

# Interrogating Whiteness in Community Research and Action

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## Highlights

- Critical evaluation of whiteness is virtually absent from community psychology literature.
- Other fields provide more comprehensive frameworks for interrogating whiteness.
- Incorporating whiteness into liberation frameworks would advance the study of social justice.

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**Abstract** Community psychology is expressly concerned with social justice. Such concern necessitates attention to race. Yet, nearly absent from the field's literature is explicit and critical attention to whiteness. Thus, community psychology's contribution to promoting social justice remains incomplete. In this article, we examine how a critical construction of whiteness can be useful for community research and action. After a brief history of the construction of whiteness in the United States, and a summary of key insights from critical whiteness studies, we present a scoping review of the nascent body of community psychology literature that addresses whiteness. That work implicates whiteness in the emergence of the field itself, frames whiteness as social location, problematizes whiteness, addresses White supremacy and institutional racism, interrogates White privilege, and employs whiteness as a theoretical standpoint. We conclude with three propositions for scholars to broker the relationship between community psychology and critical whiteness studies: (a) community psychology should become more critically conscious of whiteness, (b) community psychologists should promote critical awareness of the ways that whiteness operates as a complex system, and (c) greater critical awareness of whiteness should be applied to the development of multilevel interventions aimed at dismantling whiteness as a system of domination.

**Keywords** Whiteness · Racism · Oppression · Liberation

## Introduction

Social justice is one of community psychology's core values, which has inspired important, socially pressing work on racial liberation that centers people of color. Community psychology scholarship addressing racial justice, however, rarely critically engages with *whiteness* as a system of domination rooted in social, economic, and psychological processes (Feagin, 2013; Green, Sonn, & Matsebula, 2007). Whiteness is a significant and often elusive barrier to community psychology's long-standing aim of promoting social justice through multilevel analyses, interventions, and collaborative, action-oriented research. The value of social justice implies the objective of promoting equitable allocation of power and resources. Social action, on the other hand, refers to engaging in praxis aimed at changing social conditions to produce just outcomes (Prilleltensky, 2001). Much work remains to be done regarding the promotion of social justice and social action (Chavis & Wolff, 1993; Prilleltensky, 2001). The field could more fully attend to these core values by more deeply interrogating whiteness.

The purpose of the current paper is to examine how a critical construction of whiteness can be useful for community research and action. The field of critical whiteness studies has already begun this work, and synthesizing it with community psychology would benefit both fields. Here we present a model of key concepts and frameworks from critical whiteness studies to facilitate their application to community research and action. We then conduct a scoping review to provide a detailed assessment of the state of community psychology's engagement with

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whiteness. Our findings underscore the dearth of work on whiteness in community psychology, while highlighting important exceptions. To encourage work that advances a critical whiteness community psychology, we end with three propositions for incorporating whiteness into community research and action. Crucially, we propose a multilevel interventionist approach grounded in critical whiteness studies, among communities and settings in which whiteness affords unearned privilege and power. This critical whiteness community psychology is both timely and necessary, especially given renewed energy around racial justice and the Black Lives Matter movement in the wake of the killing of George Floyd, Tony McDade, Breonna Taylor, and too many others to name (Pew Research Center, 2020). The present national conversation has left individuals and organizations searching for ways to dismantle systemic racism (Marquez, 2020). Engaging with whiteness will be an essential step in that dismantling.

### The Social Construction of the “White” Race and Whiteness Ideology

Characteristic of whiteness is that it is often taken for granted or ignored. Even astute readers of racial justice may have given little thought to what whiteness is and where it comes from. Understanding the historical and economic roots of whiteness is commensurate with community psychology’s ecological, systems, and liberation orientations calling for attention to the relationship between individual and organizational experience and social structures and forces (Kelly, 2006; Maton, 2008; Trickett, 2009). Racial categories in general can be described as resulting from a *racialization* process characterized by *racial projects* (Omi & Winant, 1994, 2008). Omi and Winant (2008) define racial projects as “simultaneously an interpretation, representation, or explanation of racial dynamics, and an effort to reorganize and redistribute resources along particular racial lines” (p. 1567). As such, representations of and significations on race “invoke social structures, power relations, and lived experiences of identity and difference” (Omi & Winant, 2008, p. 1569). However, racialization theory downplays what W.E.B. DuBois (1953) called the “psychological wage” that White people derive from racism (i.e., White privilege). While all racial groups engage in some form of contestation and reorganization of the meanings of racial categorization, they do so on an uneven playing field that favors whiteness (Feagin & Elias, 2013).

Whiteness is the result of the legal and political process of constructing a “white” race that is at the top of a racial hierarchy, particularly within colonized nations such as Australia, South Africa, and the United States (Green

et al., 2007). These processes unfairly privilege White people by granting them access to social, economic, and political benefits that are denied to their non-White counterparts. White dominance and control of social, economic, and political institutions also forges a particular, and sometimes peculiar, state of consciousness (Baldwin, 1984, 1985; Brodtkin, 1998; Ignatiev, 2012; Thandeka, 1999; Vecoli, 1995). These processes manufacture a “fundamental dominant frame” (Feagin, 2013), which like other dominant ideologies, tends to be taken for granted or ignored altogether (Montenegro, 2002). When racism is attended to, it is typically framed as primarily within the purview of people of color and not White-identified people (DiAngelo, 2018; Feagin, 2013; Forman, 2004; Green et al., 2007; Lewis, 2004).

### Whiteness, Property, and Power

Critical race theorists and critical whiteness scholars have come to a central conclusion: that the maintenance of the racial hierarchy serves the material and psychological interests for White people across all economic classes (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017). These interests are “decisively shaped by the exercise of power and the expectation of advantages in acquiring property” (Roediger, 2001, p. 81). In the United States, economic and legal institutions have been at the center of constructing a “white” race. Lopez (2006) outlined the ways “white persons” were set as a criterion for citizenship in U.S. naturalization law, effectively determining who was and was not legally considered “white.” A consequential advantage of the White racial classification in the United States was access to property and ownership. In *Whiteness as Property*, Harris (1993) noted that “it was not the concept of race alone that operated to oppress Blacks and Indians; rather, it was the *interaction* between conceptions of race and property that played a critical role in establishing and maintaining racial and economic subordination” (emphasis original; p. 1716), also understood as racial capitalism (Kendi, 2017, 2019; Leong, 2012).

In the early colonial territories and up until the ratification of the 13th amendment to the U.S. constitution in 1865, the conflation between whiteness and property literally meant that White people could own Black bodies and had the right to take and own Native land. This conflation has continued into contemporary life through policies such as redlining, discriminatory lending practices, and inequitable public school funding which have resulted in persistent racial wealth gaps (Coates, 2014; Rothstein, 2018; Walsh, 2018). Additionally, the rejection of policies such as affirmative action and reparations that seek to right the wrongs of past racial injustices (Awad, Cokley, & Ravitch, 2005), maintenance of racist institutions such as the

school-to-prison pipeline and the disproportionate incarceration of Black and Brown people (Alexander, 2010), and voter ID laws that disproportionately affect low-income people of color all continue to cement the legacy of White “ownership” of U.S. social, political, and economic systems. These historical processes manifest in the form of distinct societal advantages for White people in the United States in virtually every domain of life. Non-Hispanic White mothers experience significantly more adequate prenatal care than Hispanic and Black mothers (Green, 2018); White college graduates have approximately seven times more wealth than Black college graduates, and approximately four times as much as Latinx college graduates (Hunt & Ray, 2012); Black and Brown people are significantly more involved in the criminal justice system, are more likely to be arrested, charged, and convicted, and are more likely to be killed by police than White people (Edwards, Lee, & Esposito, 2019; Nellis, 2016; Sentencing Project, 2018). These and seemingly countless other examples are the results of the laws, policies, and practices described above, which both reflect and construct an ideology of White dominance.

