Subverting Whiteness: A Systems Theoretical Approach to Anti-Racist Praxis

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Abstract

Whiteness as a is a socio-political identity characterized by expectations, conscious and/or unconscious, of power and privileges that are granted to individuals or groups conferred into a White racial classification. This identity was born out of historic conditions (e.g. laws, policies, and practices) that gave rise to a racial hierarchy in the U.S., granting social, political, and economic privileges to people considered "White" and created the expectation that these advantages should continue. This hierarchy and related structural advantages persist today. To subvert Whiteness, activists, educators, and scholars created White privilege (and other related) interventions seeking to illuminate the power inherent in Whiteness. However, these psychologically focused (implicit bias) interventions frequently fail to alter the systemic conditions that perpetuate and reinforce White privilege and BIPOC oppression. To address this issue, we provide a framework that takes a systems approach to subverting White dominance. Bringing together critical Whiteness and systems change theories, we provide readers with a framework designed to alter systems' and settings' relationship to Whiteness. Specifically, we detail how interventions may be successful in altering White dominated spaces by (1) *defining* local patterns of racial privilege/oppression and the system conditions reinforcing them; (2) *designing* interventions to disrupt and realign these system conditions to promote equity; (3) *implementing* interventions in ways that uphold justice; and (4) *redefining* patterns of privilege/oppression and system conditions to learn if efforts are starting to make a difference. We conclude by providing recommendations to change agents, stakeholders, and researchers.

Introduction

"There's a man, African American, he has a bicycle helmet. He is recording me and threatening me and my dog… Please send the cops immediately!" (Vera, 2020). On May 25th, 2020 these words were spoken during a 911 call by a White woman named Amy Cooper in Central Park, New York City. This call occurred following an interaction between Ms. Cooper and a Black man, Christian Cooper (no relation), who asked Ms. Cooper to leash her dog. In late June of 2020 William Beasley, a White man, repeatedly blocked a Mexican American man, Michael Brajas, with his SUV from entering the parking area of his apartment complex, assuming Brajas was trespassing. Beasley repeatedly threatened physical violence and called the police on Brajas (Edmonds, 2020). Ironically, Beasley was driving a car with an out of state license plate, making it more likely that he was trespassing, and not Barajas. A couple years prior to these incidents, Alison Ettel, a White woman, questioned an eight-year-old Black girl for selling bottles of water on the street without a permit. Once the girl's aunt intervened, Ettel called the police to report the child (Campisi, et. al., 2018). Videos of these racialized incidents went viral, spreading across mainstream and social media like wildfire. For each of these videos, however, there are innumerable incidents of White people using their Whiteness to gain power over people of color.

Viral incidents like these have sparked a collective awareness regarding the power inherent in Whiteness, and underscore the systems of domination "White people" have operated under in the United States (U.S.) for centuries – the use of Whiteness as a weapon to threaten and gain power over certain people, particularly Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC; Horne, 2020; Quijano, 2000, 2016). These incidents highlight the racial biases that lead many White people to perceive the most innocuous behaviors of BIPOC as threatening. To address *unconscious racial biases* within their ranks, institutions and communities across the U.S. have implemented White privilege, implicit bias, diversity, and other trainings:

> "anti-bias and cultural competency educators, consultants, workshops, and trainings [are] worth close to $8 billion. Diversity training is currently mandated at most Fortune 500 companies and about half of all midsize firms in the United States. In addition, nearly two-thirds of colleges and universities use diversity trainings, and about 30 percent require their faculty to attend them. And, of course, in the wake of race-related public relations disasters, it's now standard practice for corporations to conduct nationwide company sensitivity trainings…" (Pan, 2020)

While popular, these trainings often fail to improve racial disparities because they are not designed to shift the underlying *systems* that serve to reinforce the outcomes of Whiteness ([Carmichael] Ture & Hamilton, 1992; Baldwin, 1984; Bell, 2004; Bonilla-Silva, 2006; Delgado & Stefancic, 2017; Harris, 1993; hooks, 1989; Lopez, 1997; Roediger, 1999). Citing the general ineffectiveness to alter material racial disparities, critics argue the real purpose of these trainings is to help institutions avoid public scrutiny and litigation, not to address systemic racial disparities (Newkirk, 2019; Pan, 2020).

To address this issue, we propose a *systems praxis* framework that attends to multiple systemic conditions – including psychological mindsets *and* structurally racist goals, decision-making processes, regulations, connections, and resources – that contribute to racial disparities and reinforce White domination. This paper first provides a background on the concept of Whiteness, then reviews the literature on the strengths and problems of psychological praxis and White privilege pedagogy, and then describes a systems praxis framework that can be used to inform anti-racist research and action.

We write this paper as two White identified community psychologists, scholars, practitioners, and activists who take an action research approach to working on issues of structural inequality. Our purpose is not to re-center our own identities, but to illuminate what we believe is an underlying cause of inequities - White racial domination. Our purpose is also to address an issue we see in many anti-racist efforts, namely the lack of specification to transform *system conditions* that reinforce White domination, the positioning of White institutional leaders instead of BIPOC as drivers of local change efforts, and the lack of attention to learning and (humble) adaptation to anti-racist interventions. This model was developed to help promote a "community psychology for liberation...through the deconstruction of racialized coloniality as it intertwines with systems of power that maintain the structures of whiteness" (Dutta, 2016; Fernández, 2018, p. 296; Montero, 1994, 2009; Reyes Cruz, 2008; Seedat & Suffla, 2017; Serrano-García, 1984; Sonn, 2004, 2016).

