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## **Accomplices in the Academy in the Age of Black Lives Matter**

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*While a growing number of white scholars and activists identify themselves as allies to people of color as they engage in movements to end institutional racism, others have criticized this alignment. Instead, an emerging and alternative framework calls for white scholars and activists to act as accomplices, working in solidarity with people of color within social justice and anti-racists movements. This paper discusses the differences between these two stances, with implications for white educators and scholars in the teaching and social work professions. We aim to provide a framework for moving conversations around race and justice forward, as well as highlight examples of accomplice work in scholarship, teaching, and service, from both the education and social work perspectives.*

**Keywords:** Accomplice | Race | Higher Education | Social Work | Education | Ally

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Philando Castile

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*“Hands Up! Don’t Shoot!” “I Can’t Breathe!” “Black Lives Matter!”*

These chants can be heard at rallies across the nation as community members gather to demand justice in the wake of proliferating, publicized violence against people of color. However, questions have been raised as to the role of white voices in the Black Lives Matter movement. What does it mean for a white individual to echo, with fists raised, the last words of Eric Garner?<sup>1</sup> How does the story transform as it moves from Eric Garner’s lips, to the streams of social media, and finally into the lips of white individuals? More specifically, what does it mean to be an ally or accomplice in the movement for racial justice? These questions have implications for white scholars in the academy who seek to move the conversation around racial justice forward and, ultimately dismantle systems of oppression.

This paper is a call to white academics to consider their role in the movements against white supremacy. Through an analysis of our own personal experiences in the academy, and building upon the scholarship of critical race and critical white theories, we seek to understand our own roles as white academics within institutions of higher education built

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<sup>1</sup> Eric Garner was approached by police in Staten Island, NY, for allegedly selling cigarettes illegally. He died while being arrested in what observers and the medical examiner referred to as a chokehold.

on legacies of white supremacy. This work is grounded in the ethics of the two professions in which we sit: education and social work. These professions each profess to teach students to work with the most vulnerable of our society, our children and those most marginalized by the institutions we all rely on as a society (e.g., education, health, mental health, policing and prisons, social services).

In doing this work, we acknowledge the privileges we bring in terms of how likely we are to be heard and respected as compared to our colleagues of color. We seek to leverage our white privilege to ensure that marginalized voices and realities are heard, honored, and used to critique, reform or abolish the inequitable institutions that impact all of our lives. As the reader moves through this paper, you will see interjections of the names of those whose lives were taken by the hands of the police. These interruptions are a reflection of the moments of violence that disrupted our writing, our teaching, our being. Over the months that we worked to write and revise this piece, the news of police brutality and community resistance seemed to pull us away from the keyboard and into rallies, long conversations, and the arms of loved ones, as we tried to process yet another life taken too soon and without justice. *In our use of these interruptions, we honor the call to “say their names,” an action that has been integral to the Black Lives Matter movement.*

The Black Lives Matter (BLM) organization emerged out of the voices of Black queer women, in particular Alicia Garza, Patrisse Cullors, and Opal Tometi, after the murder of Trayvon Martin in 2012. The organization was a “response to the anti-Black racism that permeates our society and also, unfortunately, our movements” (Garza, 2014). Soon after Garza, Cullors, and Tometi launched BLM, the movement took on new forms as it morphed across twitter feeds, social networks, and in the streets. As white community members joined the fight for racial justice, the role of allyship also transformed. Anti-racist work by those who identified as allies ranged from posting on social media to acting as mediators between Black activists and the police during protests. Along this continuum of allyship is the degree to which whites are willing to put their ideas, actions, and bodies out into the community in the name of social justice.

We argue that the core idea that separates white *allies* from white *accomplices* is risk. Martin Luther King, Jr., Audre Lorde, James Chaney, Harriet Tubman, Angela Davis, Bree Newsome, among countless other people of color, broke the law and/or took risks in the name of racial justice. There are also examples of white accomplices throughout the long civil rights movement, such as Andrew Goodman and Michael Schwerner (Payne, 2007)<sup>2</sup> as well as Anne Braden (Fosl, 2006)<sup>3</sup>. As white scholars in the social work and teaching professions we believe that the fight to end white, hetero-patriarchy occurs in our classrooms, through our research, and in our communities through direct action. In these spaces, we seek to locate ourselves in the movement not as benevolent supporters, but as risk-takers who aim to destabilize white supremacy in ourselves, families, schools, communities, and within the judicial system.

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<sup>2</sup> Andrew Goodman and Michael Schwerner were white civil rights activists working in the Freedom Summer of 1964 in Mississippi. They were arrested by police, along with James Chaney, and then released to members of the Ku Klux Klan who murdered all three.

<sup>3</sup> Anne Braden was a lifetime racial justice organizer who was at one time tried for sedition for attempting to desegregate a Louisville, KY, suburban neighborhood. Putting her freedom on the line, Braden fought for over 60 years to ensure that white people stand up as a part of a multi-racial movement for social justice.

The impetus to collaborate as two scholar-activists (teacher educator and social work educator) in distinct fields that don't often communicate directly, began on the day Sandra Bland<sup>4</sup> died in police custody. From this initial connection around our shared reactions to this event, we began to reflect on the different ways we act as accomplices in our work. In this paper, we will share some of that exploration of what we believe it means to be an accomplice scholar and educator, honoring the complexities of the movements led by those most impacted by injustice, all while supporting and furthering those movements in our work and lives.

Framed by theories of critical race and critical whiteness, this paper provides an analysis of our autobiographical reflections as well as the literature on white allyship in an effort to problematize the roles of white scholars in contemporary social justice movements. We do this by conceptualizing an alternative position: an *accomplice*. Approaching our positions as anti-racist accomplices, we ground our work in the ethics that guide our corresponding fields: social work and education. We then explore the complexities and possibilities of what it means to be an accomplice in the academy through our work in the following domains: teaching, scholarship, and service. Finally, we will conclude this paper by providing some recommendations for white accomplice scholars to consider.

