The Intrepid Elective: Transforming Potential for Consciousness to Action in and With Social Work Education

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Abstract: *The field of social work has a professional and ethical commitment to social justice. However, scholars have identified potential dangers that may threaten that commitment. To transform dangers into opportunities that strengthen social justice service, schools of social work could incorporate critical pedagogy within the Master of Social Work (MSW) curriculum. By training future social workers in critical social work practice, social work education becomes an advocate for marginalized populations. If not educated from an anti-oppressive framework, social workers have the potential to harm, oppress, and control rather than support and serve. The weight of this responsibility and firsthand social work education experiences led to the development and implementation of an elective course in critical social work informed by the Critical Transformative Potential Development (CTPD) Framework. The course follows a method that puts the CTPD theory into practice to bridge the micro-macro divide by engaging students in actively dismantling ideologies and practices of dominance. The course aims to produce anti-oppressive social workers who can better navigate social justice terrain. A student's perspective on the course highlights strengths and areas for improvement. Future iterations of this class or similar courses of study could be adapted by and adopted for other social work education institutions. Because social work education is fertile ground to plant seeds that will grow social workers rooted in anti-racism and anti-White supremacy, there is the opportunity, with a radical education, to transform the field in a critical direction, better prepared to overcome the social justice challenges of the era.*

Keywords: *Critical consciousness, White supremacy, social work education, elective*

The field of social work has a professional and ethical commitment to social justice (National Association of Social Work [NASW], 2017). Social justice can be characterized as a comprehensive economic, social, and cultural construct having overlapping components that are grounded in practices and pursuits of equality, resource distribution and allocation (Cook, 2019; Johnston, 2009). Reisch (2002) further describes the concept of social justice as an ever-evolving idea that functions to maintain equitable or oppose inequitable existing conditions and holds individuals and society accountable for remedying injustices. One issue preventing the field from accomplishing its social justice mission is the micro-macro fissure embedded in the field's foundation (Androff & McPherson, 2014; Bussey et al., 2021). This long-standing tension about what "social justice" means and how to engage – whether to focus on micro-level or macro-level factors – dominates social work practice and is reflected in social work education (Finn & Molloy, 2020; Morgaine, 2014).

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Indicative of this division is that some schools of social work require prospective students in their applications to choose tracks (e.g., clinical, management, or community organizing) or concentrations that reinforce the micro/macro divide. The tracks bolster pseudo binary objectives of micro (individuals, families, and groups) and macro (community organizing, management, advocacy, and policy) in social work education and practice, which undermines the social work notion of person-in-environment (Austin et al., 2016; Reisch, 2007; Rothman & Mizrahi, 2014) and the social ecological perspective (Bronfenbrenner, 1977). Both perspectives emphasize interconnectedness of micro, meso, macro contexts and incorporate the axiom that macro processes have micro consequences. Programs, policies, and practices that treat behaviors as if they exist in a micro vacuum - by solely focusing on the individual level—allow invisible, inequitable socio-structural factors to continue unchallenged (Jemal et al., 2019a; Windsor et al., 2015).

In social work institutions familiar to the authors, admitted students follow a specific course of study with minimal to no cross-track interaction except, possibly, through some elective course offerings. Although not scientifically studied, it is no secret that some students who pursue an MSW often had/have an interest in psychology; but chose to pursue social work as a fast track to clinical practice (i.e., therapy; Apgar, 2020). Most MSW students choose the micro/clinical focus (Harrison et al., 2016; Varghese, 2013) and some schools only have a clinical program (Apgar, 2020). Yet not all US Master of Social Work programs infuse social justice content throughout the curriculum (Tisman & Clarendon, 2018). Particularly, the lack of social justice content may be more noticeable amidst the clinical concentrations. Thus, this structure of education with the forced track selection, the actual selection of the clinical focus by the majority of social work students as a fast track to clinical practice, and the lack of social justice content infused throughout curriculum, could be interpreted as social work, through its educational process, stating that macro practice does not matter (Reisch, 2016) and, as such, abandoning its social justice mission (Sprecht & Courtney, 1994).

Another obstacle potentially thwarting the field's social justice mission is that social work has a dialectical character, containing both repressive and liberating dimensions. As a result, the field has oscillated between being a mechanism of social control and source of liberation (Bussey et al., 2021). One result of these tensions is that mainstream social work has too often tiptoed around major issues of power and coercion, especially regarding class, sexual orientation, gender, and Black, Indigenous, and other people of color (BIPOC) racial oppression (Feagin et al., 2015). This is problematic since the social work profession grants access to communities who are constantly marginalized by society. These communities share intersecting identities – often low-income, LGBTQ+, Black and/or people of color, disabled, undocumented, women and children – and bear the most visible effects of oppression, such as poor health outcomes, employment and housing discrimination, and disproportionate interactions with the criminal justice system. The lived experiences often demonstrate how environmental and socio-political processes have individual-level outcomes (Dunlap & Johnson, 1992). Oppression is rooted in colonialism and White supremacy culture, which Okun & Jones (2016, p. 28) describe as "powerful precisely because it is so present and at the same time so very difficult to name or identify," shaping both inner and outer worlds.

Whereas the term [White supremacy] has historically been associated with hate groups such as the Ku Klux Klan, scholars now recognize *White supremacy* to be a cultural, economic, and political system that sustains White people's dominance over virtually all sectors of society and through which implicit and explicit ideas about White people's superiority are reproduced through every day dynamics in a wide variety of institutional and social settings. (Grzanka et al., 2019, p. 479)

White supremacy shapes the political and socio-economic contexts in which we operate; and both the formal and informal rules by which we live (Kendi, 2016; Wilkerson, 2020). In essence, White supremacy culture is within and reproduced by all the institutions of our society as evident by racial disparities. It "saturate[s] the everyday mundane actions and policies that shape the world in the interests of White people, so that they can enjoy structural advantage and rights" over people of color at the collective and individual levels (Gillborn, 2006). Moreover, oppression shapes our thoughts, emotions, and personality, and thus functions simultaneously as a historical, psychological, socio-political, and cultural experience (Berila, 2014). Without the work of critical reflection (and still at times, even with it), social workers are inevitably bound to perpetuate the harms of White supremacy and oppression.

