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FROM THE ANTI-SLAVERY MOVEMENT TO NOW: (RE) EXAMINING THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN CRITICAL RACE THEORY AND BLACK FEMINIST THOUGHT

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Abstract: The history of Black feminism is often cited as having emerged during the civil rights movement of the 1960s and 1970s. On the same note, critical race theory is often reported as having originated during the 1970s with the efforts of legal scholars of color. However, a closer look at history reveals a contrasting story about the origin of Black feminism and critical race theory. This discovery stands at the beginning of points of "intersection" and "separation" revealed during an exploration of the historical and theoretical relationship between Black feminist thought and critical race theory. This paper provides important implications for researchers considering either Black feminist thought and/or critical race theories as possible theoretical frameworks for future research.

Keywords: Black feminism; critical race theory; anti-slavery movement; Black women abolitionists

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In this paper, I examine the historical and theoretical relationship between Black feminist thought (BFT) and critical race theory (CRT). Both critical race theories and Black feminist theories are regarded as suitable theoretical frameworks or relevant bodies of knowledge for conducting research on behalf of people of color, more specifically Black people (Prasad, 2005). Yet, the purposes, tenets and practices of Black feminist thought and critical race theory have been taken up in distinct ways in the literature. My exploration of the relationship between Black feminist thought and critical race theory revealed multiple points where the two bodies of knowledge "*intersect"* and "*separate*." By "intersect," I mean the points where the two bodies of knowledge share commonalities. Likewise, "separate" indicates the points where the two bodies of knowledge expose their distinctions. Through points of intersection and separation, Black feminism and critical race theory establishes a parallel yet divergent relationship. The commonalities that lie between the two bodies of knowledge has even led to the construction of a critical race feminism. I begin by examining the historical relationship between Black feminism and critical race theory; the points where their histories intersect and separate. I follow this with an examination of the commonalities and distinctions within their theoretical relationship. This paper provides important implications for researchers considering either Black feminist thought and/or critical race theories as possible theoretical frameworks for future research.

The Historical Relationship Between Black Feminism and Critical Race Theory

The history of Black feminism is often cited as having emerged during the civil rights movement of the 1960s and 1970s (Roth, 1999; Thompson, 2002). This genealogy of feminism excludes much of the contributions of Black women to the feminist movement. Springer (2005) argued that the Black feminist movement (re)emerged during the civil rights movement not emerged. The 1960s and 1970s was a period of growth for the Black feminist movement not new beginnings. On the same note, critical race theory is often reported as having originated during the 1970s with the efforts of legal scholars of color (Harris, 2012; Tate, 1997). However, a closer look at history reveals a contrasting story about the origin of Black feminism and critical race theory. Part of that story being how critical race theory emerged from Black feminism (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012). Although the exact terms "Black feminism" and "critical race theory" were coined in the 1970s, both Black feminism and critical race theory have long histories dating back to the nineteenth century (Longhofer & Winchester, 2012). To understand the historical relationship between Black feminism and critical race theory, more specifically the points where their histories intersect and separate, we must first (re)examine their

origin. Both Black feminism and critical race theory emerged within the anti-slavery movement of the 1800s (Gamble, 2004; Guy-Sheftall, 1995).

