Latina/o/x Critical Race Theory (LatCrit) in Social Work Praxis: A Tool to Dismantle Racism and Build Racial Equity

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Abstract: *We propose that the profession is theoretically at a point of convergence between CRT and LatCrit. Both theories are united in the production of knowledge to dismantle oppression. This article provides a brief review of CRT and a comprehensive understanding of LatCrit as a starting point for critical social work education perspectives. We discuss implications for social work education by broadening the racial discourse to include Latinas/os/x and suggest critical solutions and adaptations to current social work pedagogy to better prepare students to enter the social work field and respond to this growing population. We provide recommendations for reevaluating social work and find an exit from the loop of "band-aid" interventions that lack a fundamental basis for addressing the underlying causes of trauma, stress, and racism. We provide concrete examples for incorporating LatCrit into social work education, practice. We close by calling on the professions leading organizations, NASW and CSWE, to release statements addressing the recent assault on CRT (and LatCrit by way of its extension of CRT) and join other social work organizations in condemning the unfair attacks on CRT if social work is committed to the Grand Challenge to Eliminate Racism.*

Keywords: *Latina/o/x Critical Race Theory, Critical Race Theory, racism, anti-racist pedagogy, social work policy, social work education*

In its current form, social work education fails to examine how the profession has operated to maintain White supremacy and White privilege, and to sustain the current racial social order (Beck, 2019; Bussey, 2020; Ortega & Busch-Armendariz, 2013; Teasley et al., 2021). Given the profession's history of coexisting within patriarchal systems, social work pedagogy has invariably tended to practice white saviorism (Rangel, 2021).The profession's omission of the historical and contemporary context of a racialized America does not absolve us from self-critique. Wilson (2020) reminds us that frameworks of change in social work "are built from figure/ground dichotomies in which an object of interest is as somehow distinct – divided, purified, abstracted out – from everything else" (p. 41). This humanistic perspective establishes a social work praxis that reduces communities and people into objects within a larger system. While social work remains oriented towards a humanistic perspective, we must re-conceptualize the profession to incorporate contextual theoretical frameworks that provide a more complex structural lens.

Latina/o/x Critical Race Theory (LatCrit) is a framework that can guide social work praxis by offering insight into the ways that racism is more than racially biased attitudes and actions, but a hierarchical social structure established by White elites to preserve their social status. Structural and institutional racism is present in the communities social workers advocate alongside, and is experienced by our clients. These key concepts about

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race and racism emphasize the Latina/o/x experience of racism and not on how White people conceive of or intend to act around race. This theory presents racism as a collection of social, political, and economic circumstances that jeopardize the quality of life of Latinas/os/x.

LatCrit, draws on the original tenets of Critical Race Theory (CRT) and expands the framework by including factors that are specifically a part of the Latina/o/x experience. LatCrit focuses on the positions Latinas/os/x hold within multiple systems of inequality based on their intersectional identities such as race, ethnicity, gender, social class, sexual orientation, age, ability status, and migration status, while also examining their experiences with language, immigration status, and citizenship. The Black/White paradigm inherent in CRT does not speak to the experience of "others" and instead serves to perpetuate cultural and racial erasure. LatCrit can be used to intentionally address the gap in social work praxis with Latinas/os/x by increasing the understanding of the Latina/o/x community and addressing this growing population's needs. Given the current devaluation of Latina/o/x culture—including nativist and anti-immigrant sentiment that threatens the community's well-being—addressing these conceptual limitations is especially important. Thus, LatCrit offers tools to direct our work to be increasingly responsive and match the level of entrenched racism in Latina/o/x communities.

This article begins by defining the terms used throughout this paper, followed by a brief historical overview of CRT to provide a primer for the role of historical and contemporary race-based events contributing to Latina/o/x skepticism and mistrust of various governmental and social service systems (these are simplified accounts that serve as poignant examples but do not convey the entire story). We then define, discuss, and review LatCrit within the current social work literature. We conclude by offering specific implications that foreground a conceptual framework for social work praxis that interrogates the role of racism in the profession, which can serve to adequately prepare students to enter the field and respond to the experience and needs of the growing Latina/o/x population.

Racism Must Be Defined Explicitly in Social Work Praxis

As Teasley et al.'s (2021) call to action states, "the grand challenge to eliminate racism calls for the social work profession to focus on the centrality of racism and white supremacy, both within society and within the profession" (p. 1). Predominant Eurocentric definitions have shaped how social work understands race and racism. Therefore, Brown, Black, and Indigenous scholars have a particular responsibility to explicitly define these concepts according to our knowledge traditions, and to remain steadfast as part of our critique of the current production of knowledge and the potential harm to our communities created by these various approaches to knowledge. As Brazilian critical education scholar Paulo Freire (1985) has reminded us, "washing one's hands of the conflict between the powerful and the powerless means to side with the powerful, not to be neutral" (p. 122). We must understand that racism and not race is a determinant of health, and is a fundamental cause of unequal outcomes for Latina/o/x communities (LeBrón & Viruell-

Fuentes, 2019). It is necessary to define the concepts covered in this paper in order to indicate the ways that race is socially constructed within society. These definitions are found in Table 1.

