

PARADIGMS: METHODS OF MIND

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Abstract

Qualitative research is intensely personal (Saldana, 2013). As a culturally responsive researcher, budding critical race theorist and ethnographer, I define my positionality as: raced African-American, devoid of inherent privilege, gendered female; classed with little material but great spiritual fortitude, wealth and status. Through the pursuit of a post-graduate education, I critique and write against traditional, ableist, and stratifying perspectives, often rooted in implicit bias and racism. A postcritical orientation keeps me focused on the social ills of dominance, oppression, and inequity. A determination to resist the narrative of the absentee Black father, impoverished and genetically inferior race, my research interests are intensely personal, partial, positional, and perseverative. I work to understand, and reimagine the African American family. Over the last decade there has been noticeable growth in published works citing Critical Race Theory (CRT) as the framework. Research on race is an emerging topic of study; what is less plentiful and definable is how CRT is postulated relative to a researcher's ontology, epistemological underpinnings, axiology, methodology, and methods. Notwithstanding intersectional issues, a CRT methodology is recognizable by how philosophical, political and ethical questions are established and maintained in relation to racialized issues. This module one paper will discuss the personal exploration of my evolving philosophy and paradigm of qualitative research.

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Qualitative research is intensely personal (Saldana, 2013) and efforts should be made to make the research process, epistemologies, values, methodological decision points, and argumentative logic, open, accessible, and visible for audiences (Koro-Ljungberg et al., 2009). As I seek to make my perspectives on each of these paradigms unambiguous and explicit, the process of self-reflection will further assist the selection of methods and build knowledge (Carter & Little, 2007).

I will present my position on ontology, epistemology, axiology, methodology, and methods, in relation to my research interests and future qualitative research studies. First, Black and Indigenous People of Color (BIPOC) family perception of disability diagnoses and the impact on help-seeking (treatment and care). And, second, the impact of race, bias, and stereotypes on rater effects of parent and teacher rating scales. Prior to clarifying the type of ontology of these future studies, it is important to define ontology.

Ontology

Ontology is the study of being; theories about the nature of existence, yet are not motivations or casual explanation for how we develop research methods (Pascale, 2010). Ontology is a philosophical belief system about the nature of social reality—what can be known and how it can be known. The study of being requires adopting different lenses, filters, and angles as we view social life so as to discover new perceptions and cognitions about the facet of the world we are researching (Saldana, 2015). For example, is the social world patterned and predictable, or is the social world continually being constructed through human interactions and rituals? These assumptions represent two very different ontological perspectives. These ontological questions are fundamental to social research as all research is anchored to basic beliefs about how the world exists (Pascale, 2010).

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Most of the qualitative research in education that has used CRT, has been grounded in the idea of race as a social construct deeply rooted in the notion of whiteness as property and White supremacy. My ontological perspective posits that social construct and an integral element of institutions, social interactions, and contexts. In education, racism and racial capitalism is imbedded within the structures, discourses, and policies that guide the daily practices of schools and universities which seek to make race a commodity in order to, with blinders, ignore the harder steps needed for substantive racial change (Ladson-Billings, 2000). Race and racism have been central constructs that have intersected with other dimensions of one's identity, such as language, gender, sexuality, and social class. For people of color, each of these dimensions of one's identity has potentially elicited multiple forms of subordination, yet each dimension has been subjected to different forms of oppression (Crenshaw, 1995).

Pascale (2010) states that the neglect of philosophical foundations in social research results in ontological assumptions that function as untheorized truth. Ontological assumptions are extremely powerful because they shape what counts as valid knowledge and they do so in ways that are not explicit and therefore not accountable and not open to doubt. This brings us to the second paradigm that takes up questions about how the world can be known through nature, sources and the limits of knowledge.

Epistemology

As a future qualitative researcher, we construct in our minds the natural experiences we observe and the analytic connections we make with the data. What we perceive and interpret about life is greatly influenced and affected by the lenses, filters, and angles – constructs similar to a camera – through which we view the world (Saldana, 2015). Extending the camera analogy, a lens refers to significant attributes such as the researcher's ethnicity, economic class, age,

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gender, or vocation. A lens may also refer to a chosen research methodology. A filter refers to personal values, attitudes and beliefs about the world formed by our learned and lived experiences. Filters also contain theoretical perspectives within a discipline. Lastly, our cultural landscape position is our angle. Outsider, other, objective are all angles.

My lens, filter and angle can be summed up in my positionality statement: raced African-American, devoid of inherent privilege, gendered female; classed with little material but great spiritual fortitude, wealth and status. Through the pursuit of a post-graduate education, I critique and write against traditional, ableist, and stratifying perspectives, often rooted in implicit bias and racism. A postcritical orientation keeps me focused on the social ills of dominance, oppression, and inequity. A determination to resist the narratives of the absent or incarcerated Black father, impoverished and genetically inferior race devoid of substantive contributions, my research interests are intensely personal, partial, positional, and perseverative. I work to understand, and reimage the African American family.