Point of Intersection: Origin

The Origination of Black Feminism

An examination of the origin of Black feminism requires a (re)examination of the origin of feminism in general. A tracing of the history of feminism takes us back to the enslavement of Africans and African Americans (Norwood, 2013). The civil birthplace of feminism in the United States was the abolitionist or anti-slavery movement of the 1800s (Freedman, 2007). Although the U.S. government banned slave trade around 1809, the possession of slaves remained legal and lucrative; therefore, the call to eradicate slavery and free slaves became an active movement in the United States in the 1830s (Taylor, 1998). While northern states slowly ridded slave labor, the South relied upon it all the more—leading Northern women to challenge the racist institution. These women believed that the system of slavery did not correspond with their ideas of womanhood as slave mothers were being separated from their families and sexually abused. Many of these women responded by organizing female anti-slavery societies in the 1830s (Yee, 1992). The agenda of the female anti-slavery societies included creating petitions asking government officials to abolish slavery and supporting the Underground Railroad. The Underground Railroad, which gained prominence in the 1830s, was a network of routes, safe houses, and anti-slavery activists who helped slaves escape to the northern states or Canada (Foner & Garraty, 1991). While White women abolitionists supported the Underground Railroad, majority of the railroad workers were northern free Blacks or escaped slaves. There was a race barrier within the female anti-slavery movement. "Opposition to slavery did not necessarily translate into a belief in racial equality" (Freedman, 2007:77). Some female anti-slavery societies did not admit Black women. In response, northern free Black women organized their own groups whose mission was to combat slavery, women's rights, and racism (Yellin, 1989). These themes and Black women's personal experiences provoked feminist and race discourse among Black women intellectuals on the complexities of Black womanhood. Black women intellectuals from diverse backgrounds began merging intellectual work and activism. They attended conferences, delivered political speeches, produced and distributed literature (e.g., pamphlets, poems, stories,), and preached among many other things. Maria M. Stewart was the first Black woman to speak publicly about women's rights in 1832. "Stewart stands at the beginning of an unbroken chain of Black women activists whose commitment to the liberation of Black and women defines their life's work" (Guy-Sheftall, 1995:25).

The Origination of Critical Race Theory

More recently, the origination of critical race theory has been contested. Some scholars believe CRT was developed by prominent males of color within the legal field, primarily Derrick Bell (Dixson & Rousseau, 2005; Harris, 2012; Tate, 1997).

Other scholars argued that critical race theory derived from the writings of W.E.B Du Bois (Rashid, 2011; Shuford, 2001). I argue that critical race theory, like Black feminism, emerged during the anti-slavery movement with the labor of Black women abolitionists. Collins (2009) argued that Black activists, in this case Black race activists are always portrayed as male. Yet, Black women have played a major role in challenging racism throughout history.

During the anti-slavery movement (as mentioned in the previous section), Black women abolitionists realized the connection between sexual and racial oppression and began simultaneously challenging both racism and sexism (Yee, 1992). Although they did not identify themselves as such, Black women abolitionists acted as both Black feminists and critical race theorists. While literature provides evidence of critical race theory as being rooted in the writings of Du Bois, his first major writing on race was not published until 1897 (Du Bois, 1897). By stating that Du Bois did not provoke the commencement of critical race theory, I do not fail to recognize his contributions to the movement. His intellectual work indeed informed the tenets of the later critical race theories (Du Bois, 1994). However, I refuse to suppress the intellectual and activist work of Black women who gave rise to critical race theory to privilege the Black male. According to Collins (2009), "adhering to a male-defined ethos that far too often equates racial progress with the acquisition of an ill-defined manhood has left much of U.S. Black thought with a prominent masculinist bias" (p.9). Therefore, Black women abolitionists must be given credit for their contributions to establishing both Black feminism and critical race theory. Validating this truth is critical in understanding the historical relationship between BFT and CRT.

Point of Separation: Decision to Organize

In this section, I turn to a point of separation or the place where Black feminism and critical race theory diverged in their relationship. The point where Black feminism and critical race theory "separate" is with the decision of Black feminists and critical race theorists to form organized groups and bodies of knowledge to define "who they are" and what they do." In the beginning phase, neither Black feminism nor critical race constituted labels or theories used by Black people to identify themselves. Because of this, several Black women and men inherently operated within both realms. Today contemporary scholars identify some Black intellectuals/activists as both Black feminists and critical race theorists (Brah & Phoenix, 2004) The contributions of Sojourner Truth, Frederick Douglass, and W.E.B. Du Bois can be found in both Black feminist and critical race literature (Harris, 1996; Martin, 1985). By stating that Black feminists and critical race theorists' decision to organize "official" groups brought about a point of separation is not to say that Black feminists or critical race theorists had not previously formed groups. However, the point where Black feminists and critical race theorists decided to define and clarify their politics was the genesis of contemporary Black feminism and critical race theory. In regards to Black feminism, this time period is often referred to as second-wave feminism (Gamble, 2004). Both groups'

