> There must exist a paradigm, a practical model for social change that includes an understanding of ways to transform consciousness that are linked to efforts to transform structures.
>
> hooks 1995, *Killing Rage: Ending Racism*

Introduction

Critical Race Theory (CRT) is a framework that adopts a race-conscious approach to uncover and better understand institutional and structural racism in our society with the aim of promoting and achieving social justice. The premise of CRT is that our legal, political, and economic institutions are inherently racist and that race is a socially constructed concept that enables and justifies the ability of Whites to promote their own economic, social, and political interests at the expense of people of color (Bell, 1992, 1995; Crenshaw, 1988).[1] Bell and other legal scholars advanced the theory in the 1970s and 1980s in response to the lack of or incremental progress being made by the civil rights movement, arguing that White liberal ideals such as equal opportunity, freedom of choice, and merit advanced the interests, privileges, and entitlement of Whites while perpetually repressing and oppressing people of color.

Initially relied upon in legal studies as a framework to analyze patterns in law, court cases, and legal precedents, CRT more recently has been applied to a number of disciplines, including sociology (Bonilla-Silva, 2015; Ray et al., 2017; Romero, 2001), social work (Moore et al., 2018), criminology (Coyle, 2010; Cunneen and Tauri, 2019; Schneider, 2003), social psychology (Correll et al., 2007; Kang et al., 2012), public health (Gilbert and Ray, 2016), and predominantly education (Banks, 1995; Garcia, López, and Vélez, 2017; Ladson-Billings, 1999; Sablan, 2019).[2] Research has employed both qualitative and quantitative methodologies, although a number of provisos have been advanced around the application and suitability of quantitative methods.

This Element addresses these issues in the context of public administration research, and proposes areas within the field that could benefit from the application of a CRT framework. This requires a shift in the field, which is desirable

[1] Critical theory in a broad sense focuses on structural and institutional barriers (e.g., social and economic) that persons face based on social identity. It accepts the premise that putatively neutral or impartial norms are inherently biased, thus limiting the applicability of "traditional" theories. Critical theories have been applied in public administration as will be seen later in the text (see, e.g., Stivers, 1991). Also see, later in the text, Blessett's (2020) application of CRT to urban renewal efforts in Baltimore, Maryland.

[2] As Hochschild (2005) observes, few political scientists tend to rely on a CRT framework. In addition, as she goes on to say, they do not spend much time "thinking about the linguistic connotations of or conceptual boundaries around 'race' or 'ethnicity,' or much time debating the legitimacy of categories such as Black, Latino, or Asian. Most simply use the terms as either independent or dependent variables depending on the nature of their analysis" (p. 108).

given the high priority that the field places on social equity, the third pillar of public administration (Frederickson, 1990; Gooden, 2014). If there is a desire to achieve social equity and justice, racism needs to be addressed and confronted directly. The Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement is one example of the urgency and significance of applying theories from a variety of disciplines to the study of racism in public administration.

Critical Race Theory

Derrick Bell and other legal scholars, including Kimberlé Crenshaw,[3] Richard Delgado, Patricia Williams, and Mari Matsuda, advanced CRT to address the pervasive problem of racism in our society, which they argued is ubiquitous throughout America's institutions. CRT is a theoretical framework that centers around the experiences and needs of people of color, particularly Black and Brown people; it challenges dominant frameworks and ideologies that are White-centered, White normative, or White supremacist in origin. A basic tenet of CRT is that racism, race, and its intersections with other identity markers, such as gender, sexuality, and class, are an endemic part of society and are institutionalized in and by the law and public policy. CRT maintains that racism is not limited to individual acts or interpersonal bigotry, but rather, it is structural and systemic and accomplished by laws, legal reforms, and public policy, which may be unintentional, but are cloaked in choices that are racist (Bonilla-Silva, 2015; Crenshaw et al., 1995; López et al., 2018; Matsuda, 1987; Williams, 1987). Bell and others, for example, argued that racism permeated civil rights laws in housing and employment, whereby housing transactions and employment criteria were racist in practice – and still are – even though they may not have been racist in intent. The continued reliance on "merit" in hiring and promotion exams in the public sector, which has a disproportionately harsh impact on persons of color, is an example here (Portillo, Bearfield, and Humphrey, 2020). Another example can be seen in the continuance of racially segregated schools – almost seventy years after *Brown* v. *Board of Education* (1954) outlawed school segregation. CRT studies embrace race consciousness and seek to alter how race and racism were conceived in White America's consciousness. It challenges the pretense that racism does not exist, that merit or incompetence, excellence, or inferiority could explain away racism and racial imbalance. CRT unravels the American myth.

