us to become aware of our unearned privileges and advantages as well as the subtle behaviors that support racism and provide motivation to take anti-racist action (Case & Hunter, 2012).

In an effort to make my own heart work visible, I share two examples of times when my affective whiteness and embodied subjectivities showed up in my work with a community partner. The examples I share here center on my work with a local, Black-led organization focused on youth organizing for education reform. For the purpose of this paper and to protect the anonymity of the organization, I will refer to them as Youth for Justice. This organization focuses on organizing working class Black and Brown youth to fight back against school pushout and the criminalization of Black students. At their core, Youth for Justice believes that all young people deserve to be raised in environments that are healthy and promote a sense of safety. As an organization they help support youth development by building leadership skills, fostering political identity, and teaching young people how to organize in their communities to build a more equitable society. As an organization, they are fighting for schools that prioritize human development over profit and provide all students with the access to resources and opportunities they need to reach their full potential and develop into full human beings.

Heart Stories

Both examples that I share here center on discomfort around conflict, particularly conflict that arises between myself and others who hold more power. What I used to think was a personal fear of conflict, I now understand to be connected to cultural practices of whiteness which serve to uphold the status quo. Green et al. (2007) outline these cultural practices as being rooted in colonial constructs of whiteness which are represented by orderliness, rationality, and self-control. I have been socialized to uphold a culture of white supremacy through practices of reinforcing and maintaining dominate structures. In this case, it means avoiding conflict, particularly in cases where engaging in conflict may challenge existing conditions and betray my white identity.

In the first example, my affective whiteness and embodied subjectivities manifested in the form of fear, discomfort, and unease, when a school board member asked that we, the community members speaking in support of Youth for Justice's demands regarding the districts disproportionate funding on policing over mental health support for students, choose one spokesperson to speak on our demands rather than allowing all eighty of us to give our individual testimonies. My feelings of

discomfort and fear that we were doing something wrong caused me to initially agree with the school board member; perhaps we were taking up too much space and limiting other community members' opportunities to speak, as the school board was suggesting. In this case I was relying on rationality as a means of maintaining order, which placed me on the side of the school board members and betrayed my solidarity with the organization. As I was going through this thought process, I realized the executive director and other staff of the organization were telling the school board "no"; their recommendation was not acceptable, and they would not be silenced. Each person's testimony was personal, vulnerable, and unique to their own experience. The school boards assertion that each person's testimony was the same was deeply problematic and demonstrated the school board's lack of attention and consideration of each person's story. I then reminded myself how essential it is for the members of this organization to take up space and that the school board's comment was rooted in an assertion of power, white supremacy, oppression, and racism. Had the room been filled with all white community members and youth, would the same have been asked? I realized in that moment that I needed to become comfortable with conflict and commit to challenging structures of power or I better get out of the way. In this situation, my affective response—fear, anxiety, unease—was keeping me aligned with the status quo, working against my values and goals. By engaging in reflexivity and understanding the ways in which my emotions were connected to cultural practices of whiteness, I was able to recognize a moment where I was colluding in the organization's oppression by the school board.

In a second instance, the conflict I felt was more internal as I had to evaluate if I, the white researcher in the room, had unconsciously taken up too much space. During a presentation Youth for Justice was being asked to give to a group of teachers enrolled in an education program at a local university, I was asked by a staff member if I would present on the school data myself and other graduate students had helped find and analyze. I was not prepared to help give a presentation and I immediately felt uncomfortable that I was the one stepping into a co-presenter role on behalf of the organization when there were other organization members in the room who may have been better suited for that role. I kept my part of the presentation short in an attempt to leave more space for the staff member to speak and represent the organization. At the end of the meeting, the white professor leading the class began talking to myself and the same staff member. This professor immediately turned to me to tell me how well I had presented the data and that I was a really good presenter. He continued to focus the conversation on me and my work with the organization rather than the organizer standing next to me who was actually there to represent the organization and to lead the meeting.

