Applying Transformative Organizing Theory to White Antiracist Organizing

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White antiracist organizing is a type of community organizing that works to build a movement that challenges the political, social, economic, and cultural manifestations of white supremacy, especially in white communities. In striving to harness strategic white antiracist organizing, an applicable theoretical lens is needed to guide both scholarship and practice. Transformative organizing theory, predicated on the need to organize and work for change on multiple levels at once, is particularly salient. This paper highlights how transformative organizing theory can anchor and cultivate white antiracist organizing through the application of key theoretical concepts, such as suffering and oppression; self-awareness and intentionality; vision; centering impacted communities; and reaching scale. Although the transformative lens carries tremendous possibilities, it is not without its limitations. Implications for both practice and research on transformative white antiracist community organizing are also discussed.

Keywords: antiracist organizing, transformative organizing, social movements, social change, oppression, white supremacy

Martin Luther King Jr. defined power as "the ability to achieve purpose [and] the strength required to bring about social, political, and economic change" (Washington, 1986, p. 246). Yet, several decades later, the United States continues to be a nation characterized by unmitigated inequality sustained by a striking imbalance of power. The ability to affect systemic change largely lives in the purview of the few. Even so, people are moved by injustice and outrage to challenge the powers-that-be (McAlevey, 2016). There exists a thriving history of strategic and bold organizing in the face of such exploitation and oppression. Community organizing harnesses the mismatch between how things truly are and how people imagine they ought to be; this dissonance requires action, as exhibited in past and modern social movements (Ganz, 2010). Challenging inequity is about power, particularly in regard to people and communities who seem to possess very little. Organizing builds the power of these people—not elite decision makers, but those with a stake in demanding and making change. In fact, according to McAlevey (2016), "only organizing" can fully confront and disrupt the runaway power disparities in the United States (p. 2).

As such, the purpose of this paper is to illuminate how the theory of transformative organizing can anchor and cultivate white antiracist organizing. First, I define the practice of community organizing, followed by a closer focus on white antiracist organizing, including its background and foundation. I then review the origins and core concepts of transformative organizing theory before presenting an application of the theory to white antiracist organizing. The final sections of this paper explicate some limitations of the application and implications for practice and research.

Community Organizing and
Social Movements: Creating Change

In his curriculum on community organizing, Marshall Ganz (2010) conceptualizes organizing as a form of leadership that allows people to turn their resources into the power they need to make desired change. Organizers, as leaders, are essential to driving the work and building people's capacity for leadership by tapping into their resources, including "time,

skills, and effort" (Ganz, 2010, p. 27; Han, 2014). Yet, organizing is collective, and so, it is not limited to channeling such resources on an individual-by-individual basis. Rather, organizing is a compelling practice because it is fundamentally relational. Relationships anchor the work and generate new resources in the process (Han, 2014). Indeed, a person does not make commitments to an idea, but commits to other people, and those commitments stimulate the person's sustained motivation and dedication. These relationships may be located in a community bounded by a geographic area, though they need not be. Organizing can also happen among a community of people with shared interests or values, regardless of geographic proximity (Castelloe, Watson, & White, 2002). Indeed, organizing encompasses local, grassroots efforts, as well as larger-scale organizations (Sampson, 2017). Tension can sometimes exist, though, in regard to scaling—building on and connecting local campaigns to systemic and wide-reaching efforts for social change, all while staying connected on the local level (Young, Neumann, & Nyden, 2018).

Organizing is highly participatory, meaning that experts or "knowledgeable-others" are not centered. Ordinary people are considered to be expert and employ themselves in the work for social change (Staples, 2009). Moreover, organizing is also inextricably linked to social movements, which are "collective, strategic, and organized" (Ganz, 2010, p. 1). In movements, people unite in a sustained way, for a shared purpose (Pyles, 2014), and they are organized to do more than imagine what could change in the world, but to do the work to make it happen (Ganz, 2010). This work might include a variety of activities, such as phone banking, canvassing, campaigns, political education, open meetings, social media, research, one-on-one conversations, and nurturing alliances (Castelloe et al., 2002). However, it is strategy, a "vision of how to get from here to there," that informs these details (Ganz, 2010, p. 18). Social movements rely on strategic organizing in order to most effectively utilize resources to target people with power. The assumptions underlying how to shift power from elites to the people is the theory of change (Han, 2014). For instance, the theory of change behind organizing posits that relationships, training, learning, acting, and reflecting are all essential to making change. Consequently,

activities like door-to-door canvassing and one-on-one conversations are very salient to the strategic aims of the organizer. All in all, organizing carries immense possibilities for shifting power and creating bold social change, particularly when it operates from a well-developed, clear framework.