Table 1. *Social Work Definitions Utilizing Concepts of Critical Race Theory*

Concept	Definition
Social Work	Analysis of the interconnectedness between societal and institutional racism and social welfare systems, and willingness to challenge these systems. Recognizes that individuals' and communities' concerns are deeply rooted in larger systems of power and are manifested as oppression, which leads to unequal health outcomes. Understands that the personal is political.
Latina/o/x*	The term Latina/o/x is used throughout this article to capture the diversity within the racial/ethnic group and to prevent erasure of connections Latinas/os/x have to distinct ancestral roots across the Americas (Northern, Central, Southern, Caribbean, and Africa). "In this context Latinas/os/x can be native or foreign-born, citizens or non-citizens, authorized or unauthorized, and identify as Afro-Latina/o/x, Hispanic, Latino, Latina, or Latinx" (García, 2020, p. 393).
Race	"Race is a concept, a representation or signification of identity that refers to different types of human bodies, to the perceived corporeal and phenotypic markers of difference; in addition, it refers to the meanings and social practices that are ascribed to these differences" (Omi & Winant, 2014, p. 111) .
Racialization	"Races typically are identified by their phenotype, but the selection of certain human traits to designate a racial group is always socially rather than biologically based" (Bonilla-Silva, 1997, p. 469)
Racism	"The state-sanctioned and/or extralegal production and exploitation of group-differentiated vulnerability to premature death" (Gilmore, 2006, p. 247).
White Supremacy	Beliefs and ideas embedded in our institutions, social work theories, approaches to social work practice, and ideologies; "a hierarchy of any sort that prioritizes Whites and Whiteness over all other" (Teasley et al., 2012, p. 1).
Praxis	An "iterative process by which the knowledge gained from theory, research, personal experiences, and practice inform one another" (Ford & Airhihenbuwa, 2010).
Theory	"Lenses through which social scientists examine, evaluate, organize, predict, and interpret social phenomena. Theories propose ways in which different factors relate and, in some cases, how one factor may be the cause of another factor or phenomenon." (Kulis et al., 2021).
Framework	"A framework is the total, logical orientation and associations of anything and everything that forms the underlying thinking, structures, plans and practices and implementation of your work" (Kivunja, 2018, p. 47).

*It is important to note that Latinas/os/x are not a homogenous group, and they may or may not view and experience anti-immigrant or racist rhetoric the same. That is to say, Latinas/os/x who are immigrants may experience the consequences of racialized immigration policies while White middle- and upper-middle-class or White-passing Latinas/os/x may avoid personally being impacted. While not all individuals who identify as Latina/o/x are impacted by racism, those that are racialized as non-White or that lack economic means are more likely to experience the racial state.

Critical Race Theory (CRT)

The debate over CRT has been catapulted into the public discourse in the United States (US), as critics have deemed it anti-American and with Marxist undertones (Farber & Sherry, 1997; Posner, 1997; Pyle, 1999). Several Republican lawmakers have proposed new bills regulating the discussion of race in the classroom (Gabriel & Goldstein, 2021). Twenty-six states have either proposed legislation, taken other measures to restrict the teaching of CRT, or placed restrictions on how instructors can address racism and sexism in the classroom (Ray & Gibbons, 2021). Nine states—Idaho, Oklahoma, Tennessee, Texas, Iowa, New Hampshire, South Carolina, Arizona, and North Dakota—have passed legislation primarily banning "the discussion, training, and/or orientation that the US is inherently racist as well as any discussions about conscious and unconscious bias, privilege, discrimination, and oppression" (Ray & Gibbons, 2021, para. 8). Idaho and North Dakota are the only states that passed a bill explicitly referencing "critical race theory" (Ray & Gibbons, 2021, para. 7). The attack on CRT is evidence of the ways the system of White privilege attempts to silence those who experience racism and to attribute innocence to those who are active or complicit participants.

So, what is critical race theory? And, as Derrick A. Bell (1995) asked, why are so many people afraid of it? Given the range of misinformation, it is imperative to remember the movement's foundation in the emancipatory work of scholars such as Sojourner Truth, Ida B. Wells, Carter G. Woodson, W. E. B. Du Bois, Anna Julia Cooper, and Zora Neale Hurston (Crenshaw et al., 2019). The work of CRT's earliest authors was rooted in recognizing and calling for an end to racial disparities, including in the social order, income disparities, and the political system, all of which framed the concepts of oppression and exploitation that serve as the foundation for CRT. As Crenshaw et al. (1995) explained in *Critical Race Theory: The Key Writings that Formed the Movement,* critical race research is united by two fundamental objectives:

> The first is to understand how a regime of white supremacy and its subordination of people of color have been created and maintained in America, and, in particular, to examine the relationship between that social structure and professed ideals such as "the rule of law" and "equal protection." The second is a desire not merely to understand the vexed bond between law and racial power but to *change* it. (p. xii)

CRT offers analytical tools for reassessing the conditions under which race and racism have been constructed in the social structure of the US. CRT scholars are grounded in a vision whereby the law may serve as a tool of liberation rather than domination.

