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Bringing Light to the Unconscious: A Theoretical Examination of Racism Through the Adlerian Lens of Social Interest

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BRINGING LIGHT TO THE UNCONSCIOUS: A THEORETICAL EXAMINATION OF
RACISM THROUGH THE ADLERIAN LENS OF SOCIAL INTEREST

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ABSTRACT

BRINGING LIGHT TO THE UNCONSCIOUS: A THEORETICAL EXAMINATION OF
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This theoretical paper posits that racial oppression ensues in part due to a lack of social interest, manifested by excessive self-interest in the projection of negative white attributions onto people of color. Excessive white self-interest not only divides whites and Black people but within people groups and among individuals; all are negatively impacted by racism, and to believe otherwise is to succumb to the dangerous falsity of zero-sum thinking. Furthermore, a scholarly case is made for the amplification of social interest by a lowering of white defenses and a reclamation of one's authentic parts of self. Specifically, one must acknowledge, claim, and examine internalized white power structures, which denote ways of thinking, feeling, and being that uphold white superiority and nullify relationships of equity which welcome all parts of the self. In examining one's defenses and the vulnerability behind them, one can hope to re-engage in a more wholesome and healthy way that prioritizes shared power relationships instead of power over relationships (Hill, 2022). This process is often ambiguous, nonlinear, personal, and subjective; it is a personal kind of learning. This dissertation is available in open access at AURA (https://aura.antioch.edu) and OhioLINK ETD Center (https://etd.ohiolink.edu).

Keywords: social interest, feelings of inferiority, racism, the gaze, dysconsciousness, decolonization of psychology

Dedication

I dedicate this paper to my dog, Sawyer. Dogs know no arbitrary boundaries imposed between individuals as mechanisms of power. Dogs don't need social interest.

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In addition to my partner, Juan Pablo, my mother, Cheryl, and my friend, Helen, all of whom supported me endlessly by listening to me ramble about racism and helped maintain my enthusiasm through collaborative brainstorming, I would like to thank Dr. Melissa Kennedy, my esteemed Dissertation Chair, role model and baking buddy; Dr. William Heusler, Committee Member; and Dr De La Torre, Committee Member, for their dedication and support. I can't imagine a more honorable undertaking than the task of shaping the next generation of psychologists, and I consider you three integral parts of my doctoral journey. Thank you for your encouragement, but more importantly, thank you for always making me think.

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Statement of Positionality

I knew from the beginning that I was to write about race. I did not know what form it would take or what point I would make. As a white woman, I was unsure of how to accomplish this task. The one idea I knew would be integral to the development of this work is that it is not in humanity's interest to be self-interested.

Let me introduce myself. My name is Elle Harris. In the winter, my skin is the color of paper. During the summer, I am a compilation of rust-colored freckles among the early beginnings of sunspots. My eyes are a dark honey-color. My dark blonde hair is stick straight except along the hairline, where it gathers into small curls. My facial structure, according to others, is undeniably Eastern European. Everyone in my family is white, including those who have joined by marriage, and most possess pale coloring. Even my dog is of unusually light color, with white fur and light blue eyes; in El Paso, Texas, our hometown, the pair of us was called "las gueritas," a casual phrase for "white people."

Growing up in El Paso, Mexican culture sometimes melds with my own. I belong to two: one by skin and racial association, the other, by direct enfoldment into her Mexican way of living, by my childhood nanny. However, these intersections of my identity mark the privilege of other races with no mention of the hardship that accompanies skin that is not white. Even though I appreciate my nanny's loving gesture into her familial protection, I also recognize the incongruities it presents were I to claim her culture as my own.

My motivation to involve myself in this work may be better illustrated by a glimpse into my childhood: a book worm, I read fairytales during my car rides to my private elementary school, but rarely did I forget to lift my eyes for the stretch of drive that overlooked Mexico, divorced from us by the dried-up Río Grande River and a chain link fence, the banal stench of

burning cardboard as people without electricity creatively forged warmth. My brothers joked with their Mexican private school friends, "Where did you leave your muddy boots this morning when you crossed?" The families of my fellow students had made such great sacrifices for their children to be there, that they willingly and gracefully side-stepped the micro-aggressions heaped upon them by their white counterparts. Socioeconomic status seemingly melted the racial divide in El Paso, and yet the majority of our 90% Mexican town did not benefit from this selective homophily. Not our housekeeper, who left her baby each week to care for my parents' three white-skinned ones and refused to eat dinner with my family at the table even when six-year-old me begged her to, as my best friend; nor the majority of the students of my frighteningly public high school, many of whom managed with a scant few words of English, and not one of whom joined me in my accelerated high school program. I consider these glimpses into the suffering of Otherness as my earliest comparative exposures to racism, "impactful moment[s] in which awareness of privilege, in any social identity domain, burns through dysconscious barriers and into clear and undeniable focus." These moments were impactful "due to the emotional salience of interpersonal relationships" between myself and Others (Bergkamp et al., 2022, p. 708).

When I arrived in southern California a decade ago, I soon discovered I was lacking in my multicultural awareness. The concepts of "white privilege," and "white saviorism" were new to me, as were Robin DiAngelo and Peggy McIntosh; McIntosh's (2019) invisible knapsack caused me to feverishly contemplate "some of the daily effects of white privilege in my life" (p. 191). For example, it shocked me that someone might not be sure that if she needed legal or medical help, her race would not work against her (McIntosh, 2019). However, I quickly, in my study of cultural humility, developed affinities for Jung's shadow self, Freud's unconscious, and

Adler's social interest, all of which encapsulate our human tendency to disavow, personally and societally, unappealing pieces of self, and sought a way to combine them all.

I project my frustration with my perpetually marginal tardiness onto my South American partner, who views time differently than I do. Societally, we as white people project our drug addictions, our aggression, our poverty—anything unsavory—onto people of color. I soon learned that I possessed a kind of knowing unbeknownst to most others, or known, but not utilized. Even as the racial minority in our border town, we white people were still the social majority. At a tender age, I somehow knew that the land I was standing on was not really mine, and it was hard to reconcile that with the sense of blatant entitlement I witnessed around me. It was clear to me that my nanny skirted the cracks in her own life to smooth over the fractures in mine. I knew the Other within my childhood self, and I know that this type of healing and gap-bridging is not found in racial models or textbooks, despite their importance, but in a compassion so naked and vulnerable that I am the Other and the Other is me. When the Other flourishes, I flourish. And vice versa, ideally. The concept of mutual flourishing led me to Adler's social interest, the true star of this paper.

This paper began as a reaction to a specific breed of thought harmonious with the charity work of multiculturalism and allyship—the idea that lack of empirical understanding impedes connection and healing. The unfolding of this paper correlates with learning, in layers, to better trust myself and the human part of me, in all of us, who instinctually connects with others— models, directions, and rulebooks aside. Some think of this human aspect as one's childhood self. This paper is my effort to articulate more clearly what I came to know as true regarding human capacity to heal by connection, and to share that with other agents in the domain of race. Alok Vaid-Menon (2020), Indian American gender non-conforming author, writer, and speaker,

said, "It's never been about comprehension, it's always been about compassion. You shouldn't

need to understand to believe [anyone is] worthy of dignity and safety" (p. 3).

The object of this paper is not to create anything new but to rearrange the beautiful,

essential voices of select people of color to formulate a theory that in part explains the origins of

racism, and in part offers a way to do better; "Do the best you can until you know better. Then

when you know better, do better" (Winfrey & Lowe, 1998, p. 132). This paper has helped me

make sense of my responsibility to speak agent-to-agent to other white people—to help others

like me to remove the blinders that keep us from advancing our privilege awareness—and to

consistently engage in the kind of brutally honest self-work that might increase equity among

people of color. This dissertation has helped hold one white person—me—accountable not just

to talking about subversion of racism with others in theory, but also to employing its practice. I

am strongly committed not to getting this right but to always trying.

CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

Adler, with his concept of social interest, explained that society functions properly and fully when an individual's self-interest aligns with large-scale societal interest (Overholser, 2010). Social interest is the intersection of these two, of self and societal interest, a point at which the individual's existence serves or advances society, and vice versa (Adler et al., 2006). When one gains and prospers, both gain and prosper. Adler stated, "We have no problems in our lives but social problems: and these problems can only be solved if we are interested in others" (Adler, 1976, p. 133). Adler primarily focused on the individual and her immediate circle with little emphasis on the societal level; but what would it mean at the societal level, or for an entire country, for large groups or even generations of individuals, to grow and live with diminished interest in others? What is the large-scale impact of reduced social interest?

Some believe that the polarizing effects of 2020's racial tension and release are second in magnitude only to the decade preceding the Civil War (1861–1865), when congressional representatives became accustomed to carrying arms to the Capitol (Buchanan et al., 2020). Social interest is clearly misaligned. Through the psychological lens of Adler's social interest, this paper argues that a causal component of racism is a lack of connection with others due to excessive pursuit of self-interest. White supremacy serves as a preemptive strike against feeling inferior, a result of competition and fear of insufficient resources. Were we to embrace this fear and collaborate with others, might we dissolve oppression? This paper argues in favor of such an exploration and shift toward a healthy alignment of social interest for all.

The primary task of this dissertation is to explain how repression of pieces of the self is a major facet of racism, and that for agents to address these pieces of self would lessen the need to oppress others and allow us to unite and connect with one another under a common good. The

paper is mapped out in a standard, linear fashion, from *Intersection of Adlerian Theory and the Roots of Oppression*, to *Decolonizing Social Interest Theory* to *Theoretical Implications: Whiteness Inhibits Connection.* The first of these three sections lays the foundation for this theory with a comprehensive overview of Adler's social interest theory and an explanation of how social interest or lack thereof relates to racism. Subsections reveal the role of defense mechanisms in perpetuating racism and the impact of racism on the oppressor and the oppressed. The intention is to recruit the reader in pursuit of resolving racism.

The second chapter acknowledges the colonizing nature of Adlerian theory, and how it must be interpreted within the context of Adler's social location before choosing to utilize segments of it to cross swords with white supremacy. Subsections highlight the colonial underpinnings of personality theories, examine Adler in his cultural context, and provide a means to apply social interest theory to the practice of cultural humility going forward. The third chapter explains how whiteness inhibits social interest and promotes a counter-productive, manualized, formulaic approach to anti-racism that lacks genuine compassion and is not sustainable. The intent of this final section is to nudge the reader into the uncomfortable ambiguity of reclaiming feelings of inferiority which manifest via racism and prevent social interest.

CHAPTER II: INTERSECTION OF ADLERIAN THEORY AND THE ROOTS OF OPPRESSION

Important Definitions

Race

Race defined as a power identity is most applicable to this dissertation as power indicates a socially constructed disjunct between those who have it and those who do not, which is a natural misalignment of self and societal interest (Kendi, 2019). In fact, "Race creates new forms of power: the power to categorize and judge, elevate and downgrade, include and exclude" (Kendi, 2019, para. 15). The objective of race is not to distinguish and celebrate cultural groups but to group humans by an arbitrary metric so as to dominate, with white people at the top. This hierarchy of humans, determined by skin color, justifies the exploitation of the lower groups by the upper groups; the subtlety of race is that it makes oppression seem natural, or even merited.

Race as a power identity is best explained with an example. Although "the need to justify African slavery preceded colonial America" and distinguishing between Black and white can be dated back to the Spanish Inquisition (approximately 1478), Bacon's Rebellion, in 1676 colonial Virginia, serves as a poignant reminder of the desire for white dominance which underlies the invention and use of race (Kendi, 2017). In these pre-slavery years, the working class was composed of Blacks and whites alike, who, bonded in their shared low socioeconomic status, behaved as equals. Marriage between two people of differing colors was common (Dabiri, 2021). Actually, "where whites and Blacks found themselves with common problems, common work, common enemy in their master, they behaved toward one another as equals" (Zinn, 2015, p. 31). Bacon united the working class, of all skin colors, in a targeted orientation of their resentment toward the English elite, for whom, Kendi said, "poor whites and enslaved Blacks joining hands presaged the apocalypse" (2017, p. 52). After this failed uprising, whites were granted more

privileges than Blacks so as to disjoin laborers by skin color and prevent further cooperation and subsequent potential insubordination to the English rule. Whites who partook in this rebellion were pardoned, while Blacks were each prescribed 30 lashes. It became common practice that "all whites now wielded absolute power to abuse any African person," and poor whites were even mobilized in amateur militias to prepare for any insurrection of Black people against whites (Kendi, 2017, p. 54). Most Blacks became enslaved and were stripped of all rights, but even free Blacks lost the rights to vote, bear arms, or bear witness (Kivel, 2017). Zero-sum thinking fears white loss for Black gain, when in fact, whiteness constitutes and was founded on Black loss for white gain.

Furthermore, it was intuited that resentment of a people group based on the arbitrary metric of race would help consolidate power to the top of the hierarchy. The lens of race was used as a ploy to distract lower class whites from their oppression by working class whites, "so that whiteness takes the heat off wealth-hoarding elites while everyone else fights each other" (Dabiri, 2021, p. 57). Instead of fighting for a more equal distribution of wealth or a fairer healthcare system, then, lower class whites fight people of color to evoke the reminder of their own superiority. The sense of compelling superiority embedded into whiteness distracts from the exclusivity of healthcare, unaffordability of housing, and discrimination against other identities, like sexual orientation or physical disabilities. The only entity to benefit here is a handful of wealthy white elites, while the white majority continues to suffer alongside but just a little bit apart from people of color. The invention of race opposes a common good and prevents people of all skin colors from uniting to overthrow current power structures with the demand for a higher quality of life.

Racism and Whiteness

Racism, like race, is inherently divisive in that it further obscures the connectedness of white and Black; from this perspective, social interest, or a common good, are irrelevant and nonexistent. Part of this problem is one's definition of racism. When signified as overt acts of meanness, a white person can easily claim that she plays no role in racism *like those other bad whites*, and distance herself from the suffering of people of color; she imagines that she can "disarticulate herself from the history of whiteness and the ways in which whiteness continues to assert its power, privilege, and hegemony" merely by claiming to be personally innocent (Yancy, 2012, p. 160). An over-emphasis on interpersonal racial tensions and microaggressions over-simplifies racism by obscuring the insidious, pervasive nature of whiteness and the drive for white superiority that perpetuates racism (Dabiri, 2021). This reductionistic perspective of racism shifts the responsibility for addressing and lessening racism onto abstract others who are less aware of their racist ways. Many white people cannot conceive of the enmeshment, or even the causal nature of whiteness and racism because to do so would be to negate the possibility of white innocence; to admit that whiteness is in its essence, power and control, and the force behind racism, might be viewed as indictment of oneself (Tyler et al., 2021).

Yancy (2012) recounted a class discussion about bell hook's (2008) conceptualization of whiteness as terror, which provoked negative reactions in his white students who did not view whiteness and racism as interconnected. A Black student advocated for this proposed conceptualization by describing her troubling experience at an all-white school, where she had been referred to as "the black girl" (p. 341). In reaction to this description, a white student then asserted that "she did not understand how her whiteness could possibly be a site of terror as she did not own any Black people as slaves and was not violent toward Black people" (p. 159). This

scenario exemplifies one of the myriad ways white people distance themselves from the problem of racism to avoid a sense of culpability, and "the fear, guilt, shame, and anger that result from privilege awareness" (Bergkamp et al., 2022, p. 11). In doing so, the white student does not hear the suffering of her fellow Black classmate; she cannot let herself be impacted by her classmate's experience lest her fragile truth of white innocence, a foundational component of her identity, be shaken. This "view of the white subject … obscures its status as *raced* and elevates it to the status of human qua human" (Yancy, 2012, p. 161). In other words, the white student reduced the prejudice faced by the Black student to something that could and does happen to anyone. The white student invalidated her Black classmate's experience in her blindness to "the morally atrocious and enduring history of Black people as the objects of white insults," a form of protection that maintains her comfort and identity but divides her from the Black student (Yancy, 2012, p. 160).

Many white people, perhaps unconsciously, see themselves as abstract, raceless, autonomous, and nondescript beings who transcend the violent history of whiteness and racism of whiteness as terror, as separate from whiteness; one might think of herself as *just a white person*. White people act as if "'free' to move through the stream of history unmarked by race, for the problem of race pertains to 'those Others'" (Yancy, 2012, p. 161). But being able to question the existence of oppression and to twist one's perception of one's role in it, is a privilege; only white people can choose to distance themselves from racial privilege and oppression and from awareness of the parasitic relationship in which people of color are ensnared and prosecuted (Applebaum, 2011; Yancy, 2012). When the definition of racism includes whiteness situated accurately in its historical context, whites cannot escape a painful

relatedness to the invention of Blackness and their role in Blackness as marginalized, and with it the opportunity to formulate a different relationship with Black people.

Much of literature and media focuses on the victims of racism, but examining Black experience alone is insufficient for understanding the complete narrative of oppression on the basis of skin color; whiteness must be studied. For, according to Tyler et al. (2021), "the etiology of black issues lies in White personality structure, cultural values, philosophical orientations, politics, and behaviors." In other words, whiteness drives racism, and racism is an apparatus or representative of whiteness. To understand racism and therefore the relationship between whiteness and racism, one must first define whiteness.

Common denominators of definitions of whiteness from prominent authors of color include invisibility, ubiquity, and whiteness as superior. The invisibility of whiteness means that there are people, and there are Black people, brown people, etc., which reifies the normalization and standardization of whiteness and automatically bestows dominance to whiteness. J. E. Helms (2017) presented whiteness as "the overt and subliminal socialization processes and practices, power structures, laws, privileges, and life experiences that favor the White racial group over all Others" (p. 718). That messages of whiteness are often "subliminal" (p. 718) makes whiteness more difficult to challenge and conceals the damage of whiteness from white people themselves, although people of color can hardly avoid it. For people of color, whiteness is inescapable, but for white people, awareness of whiteness requires great effort (Ahmed, 2004, para. 1). The invisibility of whiteness allows white people to disconnect themselves from racism.

The ubiquity of whiteness becomes apparent in whiteness as the default. The Smithsonian National Museum of African American History and Culture (2022) defined "whiteness and white racialized identity [as] the way that white people, their customs, culture, and beliefs operate as

the standard by which all other groups are compared" (para. 3). White social practices, ideologies, and behavioral patterns create a binary in which the antithesis of whiteness is not only Blackness but everything but whiteness. Yancy (2012) characterized "the heart of whiteness [as] a profound disavowal: 'I am not that!'" (p. 20). This disavowal applies to the inferiority that is everything but whiteness. A person is either white or Other, and the Other, regardless of her specific cultural background, is intrinsically inferior. Whiteness is therefore everywhere in that it marks and separates from itself everything that is not part of white culture. No one remains free from white judgement.

