

Problematizing Whiteness: A Woman of Color and a White Woman Discuss Race and Research

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In this paper, we engage in reflexivity to explore our experiences with race and research. Employing critical race theory as a framework, we engage in a dialogue about the risks and benefits of White scholars exploring race in higher education research. Through this conversation, we attempt to problematize the use of CRT by White scholars and provide a framework for scholars to consider when engaging in research related to race. Further, we intend to model the difficult dialogues in which White women and women of Color must engage to support each other as scholars in higher education.

Keywords: Critical Race Theory, reflexivity, qualitative research, higher education

Introduction

Problematizing Whiteness: Reconstruction or deconstruction? Unmasking or re-masking? Authentic tears or guilt? Genuine concern or professional opportunity? The preceding polarizing binaries often surface when considering the effectiveness of White scholars attempting to understand issues of privilege and oppression through the use of Critical Race Theory (CRT). The importance of such work is evidenced through its continual proliferation in literature (e.g., Bergerson 2003; Bondi 2012; Linder, Harris, Allen and Hubain 2015; Thompson 2003). But some scholars (e.g., Dace 2012; Patton and Bondi 2015) question the authenticity and expansive (Crenshaw 1988) outcomes of such work. Aligned with this critique, literature recently surfaced that heavily focuses on critical issues arising from research collaborations between women of Color and White women in the academy (Dace 2012).

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The propensity of collaborations between women of Color and White women to negative experience points to the importance of deconstructing critiques and concerns associated with this work. A negative experience with such cooperation can lead to a permanent severing of highly needed alliances. White women and women of Color share an obligation to dismantle perpetuations of oppression; further, we share a responsibility to countless women of Color to continue engaging in difficult collaborations that bring light to our hurt, our stories, and our hope. In this paper, we (one White woman and one woman of Color) discuss cross-racial collaborations in the context of using CRT from a research standpoint.

As the academy continuously strives to become more inclusive and representative of people with diverse identities, increased attention is paid to faculty issues from a variety of standpoints. Some of this literature focuses on the work-life balance for tenure-track faculty members who have families (O'Meara and Campbell 2011); mentoring dynamics between faculty members and graduate students of Color (McCoy, Winkle-Wagner, Luedke and Hannah 2013); and the continually evolving role of faculty members in the constantly changing contexts and demographics of higher education (Gehrke and Kezar 2013). Given the evolving demographics of the professoriate, we argue the importance of illuminating the increasing collaborations between White faculty members and those of Color in an effort to 1) bring light to some of the difficult issues stemming from Whiteness in such collaborations and 2) provide a framework that may serve as a guide for cross-racial research collaborations despite difficulties that can inevitably arise. In this paper, we highlight a dialogue about these complex issues as an example of a strategy to raise issues for consideration related to cross-racial collaborations. To be clear, we are not crusading for an increase in cross-racial collaborations in the academy, but rather attempting to provide a platform from which to elevate some of the issues that stem from these frequent collaborations that are already occurring. We provide detailed reasoning regarding our motivation for this work below.

As a woman of Color recently entering academia, I (Shametrice) wanted to explore the meaning of and my personal experiences with White women claiming to be anti-racist, committed to diversifying the academy, and loyal to understanding and using CRT as an analytical tool in research. I became especially motivated after reading *Unlikely Allies in the Academy*, an edited volume by Karen Dace (2012), because the book candidly addresses professional and personal predicaments stemming from alliances between White women and women of Color in the academy. During my last year as a graduate student, a new faculty member (Chris) gave a presentation regarding her research on students of Color. She openly identified as a White woman and readily acknowledged some of the complexities of engaging her research from the perspective of that identity. I experienced a visceral reaction to her presentation

because I questioned her motivation to research a group of students on an aspect of identity and experiences to which she herself could not identify. While I was sure of my discomfort with her presentation, I was less certain as to why I had such a strong reaction. It is likely due to having recently taken a Critical Race Theory course and coming to understand the dangers and repercussions of interest convergence, or the tendency for White people to suddenly become interested in issues for people of Color only if it will benefit them in some fashion. I went on to graduate and work in a postdoctoral fellowship before reconnecting with Chris a few months later at a conference and immediately remembered my feelings about her prior presentation. We began talking about it and ultimately decided to embark on the process of understanding cross-racial research collaborations in the context of academia.