inspiration to establish formal organizations spurred from the civil rights movement of the 1960s. Black feminists' experience of subordination while participating in the Black Power Movement of the 1960s was among the many issues that prompted them to organize (Collier-Thomas & Franklin, 2001). Slow racial progress despite civil rights efforts sparked the formalization of critical race theory (Delgado & Stefancic, 1993).

Black Feminists' Decision to Organize

In 1973, the National Black Feminist Organization (NBFO) was established after founder, Ruby Doris Smith Wright, called a meeting to discuss concerns regarding the subordination of Black women in both the civil rights movement, particularly the Black Power Movement, and the feminist movement (Wallace, 1995). Many Black women did not feel valued in either group. Within the feminist movement, White women had internalized the racist beliefs of White males and discriminated against Black women. Similarly, the leadership of Black women active in the civil rights movement was overlooked, suppressed, and tested. Black women were viewed as inferior to men and subjected to trivial roles. Because of these experiences, Black women realized the need to establish the National Black Feminist Organization. Through their efforts in NBFO, Black women proved themselves to be knowledgeable and valuable. In fact, contemporary critical race theorists (predominantly males during this time) gleaned from their knowledge to later formalize their own collective (Delagado & Stefancic, 2012).

Critical Race Theorists' Decision to Organize

In 1989, the establishment of critical race theory as an "official" collective of legal scholars and activists who were interested in studying and combating the commonness of racism began. The founding father of CRT, Derrick Bell, realized the need to develop new theories and strategies to challenge racism inherent in American laws and invited others to join him in a workshop to begin brainstorming. Harris (2012) cites the following about the first meeting of critical race theorists:

> In the summer of 1989, twenty-four scholars of color answered a call to attend a "New Developments in CRT" workshop at the University of Wisconsin. Meeting oddly enough in a convent, they all had agreed to submit something written as a ticket for admission. It was not at all clear, however, that this would be an event worth lining up to attend. After all, the title was a bit misleading. The "New Developments in CRT" was premised on the assumption that there was already something old. But prior to the moment that the invitation was drafted, there really was no CRT as such. The name was made up. It represented more of a possibility than a definitive project (p. 262).

Although the founders of NBFO and CRT were unsure of the outcome of their gatherings, they were certain that "separate" groups; one to address the sexism and racism Black women experienced and another to confront the prominence of racism in America were needed. The establishment of these separate groups was the first point of separation or distinction between Black feminism and critical race theory.

Point of Separation: Purpose

The point of separation or distinction between Black feminism and critical race theory is even more apparent in the established purpose of each group. The 1973 Statement of Purpose for the National Black Feminist Organization highlights the initial purpose of contemporary Black feminists. Below is an excerpt from the statement of purpose.

> Black women have suffered cruelly in this society from living the phenomenon of being black and female, in a country that is both racist and sexist. There has been very little real examination of the damage it has caused on the lives and on the minds of black women. Because we live in a patriarchy, we have allowed a premium to be put on black male suffering. No one of us would minimize the pain or hardship or the cruel and inhumane treatment experienced by the black man. But history, past or present, rarely deals with the malicious abuse put upon the black woman. We were seen as breeders by the master; despised and historically polarized from/by the master's wife; and looked upon as castrators by our lovers and husbands. The black woman has had to be strong, yet we are persecuted for having survived. We have been called matriarchs by white racists and black nationalists; we have virtually no positive self-images to validate our existence. Black women want to be proud, dignified, and free from all those false definitions of beauty and womanhood that are unrealistic and unnatural. We, not white men or black men, must define our own self-image as black women (National Black Feminist Organization, 1973).

