A Black Woman's Search for the Transdisciplinary Applied Social Justice Model: Encounters with Critical Race Feminism, Black Feminism, and Africana Studies

by

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Abstract

This work examines my journey, as a descendant of the Creoles of Freetown, Sierra Leone, on my father's side, and former enslaved Africans of rural Texas on my mother's side, to construct and develop the Transdisciplinary Applied Social Justice (TASJ©) model. The TASJ model is an Afrocentric, praxis-oriented, theoretical, and methodological approach for addressing the marginalization, exclusion, and disenfranchisement of people of color, and women of color, in particular. This article documents the development of the TASJ model using personal narrative and demonstrates its connections to Black Feminism and Critical Race Feminism. In addition, the model's contribution to Africana Studies is examined. Key contributions include its transdisciplinary focus; its recognition of the importance of intertwined identities, including race and gender; and its commitment to social justice activism and social movements.

Keywords: Black Feminism; Critical Race Feminism; Africana Studies; Transdisciplinary Applied Social Justice

Introduction

As a Black woman scholar-activist, I have been looking for justice for a long time. My search has included the academic world of departments and disciplines; the legal world of courtrooms and law classrooms; and my everyday world as a wife, mother, and daughter. My search led me to believe in the critical need for a transdisciplinary approach -- an approach that could connect multiple disciplines and areas of study. As part of my journey, I developed the Transdisciplinary Applied Social Justice model (Pratt-Clarke, 2010). The purpose of the model is to be able to approach complex social problems with a strategy that will increase the likelihood of successful social justice activism. This article explores the development of the model, using personal narrative, to demonstrate its connections to Black Feminism and Critical Race Feminism, and its contributions to Africana Studies. The model contributes to Africana Studies is highlighted through its transdisciplinary focus; its recognition of the importance of intertwined identities, including race and gender; and its commitment to social justice activism and social movements.

The Power of Narrative and Voice

Storytelling, narrative, voice, autoethnography, and phenomenology are critical theoretical and methodological concepts in Critical Race Feminism (CRF) and Black Feminist traditions: "the use of nontraditional writing genres has been a primary strategy for critical race theorists in general and black feminist critical race theorists in particular" (Alexander-Floyd, 2010, 812). They create a theoretical and methodological space for traditionally silenced and marginalized groups to critique social institutions that perpetuate inequality. In particular, storytelling and personal narrative allow women of color to discuss their experiences within a racist and patriarchal society. Personal stories create the opportunity to "re-theorize Eurocentric and patriarchal frameworks" with a focus on the liberation of people of color from the historical legacy of colonization and the hegemony of White society (Rodriguez, 2006, 1071). Housee (2010, 423) also acknowledges the power of voice in feminist theory and practice, recognizing from Friere its role in "'*conscientisation*' – consciousness-raising as an imperative for women's liberation from patriarchal domination and oppression." Thus, non-traditional genres facilitate the connected objectives of naming one's reality, engaging in self-determination, and obtaining empowerment. Collins (2009, 40) challenges Black women intellectuals to "aggressively push the theme of self-definition because speaking for oneself and crafting one's own agenda is essential to empowerment." Voice, then, has the potential to heal, to create new life, and to bring justice.

Critical race scholars recognize the critical importance of personal narrative in the search for justice (Duncan, 2005). Critical race theory (CRT) and Critical Race Feminism (CRF) focus on counternarratives and counter stories; the voices of the "other" and the silenced; and the voice that can counter hegemony, oppression, racism, and sexism. CRF and CRT as theoretical and methodological tools honor the voices of those who have been marginalized and challenge traditional methods of research (Housee, 2010). Racial narratives are "an elemental facet of the scholarly work to explain and challenge racism. …Ultimately, to write against racism requires the collaboration of theories and practices that can support the radical scholarship of challenging powerful systems of race" (Vaught, 2008, 586).

Autoethnography or racial autobiography in feminist and womanist thought has the power to facilitate an interrogation of racism, power, and privilege. Autoethnography is "research in which the use of self is central to the process of research" (Taylor, Mackin, and Oldenburg, 2007, 345). Narratives of the self, such as "poems, fictional novels, autoethnographies, autobiographies, and memoirs" can represent a transformation in ethnographic writing (Rodriguez, 2006, 1069) and serve as a site of resistance. Similarly, phenomenology, which is "the study of human experience from the perspective of those being studied," can play a related role in validating the voices and experiences of African American women (Wilson and Washington, 2007, 63). Since Black feminists and critical race feminists are usually a part of the communities they study, Wilson and Washington (2007) encourage "retooling" phenomenology to integrate Afrocentric and womanist perspectives and approaches including dialogue, storytelling, and participatory witnessing to create space for voices that have been silenced.

