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**Chapter 2: Literature Review**

*Theoretical Frameworks*

Critical Race Theory (CRT) originated in the 1970s as a movement in critical legal studies aimed at challenging race-neutral understandings of the U.S. legal system. This framework emphasizes that racism, rather than being an aberration, is pervasive, permanent, and normalized in U.S. policy and culture (Bell 1992; Delgado and Stefancic 2017). Although its origins lie in legal scholarship, CRT has been applied and further developed within the fields of sociology and education as well (Ladson-Billings and Tate 1995). Sociologists of education have utilized Critical Race theory and methodology to examine a broad range of issues such as affirmative action and race-sensitive post-secondary admissions, curricular tracking, residential and school segregation, and the school-to-prison pipeline, among other phenomena (Dutil 2020; Parker 1998; Solorzano and Ornelas 2004). Two core tenets of Critical Race Theory which are often employed in sociology of education scholarship are interest convergence and intersectionality. Together, both constructs highlight how systems of domination and subordination, such as race or sex, shape one’s social and political opportunity.

Interest Convergence

The principle of interest convergence was coined by Derrick Bell (1980) in his analyses of the landmark Supreme Court case Brown v. Board of Education (1954). This case ruled that racial segregation in public schools was unconstitutional, overturning the “separate but equal” clause established in Plessy v. Ferguson (1896). Bell argued that this decision was not solely motivated by a governmental commitment to furthering racial justice, but rather that whites in policymaking positions recognized the economic and political value of ending segregation – primarily to gain power and legitimacy on the global stage amid the Cold War era. From this, he developed the concept of interest convergence to describe the tendency that “the interest of blacks in achieving racial equality will be accommodated only when it converges with the interests of whites” (Bell 1980:523). In other words, white individuals and institutions will only support efforts towards racial equity when it benefits white society as well.

Within the study of higher education, the interest convergence principle has primarily been used to examine affirmative action and race-sensitive admissions as well as the implementation, impact, and perceptions of diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) initiatives and institutional responses to campus racial incidents or unrest (Davis and Harris 2016; Lewis and Shah 2021; Nishi 2020; Tichavakunda 2021). Castagno and Lee (2007) applied the principle of interest convergence in their case study of a predominantly-white Midwestern university’s policies towards the use of native mascots. After rising concerns from Indigenous students about the co-option of native imagery in college athletics, the university adopted a policy in which they would refuse to schedule games against teams using native mascots *unless the team is a traditional rival or a conference member*. The interests of the university and its Indigenous students converged and led to the adoption of this policy discouraging the use of native imagery. Their interests diverge, however, at the point where this policy could threaten the university’s operational status quo, athletic conference standing, or revenue from ticket sales. Although the university addressed its students’ concerns and acknowledged the harm that using native mascots can do to Indigenous communities, the university’s concession came with stipulations that ultimately protected the reputation and revenue of the institution itself.

Other scholars have used the interest convergence principle to draw attention to the “window dressing” of post-secondary diversity, equity, and inclusion efforts (Bhopal and Pitkin 2020; Masutha, Naidoo, and Enders 2023; McKinley Jones Brayboy 2003), highlighting that institutions often utilize diversity-focused initiatives, programs, and policies as a public relations measure without committing to tangible, substantive institutional change. Lewis and Shah (2021) applied the interest convergence principle in their qualitative study exploring how Black students make meaning of the implementation of diversity and inclusion initiatives at their predominantly-white institution. The findings of this study revealed that many of the respondents viewed their institution’s diversity initiatives as falling flat, relying on surface-level diversity efforts and neglecting to focus on inclusion and access. Respondents also reported that the diversity initiatives were catered toward white students and administrators, to “make them look better” and “to back up the fact that they aren’t racist the next time they say something racist” (2021:196–97). Finally, respondents noted that these diversity initiatives were only put into place by the institution after immense pressure from the Black student body. One respondent stated that “if the pressure’s not put on them, they’re not gonna do it” (2021:195). These findings highlight the strict conditions under which the interests of the Black student body and the institution converged and underscores the limitations of institutional concessions.

Critiques of Derrick Bell's interest convergence theory highlight several key limitations. First, Driver (2011) argues that Bell's conceptualization of "Black interests" and "White interests" is overly broad, failing to account for significant intraracial disagreements on what constitutes genuine progress toward racial equity. Using the case of segregation in the Civil Rights era, Driver illustrated how many Black business owners materially benefitted from being the only establishments to serve Black clientele and thus were against ending segregationist policies. The interest convergence principle would be better applied using a less reductionist view of “Black interests” and “White interests,” and instead allowing for the possibility of a wide array of ideological viewpoints within a given racial group. Second, the interest convergence principle has been criticized for obscuring the agency of Black and White actors in the struggle for racial equity. The theory relies too heavily on “fortune and happenstance” (Driver 2011:176) and treats Black Americans as passively awaiting moments of sociopolitical opportunity, without acknowledging the many Black activists and cultural leaders that have played a pivotal role in achieving racial justice in the United States. Similarly, it minimizes the culpability of White Americans in either actively upholding or challenging the existing racial hierarchy.