I felt conflicted about my presence in the meeting and taking on a co-presenter role. On one hand this had been a direct ask from one of the staff members, but on the other I felt as though one of the other organization's members should have been the one to play that role. I left feeling like I had taken up too much space in the meeting as well as uncomfortable and angry about the professor's comments to me. After this meeting I evaluated the way I had handled the situation and wished I would have made

a suggestion for one of the other staff or youth members to present instead of me. I also should have had a conversation with the organization ahead of time to clarify my role and how I could best support them. In the conversation with the white professor, I should have tried to decenter myself in that moment. Rather than accepting the compliment as a way of being polite and to avoid any conflict that may illicit discomfort for him and myself, I should have pointed out that it was the organization leading the work not me. My affective responses of anxiety, unease, and fear of conflict did not further my solidarity with the organization in that moment.

Reflecting on my heart and the emotions that arose during these two instances has helped me to assess my relationship and practices with the organization as well as problematize my positionality and power dynamics that were at play in these spaces. This process of reflexivity has helped me to shift my actions to better align with my values and efforts towards solidarity. I've had honest conversations with staff members about my role in this work as a white person and when the organization asks me to take on a role or a task I ask if I am the best person for that role and do my best to step back when it is not my place. The connection of my head and heart has also helped me build a better relationship with the organization as well as recognize the importance of continually committing to an anti-racist practice. This work of connecting the head and the heart to better inform my hand work has also helped me to critically evaluate and recognize where my community psychology values of social justice and diversity have fallen short.

Hand Work

Hand work, conceptualized by Warren (2010), has been defined as building relationships and taking action. I conceptualize hand work here through my process of building a relationship with Youth for Justice and through my own development of an anti-racist practice. Both of these actions have been deeply informed by the head and heart work that have been outlined earlier in this paper. As my relationship with Youth for Justice began to develop, I realized that my community psychology values of social justice and respect for diversity (Kloos et al., 2012) were not enough to guide my actions with the organization. As this relationship grew, and through my process of reflexivity, I realized that to be a white researcher striving to work alongside a Black-led organization without an explicit anti-racist practice was negligible at best and harmful at worst. In this section, I provide a discussion of my relationship building process, anti-racism in theory and practice, and why it is so crucial for my work with this organization. In doing so I acknowledge and build upon Brodsky (2016) critique of community psychology's values of social justice and respect for diversity as insufficient so long as they do not prepare scholars to "identify and interrupt how power vis-à-vis whiteness engenders racial silence, even in 'diverse' community settings" (p. 10).

Building a Relationship

I began building a relationship with Youth for Justice in a course I took on community-based participatory action research (CBPAR). After expressing interest in collaborating with our class, we supported their work by finding and analyzing school district data related to policing, mental health supports, and student arrests. Through the analysis of data, we provided

information that helped inform their demands of the district to eliminate police in schools and employ more school-based counselors, social workers, and psychologists. Beyond the course, I sustained my involvement with the organization and have now been in relationship with them for two years. In collaboration with them I attend organizational meetings, support direct actions like speaking at school board hearings, attend school district meetings alongside staff members, and continue to help find data that helps to inform their current demands. As an outsider to the organization, I do my best to be responsive to the organization's needs and follow the leadership of the staff and youth members. As a community psychologist engaged in community work with this organization, I began seeking out ways I could be more aware of my role and values as a researcher and how I could interact with my values, emotions, and affect in a way that is productive for social justice movements broadly, and my work with this particular organization locally. My engagement with this organization essentially held up a mirror for me to reflect on my personal and community psychology values, my biases, and privileges. I've had to continually ask myself what my role as a white researcher in this work with a Black-led organization is. In asking myself this question I sought out new places to find answers as my community psychology classes were not talking deeply about race and what it means to be a white researcher in the spaces I was occupying.