As a White woman engaged in scholarship and pedagogy related to race, I (Chris) value opportunities to engage with colleagues of Color in meaningful dialogues about race. When I re-connected with Shametrice at a national conference in the fall of 2012, I felt excited about a potential collaboration with her to explore the dynamics of White women engaging in critical race scholarship. To that point in my career, my research had largely centered on the intersections of race and gender, including topics related to white undergraduate women's understanding of race and racism and the experiences of students of Color in undergraduate and graduate programs. I sometimes engage CRT as a framework for my work and recognize the challenges of my 'epistemic uncertainty' (Shollock 2012, 709), the fact that as a White woman there will be more times than not that my race inhibits me from fully understanding the dynamics of racism in higher education. However, I also recognize the immense responsibility I have as a White woman engaged in social justice scholarship and pedagogy to continue to unlearn and stop the ways in which I perpetuate racism and to intervene in my circles of influence, specifically with colleagues and students. This work with Shametrice represents my commitment to accountability to women of Color in higher education and my commitment to continually attempting to better understand my positionality and strategies for dismantling oppression.

While CRT is increasingly used by White scholars in pedagogy and research, few scholars have publicly critiqued this work. Bergerson (2010) attempts to critically analyze and question the use of CRT from a White perspective, but a dearth of cross-racial collaboration problematizing the use of CRT by White scholars exists. Specifically, we pose the following question: How can reflexivity and CRT be used to problematize Whiteness in cross-racial research collaborations?

After an overview of the theoretical framework, we discuss cross-racial collaborations and Whiteness in the academy. Next, we engage in critical reflexivity (Daley 2010)

of a dialogue we conducted regarding the use of CRT in cross-racial collaborations. We chose to engage in dialogue and critical reflexivity because both are highly effective methods for understanding difference, power, and discrimination between and among people with diverse identities (Freire 2000; Zuniga, Nagda, Chesler, and Cytron-Walker 2007). Dialogue, as opposed to discussion or debate, helps participants not only provide their perspective, but also engage in and respond to the other's worldview and perspectives. The critical reflexivity aspect allows not only for reflection on the dialogue process, but to act on it in our personal and professional lives. The paper concludes with a framework that delineates suggestions and implications for using CRT in research. Critical Race Theory undergirds the entire paper as a theoretical and conceptual framework. Additionally, this paper is based on academia in the United States and the language and spellings used are reflective of that context.

Critical Race Theory

CRT, although derived from the work of legal scholars (i.e., Bell 1980; Crenshaw 1988; Harris 1993), is often used as an analytical research tool for understanding inequality in educational and workplace contexts (Minor 2004; Vaught and Castagno 2008). Interdisciplinary in nature, CRT incorporates academic traditions from education, sociology, history, ethnic studies, and women studies, to name a few (Harper, Patton and Wooden 2009, 390). CRT is typically outlined by five to seven tenets, though the description of each tenet may be different based on the context in which the theory is being used. The tenets include: (a) racism as endemic to society, (b) counter-storytelling, (c) critique of liberalism, (d) interest convergence, and (e) Whiteness as property (Bell 1980; Crenshaw 1988; Delgado and Stefancic 2012; Harris 1993; Ladson-Billings 1998). We focus the discussion on the latter two tenets, as those are most relevant to this paper.

The interest-convergence tenet of CRT is twofold: it argues that in addition to Whites being the primary beneficiaries of civil rights legislation, progress is typically experienced by people of Color only when it reduces the perceived threat for Whites in society (Bell 1980). Said differently, interest-convergence is a 'process whereby the White power structure will tolerate or encourage racial advances for Blacks only when they also promote White self-interests' (Harper, Patton and Wooden 2009, 391). For example, data reveal that White women have reaped the most benefits of affirmative action legislation, despite a pervasive misnomer that these laws have provided an 'unfair' workforce advantage for people of color (Ladson-Billings 1998). Another concrete example of interest-convergence is seen in the context of Arizona becoming the last state to officially recognize the Martin Luther King, Jr. holiday. State legislatures did so once professional athletic teams threatened to disband, which would have resulted in significant loss of revenue for the state.

Whiteness as property stems from the notion that ‘the origins of property rights in the United States are rooted in racial domination’ (Harris 1993, 1716). While there is a literal aspect of this under-evaluated tenet of CRT, it does go beyond property as land ownership. Whites claimed an ownership to land through a dominant ideology allowing their Whiteness to serve as justification to rights and use of property previously inhabited by Native Americans. This serves as the starting point from which property expanded into a number of other rights associated with Whiteness, including: a) rights of disposition; b) right to use and enjoyment; and c) legal acceptance and legitimation of Whiteness. White scholars benefit both professionally and personally by exposing, deconstructing, and unmasking the privileges of their Whiteness through CRT. Examining Whiteness as property and interest convergence is essential to the discourse referencing cross-racial collaboration in critical engagement of this theory, underscoring its effectiveness in reviewing literature on this topic. Lastly, although CRT is often discussed in a black-white binary context, intersectionality (Crenshaw 1993) is another important concept related to this theory that reveals the complex nature of multiple oppressions, stemming from several social identities including but not limited to gender, race, class, and sexual orientation. Both authors identify as women, thus layering this discussion as it relates to what it means to navigate gender and race-related discrimination in the academy.