Finally, superiority is the purpose of whiteness. It is not merely a subgroup of white people who embody white supremacy but whiteness itself was created, as exemplified above in Bacon's Rebellion, to distinguish one group as superior; whiteness itself is divisive. Some even liken whiteness to "the ownership of the earth, forever and ever, Amen!" (Du Bois, 1999, p. 15). Conservation of one's power requires constant maintenance, which necessitates that all aspects of whiteness serve to reinforce the installation of whiteness as superior. Similarly, Tyler et al. (2021) proposed that:

> central to the concept of whiteness are cultural worldviews, self-beliefs, and emotions, attitudes, and behavioral reactions to issues of race that White persons have. These worldviews are individually endorsed and institutionally maintained for the purpose of producing a hierarchically structured social existence where White skin, features, cultural values, philosophical leanings, and behavioral practices are disproportionately valued over those associated with Black people. (p. 9)

Much like the reproduction of cells through binary fission, whiteness multiplies through white cultural patterns which infect even the Othered, through internalized oppression, in support of maintenance of white superiority (Ahmed, 2004).

In sum, whiteness's invisibility, ubiquity, and superiority create an environment in which white people define the rules of human interaction. Therefore, white people have the ability to deny the realities of people of color and re-define them from a white perspective. As such, a definition of racism that does not consider whiteness is severely short-sighted and cannot offer hope for legitimate, sustainable change.

Furthermore, a more accurate, comprehensive definition of racism which moves beyond overt acts of meanness and from which no white can exclude herself is racism as the vehicle of whiteness. The daily individual, institutional, and structural patterns of racism "preserve whiteness by ensuring that White people enjoy an exclusive, perpetual state of perceived social elevation and entitlement (White privilege)" (Tyler et al., 2021, p. 8). Racism is best conceptualized, "though not exclusively, as uneventful acts of being white, such as walking into a store and not being followed," or daily unconscious practice of McIntosh's (2019) invisible knapsack of privileges (Yancy, 2012, p. 164). This definition of racism binds whiteness to oppression; the two are inextricable. To be white is to be complicit in racism and to acknowledge the social embeddedness of all. The innocent white is a mythological creature, which is understandably a threatening and fear-inducing notion as it requires vulnerability in the restructuring of one's white identity. White people are not individually at fault for racism, but acknowledging the role of whiteness in the perpetuation of racism and taking actions to untangle oneself from whiteness places whites in a unique position to engage in mutual empathy with

people of color and to make choices as a whole that benefit everyone, to engage in true social interest.

Whiteness cannot exist as a vague, neutral, standalone construct, or an afterthought to Blackness, because at the heart of whiteness lies the need for power at all costs, specifically by oppressing the Not White. Anyone with light-colored skin benefits from racism as the preservation of white privilege at the expense of all others. Yancy (2012) encouraged his

> white students to think about their white embedded and embodied selves as products of *the 'law' of the other*—that is, ways of having undergone interpellation, citation, and socio-structural positioning beyond their intentions, especially their 'good intentions,' beyond their sense of themselves as 'self-lawed' or as the site of exclusive transcendence. (p. 167)

Although individual whites might not routinely engage in overt acts of meanness, we all engage in racism by benefitting from structures which grant privilege to whites, which override individual desires and intentions to be non-racist or anti-racist. Blackness functions to uplift the self-conception of whiteness. Blackness and whiteness share the same origin story as they were created together for one to bear the blames and faults of the other, to uphold the image of the other as pure and good. Only by recognizing the relatedness of Black and white, by properly defining racism in the contact of whiteness, does lessening racism become a common good that benefits all.

Social Interest

Adler supported the notion of "the absolute truth of social embeddedness" by citing Darwin's claim that physically, man is not adapted to live alone (Adler et al., 2006, p. 132). Humans first learned to work together, specifically through division of labor, to solve problems

that one could not have solved on her own and which would have condemned her to failure. A human individual, then, relies on social interest as a tool to provoke her to this drive for productivity and in turn, contributes to social interest with the results from this drive. Social interest is the reason one seeks to expend her energy positively. Social interest occurs when one's individual needs align with those of greater society, so that by fulfilling one's own needs—by being productive—one fulfills the needs of others. For example, social interest is both the food a nursing mother consumes and the milk with which she nurses her child. Social interest is a balanced feedback loop between the needs of an individual and the needs of a community. Adler (1956) stated, "In this way, the demands of the community become personal demands, and the immanent logic of human society, with its matters of course and necessities, becomes the individual task for the child" (p. 138). The community succeeds insomuch as does an individual, and vice versa. In Adler's beautiful language, social interest is quite simply "to see with the eyes of another, to hear with the ears of another, to feel with the heart of another" (Adler et al., 2006, p. 135). Social interest is more than a feeling; it is a way of living.

The Paradox of Inferiority and Superiority

Few can dispute the presence of racism today. Indeed, what has been referred to as the Racial Reckoning of 2020 brought racism into public conversation in a profound way. Black lives that did not seem to matter enough to merit survival include George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, Andre Hill, Manuel Ellis, Rayshard Brooks, Daniel Preud, Michael Brent, Charles Ramos Angelo Quinta, Marcellis Stinette, Jonathan Price, Jijon Kizzee, Carlos Carson, David MacAtee, Dreasjon Reed, John Neville, Atatiana Jefferson, and countless others (Evans, 2021). Countrywide riots and protests against polices' lack of multicultural education and awareness and COVID-19's exposure of the vastly unequal access to wellbeing precipitated the forward

momentum of the Black Lives Matter (BLM) campaign and acknowledgement of the US's racial

divide (Salo, 2020). Some understand current events as mere cyclical repetitions of 1992's

Rodney King riots or 2012's nationwide protests regarding Trayvon Martin's murder, while

others believe this collective tragedy to be the biggest of its kind in history, and hopefully, the

most impactful and transformational in terms of the permeation of Black suffering in white

hearts (Buchanan et al., 2020; History.com Editors, 2009).

  This growth toward equality is cyclical, discontinuous, and can seem irredeemable; there

is a clear pattern in which a tragedy, usually a death or group of deaths, precedes a wave of

awareness of and appreciation for Black lives, or in the best of cases, a temporary collective

commitment on the part of white people to better understand and untangle their privilege to help

level inequalities (Keuss, 2021). Why must a tragedy necessitate this shift in attitude? Death and

tragedy evoke compassion, but that collective anti-racist efforts pause between tragedies suggests

the need for more enduring compassion. More enduring compassion would lead to more

sustainable changes, or removal of this cycle by the roots instead of chopping off the tips of the

weed.

  What provokes the human tendency to oppress, demean or devalue others? According to

Adler, humans are in a constant state of feeling inferior, which, for many, is healthy, and results

in a drive for productivity and positive societal contributions (Adler, 1964a). To be human means

to be and to believe oneself inferior. We are born with this "great line of activity—this struggle

to rise from an inferior to a superior position, from defeat to victory, from below to above"

(Adler et al., 2006, p. 104). It is important to note that Adler used the word "superior," which

carries a negative connotation today, to signify self-enhancement; superiority meant reaching

competence or a kind of self-actualization. Adler's meaning is clearly distinct from supremacy,

specifically white supremacy; Adler's superiority is a healthy pursuit. Throughout Adler's writing, he reiterated that we are born with the desire to move situations or circumstances from a minus to a plus.

Freudian theory can be viewed as elucidating this concept of life-sustaining forward energy as Adler's ideas closely echoed Freud's. Freud incorporated Newton's laws of motion to support the notion that humans conduct and are charged with maintaining and releasing energy to design and reach goals to fulfill an overall purpose of life (Adler, 2001; Gaztambide, 2015). Since "all problems are interpersonal problems," when an individual is properly connected to herself and to her community, she expends this energy in a way that is beneficial at the personal and societal levels (Kishimi & Koga, 2018; Overholser, 2010). In other words, her self-interest aligns with social interest, or societal or communal interest. As the self-interests of individuals align with the societal interests, greater wellness can be found for both the individual and society.

However, there are instances in which these two interests do not align, and an individual deviates and becomes more concerned with self than with the common good. Many experience excessive feelings of inferiority, perhaps due to exacerbated fear of failure or abnormal childhood adversity; those who experience marginalization, Frantz Fanon (1967) said, are made inferior. Therefore, "a permanent adaptation [to the need to feel competent or superior] would be nothing more than an exploitation of the struggles of other persons" (Adler, 1964a, p. 98). In other words, "the continual struggle for security urges towards the conquest of present reality in favor of a better" (Adler et al., p. 98). Those of us who feel excessively inferior can choose not to compensate with healthy strife but to overcompensate; we might preemptively push others down

so that they cannot out-achieve us. Is fear, or the discomfort of perceived or potential inferiority, the birthplace of oppression?

This concept of fear-based, preventative tyranny over one group eerily mirrors a statement by Abraham Lincoln:

> I will say in addition to this that there is a physical difference between the white and black races which I believe will forever forbid the two races living together on terms of social and political equality. And inasmuch as they cannot so live, while they do remain together there must be the position of superior and inferior, and I as much as any of her man am in favor of having the superior position assigned to the white race. (Mr. Lincoln and Negro Equality, 1860)

Lincoln illustrated Adler's belief with a more concrete example, whereby a zero-sum game is assumed, and one is encouraged to join the race to oppress before she herself is oppressed by others. In more psychological terms, the individual who decides to cheat in her quest for healthy productivity devalues others so that she might idealize herself (McWilliams, 2011).

Similarly, from perhaps a notorious example of excessive inferiority and its resulting tyranny over others, Hitler's mass murder of six million Jews, one might incorrectly and naively posit that the head authorities of this movement were not initially quite aware of the grotesque inhumanity of their actions. Many use the term brainwashed to refer to those in the Nazi party because mass extermination does not seem to be the initial goal of Nazi Germany. However, the initial goal of Nazi Germany was something far more insidious, intellectual, profound, and longer-lasting: the oppression of one group to re-allocate its power to that of the self-appointed dominant group (Wilkerson, 2021).

In fact, Nazi Germany's first step in their tyrannical quest was inquiry as to how the U.S. had instituted and maintained slavery and extensive oppression of Black people thereon afterward. In the first of the Nazi bureaucrats' meetings that ended in the formulation of the Nuremburg Laws, it is recorded in the opening minutes that Franz Gürtner, the Reich Minister of Justice, introduced a memorandum suggesting that Germany turn to the United States for inspiration in their quest to fool an entire country into the dehumanization of a minority group. Wilkerson (2021) detailed that, having admired and even envied the United States' treatment of minorities, specifically their strict immigration laws, slavery, and genocide of native peoples, "Hitler especially marveled at the American knack for maintaining an air of robust innocence in the wake of mass death" (p. 81). This innocence refers to the "American paradox of proclaiming liberty for all men while holding subsets of its citizenry in near total subjugation" (p. 79).

U.S. oppression of the marginalized was/is successful because white people were able to fool themselves and the rest of their group members into believing that everyone has freedom, so that while the marginalized were/are sometimes subtly and other times ostentatiously tyrannized and deprived of liberty, white people closed/close their eyes and clung/cling to the comfort extracted from their/our belief in freedom. Kendi (2017) poignantly wrote that "some Puritans carried across their judgement of the many African peoples as one inferior people … because the need to justify African slavery preceded colonial America" (p. 19). Kendi's word choice alludes to the intentionality behind the subjugation of others. White people *choose* to oppress people of color. It is a choice that serves a purpose. Implicit bias is an infection. So great was Nazi awareness of their misbehavior and plans for domination that they knew they needed to conceal the truth from the public and execute their wrongdoings subtly. To do this, they turned to the U.S., who had successfully compelled much of their dominant group population to choose

self-interest and comfort over compassion, kindness, and true equality. Nazi Germany, and slavery-era U.S. for that matter, knew exactly what they were doing.

 Lincoln and Hitler each saw a competitive race to superiority through the lens of a zero-sum game, and vowed to earn and maintain that coveted power. The purpose of mentioning Lincoln and Hitler is not to compare the outcomes of their choices to enter this race; although Lincoln was "preeminently the white man's president," his individual views regarding people of color are obscure as he was "neither a common Negrophobe nor a principled champion of racial equality" and made sure to uphold professional attitudes that functioned "within the limits allowable by public opinion at a given time" (Frederickson, 1975, p. 40). Discussion of Lincoln and Hitler serves to illustrate the tunnel vision of self-interest, seen in many leaders before and after them. Neither could conceive of shared power. Hill (2022) would comment that both leaders saw the other group—Jews and Black people—as competition, so they focused on outperforming and silencing those groups: "the binary is at the root of our fears, leaving no space for nuance or growth" (Hill, 2022, p. 159). In Hitler's Germany, either the Jewish people or the Aryans could maintain the country's power. In the U.S., Lincoln, or at least his people, saw it as either white European-Americans or people of color. In both cases, despite vastly different trajectories, the already-powerful chose to sprint to the finish line.

 Hitler is a near perfect example of the procession of excessive inferiority to overcompensation in the strife for superiority by exploiting others. Historian Timothy Ryback (2015) studied Hitler's early life and, in his book, "Hitler's First Victims: The Quest for Justice," describes a boy so persecuted by his father that his mother, when she tried to prevent the boy from receiving beatings from his father, was beaten herself. In other words, Hitler was deprived of all control as a boy. Naturally, he would seek superiority at all costs as he grew up and did not

confront the inner demons resulting from his childhood trauma. Hitler so neatly demonstrated Adler's social interest/inferiority theory that several sources attribute Adler's inspiration for creation of the inferiority complex to Hitler. However, the timeline of Adler's coining of the term and of Hitler's rise to power do not coincide; Hitler rose to power 25 years after Adler named social interest, which illustrates the prevalence of manipulations of self-interest (Overholser, 2010; Ryback, 2015).

Isolation and societal divides can result from mass feelings of inferiority in children, such as Hitler. Collectively, many individuals who feel excessively inferior lack social interest, prioritize self-interest, and live in such a way that their isolated existence holds meaning for them—as individuals—only, which Adler claimed was no meaning at all (Adler et. al, 2006). Bullying exemplifies this type of self-interested self-isolation by setting one apart from others on the basis of fear; a bully has decided that the need to devalue others in order to preserve her own worth is a worthwhile tactic.

Adler described social interest not only as the cause and result of the drive for productivity/superiority but the source and purpose of a meaningful life (Adler, 1964a). This lack of meaning can lead a group of individuals, from its basic desire to achieve superiority, to exploit others for their energetic strife. This group of individuals might then preemptively oppress others and itself "settle for the semblance of superiority and not for the overcoming of difficulties" (Adler et al., 2006, p. 157). Simply put, a lack of social interest due to excessive inferiority might tempt one people group to put down another. Furthermore, racism, oppression of a people group on the basis of skin color, is a likely outcome of the excessive inferiority-inspired need to overcompensate. The concept of race means that skin color has been chosen as the arbitrary marker of the inferior and of the superior. Specifically, if all humans are born with a sense of

inferiority, white people are incentivized to shed themselves of this concern to tyrannize people of color by depriving them of the chance for equal social opportunity. White people are the beneficiaries of oppression of people of color; had oppression less "positive" gain for the upper hand, it would not exist, or it would have been dismantled by now.

If oppression is a result of prioritizing self-interest over social interest, then it is of great importance to determine the difference between these two interests in practice, so that the individual can pursue the latter. And yet, it is difficult to distinguish the two as many who act in self-interest believe themselves to benefit the common good. If social interest is the intersection between self and societal interest, then self-interest means to live in a way that does not benefit others (Adler et. al, 2006). But how can one determine what benefits others and what does not? Adler's social interest was a personality trait, "genuine concern for the welfare of all individuals," but it lacks operationality (Leak, 2011, p. 1).

For example, in Hitler's first radio address, he described his government's "first and supreme task to restore to the German people unity of mind and will," which he said meant upholding moral Christian foundations and mending "heartbreaking [German] disunity" which had caused the German people to "lose their freedom" (Facing History & Ourselves, 2016, para. 2). Thirteen years earlier, in a public statement, he described his ultimate goal as the removal of the race of Jews altogether, which he described as "tuberculosis of the people's" (United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, n.d.). Hitler's common good extended to Germans but not to Jews or to others, which begs the question: who does social interest encompass?

Similarly, Donald Trump's slogan Make America Great Again is ambiguous as common good has different meanings for various people groups, and what is good for Native Americans living on reservations with fishing shortages is not good for white males who feel threatened by

the dilution of culture as minority populations increase (French, 2023; McGhee, 2021). Surely what Gavin McInnes, founder of Proud Boys, believed is good for his followers is not for those who identify as part of the queer community (Bloch, 2022). What Clarence Thomas believes is the common good for his conservative republican followers is not good for those of low socioeconomic status (SES; Robin, 2019). It would seem that there needs to be an objective formula for determining one's individual path of social interest. However, this kind of pre-determination or clearcut order would nullify one's participation and exercise of creativity, one of Adler's best-loved personality traits, in learning her individual societal role (Adler et al., 2006). While some clearly act against social interest, or even against their own interest, there is no way to determine what one's role or what the common good really looks like.

Us and Otherness: Defense Mechanisms

Humans employ defense mechanisms, or operations conducted to avoid what one perceives as "unbearable pain," or feelings of inferiority (McWilliams, 2011, p. 100.) As mentioned above, acknowledging one's inferiority or her sense of inferiority, is unbearable for some. Some have such a deep sense of inferiority that to acknowledge it is to face unbearable pain. Instead of facing this reality, some unconsciously turn to their defense mechanisms for their promised protection. The individual who employs a defense mechanism

> Is generally trying unconsciously to accomplish one or both of the following: (1) the
> avoidance or management of some powerful, threatening feeling, usually anxiety but
> sometimes overwhelming grief, shame, envy, and other disorganizing emotional
> experiences; and (2) the maintenance of self esteem. (McWilliams, 2011, p. 101)

A defense mechanism offers an alternative to reality. However, defenses are costly to overall functioning, and it might ultimately be better for the individual to feel her overwhelmingly

painful sense of inferiority so that the energy spent on avoidance could be used for more beneficial purposes.