#### Whiteness as Dominance

The political and legal structures that constructed whiteness have forged an ideology rooted in White supremacy that views White people as biologically and/or culturally superior and allows White people to continue their support for oppressive economic and social systems (Harris, 1993; Lipsitz, 2006). With the shift from *de jure* to *de facto* racial segregation since the Civil Rights era, there has coincided a tendency for such attitudes of White superiority to manifest in subtle and implicit ways rather than through overtly racist practices and attitudes. Critical scholars contend that this shift toward the implicit allows White supremacist beliefs to remain present in the public discourse, cloaked in colorblind rhetoric (Bobo & Charles, 2009; Bonilla-Silva, 2001; Devos & Banaji, 2005; Goff, Eberhardt, & Williams, 2008; Mills, 2007). These processes make whiteness an elusive cultural and psychological phenomenon, one that community psychology is well positioned to interrogate through ecological, systems, and liberation lenses. Doing so would constitute the seizing of a largely neglected opportunity to promote the value of social justice.

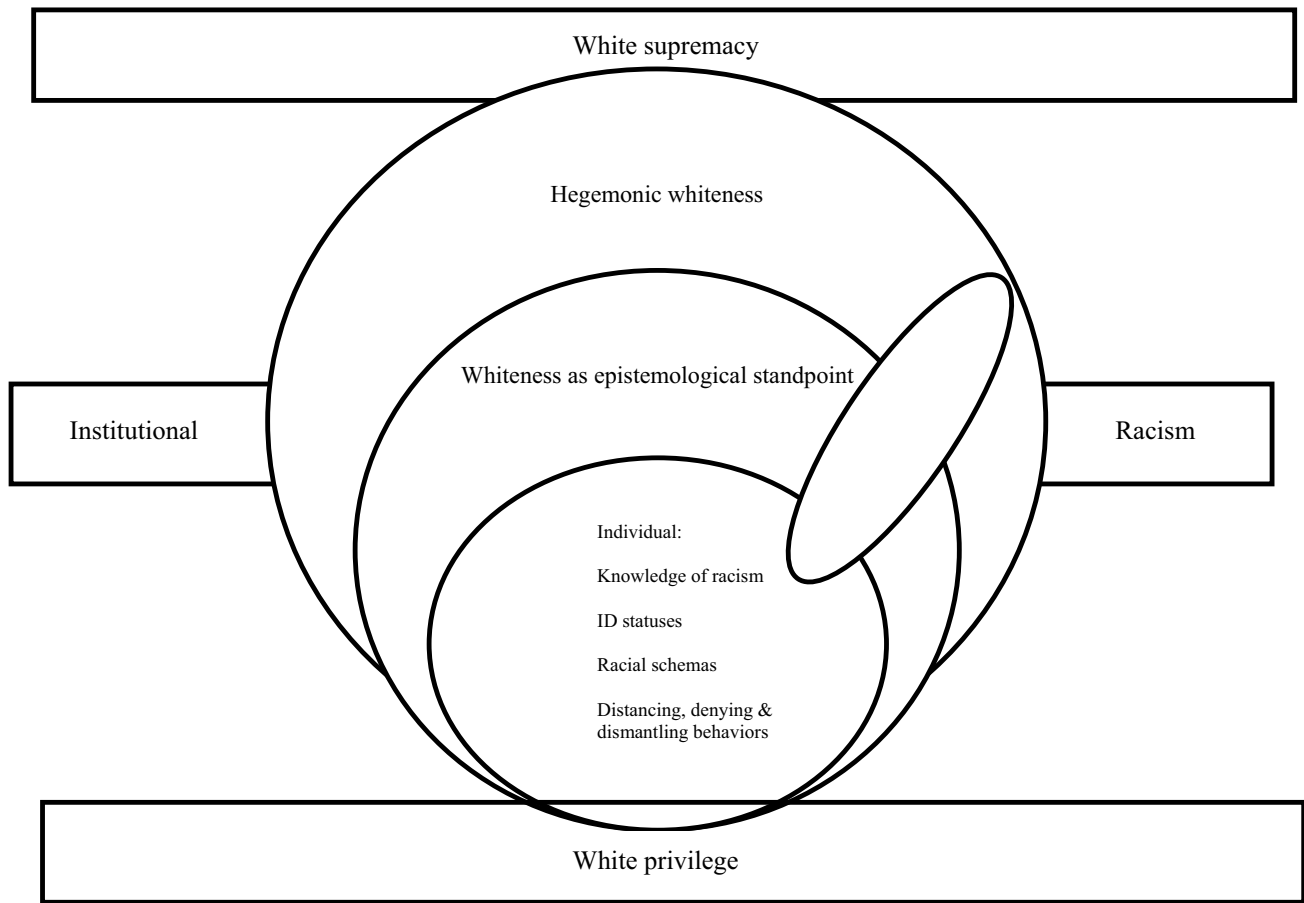
The dominance of whiteness manifests culturally and has psychological consequences for both people of color and White people. Culturally, whiteness is associated with a narrative about people of color that attributes racial disparities to individual and cultural inferiority and downplays the significance of privilege and power (Alexander, 2010; Bonilla-Silva, 2001; DiAngelo, 2018;

Feagin, 2013). Individually, whiteness is typified by psychological factors such as ignorance and/or denial of the historical and contemporary processes that result in racial disparities (Applebaum, 2013; Bonam, Das, Coleman, & Salter, 2018; Coleman, Bonam, & Yantis, 2019; Mills, 2007; Nelson, Adams, & Salter, 2012), and behaviorally as racist abuse and microaggressions (Kendi, 2019; Nadal et al., 2011). Emotionally, whiteness can manifest as guilt, rejection, rage, fatigue, and fragility among White individuals, especially when confronted about their complicity in racist systems (Applebaum, 2013; DiAngelo, 2018; Flynn, 2015). These emotional aspects of whiteness represent the “cost” of racism to White people, along with cognitive costs in the form of distorted beliefs and behavioral costs in the form of restricted actions (Spanierman & Heppner, 2004; Spanierman, Poteat, Beer, & Armstrong, 2006). Indeed, critical whiteness scholars have equated the distorted and irrational view of social reality created by whiteness as a “psychosis” (Allen, 2001; Andrews, 2016).

Arguably, the structural, cultural, and psychological processes described above represent a distinctly White ecology that provides fruitful ground for community psychology research and action. Frameworks and constructs from the field of critical whiteness studies can and should be incorporated into ecological systems-oriented community psychology, and should be directed at understanding *manifestations of whiteness* and the development of interventions to undermine these institutional, cultural, and psychological phenomena. Doing so would mutually benefit both community psychology and critical whiteness studies. It would open new ground for the application of critical whiteness theory as well as for the field of community psychology to promote the values of social justice and social action.

#### Key Concepts and Frameworks for Interrogating Whiteness

Below, we consider key concepts and frameworks in critical whiteness studies and related fields that may facilitate community psychology’s understanding, exploration, and interrogation of whiteness. These include White racial identity, epistemologies of ignorance, and hegemonic whiteness. Our aim in this section is to highlight broad frameworks from other fields that can provide both conceptual guidance for the development of a critical whiteness community psychology and specific constructs that can be measured, described, and applied in intervention contexts. Figure 1 synthesizes these concepts and frameworks into a critical whiteness ecological model that we discuss in more depth at the end of this section; we also



**Fig. 1** A critical whiteness ecology

return to this model when making propositions for community psychology research and action.

### White Racial Identity

A critical understanding of whiteness necessitates understanding White racial identity (for a review, see Spanierman & Soble, 2010). Individual differences in White racial identity relate to the ways individuals draw upon elements of a broader White racial frame to make sense of their relationships to racial others. Such identity practices may involve the rejection of “traditional” notions of racial superiority, but may still involve the conscious or unconscious reification of whiteness as normal and superior (Feagin, 2013). Perhaps the best-known framework is Janet Helms’ (2014) status theory of White racial identity development (WRID). According to this model, White people move through six psychological statuses, from an unexamined identity marked by colorblind thinking to an “autonomous” status marked by acknowledgment of institutionalized and systemic racism. These statuses reflect observable and measurable schemas that fall into two

broad categories, internalized racism and an evolving non-racist orientation, and reflect increasingly sophisticated information processing strategies for making sense of race (Helms, 2014). Notably, individuals can both progress and regress through the various stages, and individuals may hold “racist ideas” in one context but not others (Kendi, 2019).