As a result, women of color scholars are increasingly sharing their experiences as part of their scholarly work. Few (2007, 470) integrates her own journey as a scholar in her work on Black consciousness in family studies. Rodriguez (2006) also shares her own experience and struggle with racism as a woman of color, noting that the very telling of the story is an act of resistance, healing, and empowerment. Rodriguez (2006, 1087) emphasizes the responsibility of women of color to "interrogate our silences" and engage in critical self-analysis and self-transformation by remembering, speaking, voicing, and acting. One of the key challenges of "speaking up" involves the unwritten rules that control what can be said; what remains unsaid; and how we can say what we want to say. In addressing this challenge, Collins (2009: x) notes that she found it "'freeing' to be able to use `I' `we' and `our'; to combine the objective with the subjective." I, too, find it liberating.

Rodriguez (2006, 1081) reminds me that women who write have power and that writing about our experiences with race and gender as women of color is a radical and political act. As women of color activists, our stories and journeys inform our activism; they legitimate our perspectives and approaches; and they validate our theories and methods. It is part of our on-going struggle as scholar-activists to break the silence and marginalization that has traditionally encompassed our academic and personal worlds. In breaking my silence, I will integrate dualities by combining the objective with the subjective; the professional with the personal; and the autobiographical with the academic. Eliminating dualities is part of my search for justice through Black Feminism, Critical Race Feminism, and Africana Studies. My story reflects this journey.

The Search for Justice

I am a scholar-activist. I am a sociologist; I am a lawyer; I am a critical race feminist; I am an African-American; I am the daughter of an African man and a descendant of enslaved Africans; I am the wife of a Bahamian man; and I am a mother of a son and a daughter. These identities are fundamental to how I think, act, and live. My life has been full of experiences of injustice; of racism; and of sexism. These experiences have informed my quest for justice. For most of my life, I have been afraid to tell my story, to unmask myself, and to write about racism and sexism. Experiences of racism and sexism are embarrassing and humiliating. Because of the shame associated with these experiences, silence is a natural response. Fighting against the silence is a means of survival and also a radical act of courage. I have only recently felt courageous enough to speak and write about myself (Pratt-Clarke, 2010). The writing, though painful, has also been emotionally and spiritually liberating. It has enabled me to release the tightness in my chest where all my words, feelings, and emotions have been stashed and stored away for years.

As I have been writing, I have realized that my search for justice started unconsciously as a young child. My father had a profound influence on my life. He died at the age of 60 in 1996. I am firmly and unwaveringly convinced that my father's early and untimely death was a direct result of the racism he experienced that stole his academic and intellectual career, and ultimately his zest and spirit for life. The twenty years or so years before his death were my adolescent and young adult years. They were years of discipline, isolation, and loneliness. As a child, I often wondered what was going on. Why was my father so mean and mad? What had the world done to him? And my mother, why was she such a staunch supporter of his? What was their story? How were their stories connected? And how did their stories impact my story?

The foundation of my life is rooted in my ancestors' experiences of enslavement and freedom as Africans and African-Americans. My father was born and raised in Freetown, Sierra Leone, in West Africa. He studied in Africa, England, and America. After graduating from Hampton Institute in Virginia, he received his Ph.D. from Carnegie Mellon University and was the first citizen of Sierra Leone to obtain a Ph.D. in nuclear physics in the 1960s. In the early 1970s, he and my mother moved to Normal, Illinois, to begin their careers as Assistant Professors at Illinois State University. They were the only faculty of color in their departments. Given my father's international stature in the field through his international publications, he was invited to teach for one year at a university in Rio De Janiero, Brazil. My mother taught there as well. Though the university wanted to make their appointments permanent, my father felt that America offered more opportunities for his children. Unfortunately, upon his return, his Illinois State University professor appointment was not renewed. After 1973, my father never taught physics again. This, was, I learned much later, a defining moment in my father's life, in my mother's life, and in my life. My mother, upon her return, fought and barely won a difficult battle to retain her faculty appointment. Her success was a constant and painful reminder to my father of his lost and stolen academic career.

My mother was a descendant of enslaved Africans who can be traced to a matriarch named Charlotte born in 1806. My mother was raised in segregated Texas during the Great Depression and she picked cotton as a child of sharecroppers. Education at Jarvis Christian College was her pathway out of poverty. She was ordained as a minister after receiving her M.A. degree in Religion from Butler University, but due to the barriers for women in religion, chose an alternative path. She obtained a doctorate in Social Work from the University of Pittsburgh. She retired as a social work professor from Illinois State University after years of fighting against racism and sexism – often as the only woman of color in her department.