CRT first came to the forefront in the US in the 1970s when attorneys, activists, and legal scholars recognized that the significant progress made during the civil rights movement of the 1960s was being overturned as leadership in the US moved from civil rights to law and order (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017, p. 2). This cadre of activist scholars proactively engaged in analyzing and attempting to alter the interrelationship between power, race, and racism between communities of color and the legal system. The fundamental principles laid out by Bell (1980) and Bonilla-Silva (2014) continue to guide CRT, which is built around five central tenets: 1) Racism is normal: racism is not limited

to isolated instances of blatant discrimination or violence but manifests itself in the implementation of laws and policies that affect millions of people, establishing expectations for individuals and communities of all races and ethnicities (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017). 2) Interest convergence: governmental and public institutions enforce laws in order to protect the White majority's interests (Bell, 1980). 3) Race as a social construct: race is a category that has nothing to do with higher-order characteristics such as personality, intellect, and moral conduct (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017). 4) *Intersectionality*: the identification of the many cross-sectional identities that individuals possess (Crenshaw, 1989). 5) Counter storytelling: stories do not have to follow the scripts assigned by society; they may be used to identify specific types of discrimination, which is the first step to addressing discrimination (Ladson-Billings & Donnor, 2018). These five tenets provide scholars with tools to disrupt the long-standing paradigm of race that does not reflect the views of Brown, Black, and Indigenous peoples, including Latinas/os/x.

Finally, we end this section on CRT by pointing out that despite the fact that CRT makes use of the term "theory," CRT is not the same as social work theories (i.e., social learning theory, ecological systems theory, psychosocial development theory) intended to help students arrive at a more complex understanding of social relations and the learning process. Instead, CRT in social work is an iterative approach intended to assist scholars and practitioners in identifying and centering equality in social work praxis (Ford & Airhihenbuwa, 2010).

Historical Context

Latinas/os/x as a Social Construct

The concept of race is entrenched in power. Including the power to dictate how racial categories are defined and used. As Gomez (2020) states, racial categories "are political categories, reflecting the power of one group (Whites) to define other groups as inferior to them, as less than fully human" (p. 6). Those who identify as Latina/o/x are forced to select their race as "White" on demographic questionnaires that utilize the US Census Bureau's classification of written responses to the race question (e.g., White, Black or African American, American Indian or Alaska Native, Asian, Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander; US Census Bureau, 2021). Not until recently, has the ethnicity category expanded beyond "Hispanic" to include "Mexican," "Latin American," "Puerto Rican," etc. The expansion of the White racial category to include Latinas/os/x does not indicate the elimination of racial hierarchy or the racial state. Rather it remains a mechanism for Whites to remain the dominant racial group.

The first legal case involving a Mexican seeking U.S. citizenship was the 1897 Texas case known as *In Re: Rodríguez* (1897), which contested Mexicans' right to U.S. citizenship. In a Texas federal district court, Ricardo Rodríguez, a Mexican who had lived in Texas for more than a decade, sought final approval of his application for citizenship which would also grant him the right to vote. Local politicians opposed his petition, arguing that the Fourteenth Amendment provided for the naturalization [citizenship] of only Whites and "Blacks". The Texas federal court ruled in favor of Rodríguez legally affirming

Mexicans' in Texas the right to U.S. citizenship and thus the right to vote (Molina, 2014). By allowing Mexican Americans legal whiteness while denying it to other racial groups (i.e., Pueblo Indians), Whites were able to bolster their dominance and interrupt any potential coalition between other oppressed and racialized groups. This newfound status of whiteness worked as intended and promoted the disassociation of Mexican Americans from other potential non-white allies (Gómez, 2019). This racial categorization of Latinas/os/x relegates them only to exist as an ethnic group perpetuating the stereotype of Mexicans as foreigners. Classifying Latinos as ethnic minorities correlate with privileging White skin. "Those with greater Spanish ancestry have higher status than those individuals with more visible indigenous and/or African ancestry. Despite the fact that the range in phenotype due to Indigenous, African, and Spanish roots exists in all Latin American countries" (Gomez, 2020, p. 14).

Latinas/os/x in the 21st Century

The Latina/o/x population is the second-fastest-growing racial/ethnic group in the US, reaching 60.6 million in 2019. Since 2010, Latinas/os/x account for more than half of the entire population growth in the United States (Noe-Bustamante & Flores, 2019). The population growth in this population is projected to increase by 62% through 2025 (Noe-Bustamante, 2019). Latinas/os/x have made a myriad of contributions to the economic, social, and political success of the United States. For example, the overall economic contribution generated by Latinas/os/x in the US increased from $1.7 trillion in 2017 to $2.3 trillion in 2010 (Latino Donor Collaborative, 2020). Another example is the fact that Latinas/os/x represent the military's fastest-growing minority group and comprise approximately 16% of all active-duty service members (Barroso, 2019). A final example of the material contributions Latinas/os/x represent is the fact that agricultural workers are the backbone of the country's agriculture, and they are a primary reason Americans are able to put food on their tables. According to the National Center for Farmworker Health (2020), there are nearly 2.5-3 million agricultural laborers in the US, 75% of whom are foreign-born, and 83% of whom self-identify as Latina/o/x.