Whiteness in the Academy

We first examine the occurrence of women of Color and White women collaborations in academia by extrapolating some of the difficulties and advantages of such work. Next we elaborate upon the concept of Whiteness and how it manifests in the academy. Specifically, we attempt to problematize Whiteness regarding the use of CRT in research endeavors and the complexities of cross-racial collaborations.

Cross-Racial Collaborations in the Academy

Dace (2012) compiles an impressive collection of narratives from White women and women of Color elaborating upon their experiences with cross-racial collaborations in higher education. The volume deconstructs and critiques the nuances of cross-racial, same-gender collaborations in a mostly academic context with a few narratives illuminating the experience in the administration arena. Despite the complexities and feelings of pain and resentment that surface prior to, during, and long after these collaborations, there remains a call for continued engagement in such work. But within this call for sustained collaboration is a focus on shifting responsibility, as articulated by Torres (2012): ‘I believe the burden of the alliance has always tended to fall on women of Color and that is tiring’ (6). Consistent throughout this volume is a simultaneous commitment to preserving cross-racial alliances while

also problematizing the process from a critical perspective that forefronts women of Color, rather than White women.

CRT is implicitly woven through the narratives, while Whiteness is explicitly present. Dace (2012) warns women of Color of falling into the common misperception that predominantly White campuses desire their voices:

Too many of our White colleagues want diversity if it means that they can attract people of Color who will be just like them in every way except the color of their skin. They forget that a diverse professoriate, staff, and student body should bring a diversity of opinion, outlook, ideas, and experiences. That means that when a person of Color says something that a White person has not thought of or would not say, problems arise. When White women are on the receiving end of a question about their behavior, they are often shocked, offended, and often feel attacked. Every time a woman of Color questions a White woman, she is acting like her equal, she is acting White. Unfortunately, in systems of privilege and power there just are not enough spaces for everyone to be White. (49)

The systems of power and privilege referenced by Dace highlight the pervasiveness of racism in society from individual and structural perspectives. Some Whites engage liberalism by thinking they have done ‘enough’ when it comes to dismantling systems of oppression by hiring, mentoring, and collaborating with a colleague of Color. As long as there are no threats to that person’s Whiteness as property, that is, the right to not be questioned, challenged, or engaged in difficult conversations, then they have successfully aligned with and engaged in the fight to dismantle racism in the academy. The problem with that mind-set is the interwoven racism and complacency with small, comfortable progress in diversifying the professoriate (i.e., liberalism; Delgado and Stefancic 2012). If a White colleague is always comfortable with the work done to engage CRT from a professional standpoint, then that person is not doing enough work.

In further reference to Dace’s (2012) quote, too often White champions of diversity expect one sentiment from newly hired professors of Color in a department: praise. As with any new hire, praise, excitement, and gratitude are the sentiments frequently expressed from someone who is excited to embark on the professional goal of tenure. But after the initial excitement mitigates into a reality of the politics and deep issues that can plague academic departments, a new hire’s sense of agency is not always welcomed with as much enthusiasm as their initial excitement and praise. That is, when a new faculty member of Color begins to question dynamics and fight for their professional desires in a way that somehow threatens White faculty members, then difficulties begin to surface. It becomes clear that such questioning and fighting is reserved for those in power, those with Whiteness. For a faculty member of Color

to do so is to ‘act out of line’ while Dace brilliantly points out that for White faculty to engage in the same behavior is attributed to ‘acting White’ or within alignment or the ‘rights’ to do so. As such, she warns junior faculty members of Color to remain aware of this aspect that ‘acting White’ is synonymous with cultivating a sense of agency, and it is not always welcomed in academic departments that do not leave room for such agency to develop. Whiteness within cross-racial collaborations is thus complexly layered and deserving of further analysis.