Bell (1995: 899), a pioneer in CRT studies, has argued that critical race theorists "are highly suspicious of the liberal agenda, distrust its method, and want to retain what they see as a valuable strain of egalitarianism which may

[3] Crenshaw is credited with coining the term, "Critical Race Theory."

exist despite, and not because of, liberalism." He goes on to say that there are healthy tensions in CRT scholarship, "between its commitment to radical critique of the law (which is normatively deconstructionist) and its commitment to radical emancipation by the law (which is normatively reconstructionist)," or as we can deduce, between merely exposing the hidden fallacies of law – or in common parlance, trashing the law – and reconstructing or reshaping racial structures through legislation. For CRT scholars, law is never neutral and each successive wave of reform legislation works to reinforce racial hierarchies; advances for Blacks through reform bills come only when the interests of Whites are served, according to critical legal theorists.

Early on, areas that legal scholars examined in the context of CRT included the concept of colorblindness and affirmative action. Bell (1995: 899), for example, argued that policies such as affirmative action do not address the underlying problem of institutional and structural discrimination in our society. We could eliminate the need for affirmative action if we eradicated discrimination and racism. Bell (1989: 1598) questions the effectiveness of affirmative action, arguing that the policy is "the latest contrivance the society has created to give blacks the sense of equality while withholding its substance." In fact, Bell (1989: 1602) suggests that affirmative action policies are intended to benefit Blacks only to the extent that their gains do not threaten or impinge upon the status or "property interests" of Whites. He goes on to say that

> [t]hose who wield effective control in the nation make, when considered necessary, that amount of social adjustments that will help to siphon off sufficient discontent to enable the societal status quo to be maintained. . . . [T]oken or cosmetic gains are extended under the formal Constitution, while, under the operational code, of the unwritten basic law, no real redistribution of wealth, prestige, or social power takes place (Bell, 1989: 1598–1599).

Parenthetically, years later Bell (2000: 145) admitted that "[n]o one can say that affirmative action has failed. Over the years and despite the controversy and widespread opposition, a substantial number of African Americans, most certainly including this author, and many other people of color owe their success at least in part to the functioning of affirmative action policies." These policies, he states, helped to increase diversity in government agencies and businesses. However, he goes on to say that affirmative action has been far more helpful to White women.

Also a pioneer in CRT scholarship, Crenshaw (1988, 1996) points to tensions within CRT legal scholarship. For example, she suggests that some CRT scholars do not adequately consider the development of strategies for change that include the pragmatic use of legal rights. She argues that legal rights are

> the means by which oppressed groups have secured both entry as formal equals into the dominant order and the survival of their movement in the face of private and state repression. The dual role of legal change creates a dilemma for Black reformers. As long as race consciousness thrives, Blacks will often have to rely on rights rhetoric when it is necessary to protect Black interests. The very reforms brought about by appeals to legal ideology, however, seem to undermine the ability to move forward toward a broader vision of racial equality. In the quest for racial justice, winning and losing have been part of the same experience (Crenshaw, 1988: 1385). Eradicating racial domination, she maintains, requires nullifying the hegemonic function of racism and chipping away at the premises of the continuing ideology of white race consciousness. Legal reforms that do not repackage racism are part of the solution that can ultimately help to restore the traditions and cultures of Black, Brown, and Indigenous people before they are forced to integrate and assimilate into the White society.