Despite the fact that research consistently shows the contributions of Latinas/os/x, both immigrant and US-born, they continue to be stereotyped as criminals, drug lords, and predisposed to violence (Chavez, 2020; Huber Pérez, 2010; Menjívar & Abrego, 2012; Messinget al., 2015; Romero, 2001). "Within this context, racial difference became the rationale for discriminatory policies and practices of immigrant exclusion, naturalization rights, residential segregation, and forced sterilization" (Omi & Winant, 2014, p. 216). Anti-immigrant and other racist rhetoric bolster the passage of laws and legislation that are punitive towards Latino/a/x communities. Recognizing the federally sanctioned racist immigration and health practices that target racialized communities provides context for understanding why Latinas/os/x distrust these same systems (e.g., health care, social welfare, police, education), presumably intended to serve and protect them. This historical and contemporary backdrop is essential for social workers to understand as they engage with members of the Latina/o/x community.

The History of Violence Targeting Latina/o/x Communities

Between 2015 and 2020, Latinas/os/x lost their lives as a result of police interactions at a rate of 23 per million (Roberts, 2020). Latino males were more likely than any other group to be murdered by police in gentrifying areas or communities with minimal diversity, according to a 2018 study conducted by Washington University in St. Louis (Arellano, 2021). The violence against Latinas/os/x is part and parcel of the ways that racialized and marginalized communities are targets of the police and other official institutions of US society. The United Nations' (2020) Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights issued a devastating critique of the US's handling of the recent protests against the police targeting of African American communities in particular. In what the UNHCHR calls these modern-day

> Racial terror lynchings in the US after a recent spate of killings of African Americans involving impunity, particular disregard or depravity toward human life, and the use of public spaces to assert racial control, each characteristic of lynching. (para. 2)

The Latina/o/x experience of the racial state dates back centuries, even as it is excluded from mainstream historical narratives of violence in the US. Rodolfo F. Acuña (2007) regarded as one of the academic fathers of Chicano Studies, recounts that "between 1848 and 1928, mobs lynched at least 597 Mexicans in the United States. Clearly the Mexican population suffered lynching in lesser numbers than did the African Americans, whose population was much larger" (p. 67). The year 1848 is pivotal for Mexican "immigration," as millions of Mexicans were forcibly integrated into the US population after the US stole 1/3 of Mexico's territory after the Mexican American War, and consequently with the signing of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo two years later. Carrigan and Webb (2003) stated that "proportionately the number of Mexicans lynched was striking. For instance, between 1848 and 1879 "Mexicans were lynched at a rate of *473 per 100,000 of population.* During these years, the highest lynching rate for African Americans was in Mississippi, with *52.8 victims per 100,000 of population*" (p. 67). Historians have documented that White militias functioned alongside official law enforcement. The same officers sworn to protect and serve citizens participated in racially motivated lynchings and created the circumstances for Mexican citizens and prisoners to be exposed to additional state violence (Acuña, 2007; Martinez, 2018). CRT helps to identify how these systematic and unofficially sanctioned forms of violence are present today in policing and other forms of institutional control in the US.

Forced Sterilization of Puerto Rican and Mexican-Origin Women

In addition to recognizing the impact of policing and extra-state forms of violence on Latina/o/x communities, social workers also need to be aware of these communities' experiences with public health issues. Latina reproduction and fertility, particularly amongst Puerto Ricans, Mexican-Americans, and Mexican immigrant women, have long been at the forefront of governmental policies, legislation, and medical practice, all interested in controlling the fertility of low-income Latina women (Chavez, 2020). The

idea of sterilization first came into prominence in the early 20th century as part of the Social Darwinist eugenics movement. Eugenicists theorized that the United States could genetically engineer its racial composition by controlling the population (Stern, 2005). Forced sterilizations occurred in part due to the notion that immigrant families would put a strain on fiscal budgets, and thus sterilization offered a means of population control, as well as lifelong birth control.

With support from the federal government and an influx of immigrants from Mexico, California saw some of the highest rates of sterilization. In 1909, California performed one-third, or 20,000, of all reported forcible sterilizations under state eugenics legislation (Stern, 2005). Latina women continued to be unfairly targeted by eugenic sterilization legislation passed in the 1960s and 1970s (Novak et al., 2018, p. 613). A recent study by Novak et al. (2018) found that "17,362 individuals were recommended for sterilization in California state homes and hospitals between 1920 and 1945 and Latinas/os were at the highest risk of sterilization for that entire period" (p. 612). Simultaneously, 59% of Latinas faced a higher risk of sterilization than non-Latinas, and between 1920 and 1926, Latino males faced a 23% increased risk of sterilization compared to non-Latino men (Novak et al., 2018).

As Gutierrez and Fuentes (2010) explained, even if Latina patients refused to undergo the procedure, many patients later discovered that they had been sterilized at subsequent gynecological appointments or when approached to participate in the *Madrigal v. Quilligan* (1975) trial. Madrigal v. Quilligan was a civil rights class action lawsuit filed by 10 Mexican American women against the Los Angeles County-USC Medical Center for involuntary or forced sterilization. The California federal court ruled in favor of the county medical center, and held that sterilizations were the result of miscommunication and language barriers between the patients and the doctors (Library of Congress, n.d.).