As evident in the above quote, Black feminists realized a need to organize a group "separate" from White women and Black males because neither group understood what it meant to be Black and female. White feminists and Black male groups did not consider the specific needs of Black women. Therefore, Black feminists organized their own group whose purpose was to: combat the prevailing negative images and confront the cruel racist and sexist abuse of Black women, while constructing new images and providing empowerment.

Although critical race theorists did not establish a statement of purpose, the purpose of CRT can be found in the writings of the principal figures of the movement (Bell, 2000). Coming out of the legal field, contemporary critical race theorists sought to combat racism by: ending exclusive reliance upon civil rights litigation, broadening the public's awareness of racism and discrimination under the law, and protesting reminiscent of the civil rights movement of the 1950s and 1960s (Crenshaw, 2011). This examination of the purpose of NBFO and CRT reveals how Black feminists and critical race theorists seek to do a somewhat similar but quite different work. Further commonalities and differences are visible in the theoretical relationship that exist between Black feminism and critical race theory, particularly in how each group define themselves and their practices.

The Theoretical Relationship Between Black Feminism and Critical Race Theory

Points of Separation and Intersection: Self-Definitions and Practices

Who Are Black Feminists and What Do They Do?

Black feminists are individuals who believe Black women are valuable and possess distinct knowledge that derive from the unique experiences they face due to multiple oppression (Hull, Bell-Scott & Smith, 1982). Their commitment to the emancipation of Black women shapes their life's work whether it's activist or intellectual work (Guy-Sheftall, 1995). Activist work is considered on the ground social justice efforts, while intellectual or scholarly work constitutes the production of Black women's knowledge or scholarship. The production of Black women's knowledge can be a form of activist or social justice work as well. The activist and intellectual work of Black feminists are interconnected. Black feminist activism informs Black feminist intellectual work. Similarly, Black feminist intellectual work can inform Black feminist activism (Collins, 2009). One of the major goals of Black feminism is to merge action and theory. It is important to note that it is not necessary for Black feminists to limit themselves to the singular role of "activist" or "intellectual." Many Black feminists operate within the realms of both activist and intellectuals (Davis, 1981).

Because Black women's knowledge has traditionally been suppressed and deemed as worthless, Black feminists employ a number of practices to rearticulate Black women's knowledge (Collins, 2009). Black feminists engage in the practice of reclamation or the retrieval of Black women's knowledge. Dorothy Sterlings' (1997) documentary of nineteenth century Black women is one example of the practice of reclamation. Black feminists also engage in the practice of reinterpreting existing knowledge through new theoretical lens and often present this knowledge in new ways (e.g., using narratives, poetry). In the field of education, this process is illustrated by Audrey Thompson's (1998) critique of the "colorblindness" found in theories of care in education. She calls for a reassessment of the Whiteness rooted in these colorblind theories and expounds upon this criticism by demonstrating how differently some of the themes that have proved generative for theories of care might look if interpreted from a Black feminist perspective. Finally, Black feminists search for Black women's knowledge in alternative spaces outside academia (e.g., music, poetry) and among women who are not normally viewed as scholars (Collins, 2009). For example, Black women poets are often not recognized as Black intellectuals as poetry is perceived to be only a site of imagination. However, Lourde (2007) argued that poetry does constitute knowledge.

> Poetry is the way we [Black women] help give name to the nameless so it can be thought. The farthest horizons of hopes and fears are cobbled by our poems,

> carved from the rock experiences of our daily lives … poetry is not only dream and vision; it is the skeleton architecture of our lives. It lays the foundation for a future of change (p.38).

Situating the thoughts of ordinary Black women as well as those of well-known Black women intellectuals at the center of investigation produces a new lens by which to understand the issues confronting Black women.