As James Baldwin and other scholars have keenly noted in different ways, we can't claim what we can't name, and we can't face what we can't claim, and we can't change what we can't face. In other words, we cannot claim (or be accountable for) issues that we cannot "see" or perceive. Naming makes the invisible, visible (i.e., awareness). For example, in what ways has the field of social work named its history of involvement in racist tactics, practices and policies, the consequences of which are still felt today? Practicing from a White supremacist starting point with a White supremacist process leads to White supremacist outcomes that circle back to the starting point, creating a self-perpetuating and self-replicating, viral cycle (Jemal, 2018). Apparently, we cannot change what we have not claimed to be in our field of expertise. As social workers, we should be anti-oppression experts. Yet some social workers support "All Lives Matter" campaigns. In response to reparation discussions, they say "Black people had slaves too," or "My grandparents, who were treated very poorly when they first immigrated to this country with nothing, worked very hard to earn what they had and bequeathed to their children." Or, if not saying or thinking these ideas, many social workers (including social work educators) are uncomfortable with the discomfort of having difficult discussions about racism (i.e., White supremacy/privilege and/or BIPOC racial oppression) and other isms (e.g., classism, sexism, heterosexism). As a result, the topic is avoided to the detriment of their own learning, the students' education, and potential future social justice advocacy efforts with clients.

Since racism is inherently part of the culture in the US, following the status quo, usually through avoidant action, is a path of violence and perpetual racism. Every member of this society is part of the systems of racism whether intentionally or unwittingly, and thus, no one can escape the perpetual decisions to maintain or dismantle these oppressive systems with each thought and every action (Feagin et al., 2015). It is impossible to remain neutral. For example, imagine you are a social worker at a halfway house. The organization has a zero-tolerance policy for intimidation. Due to racist, socio-cultural ideas of blackness being

scary and dangerous, and the angry Black woman stereotype, White women residents often "feel" intimidated by the very existence and presence of the Black women residents. The White residents make formal complaints (creating a hostile environment for the Black women, which makes the Black women very angry and unable to fully participate in their treatment process; Jemal et al., 2019b). Having complaints filed against you constitutes a violation of probation or parole and the Black women are reincarcerated, thereby perpetuating the racial disparity in the criminal justice system. Macro forces have micro consequences and those micro consequences (e.g., rage) can elicit macro responses (e.g., stringent policies on anger expression that align with White ideals, norms, and values). Moreover, the example demonstrates how racism through or met with non-critical action can perpetuate racism.

Yet to prepare students for similar scenarios, many institutions of social work education familiar to the authors meet the Council on Social Work Education's (CSWE) cultural competence accreditation requirement by offering a stand-alone course that focuses on issues of diversity and inclusion (Gabbard et al., 2011). Although well-intentioned, the impact is problematic in that practices may camouflage racism since cultural competence does not stretch far enough or dive deep enough to reach anti-oppressive practice (Abrams & Moio, 2009). First, the MSW curriculum, particularly for the clinical track, often places responsibility for educating about or addressing systems of oppression/privilege within macro practice (Harrison et al., 2016), and thus, clinically focused courses do not engage in critical consciousness raising but instead emphasize interpersonal differences in identity through the multiculturalism approach and cultural competency (Bussey et al., 2021; Fisher-Borne et al., 2015; Tisman & Clarendon, 2018). Second, bifurcating and then relegating social justice knowledge to non-clinical practice reinforces the false micro-macro practice dichotomy, "perpetuating the micro *or* macro choice rather than incorporating micro *and* macro practices into all social work practice" (Bussey et al., 2021, p. 3). Third, a cultural competency standard without critical discussion reifies the idea that cultural competence and humility is sufficient. However, a truth for a client is that a White supremacist, patriarchal, and heterosexist culture may be the root cause of the harm experienced by the client. For example, a social worker's ability to truly affirm a transgender client depends on micro forces, such as using correct pronouns, *and* macro forces, such as understanding how the structure of cisnormativity impacts their experience (Shelton et al., 2019). The social worker, to satisfy their office policies, may require a trans client to complete medical forms that lists gender within a male/female binary. Also, the client may experience anxiety when they attempt to use gendered bathrooms. Thus, the root cause of harm lies within a structure of intersecting oppressions and persists despite the social worker's ability to engage with diversity that barely scratches the surface. In this way, social work education, and eventually social work practice may directly or indirectly reinforce dehumanizing (e.g., racist, classist, sexist, heterosexist) structures of society by not challenging, disrupting, dismantling, and replacing those normative social structures with strong anti-racist, liberating alternatives (Feagin et al., 2015). "Therefore, we must take this moment to honestly examine how social work curriculums go beyond teaching an appreciation for physical or cultural diversity and empower the next generation of social work practitioners to dismantle institutional racism" (CSWE, 2020, para. 4).

Schools of social work and social work educators have a responsibility to develop social workers who can expertly perform their social justice professional duties. Thus, it is imperative that the educational foundation of the field of social work wrestles with and interrogates its oppressive roots and current practices. To disrupt structural patterns of oppression (internal and external to the field), anti-oppressive frameworks within social work education can consider a focus on structural competence (i.e., a lens that emphasizes engagement with systemic causes of oppression as they relate to and perpetuate issues on the individual level) which could better prepare students to bridge consciousness and action, respond across multiple dimensions and intersections of power, privilege, and oppression, and dismantle dehumanizing contexts (Shelton et al., 2019). In essence, it is incumbent upon institutions providing social work education, responsible for training and socializing new social workers, to integrate an anti-oppressive framework.

