Social Work Researchers: From Scientific Technicians to Changemakers

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This invited article is based on the 2022 Aaron Rosen Lecture—"Healing Humanity: Leading through Innovation and our Courage to Change"—presented by Jorge Delva at the Society for Social Work and Research 26th Annual Conference held January 12–16, 2022, in Washington, DC. The annual Aaron Rosen Lecture features distinguished scholars who have accumulated a body of significant and innovative scholarship relevant to practice, the research base for practice, or effective use of research in practice. Delva invited colleague Laura Abrams to collaborate on this paper, which captures the essence of his Rosen Lecture, because the two scholars have extensively discussed the impact of social movements, social work roles within these movements, and research and educational trends.

The United States is facing monumental social challenges, including ongoing racial violence, COVID-19, attempts by the previous U.S. president and others to thwart our very democracy, assaults on reproductive rights, voter suppression, and transphobic and homophobic laws. Furthermore, we all are impacted by the existing geopolitical conflicts occurring globally. In the midst of these difficult moments, we pause to acknowledge the incredible research efforts and accomplishments of our social work colleagues and the wider profession as we continue to tackle society's most pressing problems through research, policy, and practice. At the same time, we want to highlight the critical importance of conducting high-impact research—that is, research that impacts people's lives now and not decades

from now. Research that uses antiracist and antioppressive lenses is absolutely necessary to improve the lives of everyone, particularly those who are most vulnerable and marginalized. In support of these points, we highlight research that has been informed by social movements and/or that contributes to social movements, as these examples lead to long-lasting, transformative changes in ways that traditional social work research tends not to due to its focus on repetitive and incremental knowledge development. In this paper, we call on all social work educators, researchers, and practitioners to contribute to, and learn from, social movements in their work.

While we were discussing and writing this paper in summer 2022, the U.S. Supreme Court announced three major decisions. One loosened gun restrictions, even in the wake of numerous lethal and horrific mass shootings. A second decision considerably reduced the power of the Environmental Protection Agency to restrict emissions from power plants, and a third overturned the landmark abortion rights case Roe v. Wade. These devastating decisions are sure to have grave future consequences. We will circle back later to how these events relate to high-impact social work research and social movements, but for now, we share these examples to illustrate the point that research without social movements is nontransformative, and social movements without research result in societies that lean toward harmful authoritarian, extremist social, economic, and political structures.

In the sections that follow, we celebrate our profession's accomplishments, highlight the importance of high-impact research, and conclude with encouragement to conduct research that is informed by antiracist and antioppressive frameworks.

Celebrating Social Work Research

In this section, we do not highlight the research of individuals because to do so would leave too many out. Instead, we highlight topical areas where social work researchers are either leading and collaborating on research that is highly important and impactful. In the United States, social work researchers are funded by the National Institutes of Health (NIH) and many other national governmental organizations, including the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, Health Resources and Services Administration, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Department of Defense, Department of Education, and the Department of Health and Human Services. Social work researchers are also funded by a large number of state governmental entities along with individual and private philanthropic foundations. With the support of these funding sources, social work researchers are conducting randomized trials to test the efficacy of new or improved interventions, observational studies, historical and archival research, primary data collection or secondary data analysis, policy analysis, and community-engaged participatory research, among many others, all of which span research methods that cut across methodologies (qualitative, quantitative, mixed-methods, and more).

Growth in the breadth and depth of social work research over the last two decades is reflected in the theoretical and methodological sophistication and productivity of today's social work doctoral students. Their presentations at research conferences, success in securing funding, and job-talk presentations are hallmarks of a sophisticated cadre of scholars conducting high-impact research—a testament to social work's focus on research. The incredible scholarship underway by social workers can also be found among faculty in our schools and departments of social work, and in social work practice programs such as Veterans Affairs centers, among others. Alongside society's and social work's increased attention to racism and anti-Blackness over the past several years, accentuated by the COVID-19 pandemic, the United States has seen an increase in calls for proposals, papers, and presentations that are both deeply scientific and attentive to social, racial, economic, and environmental justice. These calls present new opportunities for social work researchers, as this type of research speaks to our core values, knowledge, and skills that are sorely needed to address today's pressing social problems.