As a future researcher, I understand race and racism to have been central constructs that have intersected with other dimensions of BIPOC's identity, such as language, gender, sexuality, and social class (Crenshaw, 1995). For people of color, each of these dimensions of one's identity has potentially elicited multiple forms of subordination, and each dimension has been subjected to different forms of oppression.

Axiology

Axiology, from Greek words *axios*, meaning worth/worthy and *logos* meaning science/word, means the theory of value or the philosophical study of value. Axiology is the study of value, or theory on the nature of value. It's what's good or bad in life and what we find

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worthy. Axiology incorporates ethics, or a theory of morality, and aesthetics, a theory of taste and beauty. The foundation of my axiology is built upon my identification as a Christian, elder, and theologian trained in the Scriptures. As a researcher, I will strive to be impartial, caring, diligent, and “do no harm”. I will endeavor to focus on worthwhile research that is problem-centered and appreciative. I will strive to engage in interdisciplinary research bringing ontology, epistemology and axiology together.

Methodology and Methods

A method is how you go about doing something. A methodology is why you’re going about it in a particular way (Saldana, 2015). In educational contexts, Critical Race theorists, through qualitative research methodology, take up the dual responsibility and challenge of uncovering the epistemic and ontological foundations of White supremacy in a post-racial world. For example, counter stories and counter narratives, as methodology, can be used in critical race ethnographies, and as a theory that can analytically and conceptually frame a study. I am drawn to both critical race methodology and culturally responsive methodologies.

There is no one definition of a culturally responsive methodology; from readings I have summarized that culturally responsive methodology 1) embraces cultural and epistemological pluralism; 2) deconstructs Western colonial traditions of research; and 3) recognizes the primacy of relationships within a power-sharing dialogical encounter. Culturally responsive methodology encourages the researcher to engage in three distinct and often concurrent phases of the research 1) learn to know the participant(s) subjectivities 2) make transparent the researcher’s positionality and 3) engage in relational and dialogical Culturally responsive methodologies. Framing these phases are questions of ethics: what right does one have to engage in the study? who will own the research? And who determines the public good of the research? is essential. The work of

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culturally responsive methodology challenges traditional education research paradigms and honors multiple ways of knowing and engagement.

Grounded in critical theory, ethnology, and post-colonial studies, these types of cross- and intracultural research collaborations offer new pathways for the creation of rich educational research. Culturally responsive methodology is both inclusive of many postmodern research methodologies as well as distinctive. Researchers from methodologies such as feminist (Harding, 2004), decolonizing (Denzin, Lincoln, & Smith, 2008; Mutua & Swadener, 2004), participatory (Anderson, Herr, & Niblen, 2007), come from different histories, use different language, but have similar approaches -- to bring the marginalized to the center of research as co-constructors.

A number of works have utilized critical race methodology to provide insights on the ways racism has been operationalized in education settings. Critical race methodology in educational research provides a perspective linked to change in the ways communities of color are studied and written about. This change is informed by the central tenets of CRT which fundamentally challenge White supremacy which has bred discrimination and implicit and explicit racism in social contexts. A number of works have utilized critical race methodology to provide insights on the ways racism has been operationalized in education settings.

For example, Vaught (2011) used intensive interviews, document analysis of school records, and secondary data of school funding resources, media accounts, observations to triangulate and present how White supremacy was at work in the creation and maintenance of an unethical school system that had an intended harmful impact on African American student achievement and outcomes. Vaught (2011) research provided insight regarding how to do critical race ethnography, in that the research findings were linked to specific tenets of CRT; yet, the counter stories were not meant to solicit sympathy and false empathy from Whites. Rather,

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critical race ethnographies were intended to serve more of a purpose of triggering responsibility and action against overt racism, implicit bias, and structural racism which have a deleterious impact on persons of color and their material and social/psychological conditions. I desire to utilize a critical race methodology in my research.

Methods are the tools that researchers use to collect data, a technique for gathering evidence. These techniques for learning about social reality allow us to gather data from individuals, groups, and texts in any medium using listening, observation and examination. I will utilize accounts of lived experiences, oral histories, storytelling, counter narratives, interviews. Concerning design, ethnography, participatory action, and narrative are considerations.

Conclusion

I believe there is a place for CRT in qualitative research. It's longevity will depend on the efforts made by to explore the connections to life in schools and communities of color. The broader theoretical framework and widening of the lens to include other perspectives besides the Black/White paradigm would be very useful in terms of developing a comprehensive and multilayered research discussion about life in racially diverse schools with different populations of students. Connections can be made in educational research through the use of narrative inquiry in CRT, which is currently a part of literature and commentary on racism, and feminist research.

Qualitative research and CRT can be utilized to link theory and understanding about race from critical perspectives to practice in education for social justice and change. Linking CRT to education can foster the connections of theory to practice and activism on issues related to race. The key is specifically defining how one is using CRT in qualitative research at the

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epistemological or methodological levels of analysis and its connection with the law and racism.

Qualitative research is intensely personal (Saldana, 2013).

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