To that end, social work education (as defined by CSWE's accreditation standards, each school's curriculum committee or some other means) needs to be held accountable for incorporating and integrating anti-oppression frameworks and practices (e.g., anti-racism) into all curricula. Organizing efforts by MSW students in the New York City area have been the driving force behind demands for classes that incorporate anti-oppression / anti-racism perspectives within the foundational curriculum (Columbia School of Social Work Activists, 2017; NYU Silver School of Social Work, "Action Against Racism," n.d.). Anti-racism-informed social work education will not only educate students on how to do clinical practice, community organizing, or manage non-profits, but will provide guidance on how to practice, organize and lead in a way that does not perpetuate White supremacy. When lacking awareness, accountability, and the skills or tools, the potential for action that produces change at multiple system levels is greatly reduced. Inequity (i.e., oppression for marginalized identities and privilege or supremacy for socially dominant identities) flourishes in societies with cultures that lack transformative potential; that is, the ability to critically perceive socio-political contradictions and act against dehumanizing conditions and realities (Freire, 1970/2000). Should all social work be critical-radical social work (Jemal, 2017b) that addresses the root causes of social inequity, such that the integration of micro-macro practice would define the social work field in entirety (Carruthers, 2018; Jemal, 2017b; Reisch, 2007)? The fact that there is a designation as "critical social work," insinuates that not all social work (practice or education) is critical. An education predicated on critical-radical social work should be the norm rather than the exception (Abrams & Moio, 2009; Bussey et al., 2021).

Critical social work is concerned with the dehumanizing aspects of society and works toward social justice (deemed an ethical and sociopolitical imperative of social work) at the intersection of micro and macro practice to identify and address root causes of social injustice (Fook, 2003). One way to advance critical social work practice is to offer critical social work education. The elective, "Critical Social Work: Bridging the Micro-Macro Divide," was created in 2019 to transform social work education's potential to act against White supremacy and other forms of ideologies of dominance, structural violence, and dehumanization. This conceptual paper details the elective course and provides one student's experience of the elective course as an example of a strategy to address the lack of critical social work education at their institution. Particularly to persons having

intersecting, marginalized social identities, as is the case for both authors, it is important that social work fulfills its social justice commitment. People come to the field for different reasons, but hopefully people stay in the field because they internalize an urgency to have a social justice-oriented practice. As such, the purpose for creating this class was twofold: 1) to develop students' capacity to address dehumanizing realities; and 2) to develop students' skills to facilitate this process for others to address dehumanizing realities. Since education is inextricably linked to what and how to practice in socio-political environments, the creation of an elective course is one strategy to create change *within* social work education and *with* social work education when students work to dismantle the systemic racism and oppression created by White Supremacy culture. In this way, education is a form of dual-level advocacy: 1) advocating for the student to receive a rigorous education that will allow them to address White supremacy and other forms of dehumanization, and 2) advocating for the future clients of students to receive aid in eradicating the oppression they experience.

The Elective

The elective course, *Critical Social Work: Bridging the Micro-Macro Divide*, was collaboratively created by the first author, a doctoral student in social welfare, and a second year MSW clinical student. The team grounded the course in the first author's Critical Transformative Potential Development Framework. The course is our attempt at a pedagogical innovation to address issues of social injustice, such as White supremacy and inequity in the curriculum. The first author taught the course for the first time in the spring semester of 2020. The second author was a member of that first cohort.

Transformative Potential

Transformative Potential is a strategy theorized to address inequity within our personal lives, professional workspaces, and the world (Jemal, 2018; Jemal & Bussey, 2018). It is grounded in ecological systems theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1994), Marxism, critical race theory (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012), critical consciousness (Freire, 1970/2000), and intersectional theory (Crenshaw, 1989; Hill Collins, 2000). Transformative Potential constitutes developmental levels of consciousness and action that cultivate capacity and produce potential to transform the contextual factors and relationships that perpetuate inequitable conditions and unjust outcomes at one or more socio-eco-systemic (e.g., individual or institutional) levels (Jemal, 2017a, 2017b). Transformative Potential balances individual needs and the need for social reform. A person with a high or critical level of Transformative Potential is theorized to critically reflect on inequitable conditions and actively work to produce equitable change. Transformation (of oneself, relationships, or environment) requires the simultaneous processes of reflecting and acting. Merely reflecting on realities without corresponding action will not lead to transformation; and, moreover, one cannot truly understand a problem without interrogating one's relationship to the problem and taking informed action involving the problem (Freire, 1970/2000). Thus TP consists of two dimensions: transformative consciousness and transformative action. Transformative consciousness refers to the degree of awareness of systemic, institutional, and historical forces that both promote and limit opportunities for specific groups within

one or more socio-ecosystems (e.g., microsystem, macro-system). Transformative consciousness acts as a lens for understanding how people are impacted by structural and historical oppression and includes three hierarchical levels—denial, blame, and critical consciousness. Transformative action is defined as individual or community action to dismantle inequity (i.e., privilege and oppression) at one or more levels of the socio-ecosystem (Jemal & Bussey, 2018) and has three tiered levels—destructive, avoidant, and critical action (see Figure 1).