The practices of Black feminists are not limited to the aforementioned. Although a "collective," Black feminists include subgroups who engage in distinctive practices to discover, reinterpret, and analyze the issues confronting the Black women of their particular subcategory (Collins, 1996; Rousseau, 2013). The participation of Black feminists in certain subgroups is motivated by their unique experiences of oppression as well as their distinct identities. Not all Black women experience oppression in the same way, therefore, they do not take up Black feminism in the same way. For example, a working-class Southern Black woman will experience oppression differently from a middle-class Northern Black woman. This organizing of Black feminists into subgroups has led to the emergence of various forms of Black feminism such as hip-hop feminism (Sharpley-Whiting, 2007), and "endarkened" feminist epistemology (Dillard, 2000). These diverse forms of Black feminism illustrates Black feminists' efforts to include heterogeneity in constructing a "collective" Black women's knowledge.

Who Are Critical Race Theorists and What Do They Do?

Critical race theorists (also called "crits") are scholars and activists who study the relationship between race, racism, and power with the intent of transforming it (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012). Crits seek to understand the social situation of people of color due to their racialized position in society. They work to highlight how society is purposefully structured along racial lines to privilege Whites for the purpose of both psychological and material gain. Although they emphasize the prevalence of White privilege—the unearned, systematic advantages one receives simply for being White—critical race theorists do not perceive themselves to be anti-White but pro-color (McIntosh, 1989; Delgado & Stefancic, 2000). Their efforts to highlight racism is usually done using the methodological practice of narratives or counter-storytelling. Counter-storytelling involves using stories told by people of color to counter the narratives of the dominant group (Solorzano & Yosso, 2002). From critical race theorists' perspective, "knowledge can and should be generated through the narratives and counter-narratives that emerge from and with people of color" (Milner, 2007:391). Cook & Dixson (2013) used counter-storytelling to counter racialized constructions of Black teachers in New Orleans.

Further, critical race theorists believe racism is normal in our society (Bell, 1992). Racism is the standard by which society operates and is the daily experience of majority of people of color in the United States and globally. Crits reason that racism begins with the racial assumptions that people gather from the cultural heritage in which they are raised, and later individuals carry these assumptions into the public civic institutions (e.g., government, schools, churches) they participate in. Critical race theorists also view racism as complex. They argue that there are

many forms of racism: intentional, unintentional, unconscious, micro, macro, institutional, blatant, and subtle (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012). They believe that racism has not weakened; only blatant racist acts have declined. They frequently look back to the civil rights movement to inform their current efforts to combat subtle racism. Critical race theorists understand their practices to be a modern approach to civil rights (Crenshaw, Gotanda, Peller & Thomas, 1995). Crits place the issue of race and racism in the broader perspective of history, economics, context, group, and self-interest.

Although race and racism is the primary center of investigation for critical race theory, critical race theorists' work also includes challenging multiple forms of oppression. Crits believe that racism is often tinted with other forms of discrimination (e.g., homophobia, sexism). Many critical race scholars have examined the ways in which multiple forms of oppression simultaneously impact the lives of people of color. Solorzano & Yosso (2001) used critical race theory to examine the different forms of discrimination experienced by Chicana and Chicano graduate students. Crits believe racism, classism, and sexism is embedded in our society and therefore not easy to solve.

The above examination of the ways Black feminists and critical race theorists define "who they are" and "what they do" reveals both points of intersection and points of separation or similarities and distinctions between the two theoretical groups. Both groups: (1) consist of activists and intellectuals/scholars who aim to merge action and theory; (2) rely on the experiential knowledge of common, everyday people of color and scholars to construct specialized bodies of knowledge. Though, Black feminists value and privilege the knowledge of Black women as a means to empower them; (3) both groups have transformative agendas. Black feminists and critical race theorists are interested in transforming the lives of the people of color they study and the society they live in (4) accumulate knowledge for addressing present day issues by revisiting history. Black feminists revisit history to reclaim and prove valuable the lost and marginalized knowledge of traditional Black women intellectuals. Critical race theorists, as previously mentioned, revisit civil rights history to demonstrate slow racial progress in America and to expose the racist nature of civil rights law. The practice of revisiting history is significant as history is often told from the perspective of the dominant group and fails to mimic the experiences of people of color. By revisiting history, Black feminists and critical race theorists are able to replace comforting majoritarian interpretations of events with those that are consistent with the experiences of minorities; (5) both groups emphasize intersectionality. Intersectionality is the belief that individuals or groups have overlapping or intersecting identities (e.g., race, gender, sexuality, nationality) that impact their everyday lives. Black feminists and critical race theorists believe that these identities are interconnected and therefore cannot be examined separately from one another; and (6) both groups rely on narrative methodologies that utilize stories and Bible tales. However, the possibilities of narrative research (e.g., journal entries, poetry, music) using Black feminist theories are wide-ranging. Critical race methodology is narrowly defined by counter-narratives or counter-storytelling (Solorzano & Yosso, 2002).