High-Impact Research

By high-impact research, we mean research findings that can be applied in a timely manner to influence the development and implementation of programs, policies, or movements that will help improve the lives of populations who are most impacted by marginalization and oppression. High-impact research makes a difference in people's lives and is not determined solely by whether that work is frequently cited or published in a journal that is highly ranked by the Web of Science or other algorithms that calculate citations. Although we recognize that publishing in a journal with a high impact factor can bring greater attention to one's research, we are also attentive to the social construction of knowledge and historical artifacts resulting in the well-grounded criticisms of high-impact journals (Paulus et al., 2018; Saper, 1999; Seglen, 1997). We see the impact of social work research in the ways that social workers include community and client voices and work directly with community members and government officials at city, county, state, and federal levels to inform program development and formulate policies that strive toward justice. In their edited book about social work researchers from different countries attempting to influence policy, Gal and Weiss-Gal (2017) pointed to what they called the "long-running debate in academia on the role of intellectuals in addressing the social concerns of the societies which they are a part" (p. 1). They also pointed out the assumption that given social work's commitment to social justice and social change, "social work academics would be policy actors at the forefront of involvement in the social policy process" (p. 1). Unfortunately, we know this is not the case and therefore suggest that given the state of the world, there should no longer be a debate. Rather, social workers should all be actors in social policy and changemaking processes.

Paradigms of Knowledge

All types of knowledge building undergo paradigm shifts, and it is often difficult to understand these shifts while they are unfolding. We are both of the generation of scholars (with our PhDs earned around the turn of the 21st century) who lived through social work's major push toward highly empirical quantitative evidence and randomized trials—a movement that in many ways mirrored psychological and health sciences research approaches. As leaders and administrators in 2022, we now see that the next generation of scholars is calling for more critical, abolitionist, and community-rooted scholarship. With these disparate voices, it is critical that we heed the lessons of the past as we consider the future we wish to create for social work, and social work research in particular.

In the 1990s and early 2000s, several major initiatives shaped the course of social work's scholarly enterprise. We were both pursuing our doctoral degrees at major research institutions during the formation of the Society for Social Work and Research (SSWR), an organization that most certainly elevated social work's scholarship but also splintered research conferences from practice and teaching societies (i.e., Council on Social Work Education, National Association of Social Workers)—perhaps to the detriment of maintaining ties between research and practice. We also witnessed formation of the St. Louis Group, the Grand Challenges for Social Work, and other more "elite" leadership groups sponsored by the most well-funded universities. These efforts were instrumental in building social work's external credibility as a profession that can contribute to knowledge generation, and for that, we are thankful. In fact, as the recent antivaccination movement has revealed, just because people have thoughts and opinions about a subject does not mean these thoughts align with evidence. These types of movements show that scientifically rigorous knowledge-development approaches are needed to inform effective social programs and policies.

Nevertheless, no substantial paradigm shift occurs without unanticipated consequences. In this case, social work's empirical push seems to have resulted in a focus on quantity over impact; undue emphasis on publishing in journals, often in non-social-work journals that have high impact factors but are separated from our practice community; engagement in "traditional" modes of scholarship that do not necessarily challenge the status quo; and pursuit of NIH funding as an end in itself. We remember when NIH finally received a "platform" at SSWR for a preconference institute, causing us as newly minted professors to wonder if we had to obtain an NIH grant to be a successful academic, even if our research wasn't about health per se. We know we are not alone with the experience early in our careers of senior faculty attempting to steer us away from our passions to try to have our research conform to an NIH agenda. For many, this made their own work—particularly community-rooted or social movement work—seem marginalized.