To build an ethical relationship with Youth for Justice, I realized I needed to do my own work of unpacking and unlearning. To that end, I joined the local Showing Up for Racial Justice (SURJ) chapter, an organization whose goal is to educate, organize, and mobilize white people to show up for racial justice and collective liberation. My participation with this organization led me to a training for white people on anti-racism and white supremacy, which led me to read books and articles by BIPOC about the topic. I needed to expand my sources of knowledge beyond the white community psychologists we often discuss in our course work and look to BIPOC scholars in community psychology (see Case, 2017; Thomas, 2019; Wilson et al., 2020) and beyond (see Brown, 2019; Davis, 2003; Garza, 2014; Kendi, 2020) who can provide guidance, leadership, and accountability for the work I need to do. Additionally, through my own process of learning and unlearning, I continued to learn from Youth for Justice about their values, goals, and demands. In order to engage with this organization and mitigate harm as a white person, I needed to learn what it means to be anti-racist and what a sustained anti-racist practice looks like as well as learn new terminologies and ideologies like abolition (see Berger et al., 2017; Cullors, 2019; Davis, 2003) and transformative justice (see Brown, 2019; Coker, 2002; Generation FIVE, 2007).

Anti-Racist Practice

Kendi (2019) defines the opposite of racist is not "not-racist", but rather, "anti-racist". Claiming to be "not-racist" signifies neutrality by not explicitly claiming and working to be aggressively against racism (Kendi, 2019). Anti-racism is the collection of anti-racist policies that lead to racial equity and are supported by anti-racist ideas. Anti-racism turns the focus to seeing racism as rooted in power and policies that produce or sustain racial inequity between groups (Kendi, 2019). As individuals we each have a role to play in anti-racism and we each

have the power to protest racist policies and advance anti-racist ones.

In their critique, Leonardo and Zembylas (2013) discuss the problematic ways in which white people have developed anti-racist understandings that construct the racist as someone else, a problem residing in other white people. In this way, whiteness is able to bifurcate white people into 'good' and 'bad' actors (Leonardo & Zembylas, 2013). This bifurcating perception does not consider the plausibility of being both racist and anti-racist at the same time. Further, they problematize the tendency of white people to align themselves with non-racism as a form of image management rather than to align themselves with anti-racism, a political project (Leonardo & Zembylas, 2013). The distinction between the two is important because non-racist becomes an identity, possibly even a badge of honor, whereas anti-racism is a political commitment in the form of combatting racism. Leonardo and Zembylas (2013) assert that "to the non-racist, it is something one is; to the anti-racist, it is something one does" (p. 156).

For those of us who are white and strive to be anti-racist, we must understand the ways in which we are systemically linked to racial domination and unearned privilege and engage in a lifelong process of self-evaluation and reflection (Case & Hunter, 2012). Yancy (2008) advocates for vigilance for the white anti-racist because of the ways in which whiteness continually entraps us despite our honest efforts to resist it. Additionally, our white identities place us in privileged locations in conversations of anti-racism, meaning we can choose to be passive observers or active participators (Green et al., 2007). Given this, being a white anti-racist is a pledge that requires

lifelong practice and does not end in a white person's "arrival" in the form of an idyllic anti-racist identity (Applebaum, 2013; Yancy, 2008). I turn now to a description of my own commitment to anti-racism and how it shows up as a continual practice in my research, collaboration with Youth for Justice, and personal life. I document my practice here as a form of commitment and accountability, but also as an example of how I've conceptualized anti-racism in practice.

My anti-racist practice currently consists of political education, commitments to action and activism, personal reflection, and continual accountability practices with friends and colleagues who are also engaged in broader racial justice and abolition work. For me, political education means intentionally reading books and articles by scholars and authors of color as well as engaging with forms of media that are created, developed, and disseminated by people of color. It also means compensating people for their emotional and intellectual labor when I directly benefit from their work. As Morrison (2020) states, those of us who identify as white should not expect marginalized people to provide these resources for free and their labor should be compensated.

My commitment to action and activism means showing up to direct actions put on by Black-led organizations in my community, such as supporting Youth for Justice at school board hearings or community events. I use reflexivity to evaluate how I'm doing and if I am acting in ways that are consistent with my values, as described in the heart stories above. Sometimes this reflection happens independently and other times it happens in conversation with other people who I know

will hold me accountable to my values and the work I am trying to do. Reflexivity and accountability are incredibly important to ensure that I am putting my political education into practice and that my practice is aligned with the asks and leadership of BIPOC. As Dzidic et al. (2013) emphasize, developing into scholar-activists who are accountable to the communities in which we work requires us to interrogate our social positioning and relationships with the community. Practicing anti-racism requires persistent self-awareness, criticism, and examination (Kendi, 2019). My anti-racist practice is in its infancy stages and there remains a lot of room for growth. I've outlined my practice as it currently stands not to demonstrate that I have it all figured out, but to offer some ideas or guidance on where to start. When my perfectionism arises, which I've learned is rooted in a white supremist ideology (Okun, 2001), I remind myself that it's a practice and that perfection is not the intent. Every day I make the conscious decision to recommit myself to my practice and when I mess up, I recommit even stronger.