Social psychological research has shown that the strength of one’s White racial identity has implications for how individuals respond to racism. White identity can be associated with an understanding of privilege and the need for antiracism on the one hand, and White superiority on the other; and reminders of privilege can be threatening to a White identity grounded in a belief in a meritocratic society (Goren & Plaut, 2012). Such threats can be managed in three ways, according to Knowles, Lowery, Chow, and Unzueta (2014), by denying White privilege, distancing oneself from whiteness, or working to dismantle systems of privilege. Managing the threats to White identity means that White people also experience psychological costs of racism (Spanierman & Heppner, 2004; Spanierman et al., 2006). Spanierman and Heppner’s

(2004) three-part model outlines the affective, cognitive, and behavioral costs, which have implications for White peoples' racialized experiences. According to Spanierman et al. (2006), empathy and guilt play a prominent role in that regard. They found that White empathy was positively associated with racial awareness, attitudes toward diversity, and ethnocultural empathy (Wang et al., 2003). They also speculate that White guilt manifests in two main forms. The accountable form is based on feelings of empathy informed by knowledge of the impacts of racism and awareness of White privilege, and may predict antiracist attitudes and behaviors. Fearful guilt, on the other hand, may be associated with less contact with and greater fear of racial others, and less empathy for those directly experiencing racism. White guilt may be useful for interventions that promote White antiracism if they rely specifically upon accountable rather than fearful guilt. Bringing community psychology's ecological systems orientation to bear on these insights would be useful for understanding what contextual conditions promote denial, distancing, or dismantling behaviors among White people, or what setting-level processes might promote accountable over fearful White guilt. Interventions that afford White individuals the opportunity to explore such behaviors and emotions, and their social and historical antecedents, may be particularly effective at promoting White antiracism (Coleman et al., 2019).

### Whiteness as Epistemological Standpoint

Whiteness can also be framed as an epistemological standpoint that is psychological, relational, and political in origin, and characterized by ignorance of racism, or, an *epistemology of ignorance* (Applebaum, 2013; Bonam, Das, et al., 2018; Coleman et al., 2019; Nelson et al., 2012). By "epistemological standpoint," we mean a particular way of knowing that is shaped by historical processes, contemporary policies, and sociocultural norms that make White people largely ignorant of and complicit in racial inequity (Applebaum, 2013; Campbell & Wasco, 2000; England, 1994; Mills, 2007).

The embeddedness of racism in American society has given rise to persistent and troubling "patterns of belief and behavior" (Bobo & Charles, 2009, p. 244). While White people's explicit attitudes have generally shifted toward support for greater racial equality in recent decades, those shifts are more related to that which is public and impersonal than private and intimate (Plant & Devine, 1998). White attitudes favorable to equal access to employment, for example, have been quicker to evolve than those favorable to integrated housing, schooling, and inter-racial marriage (Bobo, 2001). Furthermore, shifts in explicitly racist attitudes among White people have gone

from being grounded in biological assumptions to cultural and motivational explanations for racial inferiority (Bobo & Charles, 2009; Bonilla-Silva, 2001). These attitudinal shifts mirror social policy discourse (e.g., The War on Drugs) that has adopted race-neutral language over time yet still produces racially disproportionate impacts (Alexander, 2012), demonstrating the interdependence of individual racial attitudes with institutional and societal arrangements (Kelly, 2006; Markus & Kitayama, 2010).

The public-private contradiction regarding race relations is even more insidious considering the prevalence of implicit racial biases among White Americans. These troubling patterns include dehumanizing people of color by, for example, associating Black people with apes and crime (Eberhardt, Goff, Purdie, & Davies, 2004; Goff et al., 2008) and representing Latinx immigrants as vermin (Marshall & Shapiro, 2018). They also include polluting and monetarily devaluing Black neighborhoods, due to assumptions that these areas are already polluted and impoverished (Bonam, Bergsieker, & Eberhardt, 2016; Bonam, Yantis, & Taylor, 2018). These thought patterns likely reinforce racial disparities and scaffold racially oppressive social policy without ever requiring key decision-makers to explicitly mention race (Bonam et al., 2016; Bonam, Das, et al., 2018). Community psychology is well positioned to provide important insight into how these hidden biases, and their grounding in whiteness, operate and can be interrupted in settings where power and privilege are wielded.

Critical whiteness theory on White epistemologies of ignorance draws largely from philosophy and emphasizes White complicity with racism. Yancy's (2008) phenomenological work reveals the embeddedness of White people "within structural and material power racial hierarchies" that makes whiteness itself elusive for even antiracist White individuals who fail to remain vigilant. He describes the "elevator effect" in which the tight space of an elevator functions as a microcosm where bodily orientations can reify dominant cultural scripts of the Black body as criminal and the White (especially female) body as innocent. In the elevator, the Black body undergoes "a process of 'confiscation' through the phenomenon of the White gaze" (Yancy, 2008, p.843). This insight should push community psychology's interest in diversity to take on deeper questions about relational space in settings of community research and practice, which may subtly reinforce racial dominance in ways that go unnoticed.

The need to reveal that which goes unnoticed relates to the significance of social structure. For Mills (2007), White ignorance is put in stark relief by the transition from de jure to de facto White supremacy. That is, one's racially privileged position in an ostensibly non-racist society relates to one's knowledge practices, which for

White people means not having to ask certain questions about racial injustice. Not asking the right questions leads to misunderstanding that makes even non-racist White people complicit in the maintenance of institutionalized racism (Alcoff, 2007; Applebaum, 2013; Kendi, 2019). Community psychologists would do well to think about the kinds of settings that promote White ignorance as a “substantive epistemic practice” (Alcoff, 2007), as well as those that would promote identification of and dismantling of such practices. Promoting such critical understanding would necessitate the anticipation of psychological barriers and pitfalls, and the identification of strategies to respond to them (Coleman et al., 2019).

The epistemology of ignorance that characterizes whiteness has been addressed by social and cultural psychological research. Nelson et al. (2012), for example, provide evidence for the *Marley hypothesis*<sup>1</sup>, demonstrating that the lack of critical historical knowledge about racism, combined with a motivation to maintain a positive group esteem, leads to White peoples’ denial of racism. Bonam, Das, et al. (2018), Bonam, Yantis, et al. (2018) have extended this work, showing that stronger White racial identity predicts greater racism denial, but that learning the critical history of U.S. racism boosts White peoples’ acknowledgment of systemic (as opposed to individual) racism. A qualitative follow-up to that study suggests that sustaining the cognitive dissonance associated with learning about systemic racism may be fruitful in promoting antiracism among White participants (Coleman et al., 2019).

However, even for White people open to antiracist education, there is the risk that *White fatigue* may interrupt the learning process (Flynn, 2015). The concept of White fatigue is grounded partly in research and theory around stereotype and social identity threat (Steele & Aronson, 1995). Fatigue may be associated with White people’s efforts to manage the collective threat (Cohen & Garcia, 2005) that their behavior might confirm stereotypes about all White people being racists (Goff et al., 2008). Managing such threats are particularly relevant in educational contexts meant to promote dialogue around race (Sue, 2013, 2016). Whereas people of color may be hesitant to engage in “race talk” for fear of experiencing racial microaggressions, White people’s fears of appearing racist, having their racism revealed, or having to take responsibility for combatting White privilege can be debilitating. Sue (2013) describes three “social and academic

norms” that complicate inter-racial dialogue: the politeness protocol, the academic protocol, and the colorblind protocol. He argues that the effect of such protocols “allows society to enter into a conspiracy of silence regarding the detrimental impact oppression plays on persons of color” (p. 663). The ways in which such norms shape people’s experiences in social settings and militate against the prospects of social justice are directly within the purview of community psychology. For example, in Foster-Fishman, Nowell and Yang (2007) *Transformative Systems Change* model, norms are one of three systems parts (along with resources, regulations, and operations) to be understood and “leveraged” in organizational and community interventions. A critical whiteness perspective on systems change models would compel community psychologists to study, reveal, and intervene in the ways such norms maintain racial oppression in educational and other social settings.