Crenshaw and colleagues (1995) point out that CRT was conceived by scholars of color, mostly in law schools, who challenge the manner in which race and racial power are constructed and represented in American legal culture as well as American society as a whole. According to CRT scholars, although race is socially constructed and does not stem from natural differences, it produces negative effects in our society. As Banks (1995: 22) points out, race is "a human invention constructed by groups to differentiate themselves from other groups, to create ideas about the 'Other,' to formulate their identities and to defend the disproportionate distribution of rewards and opportunities within society."[4]

And, although there is no canonical set of doctrines or methodologies to which all CRT scholars subscribe, there are two common interests in CRT scholarship (Crenshaw et al., 1995: xiii). One is to explicate how White supremacy has created and maintained institutions and systems that subordinate people of color, particularly through White liberal ideals of law and equal protection. The second common interest is the goal of transforming the inextricable linkage between law and racial power, to ultimately promote an ethos of human liberation.

In the last two decades or so, CRT studies have moved to disciplines well beyond law, to include sociology, education, social psychology, and criminology.[5] In this sense, CRT can be seen as transdisciplinary in that

[4] Also see Omi and Winant (2015), who refer to the social construction of race as the "racial formation process," whereby political, social, and economic forces determine the content, meaning and significance of racial categories.

[5] In terms of practice, the political right has been critical of CRT, arguing that it is divisive and a "left-wing myth." To some white people it is too discomforting – or irritating – to hear how

researchers from various disciplines continue to work toward creating new conceptual, theoretical, and methodological advances to move beyond discipline-specific approaches to the universal, persistent problem of racism. Research applying CRT in all of these disciplines seeks to eradicate racism as part of a larger goal to eliminate oppression in all forms in our society and at every intersection (Matsuda, 1991; Matsuda et al., 1993; Sung and Coleman, 2019).[6] The CRT research thus far has relied more on qualitative than on quantitative methods.

Critical Race Methodology

CRT is an ontological and epistemological framework with which to analyze racism and racial inequities. Seminal studies in CRT, as noted, derived from law and examined the intersection of race with gender in antidiscrimination laws with a focus on White supremacy and structural racism in legal progresses (Crenshaw, 1996; Delgado and Stefancic, 1993, 2017; Sablan, 2019). CRT was primarily viewed as a method of legal analysis where the development and implementation of laws was a means to subordinate racial groups (Brown, 2003; Crenshaw, 1996). Thus, early on critical race methodology (CRM) was imperatively qualitative and steeped in a Realist tradition. Indeed, critical legal theory emanated from the Realist movement, wherein law is viewed as neither value-free nor neutral and is inextricably entwined with politics and social issues. Today, CRT research is both qualitative and quantitative, although traditional critical race theorists advanced a number of provisos around the application and suitability of quantitative methods, as will be seen shortly. Ultimately, the suitability of a CRM will certainly depend upon the topic of study and the research questions asked.

White supremacy has created racist structures and institutions in America (see work on White fragility). Despite the fact that CRT is not taught in K-12 classrooms or in high schools, a number of Republican-led bills across the country in the 2020s have sought to ban the teaching of CRT in classrooms. A Rhode Island bill, for example, disparages the idea that "the United States of America is fundamentally racist or sexist" (Adams, 2021: online). And in September of 2020, Trump directed his Office of Management and Budget (OMB) to ban its use throughout the federal government, despite the fact that it was not in use: "All agencies are directed to begin to identify all contracts or other agency spending related to any training on 'critical race theory,' 'white privilege,' or any other training or propaganda effort that teaches or suggests either (1) that the United States is an inherently racist or evil country or (2) that any race or ethnicity is inherently racist or evil" (OMB Memorandum, 2020: online). It seems that many have no clear conception of what CRT really is or does. In June of 2021, President Biden rescinded Trump's ban on diversity training. Dog whistles and obscurantist conceptions of CRT advanced by the right wing have sought to sidetrack the issues, but their repudiation seems more like an effort by White people to hold on to their power.