Figure 1. *Levels of Transformative Consciousness and Transformative Action*
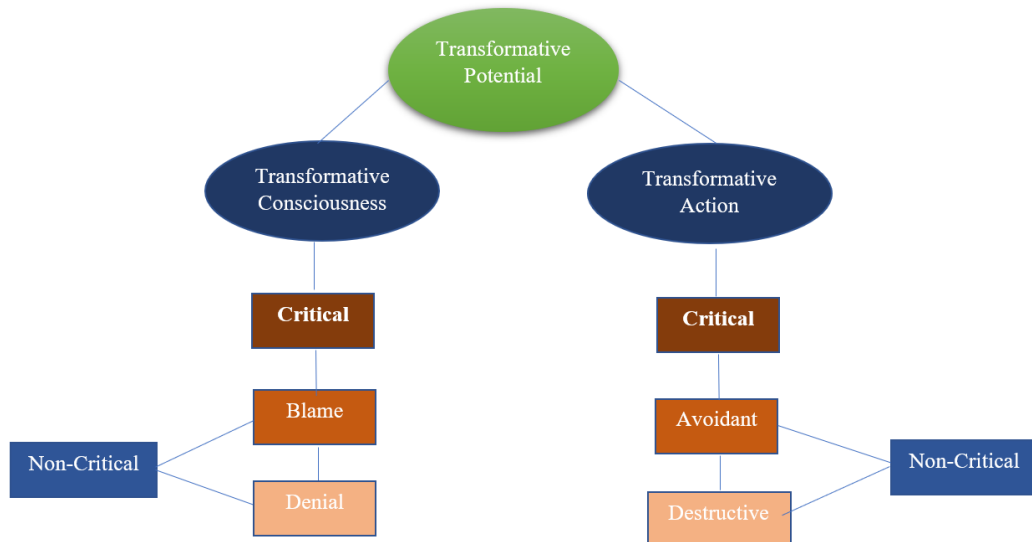
Note. Figure 1 depicts the two dimensions of Transformative Potential with the levels of the Transformative Consciousness and Transformative Action dimensions (Jemal, 2018).

Both dimensions (transformative consciousness and action) determine one's level of Transformative Potential, indicating how likely one is to transform (from personal to environmental transformation). The goal in transformative work is to facilitate an individual's or community's potential to transform consciousness into action by progressing from lower levels of consciousness (i.e., blame or denial) and action (i.e., destructive or avoidant) to developing critical consciousness and action, which would produce critical Transformative Potential. Critical Transformative Potential positions people to be "transformers": to make meaningful change in themselves, in relationships, and within communities. However, it is important to note that critical consciousness does not ensure engagement in critical action. To bridge this potential divide, the Critical Transformative Potential Development Framework ("framework"), a philosophical and practice-based theory, incorporates accountability/responsibility and efficacy. This framework is theorized to make it more likely for Critical Transformative Potential to manifest.

Critical Transformative Potential Development Framework. The cornerstone of critical social work is the development of critical transformative potential (TP). Critical

social work struggles to interrogate and understand society and then to disrupt the oppressive realities, "the taken-for-granted, 'natural' order that supports it and makes it possible" (Feagin et al., 2015, p. 17). The framework speculates that participants (here, MSW students) will be much more likely to engage in critical action if they consciously identify an issue and understand its structural linkages *and* perceive the ability to create meaningful change via their actions (Watts et al., 2011). Moreover, critical TP comprises information, interrogation, inspiration, imagination, innovation, and intervention, all of which begin with "I." Coincidentally, the first step in developing critical TP begins with the self ("I") as the subject for action and transformation: self-awareness and self-work to examine one's social location and address one's own internalized privilege, oppression, prejudices, biases, and discriminatory behavior. Built from this logic, the four dimensions of the framework—critical consciousness/awareness, accountability/responsibility, efficacy/ability, and critical action—are pathways that enable people to develop the potential to transform themselves, relationships, communities, and/or sociopolitical realities. Awareness is the naming of social injustices that can lead to accountability (i.e., claiming one's role) for perpetuating White supremacy and responsibility for taking social justice action. Once able to perceive the problem and recognize our accountability, identifying a role for ourselves in creating a solution, we can then develop the skills and obtain the tools needed to increase our self-efficacy to be involved, empowered to effectively face the challenges by engaging in anti-oppressive action needed to eradicate inequity and injustice. The elective course had four units that focused on each dimension of the framework.
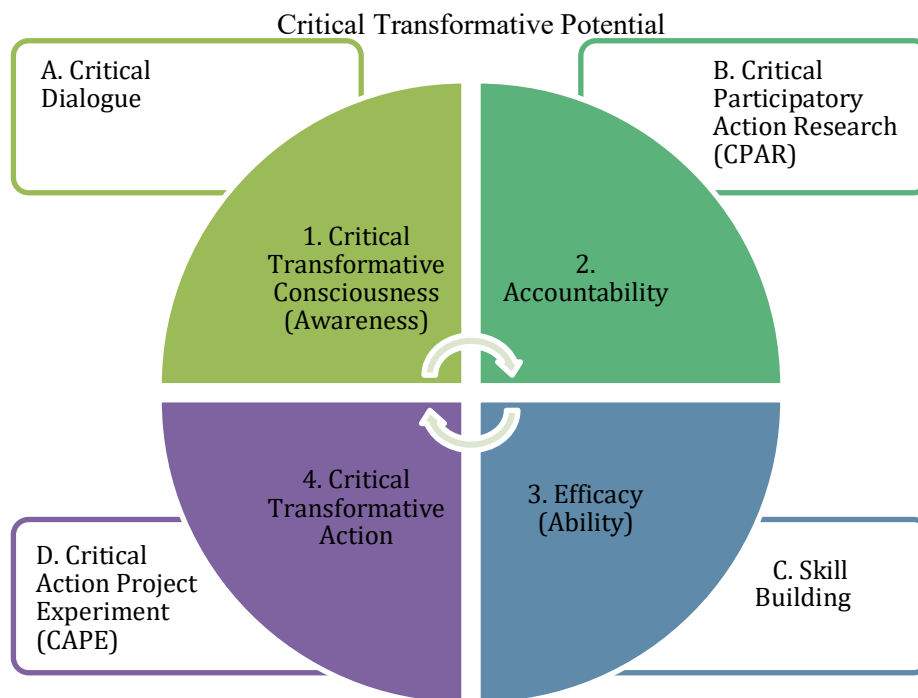
Implementing Critical Transformative Potential Development

There are numerous ways to put theory into practice to develop Critical Transformative Potential. One potential method, the Integrated Transformative Potential Intervention Development (InTrePID) method, designed to engage each pathway of the framework, structured the elective course (See Figure 2). The method has four components that align with the process of Critical Transformative Potential Development: 1) critical dialogue, 2) critical participatory action research (CPAR) approaches, 3) skill building, and 4) critical action project experiment (CAPE).