Unfortunately, the forced sterilization of Latina women is not an episode that is relegated to the more distant past. The American Civil Liberties Union released a report on a recent lawsuit against authorities who illegally forced sterilization practices on immigrant women held in US Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) detention centers (Manian, 2020). According to the lawsuit, authorities transported prisoners to a physician who sterilized them, performed forced hysterectomies, and performed unwarranted gynecological procedures without the women's knowledge or consent (Manian, 2020). When advocating alongside Latina women to promote their well-being, social workers must recognize and respect the historical negligence women have experienced at the hands of the US government and medical practitioners. These histories are still alive in the distrust among Latinas in relation to official institutions and policies.

Segregation and the Education of Latina/o/x Students

Another manifestation of deep-seated racial segregation is manifested in Latinas/os/x's experiences of mistrust of the US education system, which can be traced back to the segregation of Mexican students into all-Mexican schools (Delgado, 2019). In 1931, a statewide survey showed that 85% of California schools segregated children of Mexican descent in either separate classrooms or schools (Constitutional Rights Foundation, 2007).

The arguments for segregating Mexican students from White students were that: 1) Mexican students were "culturally distinctive" compared to Anglo-American children, contributing to their capacity to learn; 2) the Spanish language Mexican students spoke impacted their learning and kept them from advancing in school; 3) their IQ was below that of the average White child; and 4) the patterns of their parents' occupations prompted educators to emphasize a vocational education (Delgado, 2019). Rarely did Mexican children receive an education equal to that provided to White students in the community.

The experiences of Mexican students in the US education system in the early 20th century set a precedent for using as a deficit understanding of Mexican students' ability to learn at the same level as their White peers in the present day, as bilingualism is seen as un-American and considered a barrier to learning (Delgado Bernal, 2002). Latina/o/x students are still encouraged to consider vocational training to get them ready for a career, rather than promoting an academic track to higher education (Fernández, 2002). Many students respond to these expectations by missing school and disengaging, based on the low expectations projected onto them (Fernández, 2002). These examples from both the present and the past demonstrate the continued distrust of the US education system among Latina/o/x students, who still experience forms of segregation comparable to their predecessors in the early 1900s.

The Migrant as a Threat

The US immigration system subjugates immigrants in many ways, including the loss of rights over their body and their political status when detained by the US Border Patrol and placed in ICE detention centers indefinitely and without legal counsel (Chavez, 2020). Research by Becerra et al. (2017) argued that concerns among Latinas/os/x about deportation have a major impact on their views of the legal system and law enforcement. Latinas/os/x in the US who had a greater fear of deportation reported: 1) less confidence that police would not use excessive force; 2) less confidence that police would treat Latinas/os/x fairly; and 3) a lower likelihood of reporting crime. Mbembe (2019) described this as a "triple loss: loss of a 'home,' loss of rights over one's body, and loss of political status. This triple loss is identical with absolute domination, natal alienation, and social death (expulsion from humanity altogether)" (pp. 74-75). Ongoing research examines the impact of the past decades of immigration policies and practices on immigrant families and their well-being (Becerra et al., 2017; Dreby, 2015; Hatzenbuehler et al., 2017; Rubio-Hernandez & Ayón, 2016). In spite of ongoing research about the ways Latina/o/x communities are targeted, White people remain at the top of the social hierarchy and preserve their power (Bonilla-Silva, 2014), while simultaneously demonstrating the expendability of immigrants.

Despite the anti-immigrant rhetoric asserting that immigrants are a burden, to the justice system, schools, and the US economy, substantial research indicates that immigrants, in fact, contribute to the economy (Becerra et al., 2012; Gillula, 2015). Moreover, studies have found no link between undocumented immigration and higher rates of criminality (Green, 2016; Light & Miller, 2018). Yet, these myths about immigrants drive decisions related to policy, public services, and deportations, and demonstrate the

systematic exclusion of Latina/o/x communities from participating with the same rights as their White counterparts.

Latina/o/x Critical Race Theory (LatCrit) and Social Work Literature

As the country's largest and expanding racial and ethnic group, social work must critically revisit the ways in which the Latina/o/x community has been harmed by the interaction between law and society in the US. The sections above give a cursory idea of the scope of discourses mobilized against Latinas/os/x, historically and in the present day. Given the likelihood that social workers will be involved with the Latina/o/x community, Latina/o/x Critical Race Theory (LatCrit) can usefully inform social work praxis.