Whiteness

Whiteness is the psychological and cultural manifestation of White supremacy and has resulted in a configuration of mindsets, values, beliefs, and practices that uphold White domination of a racial hierarchy (Harris, 1993; Hughey, 2010; Roediger, 2001, 2006). Whiteness is a *socio-political identity* reinforced by expectations, conscious and/or unconscious, of power and privileges granted to individuals or groups conferred into a White racial classification (Applebaum, 2016; Barrett & Roediger, 2002; Brodkin, 1998; Guglielmo & Salerno, 2012; Helms, 1990; Leonardo, 2004; Roediger, 1999; Vecoli, 1995). In the U.S., the power and privileges bestowed upon "White people'' was created through European (White) settler colonialism, which violently stole African bodies and Indigenous land and resources to expand colonial rulers' wealth (Adams, Dobles, Gómez, Kurtiş, & Molina, 2015; David & Okazaki, 2006; Green, Sonn, & Matsebula, 2007; Maldonado-Torres, 2006, 2017; Sonn, 2004, 2016; Sonn & Fisher, 2003; Tuck & Yang, 2012). The genocide, enslavement, and erasure of Indigenous and African people was justified by White colonial settlers through a race-based hierarchy that labeled "White people" as superior and Indigenous and African peoples as "savages" and less than human (Fanon, 2007; Harris, 1993; Veracini, 2011). Through "the biopolitical and geopolitical management of people, land, flora and fauna ... the use of particularized modes of control - prisons, ghettos, minoritizing, schooling, policing" (Tuck & Yang, 2012, pp. 4-5), White settlers managed to subjugate or erase entire populations of Indigenous and African peoples (Phillips & Lowery, 2018).

Whiteness is characterized by several psychological, behavioral, and emotional processes which are mutually reinforcing, operate largely unknown to White people, and can generate conflicting dualities. First,

Whiteness is characterized by a general *ignorance* - or "historical amnesia" (Fernández, 2018, p. 294) - regarding the history of violence perpetrated by White people to establish racial dominance and the resultant contemporary racial disparities of that violence (Bonam, Nair Das, Coleman, & Salter, 2019; Mills, 2007; Nelson, Adams, & Salter, 2013). Through this ignorance, White people often adopt a "colorblind" worldview that permits them to ignore vast racial disparities, and even support racist policies in good conscience (Bonilla-Silva, 2006). Evidence contrary to a race-neutral/race-equal society is subsequently explained by a "bootstraps" and individualistic narrative that minimizes systems of White privilege and equites racial disparities to the work ethic of individuals (Alexander, 2012; Coleman, Collins, & Bonam, In Press; Feagin, 2013). Second, Whiteness is reproduced by *presumptions* of White normality such that White ideals, bodies, behaviors, and cultures serve as the natural order and should be (over)represented in society (Hughey, 2010; Schneider & Ingram, 2005). These beliefs are bolstered by the lack of racially diverse representation in entertainment, politics, and business, for example (Andrews, 2016). These presumptions are also reinforced by systems that place "White people in dominant positions and grants White people unfair privileges, while rendering these positions and privileges invisible to White people" (Green et al., 2007, p. 390). Finally, Whiteness is characterized by an emotional *fragility* that results in the inability for many White people to confront their own history, creation, and support for racist systems (DiAngelo, 2018). In their fragility, White people may engage in a series of emotional defensive moves, including rage, sadness, and aggression, that distance themselves from racial tension, which allows them to escape from the potential cognitive dissonance that may come from even the most mundane racial topics. Paired with the power held by White people, this fragility can result in extremely negative

consequences for the targets of such emotion. Given the history of White settler colonialism and the structure of White racial domination, we contend, like others, that Whiteness lies at the core of racism (Applebaum, 2016; Baldwin, 1984; Brodkin, 1998; Feagin, 2020; Feagin & Hernan, 2000; Harris, 1993; Ignatiev, 1994; Rogin, 1996; Thandeka, 1999; Wise, 2011).

Many race scholars illuminated the historic policies, practices, and institutions that brought about the construction of Whiteness as a racial identity and the privileges gained through groups' inclusion in it. For example, Harris (1993) investigated U.S. court cases which permitted "White people" to acquire and own "property" in the forms of Black bodies and Indigenous land. Walsh (2018) revealed the ways racially discriminatory tax policies created a U.S. public school system that granted massive benefits to White children at the expense of Black children and their communities. Roediger (1999) outlined how the U.S. labor movement effectively reinforced racial stereotypes and pitted White workers against Black workers. Throughout the entire history of the U.S. as a European colonized settlement, the benefits of being accepted into Whiteness could literally mean life and death (Lipsitz, 2006). Because of this, extensive work outlines the ways different ethnic groups such as the Irish (Ignatiev, 1994), Jewish (Brodkin, 1998), and Italians (Guglielmo & Salerno, 2012; Vecoli, 1995) were granted entry into Whiteness and gained access to its benefits (Barrett & Roediger, 2002; Lopez, 1997; Roediger, 2006).

As the above examples illustrate, Whiteness creates (and is reinforced by) systems and institutions that manufacture privileges for White people. McIntosh (2001) demarcated *White privileges* as a metaphorical "invisible knapsack" that gives White people "special provisions, assurances, tools, maps, guides, codebooks, passports, visas, clothes, compass,

emergency gear, and blank checks" (p. 95) to navigate life. Because the privileges associated with Whiteness go largely unseen by White people, it can be difficult, if not impossible, for its occupants to be aware of them. A growing industry is working to increase this awareness and subvert the implicit psychological biases inherent in Whiteness. Activists and scholars developed White privilege, implicit bias, and other trainings to undermine the culture and psychology of Whiteness by raising the awareness of White people's blind spots. Below, we review the features, functions, and results of such programs.