Organizing has been at the heart of myriad movements for change, including civil rights, LGBTQ rights, and anti-war efforts (Minkler, Wallerstein, & Wilson, 2008). Although arguably less is known about it, there is also a history of white people organizing against white supremacy. The term *white supremacy* is not limited to personal attitudes of racial animus or to members of blatantly supremacist groups. Rather, white supremacy is a

> political, economic and cultural system in which whites overwhelmingly control power and material resources, conscious and unconscious ideas of white superiority and entitlement are widespread, and relations of white dominance and non-white subordination are daily reenacted across a broad array of institutions and social settings. (Ansley, 1989, p. 1024)

Indeed, Bonilla-Silva (2014) conceptualized white supremacy as a "racialized social system" (p. 9) that has, since the Europeans first invaded today's North America, awarded advantages to white people, simultaneously denying them to people of color. White supremacy is intimately intertwined with systems wherein white people have tremendous power, hegemony, and dominance (Gillborn, 2005). Institutions, such as education and criminal justice, sustain white access to and control over various resources (Ansley, 1989). Interestingly, Saul Alinsky and Paulo Freire, significant influencers in community organizing, both juxtaposed those with power and those without: Freire (1970) as the oppressor and the oppressed and Alinsky (1971) as the "Haves" and the "Have-Nots." In turn, they illustrated how those without power can organize to create change. Yet, white antiracist organizing does not squarely fit into this framework inasmuch as white supremacy is a system in which white people are the oppressors, the Haves, and the people with power. As such, how can white antiracist organizing be understood? Why and how can white people organize to dismantle white supremacy when they are unequivocally benefited by it?

Methods

Several sources were utilized to review the literature on white antiracist organizing and transformative organizing, including scholarly articles, documents, reports, and practice-based resources. A thorough EBSCO database search was conducted using the terms "white antiracist" and "organizing." In reviewing citations in the applicable articles, additional historical documents were searched, particularly regarding the civil rights movement, as well as documents and websites from contemporary white antiracist organizations. Another EBSCO database search was conducted using the term "transformative organizing." Again, citations from the literature indicated important books and organizational reports regarding transformative organizing. As of this writing, there has been no scholarly application of transformative organizing theory to white antiracist organizing, specifically. Thus, I drew, in part, from Wernick, Kulick, and Woodford's (2014) transformative organizing approach to LGBTQQ youth empowerment, as well as Costanza-Chock, Schweidler, and Transformative Media Organizing Project's (2017) application of the theory to LGBT and Two-Spirit organizations and their media work. Grounding my approach in these examples, I utilized the key tenets of both transformative organizing and white antiracist organizing to identify and elucidate areas of intersection and application.

White Antiracist Organizing

White people organizing in white communities against racism is not without precedent. Many leaders of color have called on the white community to do this work. Malcolm X, for instance, stated "Let sincere white individuals find all other white people they can who feel as they do—and let them form their own all-white groups, to work trying to convert other white people who are thinking and acting so racist" (X & Haley, 1965, p. 383). Similarly, in a speech at the University of California at Berkeley, Stokley Carmichael (1966) asked, "…can white people move inside their own community and start tearing down racism where in fact it does exist?" More recently, Alicia Garza, a founder of Black Lives Matter, challenged white people to get

on the "right side of history" and organize other white people (aliciagarza, 2017).

Further, movement history in the United States has involved shifts in terms of race, alliances, and organizing. Originally, white people were part of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) during the civil rights movement. Then, in the mid-1960s, the organization asked the white members to organize the white community—"where racism originated" (Digital SNCC Gateway, n.d.). In other words, they called for a coalition model wherein white people organized white people, while also supporting SNCC and organizers of color (Middlebrook, 2010). Some white people who had been part of SNCC, like Bob and Dottie Zellner, went on to form the Grass Roots Organizing Work (GROW) project (also known as Get Rid of Wallace) in order to organize poor and working class white people in the late 60s (Digital SNCC Gateway, n.d.). The GROW proposal affirmed the need to engage in organizing in the white community in order to build a veritable group of white antiracists committed to the work. Additionally, the mid-1960s saw other examples of white- and people of color-led organizations that were allied but which operated separately in regard to race—what Middlebrook (2010) referred to as "affiliate-autonomous organizing" (p. 236). For instance, there existed a relationship between SNCC and the Southern Student Organizing Committee (SSOC), which focused on organizing white people in the South, particularly on college and university campuses (Royall, 2018).

