

BUILD PODER 2016 CONFERENCE: SCIENCE, RACE, RACISM

Critical Race Theory: Core Themes

Following quote taken from: Mcdowell, T., & Jeris, L. (2004). *Talking about race using critical race theory: Recent trends in the journal of marital and family therapy*. *Journal of Marital and Family Therapy*, 30(1), 81-94. pgs. 82-83

"Although there is no set of agreed upon tenets of CRT, numerous scholars have identified consistent themes (Bernal, 2002; Delgado & Stefancic, 2001; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1999; Parker & Lynn, 2002; Soloranzo & Yosso, 2002).

First, CRT acknowledges that race has historically been, and continues to be, a fundamental organizing principle in U.S. society (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1999). A "color-blind" approach to race attempts to deny the material and experiential consequences of racism in favor of an "equal but different" system of meritocracy that assumes a level playing field while turning a blind eye to discrimination. Likewise, viewing race from a liberal, pluralist, "multicultural" perspective fails to examine critically the historic and contemporary significance of race/racism as well as the significance of the processes of immigration, acculturation, and colonization. Critical Race Theory challenges the idea that any one of us has a single, stationary identity or that racial groups are monolithic, acknowledging that our many and often overlapping (or even conflicting) loyalties and identities are socially positioned and relative.

Second, critical race theorists take the position that, far from being the exception, racism is "normal" or "ordinary" in that it is "the usual way society does business, the common, everyday experience of most people of color in this country" (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001, p. 7). Critical Race Theory critiques the perspective that racism is primarily an individual, psychological problem, arguing that this perspective masks the more significant problem of systemic racism. White supremacy is so ingrained in our institutions and cultural practices that it is often unrecognizable, creating an "invisible norm" against which all other races are measured. Critical race theorists challenge White-dominated "truth" and support revisionist history, which accounts for the experiences of those who have been silenced in the original telling. While re-narrating is an important part of CRT, materialists argue that it is idealistic to assume that changing racial attitudes and racial representation alone will change actual physical circumstances.

Third, the ultimate goal of CRT is social justice. Far from politically neutral, CRT supports the argument that theories are never neutral or objective, but reflect the worldview, social position/perspective, and interests of the theorist. Critical Race Theory relies on this social-constructionist stance to understand race and racism as "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" (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001, p. 7). For example, different minority groups have been racialized by the dominant culture at different times for different purposes.

In one era, a group of color may be depicted as happy-go-lucky, simpleminded, and content to serve white folks. A little later, when conditions change, that very same group may appear in

cartoons, movies, and other cultural scripts as menacing, brutish, and out of control, requiring monitoring and repression. (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001, p. 8)

Theories about race once considered "objective" and "neutral" (e.g., eugenics, social Darwinism) have proven to reflect socially constructed ideas of reality that socially and materially benefited Whites over those of color.

The fourth theme in CRT is that people of color have a unique voice in racial matters because of their social position and experiences with oppression. Critical Race Theory emphasizes the importance of racially marginalized members of society telling their stories. Counter stories, or stories that deconstruct existing narratives, challenge "embedded preconceptions that marginalize others or conceal their humanity" (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001, p. 42). Finally, CRT draws from many disciplines including history, philosophy, law, anthropology, sociology, economics, and political science to analyze the complexities of race relations and encourage change."

Source: McDowell, T. , & Jeris, L. (2004). Talking about race using critical race theory: Recent trends in the journal of marital and family therapy. *Journal of Marital and Family Therapy*, 30(1), 81-94. (attached)
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