My mother's income was the sole source for our family upon our return from Brazil until my father made a critically important and self-defining decision. He became a self-employed businessman and my brother, mother, and I became his "employees" in the family business of apartment ownership and management. Serving as a businessman and pro se attorney, my father fought racism and injustice daily. He battled the tenants in court for non-payment of rent; he battled the bank that provided the mortgage alleging the incorrect calculation of interest; and he fought against city property ordinances that he considered unfair. He taught himself the law; prepared trial and appellate briefs; and represented himself in court. Though my father created another life for himself, he was not a contented man. For much of his life, he was bitter, angry, and resentful.

My father's decision to become self-employed was part of a larger, deliberate, and calculated vision for his life and for his family. It was a vision of independence and freedom from White racism and the "White system." My parent's goal (but largely my father's goal) was to raise my brother and me to also be independent from the "White racist system." His plan for our independence was grounded in cultivating and developing his children's gifts and talents in piano, violin, and tennis. The goal was for us to have "independent" and self-sustaining careers. Private classical music lessons and tennis lessons with him as our coach ingrained in us the value of discipline and hard work. Our daily routine was waking up at 4:30 in the morning and playing tennis before school; practicing our instruments daily for two hours after school; and doing homework to get the "A." We cleaned and painted apartments, mowed yards, and shoveled snow. My brother and I did not go to parties; socialize with friends outside of school; watch movies; or attend school dances.

I graduated from high school at 16 and my parents (mostly my father, though) and I traveled for two years to tennis tournaments all over the United States chasing "freedom" and "independence." I sensed racism when my parents were afraid to stop in certain areas and cities. I felt racism as a young tennis player in Birmingham, Alabama, when I was not allowed access to the practice courts at a Whites-only private country club. The lesson I learned from my childhood and my tennis career was that it was tough being Black and that every day was and would be a battle for self-validation, self-legitimacy, self-affirmation, and self-empowerment. I was taught that my success was completely and totally dependent on my own ability to address, fight, and overcome a racist society that did not want me to succeed.

My parents instilled in me an acute consciousness of my Black identity. I was "forced" to watch the premier of *Roots* as a young child and was permanently traumatized by the brutality of slavery. I "had" to watch PBS specials on race and civil rights. I remember feeling sickened by violence of water hoses, dogs, beatings, mobs, and lynchings; horrified by the magnitude of the atrocities; and shocked at the level of White hate and anger. I was frequently "lectured" about racism and told that I needed to be twice as good as Whites. Any time my parents experienced racism – those small and big every day acts of injustice and disrespect – I heard about it. Although I'm sure my parents felt that sharing these stories would motivate and encourage me, they were, in actuality, demoralizing and disempowering.

I was an angry and confused young woman when I went to college. I was angry with the rigor and discipline in the household and the pain and isolation of childhood; I was angry at the "White system" (whatever that was) that was responsible for my disciplined and isolated life; and I was angry at my parents for their anger. I have carried anger with me in my chest as a fiery flame, easily stoked and inflamed by life experiences. My anger was stoked as an undergraduate at Iowa as I minored in African-American Studies and learned about ancient African civilizations, the slave trade, Jim Crow, Black Codes, Reconstruction, and the Civil Rights Movement. I learned about our African-American heroes: Martin Luther King, Jr., Malcolm X, Elijah Muhammad, Louis Farrakhan, W.E.B. Du Bois, Marcus Garvey, and Booker T. Washington. I actually fell in love with James Baldwin. I understood what he was talking about and it resonated with me.

My anger was stoked again, after a visit to Freetown, Sierra Leone, and Bunce Island where Africans were held before the trans-Atlantic journey. My anger was further inflamed after I visited Egypt and personally confirmed that the pyramids did, in fact, exist. In my young mind, I could not believe that they existed; and that there was such an advanced civilization that was able to create in the past what could not be re-created in the present. I remember the awe and ancestral power that I felt from seeing the Great Pyramid, the Sphinx, the Temple of Queen Hatshepsut, the Nile River, the Valley of the Kings, and other sites in Cairo, Luxor, and Aswan. I was angry that I was never taught about myself and my history as an African woman, and the greatness of my civilization. The angry was further stoked by a visit to Exuma, Bahamas with my husband. In Nassau and Exuma, I saw the legacy of slavery in the remnants of plantations and I realized the extent of the slave trade that I had never been taught.