The process of connecting my head and heart work to better inform my hand work has been a crucial process for my own development as a scholar activist and for my relationship development with Youth for Justice. As a field, I believe it is necessary for us to critically examine whiteness as well as be reflexive about our own investment in and perpetuation of oppressive systems. The field's education of graduate students is a ripe place to start this work as well as critical for the development of scholars who aim to build ethical relationships with communities. Given recent uprisings, protests, and Black Lives Matter movement building in response to police violence against Black people and the

deaths of Breonna Taylor, George Floyd, Ahmaud Arbery, and many others, the field of community psychology's explicit commitment to anti-racism and the dismantling of white supremacy is now more important than ever.

Recommendations for Training Graduate Students

Community psychology's commitment to social justice has led to community psychology graduate programs that strive to train and develop scholars who work in support of social justice movements (Langhout, 2015; Nelson et al., 2004; Prilleltensky, 2001). Community psychology's focus on head work (i.e., theory and knowledge building) is deeply important, but we must also get to the heart of our work if we are to inform actions that deepen our commitment to social justice. Several scholars, including Watts (1994), Langhout (2016), and Coleman et al. (2020), have called for a deeper focus on whiteness in the field, particularly among white community psychologists regarding their positions and roles in social systems. It has been argued that the field's core value of social justice cannot truly materialize without better theoretical understandings of whiteness and its connection with other structures of dominance (Coleman et al. (2020). I believe building that theoretical understanding can and should occur in graduate education and training, particularly for a field who so often trains graduate students who seek to work with marginalized and racialized communities.

As Coleman et al. (2020) scoping review suggests, educational settings are important spaces for community psychologists to interrogate whiteness and dismantle systems of domination and oppression. Additionally,

in her study of the family portrait assignment, Fernández (2018b) suggests that facilitating opportunities for white students to engage in critical reflexivity in educational settings is crucial for social change. Further, interventions aimed at white students about their relationship to and complicity in structural racism would be fertile grounds to help white students understand the relationships between their own racialized beliefs and behaviors with their social and historical backgrounds (Coleman et al., 2020; Fernández, 2018b; Todd et al., 2010). Although the study by Fernández (2018b) is focused on educational settings beyond community psychology graduate classrooms, I believe this work can be applied to community psychology training programs and should be considered in the ways we train white community psychology students. These classrooms can be settings that help students see how their own color-blind thinking and lack of knowledge about racism are expressions of white supremacy and hegemony, as well as engage them in critical reflections on what it means to be white (Coleman et al., 2020).

In my own core community psychology classes, we talked very little about white supremacy and racism, but yet I was being trained to be a researcher who could "give voice" to marginalized community members. I echo here Langhout's (2015) question in her letter to budding scholar-activists, "how do we become aware of the role our values, emotions, and affect play in our work, and how can we interact with our values, and emotions—which are embedded within dominant structures—in ways that are productive for social justice movements" (p. 268)? As Evans et al. (2017) suggests, we need graduate programs that teach students more than just technical skills and traditional theories. Drawing on the work of

other scholars (Coleman et al., 2020; Fernández, 2018b; Sonn, 2011; Todd et al., 2010) and my own experience, I argue that we need community psychology programs that train graduate students to be (1) reflexive, (2) vulnerable, and (3) anti-racist.