### **Critical Whiteness: A Conceptual Framework**

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Sandra Bland

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Our interrogation into our roles as accomplice academics is informed by critical race theory (CRT). Critical race theorists examine how racism permeates social and cultural institutions and offer counter-narratives to challenge the dominant ways of knowing (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001; Ladson-Billings, 2004). In this paper, we honor the tenets of CRT by centering racism, but also by naming whiteness as a central tension in our work to challenge white supremacy. Acknowledging the risk of white researchers colonizing and appropriating CRT, we turn to critical whiteness studies (CWS) to provide a lens for our analysis. CWS centers the normalization of white domination in an effort to address how “whites deflect, ignore, or dismiss their role, racialization, and privilege in race dynamics” (Matias et al., 2014, p.291). In this paper, we use CWS to problematize white allyship and better understand the tensions of our work as white accomplices in the academy. In doing so, we build on the long history of white scholar-activists who have sought to organize and educate white people to fight for racial justice and against white supremacy. Some of these include Paul Kivel, Peggy McIntosh, Robin DiAngelo, Criss Crass, and Cindy Milstein, among countless others (Crass, 2015; Milstein, 2015; Rothenberg, 2016).

It should be noted that while we recognize that power and privilege are intersectional, overlapping, and complex, for the purpose of this discussion we are intentionally centering race in our analysis. Intersectional forms of oppression have impacts across society and the life span, up to the consequence of early death for many. One clear example is that of trans\*

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<sup>4</sup> In 2015, Sandra Bland was pulled over by a Texas State Trooper for failing to signal when changing lanes. After a series of events, she was arrested for assault. Within 65 hours of her arrest, she was found dead in her jail cell. Her death was declared a suicide.

women of color who are murdered disproportionately as compared to other demographics in the U.S., as well as the ongoing violence against all women of color (Crenshaw, 1991). Additionally, we also acknowledge that all forms of injustice and oppression are linked, and that the struggles of native people to end pipeline drilling on native land, the fight for women's access to contraception and family planning, and the fight against anti-Semitism (among other peoples' struggles) are inextricably linked. Understanding the intersections among racism, classism, sexism, heterosexism, ableism and other forms of injustice can help us to be more strategic and savvy in dismantling all forms of oppression (Kivel, 2016). Acknowledging this larger intersectional framework, we choose here to focus on whiteness and racial justice and the imperative to act as an accomplice to organize against white supremacy.

### **Allies and Accomplices**

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Daniel Harris

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A growing number of white scholars and activists identify themselves as allies in social justice and anti-racists movements. The need to distinguish between white *allies* and white *accomplices* derives from the proliferating number of people identifying as allies who are not working toward disrupting the heteropatriarchy, but are rather cycling through and maintaining systems of privilege and oppression. The Oxford English Dictionary (Ally, 2016b) defined *ally* as: "An individual. A relative, a relation; a kinsman or kinswoman. A person who helps or cooperates with another; a supporter, an associate; a friend." Some social justice scholars have theorized allies as members of the privileged group who, "act against the oppression(s) from which they derive power, privilege and acceptance" (Hardiman, Jackson, & Griffin, 2013). White allies may align themselves with anti-racist movements for various reasons, including what critical race theory refers to as *interest convergence* (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001) and/or personal moral convictions (Hardiman, Jackson, & Griffin, 2013). The ally paradigm ideologically positions whites as those who assist and people of color as those who need assistance, thereby maintaining oppressive hierarchies. White allies may claim allegiance to the communities of color through social media participation or by wearing symbols such Black Lives Matter t-shirts or a safety-pin (a symbol which emerged during the recent 2016 presidential election), yet fail to participate in any meaningful action. Other allies might feel immobile, believing their role is on the sidelines and offer support only when asked. Furthermore, allies might set their own agenda, choosing which issues to amplify. Some allies might profit off of trainings, workshops, or professionalized activism that seek to neatly package responses to social justice.

Scholars and activists have challenged the practices of the self-identified ally. One example is Noel Ignatiev's and John Garvey's (1996) race traitor project, where they boldly proclaim that "Treason to Whiteness is Loyalty to Humanity," (p.10). Although controversial, the race traitor project demands whites abolish the white race by rejecting their white status and violating socially acceptable norms of whiteness. Recently, the term "co-conspirator" has been used by community organizers such as Feminista Jones and Alicia Garza (Hackman, 2015; Move to End Violence, 2016). Others have interrogated

ways for white people to disrupt racism in their lives and classrooms (Johnson, 2013; Matias et al., 2014; McIntosh, 1997). Drawing from this body of work, we explore the role of an *accomplice*, another alternative to the ally paradigm.

An *accomplice* is defined as: “A partner in some undertaking; A person who helps another commit a crime; a partner in wrongdoing” (Accomplice, 2016a). The group, Indigenous Action Media (2015), explained,

The risks of an ally who provides support or solidarity (usually on a temporary basis) in a fight are much different than that of an accomplice. When we fight back or forward together becoming complicit in a struggle toward liberation, we are accomplices. (p. 88)

Their statement goes on to critique allies as “often carrying romantic notions of oppressed folks they wish the ‘help.’ These are the ally saviors who see victims and tokens instead of people” (Indigenous Action Media, 2015, p. 88).

On the contrary, an accomplice scholar would “seek ways to leverage resources and material support...to further liberation struggles. An intellectual accomplice would strategize with, not for, and not be afraid to pick up a hammer” (Indigenous Action Media, 2015, p.40). As scholars seeking to be accomplices, we hold this tension, integrating risk and action into the work we do with our students, institutions, and communities. As we sought to bring our personal discussions on what it means to be an accomplice to a wider audience, the authors of this paper engaged in frequent dialogue to examine the risks we are willing to take and whether these risks are real or protected by our whiteness and power. We acknowledge and problematize the differences in risk that we take, as white academics, as compared with our colleagues of color. Academics of color take much more significant risks when they seek to overturn paradigms of educational institutions and professions built on white supremacy. In fact, academics of color take more risks simply by being racialized within the institutions of higher education. This is apparent in hiring decisions (Correll & Benard, 2006; Edmonds, 2016; McMillan Cottom, 2014), student evaluations (Anderson & Smith, 2005; Smith & Hawkins, 2011), and tenure and promotion processes (Allen, et al., 2000; Finkelstein, Martin Conley, & Schuster, 2016), each of which has real world and long term consequences (Gutierrez y Muhs, Neimann, Gonzalez, & Harris, 2012; Law, Phillips, & Turney, 2004). With this understanding of the difference in risk taking in mind, we discuss here ways not just to support colleagues of color in that work, but to work alongside them, in solidarity, through our own practices of teaching, scholarship, and service.

