Black Women and Theoretical Frameworks

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Background and Introduction

While it seems as if women have been gaining presence in higher education institutions over the last 50 years, women's presence at higher levels of academia has not increased in tandem with increases in female undergraduate enrollment (Cheung, 2021). Regardless of the increase in the number of female students and new faculty/administrators, there are still not enough women leaders in academia to motivate the changing demographics. Globally, the growing number of female undergraduate students has created the erroneous perception that gender equality in higher education has been attained. While women's contributions to higher education have increased, the attainment of leadership positions is practically unknown worldwide (Hunter-Gadsden, 2018).

Global leadership means leading people worldwide who come from different backgrounds and cultures (Global Leadership, 2020). Global leaders must mobilize extremely varied and dispersed sets of associates and investors to accomplish tasks. Moreover, the global leader must also navigate five additional obstacles: (a) distance, (b) cultures, (c) time zones, (d) communication via technology, and (e) managing complicated organizational structures, such as a matrix or system organizations. Outlining the history of leadership discourse reveals a map of leadership thought dominated by and centered on mostly White males

As hegemonic leadership practice is deeply ingrained in our institutions, beliefs, and values regarding what makes for good leadership, excluding people whose lives do not match up with the dominant culture, becomes an issue seen in most dynamics. For Black women, mainstream leadership rhetoric and practice exclude them as these ideas are shaped by both White men's and White women's experiences (Parker, 2005). According to a 2018 poll of women in the workplace, 60 Black women were promoted for every 100 men (Hunter-Gadsden, 2018).

According to Gamble and Turner (2015), educated Black women leaders continued to be disproportionately underrepresented in attaining or keeping leadership roles at higher education institutions throughout the world. To restore balance to the area of leadership, it is critical to research, comprehend, and include the experiences, views, and viewpoints of Black women. Alston (2012) explained how excluding various viewpoints silence and marginalize certain groups, while enhancing the privileges of others.

Davis and Maldonado (2015) explained that Black women endure prejudice in the workplace because of the junction of their gender and race, a phenomenon known as the "double bond." Numerous challenges impede the achievement of Black women leaders in higher education institutions. The different racial prejudice about Black Americans dates back to slavery. Black women's unfavorable academic experiences stem from an early age, as they encounter a slew of hurdles when they seek to navigate the demanding world of academics. Collins (2001) stated, "While Black women at academic institutions have diverse experiences, histories, and perspectives, they are unified in their pursuit of acceptance and respect, as well as a voice in a heterogeneous institution" (p. 20). Moses (1989) asserted that administrators must abandon the belief Black men and women have shared experiences or that Black women and White women have shared experiences. Due to institutional discrimination throughout higher education institutions and supporting ideas that promote White hegemonic masculinity, Black women face greater obstacles than White women and in contrast, Black men face more challenges than White men (Guillory, 2001). The aim of this article is to highlight theories through published literature which reveal the needs of Black women leaders around the globe in higher education that support their advancement and the establishment of a forum. This creates

the space for forums that are open to the variety of perspectives that Black women leaders can bring to the table.

Literature Review

Applying theoretical concepts that are adequate for describing and comprehending the encounters of Black women might be difficult to identify (Gamble & Turner 2015; Hannum et al., 2015; Howard-Hamilton, 2003; Savin-Baden & Major, 2012). There is limited information available regarding Black women who work in higher education, particularly those working in administration rather than teaching. According to research accumulated over the last 20 years, different theoretical models have included the voices of women, people of color, and other disadvantaged groups (Hardiman & Jackson, 1997; King & Kitchener, 1994; Torres, 1999; Torres & Phelps, 1997; Wijeyesinghe & Jackson, 2001). Additionally, for more than four decades higher education institutions have relied on well-established theories for student development; Chickering, Perry, Kohlberg, Holland, Super, Loevinger, and Sanford ideas have been accepted and welcomed by institutions (Howard-Hamilton, 1997).

Perceiving why Black women's encounters vary between other women as well as Black men, requires an understanding of Black people's historical advancement and ideology around the world (Hunter-Gadsden 2018; Johnson, 2017; Jones, 2013; Wolfe & Dilworth 2015). The historical development and ideology of Black people in the U.S. is crucial to comprehending why Black women's experiences are diverse from other women and Black men. Black women were perceived in the early 19th century as supporting their husbands and taking care of the home rather than as household providers (Guy-Sheftall & Bell-Scott, 1989; Payton, 1985). Howard-Hamilton (2003) explained that education was not meant to be obtained by those who were regarded as less than human, whether they were slaves or not, especially Black women.