Without doubt, federal grants have bolstered the state of social science and have funded many important studies. Many of our colleagues have produced robust knowledge that has changed their respective fields, including important community-centered

studies in housing, substance use and mental health disorders, HIV/AIDS prevention and treatment, and Indigenous wellness, among many others. Yet, the narrow focus on NIH as an arbiter of a successful scholar has also reinforced the top-down, parachuting type of research whereby researchers drop into a community, conduct their research, and depart with little to no involvement by and impact on the community "studied." In other words, no tangible or noticeable improvement in people's lives results from the research. Of course, there are notable exceptions to this practice, but we have seen more of the former work than the latter.

Social work researchers who publish frequently in high-impact journals and earn NIH grants should be celebrated, and with good reason: These accomplishments reflect the recognition by peer scientists of high-quality research with state-of-the art conceptual and methodological innovations aimed at understanding or solving societal problems. We are concerned, however, with the unanticipated consequence that these have become goals to aspire to throughout social work academia, often at the expense of real partnership, working toward real transformative change, dismantling socially and racially unjust practices, and making a more immediate impact on the problems we seek to solve. We fear that when research is not critical of the status quo, it will reproduce and maintain social inequalities, which is perhaps one of the more negative unanticipated consequences of this empirical trend. As pioneer race researcher and Dean Emeritus Larry Davis (2016) warned us before he passed:

> Our research should identify greater implications for impacting social policy. That is, we must begin to think about influencing racial justice via social policy. We have often failed to recognize that influencing social policy is central to our mission as social work researchers. With this in mind, we must design and plan our studies with the goal of more adequately influencing racial aspects of social policy. (p. 401)

We recognize that the push toward evidence without a solid anchor to community needs or voices has been to a large extent responsive to pressures from leaders in academia and in the macro environment of academic research funding, prestige, and power. The academic institutions that employ us have intensified the pressure on all academics, and certainly on our profession, to pursue large external funding and publish in highly ranked academic journals. Cassil's (2021) report summarized the ways these pressures preserve heterosexism and a hostile, toxic, and racist environment because the "current academic recruitment, promotion, and tenure practices reward adeptness at capturing federal funding and burnishing university reputations in various ranking schemes rather than conducting research that improves people's lives" (p. 6). The fact that deans and directors (admittedly including ourselves) continue to participate in the *U.S. News & World Report* rankings process, despite overwhelming agreement that these rankings are at best incredibly biased

and at worst entirely invalid, show the pressure we are under to climb in these rankings. The pressures come from our respective provosts and presidents, who in turn are responding to pressures from alumni and prospective students and their families, all of which is strongly influenced by the profit-seeking corporation that *U.S. News & World Report* is.

With this complexity in mind, we return now to how we might reconcile varying trends in knowledge production. We posit that our conversations should be intergenerational, honest, and inclusive. They should not fall into dichotomous either/or choices but should expand to include the range of voices that make an impact. Methodological pluralism and less elitism can open the way for amazing voices to emerge, including those emerging scholars with lived experience, BIPOC scholars, LGBTQ+ scholars, scholars with disabilities, and/or scholars from colleges and universities without an elite institutional backing. We should honestly and thoughtfully consider the impact of our work on improving people's lives: Has anyone benefitted from our work? If so, how? Similarly, when advocating for a particular paradigm or approach, we should all be able to answer the critical questions of whether and when our work will help ameliorate the conditions that give rise to human suffering.

Emerging scholars, including social work doctoral students, are demanding more comprehensive change in our profession and our academic enterprise (e.g., Mendez et al., 2021). As is the case with all paradigm shifts in knowledge production and dissemination, a period of resistance can prevent advancement. Yet, if we can engage in these conversations—we recognize that this is a big "if"!—perhaps our response to the current state of affairs can point us toward a collective vision for the future of social work research.