### **Ethical Imperative to Challenge Racist and Colonial Paradigms**

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Tyre King

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Our work with students, children, incarcerated people, and community members is imbued with ethics. However, ignoring the moral dimensions of our work risks perpetuating unethical systems of power and oppression. As scholar-accomplices, our practices are anchored in ethics. As we move through the daily tensions, messiness, and risks that

accompany these practices, we consistently circle back to our ethics to guide us. After a close analysis of the code of ethics in each of our respective fields, we found support and even demand for the embodiment of accomplice work in our professions.

## **Education**

Ayers (2010), argued that education is deeply intellectual and ethical work. He explained:

Teaching as an ethical enterprise goes beyond presenting what already is; it is teaching toward what ought to be. It is walking with the mothers of children, carrying the sound of the sea, exploring the outer dimensions of love. It is more than moral structures and guidelines; it includes an exposure to and understanding of material realities--advantages and disadvantages, privileges and oppressions--as well...At this point, when consciousness links to conduct and upheaval is in the air, teaching becomes a call to freedom. (p. 161)

As we attempt to bring this call to freedom into our practice, ethical codes of conduct provide support. The National Association for the Education of Young Children's (NAEYC) Code of Ethical Conduct (2011) outlines our professional and moral responsibilities to children, families, colleagues, and community and society. They explained,

Above all, we shall not harm children. We shall not participate in practices that are emotionally damaging, physically harmful, disrespectful, degrading, dangerous, exploitative, or intimidating to children. This principle takes precedence over all others in this code. (p. 3)

The Code of Ethics goes further to demand educators work as advocates for the whole child and community:

To work through education, research, and advocacy toward an environmentally safe world in which all children receive health care, food and shelter; are nurtured; and live free from violence in their home and communities...To support policies and laws that promote the well-being of children and families and work to change those that impair their well-being. (p. 6)

These ethics are a call to educators to not only advocate for curricular and pedagogical change in our classrooms, but to work towards a deep and systemic change that tackles the systems of power and oppression that profoundly impact the children and families we serve. These demands listed in the Code of Ethical Conduct can only be realized through transformations in ourselves, our classrooms, and our communities.

## **Social Work**

The preamble of the National Association of Social Workers Code of Ethics states, "Social workers seek to enhance the capacity of people to address their own needs. Social workers

also seek to promote the responsiveness of organizations, communities, and other social institutions to individuals' needs and social problems" (NASW, 2012, p. 1). The preamble lists social justice as one of the profession's six core values, with a focus on working with and on behalf of those who are vulnerable and oppressed. Other various ethical responsibilities of social workers are described, including those to clients (widely defined as individuals, organizations, and communities), as professionals and to the profession, and to broader society. Within each section, responsibilities are further defined, including seeking to understand the nature of racial oppression (among other specifically named types of oppression) with clients, a specific note that social workers are not to "practice, condone, or collaborate" (NASW, 2012, p. 20) with any form of racial discrimination by social work professionals, and notes a continued "study and research, active discussion, and responsible criticism of the profession" to further the values and responsibilities listed throughout the code (NASW, 2012, p. 21). In terms of responsibilities to the broader society, social workers are guided to consistently work towards the social welfare of society, from local to global levels, including an emphasis on both social and political action. The most direct call to action for social workers is call that social workers "should act to prevent and eliminate domination of, exploitation of, and discrimination against any person, group, or class on the basis of race, ethnicity, national origin, color, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, age, marital status, political belief, religion, immigration status, or mental or physical disability" (NASW, 2012, p. 24).

The call for ongoing engagement and action with anti-oppression work, and antiracism in particular, is clear across the code. Unfortunately, this does not necessarily translate into anti-racist social work education and practice (Ferguson, 2007). In fact, there has been some backlash around the explicit and political direction of the code, with some arguing that it should not be as direct in its call for social change and racial justice practice (Buila, 2010; Rank & Hutchinson, 2000). To this point, however, the NASW holds firm to the code, and for those in the social work profession who seek to be accomplices in the work towards eradicating racism and other generally overlapping forms of oppression, we can look to the code as a direct call for work as an accomplice, asking that we take a stand and engage in direct action in the work.

Educators and social workers have an incredible amount of power in the lives of vulnerable people (children, marginalized and otherwise/marginalized clients and communities). As scholars and educators within these professions, we can and should consciously engage in scholarship, teaching, and service in ways that furthers the written goals embedded within our different codes of ethics. We suggest that it is an ethical imperative to engage in our work as accomplices, weaving our accomplice sensibilities and actions through our work and lives.

### **Our Role as Accomplices**

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Keith Lamont Scott

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In our classrooms, we often push our students toward what Ayers (2010) referred to as "working the gap" (p. 135). He suggests greatness in teaching is maintaining one foot in reality and the other reaching toward what *ought* to be. In our classes, we discuss the

tensions and problems in our schools, institutions, communities, and wider society, and brainstorm ways to subvert the system. Some of the larger questions that continuously creep into our conversations as we unpack these hopes and ideals are: As untenured professors, *how do we do this and not lose our jobs? What is worth risking? What is a risk?* And as white professors, how can we leverage our privilege in the name of social justice, to support our comrades of color whose similar moves carry more significant risk? In the sections to follow we will provide a discussion of how each of us explores our role as an accomplice through our scholarship, teaching, and service.

## **Scholarship**

There is a complicated history of research and scholarship exploiting historically marginalized communities. However, recent methodological turns have urged scholars to use their power and platform to rethink how we engage in socially conscious methods of inquiry, representation, and dissemination. Below we explore of our roles as accomplices through our scholarship.

**Jessica's Experience.** My research sought to center race and explore the stories of segregation and desegregation among generations of Black families in the south. I struggled with how it was problematic for a white, northerner to listen to, analyze, and retell the counter-narratives of Black families living in the south. After months of rich dialogue with my colleagues, I realized that disengaging in research with Black communities perpetuated the microaggression that only scholars of color must carry the weight of studying racism and working to disrupt it (Pittman, 2012). Thus, I turned to postcritical ethnography as a methodology that opens a space for critical, anti-racist work. It is defined by Noblit, Flores, and Murillo (2004) as research that problematizes reflexivity, positionality, objectivity, and representation by requiring a critique of both the researcher and the social structures being scrutinized. Postcritical ethnography moves beyond critical ethnography's critiques of grand narratives and power structures and prompts researchers to question their relationship to that which they study and to re-imagine methods of representation that honor the interpretive nature of this research. Thus, while engaging in postcritical work, I must examine the challenges of my role in the research process and acknowledge how the work may inadvertently forward systems of power, even as I work to destabilize them.