Today's white antiracist organizing draws on the precedent set in the 60s and the example of prominent white antiracists, such as Anne Braden. In the 1950s, Braden worked for racial justice in the South, especially in her hometown of Louisville, Kentucky. She was arrested for protesting a man of color's execution (asserting he was unjustly convicted of the crime), and was put on trial after trying to integrate a white community (Americans Who Tell the Truth, 2018). The work of Braden, SSOC, GROW, and others exemplifies how antiracist organizing cannot be reduced to mere learning, writing, talking, and meeting (Middlebrook, 2010). It requires active, intentional, and reflective work. White supremacy is systemic and white people benefit regardless of their individual orientation toward it. Indeed, perpetuating white supremacy does not require open or flagrant racist behavior and attitudes (Gillborn,

2005; Tatum, 1997). Thus, Tatum (1997) stressed the need to ask how white people can be shifted to actively engage in antiracism, rather than passively accepting how things currently are.

White people have a stake in ending white supremacy. Rather than operating from a patronizing lens of helping or assisting people of color with *their* issues, antiracist organizing acknowledges that white people are also harmed, albeit in vastly different ways, by white supremacy (Showing Up for Racial Justice [SURJ], n.d.b). Today, organizations continue to engage in affiliate-autonomous organizing, including Showing Up for Racial Justice (SURJ), a "national network of groups and individuals working to undermine white supremacy and to work toward racial justice" (SURJ, n.d.a). Alliance of White Anti-Racists Everywhere-LA (AWARE-LA), part of the SURJ network, utilizes a five-pronged model of community organizing to engage in the work. Their model includes: building a base of white anti-racists; cultivating alliances with communities of color; raising antiracist consciousness among white communities; using the dominant white voice to speak against racism; and working toward a national antiracist movement (Middlebrook, 2010). Ultimately, white antiracist organizing can challenge the status quo and powers-that-be and build a movement that challenges the political, social, economic, and cultural manifestations of white supremacy.

Transformative Organizing Theory

In striving to describe, understand, and utilize powerful and strategic white antiracist organizing, an applicable theoretical lens is undoubtedly necessary. Transformative organizing theory is particularly salient. Transformative organizing is predicated on the need to organize and work for change on multiple levels at once (Social Justice Leadership, 2010). In other words, transformation can and must happen personally, organizationally, and societally. Many formative materials written about transformative organizing are external to academic literature, such as Social Justice Leadership (2010), Mann (2010), and Williams (2013). Although there is significant overlap between these texts, each uses a somewhat distinctive approach to categorizing and organizing the vital ideas, values, and principles underlying transformative organizing. To an extent,

academic literature has also drawn on and applied the theory (Costanza-Chock et al., 2017; Fisher, Katiya, Reid, & Shragge, 2013; Moore, 2018; Wernick et al., 2014).

Origins

Transformative organizing theory originates from, unsurprisingly, the wider realm of community organizing and social movements. Mann (2010) posited that the foundation of the theory dates to the Europeans' colonization of the United States; their violent seizure of land and mass genocide were met with strong resistance among the indigenous communities. The theory assumes that organizing is essential to democracy and, in the past, has fueled substantial social change. However, it also recognizes that, particularly in the past several decades, social justice movements have grown weaker and diluted. Instead of radical demands for change, an Alinsky-inspired, practical framework for organizing has gained more traction—a trend challenged by the transformative lens (Bix, 2014; Mann, 2010). Transformative organizing asserts a need for the "social justice movement to reassess its approach," reignite its impact, and embrace a new organizing paradigm that looks toward long-term transformation (Social Justice Leadership, 2010, p. 4). In other words, rather than stopping at reformist, incremental change that largely leaves the status quo intact, the theory stresses commitment to more far-reaching change. Faced with the enormity and complexity of injustice today, transformative organizing recognizes that a multifaceted approach is needed that harnesses, and builds on, other organizing frameworks (Williams, 2013).

Transformative Organizing: Key Concepts

Literature on transformative organizing specifies several key concepts of the theory. These concepts include suffering and oppression, self-awareness, intentionality, vision, centering impacted communities, and reaching scale.

Suffering and oppression. Transformative organizing theory asserts that oppression is systemic, structural, and cultural, whereas suffering is an internal response to external circumstances. Social Justice Leadership (2010) identified two "spheres"

of transformation needed to get free from oppression and suffering: "1) the creation of a society based on justice, democracy, and equality and 2) the transformation of ourselves and our relationships based on authenticity, interdependence, and compassion" (p. 10). Based on factors like race, gender identity, class, and sexual orientation, the social, economic, and political structures determine who has access to resources, power, and autonomy (Mann, 2010). Transformative organizing emphasizes radically changing such structural relationships to ensure that basic needs are met and democratic participation is possible.