Black people were not bothered with gender issues at the time since they were more interested with improving their race as a whole, both men and women (Smith et al., 2002). Unfortunately, Black men's belief in equality declined after the Emancipation Proclamation, although they were being educated in all academic fields. However, during this time the Black women attending college became elementary or secondary school teachers (Howard-Hamilton, 2003). Black women faced both racism and sexism when White men, Black men, and White women, accepted and reinforced their subservient status.

Lucy Slowe, who was the Howard University dean of students in the 1930s, realized that Black women leaders and Black women students faced numerous barriers. First, they lacked experience in public or communal matters. Second, their gender-restricted upbringing had instilled traditional beliefs about women's responsibilities. Finally, they had accepted a self-defeating outlook on life (Guy-Sheftall & Bell-Scott, 1989). One may maintain that the participation of Black women in higher education has changed little over the past 200 years. As they seek for educational and economic equality in modern society, preconceptions and inequality continue to present formidable challenges. Thus, members of the dominant society's perceptions and objectives have shaped and been interpreted within the framework of Black women's development and socialization. Though it is apparent that Black women's cultural, personal, and social settings are very different from those who have not faced racial and gender discrimination, choosing the right theories to comprehend their needs should be based on these differences. This article presented three theoretical frameworks outlining elements necessary for gaining a better understanding of the developmental and sociocultural challenges experienced by Black women.

Black Women Development Theories

Black women students' and leaders' personal development depends on how much they value the cultural diversity that they bring to higher education institutions. However, using a single lens in understanding diversity cannot help all of the students, especially Black women, to feel as if they are safe to immerse themselves fully within academia (Howard-Hamilton, 1997). Thus, there is a loss of individuality, and gender as well as cultural constructions when Black women are unable to see themselves as being embodied within the institutional framework setting, and all students appear to be handled from a "one size fits all" frame of reference (Howard-Hamilton, 2003). A strong Black feminist ethos based on the conviction that the political structure is personal, and that societal structures and processes may contribute to human dysfunction, is built instead of allowing self-blame.

Black Feminist Thought Theory (BFTT), Critical Race Theory (CRT) and Strong Black Women Collective Theory (SBWCT) are three theoretical frameworks which show promise for comprehending the overlapping identities of Black women. These theories explain how their needs may be successfully met around the world that encourage their growth, as well as the establishment of a platform that is open to the diverse perspectives that Black women leaders bring to the table.

Black Feminist Thought Theory

When the idea of feminism arose, the term had different meanings to individuals. For example, many people identified themselves as fundamental, precarious, conventional, Black, broadminded, and post-structural feminists (Johnson, 2021). Eisenstein (2004) suggested that the feminist philosophy presumed that women were identical, had comparable hardships, and faced patriarchal encounters within institutions. According to hooks (1984), the failure to reach an agreement on the notion of what a feminist is, or comprises of as a foundation of agreement, has

become an imperative issue in the debate about feminism. Additionally, Collins (2004) asserted the belief of Black Feminism was based on the subjugation of Black women, challenging that racism, sexism, and class subjugation were interwoven together.

The most important intellectual backdrop for understanding Black women is the BFTT (Collins, 1991). The key finding of the BFTT is that consciousness is impacted by several factors related to a person's or community's distinctive position in both culture and history. Ethnicity, gender, cultural setting, social status, and personal experiences of Black women have played a significant role when advancing to leadership positions. For example, networks, mentors, and contacts are critical toward success in current professional fields. Based on current literature, Black women are not as likely to secure advisors or mentors who could aid them in advancing within their organizations; however, they are more determined and highly likely to say they desire to do so (Wingfield, 2020). Davis and Brown (2017) stated that the term "Black Feminist" was coined in the 1970s, during the mid-19th century, when Black feminists engaged in feminist discourse. Thus, BFTT's distinctive views are linked to Black Americans and women's social justice movements. Davis and Brown later noted that BFTT broadened the notion to encompass class and sexual orientation. Feminists in the mid-19th century said that Black women face a double bind in terms of politics and social status. Thus, both gender and race overlap in some instances, according to Salzman (2006).

In 1989, Crenshaw (2005) defined *intersectionality* by stating that societal identification classifications led to discrimination and placed Black women in situations to battle multiple positions. Intersectionality, according to Crenshaw, goes beyond gender and race identity; it also includes sexual orientation, class, religion, and further distinctive identities, implying that people of color are subjugated in a variety of ways. Collins (1998) added that women of color encounter

a worldview based on the intersectional lens framework, which stresses the position in relation to gender and race. According to Salzman (2006), two of the most influential civil rights movements at the confluence of gender and race ignored the demands and voices of Black women. Additionally, the predominantly male-dominated civil rights movement effectively and tenaciously fought for Black ethnic minority rights. Conversely, this very movement omitted women's rights and demands. Likewise, in the 1960s and 1970s, the subsequent upsurge of women's groups waged a distinct battle against gender inequality, ignoring the concerns of women of color for equal justice.