Just as the Black Lives Matter movement transformed across geographic and temporal spaces, at times being co-opted and reified, I acknowledge our role of moving and transforming stories through anti-racist scholarship. To understand this, I am inspired by anthropologist Ana Tsing's (2004) three-fold framework for understanding movement: first, stories move us, conjuring emotional and visceral responses. Second, stories move across geographic and contextual spaces. Stories make their way from voice to ear, to hand to eye (Tedlock, 1990). And finally, stories can be part of a movement: an alliance of individuals working toward a common political goal. As accomplice scholars we move stories through our research, writing, teaching and direct action, in ways that honor the complexities of this movement without co-opting, eclipsing or appropriating the work of Black scholars and/or members of the community.

This postcritical approach further challenges the notion of a single, true story. By recognizing the multiplicity of the stories we tell about our lives and honoring the (im)possibilities of our representations and conclusions, we can develop more textured understandings of the world in which we live. When I first began to study race and education I asked myself, “Should a white woman engage in a study of the lives of African-Americans?” Arguments from both sides of the spectrum were convincing. On the one end, some argue that only those belonging to a particular racial, cultural, or ethnic group should research within that group (Chadderton, 2012). This argument is aimed at avoiding a tendency for white researchers to exploit, misunderstand, and/or misrepresent the experiences of historically marginalized communities. This argument has its merits. As my research study unfolded, it influenced my reflexivity and pushed me to constantly question my intentions: “Why am I interested in Black families’ cross generational stories of education and segregation?” “What is there to gain by engaging in this research and what is at risk?”

However, I believe that white scholars must play a vocal, active and complementary role in critical studies of race and power, even as I continue to discover how this unfolds outside the rhetoric of critical white studies and inside the realities of our research. Amy Bergerson (2010) suggested that white scholars centering race must be careful not to appropriate the critical work and theories emerging from communities of color. Instead, they “must join the ranks of those celebrating the experiences of people of color and insist that the academy recognize these experiences as legitimate sources of knowledge” (Bergerson, 2010, p. 59).

Some contend that white researchers run the risk of their bias misrepresenting their participants’ stories and that the power differentials between researcher and participant will inevitably shape the results (Chadderton, 2012). This caution speaks to the messiness of white researchers studying across racial lines. However, this argument suggests that a true story exists and can be represented by the qualified researcher. I have approached my research with the understanding that the stories we share are performative, dialogical encounters, embodying our histories and identities in ephemeral form. Thus, the stories my participants shared were shaped by the interaction of their identities and mine. And the representation of their stories in publications and presentations are also a performative encounter. Given my recognition that there is no single narrative and that my participants’ stories were shaped by the context within which they were shared, I have the responsibility of explicitly addressing what Wanda Pillow (2003) referred to as reflexivities of discomfort. Pillow defined this concept as reflexivity “that seeks to know while at the same time situates this knowing as tenuous” (p.188). She calls for reflexivity that goes beyond simply reflecting on how our biases influenced interpretations toward recognizing the discomfort inherent in acknowledging the impossibility of sharing the accurate or correct story.

To this end, acknowledging the ways my whiteness, history, and multiple identities participated in shaping all aspects of my research does not lead to a more valid narrative. Rather, it helps the reader to understand the stories of my participants as performative representations of our lives. And the notion that a true narrative doesn’t exist does not mean that there is no knowledge to be gained from the study. Through different interpretations new ideas become apparent and enrich our ongoing process to understand.

Reflexivity of discomfort ultimately lies in the recognition that the possibilities of our critical research are contingent on acknowledging their impossibilities. As we engage in moving stories, we invite further interpretations and honor the impossibilities of “getting the story right.” Nigerian author, Chimamanda Adichie (2009), from her talk entitled, *The Danger of a Single Story*, reminded us that stories are powerful, having the ability to “break the dignity of a people” or “restore broken dignity.” It is my hope that my postcritical research pushes against the single story Black families and education and moves the conversation forward. By recognizing and respecting this reflexive discomfort in our research, the stories we move, the stories that move us, and the stories that are part of a movement can empower and restore dignity.

**Amber’s Experience.** I came to my scholarship from an explicitly political viewpoint of understanding who is included in our ideas of humanity and who “deserves to suffer,” according to our policies. Currently my scholarship centers on creating trauma-informed programming for incarcerated women. In doing and presenting this work, I seek to make public both the past and current violence experienced by incarcerated women in the United States. I argue that incarcerated women in the US are majority survivors of interpersonal violence (Browne, Miller, & Maguin, 1999; Komarovskava, 2009) currently surviving ongoing institutional violence (Dirks, 2004; Peter-Raoul & Apple, 1999). The rates of survival of violence for incarcerated women range from 43% to 75% (Browne, Miller, & Maguin, 1999). One study of trauma and PTSD for incarcerated women in the prison setting found that 48% of the women met the criteria for current PTSD, and 20% for lifetime PTSD (Zlotnick, 1997). For this population, victimization is often ongoing with multiple perpetrators and throughout their lifetime (DeHart, 2008).

There are multiple critiques with building trauma-responsive programming within women’s prisons, with one specific critique noting the dissonance with building “kinder, gentler cages” for incarcerated people (Braz, 2006). There is real and urgent need to dismantle prison industrial complex in the United States. Having said that, we also need to consider current day programming that serves to meet some of the emergent needs of survivors living in conditions of no control, under continued violence. Discussing this need, as well as creating trauma-informed programming to serve a population that lives under continued violence, is a framing that is explicitly anti-racist and social justice oriented. These are discussions that I bring to the forefront in program building, presentations, and teaching, with an idea to disrupt paradigms of viewing incarcerated people as only victims in need of social services due to histories of trauma in order to prevent re-arrest and incarceration.