The second sphere, personal transformation, is based on the necessity for people to acknowledge—and seek to change—the ways in which their personal behaviors and attitudes are reflective of dominant societal norms, such as individualism and competition (Social Justice Leadership, 2010). Personal transformation is a process that both organizers and the people being organized experience, as their consciousness of personal suffering and societal oppression deepens (Bix, 2014; Fisher et al., 2013; Mann, 2010). Ultimately, the transformation of society and of people, the two spheres, are intimately connected and cannot be attained in isolation from one another.

Self-awareness and intentionality. Transformative organizing theory is meaningful when anchored in a transformative organization (Mann, 2010). It rests on collective and organized efforts, rather than the independent practice of individual people. Still, both individual and organizational self-awareness are considered foundational to the theory, as transformation requires becoming attuned to habitual reactions, feelings, and behaviors. Routine actions and patterns are considered to be limiting inasmuch as they hamper the development of novel skills and practices, thereby restricting change (Social Justice Leadership, 2010). Accordingly, self-awareness paves the way for intentional practice. Intentionality is about replacing the routinized, habitual behaviors with patterns that considerably alter how a person "show[s] up in the world" (Social Justice Leadership, 2010, p. 19). Both individuals and organizations can then line up how they envision themselves showing up with how they show up in practice.

Vision. Vision captures values, beliefs, and ideology and continues to stimulate self-awareness and intentional practice.

Transformative organizing theory posits vision as existing at all levels—the individual, organization, and society (Social Justice Leadership, 2010). Vision articulates the society that is desired —one of justice, equality, compassion, and interdependence. Transformation requires vision in order to imagine and articulate an alternative, even when that alternative has not yet been experienced (Perry, 2012).

Evans, Hanlin, and Prilleltensky (2007) juxtaposed first order and second order change; whereas the former is a more reformist approach, the latter type captures the revolutionary change of current systems and the redistribution of power. The process of second order change will inevitably reach a time in which the status quo needs to be abandoned, although the new systems and structures are still in formation and flux (Social Justice Leadership, 2010). Without a vision as guide and motivator, the discomfort inherent in this process can easily sideline and impede further growth and transformation. The transformative organizer can and ought to be anchored in a mission to disrupt current social structures in order to alter the course of history (Mann, 2010; Williams, 2013).

As an example, the National Domestic Workers Alliance articulates an "aspirational vision of fair work that goes well beyond the limited protections afforded by law" (Moore, 2018, p. 1228). They center a vision of society that values and prioritizes the work of all, even while that vision is currently limited by legal hurdles and cultural norms that devalue and disregard domestic work.

Centering impacted communities and reaching scale. Moreover, transformative organizing theory is centered on shifting power and developing leaders among impacted communities. The leadership of oppressed, exploited, and marginalized people is considered essential in undermining current hegemony, dominance, and privilege in the United States (Mann, 2010). In their study of LGBTQ youth, Wernick, Kulick, and Woodford (2014) utilized transformative organizing theory to understand how the youth used a model of theater to make connections between the larger sociopolitical context and their own marginalization. Indeed, engaging in theater was not limited to the LGBTQ youth's personal empowerment, but was also connected to

structural policies and practices (Wernick et al., 2014). With its focus on replacing suffering and oppression with liberation and freedom, transformative organizing theory consistently makes linkages personally, organizationally, and societally (Fisher et al., 2013; Social Justice Leadership, 2010; Williams, 2013). Costanza-Chock, Schweidler, and Transformative Media Organizing (2017) highlighted these linkages in an application of transformative organizing to media use/creation among LGBTQ and Two-Spirit organizations; media gave those involved the space to give voice to their own stories, engage in policy and electoral campaigns, and alter cultural norms, beliefs, and values.

Still, for transformation to occur, the scope of organizing must be massive in order to reach scale. That is, shifting power and changing structures will require the united work of the masses, who can, in turn, demonstrate and live out the new vision of justice, equality, and compassion. In this way, transformative organizing theory is "visionary and pre-figurative" (Social Justice Leadership, 2010, p. 26). Not only does it articulate a vision for long-term change, but it also begins to put that vision into practice here and now. As a result, transformative organizing connects interpersonal relationships to scaling up so as to impact large-scale social, cultural, economic, and political issues. Growing an expansive base builds the leadership and organizational capacity needed to scale and effect change on multiple levels.