Psychological Praxis

To address growing racial inequities, activists and academics have recently intensified their efforts to subvert racial biases inherent in Whiteness. Organizations such as "The People's Institute for Survival and Beyond" and "Race Forward" create and conduct anti-bias and anti-racism trainings for individuals and organizations across the U.S.; activists and academics wrote handbooks to support anti-racist practitioners (e.g. Katz, 2003; Singh, 2019); and educators created and implemented critical whiteness pedagogies for teacher preparation programs (Matias, 2016; Matias & Mackey, 2016). The purpose of this work is to shift setting members' (e.g. employees, organization staff, teachers, etc.) awareness of their own White privilege and implicit racial biases, and the potential harm created by these mindsets, to alter their own behaviors and relationships with whiteness and racially unjust systems (Kalinoski et al., 2013). Generally, this work aims to build individuals' cognitive-based knowledge about issues of White privilege, skills to intervene in a biased situation, and willingness to take action against biased behaviors (Bezrukova, Spell, Perry, & Jehn, 2016; Celik, Abma, Klinge, & Widdershoven, 2012; Kalinoski et al., 2013; Kraiger, Ford, & Salas, 1993; Matias, 2016; Matias & Mackey, 2016). A central

assumption within this work is that "White privilege is the primary driving force behind ongoing racial injustice, and that such privilege operates mostly unconsciously", and as such the primary goal is to make individuals consciously aware of these privileges (Pierce, 2016, p. 509).

White privilege pedagogy and anti-bias trainings vary significantly in their form, function, intensity, and timing. In some cases, trainings may take the form of two-hour long "orientations" that brief participants on the do's and don'ts of racial biases. In others, learners attend more intense training sessions that include participatory exercises, dialogues, and reflections and may occur over a long weekend, week, or even over several months. Organizations such as Race Forward developed interventions that span across the spectrum – from sessions where attendants participate for a few hours, to multiphase trainings where learners attend multiple sessions across several months. Consistent with the transfer of training literature (Blume, Ford, Baldwin, & Huang, 2010), implementation can also be affected by factors such as the race of the trainer, training environment, and organizational culture (Hill & Augoustinos, 2001; Mathieu & Martineau, 1997).

Although implicit bias-type trainings and White privilege pedagogy are becoming nearly ubiquitous in U.S. organizations and institutions, research on their effectiveness show only small to moderate effects, with results often decaying over time (Bezrukova et al., 2016; Kalinoski et al., 2013). These proximal results are more likely to remain stable if paired with larger organizational/system interventions (Bezrukova et al., 2016). While research indicates anti-bias trainings may alter individuals' *attitudes*, they often do little to shift long-term *behavior*. For example, a recent evaluation of an anti-bias training program with New York Police Department

(NYPD) officers showed that although the training shifted officers' attitudes about the importance of understanding their own bias, it did not significantly reduce racial/ethnic disparities in enforcement actions such as stops, frisks, searches, arrests, summonses, and uses of force (Worden et al., 2020). However, the study also suggested that when paired with other system organizational and institutional changes such as monitoring and intervention by superiors, racially biased incidents may be reduced. Results such as these indicate even when a learner's motivation to account for their own racial biases is high, the ability to implement training in a way that alters behavior may be difficult. This again highlights the need for anti-racist praxis to attend to both the psychological *and* systemic conditions contributing to racial equity.

Unfortunately, as mentioned above, few White privilege pedagogies and anti-bias trainings directly focus on altering racist organizational/institutional goals, decision-making, policies, and practices (Noon, 2018). Without this focus, anti-racist interventions are insufficient to create sustainable shifts in the knowledge, skills, attitudes, and behaviors inherent in Whiteness (Bezrukova et al., 2016; Worden et al., 2020). Indeed, critical race scholars have made this point clear. Critical race theory argues that while attending to individual level processes (i.e. psychology, behavior, and emotion) is necessary to subvert White racial domination, it is insufficient because Whiteness and White privileges will continue to be reinforced by current *racist system structures* (Bell, 1980; [Carmichael] Ture & Hamilton, 1992; Desmond & Emirbayer, 2009; Feagin, 2013; Feagin & Elias, 2013; Feagin & Hernan, 2000; Kendi, 2017; Leonardo, 2004). Thus, even if White people increase their critical consciousness of racism and go so far as to "disavow" their Whiteness in anti-racist solidarity, they will never be able to escape the conveyer belt of White privileges that

keeps Whiteness firmly in place without also transforming racist systems (Roediger, 2001). As Leonardo (2004, p. 148) noted, "Privilege is the daily cognate of *structural domination*. Without securing the latter, the former is not activated" (emphasis ours). Thus, to dismantle Whiteness, the *systems* that perpetuate White racial domination and privilege must also be altered. Below, we describe a systemic praxis process that can be used to promote more racially equitable systems and disrupt the cycle of Whiteness.

Systemic Praxis

A system is often defined as a set of interacting parts that function as a whole (Ackoff & Rovin, 2003; Maani & Cavana, 2007). System parts can represent most anything, from tangible elements like individuals, buildings, and money to intangible elements like mindsets, goals, decision-making processes, and policies (Meadows, 2008). Systems can take on many forms such as a neighborhood, organization, service delivery system, or nation (Foster-Fishman, Nowell, & Yang, 2007). The boundaries around a given system are socially constructed and can encapsulate any configuration of actors, settings, and organizations across ecological layers (Bronfenbrenner, 1977, 1979; Midgley, 2000). Systems can also be nested, such as a department within a larger organization (Stroh, 2015). Most importantly, the configuration of a system's interacting parts will either bring about outcomes of racial equity or perpetuate White racial domination. As Kendi (2019) notes, there is no such thing as an equity neutral system.