In regard to holding difficult conversations, it has been our experience that too often when we discuss some aspect of our social work profession, we tend to be a hypercritical group, and in many cases, we belittle the work that we do as social work practitioners, scholars, teachers, or others. We posit that this sense of inferiority is at least partially rooted in sexism: As a primarily "feminine" helping profession, social workers often see themselves as "less than" and harken back to ideas that the work of social change and social casework is not in fact a "science" (or with the Flexner [2001] lens, not even a legitimate profession). This self-criticism has in part been fueled by the intensive focus on evidence-based practices that elevated our profession scientifically but also siphoned off or marginalized other important forms of knowledge, particularly eclipsing the voices of scholars and communities not at research-intensive universities, who were not funded by NIH, or who did not become recognized as part of the evidence-based cannon.

Other critiques that come from within point out that our current research practices, merit, and other forms of valuing research function as a tool of white supremacy, patriarchy, anti-Blackness, and social control (Cassil, 2021). Growing critiques

from this perspective are not necessarily new, as journals such as the *Journal of Progressive Human Services* and *Affilia*, among others, have provided an outlet for more critical scholarship for many years. As early as 1968, the National Association of Black Social Workers (NABSW) urged the National Conference on Social Welfare to, among other points, "publicly repudiate the current welfare system which serves as a tool of oppression for black people as well as the social workers providing services" (para. 7). These voices are embedded within our historical social work discourse and traditions but are still siloed from the largely white and often male power structures that have constituted the status quo.

Recently, two prominent scholars, both members of the American Association of Social Work and Social Welfare (AASWSW), opined that social work research is at a crossroads between "staying on the Empirical Highway versus taking the Postmodern/Critical Off-Ramp" (Drake & Hodge, 2022, p. 363). Their analysis is comprehensive but still situates social work as "either/or" without a clear future for a potentially new paradigm—perhaps one that is yet to be discovered. Toward the end of their article, Drake and Hodge recognized that social work research is more realistically situated as both a science and an art and as a tool of both oppression and liberation; however, we believe that the central theme of this argument falls within dichotomous either/or thinking that limits our imagination. We agree that it is important for our profession to remain vigilant to areas that need improvement—hence the need for ongoing self-criticism, reflection, and change. But we also recognize that it is important to celebrate and highlight social work's many accomplishments. We also are not convinced that social work research is at a new crossroads or that we need to make a choice. Rather, we think it is an opportune time for social work research to continue paving its unique "Empirical Highway" while incorporating a postmodern critical lens that is needed to shed light into, and accelerate the impact of, social work research. It is through a critical lens as well that social work can conduct more community-relevant research and research that responds to urgent sociopolitical needs. We expand on these points in the section entitled "Courage to Change: Antiracist and Antioppressive Research in Social Work."

Using Knowledge for Change

In the population health field today, the idea of using scientific knowledge to successfully implement or transfer the knowledge acquired through research into real-world practice, sooner than later, falls within the clinical and transformational science approach of which implementation science may be considered a subset. An entire field of implementation science has developed. The NIH Fogarty International Center provides a review of various implementation science frameworks (NIH Fogarty International Center, n.d.). We value the contributions to improving population health that is occurring thanks to implementation science, which blends state-of-the-art scientific approaches with an emphasis on community partnerships and stakeholder

inclusivity. Nonetheless, our concept of high-impact research in this paper goes beyond implementation science's goal of translating health research to practice, as we recognize that intervention science deals with cleaning up the effects of deep-rooted problems such as structural racism, sexism, heterosexism and all types of social inequalities rather than addressing root causes. Perhaps it is these root causes that the next generation of scholars wants us to grapple with. Setting our sights set on the medical model of evidence may have led social work researchers along the path of being the scientific "technicians" but not the holistic changemakers that our profession claims to be.