[6] CRT and CRMs are also able to address the inequities at the micro (individual), meso (organizational), and macro (societal) levels. See text later in this Element where the work of Victor Ray is addressed.

The Qualitative Case

Qualitative research has been the dominant form in CRT studies, and, in fact, many critical race theorists maintain that, because of their ability to understand and contextualize the nuances of everyday experiences and the social processes that result in racism, qualitative approaches are the most suitable. These traditional critical race theorists have argued that quantitative methods are antithetical to the core tenets of CRT. They argue, for example, that quantitative research presumes objectivity and neutrality, which contradicts tenets that take a definitive stance on the role of race and racism in our society Carbado and Roithmayr, 2014; Garcia, López, and Vélez, 2017; Sablan, 2019; Smith, 2012). Their main concern here is that race poses challenges to objective judgments in the United States (Sablan, 2019; Smith, 2012). Moreover, researchers cannot separate themselves from what they observe. According to Garcia, López, and Vélez (2017: 151), the main arguments against quantitative methods in CRT studies include the following:

(1) The centrality of racism as a complex and deeply rooted aspect of society that is not readily amenable to quantification
(2) The acknowledgment that numbers are not neutral and they should be interrogated for their role in promoting deficit analyses that serve White racial interests
(3) The reality that categories are neither "natural" nor given and so the units and forms of analysis must be critically evaluated
(4) The recognition that voice and insight are vital: data cannot "speak for itself," and critical analyses should be informed by the experiential knowledge of marginalized groups
(5) The understanding that statistical analyses have no inherent value but they can play a role in struggles for social justice (also see Gillborn, Warmington, and Demack, 2018).

Sablan (2019: 181) argues that qualitative methods may be most appropriate because "Social science research on the whole is regarded by some as not fully equipped to reflect oppressed communities, including indigenous and colonized populations" (also see Smith, 2012). She rationalizes this by examining some of the aforementioned tenets, particularly with respect to the lack of objectivity in research. She goes on to say that quantitative methods tend to rely on positivistic paradigms, but qualitative methods may be better suited for critical theories and alternative epistemologies. Nonetheless, she concludes by opining that "critiquing the limits of post-positivism does not negate the potential use of [quantitative methods]" (Sablan, 2019: 181).

Experiential knowledge is central, legitimate, and appropriate for capturing racial subordination. Thus, CRMs have included storytelling, biographies, family histories, and narrative inquiry (see, Bell, 1987; Delgado, 1995; Williams, 1991). CRM allows for research that is grounded in the experiences and knowledge of people of color. Solórzano and Yosso (2002) make a distinction between traditional storytelling and narratives, which they refer to as "master narratives." The former, they argue, do not fully capture the complexities of and richness of a group's cultural life, but rather portray and promote racial characterizations and stereotypes. They offer, instead, the concepts of counternarratives and counter-storytelling. Solórzano and Yosso (2002: 32) define the counter-story as "a method of telling the stories of those people whose experiences are not often told (i.e., those on the margins of society). The counter-story is also a tool for exposing, analyzing, and challenging the majoritarian stories of racial privilege."

Counter-stories refute racist characterizations of social life and seek to expose "race neutral" discourse to reveal how white privilege operates to augment inequities in race relations. As Manglitz, Guy, and Hunn (2006: online) argued,

> [w]hile majoritarian stories draw on the tacit knowledge among persons in the dominant group . . ., they also distort and silence the experiences of the dominated. Counter-stories facilitate social, political, and cultural cohesion, as well as survival and resistance among marginalized groups. By acknowledging subjugated discourses we not only recognize there is more than one way to view the world, but we also open up possibilities for understanding phenomena in new and different ways (also see Delgado and Stefancic, 2000; López, 2001).