Points of Separation and Intersection: Theoretical Features and Tenets

The decision of Black feminists and critical race theorists to organize formal organizations also led to the development of each group's own specialized body of knowledge or theories: Black feminist thought (BFT) and critical race theory (CRT). It is important to note that up until this point; I have been using the terms Black feminism and critical race theory to refer to the actual movements. There is another point where Black feminism and critical race theory simultaneously "intersect" and "separate" or expose both similarities and distinctions. This point lies within their theories, particularly within the tenets or theoretical features of the theories.

Theoretical Features of Black Feminist Thought

Black feminist thought is rooted in the pioneering work of multiple generations of Black feminists based in the United States and in the diaspora. It is comprised of Black women's communal knowledge that derives from our shared experience of intersecting oppression. "It is a group-based, collective standpoint" or group knowledge (Collins, 2009:28). The purpose of this body of knowledge is twofold. First, Black feminist thought is used to combat the very oppression that produced the body of knowledge in the first place. Second, Black feminist thought is a tool for empowering Black women within oppressive contexts. To effectively resist oppression, Black feminist thought has six distinctive features that characterizes it. While some of these features may be similar to the tenets of CRT, the features as a whole is what makes Black feminist thought a unique theoretical framework.

The first distinctive feature of Black feminist thought is its recognition of how the ties between experience and consciousness impacts the everyday lives of individual Black women and Black women as a collective. This realization of how both what we do and what we think shapes our lives, and in turn permeates our work (Collins, 2009). This feature of Black feminist thought can be seen in the work of many Black feminists such as in bell hooks (1981) *Ain't I a Woman: Black Women and Feminism*. Black feminists use Black feminist thought as a tool for rearticulating their experiences and consciousness. The process of rearticulation provides Black women with opportunities to express our consciousness publicly and to reconstruct a different view of ourselves and our world. According to bell hooks (1989), rearticulation is Black women's pathway to self-recovery.

> The most important of our work—the work of liberation—demands of us that we make a new language, that we create the oppositional discourse, the liberatory voice. Fundamentally, the oppressed person who has moved from object to subject speaks to us in a new way. This speech, this liberatory voice, emerges only when the oppressed experience self-recovery (p.29).

The consciousness of Black women or the ways in which Black women think about oppression is influenced by our diverse experiences. Awareness of these experiences will subsequently produce diverse responses. Black women's diverse

responses to oppression is the second distinctive feature of Black feminist thought. Although Black women share some common experiences, all of our experiences will not be the same. "There is no essential or archetypal Black woman whose experiences stand as normal, normative, and thereby authentic" (Collins, 2009:32). Some Black women will experience differential treatment that other Black women will not, however, Black women as a collective will still regard these occurrences as differential group treatment and knowledge. Not all Black women need to experience the discrimination for it to become Black feminist thought or group knowledge. The everyday experiences and knowledge of all Black women constitutes Black feminist thought. Black women's diverse responses to our experiences create a body of knowledge that is comprised of different kinds of thought.