My anger has fueled my search for racial justice. I was not aware or conscious of my gender identity and role as a Black woman until I experienced sexual abuse and violence as a college student. It was then that I started to understand and see myself as a Black woman. It has been a struggle for me to accept and to validate my own intertwined race and gender identity. This struggle has informed my unwavering belief in the importance and legitimacy of the intersectionality of race and gender. As I developed a gender consciousness, I realized that Black women have been and often remain invisible in many historical accounts. For example, we were part of Ancient Kemet as goddesses, yet we were rarely mentioned: "there are numerous accounts of the capabilities of the male monarchs and their contributions to the society of ancient Kemet. Yet there were many female monarchs whose achievements throughout the 4,000-year span of the dynastic period should be recognized" (Monges, 1993).

Our invisibility and silence was not limited to ancient Kemetic historical accounts. We were part of abolition and it was not just Sojourner Truth and Harriet Tubman. We were part of the Civil Rights movement and it was not just Rosa Parks. We were part of the women's movement, the feminist movement, and the Black Power movement. But, our story is not included in the "story" that is told and in the "history" that is taught. It has been difficult to find texts about Black women, like Anna Cooper, Mary Church Terrell, Sadie Tanner Mossell Alexander, and others. It was challenging to find academic writing by and about African-American women and Black feminism, like those by bell hooks, Patricia Hill Collins, Barbara Smith, and Deborah King. It is as if there is an unwritten rule that operates to hide and silence the existence and contributions of African-American women leaders.

It was my anger at the existence of "hidden narratives" that motivated my academic, legal, and doctoral journey at Vanderbilt University with the expectation that I would find these women and our stories. I encountered, however, a discouraging reality. It was the reality of law school that did not offer classes on CRT or CRF. It was the reality of a doctoral program in sociology that did not require any classes on the role of race, class, and gender in America. It was the reality of our invisibility, marginalization, and exclusion in academic disciplines, in schools of thoughts, and in areas of study. It was the reality that education institutions were not the space in which the buried stories, ideas, journeys, and knowledge of African and African-American women could be unearthed.

This reality, combined with my barely suppressed fire of anger, fueled my own personal quest. I felt a responsibility to write about African-American women and girls. I wanted to increase our visibility in academic writing. I was interested in combining law, sociology, political science, critical race studies, Black feminism, critical race feminism, race, class and gender studies, education policy studies, and history to understand the experiences of African-American women and girls. I was still looking for justice. I needed a narrative that showed that Black women (that I) belonged and that we were (I was) visible, powerful, and relevant.

My dissertation was the first opportunity to think critically and to write about race and gender and to critique not only White racism, White feminism, but also Black male sexism, and Black nationalism (Pratt-Clarke, 1999). It was an opportunity for me to explore issues of race, class, gender, and nationalism in the Detroit African-American community through a comprehensive and complex lens. Though discourse analysis, I examined how the Detroit Public School system designed three all-male schools for African-American boys; how responsibility for the "endangered" condition of these boys was attributed to females as teachers, students, and mothers; how nationalism was used to justify the exclusion of educational opportunities for African-American girls; and how race, gender, and class were socially constructed, resulting in the marginalization and "demonization" of African-American girls and women and the corresponding "sanctification" of African-American boys and men. I examined the interconnections and relationship between interlocking social institutions of the legal system and the education system and the experiences of individuals based on their socially constructed race, class, and gender identities. I looked at the collective action frames of social justice activism. I also explored sociological power domains (Pratt-Clarke, 2010).

I documented what I found; and what I found in Detroit was that the rallying cry at public marches in support of the all-male academies of "Keep your girls at home" reflected the literal and symbolic perspective about the role and place of African-American girls and women in society. While I saw the powerlessness of "White" feminism to effectively address the issues of Black girls, I was deeply saddened by the silence and absence of Black feminist activism on behalf of Black girls. Black feminists were largely silent in the Male Academy debate. In my search for justice, I didn't want African-American girls to have to "stay at home" – hidden, invisible, marginalized, uneducated, and silenced. I wanted to shine light on African-American women and girls and I wanted to honor Shawn and Crystal Garrett for their courage in coming forward to challenge the all-male Academies. My dissertation title reflected that effort: "Where are the Black Girls?: The Marginalization of Black Girls in the Single-Sex School Debate in Detroit" (Pratt-Clarke, 1997).