Problematizing Whiteness and the Use of CRT

Extending beyond extant literature regarding cross-racial collaborations reveals the largeness of Whiteness in pedagogy, research, and professional situations. Issues surfacing from Whiteness and the use of CRT are discussed interchangeably, as the two concepts typically act in tandem with one another. For example, Hayes and Juarez (2009) further expose the interest-convergence aspect of White scholars using CRT in research and pedagogy by revealing the common desire of Whites to be seen as a ‘good’ White person. This concept is also underscored from a dominant perspective by Thompson (2003), who elaborates upon the concealed agenda of White antiracists’ ‘desire for unproblematic solidarity with people of color’ (10). Whites are happy to ‘join the fight against racism’, or claim a ‘commitment to social justice’ as long as this engagement does not become too difficult, painful, or threatening to their internalized dominance. Hayes and Juarez (2009) provide the metaphor of winning this fight by critiquing the desire of Whites using CRT to be awarded with a ‘good’ White people’s medal. They further expose the various ways in which such scholars continuously expose their Whiteness in trying to understand and adopt CRT into their pedagogy and research. The vast chasm between a White scholar enacting CRT in research and pedagogy and expansively incorporating it into their personal and professional actions is so great that lying within it are the multiple ways in which Whiteness as property is maintained through such endeavors. It is easy for some White scholars to academically understand, write about, and raise awareness on the tenets of CRT, but it is more difficult to concretely enact it into the fabric of their everyday life that is sewn with bridges providing a thruway for racism, dominance, and oppression to persist. To do so would mean that these White scholars may have to suspend one of these bridges of dominance, that is, their job, their credibility, their desire to be seen as ‘nice’ and not a ‘troublemaker.’

After reflecting on their experiences with this phenomenon, the authors of this paper engaged in a dialogue first to illuminate their thoughts, reactions, and understandings of CRT: who uses this theory and in what ways does Whiteness complicate this use. The goal of the dialogue was twofold, the first being to expose the pervasive nature of racial scripts in society. Defined as ‘a series of programmed messages (e.g., stereotypes and myths) about a particular ethnic group and significant

others' (Williams 2007, 48, as cited in Patton and Winkle-Wagner 2012), racial scripts are pervasive elements in everyday interactions between and among Whites and People of Color. While racial scripts typically present people of Color from a deficit or negative perspective, they generally preserve the privilege usurped by Whites to be presented as innocent and deserving of superior treatment. The second goal is to provide a framework for cross-racial collaborations with CRT in research. We expand on this process in the methodology section, before providing an excerpt from the dialogue. We then provide a critical, reflexive discussion of the dialogue that informs our recommendations for the practice and use of CRT in pedagogy, research, and personal/professional enactment.

Critical Reflexivity in Practice

Duo-ethnography, a methodology through which researchers engage in dialogue about a particular topic, provided a framework for engaging in this study. Building on autoethnography, through which a person shares their interpretation or experiences with a topic, duoethnography pushes researchers to engage with another person to make meaning of a particular topic through dialogue and reflection to further develop their understanding of a topic or issue (Sawyer and Norris 2009). Similarly, reflexivity, sometimes referred to as positionality, requires scholars to consider their relationship to power and privilege prior to and during the times they engage in identity-related work, including work related to race (Espino 2012; Freire 2000; Stewart 2010). Reflexivity and critical reflection are central components to critical research and critical pedagogy (Espino 2012; Freire 2000; Linder and Ivery 2012; Mertens 2010). Many scholars have written reflexive pieces about their work engaging with CRT (e.g., Bergeson 2003; Chávez 2009; Dace 2012) and several of those pieces influenced our approach to this paper. We build on those pieces with this duoethnography interrogating the use of CRT by White scholars.

Reflexivity may be described as 'reflection in action' and 'reflection on action' (Daley 2010, 2; Freire 200). The concept of reflection in action calls on scholars to consider their positionality in research and in the classroom during the process of engaging with research participants and students. Reflection in action requires on-going awareness of the subtle ways in which power influences relationships between people and attempts to mitigate some power differentials in the moment. For example, in the research process, an interviewer may attempt to mitigate some power differentials by meeting participants in a space of their choosing, rather than the researcher's office. In the classroom, faculty may attempt to reduce power differentials by sitting with their students in a circle and participating in class discussions, rather than standing and lecturing.

Reflection on action describes the process scholars engage in when they reflect on previous experiences related to research and teaching to consider ways to improve future scholarship (Daley 2010). Scholars may reflect on previous experiences through formal measures like annual evaluations or intentional and structured conversations with mentors. Additionally, some scholars may choose to engage in more informal experiences of reflection such as a researcher journal or an end of the semester review of a syllabus and learning activities. Patton and Winkle-Wagner (2012) engaged in a similar ‘discussion analysis’ and we draw our inspiration for this paper from their work.

In this paper, we use duoethnography as a methodology and reflexivity as a theoretical framework to interrogate the use of CRT by White scholars. The authors explicitly reflected on a set of questions co-developed in a preliminary conversation about the topic of White scholars employing CRT. We discussed a series of five questions over a Skype conversation, then transcribed the conversation and reviewed the transcripts for salient ideas. Both authors also independently journaled about our responses to our conversation and on-going thoughts related to the topic.