Systems change involves transforming the form and function of a targeted system to bring about desired outcomes (e.g., racial equity; Foster-Fishman et al., 2007). Because of the interdependencies between system parts *across ecological layers*, systems change

often occurs in nonlinear and unpredictable ways (Stroh, 2015) and profound changes can emerge from the accumulation of seemingly small actions that have the power to trigger cascading ripple effects throughout the system (e.g. "the butterfly effect;" Eoyang & Holladay, 2013; Patton, 2008). Some system parts and interactions have more power to serve as leverage points for system-wide change than others (Meadows, 1999) and effective change efforts strategically target a wide array of these leverage points across multiple levels of the system (Authors, under review).

Systemic anti-racist praxis is an iterative problem-solving process where stakeholders understand and transform systems reinforcing White domination and BIPOC oppression. This system transformation serves as a necessary step to ultimately dismantle the paradigm of Whiteness. Systemic anti-racist praxis includes the following phases: (1) *defining* the ways in which system parts and interactions across ecological layers reinforce patterns of racial inequity; (2) *designing* interventions to disrupt and realign system conditions to promote racial equity; (3) *implementing* interventions in ways that uphold justice; and (4) *redefining* the ways in which targeted system parts and interactions are starting to change and ultimately bring about patterns of racial equity (see Figure 1). While this paper focuses on racial inequity, the praxis process can be applied to inequities at the intersections of numerous other social identity categories such as gender, class, sexuality, geography, age, disability/ability, migration status, and religion (Hankivsky, 2014). It should be noted that systemic anti-racist praxis is a *problem-solving* process, not a *change* process; the latter requires additional elements such as ongoing communication and change management (Kotter, 2007).
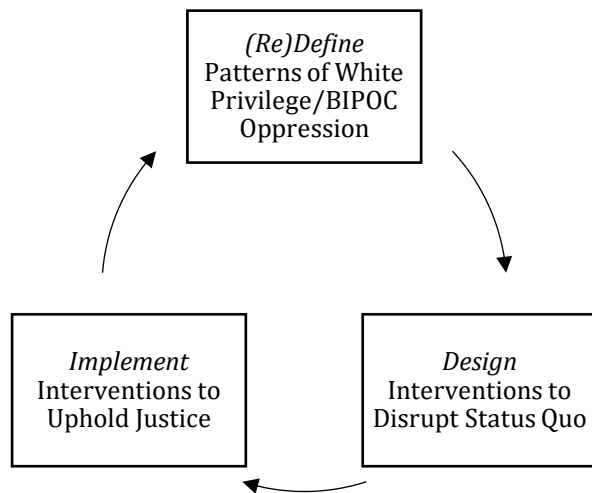
Figure 1. Process of Anti-Racist Systems Praxis

A central tenet of the model is that it positions BIPOC stakeholders as the drivers of all four phases, as this ensures BIPOC have influence over decisions affecting their lives (Fraser, 2009; Watts, Williams, & Jagers, 2003; Wolff et al., 2017), improves learning and strategy design by grounding the change efforts in the experiences of the people most affected by racially inequitable systems (Ford & Airhihenbuwa, 2010; Freire, 1973; White, Adams, & Heywood, 2009), and promotes transformation by expanding the range of actions taken across the system (Blanchet Garneau, Browne, & Varcoe, 2018). In contrast, White stakeholders who often dominate decision-making and action processes take on more supportive roles, such as putting sufficient staff in place to convene and organize BIPOC, building local resident leadership capacity, and providing necessary supports to ensure marginalized stakeholders can fully engage in the process (e.g., compensation for residents' time, childcare, transportation, peer networks, etc.; Barnes & Schmitz, 2016; Stark, 2020).

Systemic anti-racist praxis was developed in response to the growing recognition that most change efforts have failed to improve racial disparities because they continue to use problem-solving processes that are ill-equipped to navigate the intersection of complex systems and equity (Came & Griffith, 2018; Hogan, Rowley, White, & Faustin, 2018; Rutter et al., 2017). The model represents an integration of research and scholarship on systemic racism (Bonilla-Silva, 2001; Delgado & Stefancic, 2017; Elias & Feagin, 2020; Camara Phyllis Jones, 2000; Kendi, 2019) (Bell, 2008), systems change (Foster-Fishman & Watson, 2017; Meadows, 2008) powell, Cagampang, & Bundalli, 2011; Stroh, 2015), and implementation science (Chinman, Woodward, Curran, & Hausmann, 2017; Purnell et al., 2016; Woodward, Matthieu, Uchendu, Rogal, & Kirchner, 2019). It also draws on approaches such as intervention mapping (Eldredge et al., 2016), developmental evaluation (Patton, 2008), and participatory action research (Foster-Fishman & Watson, 2010; R. G. Jones, Trivedi, & Ayanian, 2010) People's Knowledge Editorial Collective, 2016). The following sections describe the systemic anti-racist praxis process.

Phase 1: Define System Inequities

The first systemic praxis phase includes defining local population-level outcome disparities to prioritize for change, local patterns of White privilege and BIPOC oppression contributing to these disparities, and the multi-level systemic root causes for why these patterns of privilege and oppression are happening. Each of these activities is described below.