Years after the dissertation defense, I have continued to ask the question: "Where are the Black girls?" This question has informed my search for justice. My purpose and journey has been to talk about, document, understand, validate, legitimate, and acknowledge us as Black women. My search for justice demands that I attack racism and sexism. I have seen and experienced racism and sexism as a Black woman corporate lawyer at a law firm; as the only CRT and CRF law professor at the University of Illinois; and as a senior administrator in higher education. I know that racism and sexism are real. It affects us at our core and devastates many of us. My father never spoke about his experience at Illinois State University. I only learned about it, in detail, from my mother after my father's death. I believe that our silence about our experiences of racism and sexism actually kills many of us. I believe our silences exist, in part, because of shame that accompanies our experience of racism and sexism; but also because we have not discovered the spaces, nor been given the tools, to talk about our experiences.

For many of us, I believe our experiences create the anger that simmers, boils, and explodes, just as a dream deferred does. In my search for justice and for the cooling waters to mitigate the fire of anger, I needed to find a way to think about, talk about, and fight racism, sexism, and discrimination in a way that was academic, theoretical, methodological, and practical. I needed a tool and a vocabulary. To address the need, I developed is the Transdisciplinary Applied Social Justice (TASJ) model. The TASJ model is a tool for engaging in social justice activism (Pratt-Clarke, 2010). TASJ is "the application of concepts, theories, and methodologies from multiple academic disciplines to social problems with the goal of addressing injustice in society and improving the experiences of marginalized individuals and groups" (Pratt-Clarke, 2010, 27).

A key component of the TASJ model is its transdisciplinary focus. The model combines sociology, history, political science, and literary analysis. It also incorporates Black Feminism and Critical Race Feminism. The model includes a theoretical foundation, a qualitative methodology, and an emphasis on praxis. The theoretical foundation is rooted in Collins' (2009) Black feminist power domains. The methodological component is grounded in discourse analysis. Concepts from social movement theory and collective action frames inform the model's component on praxis. The goal of the model is to "understand the manner in which the life experiences of individuals and groups are entangled and influenced by the operation of systems of power with the objective of designing effective intervention strategies" (Pratt-Clarke, 2010, 38-39). The model is discussed in greater detail below through a discussion of its intersections with Black Feminism and Critical Race Feminism.

Encountering Black Feminist Thought and Critical Race Feminism

Collins' (2009, 35) *Black Feminist Thought* is a core foundation for the TASJ model: "As a critical social theory, Black feminist thought aims to empower African-American women within the context of social injustice sustained by intersecting oppressions." It also examines "sets of institutional practices" affecting Black women. Its three key themes include the importance of Black women's stories and experiences; a recognition of the intersection of experiences; and an acknowledgement of the role of class, religion, age, and sexual orientation in the experiences of Black women (Howard-Hamilton, 2003). Collins (2009) describes six distinguishing features of Black feminist thought: 1) the commonality among Black women's experiences; 2) the diverse responses to common challenges; 3) the connection between theory and practice; 4) the role of Black women intellectuals; 5) the importance of Black feminism thought and Black feminist practice as a dynamic and changing, and not static; and 6) the relationship between Black feminist thought and other projects for social justice and a recurring humanist vision. These concepts come together in Collins' discussion of the politics of empowerment.

Collins (2009, 291) notes that empowerment "requires transforming unjust social institutions that African-Americans encounter from one generation to the next." In Collins' (2009, 292) approach to addressing injustice, she encourages seeing power "not as a something that groups possess, but as an intangible entity that circulates within a particular matrix of domination and to which individuals stand in varying relationships." Collins then discusses the four power domains: hegemonic, structural, disciplinary, and interpersonal. The hegemonic domain involves systems of thought, ideology, and culture, such as patriarchy, colonialism, sexism, racism, and homophobia which provide the justification and legitimation for oppression. These ways of thinking are codified and operationalized through the disciplinary domain which manages power relations through procedures, policies, and laws. The disciplinary domain involves the disciplining and controlling operation of bureaucracies through surveillance and regulation. This operationalization occurs within the structural domain of large-scale interconnected social institutions, such as the legal system, the education system, the media, and the financial system. In addition to these large scale institutions, there are small-scale manifestations: schools, banks, courts, and the local governments. This domain provides the organizational structure and site where oppression is perpetuated. The interpersonal domain represents the micro-level of day-to-day interactions and practices in which ideologies from the hegemonic domain are implemented through individual interactions.

As part of the theoretical foundation for the TASJ model, these power domains provide a lens through which social problems can be analyzed. The model encourages us to recognize the role of intersecting identities of race, class, and gender on the experiences of marginalized individuals. Therefore, we must examine which interlocking macro-level social structures and systems and micro-level institutions are affected. We must seek to assess the role of ideology and challenge the dominant hegemony of patriarchy, racism, and sexism. We must interrogate the manner in which ideology is legitimized through policies, procedures, and laws. And finally, we must assess the individuals involved, their roles, and their level of influence based on their intersecting identities. Social problem, then, can be analyzed, through these domains. The usefulness of this analysis is demonstrated by the model's connection to Critical Race Feminism (CRF).