Using Transformative Organizing Theory to Inform White Antiracist Organizing

Transformative organizing theory provides groundwork for organizing that seeks to create radical, substantial social change. Thus, the theory has great potential to elucidate the practice of and knowledge underlying white antiracist organizing. Applying the transformative lens to this particular type of organizing can both anchor and cultivate the work to delegitimize and dismantle white supremacy, especially in white communities. See Table 1 for a summary of the following application.

Table 1. Applying Transformative Organizing Theory to White Antiracist Organizing

Transformative organizing: Main tenets	Intersection with white antiracist organizing
Suffering and oppression	• Suffering and oppression from white supremacy experienced disparately by white people and people of color • Capitalist economic system manipulates race in order to divide people of the same class background • White people organize out of mutual interest; experience harm and disconnection from white supremacy • Intersectionality, including class, vital to organizing • AWARE-LA's Saturday dialogues
Self-awareness and intentionality	• Don't need to be "totally woke" to enter into antiracist work as white person; calling in, not out • Questioning white supremacy can be uncomfortable work and can lead to guilt • Move from complicity to re-engaging with humanness; build skills as antiracist allies
Vision	• What are the alternatives to white supremacy? • White antiracists organizationally and interpersonally live out the alternative vision now; i.e. AWARE-LA's structure • White antiracist practice must be connected to sociopolitical context and systems change
Centering impacted communities	• Some white people are disparately impacted by system of white supremacy, ie., poor and working class, LGBTQ, and disabled communities
Reaching scale	• National organization and local chapters/affiliates (i.e., SURJ) • Asking: Who are the white people that need to be organized? • Using local groups, house parties, film screenings, deep canvassing and other events to build a base and grow

Suffering and Oppression

Liberation from suffering and oppression lies at the heart of transformative organizing theory. These personal and societal experiences must be treated together, not in isolation; for example, racism, a form of oppression, cannot be separated from the way it manifests in people's lives as distress, worry, and terror (Social Justice Leadership, 2010). White supremacy, too, is a form of oppression and undermining it is, without a doubt, a transformative process. It is vital, then, to note that the experience of

white supremacy as oppression and suffering is quite divergent for white people versus people of color. People of color are dehumanized, marginalized, and killed by this system, whereas white people are normalized and advantaged.

Considering the vast privileges inherent in being white under a system of white supremacy, the question may even be asked: Do white people suffer at all under this system? The white antiracist organizing model recognizes how they are hurt, though not in the same way as people of color. For instance, racial divisions prevent movements that might join poor and working class whites together with communities of color to fight for economic justice, as both groups are exploited by a capitalist system (Crass, 2015). Moreover, white supremacy, in many ways, has stripped white people of their origin stories, which were largely lost to become white (SURJ, n.d.b). Consequently, a fundamental application of transformative organizing theory to white antiracist organizing is highlighted by mutual interest, a core value of SURJ (n.d.b) that acknowledges how white supremacy has "hurt white people by cutting us off from powerful traditions and cultures that we come from" (para. 5). Organizing from mutual interest recognizes that white people need to know and tell their stories of personal suffering and oppressive experiences that brought them to the work. AWARE-LA, a SURJ affiliate, holds Saturday dialogues that provide space for white people to reflect on and own their stake in fighting white supremacy (Middlebrook, 2010).

Additionally, suffering and oppression are multifaceted, which must be acknowledged in a white antiracist organizing space. White people are not a monolith and, as such, their experience of white supremacy will be uneven. People who are poor and working class, disabled, and LGBTQ, for instance, experience intersecting systems of oppression (Collins & Bilge, 2016). Thus, intersectionality is a key component underlying transformative white antiracist organizing, as people will carry varying traumas and suffering, such as grief, death, and loss, into the work. Carruthers (2018) highlighted the role of trauma, as both personal suffering and societal oppression, in movement spaces. She spoke to the need for healing justice, which requires those who have experienced trauma to be centered and to take the lead; moreover, organizing spaces must avoid recreating trauma, loss, and death

in order for transformation to happen (Carruthers, 2018). Indeed, the organizing space has the potential to be a great asset to the individual because of the centrality of relationships, which are a powerful way of coping and healing from trauma (Williams, 2006). Consequently, AWARE-LA's Saturday dialogues strengthen the organization through purposeful relationship-building while recognizing the centrality and importance of personal and social pains (Middlebrook, 2010).