Defense mechanisms can allow those in power to commit excruciatingly harmful acts of oppression without feeling the ensuing suffering of the oppressed. Defense mechanisms also protect the oppressed, the receivers of harmful acts of oppression, from becoming fully aware of their treatment by the oppressor. Such use of defense mechanisms advances a world without social interest; they advance the exploitation that can result from excessive feelings of inferiority, an antithesis of social interest. A muted capacity to feel paves the way for exploitation and oppression. Although many types of defenses are employed in the perpetuation of racism, the most conspicuous ones are splitting, moralization, and dysconsciousness.

Splitting

Whereas social interest encloses all individuals under a common good, splitting divides the individual from others. Before one may fall prey to the prioritization of self-interest above societal interest, she must at some point find where she ends and where others begin; she learns to differentiate between self and other. At birth and in early childhood, a baby understands she and her mother as a "dual unity within one common boundary," and her "'I' is not yet differentiated from [her] 'not-I'" (Mahler, 1972, p. 571). At some point, through the process of differentiation, she comes to realize that she is a separate being from her mother and from others and that even within herself she possesses multiple objects, or components, that comprise her self-concept (Mahler, 1972; McWilliams, 2011). If her childhood is unusually difficult, or if she is taught by others that she is less than worthy, she might then be tempted to, within her self-concept, split herself into her good and bad parts, for the purpose of viewing herself more positively. She might even try to ignore or discard what she deems bad about herself through

repression. By the process of splitting, an individual may choose to acknowledge what she admires in herself and repress what she disdains.

Nancy McWilliams (2011), psychodynamic author, professor, supervisor, and therapist, defined splitting as "a need to organize [one's] perceptions by assigning good and bad valences to everything in [her] world" (p. 116). Splitting is an appealing defense mechanism employed to make sense through oversimplification of complex, confusing, and threatening experiences. The satisfaction that accompanies the categorization of ambiguity can reduce anxiety and maintain self-esteem. In other words, good needs to be separated from bad to protect good.

The problem, of course, is that good and bad are reductionistic categorizations, so this type of organization is a distortion. Splitting is comforting and protects from such great pain that even when confronted with undeniable proof of one's distortions, she still might not be able to see her faulty oversimplification of uncertainty. Frantz Fanon (1967), a Black French psychoanalyst known for his written analyses of the psychology of racism, provided support for the splitting/moralization process by explaining that to challenge one's distorted belief would provoke cognitive dissonance, a feeling of great discomfort when two beliefs seem incompatible (Bergkamp et al., 2022). This discomfort is of such great magnitude that it is more compelling to rationalize, deny, or ignore any evidence that the belief might not be undoubtedly true.

From an Adlerian lens, splitting is a shortcut to superiority, or a semblance of superiority, whereby an individual uplifts herself by tyrannizing others, whether by judging them mentally or by actions and words (Adler et al., 2006). The word "semblance" in the last sentence is key. The superiority one robs from others via bullying is not true superiority but a lonely shadow of true community.

Societally, splitting occurs between groups of people and can be seen through the characterization of one group as the cause of problems, as the scapegoat. Wilkerson (2021) explained that "a scapegoat caste has become necessary for the collective well-being of the castes above it and the smooth functioning of the caste system" (p. 191). A "scapegoat caste" refers to a group of people who, by some arbitrary marker, like skin color or gender, has been separated from other groups and labeled "bad." This group bears the blames for the wrongdoings or fault of other groups so that the other groups, theoretically, can be or think of themselves as "good." Wilkerson (2021) compared our current projection of "the worst aspects of society" onto

> the groups with the least power and the least say in how the country operates [,] to ancient sacrifices within Christianity, whereby a community would sacrifice an animal, usually a lamb, to cleanse themselves of their sins so that they might, in their purity, be spared from God's wrath. In fact, Jesus himself was the very scapegoat for all of humanity, once again, so that we might discard our sins onto his cross and be spared God's wrath. (pp. 191–193)

This split of one's goodness and one's sin is conscious because it was the very purpose of these sacrifices; it is a collective ritual to benefit all but the lamb.

Modern day splitting, over time, because there is such distance from the original oppressor and the rest of a given group, has become implicit and does not stem from conscious choice, nor does it yield healthy benefit. Some split because they observe it in and mirror it from others. Someone might hear repeatedly on the news of incarceration of Black people for drug abuse. She might come to believe in association between Blackness and drug abuse. She might even then blame Black people for drug abuse and dismiss white people from similar offenses. She might derive satisfaction from the implicit knowledge that her race is more sophisticated and

less impulsive and thereby erase these very evils from her self-concept. Little does she know that Black people are no more likely to use drugs than the dominant caste, and that Black people are incarcerated at six times the rates as whites for the same offenses (Wilkerson, 2021).

By attributing these negative qualities to other peoples, the group judging can evade their own shortcomings and feel superior. For example, white alcoholics might scapegoat Native Americans, who have often been associated with excessive alcohol use, to prevent from dealing with their own personal struggles with substance abuse (Kivel, 2017). Their own difficult reactions to their personal struggles, such as anger, disgust, contempt, self-loathing, are projected onto an underserving group. Over time, the dominant group comes to firmly believe that, for example, Mexicans are less successful not because they lack social and socioeconomic opportunity, but because they are lazy, and therefore, inferior to white people. Wilkerson (2021) illustrated the concept of projection with her statement that "Hitler blamed the Jews for everything that was wrong with the world" (p. 47).

Gaztambide (2015), a scholar of Liberation Psychology, also explained the damage done by splitting at the societal level. If many individuals within the same society engage in splitting, there is a collective splitting process. He argued that oppression begins with an "ethics of otherness," or a worldview of us versus other, which recalls Mahler's (1972) "I" and the "not I" (p. 700). Gaztambide (2015) stated, "that which is repressed, that which we turn away from and cast out, becomes unconscious" (p. 702). He defined the oppressed as "that which the ego wards off," or that which the ego does not like (p. 704). White people easily then attribute their negative qualities which all humans possess—greed, lust, apathy, etc.—to people of color. By splitting, an individual projects her negative attributes onto others to avoid those displeasing

characteristics, which induces a serious impediment wherein white people cannot recognize their own flaws; we cannot grow as people and then as a society.

Societally, this translates to the repression and oppression of entire people groups. Kendi (2016) poignantly stated that:

> George Best used Africans as "social mirrors," to use Jordan's phrase, for the hypersexuality, greed, and lack of discipline—the Devil's machinations—that he "found first" in England "but could not speak of." Normalizing negative behavior in faraway African people allowed writers to de-normalize negative behavior in White people, to de-normalize what they witnessed during intense appraisals of self and nation. (p. 32)

Dark skin color serves "ontologically—one might say archetypally—as a sign for all oppressed people" (Gaztambide, 2015, p. 704). Thus, white people can view themselves as superior to people of color and therefore good and worthy.

Moralization

Further, beyond splitting is the more advanced defense mechanism of moralization (McWilliams, 2011). If one protects herself by splitting, then she might understandably seek to layer that barricade with yet another form of defense. Moralization, a successor to a case of splitting, further roots and unconsciously justifies the primitive tendency to separate good from bad. McWilliams explained that "when one is moralizing, one seeks ways to feel it is one's *duty* to pursue that course," as a matter of right and wrong (p. 134).

To moralize is to resolve any mixed feelings one might have about splitting. For example, it was common opinion in the U.S. during the1850s that Black people were regarded as "beings of an inferior order … so far inferior … that the negro might justly and lawfully be reduced to slavery for his benefit" (Finkelman, 1997). In fact, many slaveowners cited the Bible to claim

that slavery was God's will (Wilkerson, 2021). The splitting is the attribution of negative qualities to Black people, such as laziness, unintelligence, and sub-humanity to justify their imposed manual labor and ownership. Reaching for Bible "truths" to further justify slavery adds a moral component that must have allowed plantation owners to sleep well at night because they were "pleasing God" by "acting out His will." One can infer from moralization that "the operation of a superego, albeit usually a rigid and punitive one, requires a contrast group of "others," or "those people" who lack the ethical sensibilities of the moralizer" (p. 135). To undo this steel blockade of justification for slavery, one then must first convince the slaveowner that God does not wish for his children to oppress each other, and then convince her that Black people are indeed intelligent homo sapiens.

Moralization is also common within the oppressed as a means to fortify the split within an individual and between Black and white by upholding white power structures. For example, in "Reading the Bible from the Margins," De La Torre (2002) described how splitting within the oppressed can be weaponized into moralization, a stronger defense. At a conservative northeastern Pentecostal church, an elderly woman explained that she adhered to the typical dress code of long skirt and loose shirt "so as not to tempt the men" (p. 82). De La Torre (2002) wrote:

> Frankly, I didn't have the heart to tell this eighty-year-old woman that she need not worry about this. Nevertheless, what I found fascinating about her comment was the way she saw herself—that is, through the eyes of the men of her church. Her activities, including the way she dressed her body, were molded by this viewpoint … thus maintaining a dress code established by men and perpetuated by the church women, who have been taught to see themselves only through the eyes of men. (pp. 82–83)

This woman had so deeply internalized her role as gatekeeper of men's sexual morality that De La Torre described imagining her enforcing dress code rules on younger females within the church and chastising those who did not submit. In other words, she perpetuated her split in consciousness by making it the good and right thing to view oneself through a man's gaze; to not enforce dress code would be bad. Moralization, in this case adopting a shaming attitude toward younger females who had not yet given up their right to self-identify, lengthened the split between oppressor and oppressed.

That this woman had adopted the duty of keeping men from immoral sexual activity—of maintaining the purity of the oppressor—exemplifies the assertion that the most successful oppression is maintained not only by the oppressors but by the oppressed themselves (De La Torre, 2002). Were men to engage in said immoral sexual activity, she might be blamed for their actions, which would release men from the responsibility of controlling their sexual desires and their bodies themselves. She lacked the consciousness to question whether her eighty-year-old body would even truly be a temptation to men. She has been robbed of the right to self-identify by men to help maintain their power.

Dysconsciousness

Finally, Joyce King (1991), a professor recognized for her work on racial equality and social justice, created a new type of defense mechanism specific to racism, which differs from those mentioned above in its manifestation of the space between consciousness and unconsciousness. Dysconsciousness refers to "an uncritical habit of mind (including perceptions, attitudes, assumptions, and beliefs) that justifies inequity and exploitation by accepting the existing order of things as given" (p. 135).

Starting in the fall of 1986, King presented each of her classes with a statistic that served as evidence of racism, such as a comparison of the mortality rates of Black to white babies, and tasked them with writing a brief explanation as to why this statistic is true (King, 1991). Her students' answers fit into one of two categories: "the denial or lack of equal opportunity for African Americans, or part of the framework of a society in which racism and discrimination are normative" (King, 1991, p. 136). One example of a student's explanation claimed that differing mortality rates occur because Black people had generationally passed down deficits acquired during slavery. This response lacks full consciousness in that it does not mention the role white people played in harming Black people during slavery or now, at the time of the statistical discrepancy. In other words, this student demonstrated a fixed belief in the inferiority of Black people and the superiority of white people. Subversion of this belief would require from the student a level of consciousness clearly not present.

The responses of King's students reveal a lack of critical consciousness, an essential component for liberation from oppressive structures. Freire (2020), an educator like King, likened critical consciousness to "an investigation of generative themes" (p. 1). Critical consciousness, according to Martín-Baró (1996), "assumes an escape from the reproductive machinery of the relationships of dominance and submission, for it can be realized only through dialogue" (Martín-Baró, 1996, p. 42). Both definitions indicate a degree of intentionality; critical consciousness is not stumbled upon or found serendipitously. By extension, intentional consciousness precedes liberation from the imprisonment of racism and the blinders of defense mechanisms. Whereas critical consciousness provides clarity by engaging with others, dysconsciousness perpetuates oppressive structures by maintaining the status quo; one who

defends herself with dysconsciousness is impermeable and cannot perceive the suffering of others.

Moreover, mere presentation of statistics and facts about racism "does not necessarily enable [individuals] to examine beliefs and assumptions that may influence the way they interpret facts" (King, 1991, p. 143). Similarly, McGhee (2021) noted that "beliefs must shift in order for outcomes to shift"; this refers to legal polices established in advance of public belief. For example, although school segregation legally ended "two generations ago, but with new justifications, the esteem in which many white parents hold black and brown children hasn't changed much, and today our schools are nearly as segregated as they were before Brown v. Board of Education" (McGhee, 2021, p. xviii). Both King and McGhee expressed the similar point that beliefs are important and that factual education about inequity is insufficient to promote change.

The missing ingredient is a more personal, social interest-like, compassionate stance toward the harm caused by inequity, which requires cultivating consciousness internally and socially. Understanding and challenging oppression inherently involves togetherness as only by examining and dialoguing with others can one understand her place in the whole (Freire, 2020). If one cannot feel the pain of the oppression inflicted upon her or that of the oppression inflicted upon others, she cannot fully acknowledge the damage of inequity in order to consider attempting to change it. All defense mechanisms, in their impairment of consciousness, prevent intentional movement toward change. When one accepts her inferiority, this acceptance often extrapolates to others and their inferiorities (Reeves, 2000). Conversely, when there is an "inward rejection of one's shadow, there [is] also a parallel outward rejection of people onto whom the shadow was projected" (Reeves, 2000, p. 85).

Soul of the Oppressed

Although this paper primarily aims to still and magnify the inner workings of the oppressor as a means by which to untangle and lessen racism, one cannot fully comprehend the oppressor without examining the oppressed. The interpellation of psychological dialogue between the two reinforces Adler's theory that as humans, we are inextricably bound, hopefully for the better but often for the worse. When one suffers, all suffer, and to heal damage done to one party requires contribution from all. The ancient Scottish Gaelic word *dùthchas* "speaks to the type of coexistence, interrelationality, and entanglement that we are now, perhaps too late, recognizing the utter necessity of, if we are going to survive" (Dabiri, 2021, p. 62). Examining the oppressed and the impact of atrocities inflicted upon them by the oppressor permits a better understanding of the oppressor.

From the Panopticon to the Gaze

Not only does oppression separate oppressor from the oppressed, by splitting, moralization, and dysconsciousness, but it also imposes a split in the consciousness of the oppressed. At some point of being told repeatedly that one is of little or no value, she will start to believe it. At that point, when she concedes to explore this new story upon another's insistence, a split occurs in her self-concept between who she thinks/thought she is, and who the oppressor says she is. Du Bois (1999) pointed out, "The facing of so vast a prejudice could not but bring the inevitable self-questioning, self-disparagement, and lowering of ideals" such that the individual creates a compromise between her self-concept and how the oppressor views her (p. 8). These two are unable to integrate because they contradict one another. She might at times choose to wholeheartedly believe one narrative or the other to ease ambiguity, but otherwise, to hold the self-beliefs that she is worthy, and also worthless, is akin to relentlessly stirring an oil

and water mixture; they do not mix. She will always have "this longing to merge [her] double self into a better and truer self," and yet she will not succeed (Du Bois, 1999, p. 10). Try as she might, they will not combine.

For example, in early 1900's French Martinique, many Black women exhibited a type of splitting of consciousness and further moralization so intense that Black is not only seen as bad but is wiped out entirely (Fanon, 1967). In his analysis of a memoir by Mayotte Capécia, Fanon described her willing self-sacrifice to be married to white man. She so loved the white man "to whom she submits in everything. He is her lord. She asks nothing, demands nothing, except a bit of whiteness in her life" (p. 42). A Black woman's greatest dream was to "magically turn white," and the quickest way to do so, to erase the Black and make everything white, was to deny oneself by surrendering one's life in marriage to a white man, who, knowing that he is above his lover in terms of social status and with her can do as he pleases, will likely mistreat her. Capécia described the desire to cover herself entirely in her man's whiteness so that her Blackness cannot be seen. Capecia had accommodated the oppressor's narrative that Black is lesser than with such great acceptance that she is left little choice other than to attempt to disown her skin and her Black identity. Perhaps if she herself pretends and denies hard enough, she might see herself as white.

To fully split Black from white, self-loathing was often displaced onto Black men by their female counterparts. Fanon questioned,

> whether it is possible for the Black man to overcome his feeling of insignificance, to rid his life of the compulsive quality that makes it so like the behavior of the phobic. Affect is exacerbated in the Negro, he is full of rage because he feels small, he suffers from an

inadequacy in all human communication, and all these factors claim him with an unbearable

insularity. (p. 50)

Black men and women are divided by hatred. Black women are divided from themselves by

denial of their color and their culture, and Black men are divided from themselves by their

intense feelings of inferiority. This marks an entire people group violently psychologically

divided by whiteness's false narrative of all other people groups, to maintain the belief in white

superiority.

The Gaze

The gaze refers to the internalized perspective of the oppressor within the oppressed,

specifically of the oppressed herself, which further gauges the split within one's soul. In

"Embracing Hopelessness," De La Torre (2017) analogized and elaborated on the internalization

of the power relation between oppressor and oppressed by drawing upon Foucault's (2020a)

discussion of Jeremy Bentham's panopticon. Specifically, "to gaze upon oneself through the eyes

of the dominant culture is the ultimate goal in the colonization of the mind of the oppressed" (p.

30). The panopticon is an architectural formation, often used in prisons, designed to monitor

scores of inmates with minimal cost; this pertains to guards, security, and surveillance (Foucault,

2020b). The structure is designed in such a way that the guard(s) may unceasingly view all

inmates, but the inmates cannot detect this gaze or ascertain when exactly they are or are not

being watched (Foucault, 2020b). As a result, the prisoners over time adapt their mental

processes and behaviors to this assumed constant surveillance, as if they were truly being

watched in perpetuum.

Foucault (2020a) explained how the panopticon is organized and then stratified by

discipline's hierarchical observation, normalizing judgement, and examination. Hierarchical

observation is "a mechanism that coerces by means of observation," or, in simpler terms, an omniscient gaze that sees everything at all times, and in doing so, separates the powerful, the gazer, from the powerless, she who is gazed upon (p. 189). Normalizing judgement is the construction of a norm against which everyone is measured and judged; it is a mechanism to separate individuals who do not meet alignment with this norm for the ultimate purpose of future homogenization of all. Homogenization would mean that no one questions the status quo, that oppressors oppress, and the oppressed are oppressed. Finally, then, the hierarchical observation and normalizing judgement together comprise the concept of examination, "a normalizing gaze, a surveillance that makes it possible to qualify, classify, and punish" (p. 197).