Notwithstanding, traditional storytelling or narratives continue to dominate CRT studies. Romero (2008), for example, relies on narrative in her CRT race and immigration study. She begins by pointing out that mainstream sociological research on immigration continues to focus on questions concerning assimilation, acculturation, generational conflict, and social mobility. She argues that the application of CRT allows for research to address more relevant and contemporary issues such as racial profiling, anti-immigration bias, and the increased militarization of the US–Mexico border. Her narrative on civil rights violations of Mexicans by the Chandler, Arizona Police Department, and the Tucson Border Patrol is illustrative. The Southwest Supermarket located in Chandler was targeted by the police and border control for "citizen" inspection of its patrons. Officers requested that the store's assistant manager, Ms. Rodriguez, announce over the loudspeaker that all illegal aliens who were shopping should turn themselves over to law enforcement officers in the parking lot. Rodriguez refused, so the police and border patrol set up a command center in the parking lot near the store and began following and stopping all customers

who appeared Mexican, asking for identification or proof of citizenship; White customers were not profiled. Romero (2008: 30–31) writes about a particular incident:

> A man with two small children, about three to four years of age, was contacted by officers as he walked out of the store. The man talked to the officers as he walked to his truck. He opened the door on the passenger side of the truck and placed his children in the vehicle. He then walked around the truck to the driver's side. At this time a Border Patrol officer approached the passenger door and placed the wheel of his bicycle behind the door to prevent it from being closed. A Chandler police officer placed his bicycle wheel behind the driver's door in a similar fashion. The Chandler officer talked to the man for a few minutes, then began to try to pull him from the truck cab. The Border Patrol officer then rounded the cab and helped the Chandler officer. They pulled him from the cab, handcuffed him and placed him in a police van. The children were crying and very upset. An officer returned to the truck in about five minutes, stayed there for some time, then made a phone call. Later, another officer arrived and removed the children. In the meantime, a woman customer went to the truck and tried to comfort the children. They were left in the truck for a total of 15 or 20 minutes.

Romero uses this narrative to depict how a Latinx elder was demeaned, humiliated, and subordinated in front of his children and other customers in the parking lot. Solely based on his physical appearance, the young children witnessed that their father was placed at risk before the law, and was treated as inferior compared to White customers. She goes on to say that "[a]lthough citizens who leave children in cars in the summer can be prosecuted for child endangerment, this man's children were left by the officers in July's triple-digit temperature without apparent concern for their safety or fear of legal action against them" (Romero, 2008: 31).

Although many critical race theorists argue that qualitative approaches such as those described earlier are more suitable for studies on race and ethnicity, others have more recently pointed to the need for quantitative studies. The qualitative–quantitative debate in CRT scholarship mirrors debates in feminist epistemology. For example, feminist theory maintains that statistical procedures in examining gender sex differences are inadequate as they rely on crude and simplistic data-labelling, which ignores the complexity of women's experiences (hooks, 1981, 2000; Roberts, 1981). Gender is a social construct, with identities that include, for example, "Agender," "Two Spirit," "Gender Expansive," "Intersex," "Transgender," and "Nonbinary/Genderqueer/Genderfluid." Moreover, feminist researchers contend that methodology is gendered in that quantitative methods have traditionally been associated with concepts such as positivism, scientific, objectivity, statistics, and masculinity (Oakley, 1998; Westmarland, 2001). But

qualitative methods are associated with interpretivism, nonscientific, subjectivity, and femininity. Some feminist researchers have thus rejected quantitative methods as not aligning with the aims of feminist theory and research (see, e.g., Pugh, 1990; Reinharz, 1992). As Westmarland (2001: online) has pointed out, however, "different feminist issues need different research methods, and that as long as they are applied from a feminist perspective there is no need for the dichotomous 'us against them,' 'quantitative against qualitative' debates." Thus, a pluralistic approach seems suitable for CRT studies, particularly in the social sciences. And, in fact, a number of scholars have applied quantitative methods to CRT studies, despite the challenges advanced.