Organizing and analysis around class is another area that accentuates the connection of suffering and oppression to white antiracist work, as class and race are decidedly linked (Middlebrook, 2010). In the mid-to-late-1600s, white and black servants banded together in rebellion against the land-owning elite in the early colonies of the modern-day United States. Thwarting such allegiances worked hand-in-hand with landowners' need for unbridled manual labor, and thus, the solution among the powers-that-be was to enslave black servants and placate white servants by granting them social advantages (Gilbert, 2017). This divisive system of social control manipulated race to drive a wedge between people of the same class status (Gilbert, 2017). As such, poor and working class white people have a particular social and personal stake in the fight against white supremacy. Centering, lifting up, and supporting poor and working class organizers is particularly essential if white antiracist organizing is to be sustained, authentic, and impactful. Illustrating this focus, the Catalyst Project (n.d.), a white antiracist organization, holds a yearly training for white organizers, stating on the application page: "We will prioritize applicants currently engaged in grassroots organizing in working class communities…" (para 10).

Self-Awareness and Intentionality

Transformative organizing stresses the need to practice self-awareness and, by extension, fundamentally change habitual practices; both the organized and the organizer are radically changed in the process (Mann, 2010; Social Justice Leadership, 2010). Consequently, this principle indicates that it is not necessary to be perfect or "totally woke" in order to enter into the work. In other words, organizing against white supremacy is not predicated on already knowing all there is to know about

this exploitative and terrorizing system, but in being open to growing in critical consciousness and awareness. Another one of SURJ's (n.d.b) values is "calling people in, not out," (para. 2) which illustrates how white antiracist organizing can embody transformative self-awareness. This value is founded on " recognizing we all mess up, and speaking from this shared experience" and "talking to people in times and places that support conversation and learning" (SURJ, n.d.b, para 2). Even so, white people possess habits, beliefs, and values that are deeply engrained because white supremacy is so culturally ubiquitous (Bonilla-Silva, 2014). Thus, working to recognize and change habitual practices—to cultivate self-awareness—may be deeply uncomfortable and unwieldy.

For instance, suppose an individual becomes involved in a white antiracist organization. Though they recognized the injustice of racism, they had not hitherto been connected to a sustained movement for racial justice. As they learn about white supremacy—its systemic and cultural manifestations—they also become increasingly cognizant of how it is connected to their routinized thinking, practices, and learnings. They may realize how deeply they've been misinformed about the history of racial exploitation or how it continues to shape social, economic, and political systems. In turn, they may recognize that their prior silence was akin to complicity in this degrading, underhanded system of white supremacy. Without a doubt, making the connection between their own social locations and white supremacy is vitally important in white antiracist work. Yet, slipping into feelings of guilt and shame can impede the development and growth of intentional practices.

AWARE-LA has highlighted how guilt can become detrimental to white antiracist organizing, resulting in, for instance, the placing of "people of color on an unrealistic pedestal" or "dissociat[ing] from whiteness and white people" (Robbins et al., 2008, p. 2). Thus, they ground their organizing in intentionally moving white people from complicity in white supremacy to re-engaging with one's humanness. Having spaces like Saturday dialogues provides support and the impetus to do intentional work of getting skilled up as antiracist allies (Middlebrook, 2010). In other words, they create space for white people to exercise agency—to use their resources and power—so they

can show up in new ways that align with their beliefs and values (Social Justice Leadership, 2010). Even so, it is significant to note that this process is indisputably slow. Transforming habits is a radical practice, but it is not immediate. Disrupting white supremacy—and how it manifests in routinized thinking and behavior—involves sustained, difficult, and intentional work.

Vision

In transformative organizing theory, vision highlights a movement's values, beliefs, and ideology (Social Justice Leadership, 2010). So, if white supremacy no longer held systemic dominance, a societal-level vision would articulate what the world might then look and feel like in its stead. In light of the extensive, insidious, and violent nature of white supremacy, motivation is absolutely needed to sustain white antiracist organizing; without it, dismay, fatigue, and burnout could undermine the work. Vision is the source of this motivation (Social Justice Leadership, 2010). In articulating a societal vision, the antiracist organization needs to contemplate questions such as: What is the alternative to white supremacy socially, economically, and politically? What will our relationships and communities look like? The SURJ New York City (2019) chapter articulates their vision as "a society where we struggle together with love, for justice, human dignity, and a sustainable world" (para. 1). It is a vision of collective liberation.