Ultimately, a gaze is sufficient to "correct" and re-align non-conforming to conforming behavior because the body is no longer the only object of control; the panopticon denotes a shift from the traditional punishment of controlling one's body to controlling one's soul (De La Torre, 2017; Foucault, 2020b). The goal of discipline here is to manipulate the mind to access the body such that both are within the grasp of she who is in power. At this point, fear of punishment is no longer required for the inmates have sacrificed their souls to the oppressors by measuring themselves against and adjusting to the norm (De La Torre, 2017). After all, Du Bois claimed that "our sense of self is necessarily constructed in a dialogue that is continually subject to implicit power relations," (Du Bois, 1999, p. 5). One might similarly conclude that "after having been a slave of the white man, [the Black man] enslaves himself" (Fanon, 1967, p. 58). Behold the power of the norm!

The above description of the panoptical discipline delineates the true intention of this correction: adherence to a chosen societal norm designed to maintain the power of the powerful by exploiting the powerless. Foucault (2020b) explained that "discipline may be identified by

institutions that use it as an essential instrument for a particular end … to increase both the docility and the utility of all elements in the system" (p. 206–207). In fact, this revelation undermines and overthrows the common knowledge or belief that discipline, as a system, serves to support, rehabilitate, and improve society, particularly the broken parts.

This belief is more a mask to conceal the true purpose of panoptical discipline, which is to uphold specific societal ideals by maintaining a human hierarchy. What is really a "reciprocal adjustment of bodies, gestures" to suite those in power is "masked by the establishment of an explicit, coded, and formally egalitarian juridical framework" (Foucault, 2020b, p. 211). We are led to believe that those who engage in deviant behavior, which should refer to acts of a criminal nature but often means anything that differs from normal behavior, are treated and disciplined with respect for their rights and this country's founding value of equality (De La Torre, 2017; Foucault, 2020b). Foucault (2020b) called this "the nonreversible subordination of one group of people by another" (p. 212).

The right to self-identify becomes a luxury of which the inmates and oppressed have been robbed. They adapt a constant internal policing that integrates the gaze of the powerful or the oppressor's judgement into their own self-concept and disables their own personal, subjective consciousness. The oppressed individual is unable to separate her own view of herself from the powerful or the oppressor's view.

Double Consciousness

How is panoptical discipline related to racism? Du Bois's (1999) double consciousness, "this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others" is the link between modern, everyday U.S. racism and Foucault's description of this insidious punishment (2020b, p. 5). Double consciousness is an aspect or a result of the gaze. Those who hold power, or the

metaphorical prison guards of life, tend to write the unofficial and official narratives of what life is like or should be like, so, in a society where white supremacy reigns, racism is the unavoidable law of the land and structure of the nation. Those who are not white are singled out as not normal and punished by the shame of being different. As Dabiri (2021) said, "white perspectives continue to be seen not as 'white perspectives' but as objective truths, while Black perspectives continue to be perceived as just that: deviations from the norm" (p. 59).

In turn, despite defense mechanisms such as avoidance or denial, whether consciously or unconsciously, people of color are well connected to white people's perception of them. A marginalized individual easily falls prey to viewing herself through the eyes of a racist white society, and therefore might question her view of herself, which is at odds with her perception of the oppressor's view of her. Each of these conceptualizations—how the individual views herself and how her oppressor views her—is a consciousness, and both reside within her. One "simply wishes to make it possible to be both a Negro and an American, without being cursed and spat upon by his fellows, without having the doors of Opportunity closed roughly in his face" (Du Bois, 1999, p. 5). But one cannot detach her perception of how white people view her from her view of herself. That these two identities do not integrate divides an individual's energies (Du Bois, 1999). She might expend effort maintaining each identity and then consciously or unconsciously, to avoid ambiguity, trying to piece the two together (McWilliams, 2011). In this sense, she will never be a complete person. If half of her being is devoted to advancing her own self-constructed consciousness, and the other to managing that ascribed to her by her oppressor, or even to fighting this second consciousness, then the whole of her is rather weaker (Du Bois, 1999). This is another win for the oppressor in that the oppressed cannot full-heartedly oppose unfair distribution of power. Individuals might not be able to fully believe in themselves enough

to fight for the true, just, and moral purpose. This internal psychic tension weakens their ability to function, much less to protest.

The Self in the Mirror

Jacques Lacan, French psychologist, integrated this phenomenon into the Mirror Stage, a parallel concept of the damage incurred when two consciousnesses cannot coexist; the two consciousnesses referred to here are one's self, which is fragmented, fluid, undefined, and her ideal self, or the self she sees in the mirror (Fink, 2007). The mirror stage occurs when an infant, with the support of another, momentarily stands upright in front of a mirror and recognizes herself for the first time. She identifies with the image of a unified self, defined by the boundaries of a physical body. Usually, even a supporting other, likely a caregiver, will confirm that this mirror image belongs to the infant, perhaps with cooing or by pointing between the infant and the image in the mirror; the infant needs this confirmation (Gallop, 1983). This image, the ideal self, creates within her a striving anxiety to become defined, autonomous, able to stand upright on her own, and of a formation which others might easily see and understand (Fink, 2007). She is aware of the dissonance between the chaotic internal workings which comprise herself, and the neat physical representation of her which others see and which affirms her to keep striving. The greater the convergence between the ideal self and the real self, the more confidence and positive feeling the individual will have.

While Lacan used a physical mirror to explain the conception of the ideal self, the infant can also locate herself within others, in their affect, body gestures, mood, and any form of expression (Fink, 2007). In this way, others can reinforce within a child culturally sanctioned qualities (Gonçalves, 2012). Adults can prepare children to be actively contributing members of society by reinforcing gentleness, goodness, kindness, or whatever qualities uphold the current

zeitgeist. Others can hold pieces of the infant's ideal self. For example, if a young child, on the day of her sister's birthday, before the birthday dinner, pokes her finger inside the birthday cake in the fridge for a quick, eager taste of frosting, a parent might either accuse the child of trying to ruin her sister's birthday and punish her for this ill intent, or laugh with her, gently chastise her, and help her cover up the finger-hole with extra frosting. In the first scenario, the child has looked to find herself within the parent and not succeeded. She has looked for her parent to see her true, good, if a bit misguided, intent, but in turn, she has been told that she is not good. In the second scenario, the child has been seen for who she is in that her parent has accurately reflected back the child's image of herself. The parent has seen her silliness, her spontaneity, and her bold craving for sugar and has reinforced these qualities.

When oppression so clouds all an individual's mirrors that the individual cannot locate herself, or her ideal self, she will likely turn inwards and give in to others' warped mirror of her. The child who stole a finger-lick of frosting and was shamed for it will come to believe that she is bad and deserves her punishment, perhaps even that she had bad intentions in her eagerness to taste. Like having two consciousnesses, this individual is divided and cannot grow as one who has consistently seen herself accurately in others (Du Bois, 1999). She will be too busy looking for herself, if she has not yet given up on that pursuit and succumbed to her badness, to fight against oppression.

The Alien Self

Gaztambide (2015) referred to this second consciousness, one's perception of how the oppressor views her, as an "alien self," or an "alien totalitarian object" that infiltrates her being and sits itself alongside her true self, blurring her vision of who she really is (p. 137; p. 162). Much like a parasite, this offspring of the oppressor nests deep within the soul of the oppressed,

distorting the worldview of the individual, confusing up from down and cultivating unauthentic unconscious currents which provoke thoughts and behaviors that suit the oppressor and maintenance of her power. For example, this alien being might sow within the oppressed a fear of freedom that belongs to the oppressors. Oppressors naturally fear the freedom of those they oppress; where would their power be, then? The oppressed might not be able to imagine any life in which they are not oppressed, so they fear change or are unopen to questioning current systems.

This concept of an alien being provokes two types of attitudes within the oppressed, or an oscillation between the two: a fatalistic and a fanatical attitude (Gaztambide, 2015). Fatalism refers to the magical, mystical belief in predetermination, as if existence were designed by a God, and is not to be questioned or intentionally altered, in other words, fatalism breeds submission to societal norms. Specifically, the oppressed might believe that the oppressors stand rightfully in their role of power, and from this belief, lack consciousness of alternate realities, specifically in which power is more fairly distributed, or even in which they themselves maintain the majority of power. Someone with a fatalistic attitude toward her social location might blindly accept her status as the way things are done and disavow the questioning or "rebelliousness" of others.

To flip the coin, those more inclined to the fanatical attitude live in reaction to their oppressors and to their situation and the oppressed (Gaztambide, 2015). The fanatical attitude indicates a degree of identification with the oppressor—with her power, control, and domination—and often provokes violence. One might enact horizontal violence, violent behavior toward others of the oppressed group, or more specifically, toward the alien being within their comrades that signifies the oppressor. Gaztambide (2015) stressed the importance that "the

oppressed renounce their identification with the oppressor, establishing a psychological distance necessary to see them more objectively as neither gods nor devils, but human beings" (p. 137). What does superiority mean here, and what is the quickest way to get there? To further the needs of the oppressor, to identify so fully with the oppressor that a need of the oppressor fulfilled is a need fulfilled of the oppressed?

Fanon (1967) retold many instances of identification with the oppressor, or this type of manifestation of the fanatical attitude, in Black women who "dream of a form of salvation that consists of magically turning white" by marrying white men and then looking down upon their former Black communities (p. 63). Nini, a Black woman who passed as white in a story by Abdoulaye Sadji, received a heartfelt love letter from a fellow Black man, which Fanon quoted in its entirety (Sadji, 1954, as cited in Fanon, 1967). The lover expressed his primary desire that Nini be "completely happy" and entreated her to give him the opportunity to appreciate her as she deserved by marrying him (p. 54). He stated, "I should consider it the highest of honors and greatest of joys to have you in my house and to dedicate myself to you, body and soul" (p. 55). He ended his letter with a statement about how, from her social location of greater sophistication and refinement, he believed that she would respond to his letter in kindness. In turn, she requested immediate police intervention regarding the letter, and Fanon even mentioned the threat of castration of Nini's lover for his "unhealthy follies" of loving a "white" woman and boldly threatening the purity of the white race (p. 57). In this scenario, Nini obfuscated her identity as a mulatto, a biracial woman, perhaps as a protective mechanism, so that she could identify more with the dominant white race. To thoroughly deny her Black identity, in this case, demanded that she not only distance herself from other Black people but even that she display aggression toward them. Her aggression toward her lover had little to do with him and more to

do with the threat that he might reveal her true identity as a mulatto woman and rob her of her life of whiteness and its power and purity. Nini desperately clung onto her hopes for betterment and rejected her lover to maintain her chosen identity. The rejection was not about love. Fanon (1967) explained that Nini was driven to desperation as her ego was threatened by the destruction of one of her defenses. Fanon later quoted a biracial woman who commented, "Me? A negress? Can't you see I'm practically white? I despise Negroes. Niggers stink. They're dirty and lazy. Don't ever mention niggers to me" (Fanon, 1967, p. 50). Fanon (1967) stated, "we must see whether it is possible for the Black man to overcome his feeling of insignificance," (p. 50) which implies that the Black man might not in fact be able to, that the odds against him might be too great.

This example illustrates the battle between a racially oppressed individual's self-concept and the self-concept imposed upon her by her oppressor, or the alien totalitarian object, and how this split in consciousness can be devastating not only for the individual who experiences it but also for others in her caste. Nini was willing to sacrifice a human being, in addition to her consciousness as a Black woman, to pass as one of the powerful caste (Sadji, 1954, as cited in Fanon, 1968). In a sense, these violent acts, advanced by defense mechanisms, are suicide and homicide of the soul.

Racism Harms Everyone

Black Loss Equals White Loss

Racism is often portrayed as a negative force endured only by people of color, a façade which helps sustain racism because to explicitly acknowledge that white people are harmed by racism would necessitate its immediate removal. In other words, it is to the benefit of a select few for racism to divide Black from white, and painting racism as a destructive force that occurs

separate from white people removes the necessity of white people to involve themselves in anti-racism; the onus for change is on people of color. However, race is a common answer to the question, "Since the United States of America has had the world's largest economy for most of our history, with enough money to feed and educate all our children [and] build world-leading infrastructure," why doesn't it ensure a generally high standard of living for everyone? (McGhee, 2021, p. 18). Who is harmed by racism?

The destruction of community spaces, specifically public pools, just before the date of desegregation suggests that whites were more willing to deprive themselves of these benefits than to share them with people of color. Oak Park Pool, part of a new, luxurious recreation facility which included a zoo and a community center in Montgomery, Alabama, was constructed in the wave of investments in public swimming pools in the 1920s and 1930s (Hackman, 2015). It was a gem of thousands of pools newly opened across the country which were subject to segregation between white and Black people. In 1959, segregation of public spaces was finally deemed unconstitutional, and Oak Park was to be desegregated and to welcome Black and white bodies into its waters together for the first time (McGhee, 2021; Hackman, 2015). However, rather than open the pool to all skin colors, the white city council elected to drain the pool just before the date of desegregation (McGhee, 2021). Baffled "white children cried as the city contractors poured dirt into the pool, paved it over, and seeded it with grass that was green by the time summer came along again" (p. 25). In fact, the city of Montgomery closed the entire public park system for over a decade, which meant padlocking the doors of the community center and selling the zoo animals, to circumvent shared spaces with Black people.

This choice of self-deprivation in preference to coalescence with people of color can be linked to decreased wellbeing in southern slave states decades later. In 2021, the U.S. Census Bureau indicated that of the ten U.S. states with the least educational attainment, seven are located in the South, as are nine of the ten states with highest rates of poverty (Creamer et al., 2022). The South also has the highest infant mortality rate and the lowest reported health (T. Jones, 2017). In fact, it is suggested that slavery predicted decreased opportunity today. For, "When slavery was abolished, Confederate states found themselves far behind northern states in the creation of the public infrastructure that supports economic mobility, and they continue to lag behind today" (McGhee, 2021, p. 20). As of 2021, there are less schools, libraries, and institutions that serve the public in former Confederate than in free states because at the time of slavery, these services were viewed as non-beneficial, or even as harmful, to slaves (T. Jones, 2017).

Therefore, ensuring adequate standards of living for all is not deemed of high regard in part because white people continue to drink the poison of the zero-sum game, the notion that Black gain would take away from what white people have already and, by extension, that a future of equity, without racism, would signify loss for white people and should be avoided at all costs (Semuels, 2021; McGhee, 2021). Zero-sum thinking justifies the unfathomable truth that white people are willing to defend what they have by making sacrifices themselves to prevent Black gain. Specifically:

> When the people with power in a society see a portion of the populace as inferior and
> undeserving, their definition of "the public" becomes conditional. It's often unconscious,
> but their perception of the Other as undeserving is so important to their perception of

themselves as deserving that they'll tear apart the web that supports everyone, including

them. (McGhee, 2021, p. 30)

By preventing Black gain, white people intend to defend their perception of selves, in this

instance, as a people group who merits a special, private pool.

White people could not share pools with Black people because that advance for Black

people signified, in the minds of whites, a loss to them. *If Black people are gaining, or taking a*

step forward in the race, white people must take two steps forward so as not to forfeit their

winning position (Mr. Lincoln and Negro Equality, 1860). The zero-sum notion falsely structures

white and Black people as inherent opponents, as those in power turned against one another

people groups on the basis of color, "telling them that one group's success would come at the

expense of another. As a result, white people stopped supporting the government programs that

enabled their prosperity as soon as access was expanded to Black people" (Semuels, 2021).

A Multitude of Iniquities

The structure of racism was made to and continues to serve a specific and elite group of

people, while it harms everyone else, to some degree. Today, the appeal of whiteness,

identification with the oppressor, distracts many whites from, specifically, the cruelty and

ineffectiveness of the prison system, "the pressure of financial precariousness, the

unaffordability of a home, the erosion of healthcare and education, or any of the other countless

deprivations endured while trying to 'make a living' in a world that has become increasingly

unlivable" (Dabiri, 2021, p. 56; Rothman & Fields, 2020). The draw to identify as white and

therefore superior and different from people of color prevents whites from recognizing shared

challenges.

For example, low SES is a greater determinant than skin color of one's chance of being shot by the police, but that shootings of Black people receive greater scrutiny suggests that this problem belongs to Black people with little impact on whites. Since Black people are 13.2% of the population, Black people should own 13.2% of US wealth and be 13.2% of Americans killed by the police (Kendi, 2017). However, Back people own 2.7% of wealth in the US and make up 27% of police shootings. Further, regarding police shootings of civilians between 2015 and 2021, "half of those shot dead by police—and four of every ten who were unarmed—have been white. People in low SES neighborhoods are a lot more likely to be killed by police than people in rich neighborhoods" (Rothman & Fields, 2020, para. 2). If it were more commonly known that not just Black people, but people of low SES of all skin colors are more frequent victims of police shootings, something would need to be done. These individuals might protest. In this way, problems whose resolution might benefit a wide range of people are cast onto one specific subgroup of sufferers, Black people, so that they can be ignored by the majority, which keeps the general population calm and controlled.

More broadly, racial tensions caused by whiteness distract from many collective problems, such as distribution of wealth and unequal pay. In 2020, 1% of the population controlled 37% of total household wealth, 19% of the population controlled 52% of the total household wealth, 40% of the population controlled 11% of total household wealth, and the last 40% of the population was in debt, which means it had less than zero household wealth (Wolff, 2021). Although the uppermost bracket of financial privilege is nearly entirely white, large numbers of whites, along with people of color, comprise the middle and bottom brackets (Kivel, 2017).

Similarly, "in 2015, women generally made about 80 cents for every dollar that men made in an average week of full-time work," and African American women made 64.5 cents, and Latinas, 56.5 (Kivel, 2017, p. 43). This conversation of intersectionality excludes even other marginalized identities, such as ability/disability, gender, and sexual orientation, which would likely further suggest that the majority of whites have less in common with the white and powerful than with people of color. Although all whites benefit from whiteness to some degree, the white and powerful "have cornered the market on significant benefits to the exclusion of others"; their very purpose is gain at the expense of others (p. 43).

Most white people, in fact, would benefit from relinquishing the bait of white superiority instilled by zero-sum thinking which enthralls them into false solidarity with the wealthy upper bracket of whites, and establishing solidarity with people of color within similar wealth brackets, to fight for re-distribution of wealth. The brutality of zero-sum thinking conceals the truth that whites who are not in the uppermost echelon of wealth might, in fact, share more in common with people of color in similar wealth brackets, than with the wealthy whites to whom they are told they are similar. Most obviously, "Race was invented [and weaponized] to create racist beliefs," to nurse segregation between skin colors and maintain the safety and power, primarily in the form of financial security, of those already in power (Dabiri, 2021, p. 31). Race is irrefutably a socially constructed persecutory device that maintains unequal distribution on wealth and privilege according to one group's liking.