### Hegemonic Whiteness

White racial identity and whiteness as an epistemological standpoint as described above reflect the hegemonic nature of whiteness in U.S. society. We use the term “hegemonic” here in the Gramscian sense, meaning social and cultural practices of the ruling class that shape people’s worldviews and gain consent for their dominance (Eagleton, 1991). To say that whiteness is hegemonic means, in Feagin’s (2013) words, that

[f]or centuries the white racial framing of ingroup superiority and outgroup inferiority... has been part of a distinctive way of life that dominates major aspects of society...one that provides the language and interpretations that help structure, normalize, and make sense out of society.

(p. 10-11)

Although an abstract frame, hegemonic whiteness also has implications for organizational and individual attitudes and behaviors. This kind of microlevel manifestation of macrolevel processes makes whiteness an appropriate subject of community psychology projects.

Hegemonic whiteness positions “White people” as “different from and superior to those marked as ‘non-white’” (Hughey, 2010, p. 1292) and reinforces White cohesion through essentialized performative practices of White ideals (Hughey, 2010). Hughey (2010) contends that both White supremacists and White antiracist activists perform hegemonic whiteness through inter-racial acts of superiority and intra-racial performances of distinction and marginalization. Regarding inter-racial differences, Hughey found that members of both groups performed

<sup>1</sup> The Marley hypothesis references Bob Marley’s lyric arguing that you must know your history to “know where you’re comin’ from” (Marley & Williams, 1983). Accordingly, Nelson and colleagues theorize that Whites’ lacking critical historical knowledge contributes to their racism denial.

*White victimology* by situating themselves as socially stigmatized due to their White identities; *pathologized Black and Brown people* by conveying messages of racial inferiority; and *performed White debt and epidermal capital* through tokenizing relationships with people of color and claiming knowledge of cultural traditions of non-White coded groups. Regarding intra-racial performances of whiteness, Hughey found that members of both groups performed *affective whiteness*, emotional acts intended to convey either sadness about White domination (among White antiracists), or anger over reverse racism (among White supremacists); conveyed a sense of *conscious whiteness* that was able to discern society's racial propaganda; and by promoting *simplistic whiteness*, the idea that simplistic explanations for racial dynamics are likely most accurate. These performances of whiteness are normative conveyances of a White identity intended to structure social relationships and a sense of community. They also serve to continue the perpetuation of racial domination of White people and inferiority of those coded as non-White.

Situated between the two extremes of White supremacy and White antiracism is the equally dominant racial discourse of colorblindness, the common sense way of thinking about race that emerged largely in the post-Civil Rights era (Bonilla-Silva, 2001; Forman, 2004; Lewis, 2004). Colorblind discourse reflects an ideology of "racelessness" that simultaneously allows White people to distance themselves from racism and maintain the implicit assumption about whiteness as the standard for society (Bonilla-Silva, 2001; Feagin, 2013; Lewis, 2004). In the late 1990s and early 2000s, the study of colorblind ideology emerged largely in the sociological literature as a way to understand White people as "racial actors" even when they were not "claiming white identities most loudly or explicitly" (Lewis, 2004, p. 624). Colorblindness provides White people with a way to reconcile the contradiction of living in an ostensibly equal society that is also shaped by deep racial inequity by providing a story about neither having a race nor participating in racism. Thus, colorblind ideology promotes consent for an unequal status quo, making it seem natural, which in turn upholds White hegemony (Gramsci, 1971; Lewis, 2004).

Colorblind ideology is increasingly the subject of psychological study. Neville, Awad, Brooks, Flores, and Bluemel (2013) synthesis of the interdisciplinary literature describes it as consisting of the tendency to avoid racial differences and to deny racism through egalitarian rhetoric. They suggest that such avoidance may in fact exacerbate racial tensions and inequality, and that colorblindness in general can serve to justify the racial status quo. Markus, Steele, and Steele (2000) link colorblind ideology to the Fourteenth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution, which

gave "legal force" to the desirability of colorblindness by affirming the equal status of "[a]ll persons born or naturalized in the United States." The ironic result of such race-neutral thinking is the tendency to not see important racial differences, making it "difficult for our public institutions to see group differences in lived experience and...may constitute a cultural injunction to not see group difference" (Markus et al., 2000, p. 235). Such a cultural injunction reifies hegemonic whiteness by making it difficult for White people to recognize the privilege afforded them by race and to employ race-neutral logic to thoughts and behaviors that have "racism-legitimizing consequences" (Salter, Adams, & Perez, 2018, p. 152). In their review of the literature, Plaut, Thomas, Hurd, and Romano (2018) show how colorblindness reduces sensitivity to racism among White teachers and therapists, reduces White support for affirmative action, harms inter-racial interactions, and can undermine institutional diversity efforts. These findings suggest that even when White people's intentions are good, their colorblind-motivated behaviors can reinforce their dominant status. As such, the individual actions of non-racist White people are insufficient vis-à-vis the hegemonic status of whiteness in society at large.

#### Summarizing Frameworks for Understanding Whiteness

The three main frameworks described above represent key insights from critical whiteness studies, and provide theoretical constructs that can be applied to community psychology research and action at various levels. Figure 1 represents our thinking about the implications of these frameworks for community psychological research from an ecological perspective. The various elements of the model should be thought of as in dynamic relationship to each other that has implications for individual, organizational, and community behavior. The three rectangles in the background represent the historical and structural realities of White supremacy, institutional racism, and White privilege that shape the racialized context of society. These include such observable phenomena as historically rooted racist beliefs (White supremacy), racist policies and practices such as redlining and their disproportionate impact on people of color (institutional racism), and social privilege such as the relative freedom from fear of police violence (White privilege). Note that we made the White privilege rectangle transparent to represent the fact that White privilege can be both a structural and individual process. At the individual level (represented by the smallest oval), dynamic identity statuses reflect the ways in which White individuals enact racial schemas in relation to racial others and racialized social structures. Such processes have psychological consequences for individuals that exemplify a racialized experience for White people

marked by how one makes sense of one's relationship to White privilege, White supremacy, and institutional racism, for example, by distancing from, denying the existence of, or seeking to dismantle those structures (Goren & Plaut, 2012; Helms, 2014; Knowles et al., 2014). Those individual identity processes are interdependent with racialized structural processes, demonstrating whiteness as an epistemological standpoint (represented by the middle oval). That is, how White individuals think of themselves as racialized beings is embedded within cultural and societal norms, practices, and policies, that reflect exo- and macrolevel racial processes.

The interdependence among individual-, micro-, and more distal-level processes manifests largely in terms of knowledge and understanding of race as a social process and its relationship to White individuals and communities (Alcoff, 2007; Applebaum, 2013; Bonam, Das, et al., 2018; Coleman et al., 2019; Nelson et al., 2012). How these interdependencies play out have consequences for the ways in which individuals, organizations, and communities either reinforce or contest whiteness as hegemonic in society. The outermost oval represents hegemonic whiteness as a macrolevel process, which manifests in the form of ideology and common sense thinking such that it can evade individuals' awareness, even when their intentions are antiracist. The oval cutting across all levels represents colorblind ideology, which can manifest at any level, from individual beliefs to macrolevel processes such as public ideology embedded in law and policy (e.g., the 14th Amendment). Contrary to popular belief, it is not necessarily overtly racist, White supremacist beliefs that most distinguish whiteness as a social, cultural, and psychological phenomenon. Rather, whiteness is a distinctly contradictory way of being in the world that can include simultaneously ignoring itself and reifying itself as dominant (Feagin, 2013; Hughey, 2010; Plaut et al., 2018; Salter et al., 2018). It is precisely the interdependence of individual psychological processes and social structures, and its contradictory and hegemonic nature, that makes whiteness ripe for further interrogation in our field. We contend that community psychology is uniquely positioned to address such complicated issues, provided that the field take on the challenge of interrogating whiteness in all its complexity. In the next section, we review the nascent body of community psychology literature that provides a foundation to build upon in that regard.