Define targeted outcome disparities. This activity involves using local disaggregated trend data to understand what population-level outcomes (e.g., infant mortality rates, high school graduation, homelessness, etc.) are showing the greatest racial/ethnic disparities over time within a given place (e.g., neighborhood, community, region, etc.),

and which of these disparities should be prioritized for action (PolicyLink, 2018). This place-based approach grounds the change efforts in outcomes affecting people in a particular context, making it easier to understand and address multi-level (e.g., from local to global) system determinants of those outcomes (Beer, McKenzie, Blažek, Sotarauta, & Ayres, 2020). Residents most affected by local disparities can drive this process by making sense of local disaggregated data (including helping to gather necessary data if not already available) and selecting priorities. For example, an initiative in Providence, Rhode Island (United States) engaged community leaders and residents from two focus neighborhoods to discuss disaggregated survey data on local students' academic success and identify shared priorities; the initiative then adopted these priorities as its targeted outcomes (Barnes & Schmitz, 2016). This approach requires a shared commitment among institutional leaders to empower BIPOC, especially in cases where residents' priorities conflict with those of the historical power brokers (Iton, 2016).

Once outcome disparities have been prioritized, BIPOC residents can work with institutional leaders and service providers to define which actors, settings, and organizations across multiple ecological layers (e.g., community, region, state, nation, etc.) are most relevant to include within the boundaries of their "targeted system" (Foster-Fishman et al., 2007). These boundary decisions are some of the most important in a change effort as they guide all subsequent praxis phases and determine who can be engaged, where change can happen, and who can benefit (Midgley, 2000). It is crucial to promote decision-making processes that ensure marginalized actors, settings, and organizations are not unjustly excluded from these boundaries (Foster-Fishman et al., 2007). See Midgley (2000) for example engagement processes.

Define relevant patterns of privilege and oppression. This activity involves identifying local patterns of White privilege and BIPOC oppression occurring within the targeted system that are contributing to prioritized outcome disparities. These patterns of privilege and oppression are then used to guide and focus the root cause analysis process in the final Define phase activity. Community psychologists have used the concept of social justice to describe privilege and oppression (Evans, Rosen, Kesten, & Moore, 2014; Prilleltensky, 2012; Torres-Harding, Siers, & Olson, 2012; Watts et al., 2003). Unfortunately, the concept continues to lack clarity within the field and often excludes key sources of injustice (Coleman et al., In Press; Gokani & Walsh, 2017). To address this gap, Foster-Fishman, Watson, Standley, & Meeks (under review) developed an integrated social justice framework that brings together the following domains of injustice from Fraser (2009) and Sen (2001): *distribution* of material goods, wealth, and opportunities; *recognition* as full and equal members of society; *representation* and power within decision-making processes; and the *capability* to utilize available resources and opportunities to meet one's needs and desires. Table 1 provides examples of each domain; see Foster-Fishman et al. (under review) for more details. Table 2 provides a list of prompts adapted from Eoyang and Holladay (2013) and Checkland and Scholes (1990) to help identify patterns of White privilege and BIPOC oppression in the community.

Table 1
Domains of White privilege and BIPOC oppression

Domain	Examples
Distribution The allocation of material goods, wealth, and opportunities across groups (Fraser, 2009). Related to the social determinants of health (Solar & Irwin, 2010).	BIPOC are less likely than White people to have: - inherited wealth (Feagin and Elias, 2014; Lipsitz 2016) - quality housing (Rose & Ky-Nam Miller, 2016; Williams & Collins, 2001) - livable wage employment (Hanleybrown, Iyer, Kirschenbaum, Medrano, & Mihaly, 2020) - high-quality educational opportunities (Davis, 2016) - healthcare (Feagin and Bennefield, 2014).
Recognition The extent to which individuals are acknowledged as full and equal members of society (Fraser, 2009). Related to status dimension of justice.	BIPOC are more likely than White people to experience: - negative stereotypes and expectations related to academic achievement, employment, parenting, crime, etc. (Kirwin Institute, 2016; McKown, 2013). - limited benefit from programs, policies, and environments designed to exclusively fit the needs or assets of White people (Feagin, 2014; Gershoff, Mistry, & Crosby, 2013). - marginalized, invisible, and/or dependent roles or status such as entry level positions (Davis, 2016), incarceration (Poe-Yamagata, & Jones, 2000), school suspension (Gilliam 2005), in-voluntary hospitalization (Davies et al., 1996); and denial of a business loan applications (Davis et al., 2016).
Representation The extent to which individuals from different groups have voice, influence, and power (Fraser, 2009).	BIPOC are more likely than White people to: - be denied voting power (Underhill, 2019; Williams, 2019). - lack influence over institutional decision-making (Feagin, 2014; McNulty et al., 2019). - have limited decision-making influence within collaborative community change efforts (Wolff et al., 2016).
Capability People's ability to utilize available resources and opportunities to meet their needs and desires (Sen, 1999),	BIPOC are less likely than White people to have: - trust of cross-sector service providers and institutions given prior oppressive experiences (e.g., Tuskegee experiments; King, 2016). - knowledge and skills to take advantage of employment opportunities (Davis, 2016) and effectively participate in community decision-making processes (Wolff et al., 2016). - a state of sufficient health to take advantage of employment opportunities and community participation (Sen, 1999).

Table 2

Prompts to explore patterns of White privilege and BIPOC oppression in the community

Pattern	Prompt
Generalizations	In general, I notice the following examples of White privilege/BIPOC oppression happening across the community...
Exceptions	However, I notice these examples *do not always happen* in the following situations...
Contradictions	I notice privilege and oppression sometimes happen at the same time in the following situations...
Surprises	I was surprised that the following examples of White privilege/BIPOC oppression happened...