CHAPTER III: DECOLONIZING SOCIAL INTEREST THEORY

De is an active word-forming element inherited from the Latin *de*, which means "'down, off, away, from among, down from,' but also 'down to the bottom, totally' hence 'completely'" (intensive or completive). *De* "has the function of undoing or reversing a verb's action" (Online Etymology Dictionary, n.d.). *De* refers to a relationship between two entities, whereby the two are inextricably bound in that the second derives from the foundation of the first. The undoing or reversing acknowledges the inherent hostility of this relationship. When de- precedes *coloniality*, the two phrases together form a word that means "indicative of the ongoing nature of struggles, constructions, and creations that continue to work within coloniality's margins and fissures to affirm that which coloniality has attempted to negate," and tension emerges between coloniality and decoloniality as the latter seeks to undo the former (Mignolo & Walsh., 2018, p. 17). Decoloniality is an offshoot of, or a reaction to coloniality that seeks a different means of existence from coloniality, and yet it only exists because of coloniality.

Colonialism, the forebearer of coloniality, names a relationship in which the sovereignty of one group rests in the hands of another, based on economic, social, and political power (Maldonado-Torres, 2007). Coloniality is the residual long-standing patterns of power that emerged as a result of colonialism, but that dictate the daily existence of the less powerful group, and which are "maintained alive in books, in the criteria for academic performance, in cultural patterns, in common sense, in the self-image of peoples, in aspirations of self, and so many other aspects of our modern experience" (Maldonado-Torres, 2007, p. 243). In other words, a stealthy underhandedness which makes coloniality difficult to detect, distinguishes it from colonialism; coloniality, then, is easily denied because to many, depending on one's defense mechanisms, it is invisible.

Therefore, decoloniality is concerned with "the recognition and undoing of the hierarchical structures of race, gender, heteropatriarchy, and class that continue to control life, knowledge, spirituality, and thought" (Mignolo & Walsh, 2018). Fanon (1967) stressed the importance of the decolonial attitude, which Maldonado-Torres (2017) defined as "the re-introduction of human temporality into the life of embodied subjects and society within an also re-humanized space that is conducive to intersubjective interactions beyond coloniality" (p. 435). Specifically, Fanon (1967) and Maldonado-Torres (2017) rejected the notion of an absolute truth and scientific "method as a guarantor of truth and knowledge" (p. 432). Western theory is marked by an effort to appear scientific in its neutrality and objectivity. However, these biased ways of thinking and producing derive from a position of cultural dominance (Walker & Rosen, 2004). Relational-Cultural Theory, a psychological methodology, was constructed in reaction to the distorted interpretation of the human experience under the guise of objectivity, and defined the new metric for human growth and wellbeing as "increasing levels of complexity, fluidity, choice, and articulation within human relationship" (Walker & Rosen, 2004, p. 6). As Lorde (2018) said, "the master's tools will never dismantle the master's house. They may allow us to temporarily beat him at his own game, but they will never enable us to bring about genuine change." (p. 27).

Fanon (1967) and Maldonado-Torres (2017), in addition to other contributors to the construction of decoloniality, including Bhatia (2020), Mignolo and Walsh (2018), Quijano (2021), and Vergès (2021), emphasized other types of knowing, particularly knowing through relationship, a type of "thinking from and with" that seeks to understand, instead of thinking for. This knowing comes from the bottom, from the margins of society (Gaztambide, 2015), and "offers new alternatives to the center" (Mignolo & Walsh, 2018, pp. 18–19)—to decenter—and

to take us beyond an "anti-stance" (Walker & Rosen, 2004, p. 5). To be anti-racist is not enough; we must think from and with people in their place of marginalization to create a forward movement that is more concerned with unity under a common good or goal, rather than avoidance of, or aversion to, something (Dabiri, 2021; Martín-Baró, 1996). This type of harmony that dissolves the margins between the outskirts—the Othered—and the center, is social interest.

> Further, in psychology, decoloniality means asking questions like Bhatia's (2020):
> Who decides what psychology should study? How do economic and social systems influence psychology? Is it possible to address economic inequality and social issues in psychotherapy? Does psychology speak of people, about people, or does it try to speak for them? (Dhar, 2020, 17:45)

Similarly, Martín-Baró (1996) asked, "Have we ever seriously asked what psychosocial processes look like from the point of view of the dominated instead of from that of the dominator?" (p. 28). These questions ask which voices tell the story of psychology: which voices have the power to uphold and further psychology. Psychology has historically adopted a one-size-fits-all approach, punishing deviations from the norm, as defined by those who constructed psychology. In this way, providing support for individuals in psychological practice is akin to forced assimilation of those with less power, often even with good intent. Many are blind to the colonial origins of how they practice.

It becomes increasingly clear that renovation of earlier foundational principles of psychology is essential for growth. Spurred in part by recent political events, decolonization knocks at the door of familiarity and demands a long-overdue and well-deserved revolution of psychology. This section of the paper, with a courageous, heavy-duty magnifying glass, examines social interest theory and Adler himself, as a professional and a person, within the cultural context of his time. His theory, like all, is inextricably steeped in the biases and

distortions of his cultural zeitgeist, many of which favor the privileged and support the scaffolding of oppression. In applying his theory to the pursuit of cultural humility, it is important to determine which aspects can truly support the marginalized, and which ones cannot be parsed out from their colonial background to confer more benefit than harm.

Once I have completely overthrown social interest theory based on its colonial underpinnings, I will demonstrate how viewing the theory critically, with awareness of its origin, can foster a healthier, more welcoming use of it, in a way that truly supports the benefit of the marginalized. Decolonization does not aim to discard the whole of Adler's work but to examine his theoretical yield with a critical lens and understanding of its origin. The first section explains traditional, oppressive models of personality; the second untangles social interest theory's colonial origin, and the third serves as a guide for continued use of social interest theory.

Personality Theories

Before examining Adlerian theory for colonial residue, one must examine personality psychology as a whole, as Adlerian theory is a personality model, alongside the core of psychoanalysis, attachment theory, trait theory, and the Five-Factor Model. Because personality psychology is of Western origin, created by white psychologists, its application to individuals supports white supremacy and other harmful hierarchical structures (Singh, 2021). Personality psychology has been used for decades to maintain the status quo, particularly in its assumptions of therapist as expert about the client and that the individual can be separated from all social influences and factors, which declare the therapist's subjective determinations about the client as absolute truth.

These issues hinge on the definition of personality, which in practice, is subjective in that it varies from therapist to therapist (Fox et al., 2009). One's definition of personality depends on

her theoretical orientation; a psychoanalytic approach might characterize personality as the relationships between the Id, Ego, and Superego, and a biological approach might hone in on genetics and temperamental dispositions (Fox et al., 2009). Personality becomes subjective to the psychologist, who is, by this subjectivity, then compelled to impose her theoretical view of personality upon the client. Although contemporary psychology makes efforts to diminish the power differential between therapist and client, the therapist still maintains power. In other words, that the therapist can determine how to define personality for and conceptualize a specific client's personality supports the *thinking for* common in coloniality and colonial knowledge. This conceptualization informs the therapist's diagnosis of the client, which, via medical records, follows the client to all subsequent healthcare experiences as a sort of absolute truth that cannot be overturned. For example, Adler often diagnosed individuals who lacked social interest as having neurosis; not only is it known today that neurosis has little to do with social interest, but neurosis is outdated today and bears clear linkage to male supremacy and the oppression of women (Adler, 1956).

In fact, personality psychology holds the individual responsible for social factors which negatively impact her; the concept of personality can be weaponized to maintain current power structures. Developing a "character structure" is harmful because it showcases as utile and interesting an individual's "rigidity or lack of boundaries, impaired awareness, [and] automatic behaviors that increase one's suffering" (Fox et al., 2009, p. 68). For example, as a response to childhood trauma, an individual might wholly adopt and regularly default to regression as a defense mechanism. As this person grows up, when faced with menial stressors, she cries, yells, and requires a nap with a particular blanket to recuperate from reaction to her triggers. Is this part of her personality, or is this a now-maladaptive defense mechanism, originally constituted within

her to avoid pain as a child? By characterizing regression and other defense mechanisms as part of her core personality, a psychologist, in a sense, holds her responsible for the suffering and trauma imposed upon her, and does not let her grow and heal from it by connecting with her internal experiences, or by learning healthier, more suitable defense mechanisms. More importantly, focusing on the individual instead of the social factors that impact her discourages the challenging of harmful societal norms.

The concept of personality is better viewed as a problem that requires transcendence (Fox et al., 2009). Fox et al. reminded readers of psychology's emancipatory interest and insisted on viewing the traditional definition of personality as "a social problem with social origins and effects" (p. 68). Further, if long enduring patterns and traits limit an individual, barring her from growth opportunities, then it is the psychologist's job to free the individual; it is the psychologist's task to free the above individual from her pattern of regression, and to offer up new, healthier, and more effective protections. A psychologist's goal then becomes to untangle the rigid structures imposed upon the individual, and to create opportunity for new growth.

If decoloniality is concerned with undoing power structures that hinder individual being and expression, then personality is something from which to seek liberation. For psychology to be useful and beneficial toward bridging gaps within and between individuals, it must acknowledge, question, and challenge the values imposed by those in power and how they impact the individual. A more collaborative therapeutic relationship would instill a *thinking with* attitude that delights in differences—deviations from the norm—and values all perspectives.

Adler

Adlerian Theory: Cultural Context

Alfred Adler was born to Jewish parents in 1870 Vienna, the third child in a family of seven (Adler University, 2021). At a young age, he developed rickets and nearly died from pneumonia, but he overcame these early health issues and earned a medical degree in ophthalmology in 1895 (Griffith et al., 2007). Although he began practicing in the wealthy heart of Vienna, he soon re-established himself with socioeconomically less privileged patients along the outskirts of the city, and for this reason he is often associated with the beginnings of community psychology (Adler University, 2021). He was one of the first psychoanalysts to display care for marginalized identities (Tummala-Nara, 2016). It is thought that he began to develop his psychological theories by working with circus performers, whose unique inferiorities and compensations inspired him (Griffith et al., 2007).

Adler was also a prominent member of Vienna's Socialist Party, where he met his future wife, Raissa Epstein (Griffith et al., 2007). The two married in 1897. Epstein greatly expanded Adler's worldview; a new immigrant from Russia, she was close with several radical, worldly socialists, such as Leon Trotsky and Natalia Sedovia, whom she and her husband later hosted at their home many times. After she left Russia, Epstein continued to parade her support for economic democracy in Russia as well as equality and justice for women. Her "independence, strong will, and self-emancipation" were noted (p. 368). Adler became known for his feminist views and demands for gender equality, and this is often attributed to his wife's progressive beliefs and devotion to political activism.

Adler began meeting with Freud in 1907 to develop what became psychoanalysis, but he departed from that branch of psychology in 1911, founding what became known as Individual

Psychology in 1912 (Adler University, 2021; Colby, 1951). Many believed Adler to be a protege

of Freud's, but Adler made it known that he never agreed with Freud's emphasis, or

overemphasis, on sexuality (Colby, 1951).

Adler fathered the concept of Individual Psychology from his concern that "psychologists

were beginning to ignore what he called the unity of the individual"; he viewed the individual as

whole in herself and as a component of a larger social community (Schultz & Schultz, 2017,

para. 1). To him, a social community is comprised of individuals each pursuing their own forms

of superiority, which in turn bolsters the community; when contributing to the community, an

individual naturally pursues personal goals that align with the common good. This means that

each person, based on her upbringing, personality traits, birth order, and experiences, etc., when

behaving properly as a member of society, uses her creativity to work toward a specific goal that

benefits society in a way that only she can. Adler called this uniquely individual goal the

fictional final goal, cultivated in childhood and often relatively undefined but a positive pull that

energizes, similar to but more individualized than Freud's drives. We each have a different

function or purpose, but the fruit of this purpose nourishes the community, which is nourished by

the fruit of all.

A "bad" individual, someone who is "neurotically disposed," on the other hand, allows

excessive adversity to inhibit this manifestation of self and capitalizes on the endeavors of others

without contributing (Adler, 1956, p. 139; Adler, 1964b, p. 117). She solves her problems on her

own and does not cooperate with others. A style of life, then, refers to how the individual adapts

to inferiority to pursue her fictional final goal, whether the individual reacts to adversity along

the way by engaging in social interest. One who learns to be courageous and connect with others

to face problems develops what Adler believed was a good and healthy style of life, so the contrary is true of someone who self-isolates or avoids problems.

Seeking to overcome feelings of inferiority by achieving this goal and reaching mastery is the primary force that shapes one's personality according to Adler (Schultz & Schultz, 2017). This greatly diverges from Freud's psychoanalysis, not only in its more holistic view of the individual but in Adler's conceptualization of the unconscious. For Adler, the unconscious mirrors and is not fully distinguishable from the conscious. Adler's first publication (1917) explained his theory of organ inferiority: literally that when one organ is weak, like the eyes, other organs, such as the ears, compensate to achieve their personal type of mastery. He analogized this to the social world, in which feeling inferior in one way positively encourages one to achieve mastery in another. Hysterical symptoms, then, he attributed to the psyche's unhealthy overcompensation for an inferiority (Schultz & Schultz, 2017). Schultz and Schultz gave the following example for healthy compensation: "an only child who wished to have brothers and sisters has many children of their own"; and the following for unhealthy overcompensation: "a person born in poverty strives to become a millionaire and then continues to work 80 hours a week or more striving to become a billionaire" (p. 5). Healthy striving and compensation indicate achievement and balance in one's life. The minus becomes a plus.

Most literature describes Adlerian theory as the only from its time that remains generally applicable to a great number of people with their varying identities. Adler University (2021) itself "continues Adler's work" with a three-pronged mission statement commitment to social responsibility, community engagement, and social justice, which is defined as "equitable distribution of economic, political, civil, cultural, social, and other resources and opportunities in society in order to promote the optimal development of persons and communities" (para. 9).

Although appealing, this description does not acknowledge the colonial nature of Adlerian theory, or even seem to correspond to Adler's original writing.

Most of these sources laud Adler for his belief that other internal factors, and even external factors, also proved worthy of recognition in therapy, and in comparison, Freud, whom many perceive as having primarily defined individuals by their internal sexual conflict (Schultz & Schultz, 2017). Because Adler saw the individual as a whole, he could not ignore the background and social factors that impact an individual. Also, much like more recent renovations to psychoanalysis are often attributed to Freud himself, and especially negative, exclusive ones, it seems that more modern sources, such as Bickhard et al. (2016), Colby (1951), Griffith et al. (2007), Shulman and Mosak (1977), and Adler University (2021), have softened the words of Adler's original work (Gaztambide, 2021). These sources appear to extract main concepts from Adlerian theory but modernize them such that they contain less colonial residue, and then claim that Adlerian theory exudes cultural humility and social justice. This practice is the opposite of cancel culture and splitting in its extraction of good from bad and belief in the coexistence of good and bad. Not to say that Adler is good or bad, but as we all are, a product of the cultural influence of our time.

Assumption of a Level Playing Field

Much of Adler's original writing parallels today's conservative, republican motto of "pulling oneself up by the bootstraps" (Kristof, 2020, para. 1). Adler stated that "all failures—neurotics, psychotics, criminals, drunkards, problem children, suicides, perverts, and prostitutes—are failures because they lack in social interest. No one else is benefitted by the achievement of their aims" (Adler, 1956, p. 156). In other words, Adler believed that those with mental illness, childhood trauma, those who have committed crimes, and so forth, are

responsible for not having garnered enough social interest, enough of a desire to uphold society by contributing to some common good, with which to have salvaged themselves to aid the good of humanity. This type of blame implies belief in a level playing field, in which all individuals are born with the same opportunities and are equally expected to do "good." And if Adler was cognizant that we do indeed each begin life with various advantages and disadvantages, he still held all individuals accountable for producing the same amount of good.

The point of the bootstraps motto is that one's upbringing—advantages and disadvantages—do not merit consideration; one must still, and always, pull oneself up. The idea that all people, by nature of being human, can and should contribute to a common good, is appealing. But it is unjust and futile to maintain the same expectations of all regardless of their backgrounds. One can see the prejudiced thinking embedded into this type of belief, along with the short—sightedness of studying a single person without the forces present around her at birth. Adler specifically demonstrated his uncomprehensive regard for an individual's social location with his claim that "criminals, for instance, always make excuses or accuse others. They mention unprofitable conditions of labor. They speak of the cruelty of society in not supporting them, or they say the stomach commands and cannot be ruled" (Adler, 1956, p. 139). Are these not justified reasons to contribute less than those born into greater fortune or affluence? Adler claimed, "It is always the lack of social interest which causes an insufficient preparation for all the problems in life" (Adler, 1956, p. 156). But is it? It is not a stretch to postulate that were those unprofitable conditions of labor and empty stomachs adjusted, corresponding individuals would have more social interest and less of what Adler called problems in life.

Willpower plays a pivotal role in the bootstraps argument, accompanied by shame. R.C. Schwartz (2021) stated, "The idea of taking responsibility for oneself and not making excuses is

as American as apple pie" (p. 10). Willpower as a construct dates to the Christianity of the Victorian Era, which beseeched its people to resist evil desires and demons; humanity was inherently bad and prone to continuous relentless sin (R.C. Schwartz, 2021). Only by willpower might one exhibit rare, good, holy behavior. It is still used to uphold socioeconomic coloniality in that many believe that those familiar with poverty lack financial resources due to inadequate willpower. The achievement of the affluent, on the other hand, is often attributed to their strong willpower. This single colonial mechanism connects shame to lack of willpower. Instead of social interest, those with willpower are good, and those without are bad, another demonstration of splitting as a defense against the truth that all have good and bad within, and certainly regardless of socioeconomic status.

Black and White Thinking

Further, Adler's black and white thinking regarding social interest is a type of splitting that render some people good and others bad, showcases supremacist attitudes reflective of his era. He stated, "There is only one reason for the individual to side-step to the useless side: the fear of a defeat on the useful side" (Adler, 1956, p. 157). Useless refers to those short in social interest, and useful refers to those who support others by contributing to the common good. Further, "Only those are able to muster the courage to advance on the useful side who consider themselves a part of the whole, who are at home on this earth and in this mankind" (Adler, 1956, p. 159).