Critical dialogue. The purpose of critical dialogue, a central tool for developing critical consciousness (Garcia et al., 2009; Gutierrez & Ortega, 1991), is to engage participants in the critical reflection component of Freirian (1970/2000) praxis: reflection and action. Critical dialogue is grounded in group work, critical thinking, and community organizing literature (Windsor et al., 2014b). Group meetings incorporate the co-learning, non-hierarchical process and encourage participants to engage with and reflect on content that breaks down the barriers of siloed knowledge; draws connections between past, present and future; links the socio-ecosystems, with awareness of how macro processes influence micro consequences; and, develops a deeper understanding of how marginalizing processes (e.g., racism, sexism, classism) impact lives and behavior (Diemer et al., 2006; Windsor et al., 2014a). One tool to promote critical dialogue is the posing of reflective questions that interrogate power dynamics and the relationship to violence. Questions direct attention to

the historical events, intersecting socio-structural forces, multi-systemic factors, and attributions that go beyond an individual's behavior to question context and environment that create and maintain systemic inequity over time (Jemal, 2017a; Windsor et al., 2014a). The questions within dialogue allow exploration of how "knowledge is created and maintained by larger socio-political forces" (Garcia et al., 2009, p. 32). A social work for liberation uses questions to: "uncover the hidden aspects of these concrete, historically given social arrangements" (Feagin et al., 2015, p. 16) to provoke discussions about the status quo, making the invisible, visible; promote the ability to analyze or identify the meaning of experiences and events; and, then elicit how participants would improve the situation or take action to promote equity (Feagin et al., 2015; Watts et al., 2002).

Figure 2. *The InTrePID Method to Develop Critical Transformative Potential*

Critical Transformative Potential

A. Critical Dialogue

B. Critical Participatory Action Research (CPAR)

1. Critical Transformative Consciousness (Awareness)

2. Accountability

4. Critical Transformative Action

3. Efficacy (Ability)

D. Critical Action Project Experiment (CAPE)

C. Skill Building

Note. Figure 2 depicts the four domains of the Critical Transformative Potential Development Framework (numbers 1 – 4) with the components of the InTrePID method (letters A – D; Bussey et al., 2021).

In social work education settings, as with this elective, educators can engage students in critical dialogues, encouraging structural analysis of individuals and communities, as well as critical reflexivity about self in relation to systems of privilege and oppression (Ferguson & Smith, 2012). Reflective questions can facilitate students to interrogate how social work is part of the political, social, and psychological status quo. To ignore or deny the sociopolitical and psychological standpoints of the profession's thinking and practice is to ensure that the field will stay rooted in racist practices, policies, and culture (Feagin et al., 2015). Despite challenges posed by multiple conceptualizations of anti-racism,

compounded by the theory-to-practice gap, students' participation in critical dialogue will develop critical thinking skills that are the foundation of anti-oppressive and liberating social work practice (Jemal & Bussey, 2018). Moreover, a parallel process occurs in social work education in which critical discussions aim to raise both the educator's and the student's consciousness, mimicking and modelling what should occur between a student as practitioner and their clients. Further, by intentionally drawing the connection between social structures and individual experience, social work educators may bridge the artificial micro/macro divide, moving future clinicians towards practice that consistently works to both eradicate systems causing inequity *and* addresses the suffering individuals and communities experience living under inequitable conditions. The professional duty to work towards social justice requires that social workers get comfortable with the discomfort of facilitating delicate and nuanced conversations about inequity and structural violence. For example, this class used the Liberation Health Model to guide critical dialogue to illuminate social issues from different angles, such as the personal, (and the often hidden) institutional and cultural factors underlying issues of concern for social workers (Kant, 2015).

Sociometry. The InTrePID method begins with critical dialogue; however, there is a pre-dialogue step that prepares participants for critical, productive, and effective dialogue. The dialogue prep step is to build sociometry. Sociometry, from psychodrama and sociodrama practice, entails discovering hidden connections between people (Moreno, 1953). If a person has one or more marginalized social identities, then they most likely experience chronic attacks on their wellness as a human being simply for being human. When we are connected through the experiences of our humanity, then we build relationships and develop empathy and are better able to practice open-minded listening, find healing in another's shared narrative, as well as work, learn and grow together. It is important to note that the piloting of this elective course influenced the Critical Transformative Potential Development Framework in that relationship building (affinity) was extracted as a fifth dimension. In the framework used to inform the elective, affinity and awareness were combined in Unit one, but will be separated in future iterations of the course. Thus, the revised framework is relationship-building (affinity), awareness, accountability, ability, and action. This class is an example of theory in action and how reflection on action changes theory, or in other words, constitutes praxis (Freire, 1970/2000).

Critical Participatory Action Research (CPAR). CPAR is an umbrella term that is used to describe various approaches, practices and methods to conducting research, which typically are: socially-engaged and, possibly, politically-inspired; non-traditional in form and approach; and, particularly participatory (i.e., engaged participation from the target population; those with lived experience; and/or those who are most directly impacted) and collaborative (e.g., partnerships with others who have different areas of expertise) to create multi-experiential and multidisciplinary teams (Tuck & Guishard, 2013). The research is often conducted for, by, and with the participant group. Action research models enhance the community's capacity to address their own interests (Tuck & Guishard, 2013). The values of CPAR create a space conducive to the innovative synergy produced from a various mix of knowledge(s) that lead to holistic and dynamic discoveries for problem-

solving to take place. The elective course offered CPAR so students could access conceptual frameworks that counter structural violence (that includes imposing White, Eurocentric frameworks on communities of color; Stoudt et al., 2012).