Collins (2004) detailed three themes in BFTT which were:

- the shaping of identity by Black women,

- diverse experiences in oppression among Black women versus other women, and

- the manifestation of parallels and discrepancies among Black women in relation to sexual identity, socioeconomic status, and ethnicity.

Thus, Collins addressed these factors as the forefront of the relegation of Black women and described BFTT as the interconnection of the various oppressions Black women face (Johnson, 2021).

Due to their distinguished inferior standing in society, Black women's competence fluctuates, as it does with any minority demographic. The sharing of Black women leaders' experiences resulted in an increase of knowledge and awareness throughout society. Developing strategies and best practices that can help and pave the way for Black women to progress and retain leadership roles in an organization requires gathering information and improving awareness.

Critical Race Theory

CRT arose in the 1970s, marking a turning point in the legal antiquity of racial politics and broadening the discussion about racism and race in the United States (Johnson, 2021). As such, CRT, according to Delgado and Stefancic (2001), is a theoretical structure developed in the 1970s by two experts who researched the legal policies affecting socially underprivileged groups. According to Witherspoon and Mitchell (2009), legal academics established this theory to assist explain how powerful individuals build policies and regulations that perpetuate both ethnic and racial inequalities even though institutions were seen as race neutral.

Decuir and Dixson (2004) noted that CRT was widely acknowledged as the first methodical framework for examining educational outcomes disparities. Ladson-Billings and Tate (2005) mentioned the framework was used by several scholars to examine and assess the educational system's research and practices in more detail and precision. According to Hiraldo (2010), CRT is used to study an organization's numerous forms of socioeconomic injustice. Both DeCuir and Dixson (2004) and Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) discussed how CRT explored the role of racism and ethnicity in sustaining social inequity among privileged and oppressed ethnic groups. Additionally, Jean-Marie et al. (2009) discovered CRT acknowledges the intersections of race, which researchers referred to as the *double peril* for Black women, who have historically been associated with poor neighborhoods due to their race and gender. Five straightforward tenets of CRT were laid out by DeCuir and Dixson (2004), Gasman et al. (2015), Hiraldo (2010), Ladson-Billing (1998) and McCoy (2006): (a) counter stories, (b) the longevity of racism, (c) Whiteness as property, (d) interest conversion, and (e) criticism of freethinking (Johnson, 2021).

Counter stories, allows disadvantaged groups, specifically individuals of color, to speak for themselves through storytelling by expressing their own narratives about marginalized experiences. Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) discussed CRT as a coping strategy for disadvantaged groups through its descriptive counter stories and assists them in viewing and identifying their truth. Delgado and Stefancic, (2001) and Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995), mentioned that storytelling is the most effective and prevalent strategy. Permanence of racism asserts that racism now and historically has controlled the financial and social-political domains of American society. Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) found that race was not frequently hypothesized, endorsed, and validated for empirical inquiry and investigation. DeCuir and Dixson (2004) mentioned that the permanency of racism is demonstrated by the standardization and the continuance of unfairness and inequity in everyday life. Furthermore, Whiteness as property, discuss the power systems that primarily benefit White people at the expense of non-Whites, known as White privilege. DeCuir and Dixson (2004), Hiraldo (2010), and Harris (1993) discussed the portraying of Whiteness as a property shown through rulings, regulations, and informal opportunities to interact, centered on White culture's basic facts and practices. Convergence of interest establishes White people as the main receivers of American civil rights laws. Hiraldo (2010), and DeCuir and Dixson (2004) discussed the accomplishments, liberations, and advantages won by Blacks and people of color throughout the civil rights struggle that was previously common in White society. Delgado and Stefancic (2001) noted that White individuals were incapable of empathizing with or comprehending what it meant to be non-White, and consequently committed cognitive and experiential checkout. The final principle of CRT is liberalism criticism, which is based on the notions of color impairment and historical reassessment (DeCuir & Dixson, 2004). Being colorblind is a derogatory term that strips an

individual of a crucial aspect of their societal identity (Johnson, 2021). Color blindness oppresses

people of color, making White ideology obliterate their ability to be recognized as individuals.

The Strong Black Women Collective Theory

The SBWCT is based on the appropriation of the strong Black woman (SBW) image

(Davis, 2015). The image of the SBW is a suffocating one that forces Black women to uphold an

appearance of strength. In the United States, depictions of Black women, such as the angry Black

woman and the mammy, are ubiquitous. The strong Black woman (SBW), on the other hand, is

possibly the most multifaceted (Collins, 2000). The representation of strength imposes an

unachievable norm of immunity and independence on Black women in their daily lives. The

SBWCT is rooted in the concept of regulating strength, which relates to how successfully Black

women communicate and embody the SBW in themselves and others. Second, the theory

promotes the notion that both vocal and nonverbal communication amongst Black women is a

precarious source of cohesiveness (Davis & Afifi, 2019).