With black and white thinking, Adler classified humanity in a compellingly simple way, but all defenses require sacrifice, and splitting flattens complexity, often unpleasant or ambiguous complexity. By classifying a human as useful or useless, Adler ignored all other facets of a person's identity, which begs the question: What comes first, identity or Adlerian

theory? Someone born into a home with excessive childhood adversity might refrain from any positive forward momentum because, according to Adlerian theory, she does not believe she can make the turn into usefulness. Adler did say, after all, that "this kind of identification or empathy … can be trained only if one grows up in relation to others and feels a part of the whole" (Adler, 1956, p. 133). On the flip side, once someone is clearly useful, she might become complacent and settle into a non-productive life of idleness. In these scenarios, Adlerian theory has pre-determined one's degree of social interest. Additionally, Adler did not specify what it means to "feel a part of the whole," or be "at home in this mankind," or explain how to achieve these desirable states. Such vague aspirations seem difficult to obtain, and much less so by the marginalized.

Adlerian theory and Christianity share black and white thinking, which perhaps explains the critique that Adlerian theory expedites the colonial mechanisms of Christianity (Walborn, 2014). Adler never outwardly proclaimed adherence to a given religious doctrine as a stipulation for social interest. In fact, although he was born Jewish and in 1904 converted to Protestantism, he was not a religious man (Walborn, 2014). Adler was raised among Jews and gentiles in the suburbs of Vienna and saw no need personally for religion beyond its positive role in personality development, to instill hope and good will toward others. The reason for his conversion to Protestantism is unknown; it is conjectured that he sought escape from antisemitism, but just after his conversion, his clinic was shut down based on his former identity as a Jew.

Furthermore, it has been pointed out that his juxtaposition of hope/extreme positivity and condemnation coupled with references to the human soul or his belief in eternity, veil notions of Christianity. For example, Adler (1965) said, "The human soul, as part of the movement of life, is endowed with the ability to participate in the uplift, elevation, perfection, and completion" (p.

107). A goal of perfection resembles Adler's black and white belief in one's polarized usefulness or uselessness; only those who are useful may participate in this elevation process. Those who do not contribute to social interest cannot achieve perfection, so they are useless. Adler's black and white thinking is exclusive and divisive.

Additionally, it is worth noting that Adler embedded morality deep within social interest, a theory about mental health and wellbeing (Bickhard et al., 2016). Adler stated that, "A man is called good when he relates himself to other humans in a generally useful way, bad when he acts contrary to social interest" (Adler, 1956, p. 139). Are labels "good" and "bad" not far—fetched and too all-encompassing? This entanglement of mental health and morality implies that one is as worthy morally as her mental health, that various mental health conditions serve to rank this individual's moral value.

Productivity Culture

Finally, a key component of Adlerian theory, the drive to seek superiority, can be recognized in modern, Western-idealized productivity culture. Adler placed no worth in an individual for *being*; an individual has value for her *doing*. Adler compared this need to produce to a "painful tension that seeks relief … [it] is a positive pain, and, at the very least, lasts as long as a task has not been accomplished, a need relieved, or a tension released" (Adler, 1964a, p. 96). This type of tension compels an individual to produce in a way that positively contributes to the whole, thereby introducing meaning into the individual's life and upholding social interest for all. However, productivity, or productivity culture, is more commonly viewed now as having a negative connotation. An exploration of the historical trajectory of this construct will determine how social interest theory can be used now to push away from colonialism and into connectedness.

The word "productive" dates to 16th century and the writings of Adam Smith, considered the father of economics, who believed that "a carpenter transforming a pile of boards into a cabinet is engaging in productive labor, as the cabinet is worth more than what the original boards cost (Newport, 2021, para. 5). A productive act, "in turn, grows the economy and generally improves the standard of living," which is highly beneficial over a long period of time (Newport, 2021, para. 5). In other words, productivity supported the common good by providing necessary goods and services (Newport, 2021, para. 5).

The Industrial Revolution, which began in the 1760s, marked a major shift in general productivity not only in the incorporation of machinery into production but in the introduction of the maximization of efficiency by thinking about, planning, and measuring the tasks that fulfill a specific enterprise (A. Schwartz, 2018). Companies and factories sought to plan in such a way that labor required minimal effort for maximum output. The Measurement Cine-Kodak Camera was innovated to monitor workers and help meet performance targets, so workers became self-policing commodities. The craft method of production was replaced by Henry Ford's continuous assembly line; instead of workers moving around a stationary car, a conveyance method carried cars past stationary workers, which allowed for the beginnings of mass production and jump-started the deskilling of manual labor (Newport, 2021).

The concept of productivity continued to unfold and transform society in the 1900s, in a way that sublimed greed and material wealth (hooks, 2018). Devastation post-Vietnam War then annihilated the dreams of many for justice and love evoked "by the civil rights struggle, the feminist movement, and sexual liberation" (p. 107), and in their place, comfort was sought not in community but in the Protestant work ethic. That material needs are more easily fulfilled than emotional ones allowed individuals to harden their war-devastated hearts and focus on

immediate gratification via productivity (hooks, 2018). The emotional toll of the war along with the economic booms that created jobs for men, women, and marginalized individuals, fostered a new definition of success as the amount of money earned and what that money could purchase, which reified value of mass production, mass-produced goods, and the measuring of an individual's worth by her productive output. So grew the distance between producer and consumer, input and output, and that between the average worker and the head of a business, dulling the meaning of work for the sake of productivity, and imposing the constant pursuit of *more* (hooks, 2018).

The development of software in the late 20th century marked a notable shift from burdening systems, or organizations, with the task of upping production, to charging individuals with improving output produced per unit of input (Newport, 2021). It was estimated in 1999 that the productivity of the average manual worker had increased fiftyfold from the start to the end of the 20th century (Drucker, 2017). For the first time in modern economic history, "productivity became personal" (Newport, 2021, para. 7). The drive for productivity at this point began to nurture a competitive friction between personal and professional lives as individuals were compelled by changing societal norms to relinquish personal hours for the pursuit of professional output (Drucker, 2017). When productivity depends on the individual, there is no upper limit to what can be produced; more becomes better, hence the newfound salience of greed (hooks, 2018; Newport, 2021).

The 21st century, among growing productivity culture, gave rise to a backlash against the modern productivity ethic and marked a clear shift from Adlerian productivity as a beneficial pursuit, to the harmful Western addiction it is today. Learning how to refrain from doing and to rest, or to simply be, has nearly become its own book genre, with such books as "Do Nothing"

(Headlee, 2020), "My Year of Rest and Relaxation" (Moshfegh, 2018), "How to do Nothing: Resisting the Attention Economy" (Odell, 2021), and "I didn't do the Thing Today: Letting Go of Productivity Guilt" (Dore, 2022). Schuller (2021) said that productivity, or constant optimization, is dangerous in its unsustainability and its speed because compassion, an essential building block of cultural humility, cannot withstand the speed of optimizing culture (Vaid-Menon, 2020). Drucker (2017) said that humanity is not capable of constant production, and that this would cause relationships and community engagement to suffer. Headlee (2020) claimed that productivity culture works against community values, that it embodies "a combination of capitalist propaganda with religious propaganda that makes us feel guilty if we're not feeling productive" (p. 89).

Internalized capitalism, commonly used on social media, is a particularly noteworthy critique of productivity culture. If internalized capitalism is, according to Nikita Banks (2018), author of "Finding Happy," "this idea that to be unproductive is sin, and as such that you must always be producing is in direct relation to your worthiness," then what is the relationship of productivity to capitalism? Capitalism is supposed to be a free market in which the pursuit of self-interest promises to reward, based on the market's neutrality, objectivity, impersonality, and fairness to all (Nguyen, 2020). In other words, the playing field is level, and all individuals maintain equal access to achieving the American Dream, or other similar endeavors. However, it becomes increasingly clear that:

> The market cannot be separated from society because the market is simply a tool by which individuals and communities seek to meet their needs, and needs are informed by social and geographic locations, political alignments, and religious beliefs, all of which are rooted in different power dynamics and societal structures. (Nguyen, 2020, p. 10)

In other words, capitalism promotes the economization of all things and people, and a type of hyper-individualistic race-to-the-finish-line attitude that negates communal ways of being, since bodies in this country are not all granted the same value.

In fact, all though the gentle Southern agrarian life was often juxtaposed against Northern industrialism, efficiency, and economic power, the term "racial capitalism" redefines slavery as the birthplace of capitalism, which paints history thereafter as a mere extension of racial exploitation through the mechanics of capitalism (Lemann, 2020; Robinson, 2021; Williams, 1994). Slaveholders developed capitalism through "ever-increasing production quotas for workers and the creation of sophisticated credit instruments," which made them experts in harsh business practices in line with today's productivity culture (Lemman, 2020, para. 2). Coloring capitalism and slavery as mutually dependent resituates the abolition of slavery as a mere rearrangement of oppressive structures, not an end or a liberation (Lemann, 2020; Williams, 1994).

Racial capitalism arose from the critique of Marxism as Eurocentric in that it did not account for the racialized nature of capitalism (Kundnani, 2023; Robinson, 2021). The term is highly controversial because it challenges the notion of capitalism as the great modernizer or an equalizer from which the dispossessed are given opportunity; capitalism instead becomes an economic expression of racism (Kundnani, 2023). Racial capitalism indicates that capitalism has failed. This failure to equalize is best seen in the rise of surplus populations, or individuals who cannot be engaged in waged labor and therefore are not openly exploitable by capitalism. Neoliberalism's privatization, commodification, and financialization have stifled them such that they are abandoned and excluded by the market as capital does not need them to function. But instead of addressing capitalism's inefficacy, these populations are labeled "'welfare queens,'

'Muslim extremists,' 'illegals,' 'narcos,' and 'super-predators,'" etc. (Kundani, 2023, para. 5). These populations are disproportionately people of color.

Capitalism flourishes on white supremacy, which justifies the exploitation of the marginalized, as the powerful "chase profit and hoard the means of production" (Nguyen, 2020, p. 15). Internalized capitalism, then, is the idea of working oneself to happiness by monetary and material gain, with a feeling of personal shame and unworthiness when one cannot reach her dreams. It is thought that a lack of willpower, such as that in the bootstraps argument above, is the only barrier between an individual and her dreams.

Most importantly, productivity is characterized by symbiosis with greed, which "violates the spirit of connectedness and community that is natural to human survival" (hooks, 2018, p. 117). The construct of greed invokes fixation on personal wants and needs, which aligns nicely with capitalism and consumeristic culture, and "promotes a psychological state of endless craving," much like an addiction (p. 111). The true problem posed by the constant pursuit of *more* is that it degrades or nullifies love. Many, filled with greed, lust, and lack, apply "the politics of greed" to love, expecting to passively receive love, and for that love to evoke an instant, drug-like high (hooks, 2018, p. 114). Therefore, the one criterion for relationship becomes the degree to which it can satisfy one's current needs, as greed "wipes out individual recognition of the needs and concerns of everyone, replacing this awareness with harmful self-centeredness" (p. 117).

If productivity is a vehicle through which capitalism determines the societal center and margins, then it contributes to the success of white supremacy, or any kind of division between people groups, and cannot be decolonial. Although Adler's productivity, in his eyes, from his social location, was a positive construct which encouraged collective growth, productivity has a

history that can be traced back to colonialism, and its current impact is damaging (Zinn, 2015).

His theory cannot now, as is, support a decolonial attitude that uplifts the marginalized.

Beyond Adler's Coloniality to A More Decolonized Psychology

Adlerian theory remains central in decolonial practice because like many of us, he was a proto-postcolonial thinker, "a writer whose works are constructed during a colonial period, but in using a postcolonial viewpoint when writing about the effects and anticipated legacies of colonialism, prefigure and pioneer postcolonial discourse" (Loonate, 2022, p. 1). That Adler held criminals and hungry individuals personally, morally responsible for their actions regardless of their social location speaks more to cultural norms and beliefs of his time than it does to his character. Adler was startlingly progressive for his era, particularly in his campaign for the social equality of women and his words against the marginalization of minority groups, but he was still limited by the ideologies of his time (Griffith et al., 2007; Watts, 2003). Glimmers of Adler's decolonial intent sparkle from beneath his theory's colonial underpinnings and request reconstruction for more beneficial usage (Gaztambide, 2021). Martín-Baró (1996) belabored the need to revitalize these glimmers from the perspective of the popular majorities, because "Only then will the techniques we have learned display their liberating potential or their needs of subjugation" (p. 28). If "Psychology can serve as a source of repression *and* liberation depending on" who holds this tool, how can Adlerian theory be used to bring light to the repressed and to de-center the center? (Gaztambide, 2021, p. xxi).

According to this white, female-identified, 21st century writer, the mechanisms of social interest theory that uphold coloniality are best summarized in the following theme: Adler's social interest theory pronounces the individual as the primary agent of change. The application of black and white thinking to Adler's assumption of a level playing field and modern productivity

culture, outlines a narrative in which one's life is pre-determined by the circumstances of her birth, which are extraordinarily difficult to overcome, and to which she is held responsible for overcoming through productive willpower. This narrative is not inaccurate; the problem is that although Adler acknowledged the impact of sociocultural forces, he attributed one's issues, or mental health challenges, to a lack of social interest, and at the same time charged her with achieving social interest. For example, Adler explained:

> All my efforts are devoted towards increasing the social interest of the patient. I know that the real reason for his malady is his lack of cooperation, and I want him to see it too. As soon as he can connect himself with his fellow men on an equal and cooperative footing, he is cured. (Adler et al., 2006, p. 347)

These references speak to a power-over relationship in which Adler knows the client's problem and what the client needs, which negates the mutuality of the therapeutic relationship. Adler's work suggests that his task within the therapeutic relationship is to lead the client in a direction of his choosing; Adler denied the exclusive right for one to be the expert in one's own life. To use social interest theory such that it does not demand that one remove oneself from her own difficult circumstances, the onus for change must be shared, such as in Relational Cultural Theory (J. B. Miller et al., 1991).

Many of the sources who continue to incorporate social interest theory, such as Irvine et al. (2021), Watts (2003; 2017), McCluskey (2021), and J.V. Jones and Lyddon (1997), have removed it from its cognitive constructivist origin and situated it within social constructivism because the latter embodies greater inclusivity in its foundational belief that knowledge and sociocultural context cannot be separated (Omodan & Tsotestsi, 2020). Whereas cognitive constructivism claims that "the primary focus is on the role of the *individual* in learning and

psychological development," social constructivism views psychological activity as "[arising] from, and [reflecting] our immersion in, discursive social, relational practices" (Watts, 2017, p. 140; Martin & Sugarman, 1999, p. 9). Those in favor of social interest theory as cognitive constructivist underline one's creative agency in designing her personhood to pursue her individualized fictional final goal; although social embeddedness is of utmost importance, Adler claimed that the individual must have adequate self-esteem to play her specific part in social interest (Adler et al., 2006; Watts, 2017). Social constructivism, on the other hand, points to Adler's belief in the impact of socio-cultural factors on human development and wellness and affirms Adler's declaration that "it is in relationships that humans have their meaning" (S. L. Jones & Butman, 1991, p. 237). At its core, Adlerian theory is proto-postcolonial because of these dual emphases, "a healthy balance of the individual rooted in relationships" (S. L. Jones & Butman, 1991, p. 237). Whereas much of Western theory during his era focused on the individual and discounted the contributions of "oppressive structures within the environment" to her difficulties, Adlerian theory emphasized the intertwinement of the individual's social dynamics and her overall functioning (Singh et al., 2020, p. 261).

For Adlerian theory to be decolonial, aligned with other 21st century social constructivism, it would require transferal of the pressure to change from the individual to her relationships. If social interest theory is removed from cognitive constructivism and re-rooted solely in social constructivism, it foreshadows Relational Cultural Theory (RCT).

Social interest theory is theorized to have ushered in RCT (Irvine et al., 2021). RCT arose from the observation that "when autonomy, separation, and independence are the prevailing standards of mature psychological functioning, women by most measures are judged deficient," which advances Adler's pro-feminist stance (Walker & Rosen, 2004, p. 4). RCT determines

health, wellness, and growth by the levels of complexity, fluidity, choice, and depth in relationships (J. B. Miller, 1991), similar to social interest. Therefore, the primary cause of human suffering is chronic disconnection (Walker & Rosen, 2004). The relational paradox, a center point for therapeutic focus and growth, describes how, despite intense yearning for close connection, one develops forces of disconnection, or methods of avoiding connection, from relationships that are hurtful, shameful, dangerous, or disappointing; feelings of inferiority are a likely cause (Walker & Rosen, 2004). These forces often serve to maintain a relationship; if one is repeatedly invalidated or on the receiving end of disconnection for sharing parts of herself with another, she develops methods for keeping those parts of herself to herself, for the purpose of maintaining that connection. However, this path leads her away from knowledge of herself and authenticity in that it narrows her options for interpersonal processes. In other words, this path precludes her participation in a common good.

The biggest difference between the two theoretical approaches is that according to RCT, disconnection is a problem between two people, not something belonging to one. Therefore, growth is a co-occurring, collaborative construction that moves a relationship toward increased mutual empathy and mutual empowerment and is measured by how much of oneself participants bring to the relationship, not a measurable productive output (J.B. Miller, 1991). This point highlights a gap in Adlerian theory between the individual and the community.

Although community inherently involves social interest, community plays little role in Adlerian theory. His emphasis on the power of the self, through values of individual self-esteem, creativity, willpower, and uniqueness precludes community values and separates the individual from others. Coupled with his belief in the improbability of the attainment of social interest for those born without it, it seems that community is a lofty, abstract ideal attainable only to those

born into it (Adler, 1956; Adler et al., 2006). Adler's community is an end point or a destination

for the healed and fortunate, not an ongoing process that leads to healing. Whereas other theories

prioritize community as a mechanism for growth and collective challenging of oppression,

Adler's emphasis on the individual dates his work. For example, community in RCT begins

between the therapist and the client in a healing relationship, and Liberation Psychology starts at

dialogue with the marginalized; in both theories, togetherness is a driving force of collective

growth that undoes power imbalances and advances all parties (Gaztambide, 2021; Jordan,

2018). While these theories emphasize power in the acknowledgement of shared adversity of

brokenness, the exclusivity of Adler's community incentivizes the concealment of the

shortcomings of being human shared by all. In other words, this version of community is not true

community.

RCT explores social and background factors that might contribute to one's patterns of

disconnection, which the therapist, by being in relationship with the client, helps her to attend to

and replace with healthier patterns. It is precisely this emphasis on mutuality and community that

distinguishes RCT from social interest theory and aligns RCT with the social justice movement.

