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Using Critical Race Theory to Interrogate Community Spaces at a PWI in the U.S.

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Abstract: International students of African descent are among the adult learners attending predominantly white institutions (PWI) in the U.S. Location and types of community spaces for students do not always address the unique lives and experiences of these students. Conducting qualitative interviews with international students of African descent attending a PWI and analyzing the data through a Critical Race Theory (CRT) lens allows for an examination of community spaces through the analytic frames of the: black/white binary, intersectionality and essentialism. These are useful tools to interrogate the systems of oppression that international students of African descent experience in the U.S., and the ways community spaces support or oppress based on the racialized identities of students.

Keywords: Critical Race Theory, qualitative research, African international students, adult education

African Diaspora and International Students of African Descent

The African diaspora is expansive and includes a wide spectrum of cultural and regional experiences. Immigrants traveling to the U.S. from the African diaspora represent a diverse group of people from various African regions. The term diaspora pertains to global ideas of community and identity (Hall, 1990). Alfred (2015) highlights the importance of acknowledging diversity within diaspora communities and varying aspects include but are not limited to the following: ethnicity, gender, religious affiliation, and class.

Forced and unforced immigration to the US from the African diaspora is an active and sometimes volatile part of our collective history (Okpalaoka & Dillard, 2012). When looking at the recent un-force immigration of African citizens in the United States the numbers are increasing. "From 1980-2009, the African-born population in the United States grew from under 200,000 to almost 1.5 million" (African Immigrants in the United States, 2011). Among those migrating to the U.S. are students seeking higher education. In 2015, international student migration numbers from the following African nations were: Zimbabwe; 1286, Ghana; 3142; Zambia; 507, Nigeria; 9786 (Global Flow of Tertiary-Level Students, n.d.). Interviews were conducted with six students from the listed nations and was analyzed using a CRT framework. CRT is uniquely positioned to cross-examine the racialized treatment and experiences of international students of African descent at a PWI.

Critical Race Theory

CRT as a theoretical framework recognizes that racism is endemic to American life. Additionally, people of color possess experiential knowledge of their communities. CRT allows for examination of systemized racial subjugation of non-white individuals, and is relevant in the educational context and exposes the ways educational institutions perpetuate white supremacy (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). Key tenets of CRT are:

1. Racism is ordinary - Structural determinism; empathic fallacy and a critique of Liberalism; Color Blindness (Bell, 1980; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995)

2. Interest Convergence and Material Determinism - Whiteness as Property, Black/White Binary, Legal Reform, and Race Remedies Law (Delgado, 1998)
3. Social Construction Thesis - Differential Racialization, Intersectionality, Essentialism/ Anti essentialism (Crenshaw, 1991; Grillo, 2013)
4. Voice of Color Thesis - Revisionist history and experiential knowledge (Bell, 1980)

Developed out of Critical Legal Studies, CRT tenets serve as an analytic frame to examine interview data from international students of African descent in higher education institutions. The current study uses the Black/White binary, Intersectionality and Essentialism/Anti-essentialism to analyze interview data.

CRT Tenets	Implications
Black/White Binary	International students of African descent are grouped by other students into stereotypical caricatures of what it means to be African.
Intersectionality	When desired by institution or community, students are identified as black and nationality is "erased" or nationality is highlighted and blackness is diminished.
Essentialism/Anti-essentialism.	International students of African descents services and communities are grouped together as a monolith by educational institutions.

Purpose

The purpose of this roundtable is to explore the location and types of communities available for international students of African descent while attending a PWI through a CRT lens. Additionally, round table participants discuss how Critical Race Theory addresses experiences of community, on and off campus, of international students of African descent by interrogating the interlocking systems of oppression that students experience and the ways their communities provide support or oppress aspects of their identity.

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