According to Davis's (2015) SBWCT theory, Black women re-appropriate and manage

each other's strength to foster group cohesion and jointly combat external hostility. Through

exhibiting these behaviors, Black women allocate a safe space alongside promoting unity in the

collective and challenge domineering forces (Davis & Afifi, 2019). Strength, self-sufficiency,

and perseverance are celebrated in the SBW theory, which has been a long-standing image in

American society (Collins, 2000). Black women re-appropriate the image, according to the

theory, since the rewards of strength exceed the drawbacks. Recognition of Black women's SBW

through their voice reveals the political influence and personal drawbacks of conveying power.

The SBW persona combines strength, independence, resilience, caretaking, and

invulnerability, which influences behavior and self-perception. The SBWC framework examines

how Black women manage their own and one another's strength (Davis & Afifi, 2019).

Reclaiming the strong image promotes both individual and community resistance to broader

repressive forces, as well as affirmation and acknowledgement of a distinct Black woman. The

SBWCT framework promotes the premise that Black women build strength via community

communication techniques that imbue their collective voices with power and tenacity (Davis &

Afifi, 2019). Strength control, on the other hand, is problematic because it prevents Black

women from openly communicating their fragility and emotionality (Romero, 2000).

The SBWC framework makes use of viewpoint techniques to demonstrate ways Black

women's vantage points (Black and woman) impact their distinctive communication systems and

contribute to the formation of their recognizable enclave. The theory proposes four propositions.

1. Black women express strength utilizing specific communication practices (i.e., code-switching, forceful and straightforward spoken signals, and culturally responsive codes).

2. The conglomeration of Black women who convey strength compose the SBWC.

3. Adherents of the SBWC engage in the shared collective by encouraging one another's qualities of power.

4. Communication patterns of power permits the assemblage of Black women to communicate strength (Davis & Afifi, 2019).

It is crucial to investigate the effects on Black women who jointly appropriate the strong

appearance as a form of oppression defiance and celebration of their Black femininity. Black

women who associate themselves as a group of comparable raced-gendered individuals, can

benefit from adhering to the intonation of strength through precise communication and social

practices as their capability to fight subjugated structures increase with the support of Black female counterparts.

Discussion

Many concepts are highly generic and do not incorporate numerous identities and roles, making it difficult to apply suitable theoretical frameworks for Black women. It might be difficult to locate and use theoretical frameworks that are adequate for describing and comprehending the experiences of Black women. This article sought to help identify acceptable frameworks when researching Black women. As stated by Howard-Hamilton (2003), CRT and BFTT are acceptable models utilized to meet the demands of Black women in higher education institutions. Additionally, the SBCWT emphasizes the need to use one's voice to foster unity among a group of Black women to combat external adversities collectively is another suitable theoretical framework for a Black woman. These theories explain the needs of Black women around the world that encourage their growth, as well as the establishment of a platform that is open to the diverse perspectives that Black women leaders bring to the table. Moses (1989) asserted, racism and sexism are seldom discussed in higher education institutions, and even less from the perspective of a Black woman. Future research should focus on these experiences in specific to higher education institution.

Conclusion

There is little information regarding the beneficial acts Black women, in educational leadership and accountability roles. The advancement and socialization of Black women have been shaped and recognized within the framework of perceptions and agendas of members of the dominant society. Choosing applicable theoretical frameworks to grasp the needs of Black

women should be centered on their personal, social, and cultural perspectives, which differs considerably from other individuals who have not undergone gender and racial subjugation.

The resilience of Black women in higher education can be introduced to readers at universities and community colleges through the exploration of theoretical frameworks. Exploring these frameworks will help fill gaps and add to the knowledge base on how successful Black women achieved and maintained leadership positions in institutions of higher education.

The knowledge of understanding and identifying the needs of Black women through theoretical frameworks can help aspiring Black women leaders on their path to attain leadership positions in higher education institutions. Carroll (1982) mentioned that Black women face greater perils and challenges now than previous times because they are in places where it was historically male dominated. The number of Black women is growing in colleges as they continue to be more visible. According to Mirza (2006), Black women are very visible when their bodies assist higher education institutions in achieving their broader moral and ethical objectives and in appealing to a larger worldwide market. However, Mirza also explained that Black women become invisible in the most important places and are not often recognized or accepted in everyday practice, yet these strong Black women bring with them, the transformative change offered to higher education institutions.

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