### **The State of the Field: Scoping Review of Whiteness in Community Psychology**

Over twenty-five years ago, Alderfer (1994) called for better alignment of theory, method, data, and values in

community-based psychological research on diversity and race. Specifically, he suggested that it is more important to "examine collective racist processes in organizations and in society at large" (Alderfer, 1994, p. 218) than individual racism. He further argued that such study should address White people's methods of coping with racial experience, that White researchers should take care not to unwittingly identify with the aggression of White institutions, and that attention should be given to the historical roots of racially "disturbing phenomena." The field of community psychology has only begun to fully take Alderfer up on his challenge. Few studies published in community psychology journals make whiteness the primary subject of empirical analysis. When whiteness is addressed, it is often done so superficially. However, notable exceptions have begun forming the basis for a community psychology that is critical of whiteness and are included in our review of the literature.

We conducted a scoping study of the research, theory, and praxis on whiteness, broadly defined, within community psychology. A scoping study is particularly useful when researchers seek to "clarify a complex concept and refine subsequent research inquiries" (Levac, Colquhoun, & O'Brien, 2010, p. 1). Scoping studies help identify the nature of and gaps in the literature on a topic and are an important tool to identify steps forward (Arksey & O'Malley, 2005; Ehrich, Freeman, Richards, Robinson, & Shepherd, 2002). To guide our scoping study, we adopted the method outlined by Arksey and O'Malley (2005) and expanded upon by Levac et al. (2010). In step one, the question, "What is the extent of research on whiteness within community psychology?" guided our study. During step two, we identified potential papers and conference abstracts to include in our analysis. We used keywords based on constructs utilized in the whiteness frameworks outlined above, which included whiteness, White supremacy (or supremacist), White privilege, White ignorance, White identity, White guilt, White rage, colorblind (racism), and implicit (racial) bias. For published papers, we searched U.S.-based and global journals and included all journals with the words "community" and "psychology" in their titles. For example, the *Journal of Applied Community and Social Psychology* was included in the search but journals such as *City & Community* were excluded. An Appendix S1 containing a table of articles included in our review can be found in an online supplement to this article.

To examine the published community psychology literature, we conducted a search of articles spanning from 1999 to 2020 in Google Scholar. We bounded our search to 1999 as a post hoc decision. We first searched the years 2009–2020 and then expanded the search to include 1999–2008 in order to capture a broader range of articles published



during the previous decade. We then searched in chunks of three years (e.g., 1996–1998; 1993–1995) and concluded the search once a chunk had failed to identify any potential inclusion papers. The first chunk prior to 1999 (i.e., 1996–1998) met these criteria. For conference presentations, we reviewed SCRA Biennial program abstracts for the same years—1999<sup>2</sup> to 2019—and with the same search terms.

Step three sought to set more specific inclusion and exclusion standards once potential published papers and abstracts were identified as part of our search. During this phase, we included papers/abstracts that referenced at least one of the search terms detailed above in the context of whiteness or racism within the body of the paper/abstract. Papers were excluded if the only reference to a search term was included solely within the references. We also sought to include papers that were specifically about whiteness and related concepts. For example, many papers in community psychology journals discuss issues of racial or ethnic identity. However, fewer of those papers are specifically about White identity. Therefore, we excluded papers on racial/ethnic identity that was not explicitly about White identity.

During step four, the first and second authors used thematic analysis to identify “themes” that emerged from our reading of included papers/abstracts (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Over several sessions, we iteratively read an article, noted ideas, and created themes. We continued this process until themes and their definitions adequately captured the phenomena observed within articles/abstracts and new ideas were not emerging in subsequent readings of new articles/abstracts. The themes constructed during this process include the following: whiteness in the emergence of the field of community psychology; whiteness as social location; problematizing whiteness; addressing White supremacy and institutional racism; interrogating White privilege; and whiteness as a theoretical standpoint. We expand on these below.

## Findings

Using the processes outlined above, we found 131 articles across six different journals. The number of articles containing at least one search term ranged from one (“White fragility” and “White rage”) to 70 (“whiteness”;  $M = 20.4$ ,  $SD = 22.2$ ). The number of references within journals ranged from two (International Community Psychology) to 53 (American Journal of Community Psychology;  $M = 21.8$ ,  $SD = 17.1$ ). Regarding conference proceedings, we found a total of 56 abstracts that met our search and inclusion criteria. The frequency of search terms that were present in conference abstracts ranged

from two different abstracts (“implicit bias”) to 16 different abstracts (“White privilege”). Additionally, references tended to increase over time, with 1999 containing only one abstract and 2019 containing nine. Table 1 provides the frequency of articles by journal and term and conference abstracts by term. Figure 2 shows the frequency of search papers and abstracts included by year. Finally, Fig. 3 provides a two-mode sociogram of search terms by paper. We utilize a sociogram to visualize the relationship between search terms and journals. In particular, a sociogram of this nature allows us to (a) illustrate the frequency of papers that included each search term, (b) the extent to which multiple search terms were included within the same article, and (c) in which journals those papers were published. A high frequency of papers included the search terms “Whiteness” or “White Privilege,” fewer of these papers included *both* terms, and all journals included in our analysis had at least one paper with one of those search terms. Although it is beyond the scope of our study, a larger investigation of journal citation networks may provide an interesting way to map the interrelations of the whiteness and racism literature in community psychology (Neal, Janulis, & Collins, 2013).

## Thematic Analysis

### *Whiteness and the Emergence of Community Psychology*

Whiteness is implicated in the emergence of community psychology itself. Okazaki and Saw (2011) contextualize

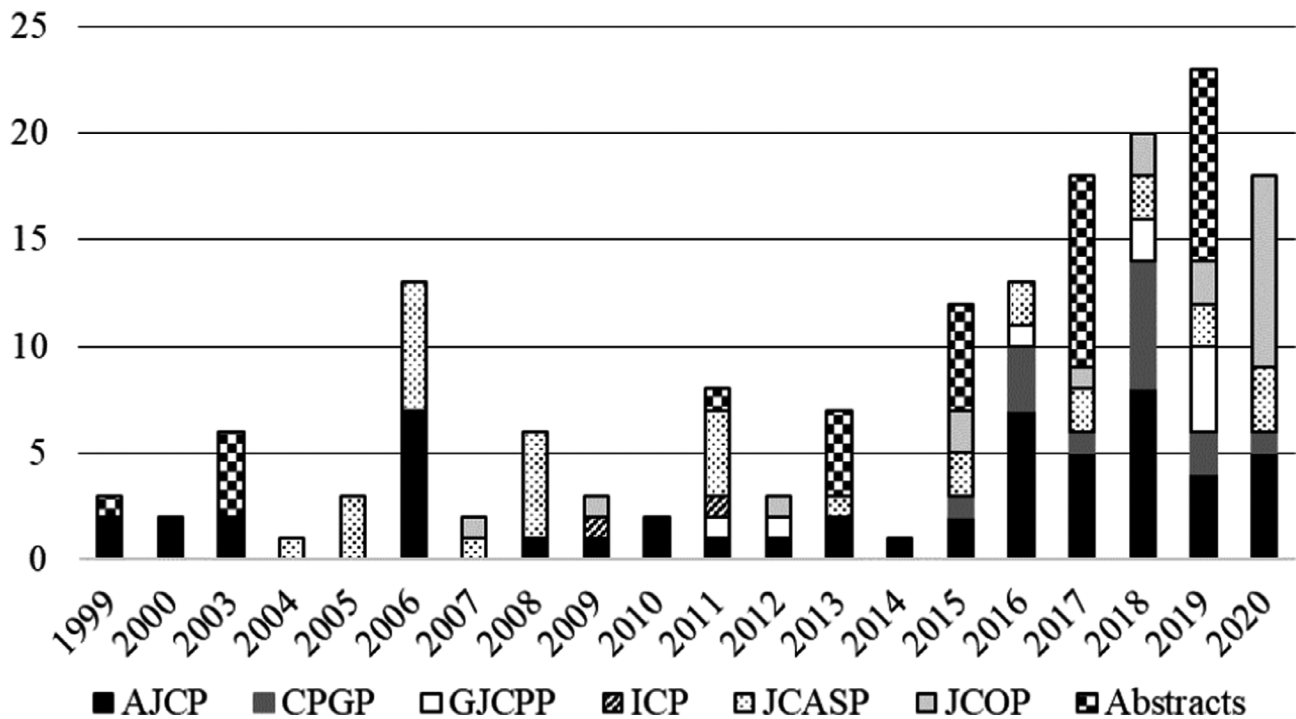
**Table 1** Frequency of Articles by Journal and Term and Conference Abstracts by Term