Dialogue and Discussion

Conversations between White women and women of Color in the academy occur in a number of contexts, spanning a wide range of topics, emotions, and outcomes. Such conversations are newly becoming documented as a means to confront difficult situations arising from cross-racial collaborations (Dace 2012). Below is an outline of a planned dialogue between the authors, a White woman scholar (Chris) and an African American woman scholar (Shametrice). The dialogue is interwoven with reflections from both of us that address the pervasive nature of racial scripts (Patton and Winkle-Wagner 2012; Williams 2007), the importance of challenging each other in discussions regarding critical research and pedagogy, the continued significance of CRT principles, and finally the vitality of creating and sustaining support in cross-racial alliances in academia.

SHAMETRICE: What are your thoughts on the increasing use of CRT by white scholars, in research and pedagogy?

CHRIS: ...I’m curious how we as white scholars are using it. I think it can be both a blessing and a curse so I think it’s really good because when white people start to understand the significance of racism, how racism impacts us as White folks, albeit differently than it impacts people of Color, it still impacts us, I think that that means that we could make some progress. The flipside of that is that I struggle constantly with the putting on a pedestal of White people who do race work. I had similar experiences with men doing feminist work. It’s like this instant credibility, ‘Oh you’re a white person who

talks about race, you must be awesome', and that comes sort of without people exploring or with any sort of critical thought that goes behind that, there's this assumption that if you care that must mean you're doing it well and that's not always the case, so that's a big part of what comes up for me is it feels like it's a blessing and curse. What about you?

SHAMETRICE: I have a few. I have a visceral reaction to it to be quite honest. If the word or the phrase CRT was replaced with Whiteness, I would be fine, but I do have an issue of more white scholars claiming this white critical race theorist label because I question the motivation in doing so, I question the enactment of doing so, not just from a research/teaching standpoint that gets them kind of professional accolades, but what that actually looks like in their personal lives and if they're willing to intellectualize what is not an option for people of Color to feel personally almost every day in their lives, how there can be a failure to acknowledge that. I have a hard time with the venue in which it's used, so I totally get why White scholars are happy to do this hard work of CRT in a venue of the classroom where there's a clear power dynamic or in the venue of research where there's a dynamic of this is what I have to do in order to get promotion and tenure. I think it allows for a separation of academic versus personal lived experience. And it's disheartening to me, but I think the way to bridge that academic and personal experience is to go the Whiteness route and I think that is a little bit more credible for me. If somebody wanted to study other White students and Whiteness studies, to me I could understand that more than White scholars using CRT to understand experiences of people of Color in a research context.

A number of racial scripts surface within this excerpt of dialogue, most frequent being that of the 'good White person.' Chris references the pedestal metaphor, that if one is White and engaging in CRT research, then they are automatically assumed to be good at the work and deemed an expert in that subject matter. Although scholars of Color have long worked to dismantle systems of oppression from race, class, and gender standpoints, that work is somewhat expected from these scholars and accolades are more reticently given. Those accolades received by White scholars for engaging in this work demonstrate the simultaneous manifestation of interest convergence and retaining of Whiteness as property (Bell 1980; Harris 1993). White scholars can engage in this work just enough to receive praise for the research, without ever giving up their dominance by failing to connect the personal with the political. Property of dominance and accuracy is maintained if research is done from the CRT perspective, as opposed to critically engaging their own Whiteness, and how it pervades the academy.

The importance of White scholars who employ CRT interrogating Whiteness as part of their research agenda cannot be overstated. Engaging in scholarship about systems of oppression without examining one's own role in upholding and

maintaining those systems is irresponsible and unethical. Epistemic uncertainty (Shollock 2012) prevents Whites from fully understanding the ways in which they (we) are complicit in racism. This requires that White scholars consistently engage in self-reflection related to their roles. Because of the long history of complicated relationships between scholars of Color and White scholars described above, White scholars may be ignorant to the times they perpetuate racism and unwilling to hear when they are failing to challenge racism. Further, because of this continued failure to change, scholars of Color may not feel safe in providing feedback to White scholars when it needs to be provided. Additionally, fear of fulfilling pervasive racial scripts of being 'angry' or 'playing the race card' may further repress the willingness of scholars of Color to engage in feedback discussions.

We now move into discussing our concrete experiences with cross-racial collaboration on the use of CRT in research:

SHAMETRICE: Maybe you could talk about your experiences in collaborating cross-racially with someone on the use of CRT.