BIPOC stakeholders are in the best position to identify and prioritize which local patterns of White privilege and BIPOC oppression are contributing most to targeted outcome disparities (Ford & Airhihenbuwa, 2010), as White people's perceptions of these patterns are often obscured by the "sincere fictions" they have developed allowing them ignore the inhumanity of racial stratification (Feagin & Hernan, 2000). Instead, White allies can support this activity by listening to and learning from BIPOC. For example, a School District in San Diego, California (U.S.) engaged families and students from marginalized groups representing six languages in a series of workshops to improve family-school-community partnerships. During the workshops, families and youth spoke about their experiences within the school in their own language while educators listened in (without interrupting) to the translated conversations using headsets. The approach

not only empowered the families and youth to identify and prioritize examples of privilege and oppression, but it also shifted the mindsets of (mostly White) educators who had never heard these families'

perspectives in such a direct way (Rowland, 2016). BIPOC can also independently gather data about local current patterns of privilege and oppression, for example by having conversations with other BIPOC (People's Knowledge Editorial Collective, 2016) and/or through methods like Photovoice (Wang & Burris, 1997).

Define Systemic Root Causes**.** This activity involves understanding how system parts and interactions *across multiple ecological layers* of the targeted system contribute to prioritized patterns of White privilege and BIPOC oppression. These system parts and interactions can be thought of as the systemic root causes driving local inequities (Kim, 1999). Systems scholars identified several categories of systemic root causes that can serve as leverage points for change (Coffman, 2007; Foster-Fishman et al., 2007; Meadows, 1999) including: mindsets, goals, decision-making, regulations, connections, resources, and feedback loops (see Table 3 for definitions; for more details see Foster-Fishman and Watson, 2017). Diverse stakeholders within the targeted system should engage in a "system scanning" process

(Foster-Fishman & Watson, In Press) to identify systemic root causes across multiple categories and ecological layers that are contributing to prioritized patterns of White privilege and BIPOC oppression. Table 3 provides example root cause questions that can be adapted for stakeholders across diverse backgrounds, education-level, and experiences. System scanning processes can also involve developing causal loop diagrams to illustrate the interactions between root causes and illuminate powerful places to intervene (Meadows, 2008; Stroh, 2015). Some participatory diagramming methods incorporate critical race theory (e.g., Frerichs et al., 2016).

Table 3
Example systemic root causes of White privilege/oppression of BIPOC*

Systemic Root Causes	Example Questions
Mindsets Deepest held beliefs, values, ideologies, and attitudes that drive system behavior (Senge, 2006).	What beliefs, values, and ideologies (e.g., Whiteness) are influencing [*local pattern(s) of racial privilege/oppression*] - and in what ways? Who holds these mindsets?
Goals Aims and purpose of a system that are driven by mindsets; influence the design and implementation of root causes listed below (Meadows, 1999)	To what extent do organizations, institutions, policymakers, and funders have goals, outcomes, objectives, and/or strategic plans focused on promoting racial equity? To what extent are they tracking their progress in reaching these racial equity goals (including collecting disaggregated data)? How is this situation influencing [*local pattern(s) of racial privilege/oppression*]?
Decision-Making how decisions are made, including who is included and excluded (Fraser, 2009; Meadows, 1999).	To what extent do organizations, institutions, funders, and community settings authentically engage BIPOC in decision-making processes (e.g., related to selecting priorities, designing policies and programs, allocating resources, hiring staff, etc.)? How is this situation influencing [*local pattern(s) of racial privilege/oppression*]?
Regulations Formal and informal policies, practices procedures, protocols, laws, and community norms (Foster-Fishman & Watson, 2017).	How are policies, practices, procedures, protocols, laws, and community norms influencing [*local pattern(s) of racial privilege/oppression*]? In what ways is the implementation of these regulations influencing these inequities?
Connections Exchanges of information and resources between and across individuals, organizations/institutions, and subsystems (Senge, 2006).	How are exchanges of information and resources (or lack thereof) between and across stakeholders, organizations/institutions, and/or sub-systems influencing [*local pattern(s) of racial privilege/oppression*]?

Resources Human (e.g., skills, knowledge, abilities, and diversity; King-Sears, 2001), economic (e.g., money and capital; Stroh 2015), physical (e.g., parks, roads, housing, technology; Metzel & Hansen 2014), programmatic/opportunity (e.g., quality, location, and array of services, jobs, etc.; Fixsen, Blasé, Metz, & Van Dyke, 2013), and social (i.e., trust; Pence & Shepard, 1999)	How is the current level of stakeholders' skills and knowledge (e.g., awareness of local inequities, understanding of structural drivers of inequity, cultural competency, skills in trauma-informed engagement, leadership skills, systems thinking, etc.) influencing [*local pattern(s) of racial privilege/oppression*]? How are current budget allocations influencing [*local pattern(s) of racial privilege/oppression*]? How is the quality and location of physical or built resources (e.g., green space, roads, infrastructure, housing, materials, technology, etc.) influencing [*local pattern(s) of racial privilege/oppression*]? How is the character (quality, cultural competence, demographics of service providers, etc.) and accessibility (affordability, location, time, etc.) of programs, services, supports, and opportunities influencing [*local pattern(s) of racial privilege/oppression*]? How is the trust (or lack thereof) between stakeholders influencing [*local pattern(s) of racial privilege/oppression*]?
Feedback Loops Interactions between the root causes listed above that either reinforce or balance out given outcomes such as racial inequity (Foster-Fishman et al., 2007; Meadows, 1999).	How are the different issues (i.e., root causes) you described so far interacting with each other? How are these interactions amplifying [*local pattern(s) of racial privilege/oppression*]? Keeping [*local pattern(s) of racial privilege/oppression*] in check?