Journal	Frequency	
American Journal of Community Psychology	53	
Community Psychology in Global Perspective	14	
Global Journal of Community Psychology Practice	9	
International Community Psychology	2	
Journal of Community & Applied Social Psychology	34	
Journal of Community Psychology	19	
Conference Abstracts	34	
Total	165	

Search term	Journal articles	Conference abstracts
Colorblind racism	16	8
Implicit bias	17	2
White fragility	1	4
White guilt	8	3
White identity	8	4
White ignorance	2	3
White privilege	51	16
White rage	1	0
White supremacy	30	5
Whiteness	70	11
Totals	204	56

<sup>2</sup> Only titles were available for the 1999 biennial program.



**Fig. 2** Frequency of Search Papers and Abstracts Included by Year. Note: SCRA Biennials only occur on odd years, so abstracts for even years are non-existent. AJCP, American Journal of Community Psychology; CPGP, Community Psychology in Global Perspective; GJCPP, Global Journal of Community Psychology Practice; ICP, International Community Psychology; JCASP, Journal of Community & Applied Social Psychology; JCOP, Journal of Community Psychology

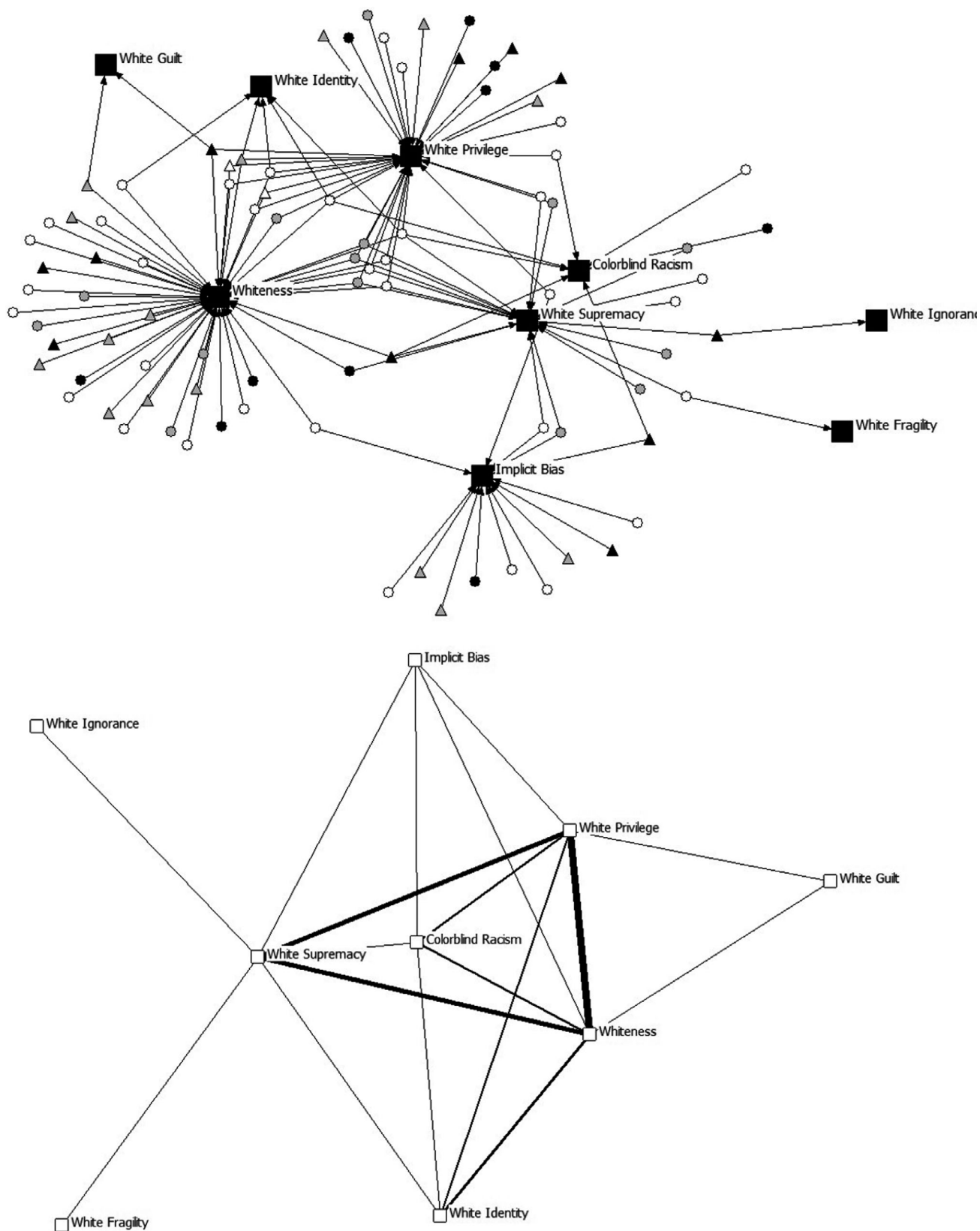
that emergence as coinciding with the U.S. civil rights movement and a developing awareness among academics of “cultural hegemony and White male elitism.” As Langhout (2016) highlights in her “agitation,” the Swampscott conference that birthed the field in the United States was dominated by White men, but also opened the door for critical inquiry into whiteness and intersecting structures of dominance. Other community psychologists similarly evoke racialized histories to emphasize the importance of context. Graham and Langa (2015) discuss community psychology’s “contested identity” in the South African context where the field has roots in community interventions meant to preserve White privilege but later evolved toward greater alignment with social justice agendas in opposition to apartheid. Given the field’s orientation toward liberation and social transformation, this theme suggests, it is reasonable to argue for greater reflexivity with regard to community psychology’s historical relation to whiteness (Langhout, 2016; Tebes, 2016).

#### *Whiteness as Social Location*

We are not unique in calling for more focused attention on whiteness in our field. Watts (1994) has argued for more self-examination among White community psychologists regarding their “position and role in social systems”

lest they implicitly reinforce existing racial hierarchies. Langhout (2016) agrees, arguing that ignoring the field’s positioning makes it difficult for community psychologists “to disrupt the structures of whiteness...and other dominant U.S. cultural norms that are the foundational building blocks of our social science” (p. 326). To that end, the field needs better theoretical understanding of the “structures of whiteness” and how they intersect with other structures of social dominance. The field’s core value of social justice cannot truly materialize without it.