RCT advances decoloniality:

> by (a) identifying how contextual and sociocultural challenges impede individuals' ability
>
> to create, sustain, and participate in growth-fostering relationships in therapy and life and
>
> (b) illuminating the complexities of human development by offering an expansive
>
> examination of the development of relational competencies over the life span. (Comstock
>
> et al., 2008, p. 279)

In fact, RCT's original intent, to expand human possibility by relieving humankind from self-

imposed, limiting bounds, recalls Mignolo and Walsh's (2018) declaration that decoloniality

seeks to make visible, open up, and advance radically distinct perspectives and positionalities that displace Western rationality as the only framework and possibility of existence, analysis, and thought" (Comstock et al., 2008; Walker & Rosen, 2004, p. 5; p. 17).

The purpose of delineating RCT in comparison to social interest theory is to provide an example of adaptations that would permit Adler's work to continue its decolonial course. Mignolo and Walsh (2018) wrote, "Coloniality is constitutive, not derivative, of modernity. That is to say, there is no modernity without coloniality" (p. 4). In other words, the constitution of decoloniality must continually transform in accordance with evolution of the social justice movement. Adlerian theory is not fruitless or nonfunctional; merely parts of it which advance colonialism through the daily mechanisms of coloniality, must breathe their last, giving rise to the parts that, with adjustment, further Adler's decolonial intent.

CHAPTER IV: THEORETICAL IMPLICATIONS: WHITENESS INHIBITS CONNECTION

Current and Past Disconnection

Up until this point, this writer has argued that white feelings of inferiority and subsequent excessive pursuit of self-interest severs connection via racism. Disconnection occurs between Black and white, between Black and Black, between white and white, and of the individual from herself. The use of *disconnect* as a verb assigns whiteness as a subject which acts on its direct objects, people. Whiteness disconnects people. *Disconnect,* as a verb, implies that under the circumstances of a different verb, whiteness might do differently and yield different results. In other words, whiteness is not limited to disconnecting. However, use of the noun form of disconnect—*disconnection*—in conjunction with whiteness, would constitute a relationship between two equal parts of speech; whiteness and disconnection together become the acters on their direct objects. From this orientation, whiteness and disconnection are conjoined, and whiteness has no other form of existence apart from disconnection. Whiteness *is* disconnection.

If social interest is a shared power, equitable interconnectedness with others, then whiteness is its antithesis. Adler (1956) said that "The capacity for identification, which alone makes us capable of friendship, love of mankind, sympathy, occupation, and love, is the basis of social interest and can be practiced and exercised only in conjunction with others" (p. 136). Therefore, reorienting whiteness from something that causes the loss of capacity for identification with self and others, to whiteness as the loss of capacity for identification itself, signifies that whiteness impedes social interest, as whiteness's implicit belief in its superiority "results in an inability to empathize or understand the viewpoints or experiences of other individuals who are different from them" (Sue, 2004). The two are mutually exclusive and antithetical.

A review of literature on racism supports the claim that as long as whiteness exists, social interest cannot cultivate racial reconciliation to promote lasting change. Near the start of this paper, I asked why black tragedy need precede white empathy and (temporary) activist endeavors, such that racial reconciliation occurs in waves, always first motivated by Black death or Black suffering. This question also addresses the ineffectiveness of past and contemporary movements against racial oppression and toward social interest; were these movements successful, one wave would have sufficed, and Black death or suffering would not reoccur.

Hill (2022) gave this response to a similar question:

> When a white person is not living in Black skin, they are able to move into apathy as soon as the work gets uncomfortable. Because performance isn't a real investment of emotional spirit; it is simply an empty reaction to feel better. (p. 111)

In other words, whites do not let themselves be addressed by Black suffering in a way that provokes sincere and lasting action (Yancy, 2012). Dabiri claimed that "outcomes seem to have disappeared [from contemporary activist movements], too often replaced by point-scoring" (Dabiri, 2021, p. 130).

The concept of empty advocacy refers to anti-racist movement that jumps to faulty actions/solutions without having perceived the full extent of the problem to begin with. Bergkamp et al. (2022) described empty advocacy, part of the Identity Threat stage of the Model of Integrating Awareness of Privileged Social Identity (MIAPSI), as actions taken to assuage difficult emotions, but with a "lack of understanding of social privilege" (p. 14). This definition of empty advocacy suggests that white anti-racist momentum is misinformed due to a limited understanding of both one's role in racism—whiteness—and the impact of racism on her, in addition to aversion to the difficult emotions that accompany that awareness. In other words, she

is unaware of her part in the whole (Adler, 1979). De La Torre (2017) critiqued hope as a counter-productive defense against these difficult emotions, common in anti-oppression movements, and held that "For hearts to weep and bleed, they require brokenness and realism" (p. 140).

Haste, or quick escapism, is an aspect of this disconnection with self and others often present in empty advocacy. Yancy explained that "The white racist self that desires to flee white power and privilege and attempts to 'rebuild' or 'rehabilitate' itself does so precisely within the context of complex and formative white racist social and institutional material and intrapsychic forces" (2012, p. 173). Although an individual's anti-racist intentions might be pure, she only further harms Black people by acting within a framework of whiteness, which inherently craves and imbues white superiority. Similarly,

> The desire for action, or even the desire to be seen as the good white anti-racist subject …
> does not necessarily involve the concealment of racism. But such a question rushes too
> quickly past the exposure of racism and hence 'risks' such concealment in the very
> 'return' of its address. (Ahmed, 2004, para. 57)

Although the desire to mitigate racism is positive, efforts to bypass the discomfort of viewing oneself in the matrix of racism can only result in ineffective solutions. Empty advocacy short-circuits the connection with self and with others needed to fully grasp the problem.

Empty advocacy often results in inclusivity: inviting people of color into a higher rung within fundamentally oppressive power structures. Inclusivity is another ineffective anti-racist movement in that it does not account for the role white people play in racism, or even the impact of racism on white people. Akomolafe's (2020) slave ship analogy best characterizes how inclusivity actually perpetuates disconnection from self and others via racism. On the ship, upper

class whites sip martinis atop the sunny decks while Blacks languish below in their own excrement, room not enough for all at once to lay on their sides. Inclusivity denotes inviting Black people from below to sunbathe up above with the whites. This analogy exposes the insufficiency of inclusivity and current and past anti-racist activism; although white people have *saved* Black people from below, the ship still progresses in the same direction, from one slave-trading country to the next. The now empty lower level still reeks of excrement. Even though Black people might be invited up top, the bottom continues to exist. Whiteness still holds the power, as inclusivity hinges upon the whims of white decision-making and aptitude for charitability. True liberation from racist power structures would mean to finally just "leave the goddam ship," not to merely adjust systems built upon inequal power dynamics (Dabiri, 2021, p. 73). The "answer is not charity but rather restructuring power structures," which might mean for white people to step below for a day or two, long enough to formulate a determination to dispense with the entire ship (De La Torre, 2017, p. 155). Some type of personal identification with self and others in white people is missing from empty advocacy and ensuing inclusivity.

Contemporary forms of activism are often unsuccessful because they do not account for whiteness. If white people believe themselves as separate from racism and the suffering of Black people, there is not common good for the rooting of social interest. If white people could see the role of whiteness in the suffering of Black people, and how Black suffering in fact harms white people, too, both groups can unite under the common good of dissolving oppression and increasing benefits for all. Only then can social interest take root. Adler claimed that "Whoever desires the human community must renounce the striving for power over others," along with (white) superiority, and reach toward that shared something (Adler, 1996, p. 169).

Reconnection

It might seem that the concept of a white anti-racist is an infuriating oxymoron. Usage of the label often further allows whiteness to dominate, but under the guise of cultural humility in the pursuit of equity. To some, this phrase further perpetuates and maintains the invisibility of whiteness. However, this author is either hopeful that whites can in time learn to override their whiteness and forge openness to other realities, or so hopeless in the capacity of white people as to believe in the radical: the eventual and purposeful dwindling of whiteness. Yancy (2012) added *racist* in between *white* and *anti-racist*, which significantly changes the meaning of this oxymoron by emphasizing the shades of gray between being a racist and being an anti-racist. A white anti-racist approaches anti-racist work with full confidence in herself as an ally to make better the lives of people of color. A white racist-anti-racist approaches this work with caution; constant self-reflection, self-critique, and self-reimagination; an awareness of one's capacity to harm, and acknowledgement of one's place in the whole as both perpetuator, benefactor, and challenger of whiteness. A white racist anti-racist understands that despite her good intentions, white power structures precede her attitudes, thoughts, and actions, and create unintended consequences in her relationship with the Othered; only through recognizing and reclaiming her whiteness—whiteness's need to oppress from a place of inferiority—can she re-inhabit her place in unity with Others under a common good.

Many contemporary authors who today pioneer the literary field of racism by pushing beyond the boundaries of that already established as true, leave their readers not with suggestions or commands of what to do next but in an intentionally unsatisfying state of not having an answer, with no visible path forward. This route is highly unpopular as a major philosophical underpinning of whiteness is the formulation of knowledge through a linear path with a clear

beginning that ends at a point of arrival or enlightenment (Hill, 2022; Mignolo & Walsh, 2018). A white person who engages in anti-racist efforts but does not acknowledge the omnipresence of whiteness in her formulation as a person and therefore as determinant of her mannerisms of thinking, speaking, and acting, will only reproduce racism, the impetus of whiteness, as whiteness exists for no other purpose but to aspire for superiority via the exploitation of others, which in the arena of anti-racism often occurs through empty advocacy (Adler et al., 1956; Bergkamp et al., 2022; Hill, 2022; Tyler et al., 2021). If whiteness is a norm from which all else deviates, efforts to step outside of whiteness are not natural and require a heightened intentionality, constant re-evaluation, and willingness to be judged as not good. Deviations from the norm, such as leaving a reader without a clear set of anti-racist instructions, are often viewed as a disruption which must be terminated (Hill, 2022).

As such, this chapter continues the trend of disrupting whiteness by leaving the reader in the enigmatical gray area between examining a problem and identifying a solution, where one can practice the iterative process of cycling between acceptance of uncomfortable ambiguity and continued defense of herself, depending on her developmental level within this work. The following section lists various fundamental components or aspects of this next step with the goal of helping the reader personally locate herself within the matrix of racism, by accepting the loss of illusion of self-image built on whiteness, and examining internalized beliefs (whiteness) that maintain current power structures. This next step parallels MIAPSI's Critical Exposure stage, "the cognitive leap from various and obscure encounters with another person's experience of oppression to the individual's recognition of systemic oppression" (Bergkamp et al., 2022, pp. 7–8; Reeves, 2000). This place is one of exposure, of the reclamation of feelings of inferiority, in

which individuals must resist the urge to "find shelter from acknowledging [her] unfinished present" (Yancy, 2012, p. 158).

Aspects of Reconnection

Willingness to Tarry

Dysconsciousness, as described above, is a defense mechanism employed to avoid exposure to Black pain, and in doing so, situates the individual in a place where the current present does not hurt, so there is no need to challenge the status quo (King, 1991). If someone cannot connect Black pain to her personal experience of pain, then racism does not seem detrimental such that she might expend effort to challenge it. Exposure, a ripping off of the blinders or defenses that conceal one from Black pain, is needed for any hope of ever understanding, or even solving, the problem. Willingness to tarry is an aspect of this essential personal exposure (Yancy, 2012).

Failure to tarry means to disconnect from one's own and others' emotions. Yancy (2012) described failure to tarry in difficult emotions and the ambiguous present, in a lecture he gave to an audience of professors about the impact of racism on Black bodies. Salient critiques from audience members included that he left the white professors without hope, and that he was too angry. Instead of engaging with their discomfort, and *tarrying*, these audience members disconnected from themselves and from Black suffering and ensured that Yancy (2012) was "reduced to the mythical angry black man, a one-dimensional caricature, rendering all that [he] had to say about whiteness and white racism of little or no value" because to see truth in his words would have necessitated a shift in self-identity as white people (p. 154).

Similarly, "elevator effect" as Yancy (2012) recognized in many of his classes, highlights white craftiness in untwisting themselves from their whiteness, instead of claiming their

privilege and using it for good. In a hypothetical elevator, a white woman grabs her purse as soon as a Black man crosses the threshold. Yancy's students, instead of admitting that the white woman is complicit in racism, questioned the Black person's reality and perception, with commentary like, "What if the purse strap broke and instead of holding it for fear of being robbed, the white woman is attempting to fix it?" or "What if the white woman on the elevator is physically blind and so does not even notice the 'race' of the man?" or "What if the white woman is claustrophobic and therefore she is simply anxious about being in an enclosed space as opposed to being in an enclosed space with a black man?" (p. 155). These questions challenge Yancy's capacity, as a Black man, "*to know* when an act is racist" and serve to reinforce the defenses of his students against the complicity of white bodies in racism (p. 155).

Both scenarios—critiques from Yancy's (2012) professor audience and his student's disputations of what transpired in the elevator—reflect a preference for rejecting the Black man's epistemic status as a Black man, by denying the possibility of racism, rather than dwelling in the uncomfortable space of attempting to understand the Black man. Moreover, "the 'innocent' white self can distance itself from any sense of racism through relocating the locus of the problem in the black person's distorted perception of what the white person on the elevator is actually doing" (p. 156). The longing for hope in the first scenario parallels the questions of the second, in that both relieve the white person from wondering *What if I am wrong?* The white audience chose to disconnect from themselves and their guilt or shame at their privilege, related to potentially being wrong, which severed them from feeling and understanding the Black man and his pain. This type of impasse perpetuates racism by arresting awareness of privilege and therefore, any chance for reconciliation.

If the above examples signified *failure to tarry*, then Yancy's following instructions shed light on how one might *tarry*:

> I encourage whites to dwell in spaces that make them deeply uncomfortable, to stay with
> the multiple forms of agony that black people endure from them, especially those whites
> who deny the ways in which they are complicit in the operations of white racism. (2012,
> p. 157).

Simply put, to tarry means to feel exposure to Black pain and to move toward it instead of away from it. To tarry is to experience the fullness of an uncomfortable racial situation to direct individuals away from empty advocacy and toward a more informed stance, to engagement of the heart in Black pain, the mind in the understanding of white power structures, and to consciously take up the problem of one's own racism. This might look like feeling the pain of a Black Other in one's body and focusing on it, asking what that pain can teach us, as shame, grief, and pain are the greatest teachers (Hill, 2022). To tarry means to try and understand the Black experience, at the preclusion of doing anything about it, although action might later ensue. Readers might ask themselves the question: "What does it feel like to be a problem?" (p. 174).

Non-Closure

Tarry is the verb, or action format, of Hill's (2022) noun, *non-closure*, which means to move into anti-racist work without a metric for progress/productivity. In its literal form, closure refers to the act of closing, or ending something (Merriam-Webster, n.d.). Moreover, anti-racism through acts of closure implies the synthesis of multiple behaviors or actions, with clear start and end points, into one thread of doing that finishes at a point of arrival. It conjures a checklist, or a to-do list of consecutive things which must be accomplished to signify productivity and therefore, success and worthiness; a checklist approach to anti-racism cannot help but belie a

neoliberal, capitalistic framework of being. Hill condemned excessive doing without "living into the experience," as "anyone can take a workshop or teach a workshop, give calls to actions, and do what feels good at any moment. But we can't *be* less of anything until we begin to *live* into the experience ourselves" (p. 198). Uninformed doing is synonymous with empty advocacy.

Hill (2022) attributed the empty advocacy, or performative allyship of 2020's racial reckoning to white misinterpretation of the murders of Black people by police as the entire problem, when in reality, the murders together were an indicator of the whole problem of Black suffering from racism as the vehicle of whiteness. White commitment to the improvement of Black lives was half-hearted in that when the indicators of Black suffering lost recognition, white advocacy waned. Therefore, white (empty) advocacy surges with indicators of Black suffering and wanes when these indicators are overshadowed by other, more pressing narratives.

Non-closure can be viewed as a disruption to the checklist approach to anti-racism (Hill, 2022). Hill encouraged her readers to unabashedly and without an intended goal, explore and feel the emotions from which white supremacy trains us to dissociate. Acknowledging these feelings as an important source of information is an act of rebellion as it is through feeling our own pain that we can identify with that of others. Non-closure, then, is relinquishment of the urgent search for, or entitlement to, an answer. Much

> like a flying trapeze artist, [one] must eventually let go of the rope [one] is holding onto in order to reach out and grab the next rope swinging before [one]. In a moment he is suspended between the two ropes, wondering if he will survive the transition or fall to the nets below. (Singleton & Hays, 2022)

Yancy (2012), Hill (2022), De La Torre (2017) clearly iterated that action is not the purpose of this answer-less gray space. Eurocentric formulations or acquisitions of knowledge

function "to render passive. Once a thing, person, or culture can be 'acted upon' at will by the European self, that self is considered to have expanded" (Ani, 1994, p. 563). To refrain from action is to interrupt aggressive, controlling action. To look for an answer in occupying this space is counter-productive and defeats its purpose, which is a richer understanding of the problem. However, action, and more informed action, often do occur as a result of time spent and discoveries made while in this space. As such, the trapeze artist's leap does not equate to taking action or making changes, but it is certain that one cannot do either without first taking the leap. The leap does not guarantee growth but opens up the possibility or it. "You can't be the expert in something you don't experience; being a know it all prevents us from learning" (Hill, 2022, p. 94). Racism is the antithesis of humanity, because in the face of such stark need to connect, we do not, even though we know we need to.

Hopelessness

Hopelessness is a deep resignation to acceptance of the status quo as eternal, that can provoke the radical, desperate actions needed for change. De la Torre (2017) ended the last chapter of "Embracing Hopelessness" with an unapologetic disclaimer that:

> If readers were looking for answers, then I fear they might leave with questions; if they were looking for certainties, they will leave with contradictions; if they were looking for order to their lives, they will find a messier existence. And if they were looking for hope, they will surely leave with a deeper sense of desperation. (p. 154)

De La Torre "confessed" a pull to end his book on a hopeful, happy note, but could not justify that offense to the vast majority of the world's oppressed who live in "hell" and for whom hope is an unaffordable luxury, specifically brown Latinx bodies who from life-threatening circumstances created by and to benefit "white supremacy's past transnational ventures" in their

home countries, are chased onto the grueling path of Western northward migration and crossing the US border (2017, p. 128). He lamented the invisibility of this people group, which subjects them to further abuses, and walks the trails of the undocumented to raise consciousness in readers and overturn the notion that these lives do not matter; they fuel his sense of hopelessness. He shares their sense of hopelessness.