In addition to implementation science, other frameworks that may help social work researchers to better understand and use their findings to influence policy include the policy practice engagement framework (Gal & Weiss-Gal, 2015) and the critical policy and evidence use studies (Rickinson & McKenzie, 2020). However, we are not sure that all these frameworks will solve problems in ways that social movements can, as social movements focus on changing structural conditions and putting immediate pressure on leaders to address social problems—a task we as researchers are less prepared to do. For example, it took decades from the nascent research in the 1940s and 1950s documenting the link between cigarette smoking and lung cancer for society to act against tobacco companies and develop antismoking programs and policies (Proctor, 2012). In fact, it was not until the antitobacco movement filed class-action lawsuits against tobacco companies that new and critical legislation and funding of antitobacco programs expanded, resulting in a decrease in cigarette use, at least in the United States (Ibrahim & Glantz, 2007). Here we see how research failed to dismantle a wealthy, powerful industry, requiring the need to mobilize at the grassroots level to make significant changes. Although Ignaz Semmelweis first posited in 1834 that handwashing is a critical way to prevent the spread of germs, it took more than a century for the medical establishment to more widely adopt this practice; in the United States, national guidelines about handwashing, now referred to as hand hygiene, were not introduced until the 1980s (World Health Organization [WHO], 2009). Despite Semmelweis and others publishing their research in the 19th century, and the large body of knowledge published on the topic since then (Boyce & Pittet, 2002; WHO, 2009), a WHO report indicates that hand hygiene compliance hovers around 70% in high-income countries and is less than 10% in low-income countries (WHO, 2022). The appallingly low percentage in low-income countries results from structural forces limiting residents' access to water. These data show that despite top-notch scientific publications and public health interventions, unless there is a concerted global social movement addressing the structural factors that prevent countries from the basic human right of having access to water and adequate health care services, no amount of scientific research published in high-impact journals will improve the lives of people with the least wealth and resources.

More recently, the scientific response to developing vaccines and antiviral treatments against COVID-19 has been rapid and scientifically astounding. However, the expression "we are all in the same boat" that arose during the hardest-hit months of the pandemic could not have been more wrong, with historically disadvantaged and marginalized communities bearing the brunt of the pandemic not just in terms of health and mortality but also socially, economically, and educationally (Galea, 2021). Although the science showed us the way to reduce severe cases of COVID-19, it was social movement organizing that pressured government leaders to apply a health equity lens.

In Chile, a student-led social movement resulted in the country recently drafting a new constitution that centers human rights, thereby impacting all sectors of the population (Bartlett, 2022). Although the newly proposed constitution was not ratified by the population, no amount of research would have resulted in the drafting of a new constitution that brings national attention to human rights.

A final example of the importance of combining state-of-the-art research methods with implementation science and political/advocacy work to result in drastic population health improvements is that of Dr. Fernando Monckeberg Barros, whose extensive research and advocacy with government leaders from the 1950s through the 1980s helped reduce infant mortality in Chile from 125.2 per 1,000 live births in 1950 to 24.6 per 1,000 in 1983, with 6.2 per 1,000 being the current rate (United Nations, 2022).

These real-world examples illustrate our point that high-quality research and strong scientific evidence are necessary but are insufficient to effect impactful changes. Essentially, it is difficult to argue that without addressing racism, social and economic inequality (Belkin Martinez & Fleck-Henderson, 2014; Delgado & Stefancic, 2017; Hannah-Jones et al., 2021), and other structural determinants of health (Galea, 2021), including environmental destruction (Quammen, 2012), a plethora of concrete scientific evidence without a social movement will have minimal impact on program and public policy development.

In the next section, we focus on the need for social work researchers to pay more attention to and be more involved in social movements to ensure that our research makes a real-world difference.