CHRIS: This project about students of Color (SOC) in Student Affairs/Higher Education programs is most definitely a CRT framework and my experience in doing that is with people of Color in that there's a research team of students and that's been challenging for me, because I believe it's important to have people of Color, the difficult part is that all of the people involved are people who have less formal authority than me as well as they are people of Color and I'm a White person, so I've struggled with what does that mean. Clearly it's an opportunity for all of us involved. ... My experience has been positive and I think that's because I'm white and people say, 'Oh my god, it's so cool you're doing this. Thanks for your work on this.' But then the other thing that's happening related to this research is people keep asking me, 'Are you going to continue this line?' This study started out as a ten- to fifteen-participant study and exploded because of the number of participants that we had respond to the call for participants. And so, the fact that that's how it happened, so I just tell people I don't see this being my primary line of work. Certainly, if I have students in the future that want to continue this line of work, I will support them and work the best I can with them, but I don't see this as being something that I will become the expert on this topic. I think it's an exploratory, it's important work, and I need to be exploring what are the white students doing in that space to create hostile environments for students of Color, so that's my experience.

SHAMETRICE: So this is my first foray into it, in terms of the cross-racial collaboration, using CRT. Um, it's interesting so far, you know... I have some thoughts on some things you just said in terms of your experience with this current project and I was like, I'll just wait until we write about it because

even as I'm just listening to you talk, I'm like, 'It's mean.' If I say what's up, it's mean, so I don't know if you want me to go there or not.

CHRIS: I mean I would love to hear it and I don't want, I mean... .

SHAMETRICE: You say you want to hear it now... .

CHRIS: I learn and see that's another risk of this work, right, I can learn at the expense of you having to feel like a jerk or feel like you're being mean, so another dynamic where I'm benefiting and you're not. I mean, I think indirectly, hopefully it will be beneficial for you, but in the process, it's not a pleasant experience.

SHAMETRICE: ...the other kind of metaphor that I thought of when [people ask you] 'Is this going to be your line of research?' and you say, 'Absolutely not,' I'm going to shift it to the White students, the metaphor I thought of is, I'm sure you've heard this, is like the eagle swooping in to get all of this wonderful rich information and then taking it and then swooping back out and I'm not imposing that metaphor or saying that that's what you're about, but that's just immediately what I thought of. Like, yeah, you'll do this and get in there and get good information, but then you won't commit to it, you'll take it and turn the tables, so yeah, get in and get all of the information and honestly, I think this is going to create a lot of buzz, you know what I mean, and so to do that and then not stay committed to it and either shift it to doing Critical Whiteness and looking at white students, then my question would be why not just do that from the beginning? Like that's my struggle with these short-term investments, but then this really isn't for me, I don't want my research agenda to be defined by this, I should go back to this standpoint, then why engage in it, you know? So yeah, those were two kind of thoughts that I had when you were speaking, but again, so much of it is just my own to need work through clear issues that I have, stemming from past difficult situations.

Reflection

The eagle metaphor referenced in this excerpt is essential to examine in cross-racial collaborations in research. If White scholars dabble in CRT for research and pedagogy, then should this theory undergird their future agendas in the academy? Is it OK to work on one research project and collect rich, informing information to then use in critical Whiteness research? If so, then why not just begin with a critical Whiteness agenda in the first place? These questions represent my (Shametrice) struggles within cross-racial collaborations that engage CRT. I also continue to struggle with actually having candid discussion with White women regarding these concerns. As displayed from the excerpt, the importance of challenging each other is underscored, particularly in efforts to avoid embodying the eagle metaphor. As

mentioned by Chris, it is at one another's expense, that such challenge and learning occurs. But the expense is mutual, as cross-racial alliances are incredibly complex and difficult for all parties involved, in some cases. It is important to note that not all collaborations are characterized with such contention. I would, however, argue that the complexities are always there, whether they remain below the surface or not.

For me (Chris), researching whiteness and racism work in tandem with each other, not necessarily in opposition. For example, exploring concepts of Whiteness and White privilege relies on understanding the nature of racism and White supremacy. Whiteness only exists to perpetuate oppression. Similarly, when exploring racism from the perspective of people or students of Color, the point is to expose the insidious ways racism and White supremacy influence their experiences in education; therefore, exploring the experiences of people of Color *is* exploring whiteness. Exploring whiteness for the sake of exploring the experiences of White people without centering White privilege and racism does nothing to dismantle oppression and results in self-indulgent scholarship. I believe there is a fine line between White scholars becoming experts on the experiences of people of Color and White scholars integrating their understanding of racism into their own research and pedagogy to do their part in dismantling racism. As a White scholar committed to eradicating racism and other forms of oppression, I believe it is important for me to find that balance. My role is to work in solidarity with critical race scholars of Color in addressing racism and White supremacy. I do not want to speak for, nor take the place of, scholars of Color in research or in the classroom.

Implications and/or Recommendations

Four implications surface from our discussion and subsequent reflections. The implications may also take the form of recommendations, as our goal of this work is to increase the mutual success of cross-racial collaborations and provide guidelines for engaging CRT in research and pedagogy. We place the implications/recommendations in a visual that represents an attempt to create a framework for increasing the effectiveness of these collaborations and use of CRT in the academy. The first two implications focus on the use of CRT in research while the last two center on cross-racial collaborations in the academy.