Reflexive practices are essential for those of us who hold dominant positions as community psychologists because it provides the space to critically examine our motives, intentions, and practices as we build relationships with communities (Langhout, 2015). In training the next generation of community psychologists, Case (2017) recommends fostering cultures of vulnerability in our programs to encourage students to share feelings of shame or guilt that may arise in our work. Similarly, Langhout (2015) recommends that we honor our hearts and utilize our affective politics to create spaces to explore our unease and discomfort. In addition to reflexivity and heart work, we need graduate programs that value anti-racism and explicitly discuss the importance of developing anti-racist practices. We need to actively call white students in to conversations about race, white privilege, and the ways in which we are complicit in racism and the oppressive structures we seek to change. We cannot dismantle the oppressive structures we claim to revolt against without first acknowledging our own locations within them. By creating graduate programs that focus on reflexivity, foster vulnerability, and raise graduate students' consciousness about racism and white supremacy we can develop scholar activists who have a deep understanding for what it means to be accountable and responsible to communities (Evans et al., 2017).

Conclusion

Part of white privilege is our placement at the center of inquiry, an expectation so strong that "even when a time and place are specifically designated for members of a non-privileged group to be central, members of the dominant group will often attempt to take back the pivotal focus" (Bergerson, 2003, p. 56). In working with Youth for Justice, the use of reflexivity and the continual questioning of my role with the organization has been crucial to ensure I do not take center stage as the white researcher in the room. In writing this paper I had doubts and questions about whether I should be the one writing it since my goal is to decenter myself as the white, academic researcher. Every aspect of what I do requires deep reflection about my goals, my reasoning for engaging in a conversation, how I engage in that conversation, and who I am truly serving with my presence. I hope my own effort to write more personally about my own process and emotions provides an example for other white scholars to do the same. I am one voice in this conversation and there are many scholars, particularly scholars of color, who have made their affective politics visible and thus paved the path for me to engage in this type of work and to write on this topic (Fernández, 2018a; Lorde, 1998; Mulvey et al., 2000; Nash, 2011; Ulysse, 2007). As white people, we should follow the leadership of BIPOC and engaging in an anti-racist practice means remaining open to accountability and to hearing feedback about how we can do better. By acknowledging my privilege and grappling with how to be more accountable as a researcher, activist, and professional, as Mulvey et al. (2000) describes, my own identity has been further revealed, challenged, and transformed through the process of engaging with my community partners. I owe my process of radicalization and learning to my

relationship with Youth for Justice, my colleagues, professors, and friends who have guided me, listened to me, and called me in to conversations about race. If not for their constant challenging and pushing to go deeper, I would not be where I am now. I hope they and many others continue to push me on my anti-racism journey because I have so far to go.

Additionally, I hope the recommendations for creating graduate training programs that promote reflexivity, vulnerability, and anti-racism will help to transform the field into one that is committed to interrogating our role within oppressive structures. As a graduate student I would have greatly benefitted from conversations that helped me to understand and critique my own white identity and socialization to be complicit in structures of white supremacy. Instead, I had to do this work largely on my own and outside of my community psychology training. I believe it is crucial for the field to become more critically conscious of whiteness within the field so that we can fully materialize our value of social justice.

References

Anzaldúa, G., & Moraga, C. (1981). *This bridge called my back: Writings by radical women of color*. Kitchen Table: Women of Color Press.

Applebaum, B. (2013). Vigilance as a response to white complicity. *Educational Theory, 63*(1), 17–34. https://doi.org/10.1111/edth.12007

Berger, D., Kaba, M., & Stein, D. (2017, August 29). *What abolitionists do*. Jacobin Magazine. https://www.jacobinmag.com/2017/08/prison-abolition-reform-mass-incarceration

Bergerson, A. A. (2003). Critical race theory and White racism: Is there room for White scholars in fighting racism in education? *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*, *16*(1), 51–63. https://doi.org/10.1080/0951839032000033527

Bonilla-Silva, E. (2003). *Racism Without Racists: Color-Blind Racism and the Persistence of Racial Inequality in the United States*. Rowman & Littlefield.