CPAR advances the accountability/responsibility dimension of the InTrePID method in two ways: 1) CPAR centers the voices of those most impacted, and 2) CPAR facilitates the development of radical imagination. First, CPAR engages students in a process of inquiry and data collection that centers the perspectives, ideas, and objectives of those historically and socially marginalized. Second, radical imagination - tapping into the unknown (Haiven & Khasnabish, 2010) - is developed by amplifying voices that have been silenced and bringing together diverse wisdoms. Lived experience provides an understanding superior to those intellectuals who only study the issue from an advantaged vantage point (Feagin et al., 2015). Listening to and learning from those with lived experience provides a key to unlock a new world of unexplored possibilities and potentialities. People with good intentions, passion, and the desire to intervene may not know *what* to do because they are constrained or limited by the tools that already exist. CPAR helps us determine our role in maintaining the problem, as well as what to do to be part of the solution as visionary activist-researchers. For this prong, one assignment had three components. For part A, students researched a socio-cultural and/or socio-behavioral health issue of interest and created an annotated bibliography. Then they engaged in member checking by identifying individuals with lived experience and shared the findings from the annotated bibliography. Lastly, for part C, they synthesized and discussed their findings from parts A and B. They summarized how their findings from the annotated bibliography converged or diverged with their findings from the member checking process. Then they discussed how their thinking had been informed to imagine potential actions to address the social issue. The next step is to determine how to put the "what" into action.

Skill-Building for Efficacy. Social justice work depends on knowing how to transform consciousness into action. Learning *how to do* is the essence of the ability/efficacy-dimension. The elective course encouraged students to develop transformative efficacy through skill development. Students researched and learned skills needed to make change. One assignment invited students to select a skill, develop an exercise to learn that skill, and then use that exercise to teach their colleagues in the class. Sharing knowledge and building from the resources that already exist in the community is community empowerment and capacity-building. In addition to the new skills shared between the students, the important lesson here was that our role as social workers is not about empowering the disempowered or being a voice for the voiceless, but facilitating access to resources or a platform, so marginalized communities can empower themselves and be heard. Collective power is needed for effective critical action and action is needed for learning and to build power. With that idea in mind, one important trap to avoid is the feeling that you will never know enough or should wait to act until you know everything possible. Learning often introduces us to the area of what we didn't know, we didn't know; and the endless contents of that box can be frightening and immobilizing. Thus, the elective course invited a student company of Applied Theatre practitioners to start the process of putting "know how" into action through embodied experiences that engage multiple

faculties, access points, and ways into doing this work starting from the knowledge already possessed.

Critical Action Project Experiment (CAPE). Critical social work not only discusses liberation and eradicating White supremacy; it also helps innovate the means to that end. The framework asserts that once participants develop higher levels of awareness of systemic factors; hold themselves accountable for addressing the issue; and cultivate efficacy, then they will develop and execute action strategies that continue to develop Critical Transformative Potential. The CAPE's purpose is to provide opportunities for people to begin action efforts or to try new methods for critical action in a supportive and collaborative environment. A potential pitfall to avoid here is believing that the CAPE should constitute action that solves the problem in a single attempt, or must be life changing, revolutionary, or worthy of a MacArthur fellowship. To the contrary, critical action can be incremental, planting seeds that may not bear fruit in our lifetime. Critical action can be ripples, that start the chain reaction of change, or waves - as powerful as tsunamis, that demolish pillars upholding structural racism - or anything in between. CAPEs are usually designed to have one to four goals in mind: 1) to work bottom up and begin community organizing efforts against inequity; 2) to improve coping strategies with inequity and its harmful consequences; 3) to work top down with those who are positioned at the top of the social hierarchy to redistribute power; and/or, 4) to heal from and address the impact of historical oppression and trauma at the intrapersonal, interpersonal and community levels that manifest in interpersonal violence and community harm. In this way, students' CAPEs can take place at their places of employment, field placements, or School of Social Work. Within the school setting, CAPEs can: 1) address educational policies and/or administrative practices that are overtly and/or covertly racist, oppressive, and inherently supportive of White Supremacy culture; and 2) suggest pedagogical innovations to address White Supremacy and contribute to race and equity in the curriculum. Lastly, a main objective for the CAPE is to reinvest in relationships and community. In this manner, CAPEs can focus on one or more of the dimensions of the CTPD framework (awareness, accountability, ability, action) or can work in each dimension simultaneously. Critical Social Work - with CAPEs that apply empathic concern and humanizing action - can dismantle social injustice and support liberation.

A Student's Perspective

Why Choose This Course?

The promise of an anti-oppressive learning opportunity is what brought me as a second year MSW student to the elective course. The course held the goal of assessing and building structural competence with social work students so that we may practice taking transformative action grounded in critical consciousness ideology. This felt familiar to me as a social work student within the community organizing track, where we were often pushed to consider our power and positionality from a strategic perspective in organizing efforts. Who or what is the target? What relationships need to be built? Is there buy-in from the community? Am I *part* of the community I'm looking to serve or an outsider? None of

these questions can be answered without a clear understanding of how you relate to the issue and to those most directly impacted by the issue with whom you organize.

On a personal level, this also felt familiar to me as a queer, gender fluid Black person in social work school. I often found myself in small conversations of enlightenment around my gender and sexuality – explaining my use of a "they" pronoun when I completed a form for the Field Office, answering questions from confused peers about what happens inside of our third-floor gender neutral bathroom, and more. These small moments of disruption of cis-hetero-normativity felt in their own way transformative. The critical social work elective seemed to offer the kind of intentional space to reflect on exactly these types of moments, looking at how our identities shape our experiences to understand how critical consciousness shapes (or does not shape) our behavior. From that point of awareness, we as social work students might use that knowledge to take radical action.