Latinas/os/x are often excluded from the benefits of civil rights laws that were enacted to counter the legacy of slavery and Jim Crow segregation against African Americans. In response to the Black/White dichotomy inherent in CRT, Latina/o/x scholars (Espinoza & Harris, 1997; Haney López, 1997; Iglesias, 1996; Perea, 1995; Stefancic, 1997) have expanded the tenets of CRT to provide a multidimensional framework for understanding Latina/o/x communities' structural relationship to broader systems (e.g., education, immigration, deportation, nativist laws, immigrant identity, language, and citizenship) (González & Portillos, 2007). Given that the ideals of the civil rights movement and the fight for Chicana/o liberation of the 1960s and 1970s (Chicana/o a self-identifying term used by many Mexican Americans residing in the United States; it is often used as a source of national pride, Acuña, 2007) among other liberatory movements, serve as the foundation for CRT, it is expected that LatCrit would evolve as an extension of CRT. This includes influence from Dolores Huerta, César Chávez and, by extension, the United Farm Workers, *El Movimiento Chicano*/The Chicano Movement, and the Chicano Moratorium, whose objectives included farmworker rights, return of land, and education reform, all of which remain urgent matters impacting the Latina/o/x community today. LatCrit is an epistemological approach that draws on the lived experiences of Latinas/os/x by addressing issues associated with language, immigration, race, and nationality, which were previously absent in the CRT framework (Delgado Bernal, 2002; Iglesias, 1996; Perea, 1997). Daftary (2020) briefly mentioned LatCrit as a way to build off the principles of CRT by centering Latina/ox perspectives, addressing issues, and creating knowledge not generally addressed in CRT scholarship (e.g., immigration, citizenship, and language rights). According to Valdés (1997), LatCrit offers an interdisciplinary and critical methodological approach for studying the social and legal circumstances that affect Latina/o/x communities.

According to Solórzano and Yosso (2002), LatCrit informs pedagogical approaches that elevate the lived experiences, perceptions, and voices of Latinas/os/x by focusing on *cuentos*/counter-storytelling and *testimonios*/testimonials. Solórzano and Yosso (2002) described *cuentos*/stories and *consejos*/advice as tools of protection. One mainstream example is the *cuento* of *La Llorona,* a ghost who roams bodies of water, searching for and mourning her drowned children (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018). As Anzaldúa (1987) recounts, it is said that when La Llorona appears, one should anticipate that something terrible will happen. These *cuentos* "were the culture's attempts to 'protect' members of the family, especially girls, from wandering" (Anzaldúa, 1987, p. 36). Some other *cuentos* are

entrenched in culture and may be used to examine inequality and injustice via social analysis. Anzaldúa (1987) presents these culturally entrenched *cuentos* as analogies that foster androcentric stereotypes in psychology and religion. She invokes Olmec mythology when she proclaims the "earth is a coiled serpent" (p. 26), and she re-interprets the historical narratives of the *Virgin de Guadalupe* to portray her as a pre-Columbian "*Coatlalopeuh*," or "she who has dominion over serpents" (p. 27). Anzaldúa provides the reader with potential feminist symbols by renaming Mexican deities, which corresponds to the continuously changing identities of Chicanas in the modern world. These *cuentos* provide Latinas/os/x permission to decolonize the patriarchal interpretations of these deities through indigenous mythology that contradict mainstream narratives and viewpoints not typically included in the dominant scholarly discourse.

Testimonios are a qualitative technique in which the individual testifying uses their own lived experience as evidence (Covarrubias et al., 2018; De La Garza & Ono, 2016; Huber Pérez, 2010). Delgado (1989), Goessling (2018), Hodge et al. (2002), and Solórzano and Yosso (2002) have all cited *testimonios* as a pedagogical approach intended to heal and liberate as a knowledge tradition already embedded in Brown, Black, and Indigenous communities and cultures. Ortiz and Nakaoka (2018) advocated for the use of critical race pedagogies while using *testimonios* to discuss their own lived experiences of microaggressions during their 40 years in social work education. They describe 1) students and faculty being "othered" in academic spaces; 2) the types of knowledge that are respected, who is qualified to teach, and how various epistemologies are valued; and 3) how people and communities of color are represented (or not) in the explicit curriculum in particular if/how their stories and history is valued. Therefore, LatCrit draws on *cuentos* and *testimonio*s, as well as situated knowledge about Latina/o/x communities to challenge White supremacy and privilege.

While there have been advancements in applying CRT within various disciplines (e.g., public health, education, and law), there remains a gap in social work literature that explicitly focuses on LatCrit as a tool to guide praxis. There are, however, a few prominent studies that apply a LatCrit perspective, such as an article by Lechuga-Peña and Lechuga (2018) that examines the barriers and facilitators to educational success for Latina/o students using a counter storytelling methodology. Like many other Latino/a/x students, they experienced barriers such as socioeconomic hardships and racial discrimination in school, which was challenged by facilitators that provided access to opportunities, including social activism, participation in college pipeline programs, mentorship and authentic caring, culturally relevant curriculum, and familism, an ideology that places priority on the family. Lechuga-Peña and Lechuga (2018) recommend the contributions of Latina/o practitioners in social work be incorporated in social work curriculum as Latina/o students are enrolled in social work programs and many of the students are interning and working with Latina/o communities. Franco (2020) also used LatCrit to discuss social work praxis, including culturally responsive practices among social workers and the importance of policy reform. Franco (2020) has suggested that as social workers, we should be focused on teaching service users how to manage and survive oppressive and punitive systems but also be more active in policy reform through activism.