Brodsky, A. E. (2016). Taking a stand: The next 50 years of community psychology. *American Journal of Community Psychology, 58*(3-4), 284–293. https://doi.org/10.1002/ajcp.12045

Brown, M. (2019). Transformative justice and new abolition in the United States. In P. Carlen & L.A. França (Eds.), *Justice Alternatives* (pp.73-87). Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9780429468179-6

Case, A. D. (2017). Reflexivity in counterspaces fieldwork. *American Journal of Community Psychology, 60*(3–4), 398–405. https://doi.org/10.1002/ajcp.12196

Case, A. D., & Hunter, C. D. (2012). Counterspaces: A unit of analysis for understanding the role of settings in marginalized individuals' adaptive responses to oppression. *American Journal of Community Psychology, 50*, 257–270. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10464-012-9497-7

Coker, D. (2002). Transformative justice: Anti-subordination processes in cases of domestic violence. In H. Stang & J. Braithwaite (Eds.), *Restorative justice and family violence* (pp. 128-152). Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press.

Coleman, B. R., Collins, C. R., & Bonam, C. M. (2020). Interrogating Whiteness in Community Research and Action. *American Journal of Community Psychology*, 1-19. https://doi.org/10.1002/ajcp.12473

Cruz, M. R., & Sonn, Christopher C. (2011). (De)colonizing culture in community psychology: Reflections from critical social science. *American Journal of Community Psychology, 47*(1-2), 203-214. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10464-010-9378-x

Cullors, P. (2018). Abolition and reparations: Histories of resistance, transformative justice, and accountability. Harv. L. Rev., 132, 1684.

Davis, A. Y. (2003). *Are prisons obsolete?* Seven Stories Press.

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

Dzidic, P., Breen, L. J., & Bishop, B. J. (2013). Are our competencies revealing our weaknesses? A critique of community psychology practice competencies. *Global Journal of Community Psychology Practice, 4*(4), 1–10. https://doi.org/10.7728/0404201302

Evans, S. D., Duckett, P., Lawthom, R., & Kivell, N. (2017). Positioning the critical in community psychology. In M. A. Bond, I. Serrano-García, C. B. Keys, & M. Shinn (Eds.), *APA handbook of community psychology: Theoretical foundations, core concepts, and emerging challenges.* (pp. 107–127). American Psychological Association. https://doi.org/10.1037/14953-005

Fernández, J. S. (2018a). Toward an ethical reflective practice of a theory in the flesh: Embodied subjectivities in a youth participatory action research mural project. *American Journal of Community Psychology, 62*(1–2), 221–232. https://doi.org/10.1002/ajcp.12264

Fernández, J. S. (2018b). Decolonial pedagogy in community psychology: White students disrupting White innocence via a family portrait assignment. *American Journal of Community Psychology, 62*, 294–305. https://doi.org/10.1002/ajcp.12282

Frankenberg, R. (1993). *White women, race matters: The social construction of whiteness*. University of Minnesota Press. https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203973431

Garza, A. (2014). A herstory of the# BlackLivesMatter movement. In J. Hobson (Ed.), Are all the women still White? (pp. 23-28). New York, NY: SUNY Press.

Generation FIVE. (2007). *Toward transformative justice: A liberatory approach to child sexual abuse and other forms of intimate and community violence*. San Francisco, CA: Author.

Gould, D. B. (2009). *Moving politics: Emotion and ACT UP's fight against AIDS*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Green, M. J., Sonn, C. C., & Matsebula, J. (2007). Reviewing whiteness: Theory, research, and possibilities. *South African Journal of Psychology, 37*(3), 389–419. https://doi.org/10.1177/008124630703700301

Hughey, M. W. (2010). The (dis)similarities of white racial identities: The conceptual framework of 'hegemonic whiteness'. *Ethnic and Racial Studies, 33*(8), 1289–1309. https://doi.org/10.1080/01419870903125069

Kendi, I. X. (2019). *How to be an antiracist*. New York, NY: One World, A Trademark of Penquin Random House, LLC.

Kloos, B., Hill, J., Thomas, E., Wandersman, A., & Elias, M. J. (2012). Community psychology: Linking individuals and communities (3rd Ed.). Cengage Learning.