*Adapted from Foster-Fishman et al., 2007; Foster-Fishman & Watson (2017)

Phase 2: Design Systemic Interventions

Systemic anti-racist praxis phase two involves designing interventions - best thought of as clusters of aligned and mutually reinforcing strategies - to transform prioritized systemic root causes and disrupt current patterns of racial inequity. In most community change efforts, groups engage in long strategic planning processes or spend years developing the "perfect" intervention. This approach is problematic given no systems change strategy is likely to be designed perfectly at first, especially given the complexity of social systems, and extensive resources are often wasted in designing fully developed strategies that end up being ineffective or even worse exacerbate local inequities (Chang, 2018; Wolff et al., 2017). Instead, systemic anti-racist praxis adopts the "lean impact" approach of designing small yet viable intervention prototypes that are tested and improved through short, iterative learning cycles

(Chang, 2018). This cycle is described in praxis phases 3-4 below.

Effective system interventions address multiple, *interdependent* systemic root causes across ecological layers (Hankivsky, 2014; King-Sears, 2001; Solar & Irwin, 2010) and use a targeted universalism approach (Powell, Menendian, & Ake, 2019) to ensure system changes meet BIPOC needs/situations and prevent White opportunity hoarding (Lewis & Diamond, 2015). For example, interventions to address root causes of *distributive* housing inequities may include reallocating local hospital's community benefit spending (mandated by the Affordable Care Act) to directly fund the development of affordable housing for priority groups (Bamberger, Bluestein, Latimer-Nelligan, Samson, & Shoemaker, 2017) and creating incentives (e.g., density bonuses) and zoning codes to promote the development of multi-family affordable housing near transit hubs (Rose, 2016). Similarly, interventions to address *recognition* housing inequities could include creating county-level just-cause eviction and tenant rights policies to limit landlords' profit-driven evictions in gentrifying BIPOC neighborhoods (Rose, 2016) and shifting city goals and resource allocations to increase community enforcement of these anti-discrimination policies (Estes, Haar, Mikkelsen, Nichols, & Cohen, 2016). Systemic interventions often require partnerships between groups focused on root causes at different ecological levels to share information, align and coordinate efforts, and champion shared goals (Mikkelsen, Novotny, & Gittelsohn, 2016).

BIPOC should play a central role in co-designing systemic interventions to ensure they meet local needs and goals. Community-based participatory design methods, such as co-design workshops, have emerged as one approach to engage marginalized residents in addressing social issues in collaboration with community partners (Harrington, Erete, & Piper, 2019). Similar to participatory action research, these methods are meant to both center the input and narratives of marginalized groups in the design process (Duarte, Brendel, Degbelo, & Kray, 2018) and support collective action (Le Dantec, 2016). However, co-design processes are highly vulnerable to racialized power dynamics which can exacerbate inequities (Tran O'Leary, Zewde, Mankoff, & Rosner, 2019). Using a postcolonial perspective, Harrington et al. (2019) recommend co-design processes attend to the histories of injustice affecting participants, encourage participants to provide rich and full accounts instead of stressing "honest disclosure" (which can become weaponized against them), and challenge "corporate" design thinking approaches that value new, technology-oriented ideas while minimizing existing assets.

Phase 3: Implement Interventions

The third systemic anti-racist praxis phase focuses on engaging diverse stakeholders - with BIPOC as the central drivers - in taking actions to implement interventions or intervention prototypes. Effective implementation involves developing specific implementation processes (Fixsen, Blase, Naoom, & Wallace, 2005), putting structures and behind the scenes coaching in place to support these processes (P. Foster-Fishman & Watson, 2018; Wandersman et al., 2008), and aligning system characteristics (see Table 1) to ensure effective diffusion, use, and reach of the intervention (Foster-Fishman & Watson, 2012). Unfortunately, implementation processes often unintentionally contribute to injustice (Chinman et al., 2017; Woodward et al., 2019) and reinforce the four forms of inequity described in Table 1. For example, the implementation of an intervention may not reach oppressed individuals or communities (distribution injustice; Foster-Fishman, Watson, & Wattenberg, 2014;

Trickett, Espino, & Hawe, 2011); take into account common access barriers affecting marginalized groups such as cost, service location and time, and transportation (recognition injustice; Daly et al., 2002; Kissane, 2010); or provide the supports or capacity-building needed to use or benefit from the intervention (capability injustice; Ribot & Peluso, 2003). These implementation failures often occur because BIPOC are not positioned as drivers of all praxis phases (representation injustice; Alcaraz et al., 2017). Stakeholders can prevent this situation by considering how their implementation processes and structures can better align to promote equity and justice before launching their efforts, and carefully track implementation over time to quickly identify and address emerging injustices (Foster-Fishman & Watson, 2017; Camara P Jones, 2014).

Phase 4: Redefine Local Context to Restart Iterative Cycle

The final phase of the systemic praxis framework involves gathering short cycle feedback from diverse stakeholders and data sources across the system to assess implementation effectiveness and the extent to which interventions are *starting* to shift prioritized root causes across ecological layers, patterns of racial inequities, and outcome disparities within the targeted system (Foster-Fishman & Watson, 2010; R. G. Jones et al., 2010; McKenzie, 2014). The redefining phase also involves looking for unintended system responses to the interventions, as efforts targeting change in one part of the system often unintentionally and unpredictably bring about changes in other parts of the system (Eoyang & Holladay, 2013; Zimmerman, Lindberg, & Plsek, 2001); and how the system is resisting change to maintain the status quo of white domination (Blanchet Garneau et al., 2018). As in the initial design phase, BIPOC residents can drive the process, for example by prioritizing

questions and methods, helping to gather short cycle feedback, and making sense of the information.