Community psychologists are already sensitive to such issues. In her envisioning of “The Next 50 Years of Community Psychology,” Brodsky highlighted how community psychology uses terms like “diversity” as coded language for individuals of minoritized statuses and not “White, heterosexual, Christian, male, Western scholars” (Brodsky, 2016, p. 290). She goes on to call for a more perfect community psychology that explicitly acknowledges and understands the centering of White identities in relation to “ethnic minorities.” She also emphasizes that an inclusive community psychology is one that understands whiteness and how power relations manifest across different identities. For these and like-minded community psychologists, respecting diversity is inadequate if it does not prepare scholars to identify and interrupt how power vis-à-vis whiteness engenders racial silence, even in



**Fig. 3** Sociogram Depicting the Relationship between Search Terms and Articles. White circles = AJCP; gray circles = CPGP; black circles = GJCPP; white triangles = ICP; gray triangles = JCASP; black triangles = JCOP; and squares = search terms

“diverse” community settings. Recent SCRA presentations appear to have heeded the call for attending to whiteness in this way, including presentations on clients’ perceptions of White therapists’ microaggressions (Yeo & Torres-Harding, 2019), White masculinity, critical consciousness and solidarity among activist White men (Majzler, 2017).

### *Problematizing Whiteness*

Much of the material examined in our review provided some critique of whiteness in relation to power, privilege, and oppression. Three conference abstracts addressed White ignorance, including a study of a college-level, classroom-based intervention meant to teach White students about racism as a systemic process (Coleman, 2019) and the experimental brief intervention on which it was based (Coleman & Bonam, 2017), and a separate college-level classroom intervention meant to address willful ignorance of racism among White students (Fernandez, 2017). Most closely related to critical whiteness theory is a critique of the “centering” of whiteness within community contexts. For example, in their research with young Black gay/bisexual men (YBGBM) in the context of online dating, Wade and Harper (2019) discuss how ideals of beauty normalize the European form. They note that, “the partner-seeking digital landscape advantages those of European ancestry and reinforces the notion that people of color are less desirable or attractive” (p. 3). Additionally, several papers incriminate academia as an institution of whiteness that normalizes White archetypes. Fernández (2018) discusses her classroom-based work of interrupting White innocence, which frames multidisciplinary as a way to decolonize academia. Through a Family Portrait assignment meant to promote critical thinking about White families’ immigration experiences, Fernández’ students interrogated the power conveyed by whiteness vis-à-vis coloniality. She argues that, “[d]econstructing the coloniality of power requires problematizing and dismantling the *normativity* ascribed to whiteness” particularly in academia (emphasis ours, Fernández, 2018, p. 295). In their work supervising counseling Master’s students in South Africa, Graham and Langa (2015) examined some of the challenges faced, particularly for White students, in disrupting White privilege in an academic context where whiteness is a normative social location. Similarly, Lichty and Palamaro-Munsell (2017) discussed various “dilemmas” of teaching issues of privilege and oppression in their community psychology courses. They discussed the issues that arose by the normative assumptions of students about racial privilege and oppression. They reflected on some of the difficulties involved in decentering White voices and providing spaces for students of color. They also discussed the issues that arose around students’

unwillingness to acknowledge White privilege and the difficulties in moving some students to a more critical analysis of race.

### *White Supremacy and Institutional Racism*

Some community psychology research directly addresses White supremacy and institutional racism, perhaps most notably outside the United States. For example, Sonn, Quayle, Belanji, and Baker (2015) implicate the “White Australia” policy in shaping “understandings of self, other, and everyday interactions between differently racialized groups of people” (P. 245) in Australian society. They argue that in settler colony societies, “decentering” whiteness is key to disruptions of social identity construction meant to provoke personal and social change. Also in Australia, Bishop and colleagues (Bishop, Vicary, Browne, & Guard, 2009) refer to the policy of forced removal of Aboriginal children as part of an effort to make Aboriginal people White, which was a precursor to an assimilation policy intended to create a homogenous Australian culture. In the United States, Collins, Kohfeldt, and Kornbluh (2019) describe the ways in which antiracist activists understand White supremacy ideology as an underlying cause of racialized oppression. They present a model of antiracist activism that seeks to undermine White supremacy and institutional racism through critical consciousness and social action. Conference abstracts addressing White supremacy included a study of a social marketing campaign meant to challenge White supremacist norms in youth violence prevention (Wendel, Williams, Nation, & Debreaux, 2019) and a study of White supremacy-preserving rhetoric in social media (Johnson, Billingsley, & Hurd, 2019).

### *White Privilege*

Community psychologists have frequently used the White privilege construct as both a facet of White identity and a social process. Among the SCRA conference abstracts, White privilege was the most frequently addressed topic in our review. In the published literature, Miller discusses the role of White privilege in her experience as a White-passing Black woman and its relationship to the “messiness” of community-based work. In her case, being perceived as White, and therefore possessing privilege, complicated her working relationship with Black women in the community “when subjective and ascribed identifications [were] poorly aligned” (Reed, Miller, Nnawulezi, & Valenti, 2012, p.14). Todd, McConnell, and Suffrin (2014), on the other hand, employed White privilege as a way to understand how White Americans are implicated in racial oppression, and how intersecting privileged

identities relate to White people's commitment to social justice. And in related work, Todd (2012) considers the usefulness of White privilege for people who are both White-identified and interested in promoting social justice. His study of White Christian groups suggests that settings promoting moral and spiritual values may also motivate White people to use their privilege "for good" in the context of justice work. He is essentially proposing an extension of Maton's (2008) empowering community settings framework, which parallels our call for examining the other side of the metaphorical coin regarding racial justice and power.

### *Whiteness as a Theoretical Standpoint*

Theoretical constructs specific to whiteness are increasingly applied in community psychology research. Conference abstracts included such applications as a symposium on whiteness in the field of community psychology (Bonam, Collins, Coleman, Bennet, & Gupta, 2017) and a research presentation on the role of White fragility in racial discourses surrounding Black youth among inhabitants of a liberal White college town (Baldrige & Reeves, 2019). Theoretical frameworks intended to guide thinking on whiteness are also largely situated in international contexts. Of the articles we reviewed, Sonn and colleagues' work in Australia and South Africa provides some of the most robust theoretical framing of whiteness in community psychology. Sonn (2011) utilizes a whiteness frame to situate the ways in which research, teaching, and community-based work may lead to further marginalization if community psychologists do not attend to the ways that whiteness shows up in context. In working within Indigenous communities, Sonn (2009) highlights how research can be utilized as another form of colonization and forced assimilation into White ways of being (i.e., hegemonic whiteness). And in their work with a community-based arts program in Australia, Sonn and Quayle (2012) highlighted how whiteness results in privileging White people, allowing them to distance themselves or deny racism, and remain unaware of racist systems (i.e., epistemologies of ignorance).

### **Toward a Critical Whiteness Community Psychology**

Having reviewed the community psychology literature on whiteness, we now turn our attention advancing such study. The six themes described above represent the field's potential for a more comprehensive critique of whiteness. Integrating this critical whiteness orientation more thoroughly into community psychology necessitates

greater understanding of how whiteness manifests psychologically, socially, and structurally, and the strategies that communities may employ to undermine the practices that maintain racial injustice via whiteness. Here, we propose three ways for community psychologists to begin brokering the community psychology and whiteness relations.

**Proposition 1:** Community psychology as a field should become more critically conscious of whiteness, both within the field and the world at large.