Courage to Change: Antiracist and Antioppressive Social Work Research

A global example illustrates the importance of science and antiracism when making decisions that can impact the lives of entire populations. Consider the way that the 1918 flu pandemic was handled in the country that was then called Western Samoa (now Samoa) versus how it was managed in the U.S. territory of American Samoa (the eastern half of the Samoan Islands). During World War I, New Zealand took control of the Samoan Islands that were under German control, and in 1919, the League of Nations (now known as the United Nations) provided New Zealand

with the right to administer the Western Samoan Islands (Condliffe, 1930). By then, the eastern half of the islands were under U.S. political control. When the 1918 flu pandemic struck the world, the New Zealand administrator paid no attention to the science and quarantine practices and had no interest in working with *matais* (chiefs) and villages (what we would now refer to as community partners) to address the epidemic. As a result of this negligence, over one fifth of the Western Samoan population died. On the other hand, the naval administrator for American Samoa implemented quarantine practices and worked closely with matais and villages, resulting in no influenza deaths (Condliffe, 1930; Stout, 2020).

The previous examples, and numerous others, show that science alone does not catalyze mass movements or massive social change. Science alone would not have improved women's lives and quest for liberation and equality without the women's suffrage movement and the second- and third-wave women's rights movements, and without the labor and union movements, the lives of workers would not have improved either. Social science has produced detailed demographics, identified community needs, and relayed critical information to the public, but it is the movements themselves, including their successes and setbacks, strengths and flaws that have advanced large structural changes. Following the same line of argument, we posit that without the LGBTQ+ liberation movement, the United States would not have observed the progress we have seen in terms of programs and policies that serve to improve (notice we don't say completely address) the safety and quality of lives of LGBTQ+ populations. Without the more recent #MeToo, Black Lives Matter, and Stop Asian Hate movements that have brought greater attention the intersectional oppressive systems that promote sexism, racism, and the serious abuses that women and Black, Latinx, and Asian individuals and communities experience, these would not be at the forefront of national conversations. In essence, good research alone can and does make a small impact on social progress, but we wonder to what extent social work research aligns with these larger movements and what we in the profession are doing to further such critical social change efforts.

In their article analyzing the tension between social work's empirical approach to knowledge development and what they call the postmodern/critical paradigms that we mentioned earlier, Drake and Hodge (2022) described the historical pathway social work has followed to become a more traditionally (Western) scientific enterprise driven by positivist and postpositivist empiricism, in contrast to what they refer to as postmodern/critical theory perspectives (P/CT) with early roots in Marxism and Foucault, among others. They wrote, "While a *foundational* synthesis of these two pathways may be impossible due to fundamentally incommensurate assumptions about the nature of reality and of knowledge, a limited synthesis may be achievable" (p. 9). They stated that "Social Work could continue with a (mainly) empirical and humanist core, but could benefit from ideas, insights, and practices

developed under the P/CT model" (p. 9). We see this conversation as vitally important in our current political climate, but as we noted earlier, we do not think there is a need to divide knowledge into the two separate pathways mentioned previously, as the more perspectives that inform one's understanding of this complex world, the more pertinent knowledge one can develop to alleviate human suffering.

The COVID-19 pandemic presents a good example of how a blend of epistemologies is needed. It has been critical to have scientists pursue the development of vaccines, but without paying attention to the knowledge about social determinants of health, structural inequalities, racism, and social and economic injustices, only a small group initially benefited from vaccine development, leaving too many communities to suffer from higher mortality and morbidity as well as social and economic injustices (i.e., job loss, inadequate access to care, higher food costs, and housing insecurity). Hence, the scientific approach can help identify causes and solutions, but these understandings can be better informed and implemented when close attention is paid to the intersectional, structural inequalities that drive social problems and their solutions. Both answer questions at varying levels with intersecting dimensions. For example, at one level, scientific knowledge told us that wearing masks and socially distancing were important protection methods against COVID-19, but this knowledge did not help low-income communities—predominantly low-income communities of color—because many lived in crowded conditions where they could not distance, worked in jobs that did not provide them with protection or that could not be done remotely, and were distrustful of the government, preventing them from being vaccinated. In this sense, without an understanding of racial, social, and economic justice, the scientific knowledge was not helpful to prevent illness in low-income communities, especially low-income communities of color.