Transformation requires more than articulating what is envisioned for the future, but also beginning to live that vision now. Manifesting that vision in an organization means practices and structures that reflect a truly democratic, interdependent, and equitable way of operating. For instance, AWARE-LA's structure includes a central coordination team that acts as a hub, but not as the sole deciding body; there are additional workgroups and teams that move particular elements of work (Robbins et al., 2008). Essentially, they operate so as to build relationships, increase leadership, and give a voice to a wide base of people. Moreover, the vision of groups like SURJ includes accountability to people of color-led racial justice organizations. Living the vision now means that this relationship must be authentic and genuine, not in words only.

Accordingly, vision challenges the white antiracist organization to consistently connect their practices to the "broader political and social change context" (Social Justice Leadership, 2010, p. 22). For example, a campaign to restore voting rights for former felons was waged by Kentuckians for the Commonwealth (Crass, 2015). Without a vision, their campaign could have been solely focused on rallying and advocating for this restoration, without connecting the fight to the wider system of white supremacy. Instead, undermining white supremacy was an intentional component of the campaign and the work to hold decision makers accountable (Crass, 2015). Protests, phone banking, canvassing, and political education will not be transformative if they are not connected to the sociopolitical context. An organization's vision of achieving racial justice must think beyond immediate wins to the bigger personal, organizational, and societal pictures. In other words, boldly challenging decision-makers in order to shift power needs to be connected to disrupting white supremacy in ourselves and society (Mann, 2010).

Centering Impacted Communities and Reaching Scale

Challenging both the cultural and systemic manifestations of white supremacy requires the power of people. Indeed, massive numbers of people are needed to get to the scale needed for transformative change in the face of such an intractable issue (Social Justice Leadership, 2010). Ganz (2010) highlighted the essentialness of leadership development for getting to scale, and Young, Neumann, and Nyden (2018) emphasized the potential impact of far-reaching organizations. Indeed, SURJ (n.d.a), as a national organization, operates in such a way as to allow for collaborative regional and national efforts, while also cultivating the work needed in particular communities and neighborhoods by supporting its chapters and affiliates. Said affiliates, like AWARE-LA, support an organizational structure to sustainably build new leadership, which is, in turn, responsible for bringing more people into the work (Robbins et al., 2008). Time, energy, and skills are vital resources in this process of building a base of antiracists needed to disrupt and dismantle white supremacy.

Consequently, scaling white antiracist organizing also brings up some crucial questions to address: Who are the

white people we are trying to reach? How will we reach them? In terms of the former, a transformative organizer will value leadership development among white people who are more impacted by the white supremacist system: poor and working class, LGBTQ, and disabled. SURJ (n.d.b) explicitly states that they have "committed to centering disability justice and poor/ working-class organizers in our work" (para. 9). Still, antiracist organizations must determine how to utilize their resources, including whether they will work to agitate people who are conservatively leaning or somewhat supportive of racist policies that benefit them and their families. Alternatively, white antiracists may focus on engaging people who are more progressive and sympathetic to the work. In all, the question of which white people to organize is significant to reaching scale in disrupting white supremacy.

Moreover, white people may generally be quite comfortable where they are, particularly those living in highly segregated suburban communities with adequate community resources and good schools. Reaching scale, then, may be met with some form of resistance or indifference, fueled by the security and protection of white privilege. Both persistence and creativity will be needed in facing the uncertainty and long process of organizing these communities to get to scale. Thus, white antiracist groups can work to hone in on the needs of their surrounding community, like SURJ NYC's (2019) neighborhood groups that specifically focus on "local issues and opportunities with neighbors" (para. 5). Additionally, SURJ NYC's (2019) base-building strategies help to get to scale using "events, study groups, house parties, film screenings…[and] deep canvassing" (para. 5). Indeed, at the end of the day, organizing far and wide is critical because at the other end of the spectrum, white supremacists are actively dedicated to organizing and building their own base of committed people (Middlebrook, 2012). If white antiracist organizing does not dynamically engage white communities with a variety of strategies, white supremacists will.

Discussion

Indeed, transformative organizing carries great possibilities for cultivating white antiracist organizing vis-à-vis the theory's

central concepts, such as liberation from suffering and oppression, intentionality, vision, and reaching scale. Still, its application to white antiracist organizing is not without limitations. Firstly, empirical research on transformative organizing theory is very limited, and there is little prior literature in which to ground this application to white antiracist organizing. Future studies can help to address this limitation by investigating white antiracist organizations that work from a transformative organizing framework to understand how it is effectually applied to their work.