I see this portion of my scholarship as that of accomplice-action. I refuse to talk about issues of intervention with incarcerated persons in the United States without discussion of the prison industrial complex and how it both dehumanizes and traumatizes people on a day-to-day basis. How we define those who are currently locked up and the programming we seek to create within current systems of incarceration inform how we envision a future for these systems. Any discussions of these realities must also discuss the imperative to dismantle current systems of policing and incarceration that allows for movement to action on a organizing and policy level. Additionally, there is an explicit challenge to these systems when we discuss people living under such conditions as people- not prisoners, inmates, or otherwise.

This refusal to other those we lock away through titles forces us to reckon with the ways we treat people in our society. While my scholarship would be defined as psychological intervention research, any intervention researcher can and should make such discussions explicit, working to imbed their scholarship with refusal to be complicit in this othering and continued marginalization, as long as it is in the forefront of our understanding of our work. These are some of the ways that I see my current scholarship contributing to the larger body of literature working to disrupt systems of criminalization and incarceration (e.g., Alexander, 2012; Braz, 2006; Davis, 2011; Morris, 1976).

## Teaching

One of the most important spaces we realize our roles as accomplices is in the classroom. Through our curricular and pedagogical choices, we are preparing our students to “work the gap”: the space between the world *as it is* and the world *as we want it to be* (Ayers, 2010, p. 137). To do this, we push our students to understand and acknowledge systems of power and oppression while simultaneously exploring ways to disrupt the existing social order and to work in partnership with their communities toward new possibilities. As educators striving to be accomplices, we ask ourselves and each other: What does it mean to take risks and initiative to challenge the status quo through our curriculum and pedagogy? How do we move our white students beyond fear and guilt, or worse, the role of benevolent savior?

**Jessica’s Experience.** I embody my role as an accomplice-scholar through the deliberate inclusion of social justice education in every course I teach as well as through my pedagogical work with students and colleagues outside of the classroom. Grounded in the NAEYC Code of Ethics and guided by the critical work of Paulo Freire (2000), Bill Ayers (2010), Gloria Ladson-Billings (1992, 1994), Christopher Emdin (2016) and Tanehsi Coates (2015), among others, my pedagogy incorporates autobiography, storytelling, critical analyses of society and school, and explicit conversations around risk taking and moving toward *what ought to be*.

As a teacher educator, I challenge my students to engage in critical action as well as what Emdin (2016) referred to as “reality pedagogy” (p. 27), which in today’s schooling environments can only be realized through “creative insubordination” (Ayers 2010, p. 143). My students struggle with the genuine question, “How can I engage in culturally responsive and ethical teaching and truly challenge the system without losing my job?” The irony of students posing this question hasn’t escaped me, as I grapple with the same challenge. As I am still on this journey to become an accomplice and cannot always provide satisfactory responses to their concerns, I can engage them in genuine conversation around their role in perpetuating the existing social order as well as the possibilities of moving toward a more socially just world. There have been moments when I struggled to realize this role. For me, being an accomplice in the classroom requires me to expose my own vulnerabilities as I ask them to reveal theirs and explore together in dialogue and action what it means to take the stance that Black lives matter in our classrooms.

In many predominantly white institutions, faculty of color report microaggressions as well as microinvalidations from both colleagues and students (Pittman, 2012). Given that faculty of color are in a significant numerical minority among predominantly white

campuses, they often experience being asked to speak or present on behalf of their race or cultural background, a similar experience to the few students of color in teacher education classrooms. Further, faculty of color frequently experience challenges to their position or invalidations from students in their classes, either in person or in course evaluations (Alexander Jr. & Moore, 2008; Smith & Hawkins, 2011). Therefore, it is imperative that white accomplices acknowledge these microaggressions, vocally support their colleagues of color, and take the initiative to address racism and other forms of intersectional oppression in the classroom.

One of the risks we are taking as accomplices in the classroom is the risk of vulnerability. The dominant narrative of the teacher as authority, stability, and keeper of knowledge is a constant and silent invader, even as I engage critical pedagogies that refute this master narrative to its core. This invasion manifests through a deep sense of vulnerability that creeps through my body as I engage my students in conversations that are uncomfortable and, at times, deeply disturbing. The Oxford English Dictionary offers two seemingly contrary definitions for *vulnerable*, the first one being obsolete: 1) Having power to wound; and 2) susceptible to receiving wounds or injury (Vulnerable, 2016c). The dual description of vulnerability as both the power to wound and being exposed to wounding resonates with my own discomfort with addressing privilege and oppression in the classroom. For example, a few weeks ago in classroom management course, I was providing a historical context of race in America for understanding what's known as the *school to prison pipeline* in today's society. Through these conversations, we also examined our own identities and intersections of privilege and discrimination. When I asked my students to grapple with these issues and to sit with the discomfort together, I was really asking them to be vulnerable. Through this vulnerability, we lower the walls of cognitive dissonance and allow ourselves to feel-- and to think about those feelings-- and then ultimately to act upon them ideally in ways that work towards a new social order. Upon the end of many class sessions, I walk out of the classroom with my own sense of discomfort and vulnerability. I am often uncomfortable with the ways my passion, sadness, and range of emotions emerge through our conversations around social justice in the classroom. The image of the teacher as stoic and authoritative is crushed as I struggle to find answers to enduring questions and as my heartache reverberates through the classroom. Some students leave my course feeling equally enraged, moved, and empowered, as others feel angry, guilty, or numb.

My vulnerability lies in the Oxford English Dictionary's suggestion that it is both a sense of power to cause pain and the openness to receive it. To be an accomplice in the classroom is to acknowledge the vulnerability that people of color experience every day: walking the streets, driving a car, or even sitting in their own home. This vulnerability not only refers to emotional discomfort but to mortal, bodily risk. I acknowledge that the vulnerability I bring upon myself through the curriculum and pedagogy I engage pales in comparison to that which many people of color encounter without choice. I remind myself that I must not take the road well-traveled: to teach my teacher education courses devoid of context, intersectionality, and emotion. I remember reflexivities of discomfort, mentioned above, which guide my scholarship. I push myself to sit with the discomfort and honor the complexities of having conversations around racial justice across multiple perspectives. It's hard and vulnerable work, and there isn't a single "right way" to do it. Each conversation, each class dynamic, each community brings unique elements that

continuously shape and move the conversation in various ways. My intention is to follow this movement and to welcome my students to sit with me in a space of openness, where we can allow our vulnerabilities to empower us to, in the words of poet Mary Oliver (2008): “Pay attention, be astonished, tell about it” (as cited in Ayers, 2010, p. 166).