Avoidance of Embodying the Eagle Metaphor

Most important in choosing to engage in critical research as an outsider is careful consideration of why one is choosing to do so. This includes going beyond rationalizing the importance of the work. For example, pondering whether such work will define the researchers' subsequent research agenda is important in an effort to avoid diving in to a community with whom they do not identify, and

then flying back out having collected abundant goods and information only to abandon that community to take the resources as the researcher's own. We are not suggesting that all research must be undergirded by CRT, but rather that heavy consideration of how it will remain a significant aspect of work from personal and professional perspectives is essential. One way to remain connected to values of CRT is to engage in cross-racial research or teaching, to continue discussing and problematizing issues of racism in the academy.

As described earlier, an essential component of CRT is praxis – acting based on reflection and research. Avoiding the eagle metaphor also requires scholars to integrate findings from their research into their practice. It is not enough to simply illuminate the ways in which racism occurs in the academy. As a critical race scholar, one must act to address systemic racism in their work through challenging racist practices in tenure and promotion and addressing racism in the classroom.

Carefully Consider Co-researching Cross-racially

White scholars conducting research with communities of Color should carefully consider whether collaboration with someone who is connected to the community will strengthen the research. Cautiousness and intentionality is of utmost importance in these collaborations. Tokenizing a person of Color by assuming they are interested in or connected to a research issue is dangerous and offensive. Another pitfall to avoid (as much as possible) is constantly learning at a person of Color's expense. To some extent, this will always occur, as discussed in our dialogue, but maintaining an awareness of how much one asks for understanding, clarity, and follow-up from a research partner will limit the exhaustion and fatigue that comes with such educating. It is also an opportunity for a White scholar to directly and authentically engage with the community of Color they are researching by asking questions that help clarify possible cultural barriers once mutual trust has been established. It is difficult to know when trust has reached a level that asking such questions can occur, but again, being intentional in one's efforts may go a long way.

Having insider and outsider status (Collins 1986) in research is complicated and also worthy of consideration. For example, I (Shametrice) completed my dissertation research on the success of historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs) in the twenty-first century, and while I share an African American identity with the majority of my research participants, I do not have the experience of attending an HBCU. During data analysis, taking time to bracket (Moustakas 1994) my schooling experiences was important in an effort to not conflate my experiences with that of the research participants, being that the contexts were entirely different. Milner (2007) offers insightful suggestions for how to consider one's own positionality as it relates to their work with different communities in research and scholarship.

Acknowledge and Discuss Whiteness and other Power Dynamics

With the expectation of demonstrating collegiality in the academy, it is not surprising that cross-racial collaborations have long occurred in academia, and are continually increasing (Dace 2012). We acknowledge that we are not suggesting anything new by asserting the importance of understanding power dynamics in research collaborations (Creswell 2007). Missing from extant literature, however, is the call to candidly discuss Whiteness, particularly in cross-racial collaborations. Uneven power dynamics in the name of tenured versus untenured or junior versus senior faculty status is only one place to begin this dialogue. As seen in our discussion, talking about issues of power and privilege from a Whiteness perspective can be emotionally difficult, but also effective in exposing unintentional actions that can have severe consequences for both the research being conducted and the vital partnerships needed to successfully navigate the academy.

Similarly to collaborating cross-racially in research, discussions regarding Whiteness cannot be placed solely on the shoulders of the woman of Color (Torres 2012). While it is her responsibility to educate, she should not have to do this alone. Integral to understanding Whiteness is self-work (Ortiz and Patton 2012), most effectively with others who are on a similar journey. Taking opportunities to work individually on personal issues regarding Whiteness, be it anger, guilt, or sadness, will assist in one's ability to effectively work on these issues in a group. Mutual work, educating, and discussing must occur as much as possible with regard to candid dialogue about Whiteness.

Engage in Cross-racial Dialogues and Subsequent Reflection

Lastly, the critical reflexivity is one of the most important suggestions we have for engaging in these collaborations. As essential as broaching the difficult topic of Whiteness in cross-racial collaborations may be, it is equally important to critically reflect after such dialogue, whether through journaling or venting to a trusted friend. When engaged in heated discussion on complicated topics, it is not always simple to see the tree in the forest. Some of the most essential realizations occur through reflection after having some time and space from the conversation (Patton and Winkle-Wagner 2012). The last step in this recommendation is to then discuss these realizations or new insights and ideas that may be useful in the future. Reuniting through reflective discussion after difficult dialogues about Whiteness and/or CRT in research can be very difficult, but is essential to dismantle contentious issues stemming from collaborations between White women and women of Color.