The point is that without research that is deeply rooted in community needs and voices, and without linking our research to social movements—learning about social movements to inform our research and intentionally using research findings to inform social movements—social work's progress in promoting social justice will be limited. For example, considerable research points to the positive effect of higher education on social mobility, yet, without success of the zero-debt movement, higher education remains inaccessible to large sectors of the population (Tough, 2021). Substantial research exists about the importance of preventative health care for long-term effects on all types of chronic illness and mortality, but without universal health care, too many do not have access to preventative services (National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine, 2019).

As another example, numerous research-informed practices have been recommended for reducing racial bias in child welfare decision-making (Dettlaff & Boyd, 2020; Miller & Ward, 2008). Nevertheless, even with this knowledge—research that

has influenced direct practices—structural racism still causes child welfare systems and workers to investigate Black and Indigenous families in an egregiously disproportionate manner (Putnam-Hornstein et al., 2021). Hence, we have a blend of knowledge, dissemination, and practices, but not structural change. It is notable that until recently, the greatest critiques of our inattention to the oppressive and anti-Black social structures and institutions that have undergirded child welfare and relevant welfare state practices come from other disciplines—such as sociology, law, and history (Quadagno, 1994; Roberts, 2002)—and from organized groups that the mainstream social work platform has marginalized (such as the NABSW). Nonetheless, emerging voices are reckoning with our legacies of structural racism and how they have permeated social work's professional practice and scholarship (see, for example, Dettlaff et al., 2021; Park 2019; Reisch, 2019).

As a chorus of more critical voices grows with different epistemologies and strategies for structural change, we recognize that there are limited conversations across perspectives. All told, we believe that social work will accomplish greater social progress with fewer silos by encouraging conversations among a growing chorus of social work researchers who are working toward a common goal and in concert with community and social movements. There are indeed current models of combining knowledge for larger impact, such as National Academies reports on key issues, the Campbell and Cochrane collaborations, and the Grand Challenges for Social Work (Barth et al., 2022). More and more, social work research is considered in this body of evidence, particularly in such forums as social work Campbell systematic reviews. However, we must recognize that such reviews still privilege expert voices over clients and communities, randomized trials over other forms of research, incremental versus transformative research, and research that does not fully address social and racial inequalities. Hence, whereas these collections produce a powerful form of knowledge building, other forms of knowledge still need to be elevated within our academic cannon.

New knowledge and ways of thinking require institutional change at all levels of power and hierarchy. It is promising to see the new mission of the *Journal of the Society for Social Work and Research*, which advances the journal's commitment to antiracist scholarship (Herrenkohl, 2022; Herrenkohl et al., 2020) and SSWR's growing focus on antiracist and antioppressive research. We applaud SSWR's conferences, videos, and latest initiative, which seeks input from the social work research community for a study exploring antiracist and antioppressive research practice in social work:

> In response to the renewed commitment to promoting anti-racist and anti-oppressive social work scholarship, SSWR is conducting a study to garner a comprehensive understanding of Anti-Racist and Anti-Oppressive (ARAO) research practice and scholarship in social work. This study aims to explore: (1) social work's perspective on anti-racist and anti-oppressive research

practice and (2) multi-level barriers and facilitators of conducting ARAO re-
search in social work. In addition, based on the study findings, we hope to
develop an anti-racist and anti-oppressive research capacity framework that
can help translate pragmatic research skills and support engaged scholar-
ship capacity. (SSWR Board of Directors, 2022)

We commend SSWR's leadership on this important initiative, which will make
a critical contribution to enhancing the pace and real-world impact of social work
scholarship. Informed by our own experiences, discussions with colleagues nation-
ally, and within our institutions and schools, as well as by Cassil's (2021) report,
we provide some suggestions for pushing our knowledge paradigms toward the
future.