Black feminists, as previously stated, are both activists and scholars who aim to merge action and theory. This goal encompasses the third distinctive feature of Black feminist thought. Black feminist thought, as critical social theory, stimulates Black women to resist (Collins, 2009; Davis, 1981). This resistance is often referred to as Black feminist practice or activism. Black feminist thought is designed to generate activism among Black women. BFT is constructed under the assumption that action and thought inform one another. However, the action it stimulates Black women to perform will differ according to our social location. This point incorporates the fourth distinctive feature of Black feminist thought. Black feminist thought draws upon the different dialogical practices of Black women. The ways in which Black women intellectuals engage in dialogue about our oppression is dependent upon both our social location and experiences (Collins, 2009). For example, a Black woman artist may use painting or drawing as a medium to dialogue about her experience of having the art program removed from her segregated, all-Black elementary school. Black feminist thought consist of two interdependent types of knowledge; (1) everyday, taken for granted knowledge shared by Black women deriving from our everyday thoughts and actions; the thoughts that we share informally with one another daily such as those about relationships with men or family issues; and (2) knowledge provided by Black women experts or specialists who come from different social and educational backgrounds (Collins, 2009).

The fifth distinctive feature of Black feminist thought is the ways in which the body of knowledge does not remain the same. Because Black feminist thought is designed to combat the social injustices Black women face, it must change as social conditions change. This is the only way for "Black feminist thought to operate effectively within Black feminism" as a facilitator of social justice (Collins, 2009:43). Finally, Black feminist thought recognizes the importance of social justice for not only Black women but all humans. A concern for human solidarity is the final distinctive feature of Black feminist thought. Black women intellectuals believe Black feminist practice and thought to be a means to empowering not only Black women but all individuals (Collins, 2009; Springer, 2005). This feature of Black feminist thought joins Black feminists with other social justice groups such as critical race theorists for the purpose of achieving solidarity of humanity.

Tenets of Critical Race Theory

Like Black feminist thought, critical race theory also situates itself within the critical theories. CRT critiques ideologies that distort the reality of racism in our society. It is a theoretical tool used to raise awareness or consciousness of ideologies that both conceal and legitimate racism. Critical race theory aims to challenge racist doctrines in societal structures, especially in policy and law, and in turn seek to transform those structures (Delgado & Stefancic, 2000). To effectively critique and transform racism and other forms of domination, critical race theorists advance four major tenets.

The first tenet or feature of CRT is colorblindness. Colorblindness is the belief that the issue of racism has been solved (Donnelly & Cook, 2005). Because federal and state laws have been passed that demand people to be treated equally regardless of race, many people believe racism no longer exist. Critical race theorists argue that some laws are purposely constructed to conceal racism and use the concept of colorblindness to critique these laws. Bell (2004) reasoned that colorblindness "is adopted as the easy resolution to issues of race with which the nation would rather not wrestle, much less try seriously to resolve" (p.10). Scholars outside the legal field, particularly in education, use the concept of colorblindness to critique the American educational system. In, *Color Blindness and Basket Making Are Not the Answers: Confronting the Dilemmas of Race, Culture, and Language Diversity in Teacher Education*, Cochran-Smith (1995) challenged teachers' belief that they must be colorblind to be fair to all students and called for new responses to cultural diversity.

The second tenet of CRT is interest convergence. Interest convergence or material determinism is the belief that racism advances the interests of White elites materially and working-class Whites psychically (Bell, 1980). Critical race theorists argue that changes in laws which appeared to eradicate racism was not derived from a desire to help Blacks but from the self-interest of elite Whites. Since racism advances the interests of Whites, much of society has little incentive to eliminate it. Many traditional and contemporary scholars have provided examples of the ways in which racism has been used to increase the material and psychological condition of Whites. Bell (1980) critiqued the Supreme Court's decision to declare school segregation unconstitutional in Brown vs. Board of Education Topeka, Kansas (1954) and contended it was not in the best interest of Black students.

> I contend that the decision in Brown to break with the Court's long-held position on these issues cannot be understood without some consideration of the decision's value to whites, inequality, but also those whites in policymaking positions able to see the economic and political advances at home and abroad that would follow abandonment of segregation (p.524).