Moreover, this theory is soundly centered on the leadership of people directly impacted by systems of oppression and exploitation (Mann, 2010). It seeks to alter current systems that maintain power in privileged white communities. Thus, on the surface, transformative organizing theory is arguably not entirely relevant to organizing in white communities. Though the theory undergirds the importance of centering people who are LGBTQ, poor and working class, and women in white antiracist organizing, it does not necessarily illuminate an appropriate and radical position for middle and upper/owning class white people in an organizing space. Thus, it does not fully extend into the intricacies of cross-class organizing. In order to organize to scale in a cross-class context, a foundation is needed for how people at intersectional places of privilege (white and wealth) can accountably and responsibly engage. See Table 2 for a brief summary of this, and subsequent, limitations.

In addition, the theory is limited in terms of delineating how white antiracist organizing remains authentically accountable to people of color. Though fidelity to a vision of accountability can buoy organizers in their commitment, the way in which to navigate said relationships is not fully fleshed out. Transformative organizing theory, clearly, stresses the centrality of targeted communities leading the movement for racial justice, but is less clear about questions such as: How do white antiracists engage in their own work supportively, accountably, and responsively? How do white antiracists build accountability relationships and do antiracist work without furthering harms done historically? Principles for organizing across racial, ethnic, and cultural lines are not thoroughly captured by the theory.

Table 2. Limitations of Application of Transformative
Organizing (TO)

Concept	Limitation of TO application
Leadership of directly impacted people	• Does not illuminate role of those benefited by white supremacist system • Limited application to cross-class organizing
White antiracist accountability	• Does not fully address how white antiracists can do work accountably and responsively to communities of color • Questions remain on organizing across racial, ethnic, and cultural lines
Reaching scale	• White supremacy is at the bedrock of current systems • Need to question engrained national values and norms that may be seen as innocuous by white people • Building antiracist movement to scale is aspirational

Applying transformative organizing theory to white anti-racist organizing is rather aspirational. Undermining white supremacy in today's systems is a profoundly arduous and nearly unfathomable task. White supremacy undergirds the very systems that shape daily life, including education, housing, jobs, criminal justice, and politics. It is also engrained in national norms and liberal values that are seemingly innocent, particularly to people with power. That is, individualism and meritocracy may seem innocuous and natural to some, but they are deeply connected to racist systems (Bonilla-Silva, 2014). Though the cultural and systemic depth of white supremacy highlights the need for it to be dismantled, the concepts of transformative organizing do not immediately indicate how to move people resistant to challenging dominant norms. This task is no small endeavor, given the enormity of the problem.

Transformative organizing theory has substantial implications for practice. White antiracist organizations must be careful not to get stuck in simply admiring the theory, without

intentionally applying it to their work. The theory may *sound* attractive, but fidelity to the core concepts cannot be met without purposefulness. Becoming a transformative organization is not a one-time decision, but a commitment to an ongoing process. An initial step an organization needs to take is clarifying its ideology, values, and beliefs and, in so doing, its vision. The blatant violence and disturbing ubiquity of white supremacy could be an impetus for organizers to quickly respond to each related issue that arises, without operating from a long-term vision. Consequently, the mission and vision for the organization need to be explicitly stated, as do the goals and purposes. Making these components overt holds the organization accountable to its transformative commitment, and it also informs people entering the space about the group.

From an academic standpoint, transformative organizing has much potential and implications for research and scholarship. Notably, organizing is often fueled by anecdotal and intuitive experience and knowledge, and there is a dearth of evaluation and other forms of research on organizing, in general (Minkler et al., 2008). Transformative organizing theory provides a foundation for more than practice, but also for approaching research projects. In fact, a transformative approach to research would be highly participatory, by nature, and poised to inform further action and learning. A white antiracist organization, operating from a transformative organizing lens, might plan a research project with questions including: What does it mean to fight white supremacy from this approach? How can this lens be most effective in the work? By seeking such insights, research can capture learnings of white antiracist transformative organizing, thereby adding to the precision of what is known and not known with regard to its potential and strength.

Conclusion

Organizing is a robust, potent tool for challenging insidious power disparities in the United States, including those instituted and sustained by white supremacy. White folks have a tremendous role and stake in the work to dismantle this longstanding, violent, and exploitative system, in accountability to people of color-led organizations. Moreover, an explicit

foundation that connects today's endeavors to the larger socio-political context is vital for white antiracist organizing to affect radical change in the current racialized social system, without inadvertently reinstituting and re-centering the very system it seeks to end (Bonilla-Silva, 2014). Accordingly, transformative white antiracist organizing requires making constant connections between the personal, organizational, and social in the movement toward a bold, new vision and freedom from suffering and oppression. Indeed, the transformative lens imbues white antiracist organizing with considerable capacity to be a grounded and authentically accountable force in the fight for racial justice and collective liberation.

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