The Quantitative Case

A number of CRT scholars who support the application of quantitative methods to CRT studies, nonetheless, offer caveats or provisos in so doing (e.g., Garcia, López, and Vélez, 2017; Gillborn, Warmington, and Demack, 2018; López et al., 2018; Sablan, 2019). Indeed, many of the CRT studies that claim to be quantitative merely outline the problems associated with efforts to apply quantitative methods, particularly around measurement (e.g., deracializing statistics and developing measures for structural and institutional racism, as will be discussed in a later section).

The Caveats

"QuantCrit" refers to critical race theorists who promote or use quantitative methods but through self-reflection and avoiding the perpetuation of racist narratives through data (Cross, 2018).[7] A fundamental premise of QuantCrit is that statistics are socially constructed. In addition, because direct measures of racism are difficult to capture, as open, overt admission of racial bias has become less acceptable over time, indirect measures such as perceived racism and/or discrimination are relied upon. From this perspective, they have outlined key tenets for using statistical methods to advance social justice and equity. Mainly, they argue that an ontological shift is in order whereby quantitative CRMs account for the axiological underpinnings of social statistics, which they argue are racialized (see, Garcia, López, and Vélez, 2017). In other words, as Zuberi and Bonilla-Silva (2008) argue, quantitative CRT studies must account for the "white logic" in quantitative research (e.g., the lack of neutrality and objectivity). Covarrubias and Vélez (2013) and Vincent-Ruz (no date) offer the following:

[7] QuantCrit has been predominantly used, thus far, in the field of education.

1. Avoid using race as a variable that reifies race as a biological construct, which emanated from the White supremacist eugenics movement after emancipation in the United States (see Zuberi, 2001).
2. Include variables that focus on structure and institutions, in order to avoid focusing solely on individual factors.
3. Focus on malleable factors where interventions can produce change.
4. Consider a mixed-methods approach.
5. Acknowledge that we cannot separate analysis from the analyst.
6. Acknowledge that the disciplinary contexts in which we operate are primarily defined and led by White scholars.

Garcia, López, and Vélez (2017) call for a "deracialization" of statistics by challenging eugenicist assumptions about intelligence that frame Black communities as innately self-destructive and inferior. Indeed, these ideas are the centerpiece of the 1899 seminal work of W. E. B. Du Bois, *The Philadelphia Negro*. His mixed-methods study provided a counter-story to the prevailing traditional, eugenicist approach to studying social inequalities in Black communities in Philadelphia in the late 1800s and early 1900s. Du Bois (2007) provided a radical contextualization of the structural origins of social inequalities and demonstrated that structures of power operated to oppress Black communities (also see, Chapman and Berggren, 2005; Zuberi, 2000, 2001).

Deracializing statistics is challenging as it requires deracializing the social conditions that produce racialized inequalities.[8] Also, there is a good deal of ambiguity around the definition and conceptualization of deracializing. In effect, most researchers then simply assert explicitly that current methodologies fail to adequately account for the socially constructed nature of race. An example often offered here is when researchers adopt a conceptualization of race as a fixed attribute; but, as critical race theorists maintain, race cannot be considered fixed at birth, because this would antecede subsequent life outcomes, such as income or education, which are social circumstances that contribute to the social construction of race. Thus, the narrative by researchers then shifts to fundamental problems in constructing and measuring race as well as racism. Indeed, disciplines have acknowledged the lack of clarity around the use of racial variables

[8] Moreover, it has taken on different, almost opposing meanings depending upon the topic of study. For example, political scientists studying elections have constructed deracialization as downplaying racial themes to attract white voters, and defusing the polarizing effects of race by avoiding reference to race-specific issues. In an effort to gain white support, Hamilton (1973), for instance, indicated that blacks should address social issues that appeal to society as a whole. For Hamilton, one such issue was "full employment," rather than topics such as welfare or set-asides (also see Johnson, 2017). However, some have criticized such a race-neutral approach as marginalizing race itself, by subsuming black demands and interests for the sake of Whites (see, e.g., Rho'Dess, 2011).