**Amber’s Experience.** As an accomplice scholar in the social work field, grounding anti-racist understandings of social work intervention through the person-in-environment paradigm (Bronfenbrenner, 1992) is easily undertaken. This concept, defined by the Encyclopedia of Social Work as a perspective in social work that “is a practice-guiding principle that highlights the importance of understanding an individual and individual behavior in light of the environmental contexts in which that person lives and acts” (Kondrat, 2008). Most social work education programs have some level of asking that students reflect on their own life experiences in coming to the work of the field. The program I currently teach within explicitly asks that students reflect on how multiple levels of power and privilege have played a role in their personal development. Additionally, keeping discussions of power and privilege to the front of any discussion of intervention on the individual, family, group, community, and macro levels of assessment and intervention allow for a space for students to consistently acknowledge how and why race and other dynamics of power and oppression impact “clients”- at whatever the level of assessment and intervention of those clients (Hutchison, 2010; NASW, 1999). Embedding anti-racist and anti-imperialist understandings of psychological and social problems within the curriculum is key to accomplice education, and acculturates social work students to this way of thinking as they begin to engage in the work of the profession (Ferguson, 2007; Miller & Garran, 2008). While teaching evaluations have shown *some* students to be somewhat uncomfortable with this embed, I offer that pushing students to consider the implications of prioritizing this paradigm within the relatively safety of the classroom setting allows for an exploration of these ideas and consideration of power and privilege before they are ever with vulnerable populations. For instance, one student wrote, “I wished [professor] had remained more neutral (i.e. in talking about whiteness in class).” This student is representative of many others who come to the field more reticent to understand that these issues are not necessarily “neutral” in nature, and that the very profession has a position. Having said that, other students appear to come to the learning much thirstier for these discussions, as evidenced by one student’s wish for “talking MORE about positionality of social work and what we may bring in” as they move through the coursework.

The idea of embedding and integrating understandings of power, privilege, and racism into social work curricula is not new (Abrams & Gibson, 2007; Miller & Gurrans, 2008; Miller, Hyde, & Ruth, 2004); however, it is not ubiquitous across social work education. In response to the uneven integration of social justice curricula, there have been many “calls to action” for social workers and scholars to be more explicit in their work to eradicate racism (NASW, 2007; Social Work Policy Institute, 2014). Along with my teaching, I see it as imperative to continually dialogue with and challenge colleagues, both within my institution and across the field of social work education. As academics, we have a unique positioning and responsibility to educate the next generation of those who will work in the field, and a real influence on how the field evolves. This education and creation of space for dialogue builds on the long tradition of white scholar activists who write about

the value of this work, including that of Peggy McIntosh, Paul Kivel, and Robin DiAngelo, among countless others (Rothenberg, 2016). Asking students to acknowledge their social locations and positioning as they come into the work is protective of clients, as racial countertransference (the social worker's reactions to clients) can impact both the efficacy of their work and be a further injury and microaggression for vulnerable clients and communities (Chapman, 2006; Gelso & Mohr, 2002; Stampley & Slaght, 2004).

In addition to supporting students of all backgrounds to become more familiar with internalized racism, and white students in particular to acknowledge their privileges and internalized sense of white supremacy, there is the issue of addressing intervention. Many social work programs focus on the intervention levels of individuals, families, or groups, and community based interventions often center on social services. Many social work programs do not adequately discuss the importance of student and professional engagement in policy level change (social work intervention on the institution, city, state, national, or international scale) beyond lip service in policy classes. I find it politically and ethically imperative to bring discussions of policy focused work with students, and to encourage them to work with communities directly negatively impacted by policies to change the systems that affect their lives. Throughout history, almost every moment for social and political change arose from those who were directly impacted, yet as social workers and academics we often teach that vulnerable populations are too limited in capacity to do this work. I attempt to bring to the social work classroom the motivation for students to engage in work for social and political change work regardless of their eventual day job, noting that the ultimate goal of any social worker should be to put themselves out of a job.

I also seek to actively integrate historically marginalized voices and movements into the classroom curricula. This means using writing and videos produced by clinicians and community organizers of color. Moreover, I prioritize case studies which involve both clients and clinicians of color, and involve an analysis of racialized transference (clients' reactions to social worker) and countertransference (social worker's reactions to clients). This is all done in an intersectional way, drawing in voices that explore a multiplicity of identities and complexities in their work and experience, all while using literature and examples of pragmatic and prefigurative interventions directed at psychological, social, political, and economic change. This is a built as a framework for students, to be drawn from as they engage in any future work in the field and in their communities.

## **Service**

Marian Wright Edelman (1993) notably declared, "Service is the rent we pay for being. It's the very purpose for life and not something you do in your spare time." (p.6). In this section we explore how a significant portion of our time and effort is put toward service to the university, community, and society through support for student organizing, commitment to activism, and leveraging resources to serve children, families, and incarcerated individuals in our communities.

Service, as defined by many academic institutions, is often limited to time and work toward supporting the infrastructure of one's department and university through committee participation. While this service is important, we define service differently here, emphasizing the importance of our connections to the broader community.

**Jessica’s Experience.** My work as a scholar-accomplice comes to life through the direct actions I take in partnership with members of the community. Through my service, I seek to leverage the social and financial capital of the university in an effort to work with our local community members and educators to push for equality of educational opportunity. Recently, I have been working toward this goal through my work as the director of an urban education undergraduate service program as well as my efforts to develop a social justice summer program for children and families in our surrounding urban communities.

As the co-director of a program called the Urban Education Fellows, I work with students who are committed social justice and to strengthening their practices as educators in coalition with urban communities. Through this program, the actions I take to promote racial justice in the community are done alongside my undergraduate students. Together, we work through the messiness of conceptualizing and embodying our appropriate role as accomplices and explore what it looks like to build mutually trusting relationships with the community. In 2016, this work took the form of collaborating with school administrators and community members to strategize how to encourage the city to allocate funds to rebuild our partner elementary school. This hyper-segregated, Black and Latino/a school suffered the consequences of limited funding which manifested in extremely difficult working and learning conditions. After multiple meetings between our Urban Education Fellows and the school administrators, our Urban Education Fellows developed a plan for direct action to impact the lives of the teachers and families of this elementary school. Our strategizing led to students and faculty providing testimony, along with parents and teachers, at multiple city council budgetary hearings to advocate for this school to be rebuilt. Additionally, our Fellows, in partnership with the school community, developed a long-term plan to provide access to high quality, culturally relevant children’s literature for the school. Throughout this process, I worked alongside our Urban Education Fellows to constantly reflect and modify our practices, mindful of the ally paradigm of “white saviors” or “parachuters” who drop into communities with their own mission, often to alleviate their own white guilt.