Our theoretical model (see Fig. 1) implies the need to reveal the existence and influence of hegemonic whiteness, which is rooted in a history of White supremacy in the United States and manifests contemporarily as an epistemological standpoint represented by colorblind thinking. Contrary to "re-centering" whiteness, we propose that community psychologists work to expose whiteness as a system of domination shaping how we are socialized into and act within the profession, as well as the social worlds in which we intervene. Our scoping review provided some examples of how community psychologists have highlighted the role of whiteness in the field itself. We argue that community psychologists should practice such reflexivity regarding the ways in which the elements of our model may appear in study designs and interventions. For example, individual community psychologists would benefit from considering the influence of their own knowledge of racism or lack thereof, White racial identity, and racial schemas on their work, and whether such work represents efforts to distance themselves from, deny, or dismantle racism. Those engaged in program development and evaluation would do well to consider the ways in which the interventions they design or evaluate either contest or reinforce White supremacy, institutional racism, and White privilege, even if their work is not explicitly about race. For example, the work of Sonn and colleagues (Sonn, 2011; Sonn & Lewis, 2009; Sonn & Quayle, 2012) provides key insights into deconstructing White hegemony as it manifests in community psychology theory and methods. Most notably, they highlight the need for antiracist research and action to "question the positions and discourses of privilege and dominance that stem from an ideology of white superiority and hegemony" (Green et al., 2007, p. 389). Left unattended, those positions and discourses can result in community-based research contributing to the reification of White hegemony and the pressure on communities of color to conform to a dominant White worldview (Sonn, 2009). Greater attention to the relations between our racialized ideologies and our practices would facilitate our greater understanding of the ways in which whiteness can remain hegemonic even in ostensibly empowering and antiracist settings (Feagin,

2013; Hughey, 2010; Maton, 2008). Although community psychologists have long attended to ways that *subordinated groups* may gain power, they have yet to examine how *dominant groups* (i.e., White people) can undermine their own power toward liberatory goals. To that end, community psychologists may consider collaborating with organizations such as Showing Up for Racial Justice (SURJ), an antiracist organization whose goal is to “educate, organize, and mobilize white people to show up powerfully for racial justice and collective liberation” (Coalition of Anti-Racist Whites, 2020). Such collaborations would make for fertile ground for the interrogation of the complexities and contradictions associated with whiteness.

**Proposition 2:** Community psychologists should promote critical awareness of the ways that whiteness operates as a complex system of racial domination

Greater reflexivity and critical awareness of how whiteness shows up in our theories, methods, and settings of practice would facilitate community psychologists’ capacities to promote such critical awareness beyond the field. This proposition entails promoting the public’s critical understanding of the ways whiteness manifests psychologically, culturally, and politically, by applying our theoretical model’s insights into the interdependence between individual-level processes and racialized social structures. Such insights should be especially applied to understanding the strategies White people can use to dismantle those systems of racialized power. For White individuals, developing a critical awareness of the psychology, culture, and politics of whiteness is essential to understanding systems of domination. Yet, paradoxically, to be socialized as White means developing such critical awareness is unlikely without intervention (Bonam, Das, et al., 2018; Coleman et al., 2019).

At the individual level, psychologies of whiteness may lead White people to adopt race-neutral frameworks and stay largely unaware of their own implicit racial biases and complicity with racism (Alexander, 2010; Applebaum, 2013; Devos & Banaji, 2005). Community psychologists are well positioned to study how such processes also manifest at the setting level. As our scoping review shows, educational settings are fertile ground for community psychologists to interrogate whiteness and disseminate the resulting insights. Interventions aimed at educating White individuals about their relationship to and complicity in structural racism would be fruitful if they help White learners discover the relations between their own racialized beliefs and behaviors and their social and historical antecedents (Coleman et al., 2019). For example, Fernández (2018) intervention with White college students, as

described in our review, shows how critical thinking about White families’ immigration experiences reveal the operation of racist systems and structures, and facilitates decolonial thinking among White students that disrupts their racialized “innocence.” Her study shows how the interdependencies described in our model can be interrupted at the setting level (i.e., the college classroom) when the setting affords individuals the opportunity to see how their own colorblind thinking and lack of knowledge about racism is a manifestation of White supremacy and hegemony, and to engage in critical reflection on what it means to be White. As much of the critical whiteness scholarship appears in educational research, community psychology’s historical relationship to educational intervention suggests yet more fertile ground. Existing and new collaborations with educators and educational institutions represent opportunities for community psychologists to raise these stakeholders’ awareness of the ways in which the deleterious effects of whiteness manifest even when individual and institutional efforts are aimed at diversity, equity, and inclusion (Aragón, Dovidio, & Graham, 2017; Plaut et al., 2018).

Culturally, it is important that White people become aware of the “White as normative” assumption perpetuated in media and other institutions (Feagin, 2013), which has implications beyond educational settings. Community psychologists are well positioned to make clear the ways that hegemonic whiteness may manifest in clinical settings (Burkard & Knox, 2004) and in the policy arena (Awad et al., 2005; Bonam et al., 2016; Bonam, Das, et al., 2018; Walsh, 2018). Such critical examinations of whiteness may serve as an intervention to understand the ways it manifests ideologically and practically within White individuals and in White-dominated institutions so that White people may more efficaciously resist racialized dominant forces (Alderfer, 1994).

**Proposition 3:** Greater critical awareness of whiteness, within the field and among the people with whom we work, should be applied to the development of multi-level interventions aimed at dismantling whiteness as a system of domination.

This proposition entails developing the capacities of White individuals, communities, and institutions to understand their role and responsibility in resisting racialized oppression. Due to their relational and structural power within influential social systems, White people are uniquely positioned to take critical action against institutionalized racism (Neal & Neal, 2011; Serrano-García, 1994; Speer & Hughey, 1995). Through psychological, relational, and political practices, they may better understand their own power within dominating systems and

engage in critical actions to undo those systems (Moane, 2003; Watts & Serrano-García, 2003). The interdependence of the various aspects of our model speaks to this proposition, interdependence being a key principle of ecology-oriented community psychology (Kelly, 2006). Implicit and explicit racist beliefs at the individual level, policies like redlining and their effects at the community level, and social privileges afforded by whiteness can all be measured quantitatively and described qualitatively, as can their relations to individual and organizational behavior. One of the SCRA conference abstracts included in our scoping review exemplifies this point. The intervention described by Wendel et al. (2019) targets individual and community levels, as well as racialized discourse in policy and organizational practice. It links White supremacy to the norms that typically govern youth violence prevention, and shows how engaging youth in a social marketing campaign and other civic activities can challenge racist beliefs that often go unnoticed. Their project implies that White supremacist norms themselves are violent, and engaging youth to confront them also constitutes violence prevention in a way that is aligned with community psychology's pursuit of wellness in that the elimination of oppression is necessary for healthier individuals and communities (Hill Collins, 1998; Prilleltensky, 2001; Prilleltensky & Gonick, 1996). The design and implementation of interventions meant to disrupt whiteness should explicitly include components meant to educate White individuals, communities, and institutions about the ways in which unexamined whiteness and other forms of systemic racism may undermine efforts to promote wellbeing.

## Summary and Conclusion

In this manuscript, we argued that the field of community psychology can and should more thoroughly integrate a critical whiteness orientation. The field's tradition of promoting wellness, liberation and social justice through the application of ecological and systems thinking, combined with increased critical attention to whiteness both within and outside the field, make our call a timely and appropriate one. We first defined whiteness as a socially constructed ideology emanating from legal, economic, and cultural practices, particularly with regard to the relations between property and power. We then outlined three frameworks for understanding whiteness developed largely in allied disciplines broadly termed critical whiteness studies.

White racial identity research and theory describes the ways in which White people think of themselves in relation to racism and racial others, and outlines behavioral and emotional consequences of such thinking. Whiteness

as epistemological standpoint frames whiteness as a particular way of knowing shaped by a dominant positionality in a racialized society. As such, whiteness is defined largely by processes that facilitate ignorance and denial of social and historical processes that afford White privilege and domination. Reflected in both White identity and epistemology is hegemonic whiteness, a broad framing that renders White privilege and supremacy normal, manifests in both racist and antiracist contexts, and is upheld by colorblind ideology. We used these three broad frameworks to describe a critical whiteness ecology that demonstrates the complexities and contradictions inherent to whiteness, and that is commensurate with the ecological orientation of community psychology. We then reviewed both published research and SCRA conference abstracts from the previous two decades, showing that the critical study of whiteness in our field is emergent and ripe for development. That nascent body of work overlaps with the more well-developed field of critical whiteness studies, and suggests the potential for community psychological study to contribute to the interrogation and disruption of whiteness as a system of domination. To that end, we proposed three ways that the field can advance those goals. Our goal is to widen the lens of community psychological studies of power, oppression, and liberation with a thorough and critical interrogation of whiteness. We argue that the field's pursuit of liberation is not complete until it moves in this direction.

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### **Supporting Information**

Additional supporting information may be found online in the Supporting Information section at the end of the article.