A Student's Reflections on the Course

Syllabus. The course syllabus seemed to be the first place it began the work of disrupting White supremacy. Throughout my graduate career, if not all my formal education, I walked into classrooms where the syllabus consistently assigned readings holding the theories of cisgender, straight, White men. This course syllabus clearly centered sources each week that were predominantly Black and/or people of color, directly combatting the function of White supremacy to frame Whiteness as the official source and authority on all things, from theory to practice. Instead, it strategically and sparingly used White voices to lay the foundation of the course. Additionally, the syllabus complemented scholarly sources with non-traditional sources, making use of websites of local organizations working towards a National Day of Racial Healing, podcasts from racial justice thought leaders, and articles highlighting "artivists" (artist/activist) practicing these tenets of transformative social work in some capacity. These non-traditional resources helped me make a direct tie to skill in action, grounding my understanding of radical social work as something that is not only possible, but in many ways already happening.

Accountability and healing within affinity groups. Affinity groups provide space to build relationships with others who share similar burdens, to hold us accountable to the work of unpacking those burdens, and healing what lies at the core to take action. To that end, one of the most impactful components of this course for me was my CAPE group. We formed with the shared goal of unpacking cis-hetero-normativity as a socio-behavioral health issue under the framework of Queer Liberation. The topic felt especially poignant as a group comprised of three queer, genderqueer people of color (POC; including myself) and a cisgender White woman. Our work together throughout the semester brought to light a reality of being within a genderqueer POC body in a White supremacist society: our existence is resistance, and every exchange holds transformative potential. My colleagues and I found that we each brought with us experiences, professionally and personally, where our very presence in a space problematized the "natural" order of things, shifting foundational assumptions that work to deconstruct cis-hetero-normative narratives. During a group exercise, I shared the following experience I had as a yoga teacher working with young people. In one conversation with these elementary student yogis, I revealed that I

had a girlfriend instead of a boyfriend. This revelation was met with a mix of shock, awe, skepticism, and curiosity because I am someone who was assigned female-at-birth and who they read as female. This small exchange with my students, which lasted no more than a few minutes, planted a seed of possibility outside of the status quo for these young people. My colleagues shared similar moments of enlightenment as clinical social work interns at sexuality and gender affirming practices, where they were able to challenge the notion of the therapist as a blank canvas by openly identifying parts of their identity such as race, gender, and sexuality, at the start of their clinical relationships with clients. However, it felt awkward to me to have someone within the group who did not hold these identities or openly acknowledge the gaps between our experiences. The intersections of our identities were visible as it became evident that while my White colleague held race consciousness, there was a lack of gender consciousness. In this sense, there was an element of feeling watched or observed as we dove into these conversations about experiences of cis-hetero-normativity that prevented me from feeling truly comfortable being vulnerable. Vulnerability is where change happens, and I think about what levels of Transformative Potential I cut myself off from by not openly acknowledging this discomfort with my group. To that end, intersectional affinity groups may be something to explore in future iterations of the course.

Somatic experiencing and role-play are essential. Exercises in role-play and experiential learning may also help create more space for authentic moments of vulnerability. These types of exercises that tap into subconscious responses shaped by White supremacy, and provide opportunities to decolonize the psychic space, have the potential to be transformative (Wong, 2020). To be fair, the original curriculum included more opportunities for group-based mutual learning and role-play, yet this was severely impacted by the sudden mid-semester switch to virtual learning due to COVID-19. This disruption coincided with the murders of Ahmaud Arbery, Breonna Taylor, George Floyd, and Tony McDade. In a sense, the class took a shift to creating space to process the trauma of experiencing and living through a pandemic having a disproportionate impact on BIPOC communities, in addition to the violent, visible displays of structural racism. I found myself in many of our online small group debriefs grappling with the social work profession's complicated relationship to state-sponsored violence, which is deeply rooted in White supremacy.

Class activities provided examples of how transformative consciousness does not always translate into transformative action. The class participated in a virtual group exercise utilizing an applied theatre in education approach. The 60-minute exercise included a scenario in which our class supported a White school social worker in understanding and addressing a Black parent's claim of their child experiencing racism in a private school. I noticed that there were gentle pushes from my White classmates throughout the scenario to help the social worker to understand the parent's position – asking her if she talked to the parents, reminding her that the parents might have a different perspective from her as people of color, and so on. However, I was surprised and frustrated that none of my White colleagues attempted to "call in" the social worker or explicitly connect with her as a White person who has gone through a similar process of engaging with White fragility (i.e., White defensiveness; DiAngelo, 2018). Throughout the semester,

this course asked my colleagues and me to assess our ability to critically respond to oppression, but this end of semester role-play was a window into how we respond in the moment, rather than recalling an experience or talking about how we would respond in theory. Similar exercises that elicit authentic, realistic responses make it possible to unpack the difficulty of turning transformative consciousness into action.

Mindfulness practice to support student exploration. To aid these deep dives into critical social work, it might be beneficial to incorporate elements of a mindfulness practice for students. This could have a two-fold effect: aiding in the emotional management of explicit discussions of oppression and aiding in healing. Drawing upon the wisdom of feminist theorists like bell hooks and Gloria Anzaldúa, Asher (2010) writes, "We need to think *and* feel our way out of oppression and colonization" (emphasis in original, p. 399). A learning space that is committed to anti-racism frameworks can and should bring up a wide variety of emotions linked to the continued subjugation of parts of our identities. This includes continually pushing back against White supremacy's hallmarks of defensiveness, fear of open conflict, right to comfort, and objectivity over emotion (Okun & Jones, 2016). While offering a mindfulness component is certainly not an antidote to all that can arise in the course, it is an opportunity to sit and be present for all the responses that arise within us, a chance to "surrender to the weight of being healed" (Owens, 2016, p. 74).