The feedback is then used to inform design decisions (i.e., praxis phase 2) around how to adapt intervention elements that are not working, scale up elements that are working, and/or take advantage of emerging opportunities like new funding or community assets. The feedback can also help to identify emerging system issues to prioritize for change and determine whether to expand the boundaries around the targeted system. It should be noted that the purpose of systemic anti-racist praxis is not to sustain or scale a particular intervention, as the constantly evolving system context makes any given intervention obsolete over time (Schorr, 1998). Instead, stakeholders should strive to promote and sustain *system dynamics* that promote equity using whatever interventions make sense given the socio-environmental context at any particular moment in time. In addition, because broad system changes are often triggered in unpredictable and non-linear ways by the accumulation of changes across sub-systems (Meadows, 2008), it is impossible and illogical to try and precisely evaluate any given intervention's effect on broad system properties. A more useful approach is to focus on evaluating an intervention's effects on prioritized root causes and equity outcomes within a targeted system, and then track how interventions across many systems correspond with shifts in broad system dynamics over time.

Discussion

Whiteness is a socio-political identity associated with conscious and/or unconscious expectations of power and privileges granted to individuals or groups conferred into a White racial classification. This identity was born out of historic conditions (e.g. laws, policies, and practices) that gave rise to a racial hierarchy in the U.S.

that gave social, political, and economic privileges to people considered "White" and created the expectation that these advantages should continue (Roediger, 2001). This hierarchy persists today, and provides structural advantages and related privileges for White people in nearly every aspect of American life. To subvert Whiteness, activists, educators, and scholars have developed anti-bias trainings and other educational practices to raise individuals' consciousness about Whiteness and racism. While research shows these trainings can at least temporarily shift individual attitudes about White privilege and racism, they often do little to sustainably alter individuals' behavior. More so, this work often does little to change other relevant system conditions (e.g., policies, processes, practices, etc.) that contribute to racial inequity and by default reinforce Whiteness as a shared identity. In response, this paper proposes a *systems anti-racist praxis* framework designed to help communities understand and address the systemic root causes of White privilege.

This paper has several implications for community psychologists. First, although the model integrates well-established theories and scholarship across multiple disciplines, it has yet to be fully evaluated in practice. Community psychologists are in a unique position to partner with stakeholders in evaluating (and adapting) the model in diverse system settings. Second, the framework has implications for how community psychologists approach their community-based research and evaluation efforts. Specifically, community psychologists can integrate the framework into their existing participatory action research and evaluation processes and methods to bring a greater focus on exploring and addressing the systemic determinants of racial inequity.

The paper also has several implications for practice. First, the recognition that most psychological interventions fall short of creating sustainable shifts in people's identity of Whiteness because they do little to shift racist systems has direct implications for those responsible for designing, implementing, and funding these trainings. We believe it is unethical to continue propagating the current manifestation of psychological praxis without embedding a dual and legitimate focus on systems change. If not, anti-bias and similar interventions risk becoming simply a tool for avoiding litigation and distracting focus away from systemic transformation (Newkirk, 2019). Second, Systemic Anti-Racist Praxis is a departure from the more typical "programmatic" approach many communities use to pursue racial equity and will require new types of competencies to implement effectively (Bensberg, Allender, & Sacks, 2020). Funders and decision-makers should consider how to integrate these processes and related competencies into current capacity-building efforts and funding expectations.

There is of course a paradox within the systemic praxis framework related to power: most U.S. organizations and community collaboratives that could benefit from adopting this framework are led and dominated by White people who are most likely operating within the paradigm of Whiteness and White supremacy (Feagin, 2020). In other words, some leaders may be reluctant to adopt this praxis model (including positioning BIPOC as drivers of the process) or the systems changes it aims to bring about because they are benefiting from the current status quo, or exhibit only performative engagement with dismantling Whiteness. To address this, critical race scholars suggest promoting what Bell (1980) refers to as "interest convergence" – the belief that systemic anti-racist praxis can both meet the goal of racial equity *and* "secure, advance, or at least not harm societal interests deemed important by middle and upper class whites" (p. 523). Stakeholders can promote interest convergence through strategic framing

analysis methods (Bales, 2005) and/or initiatives such as the Movement for Black Lives that make systemic racism so uncomfortable and publicly unfavorable for White people that they are compelled to make changes (Bell, 2004; Crossley, 2016).

Some White stakeholders may also exhibit "White fragility" or "White flammability" during the praxis process - a set of highly defensive responses (e.g., shouting, crying, argumentation, withdrawal, etc.) aimed at silencing discussions about racism and protecting Whiteness (DiAngelo, 2018; Shin, 2020). Initiative conveners and facilitators must have the competencies to help stakeholders examine how White privilege and systemic racism are manifesting themselves in the praxis process, including identifying and addressing paradigms, goals, power dynamics, practices, policies, and processes within the initiative itself that are exacerbating inequity (Wolff et al., 2017). These issues can then become targeted root causes.

In closing, systemic anti-racist praxis provides a problem-solving process to address the systemic root causes of racial inequity and, in turn, dismantle Whiteness. The process expands common forms of anti-racist action, such as anti-bias trainings, which typically focus exclusively on shifting White people's paradigms instead of addressing a *comprehensive* array of systemic root causes reinforcing Whiteness and White privilege. Systemic anti-racist praxis is particularly relevant in this moment of history as we witness a climax of racist and anti-racist movements across the world. While systems change work is by no means easy, it is indeed the only way, we believe, our society stands a chance to move beyond the shackles of White supremacy and achieve racial equity.

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