Discussion

Social work education across the nation is now actively engaging in anti-racist pedagogies in response to the continued killing of Brown and Black people at the hands of the police and other representatives of the so-called justice system. We contend that social workers must learn the history of violence and exclusion targeting Latina/o/x communities in order to understand their distrust of various US systems. Furthermore, it is essential to center Critical Race Theory and Latina/o/x Critical Race Theory in anti-racist social work praxis in order to adequately respond to the social inequities experienced by our clients, their communities, and within academia. By transitioning from CRT's Black/White paradigm to a more inclusive theory and praxis like LatCrit, we expand the possibilities for social workers to directly address the conditions in which racism exists in their everyday practice. The recognition and incorporation of LatCrit pushes the profession to:

- Name racism clearly and research it directly as a means for understanding how and why Latinas/os/x experience disfranchisement, sub-par wages, or come into contact with the child welfare system.
- Create curriculum for social work education that is centered on the Latina/o/x experience, cultivating this awareness in training social workers.
- Create research projects that are centered on the Latina/o/x perspective.
- Encourage social workers to confront their unconscious and/or explicit biases and preconceptions in the field and in the classroom.

Advancing Social Work Practice

Social workers often enter the profession with the intent of changing the world. This humanistic perspective is grounded in what the western world deems to be morally acceptable norms. As Dubal (2018) stated, "this vision claims to align with justice, but it often contributes to injustice by distilling complex lives into simple moral judgments in ways that often reproduce racist modern imaginaries" (p. 212). This concept of White saviorism places white culture as the normative racial group against which all others are compared (Ortega & Busch-Armendariz, 2013). This perspective has been the foundation of the social work profession since its inception. As a result, the social work profession has many hurdles to overcome in arriving at a social justice framework that moves beyond the Black/White binary, both in social work education and praxis. We must reevaluate social work and find an exit from the loop of "band-aid" interventions that lack a fundamental basis for addressing the underlying causes of trauma, stress, and racism. We propose that LatCrit is one important element of reconceptualizing race in the field of social work.

Latinas/os/x are far from a monolithic group, and the place of origin the individual identifies with matters, as evidenced in the variations of the Spanish language, Indigenous languages, and forms of creole spoken throughout the 33 countries in Latin America and the Caribbean (Latino Donor Collaborative, 2020), not to mention the sub-regions and communities in each country. However, just as issues concerning language and cultural

origin impact racial and ethnic groups differently, specific frameworks can guide our understanding of the unique experiences of individuals and communities. As Dubal (2018) said,

> By treating individuals who manifest social problems instead of social problems manifesting in individuals, humanism misdiagnoses the signs and symptoms of a sick society as those of a sick human being, and thus offers ultimately ineffective, downstream treatments directed at the biological-individual. (pp. 222-223)

LatCrit aligns with the structural change practitioners must address so that we can focus on the multi-faceted issues faced by Latinas/os/x. Here we offer a few concrete ideas for how to advance social work practice.

- Social work literature should place a higher value on LatCrit and recognize it as a valuable framework for advancing social work research and pedagogy. Recognizing the validity of Lat Crit can lift the voices of academics of color.
- Move beyond a narrow focus on laws within the United States and address the needs of oppressed and racialized peoples globally, beyond the experience of Latinas/os/x in North America. Acknowledge the US' continued domination in Central and South American countries and beyond. Social workers need to make connections between international social work and the traumatic experiences Latinas/os/x endure prior to, during, and post-migration.

Policy Implications for Social Work

In September 2020, then President Trump issued an executive order to combat offensive and Anti-American race and sex stereotyping and training that included content on CRT (Vought, 2020). In response to this, the Critical Race Scholars in Social Work (CRSSW, 2020), "a national network of over 100 scholars committed to confronting the United States' legacy of White supremacy and racism to create a more just society for all," (para. 1) released a statement condemning this order. While President Biden rescinded this order on his first day in office, efforts at the state level are in full motion as legislation has been passed to ban CRT and penalize teachers and schools for teaching CRT. If social work is committed to the Grand Challenge to Eliminate Racism, we call upon the National Association of Social Workers (NASW) and the Council on Social Work Education (CSWE) to release statements addressing these recent assaults on CRT (and LatCrit by way of its extension of CRT) and join CRSSW in condemning the unfair attacks on CRT. As Teasley et al. (2021) state, "Social work will have to address the racism in the room before meaningful change can happen, (p. 12), and "social workers must be equipped with tools to dismantle racism and white supremacy and build racial equity (p. 13)." While CRT is one tool in doing so, we argue LatCrit is an additional tool that should be included in the social work toolbox to combat and eliminate racism.

Social Work Education

There are several ways that Social Work programs can integrate CRT and LatCrit into their program objectives and curriculum. For example, Dr. Lechuga-Peña has incorporated CRT and LatCrit into the required MSW diversity course since she began teaching it in 2014 and recently updated the diversity course textbook to include these theories (Kulis et al., 2021). While it is more likely that students in social work are familiar with CRT, most notably since multiple states have since banned its discussion, LatCrit is rarely taught in the social work curriculum.