Future Directions

The second iteration of this class that occurred spring 2021 incorporated Applied Theatre conventions to develop each dimension of the framework. Applied Theatre organically and intrinsically encompasses the InTrePID method. Applied theatre may develop awareness using various techniques and conventions that facilitate dialogue, questioning, and reflection (Thompson, 2012). One element that strengthens the effectiveness of anti-racism work with Applied Theatre is the aesthetic distance provided. Aesthetic distance allows participants the space to perceive issues from different viewpoints, to try different perspectives, and to think critically about topics that normally may engage their defensive tactics (Jackson, 2008). These techniques can tap into radical imagination that allows people to envision the unknown. The impossible becomes possible once it is imagined. Applied Theatre can generate creativity (i.e., figuring out what to do) and spontaneity (i.e., figuring out how to do), two key components for inciting critical action, leading to alternative solutions and methods (Moreno & Fox, 1987). For example, Improv theatre uses the "Yes and" method. Participants can practice saying "yes" to ideas and then contributing ideas to improve the ideas, rather than discarding an idea for its negatives before exploring potential positives.

Particularly, sociodrama and Applied Theatre techniques seem to be good strategies and methods for the iterative process of generating ideas and putting ideas into action encompassed in Freirian praxis. Creative methods can be used to develop efficacy by getting people unstuck and out of their heads; and, consequently into their bodies. Theatre is an embodied experience. As such, there is a process of remembering who you are. Oppression chips away at a person's identity until an imposed identity is accepted. When we are no longer our whole, authentic selves, but only bits and pieces of who we are meant

to be, we cannot realize our full potential or achieve our purpose. That is when we have internalized oppression and have come to believe the culturally dominant reality-distorting myths and false messages with which we've been bombarded. It is through "re-membering," wherein we piece ourselves back together again acknowledging and celebrating our intersecting identities, that we embrace our greatness. That is an act of resistance against White supremacy. Tools of applied theatre provide opportunities for behavioral rehearsal and role play so participants can play out ideas, test options, enact various scenarios in a safer environment, and receive feedback to effect better outcomes (Lerman, 2003). These techniques, and others, may help develop the skills and comfort level to take action in the real world.

One limitation of this course is that it is an elective. In other words, if there is a pattern of clinical students taking "clinical" courses, then this course may be more popular with non-clinical MSW students, thus limiting the course's ability to bridge the micro-macro divide. A few students have commented that this course should be required in the first year. That would allow data to be collected on a non-self-selecting population to further test the course's validity. It is important to note that, although the course has great potential, there is no empirical evidence to support its effectiveness at putting consciousness into action. However, in addition to being a method of intervention, Applied Theatre is also a method of inquiry and, as such, can be used to assess and gauge the course's impact and to inform future directions for the course (Leavy, 2015; O'Connor & Anderson, 2015). More research is needed to understand if and how this course bridges the micro-macro divide and, by extension, if this framework and method develops Critical Transformative Potential as theorized.

Conclusion

Social work education is fertile ground to plant seeds that will produce social workers rooted in anti-oppressive and anti-White supremacy Transformative Potential whose work will steer the field in a radical direction. Social work education and practice are interdependent, such that education informs practice and practice influences education. This paper about an elective course in Critical Social Work attempts to bridge the gap between theory, education, practice, and research. The class was informed by the Critical Transformative Potential Development Framework and incorporated the Integrated Transformative Potential Development (InTrePID) Method to create and nurture critical social work practitioners. "Practitioners of [critical social work] study current social realities so they and others can better transform them" (Feagin et al., 2015, p. 24). Through project-based, interactive learning process and group work, the students simultaneously developed their own transformative potential while learning how to facilitate the development of transformative potential in others (e.g., family, friends, co-workers, employers). As such, this course operated on three levels: 1) A critical examination of social work practice and education for developing Critical Transformative Potential; 2) An engagement of students in development of their Critical Transformative Potential; and 3) Gaining familiarity with how to develop Critical Transformative Potential in the field (i.e., the field of social work and in the field with clients). The elective puts theory into practice by transforming consciousness into action within education to support students to

challenge White supremacy and other dehumanizing ideologies in their educational institutions, communities, and in collaboration with the future clients they will serve.

However, what the class was designed to do and how it presents to a second year MSW student may differ. Sometimes there is a translation gap; that is, ideas and intentions get lost in translation when converted from the abstract existing in someone's mind to implementation living in practice. Exploration of student experiences expressed in the student evaluations will facilitate the iterative efforts to improve the class. Hopefully, this class will have a positive correlation with how the student practices in the field and how they will continue to practice once graduated. If social work is to become a stronger theoretical and practice-based framework that restructures systems of inequitable social relations for the greater human good by disrupting oppressive realities and assisting people struggling for liberation from the structures of domination, then social workers need to decide on the type of social work they will practice and whose interests they will serve (Feagin et al., 2015, pp. 24-25). Once this is decided, then social work education must be structured to carry out this mission. The way social work education is currently structured sends a clear message about the field's priorities.

In an effort to practice what I teach, and to teach what I research, and to research what I practice; the creation and development of this new elective course is an example of my CAPE as an MSW professor to explore how to incorporate the Critical Transformative Potential Development Framework and the InTrePID method into social work education. I created a theory-informed course that may address White Supremacy in social work education and beyond. Also, the fact that this class led to a collaboration between a professor and a student who both identify as people of color and occupy other marginalized statuses is a major step toward addressing White supremacy in social work education. As social work becomes more diverse in terms of who does the work, the field can embrace a broader array of human perspectives and knowledge, and more critical questions are raised about traditional perspectives and hidden societal realities (Feagin et al., 2015). Moreover, bridging the micro-macro divide is an anti-racist approach that is the cornerstone of critical pedagogy. The inclusion of critical pedagogy within mainstream social work education may provide a gauge to assess the field's transformative efforts at dismantling White supremacy in social work education and practice. Future research will have to determine if critical social work education nurtures social workers who understand that macro processes have micro consequences, take responsibility for individual practices that perpetuate systems of inequity, hold themselves accountable for ameliorating inequity, and can develop the skills that will empower them to actively disrupt systems of injustice rooted in White supremacy. If so, critical social work education could be the key to accomplishing the field's social justice mission.

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