We acknowledge that engaging these suggested implications may be cumbersome and result in further exhaustion from an already demanding profession. But embracing this full spectrum, from carefully engaging in cross-racial collaborations,

to dialoguing about Whiteness, reflecting on that dialogue, and finally coming together to offer new understandings of what can enhance these partnerships is an in-depth (though not necessarily comprehensive) approach for those committed to this work. It is our hope that in doing so, increased levels of success and happiness in cross-racial collaborations will occur. The implications are represented in the evolving framework below:

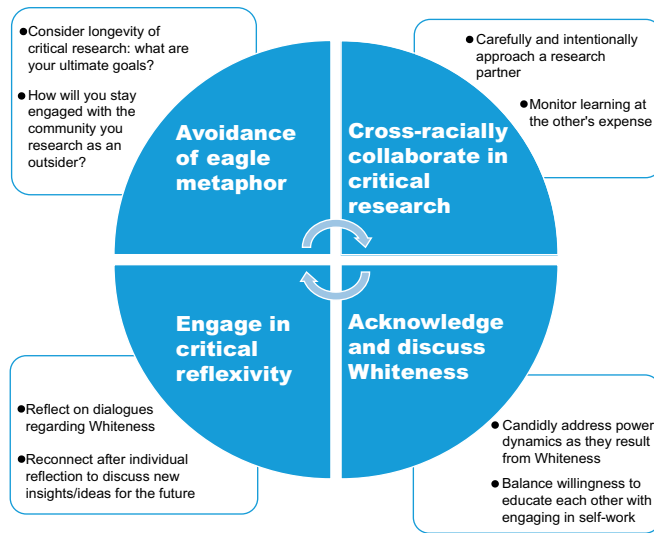


Figure 1: Factors Influencing Effective Cross-racial Collaborations

Boundaries and Areas for Future Research

The dialogue, reflections, and experiences upon which we elaborated in this paper are representative only of our respective experiences, and not that of all women engaged in cross-racial collaborations in the academy. We acknowledge the significance of context, resources, and willingness in the ability for our implications/recommendations to be used effectively. Lastly, our focus on women-only partnerships begs the question: What about males engaged in this work? It is a question worthy of exploration and an area for additional research. Are men engaged in conversations regarding cross-racial collaborations? What are the nuances of those experiences? Provided that we identify as White and African American, there may be a tendency to see this work as reinforcing the black/white binary that can dominate race-based literature (Delgado and Stefancic 2012). Future research on this topic should include a broader range of identities from a racial standpoint. Another area for future research entails the nature of cross-racial, cross-gender alliances in academia and how dynamics of race, gender, Whiteness, and power intersect. As previously stated, the expectation of faculty members to

engage in collaborative scholarship provides further justification for the importance of additional research regarding these topics.

Conclusion

We conclude with a final, brief excerpt from our dialogue that questions the ability of Whites to understand the experiences of people of Color. It is an aspect of the discussion with which we experienced significant struggle in understanding what the other was trying to articulate. Although we never reached a point of mutual understanding, we eventually acknowledged that we most likely would never fully comprehend what the other explained. It represents a significant issue that remains present, whether vividly or subliminally, in cross-racial collaborations today:

CHRIS: I absolutely hear what you're saying and I think that, I think that we're saying the same, the same thing, I would never believe that I could have the same experience as someone whose identities I don't share. Ever. And I don't think that means that I can't empathize and understand what's going on even though it's [not] my experience.

SHAMETRICE: Yeah. I think, I think I would agree with that. I think that you can empathize – you know empathy versus sympathy – whatever that means, but I think you could, you could understand it through a different lens, which is not really understanding. Does that help? Does that make sense?

CHRIS: I mean, I think this might be one of those areas where we have to agree to disagree.

It is interesting to note that the dialogue ended on a common sentiment: 'we have to agree to disagree.' It is a seemingly peaceful idea, but left unpacked, leads to continual hardship and lack of trust in cross-racial alliances in the academy. This entire excerpt focused on semantics, differences in language and misunderstandings of experiences that run so pervasively deep between and among White women and Women of Color. The intricacies of these cracks within alliances are important to continually examine, unpack, and eventually understand, rather than simply 'agreeing to disagree.' By engaging the framework emerging from the use of critical 'reflection on action' methodology, we hope to have provided a context to begin the constant examination, reflection, and dialogue pertinent to successful research collaborations in academia. As qualitative researchers are expected to engage in continual reflexivity regardless of the nature of the specific investigation, this expansion of reflexivity is useful for a variety of research endeavors. Too often are the 'in action' and 'on action' components left out of the critical reflexivity commitment. This work represents an attempt to show how integrating all three can result in research that is more rigorous, nuanced, and inclusive.

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