Hope presents differently depending on one's social location: for the marginalized, the majority of the population, hope is denial of the gravitas of their tormented existence which offers no reprieve. When the present-day is one of incorrigible anguish, the promise of a more comfortable future is moot and irrelevant to the pain of now. For the privileged, hope is a defense which distances them from the cries of the marginalized and discharges them from their participation required to undo the norm of oppressive structures to reach the dreamed-about future; "it soothes the conscience of those complicit with oppressive structures, lulling them to do nothing except look forward to a salvific future where every wrong will be righted and every tear wiped away" (De la Torre, 2017, p. 5). Perseverant hope frustrates the urge to strive for the change which hopelessness has no choice but to invoke. Hope indicates that its beholder still has something to defend and keepsake, something which prevents her from fully embracing the unjust reality.

On the other hand, hopelessness, is "a desperation rooted in hope denied" (De La Torre, 2017, p. 140) When all is lost that might compel one to live in accordance with the status quo, anyone might do anything; no actions, despite their risks or repercussions, remain too far or off-limits. Only the hopeless attempt to cross the desert which spews death threats by way of excessive exposure to heat and cold, snakebite, a misstep and resulting injury which causes one's group to leave her behind, and vengeful Border Patrol and vigilante groups which often do not

provide brown bodies adequate sustenance for survival once detained. This route is one taken once all others are irresolutely unavailable. Individuals embark on this route only when all else promises death. Hopelessness is a courageous pursuit of justice not because its pursuer believes she will be successful but "for the sake of justice, regardless of the outcome" (p. 142). Hopelessness is the only possible incitation to the radical act of northward migration.

The objective of remaining hopeless is not to paralyze individuals with shame and despair but to tear down the defenses that support systems of oppression so that one may identify with the Latinx, or the Black cry. The *hope* is that hopelessness will in fact incite one to informed, radical action which hope guards against. Similarly, "We embrace hopelessness when we embrace the sufferers of the world, and in embracing them, we discover our own humanity and salvation, providing impetus to our praxis, for hopelessness is the precursor to resistance and revolution" (De La Torre, 2017, p. 140). Delving into the ambiguity of our own personal hopelessness is a gateway to that of others. Hopelessness is meant to bar one from the notion of quick fixes and to distinctly reveal to the privileged the loss incurred by defending ourselves from the suffering of the marginalized.

Double-Turn

Although declarations of whiteness are often viewed as humble or as good practice, most often they conceal a hasty rush past the challenging emotions invoked when one honestly considers her role in Black pain (Ahmed, 2004). An aspect of empty advocacy, these "'admissions' of 'bad practice'" reinforce whiteness as superior by placing it on a stage beneath a spotlight with an audience to applaud its good and honest confession (para. 1). If the re-production of whiteness functions by appointing racial distinctions between others, then these

declarations magnify whiteness such that it reifies racial distinctions with the Not-White; declarations of whiteness do the work of whiteness (Lorde, 2018; Dabiri, 2021).

The rush to seemingly unveil white culpability or guilt creates a paradox in which those who endure the maximal impact of whiteness cannot escape sight of it—it is omnipresent—but to those who inhabit whiteness, it remains invisible, which maintains its power (Ahmed, 2004). Therefore, making whiteness visible is only relevant to those for whom it is invisible. Current studies of whiteness seek to make whiteness visible for the purpose of deconstructing it. However, this process often ends in the transformation of whiteness into a narcissistic object. For example, when one declares that she is racist, and that utterance is considered indication of her anti-racism work, this declaration has been ineffective. The declaration itself becomes evidence that she is not racist and replaces the work required to transcend the racist behavior. Transforming whiteness into a color by claiming that *We are all colored*, or *We are all marginalized* is a second, common declaration of whiteness, which conceals the power and privilege that accompanies whiteness. In this type of declaration, the speaker has amplified other types of discrimination to say that everyone suffers from some type or another of oppression. She has diluted racism and the history of white assault of Black.

Although these declarations occur from good intention, they function to block the distress of white hearing the impact of racism on Black by hastily turning away from Black experience (Ahmed, 2004). In other words, one cannot be fully present with the truth of Black experience because it induces pain at one's complicity in racism. Declaring one's racism is an urge to self-right, to over-correct one's racial wrongdoing, often in a public way, that removes whiteness outside the realm of critique. But it is essential that whites move into this critique, that we dwell in the discomfort of having done harm to people of color and to re-structure their sense of self to

accommodate this critique. Ahmed coined the phrase double-turn, which means for whites "to stay implicated in what they critique, but in turning towards their role and responsibility in these histories of racism, as histories of this present, to turn away from themselves, and towards others" (para. 59). The first of the two turns is toward oneself as a white person who naturally replicates whiteness by the nature of one's existence, and the second is away from the urge to focus on oneself but toward people of color and the application of this awareness to support the Othered.

Getting Unhooked

Like a rainbow trout who glimpses from her periphery a large mass of snack suddenly emerge upon the surface of her pond and cannot resist the tingling urge of her whole body to rush to the surface and envelop the snack along with its silver, metal hook, we, too, get hooked. We live hooked. Getting hooked is "that sticky feeling that arises when we want things to go our way"; it is the root cause of aggression and the root cause of craving (Chödrön, 2007). Getting hooked is to become entirely consumed by a strong emotional reaction that compels one to act in a habitual way that is contrary to her best interest, to activate defense and mitigate the discomfort; fulfilling that need over-shadows all else. Getting hooked is the activation of self-interest, at the expense of others. In the language of racism and oppression, someone who is hooked moves from one action to the next without a full understand of what she is doing and if it is effective, or even within her best interest, to keep doing. She has not paused to ponder the magnitude of the problem she so desperately seeks to solve because the emotions that arise from the notion of Black pain are too uncomforting. To disconnect and continue to engage in empty advocacy, is easier than to feel.

Chödrön (2007) described this happening as an acute, time-bracketed event. But this writer believes that white American culture generally lives hooked. If the hook is feeling unworthy, the habitual reaction is bustle and productivity to prove one's worth. If the hook is the suffering of the marginalized, the habitual reaction might be disgust. If the hook is loneliness, the reaction might be alcohol, sex, food, shopping, a so forth. A hook of Black pain often results in empty advocacy. Today's colonizers and capitalizers cast well-baited lines for the purpose of blinding all to anything other than the rat race to the surface to claim the bait (and the hook). This state of distraction keeps one's attention on the bait rather than the ocean. This state of trance, as Tara Brach called it, "makes us forget what really matters."

Living hooked implies constant movement as the rainbow trout has no choice but to follow and swim with her captor. However, Frankl's (1959) famous point that in the space between stimulus and response lies freedom, suggests otherwise. While the physical hook is external, there is something within the rainbow trout that makes her bite; but, does she not have the agency to refrain from succumbing to the urge? Zen Master Bon Soeng (n.d.) questioned his motives in biting the hook by asking, "What do I bite, and why do I bite it? What am I, and what am I doing right now?" (2:35). What in me drives me toward something I know is not good for me? What is it about me that causes me to forget what really matters? To arrive at these questions, one must first realize that she gets hooked, what her particular hooks are, a type of self-reflection that promoted better alignment with the whole. One must "acknowledge that it's happening and abide with the experience of being triggered, the experience of urge, the experience of wanting to move" (Chödrön, 2007, p. 104). She can then choose other ways to respond to that trigger, if at all, which disempowers the hook and allows her to gently remove it

from the roof of her mouth by not engaging, as if it never mattered at all. Getting hooked

parallels quickly reacting to the cries of the marginalized with empty advocacy.

Anything but stillness is a reaction to the hook. Anything but intentional connection with

oneself and others is a reaction within the patterns of whiteness. Stillness is a natural antidote to

movement. If getting hooked causes one to forget what really matters, stillness allows one to

remember. In the space between getting hooked and reacting, or seeing the bait and with a chase,

devouring it, lies connection with ourselves, which enables connection with others. Holiday

(2020), author of "Stillness is the Key," mirrored social interest in his claim that stillness is an

essential step in remembering that "We are one big collective organism engaged in one endless

project together. We are one. We are the same. Still, too often we forget it, and we forget

ourselves in the process" (p. 67). When I forget who I am, I forget who we are. Forgetting results

in acceptance of racism and half-hearted efforts at solutions.

Self-Inquiry

Many of the above sections entreat the reader to ask questions of herself that might

provide information on her implication in racism. Questions include "What is it like to be a

problem?" "What if I am wrong?" and "What is it about me that causes me to forget what really

matters?" (Yancy, 2012, p. 174). Clearly, questions are significant, sometimes even more so than

answers. Rilke (2019) advised one to:

> Be patient toward all that is unsolved in your heart and try to love the questions
>
> themselves, like locked rooms and like books that are now written in a very foreign
>
> tongue. Do not now seek the answers, which cannot be given you because you would not
>
> be able to live them. And the point is, to live everything. Live the questions now. Perhaps

you will then gradually, without noticing it, live along some distant day into the answer.

(p. 12)

Questions allow ideas to unfold into depth, complexity, and intensity without the bounds of needing an answer. Applied to this dissertation, valuing questions, even over answers, encourages an embracing of uncertainty in which no one answer is correct, and all perspectives are valued.

Similarly, self-enquiry, a focus on questions as a means to learning, is a common practice in self-exploration and growth. For example, Radically Open Dialectical Behavior Therapy (RO-DBT) posited that when one receives evocative or threatening sensory input, "a quick and typically unconscious evaluative process ensues, the primary function of which is to assign valence (positive or negative) and significance to such stimuli, a process which is moderated by biotemperament and past experience" (Lynch, 2018, p. 25). Although the brain requires 17–20 milliseconds to be consciously aware of observing emotional affect, the face and body reacts to an emotional face in as little as four milliseconds. In other words, all bring biases, personal truths, thoughts, emotions, and sensations from past experience into every interaction often at a level that is not conscious, which negates the belief in one absolute truth and highlights the subjective experience. Even if a truth does exist, the attainment of truth allows for more personal expansion than the actual truth itself.

Therefore, a healthy self-doubt allows greater openness to the experiences of others, especially when contradictory to one's own (Lynch, 2018). Defensive arousal, or reaction to difficult emotions, can be valuable discomfort that calls attention to one's growth edges as "moments of self-growth may stem from the very things we don't want to change or admit to as problems (that is, the point where our known makes contact with our unknown, which is referred

to as *finding one's edge*)" (p. 26). Self-enquiry is to openly contemplate how the solution entails

ownership of part of the problem to promote growth in connection with others and reach mutual

understanding. Two main observations undergird this practice: (a) openness to making mistakes

as no one knows everything, and (b) being present with the unknown. As such, self-enquiry

remains suspicious of quick answers and expresses preference for questions over answers.

Possible self-enquiry questions include: "What is the problem, and what part do I play in

it?" "Which of my daily behaviors and attitudes contribute to the level of discomfort perpetuated

by the problem?" "What are my innate defenses, and how do they reinforce the problem?" "What

are barriers to compassion?" How do I perpetuate racist attitudes in my relationships with self

and others? Do I ever choose to evade instead of confront discomfort associated with the

problem? What do I gain from refraining to address and solve the problem? "What is this

inviting me to know right now … about myself?*"* (Hill, 2022, p. 199). The goal of self-enquiry

is to examine the defenses that inhibit relational growth such that their dispersal can result in

richer relationships that welcome more parts of the self.

Reconnection Moving Forward

Perhaps the most noteworthy conclusion from the above perspectives is this: in the space

between observing a problem and locating a solution, when one tarries, practices a double-turn,

engages in hopelessness, or intentionally navigates the removal of a hook, there awaits the

re-alignment of self with social interest in seeing one's role of whiteness in racism, one's benefit

from whiteness, and one's unique role to re-connect with the Othered by reclaiming the feelings

of inferiority which started and perpetuate the need for racism.

All perspectives described or referred to two essential processes of relinquishing the

white reality as the only reality: a component of reflexivity in which the individual observes and

grieves her foundational enmeshment in whiteness, and a re-connection with others with that self-knowledge. In this space of non-closure and self-enquiry lies room for other perspectives and experiences and a re-imagining of the center as white people engage in relationship in increasingly complex ways. If whiteness does not have the only and the best answer, then all other answers and people are valid. Learning other patterns of connection is the key to growing in relationship with others, but not without first beginning to see and understand whiteness. According to Sue (2004), "To challenge that worldview as being only partially accurate, to entertain the notion that it may represent a false illusion, and to realize that it may have resulted in injustice to others make seeing an alternative reality frightening and difficult" (p. 762).

Finally, it is important to note that re-uniting under a common good might not appeal to the marginalized (De La Torre, 2017). This dissertation is grounded in the assumption that reintegration of, or the re-connection between the idealized and the devalued signifies ultimate healing. However, a white person's purposeful engagement in anti-racism does not necessitate acquiescence, approval, or forgiveness on the part of the marginalized. The reader must not presume that feeling Black pain equates to Black desire to engage with or forgive white people.

To ask that people of color forgive whites places the burden of healing oppression onto people of color instead of emphasizing the importance of slowly abandoning whiteness, or reconciliation as contingent on societal change (De La Torre, 2017). It would be dangerous for people of color to forgive without white redistribution of power and privilege throughout society; premature reconciliation would further mask the existing causes of conflict, thereby repeating cycles of abuse as has occurred for decades. Desmond Tutu asked, "If you take my pen, what good does an apology do, if you still keep my pen?" (as cited in Kidwell et al., 2001, p. 170). Change must precipitate re-connection between Black and white. Therefore, to return agency to

the marginalized is an essential first step; this would mean to follow the lead of the marginalized and the degree to which they are open to reconciliation, if at all.

Instead of resolutely moving toward a singular vision of re-connection, the steps above, like entering non-closure or engaging in self-enquiry involve doubt and uncertainty; white people might take actions that do not immediately produce the desired outcome. The marginalized "may simply not be ready, requiring more time, even waiting until the next life" (De La Torre, 2017, p. 115). The only certainty is that stepping into uncertainty with the chance of betterment is beneficial to remaining where we are (Akomolafe, 2019). We continue anti-racism work not because we believe in or hope for a better outcome, but "we struggle for justice for the sake of justice, regardless of the outcome" (De La Torre, 2017, p. 142).

CHAPTER V: CONCLUSION

The goal of this dissertation was to explain how a lack of social interest, or disconnection, creates and perpetuates racism, an antidote to which would be increased social interest and reconciliation with pieces of ourselves and others. Since compassion plays a significant role in Adler's (2006) social interest theory, one might extrapolate that to "feel with the heart of another" would bring forth a desire to mitigate pain of all others, of society, and gather under a common good or, in a way that is cognizant of social interconnectedness (p. 135). Although many have acknowledged that the disconnection via racism is harmful, few efforts against such disconnection have been unsuccessful largely because they occur from a white, monocentric framework.

Adler would stipulate that whiteness, essentially a body of thoughts, feelings, and behaviors which seek to actualize white superiority, is a preemptive, tyrannical strike against all who are not white that arose from feelings of inferiority. Mechanisms that further whiteness through racism include zero-sum thinking, defense mechanisms that blind the oppressor to the pain she causes and the oppressed to the pains she endures, and the gaze, which justifies oppression of the oppressed to the oppressed. Simply put, white people must acknowledge and explore their personal ways of uplifting whiteness to be able to connect with the Othered in a way that is truly reconciliatory.

This dissertation interrupts the white need for a clear, objective, science-backed answer or way forward by leaving the reader in a state of discomfort that encourages reflection and re-connection. That questions are often perceived as having one correct and many incorrect answers means that there is space only for one perspective. However, racism was built on this

premise—that all but white is a deviation from the norm—so racism must be undone by welcoming the repressed perspectives of all.

Epilogue: New Statement of Positionality

This paper was written with a sense of hopeless desperation, in part because a dissertation by nature diffuses hopelessness, but primarily for the soul-crushing topic of racism. At many points along the way, I felt the uncomfortable ambiguity of not having an answer or a direct path forward. As soon as I solved one piece of the puzzle, that new lead resulted in a dead end which required further delving into discomfort, frustration, and animosity for the rare glimpse of inspired "ah-ha" moments.

During my childhood rides to school, in childlike fashion, I dreamt of removing the borders between skin colors. Literally, this meant, as if Earth were a Lego set or a Lincoln logs community, for a large, calloused, parental hand to emerge from the upper layer of stormy clouds and in one neat, simple tug, to unpluck the metal stakes which grounded the chain-link fence from the Pacific Ocean to the Gulf of Mexico. It would then be tossed carelessly into the cosmos, and with it the sum of humanity's problems. I was not aware that this wall is not one single wall but often a series of walls and fences, many of which are concrete, electric, and/or buried in barbed wire, barricaded with Border Patrol, vengeful vigilante groups, tanks, machine guns, helicopters, and fear-provoking dogs. However, I was aware of other walls, invisible ones, that existed in my home between my housekeeper and me when hers was the bed I ran to in the middle of the night as frightened children do, at bus stops on Friday afternoons between the white women in Mercedes dropping off their Mexican housekeepers, and at Mexican restaurants, when I pretended to Mexican waitstaff that I did not speak Spanish, out of fear causing upset that I had taken something—a language—that did not belong to me, and to a much more privileged

social location than where it belonged. I longed to remove the walls and push together the

Black/brown and white to create shades of gray. From a child's perspective, surely, any two

humans who shared company for a handful of minutes could find within themselves pieces of the

Other, and a sense of appreciation for the Other's lived experience.

I now know that the invisible walls must be torn down before the visible one. Even if

pushed together, when one person wears the numbing, lying, taunting blindfold of whiteness, she

will not be able to recognize the human just before her. When elicited, after the deliberate tearing

down of comfortable defenses, desperation is meant to be utilized, not squandered. When used

properly, desperation can open one's eyes to whiteness, the antithesis of social interest, and the

loss it causes in destroying intrapersonal and interpersonal connection, and can fuel one to

grapple with complex, human puzzle described in this dissertation. This desperation is strong

enough to favor relationships of mutuality and shared power over the pull to exploit others as an

escape route from one's feelings of inferiority. Even zero-sum thinking, the belief that Black

gain means white loss, can be overturned by the discomfort from which we are conditioned to

hide. In essence, all that is required to engender social interest is to feel. If the best way to

disconnect is not to feel, we must rip out our defenses and dive headlong into the gray ambiguity

of fear, guilt, shame, anger, sadness, rejection, compassion, and empathy.

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