Critical Race Feminism further refines Black Feminism's application in the TASJ model by bringing the role of justice into the forefront. It requires a critical examination of the role of the law in perpetuating race and gender injustice. CRF plays a critical role in the theory, method, and praxis of TASJ. There are several core themes in CRF: the legal manifestation of White supremacy and the perpetuation of the subordinate status of people of color; the social construction of race; an acknowledgement of the reality that racism is endemic in American society; the use of narrative and storytelling, both fictional and autobiographical, as methodology; a recognition of a multidisciplinary approach to scholarship; the importance of praxis; a recognition of the role of feminism and Black feminism; and the acceptance of antiessentialism, intersectionality, and multiplicative identity (Wing, 2003; Evans-Winters and Esposito, 2007; Esposito and Evans-Winters, 2010).

The TASJ model specifically integrates Critical Race Feminism through its methodological approach of policy discourse analysis and its focus on praxis. Given the prominence of policies and laws in the disciplinary domain of Black Feminist Thought, Critical Race Feminism provides a more detailed lens to examine the role and impact of laws and policies on the everyday experiences of women of color. Policy discourse analysis requires an examination of policy documents to identify the problems and solutions; to examine images and portrayals of constituency groups; and to interrogate the discourse used. "The power of policy discourse analysis lies in its ability to shape and reframe concepts, ideologies, and dominant themes embedded within policy discourse documents" (Pratt-Clarke, 2010, 36). These policy discourse documents can include legal documents, contracts, ordinances, laws, briefs, position papers, and advocacy documents. The discourse in these documents often legitimizes and validates dominant ideologies. As such, social justice activism must be targeted to address, restructure, reframe, and challenge the ideas promoted within the discourse. Activism can take a variety of forms, but often it can involve social movements. Social justice activism is a key component of Critical Race Feminism as its focus is on the "possibility of the legal system serving as a mechanism for radical and transformative social and economic change" (Pratt-Clarke, 2010, 23).

Many scholars are recognizing and acknowledging the connections between Black Feminism and Critical Race Feminism. Alexander-Floyd (2010, 810-811) uses "critical race black feminism to demarcate and advocate for a radical feminist analysis centered on the experiences and political projects of black women in the United States and in the African diaspora." Alexander-Floyd (2010) acknowledges the importance of intersectionality for Black women; the necessity of narrative; and the role of legal issues in Black women's lives. Similarly, Howard-Hamilton (2003) examines the possibility of Critical Race Feminism and Black Feminist Thought serving as theoretical frameworks for examining the needs of Black women in higher education through a focus on empowerment, cultural identification, and renaming history.

In a more comprehensive discussion, Few (2007) also explores integrating Black Feminist Theory and Critical Race Feminism as guiding frameworks in the study of Black women's experiences in social institutions. She (2007) discusses similarities between the approaches, noting that both approaches involve the use of narrative and storytelling; focus on identity politics and the role of identity; and acknowledge the importance of race and ethnicity. Few also notes that they are both viable theoretical trajectories that involve a social justice agenda. However, a critical distinction between the two involves the "disciplinary birthplace": Critical Race Feminism emerged from Critical Race Theory and legal studies; and Black Feminism emerged from grassroots activism, social sciences, and humanities. Both Critical Race Feminism and Black feminism have important connections to Africana Studies. As Parker (2008, 1) recognizes, critical race theory can be "linked to Africana studies as a way to push for tangible actions for change rooted in the race-based experiences of black populations." The TASJ model can play an important role in linking Africana Studies, Critical Race Theory, and Black feminism.

Africana Studies and Transdisciplinary Applied Social Justice Model

In any discussion of Africana Studies, it is important to acknowledge that scholars within and outside the field are debating not only the discipline's definition, but also its relationship with other disciplines; whether it is itself a discipline; whether it is interdisciplinary, multidisciplinary, or transdisciplinary; and the appropriate tools, instruments, and methods for study (Christian, 2010; Mazama, 2010). Despite the disagreement on the definition, there are three core concepts that are part of Africana Studies: the primacy of Africa; the necessity of a critical theoretical approach; and the importance of praxis (Carroll, 2008). Another critical component of Africana Studies, according to the approaches and perspectives of Mazama, Kershaw, and Asante, is that the Africana paradigm includes "Afrocentric, centered, and activist research methods" (Mazama, 2010; Burgess and Agozino, 2011).