Looking Ahead

Deans and directors, along with senior faculty colleagues and our academic profes-
sional organizations (SSWR, AASWSW), must make a more concerted effort to ele-
vate and reward public impact, community participatory research, and social
movement scholarship. This can be accomplished in part by recruiting and hiring
faculty engaged in this type of work, supporting, and rewarding research and schol-
arship through availability of internal funding for these practices, and being clear
about the value of this work in tenure and promotion reviews (McBride et al., 2019).
We see this shift happening upon hiring new faculty, but schools of social work also
must ensure that they have adequate and informed reviewers for tenure so that
those who are writing external letters are familiar with the value, methods, and im-
pact of community-engaged and public impact work.

Moreover, faculty who sit on editorial boards and grant review teams must also
lend their understanding and support of engaged scholarship as these proposals
and papers are externally vetted. We must as a field become more appreciative of,
and educated about, diverse forms of scholarship and how methodological pluralism
enriches social work knowledge and science.

Just as we advocate from within, we must also continuously educate central ad-
ministration about the critical nature of this work by presenting data that speak to
the aspects that tend to matter to them—namely, how this work can increase the
recognition the university garners from funders, elected officials, and prospective
students.

Moreover, we need to identify strategies to increase the recognition of the strong
work and traditions of Historically Black Colleges and Universities, Hispanic Serv-
ing Institutions, Asian American and Native American Pacific Islander-Serving
Institutions, and institutions that do not have the R1 Carnegie classification. Inter-
estingly, the Carnegie Classification of Institutions of Higher Education includes
approximately 3,900 degree-granting postsecondary institutions, but only 146 (or

3.7%) have attained R1 status (Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, 2021). Recognizing that not all R1 institutions have social work programs, these data indicate that most social work programs do not fall within this research classification and thus, their knowledge-development voices are underrepresented in social work research. What might our profession look like if we were to truly welcome a broader array of voices?

As we sort through our future together, we can hold difficult conversations without polarizing or slipping into the binary mode of thinking that has prevented progress. For social work to truly drive an equitable and antioppressive future, there is a need to continue rethinking the grand challenges. We appreciate the work done to revise and update the grand challenges, including adding the grand challenge to eradicate racism (Teasley et al., 2021). We strongly suggest that any forward movement in the grand challenges of our profession must include consumer, social movement, and community voices and not just academics. This suggestion is based partially on the values driving social work but also on what we see as a need to make our mission more inclusive and antioppressive, and consequently more impactful. Consumers can and should help set the agenda for our future and what that would look like if their voices were included.

Conclusion

In this paper we sought to celebrate social work research accomplishments and articulate a vision for social work leaders and schools of social work to aspire toward elevating high-impact, transformative research. This vision is informed by the national conversations currently taking place about the serious global problems we face, which research-as-usual is not helping to solve. We recognize that implementation of some of these ideas in schools of social work and their institutions will range from "been there, done that" for some, "quite possible" for others, to "what are you talking about?" in many. We know that many of you have excellent ideas not reflected in this paper; we are eager to learn of them through future conversations. We propose that intentional dialogues and efforts such as those by SSWR described earlier are steps in the right direction.

Returning to our earlier statement about the U.S. Supreme Court's rulings in summer 2022 impacting gun laws, the EPA, and abortion rights, we sadly note that the high-quality research that exists supporting the need for laws to restrict gun access, protect the environment, and protect the health and social and economic well-being associated with having the freedom to choose abortion made no difference in the court's rulings. There could not be better examples than these to highlight the need for the integration of research with social movements. Research without social movements is nontransformative, and social movements without research can lead societies toward harmful social and political movements that result in authoritarian, extremist social, economic, and political structures. We look

forward to charting a future that attends to the concerns and recommendations that we have considered in this paper and engaging in honest, critical, and intergenerational dialogue that will maximize our collective potential as transformative change agents.

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