Langhout, R. D. (2015). Considering community psychology competencies: A love letter to budding scholar-activists who wonder if they have what it takes. *American Journal of Community Psychology, 55*(3–4), 266–278. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10464-015-9711-5

Leonardo, Z., & Zembylas, M. (2013). Whiteness as technology of affect: Implications for educational praxis. *Equity & Excellence in Education, 46*(1), 150–165. https://doi.org/10.1080/10665684.2013.750539

Lorde, A. (1998). The transformation of silence into language and action. In A. Lorde (Ed.), *Sister outsider* (pp. 40–44). Freedom, CA: The Crossing Press.

Morrison, S.G. (2020, January). *Start Here, Start Now: A guide for White folx who want to do better*. [Google Drive]. https://docs.google.com/document/d/1j4qSuDAiY54iFHVWgqyBteVSZi4zc796rhKZlhv␣␣␣MtGw/mobilebasic?urp=gmail_link

Mulvey, A., Terenzio, M., Hill, J., Bond, M. A., Huygens, I., Hamerton, H. R., & Cahill, S. (2000). Stories of relative privilege: Power and social change in feminist community psychology. *American Journal of Community Psychology, 28*(6), 883–911. https://doi.org/10.1023/a:1005120001986

Nash, J. C. (2011). Practicing love: Black feminism, love-politics, and post-intersectionality. *Meridians: Feminism, Race, Transnationalism, 11*(2), 1–24. https://doi.org/10.2979/meridians.11.2.1

Nelson, J. C., Adams, G., & Salter, P. S. (2012). The marley hypothesis: Denial of racism reflects ignorance of history. *Psychological Science, 24*(2), 213–218. https://doi.org/10.1177/0956797612451466

Nelson, G., Poland, B., Murray, M., & Maticka-Tyndale, E. (2004). Building capacity in community health action research: Towards a praxis framework for graduate education. *Action Research, 2*(4), 389–408. https://doi.org/10.1177/1476750304044798

Okun, T. (2001) *White supremacy culture*. Dismantling Racism. https://www.dismantlingracism.org/uploads/4/3/5/7/43579015/okun_-_White_sup_culture.pdf

Prilleltensky, I. (2001). Value-based praxis in community psychology: Moving toward social justice and social action. *American Journal of Community Psychology, 29*(5), 747–778. https://doi.org/10.1023/a:1010417201918

Rice, C., Harrison, E., & Friedman, M. (2019). Doing justice to intersectionality in research. *Cultural Studies ↔ Critical Methodologies*, *19*(6), 409–420. https://doi.org/10.1177/1532708619829779

Sonn, C. (2011). Research and practice in the contact zone: Crafting resources for challenging racialised exclusion. *International Community Psychology, 53*, 272–292.

Thomas, D. (2019). Black lives matter as resistance to systemic anti-Black violence. *Journal of Critical Thought and Praxis, 8*(1), 30-45.

Todd, N. R., Spanierman, L. B., & Aber, M. S. (2010). White students reflecting on whiteness: Understanding emotional responses. *Journal of Diversity in Higher Education, 3*(2), 97–110. https://doi.org/10.1037/a0019299

Ulysse, G. A. (2007). *Downtown ladies: Informal commercial importers, a Hatian anthropologist, and self-making in Jamaica*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Warren, M. (2010). *Fire in the heart: How White activists embrace racial justice*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Watts, R. J. (1994). Graduate training for a diverse world. *American Journal of Community Psychology, 22*(6), 807–809. https://doi.org/10.1007/bf02521562

Watts, R., & Serrano-García, I. (2003). The quest for a liberating community psychology: An overview. *American Journal of Community Psychology, 31*(1–2), 73–78. https://doi.org/10.1023/a:1023022603667

Wilson, C. L., Afua Darko, N., Kaur Singh, A. & Hunt, B. (2020). *Racism and Applications of Critical Race and Intersectional Theories in Community Psychology*. In M. Riemer, S. M. Reich, S.D. Evans, G. Nelson, & I. Prilleltensky, (Eds). Community Psychology: In pursuit of liberation and well-being (3rd ed.). Red Globe Press-Macmillian.

Yancy, G. (2008). *Black bodies white gazes: The continuing significance of race in America*. Rowman & Littlefield.