In an effort to further leverage the financial and social resources of the university, I work with multiple groups to develop a social justice summer program for children and families surrounding our university. Instead of solely seeks grants and funding for scholarship, I seek to capitalize on my position in academia to procure funding that provides direct services to the community. This program would provide meaningful and empowering services to the community as well as offer a location for pre-service and in-service teachers to strengthen their social justice and anti-racist pedagogy.

As a scholar-accomplice, my research and teaching are anchored in my service to the community. Kristal Clemons describes her own mission to integrate service and scholarship (Clemons, Coffey, & Ewell, 2011). Recalling the words of Professor Gregg Carr, she describes her work as seeking to, “speak to the after,” meaning to, “do something that would outlive our physical bodies” (Clemons et al., 2011, p.264). For Clemons, integrating service into her teaching and scholarship was a way to live out this mission of speaking to the after. Similarly, through the practices mentioned above my students and I can live the ethical pedagogy we problematize and re-imagine in class, providing resources to the community that move beyond us.

**Amber's Experience.** As a social work academic in a primarily teaching college, it has been made clear to me since early on that service is a big part of my expectations for tenure. This includes my service to the department, school, university, school, and profession. The notion of what qualifies as service, however, is something that I take liberties with, choosing to focus on those aspects of service which bring issues of power and injustice to the table. On a department and school level, this means being the Faculty Advisor for the MSW student organization, and encouraging them to take on projects and work that not only supports them as students but also encourages their work in the areas of social justice and anti-racist praxis. On a campus that is private and conservative, these ideas are not necessarily at the forefront for our student population. I also emphasize having honest conversations with and encourage leadership by students of color.

I take this position for many reasons, but one primary reason is noting the benefit for their future profession of having both the skills gained through taking on this type of leadership and having the information on their resume. We discuss openly the implications of this on their resume and with strategic attention to how they are thinking about their future career and how what they are doing now bolsters their ability to get a position they want now. Many have written about the limitations of social capital held by graduate students of color, as white students are encouraged by faculty to identify with them through their shared social locations. I seek to disrupt this through my role as advisor to the student organization and with students in general, utilizing and sharing the knowledge and social capital that I have for the gain of students of color, working to create a leverage that has historically been primarily open to white students (Harper, Patton, & Wooden, 2009).

Beyond the department there is an expectation of service to the school and university, primarily through serving on committee work. As an accomplice, I am very purposeful as to what committees I join, finding ways to increase programming and practices across the university that are supportive of students and faculty of color, and ask white students and faculty to examine and interrogate their privileges and whiteness. As I enter into committees focused on "diversity and inclusion" across the school, I see my role, which happens while working in solidarity with both other accomplice white faculty members and faculty members of color open to engaging in this work, as that of bringing ideas of power, injustice, and a call to action from students to the table. This includes direct engagement of faculty to push for an ongoing conversation of pedagogy and power and asking of white faculty across the school and university that we model ways of disrupting white privilege as usual. One example is the initiation of a "pedagogy and diversity reading group" for faculty within my school during this academic year. This reading group, which will focus on anti-racist pedagogical readings this first year, will be co-led by myself and a male faculty of color on campus. In initiating this project and calling for buy-in across university communities, I attempt to leverage my privilege for the purpose of educating white faculty of the value and priority of teaching from an anti-racist pedagogy across the university setting. I see creating such spaces as not just an academic conversation on campus, but as a mentorship for white students, to support the disruption and rebuilding of their own professional and personal lives.

Outside of these roles, there are the informal ways of supporting student organizing on campus. I have used my positionality as that of adjunct or assistant professor in sending messages of support and acting within faculty to support student demands and asks from the inside. Though never something I might add to a tenure profile, I have seen it as a part

of my service to the university communities which I have been a part of to ensure that calls for change by students are supported, both in word and in action on my end.

Related to this is consistent push for discussion at the department, school, and university levels, on issues related to hiring and promotion of faculty. This is a university environment that is just starting to grapple with issues of racism in hiring and is in contemplation stages of change. In the social work department, these discussions are much more explicit, as we seek to discuss how to overcome barriers to hiring faculty of color in our tiny department. As an accomplice scholar, I see my service to the university as continuing to bring this issue up, reiterating what has been said by consultants brought in to discuss “diversity and inclusion.” The call to hire more faculty of color has been clear at this point it is a matter of ensuring this call is not drowned out in the minutiae of the day to day running of the university.

Outside of the university, as a social work academic, I am expected to cultivate a role of service within my community. This is generally seen as engagement with boards of nonprofits, generally in the field of social services. As an accomplice scholar, I choose to take a different view of service in this area, purposefully choosing to spend my time in ways that I believe continue the work of challenging white supremacy on the community level. This has meant working closely within the shared leadership committee of our local Showing Up for Racial Justice organization, working with others to share anti-racism conversations and workshops in different primarily white spaces, attending and supporting actions led by people of color and events and base-building so that more white people in the area are doing so as well. This means working on policy change around policing and incarceration on the local level, as well as supporting the work of those doing policy change work in housing, education, food justice, and transportation across the city. Though this is not the typical “community service” work promoted through my academic position, as an accomplice I see this work as having profound implications that social services board work does not. Instead of working within boards to strengthen non-profits that often reinforce dynamics of dependency and disempowerment of marginalized people, I choose to work on the policies that continue to push people to marginalization and subjugation. While doing this, I have also finally begun to listen to the call by many organizers of color to organize white people, widely base building for anti-racist change.