Bell disputed that passing this law was a way for Whites to gain favor with Communist countries, manipulate Blacks into believing equality was on the horizon, and improve industrialization in the South. Scholars outside the legal field have also employed the concept of interest convergence to challenge policies and

practices used to advance Whites. Milner (2008) explored how interest convergence could be used to evaluate, describe, and conceptualize policies and practices in teacher education.

> Because issues of race and racism are deeply rooted in U.S. society … they also are ingrained and deeply imbedded in the policies, practices, procedures, and institutionalized systems of teacher education. Interest convergence could be used as a tool to help explain and operationalize race and racism in the field. It can serve as a tool to elucidate and help make sense of the salience of race and racism in teacher education policies and practices (p.332).

The third tenet of critical race theory is social construction of race. Social construction of race is the belief that:

> Race and races are products of social thought and relations. Not objective, inherent, or fixed, they correspond to no biological or genetic reality; rather, races are categories that society invents, manipulates, or retires when convenient (Delagado & Stefancic, 2012:7).

Critical race theorists do believe that people with common origins share common physical traits such as skin color, hair texture, or physique, however the problem resides in how society attaches labels to certain groups sharing physical traits and place them in racial categories to benefit Whites. Further, each group's physical traits are believed to determine their "distinctly, human, higher-order traits, such as personality, intelligence, and moral behavior" (Delagado & Stefancic, 2012:9). CRT's social construction of race tenet likewise highlights differential racialization. Differential racialization describes how the ways in which minority groups are characterized changes as the labor market changes. In one period, Blacks can be portrayed as optimistic, naïve, and comfortable with serving Whites, and in another; depicted as loud, ghetto, and violent people who need to be monitored. Differential racialization emphasizes how stereotypes and popular images of people of color change over time (Bell, 1992). The final tenet of CRT is the notion of a unique voice of color. Critical race theory constitutes the assumption that people of color are more competent to speak and engage in conversations (oral and written) about race and racism than Whites because of our unique histories and experiences of racism (Delgado & Stefanic, 2012).

The above exploration of the theoretical features or tenets of Black feminist thought and critical race theory illustrated both points of intersection and separation or commonalities and distinctions among the two bodies of knowledge. Yet, more distinctions than similarities are exposed. Because the legacy of struggle for Black women includes racism, Black feminist thought encompasses all of the tenets of CRT: colorblindness, interest convergence, social construction of race, and unique voice of color (Wing, 1997). Black feminist scholars frequently address these tenets in their work. Donnelly, Cook, van Ausdale & Foley (2005) used CRT's tenet of colorblindness to examine the experiences of Black women in battered shelters in the Deep South. On the other hand, critical race theory does not take up all the tenets of BFT. Some scholars argue this is because employing certain tenets

of Black feminist thought requires one to be a Black woman (Collins, 2009; hooks, 1989).

Conclusion

My examination of the historical and theoretical relationship between Black feminist thought and critical race theory provides important implications for researchers considering either Black feminist thought and/or critical race theories (or any theories for that matter) as possible theoretical frameworks for future research. First, theories must be considered in light of their full histories (from origin to present) and the movements which fostered them. To disregard the origin(s) of theories is to marginalize the voices of the intellectuals on which the theory and research stand. Secondly, theories should be examined in solidarity not in isolation of one another. In other words, it is our responsibility as researchers to not only know the theories we take up but those that we put down as well. Knowing the history of a particular theory and its relationship with other bodies of knowledge can help researchers to determine if a theoretical framework is appropriate for their research. Cochran-Smith & Zeichner (2005) reasoned that "without locating empirical studies in relation to appropriate theoretical frameworks…it will be difficult to explain findings" (p. 32). My examination of the relationship between Black feminist thought and critical race theory was my own personal journey to the appropriate theoretical framework for my dissertation research. Before conducting this investigation, I wanted to employ both BFT and CRT. While both theories proved to be useful, my examination of the historical and theoretical relationship of BFT and CRT helped me to understand how the tenets and practices of Black feminist thought would be more promising for my research.

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