We support the 2022 Educational Policy and Accreditation Standards (EPAS) for Baccalaureate and Master's Social Work Programs (CSWE, 2022). As such, we endorse the proposed amended language used throughout the EPAS, which integrates the term "anti-racist" and "anti-racism." We call upon CSWE's Commission on Accreditation and Commission on Educational Policy to embed anti-racist frameworks like CRT and LatCrit (among other anti-racist frameworks) into the social work explicit and implicit curriculum. to establish continuity within the professional training received at the baccalaureate and master's levels. The CSWE *implicit* curriculum refers to the learning environment in which the curriculum is presented. *Explicit* curriculum constitutes the program's formal educational structure and includes use of a competency-based educational framework intended to prepare students for professional practice at the baccalaureate and master's levels (CSWE, 2021). This revision will support the programmatic expectations of Competency 2: Engage Anti-Racism, Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion.

As Freire (1968/2000) reminded us,

> There is no such thing as a neutral educational process. Education either functions as an instrument that is used to facilitate the integration of the younger generation into the logic of the present system and bring about conformity to it, or it becomes "the practice of freedom," the means by which men and women deal critically and creatively with reality and discover how to participate in the transformation of their world. (p. 34)

Along with the policy recommendation as mentioned above, we believe that framing discussions within contextual paradigms that address race, racism, sexism, and intersectionality should not be exclusive to the current content in the diversity and oppression courses. All social work faculty should be expected to teach the diversity and oppression courses and address these issues in all their courses, and the onus should not be on faculty of color to exclusively discuss these frameworks. The invisible burden placed on faculty and students of color to "teach" White colleagues about racism, which is deeply rooted in their personal experience, often causes retraumatization. Instead, the responsibility of this anti-racist work should be shared amongst all faculty and students if equity is truly at the center of professional social work training.

Finally, social work education should revise EPAS Educational Policy 3.3—Signature Pedagogy: Field Education to integrate a specific anti-racist and social justice-centered research project in their fieldwork. The requirements for field placement should be centered around the Grand Challenges for Social Work which are the 13 areas in which the

profession could come together and collaborate on how best to take action, given the focus on the individual family well-being (micro), more robust social fabric (mezzo), and just society (macro). In this way, social work students will be more prepared to respond to the needs of communities of color, particularly Latina/o/x.

Social Work Practice

The profession has long considered micro, mezzo, and macro social work as distinct practice areas. It is imperative that micro, mezzo, and macro social work practice are integrated so that students and practitioners understand the ways in which various populations experience oppression as a result of their simultaneous interaction with these systems; these same structural and institutional systems that produce trauma for clients, specifically in the Latina/o/x community. In practice, these systems do not function in isolation, nor should they be in social work pedagogy.

As social work practitioners, it is critical to acknowledge and honor differences within Latina/o/x communities and clients. By allowing Latina/o/x to reflect on their own lived experiences, they can overcome challenges in their lives and become liberated by telling their own stories.

Conclusion

Although different disciplines are rooted in a broader social context, social work is perhaps the best-positioned profession among those that serve society to be a leader in the fight against racism (Teasley et al., 2021). It is crucial that social work pedagogy acknowledges the past and present racist laws and policies targeting Latinas/os/x in the United States. A path forward for social work includes enhanced strategic and effective engagement. We argue Latina/o/x Critical Race Theory (LatCrit) is one of many frameworks that can guide social work praxis, as it enables us to better articulate the experiences of Latinas/os/x through a more focused examination of the unique forms of oppression they encounter around language, immigration status, and citizenship. LatCrit's integration of the elements of CRT is also evident in the interdisciplinary expansion found in Kanaka Critical Race Theory (Reyes, 2017), Tribal Critical Race Theory (TribalCrit; Brayboy, 2005), Asian Critical Race Theory (AsianCrit; Chang, 1993), Queer Critical Theory (QueerCrit; DeLauretis, 1991), and Dis/ability Critical Race studies (DisCrit; Annamma et al., 2013). The amplification of race and racism inherent in the process of "othering" those that experience oppression does not contradict CRT's fundamental principles.

As Coates and Gray (as cited in Wilson, 2020) remind us, change takes time, and introducing anything new into the field of social work takes approximately 20 years. This time accounts for the ability to communicate a complex idea rationally and time for these ideas to be vetted via the peer review process. This entire process could be in excess of “25 years – a generation – and it is a longer relational duration than the short-term intervention-time that more often structures our disciplinary imaginations” (Wilson, 2020, p. 42). The current state of social work research does not equate to the direct action required to

transform the institutional and structural racist policies that impact our clients and communities daily. We must present public policies in all our work (i.e., field placement projects, dissertations, manuscripts), policies that center clients and communities most impacted. Problem-solving and human causation are the traditional ways in which social work has supported and upheld the status quo. New methods that include LatCrit are required to solve the complicated issues we face in a complex, changing environment (Wilson, 2020, which requires an urgent call to action, one that cannot wait for a generation.

A LatCrit analysis in social work provides the lens to examine the ways in which race and racism explicitly and implicitly impact social structures, processes, and policy discourse that affect Latinas/os/x. Given that LatCrit provides an analytical framework that addresses epistemological, methodological, and pedagogical approaches to the study of everyday inequalities for Latinas/os/x, the inclusion of this framework in social work is a critical first step.

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