### **Moving the Conversation Forward**

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Terence Crutcher

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During the interlude between our conclusion of writing of this paper and the time you are reading this work we anticipate countless more unjust deaths of members of the Black community committed by the state and vigilantes. We also anticipate continued uprising and messy dialogues around what it means actively work for and demand racial justice. As academics in social work and education, we believe that scholar activists must work in coalition across disciplines. We envision writing this paper as part of a call to conversation for white scholars in the academy, in particular those in the fields of social work and education. In the sections above, we explored the ways we can challenge ourselves to become accomplices in our fields: through our roles in the classroom, our scholarship, and

service to both our university and greater communities. Following the voices of people of color who have problematized ally politics (e.g., Anzaldúa, 2013; Indigenous Action Media, 2015; Tipu's Tiger, 2015), we interrogated how we can move beyond the role of *benevolent ally* toward a scholar activist who takes risks and action in our daily lives to destabilize white supremacy.

Systems of privilege and oppression are complex and run through all elements of our lives and institutions. Thus, imagining ways to disrupt such systems may seem overwhelming, impossible even. However, Allan Johnson (2013), suggested that, "It is in small and humble choices that privilege, oppression, and the movement toward something better actually happen (p. 613)." He recommended finding "little ways to withdraw support from [oppressive systems], starting with yourself" (Johnson, 2013, p. 615). Based on our discussions, experiences, as well as essays written by people of color, we will close this paper with considerations for white scholar activists who seek to live a life of an accomplice:

### **Reflect on Intentions**

At times, allies who come from a position of privilege may not be working in the best interest of the communities they seek to empower (or "save"). Accomplices seek not only to re-allocate power, but to dismantle our system of white supremacy. This can lead to cognitive dissonance and discomfort for many allies who benefit from these systems in ways they do not understand until that privilege and benefit is threatened. Thus, accomplices can begin by moving their gaze inward and reflecting on their own intentions, motivations, and emotions, with a radically honest view of how they are engaging in this work and why. This is an iterative process that accomplices return to throughout their journey.

### **Center Privilege and Oppression in our Scholarship and Teaching**

As you conceptualize your work, center concepts of race or other forms of oppression in your curriculum, pedagogy, and research. How do dynamics of privilege and oppression impact that which you seek to study or understand? How do they impact that which you seek to explore in a particular semester or class? Accomplices would risk the discomfort and potential backlash from colleagues and students, which may appear through course evaluations and promotion recommendations. Centering these ideas, rather than leaving them to one token class or to the special issue of a journal, as a "benevolent ally" might do, allows for students and others in our various fields to understand how these issues impact practice and policy across the profession.

### **Pay Attention, Listen, Tell About It**

Notice what's happening in the world around you and learn to listen and encourage others do the same. While allies might be propelled by white guilt, leading to self-centered decision making, accomplices engage in continuous, critical investigations of race, self, and society. This requires listening to the stories of others. Notice and honor discomfort, question it, and move beyond. While self-proclaimed allies may frequently share stories of

racism and their emotionally pleas for justice on social media and in other spaces, they run the risk of dominating the conversation or, alternatively, becoming inactive due to feelings of guilt. Accomplices share stories with family members, neighbors, and colleagues that challenge structures of white privilege and engage in dialogues that move the conversation forward. Accomplices also seek to leverage their privilege to access platforms where they can speak out against white supremacy while simultaneously engaging in moments of quiet to hold space for people of color to occupy.

### **Leverage Resources**

An important distinction between an ally and an accomplice is the intentional manipulation of resources to support racial justice. While some self-identified allies claim to support civil rights movements, some may even directly profit through packaged, professional development programs, they often fail to re-allocate resources and funding to directly support oppressed communities. Accomplices notice and share what resources might be available as an academic that are not available to communities who are actively working to challenge unjust and white supremacist systems. This may be access to grant bodies, office supplies, printing, meeting space, library and research resources, and otherwise. This may also include leveraging “service learning” opportunities for students to be a part of canvassing for ongoing social movements.

### **Build Genuine Coalitions with People of Color**

Allies may take actions in the name of social justice, without developing an understanding of the needs and challenges facing communities of color. In doing so, an ally runs the risk of setting their own agenda and choosing which issues to address. On the contrary, accomplices learn what organizing by POC is going on in their communities and within their academic institution, and explore ways they can work in solidarity with this organizing. This may mean working with white people to turn out to POC led events and to become familiar with and a part of acting for change on policies that negatively impact POC. We should note that solidarity work takes mutual consent and trust. Take time to build lines of communication with POC leaders and organizers in your community and within your academic institution. One specific organization which white faculty could initiate or begin working with immediately is a local chapter of Showing Up for Racial Justice (SURJ), an organization that seeks to move white people to social action as part of a multi-racial majority “through community organizing, mobilizing, and education” (Showing Up for Racial Justice, 2016). SURJ works in solidarity with and constantly seeks a process of accountability to POC led organizations and movements, both on the local and national levels.

### **Direct Action**

Take action without waiting for community members of color to invite you. Allies may wait on the sidelines until called to action for fear of overstepping. This puts the onus of organizing and teaching primarily on people of color. Accomplices find ways to be accountable for their actions, looking to the experience of others who are already involved

in the work. This can be through community organizations such as SURJ, through faculty organizing on campus, or as an individual in your everyday life, interrupting injustice that you see or are made aware of by your community members and colleagues of color.

There isn't one right way to move to accomplice action against white supremacy. We acknowledge that this may look different depending on your work environment and the communities you serve. It's messy, hard, and we may not always get it right, however the necessity to take action is urgent. We realize there are risks inherent in the work to become involved on the front lines of social and cultural change. The academic as accomplice perspective asks a lot of each of us. Yet, to build a more liberatory world for us all, our view is that we can do no less.

### **Postscript**

Readers of this document should note the following events that occurred over the course of brainstorming, writing, and revision of this paper (August-December 2016): Based on data gathered and analyzed by The Guardian (Swaine et al., 2016) 81 people identified as "Black," 58 people identified as "Hispanic or Latino," and 6 people identified as "Native American" died by police action or while in police custody. According to data collected by the Washington Post (Tate, Jenkins, Rich, Muyskens, Elliott, Mellnik, & Williams, 2016), 434 people identified as "Black," "Hispanic," or "Other" (and not as "White") were shot and killed by police in the year 2016 alone. This does not include those who died by other means while in police custody. For many, challenging and dismantling white supremacy is not a theoretical argument- it is a matter of life and death.

Up to date information on those killed by police or while in police custody in the United States since summer of 2015 continues to be gathered via both [The Guardian](#) and [The Washington Post](#).

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