Based on this definition, the TASJ model fits within Africana Studies as a theoretical-grounded; methodological-informed; and praxis-oriented tool for engaging in social justice activism. In particular, it is Afrocentric; it acknowledges the role of race and the experiences of people of color; it includes a critical theoretical approach grounded in Black Feminist Thought and Critical Race Feminism; and it has a commitment to praxis through social movements. The TASJ model, however, expands and enhances Africana Studies in critical ways by emphasizing the importance of transdisciplinarity. "A transdisciplinary approach is an applied, problem-solving, and heterogeneous approach" (Pratt-Clarke, 2010, 23). It is a radical approach that breaks boundaries; expands potential; and connects previously separate perspectives and approaches. It creates "revolutionary scholarship that challenges rigid boundaries, exposes the artificial lines, forces questions to be asked from a different standpoint, and produces answers that have the opportunity to transform society by informing both scholarship and the professions that apply the scholarship, such as education, social work, and the law" (Pratt-Clarke, 2010, 26).

One of the key challenges and opportunities for Africana scholar-activists lies in the tension between using existing theoretical disciplinary approaches and developing new approaches. Richards (1979) encourages "African social scientists, at home and in the Diaspora, to devote their energies to the radical reconstruction of the disciplines in which they have been trained." Likewise, Aldridge (2003,192) noted that "the continuing advancement of Africana Studies requires, in addition to a well-managed interface with traditional disciplines, a well-developed intellectual core that both differentiates the enterprise from and connects it to traditional disciplines." Stewart emphasizes the importance of transdisciplinary African-American Studies that rejects "the existing disciplinary boundaries as starting points for the organization of research and instruction" and seeks to "develop new ways of synthesizing various approaches to understanding the world" (Zulu and Carroll, 2008). Accordingly, Gordon's (Christian, 2010) definition of Black Studies includes the "development of new approaches to the study of the Black experience" and "the development of social policies which will impact positively upon the lives of Black people." The TASJ model, then, responds to this call within Africana Studies for a new, comprehensive approach. In its transdisciplinary approach, it "incorporates concepts from critical race theory, critical race feminism, feminist theory, sociology, gender and women's studies, ethnic studies, history, political science, and communication studies" (Pratt-Clarke, 2010, p. 41). Most significantly, given the model's use and integration of Black Feminism and Critical Race Feminism, the TASJ model also contributes to the on-going conversation about the role of gender in Africana Studies.

Gender is rarely mentioned in the definition of the discipline (Christian, 2010). Thus, TASJ responds to Aldridge's plea to promote gender equity within Africana Studies. She (2003, 191) notes that the discipline of Africana Studies has been dominated by men who "had largely written from their own interests and perspectives excluding, minimizing, or distorting the reality of Africana women." She encourages the "continued development of scholarship by and about Africana women," particularly in the areas of social and behavioral sciences, the natural sciences, professions, and policies studies (Aldridge, 2003, 189). Further, she notes that "women have to do double time in producing solid scholarship" to compensate for the absence and silence in much of the scholarly writing in Africana Studies.

Africana Womanism attempts to respond to Aldridge's call. Hudson-Weems (2005, 625) defines Africana Womanism as an "authentic paradigm, with its own unique agenda, true to the prioritization of race, class, and gender. From its very historical and cultural context, it is family-centered, not female-centered, and it is first and foremost concerned with race empowerment rather than female empowerment." This definition, however, presents challenges for Black feminists. In critiquing the theory of Africana Womanism, Alexander-Floyd and Simien (2006) discuss and challenge its assumptions and criticism of Black feminism. Most relevant to the issue of gender equity, the authors challenge Africana Womanism's focus and commitment to the primacy of race and race loyalty. Africana Womanism does not acknowledge that Black women are often excluded and marginalized from feminist and antiracist policy discourse because the discourse does not acknowledge or recognize the simultaneity of race and gender. Africana Womanism also fails to acknowledge the role of Black male sexism in the experiences of Black women.

In contrast, Critical Race Feminism and Black Feminism support the proposition that effective activism must arise from an acknowledgement of the intertwined and inseparable identities of Black women. My research on the Detroit Male Academies (Pratt-Clarke, 1997, 2010) demonstrated that the Black male crisis was framed as a race issue and in the process, Black women, girls, teachers, and mothers, were victimized, marginalized, and minimized. Race loyalty often requires the minimizing, silencing, and ignoring of gender. Thus, Brown (2011, 616), in challenging the characterization of the "crisis" discourse in the Black community as a male crisis, argues that "in order to engage in socially and culturally transformative praxis, communities must re-examine how we frame gender relationships in racialized communities." She (2011, 604) also emphasizes the need to encourage "an alternative conceptualization for black oppression and liberation that does not create gender binaries." As was illustrated in Detroit, the primacy of one form of oppression (often race) frequently dissects the intertwined identity of Black women; and thus, marginalizes or silences their voices which arise from their gender and/or class identities.

Africana Studies, then, should address not only White racism and Black male sexism, it should also challenge patriarchy, classism, homophobia, and other –isms, as well. Bell encourages black men to "surrender all misogynous practices, sexist assumptions, and patriarchal notions" (Wing, 2003, xviii). Rabaka (2003), likewise, recognizes the importance of the intertwined identities and oppressions in his exploration of the relationship between DuBois' anti-sexist social thought and the creation of Africana Critical Theory (ACT). He notes that DuBois' socio-theoretical framework was comprehensive and integrated multiple theories: "African American liberation theory; Pan-Africanism and anti-colonial theory; women's liberation theory; peace and international politics theory; and Marxist and non-Marxist critical class theory" (Rabaka, 2003, 37-38). He (2003, 39) further recognizes that Dubois understood the potential for Black women to be "agents of radical social change" based on their "simultaneous experience of racism, sexism, and economic exploitation."   As such, Rabaka's definition of ACT reflects the comprehensive scope of oppression and refers to the "major forms and forces of domination and discrimination" of racism, sexism, capitalism, and colonialism "in classical and contemporary, continental and diasporan African life-worlds and lived experiences."   He (2003, 39-40) defines ACT as "not only a critique of domination and discrimination, but also a commitment to complete human liberation through constant social transformation."

The TASJ model is consistent with this definition of Africana Critical Theory. TASJ recognizes the influence of hegemonic ideologies of racism, sexism, colonialism, classism, and patriarchy on the experiences of individuals based on their intersecting, intertwined, and socially constructed identities. TASJ also mandates praxis. The Africana scholar-activist should be engaged in praxis and the implementation of social justice strategies that can fight multiple manifestations of domination, discrimination, and oppression. As a self-defined scholar-activist, Kershaw states, "We, as Africana scholars, need to use our research to find real life solutions for the problems facing the black populations of the world. We must do more than simply sit at a desk, in a library or in front of a computer; we must become involved and work towards creating equal opportunities" (Burgess and Agozino (2011, 69). The goal of Africana Studies must be to change "the life chances of Afrikan descended peoples" (Caroll, 2008, 6).

Hudson-Weems (2005, 624) has also argued for a greater focus on praxis: "It becomes clear that there needs to be a marriage between the ideals from the academy, with authentic Africana scholars spear-heading and controlling its direction, and the activism from the communities, with the masses voicing and demanding their urgent needs and concerns." While I concur on the need for praxis, I struggle with the assumption that "authentic Africana scholars" must "spearhead and control." I believe we must analyze, contribute, listen, and partner with the masses because it is often the masses who spearhead and generate action through social movements.

Theory often translates into practice through petitions, rallies, public testimony via other resistance strategies, institutional or organizational networks, and grassroots activism (Alexander-Floyd and Simien, 2006). Social movement theory and collective action frames (Snow and Benford, 2000) are key components in the TASJ model. Hence, the TASJ model requires an analysis of how problems are defined; how blame is attributed; and how action is instigated as part of understanding social movements and social action. As such, the model contributes to Africana Studies by providing a tool that integrates theory, method, and praxis.

Conclusion

The TASJ model, then, affirms the important role of the transdisciplinary scholar-activist in Africana Studies (Pratt-Clarke, 2010). Therefore, scholar-activists must be courageous to think outside of boundaries and existing limitations; they must challenge ideologies and social structures; they must be unafraid to speak; and they must engage in transformative praxis. In this way, there is the potential for finding the justice that I so urgently and ardently seek. As Derrick Bell so honestly and poignantly stated in recognizing the matriarchal model of our African ancestors: "I contend that black people must come to realize that our greatest strength, our salvation secret, if you will, is black women" (Wing, 2003, xviii). I, too, believe we are our salvation.

I believe that we can transform our anger to activism, and that as scholar-activists, we can actively promote ways of thinking and engaging in activism that champion and celebrate Black people. I believe that we can acknowledge that the historical and continuing marginalization of Black women, combined with the potential salvation that Black women represent, requires that all of us are front-line advocates for the inclusion of Black women in all aspects of social change. Finally, I believe we must commit to writing about injustice; engaging in activism; and the telling our stories that often form the genesis for the moral imperative that creates the impetus necessary for social change, and ultimately, social justice.

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