Third, the interest convergence principle is severely limited by its assumption that the interests of Black and White Americans are primarily divergent and may only converge momentarily and opportunistically. Johnson (2024) introduces the concept of “perpetually convergent interests” (2024:1352), which are white interests that are so deeply interconnected with racial equality that they remain consistently aligned with corresponding Black interests and will never diverge. Two examples given to demonstrate this concept are spiritual and democratic interests. Spiritual interests refer to the spiritual, emotional, and psychological harm to White Americans from engaging in a white supremacist social structure. Democratic interests refer to the aim of cultivating a robust and equitable democracy. Both Black and White Americans may consistently align on these values, challenging the assumption that Black and White interests are inherently at odds and highlighting the potential for sustained alignment in the pursuit of racial justice.

While the interest convergence principle has been applied in studies of institutional diversity and inclusion policies, programs, and initiatives with regard to enrolled students, it has not yet been used to examine the racial and gender diversity of existing and newly hired faculty. It is possible that patterns in the hiring and retention of racial and gender minority faculty will mirror that of the student body. However, it is also possible that faculty face unique challenges due to their positioning within the institution. The two groups may have differing interests, and thus differing conditions for their interests to converge with that of the institution.

Intersectionality

The principle of intersectionality, coined by Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989), emphasizes the interconnectedness of social categories such as race, gender, age, sexuality, and socioeconomic status. It argues that individuals experience multiple layers of privilege and oppression simultaneously, and these intersections shape their experiences and identities. At its core, the principle of intersectionality recognizes that a person's identity is multifaceted, and different forms of oppression or privilege can't be understood independently. Instead, they intersect to create complex, and sometimes contradictory, experiences.

Crenshaw coined the concept in her study of court cases involving discrimination against Black women in hiring and promotion (1989). Her analysis demonstrated how the courts dismissed the grievances of Black women by mounting counterexamples of Black men to negate claims of racism, and of white women to negate claims of sexism. For example, in DeGraffenreid v General Motors (1976), the court dismissed allegations of sexist and racist discrimination in the company’s hiring, promotion, and layoff practices on the basis that the company had historically hired both white women and Black men. In these cases, the courts overlooked the possibility that Black women experience unique challenges in the workplace due to the overlapping and compounding effects of both racism and sexism. This study highlights the importance of considering the impact of multiple intersecting systems of oppression rather than relying on single-axis frameworks.

Within the context of higher education, intersectionality has primarily been used to study outcomes and experiences of undergraduate and graduate students. However, several scholars have applied the principle of intersectionality to examine disparities in faculty hiring and tenure promotion processes, professional expectations, and the efficacy of initiatives promoting faculty diversity. Existing literature shows that women of color in academia face unique challenges in the field including high teaching and service loads, ambiguous standards for tenure promotion, and a lack of culturally responsive mentorship (Corneille et al. 2019). Women faculty of color also face increased scrutiny from their colleagues and administrators. In qualitative studies of women faculty of color’s experiences with microaggressions in the workplace, respondents reported having had their professional qualifications and quality of work questioned as well as being presumed incompetent by students, colleagues, and incompetent (Gutiérrez y Muhs et al. 2012; Young and Anderson 2021). Further, interventions aimed at promoting diversity in faculty hiring and retention often neglect to account for intersectional factors. In practice, these initiatives tend to primarily benefit white women over men and women of color (Hunt et al. 2012; Liu, Brown, and Sabat 2019).

Blake (2022) applied the principle of intersectionality in their qualitative study of academic couples undergoing the dual career hiring process at Association of American Universities (AAU) institutions. All couples interviewed were heterosexual and both partners were racially minoritized, shedding light on how gendered dynamics occur within racial groups. Findings revealed that most women interviewed made sacrifices in institutional and departmental and tenure status in accepting dual career offers with their partner, while none of the couples accepted offers that disadvantaged men’s careers with respect to fit or tenure status. For example, one couple’s move required the woman to accept a position at an institution that did not align with her career interests (a research university rather than her preferred liberal arts university), leaving her institution which was more progressive and inclusive of women and people of color for an institution described as “very conservative” and “very White” (2022:125). In addition to this, she was placed in a department in a different field than the one she was trained in due to the institution not having a department in her area of expertise. These observations illustrate both the gendered and racialized concessions that women of color in academia are often expected to make.

In her article *Re-thinking Intersectionality,* Nash (2008) identified four main paradoxes within intersectional literature. First, the theory is criticized for using Black women as the "prototypical intersectional subjects" (2008:4) to exemplify the shortcomings of feminist and anti-racist scholarship. In turn, Black women in intersectional theory are often positioned as a “theoretical wedge” (2008:8) rather than real people with real lived experiences. This exemplification also flattens Black women into a monolithic entity and does not honor the varied experiences and social positionings within this group. Second, the concept of “intersectional” is often vaguely defined and leaves unanswered the question of *who* is intersectional. Because of the theory’s focus on Black women’s experiences, it remains unclear whether *all identities* are considered intersectional or only those that are multiply marginalized. For example, would a white woman or black man be considered to have an intersectional identity within this theoretical framework? Both subjects experience intersecting racial and gendered dimensions of identity, yet neither is multiply marginalized by this intersection. Existing intersectional scholarship provides contradicting conclusions to this important question (Ferguson 1998; Runyan 2018; Zack 2005).

Third, existing intersectional scholarship overwhelmingly centers the intersection of race and gender, paying little attention to other factors of one's identity such as socioeconomic status, sexuality, nationality, disability status, etc. In using Black women as “prototypes” to juxtapose against the experiences of Black men and white women, there is a lack of concern for the ways in which Black women’s experiences of oppression can differ based on their social class, level of education, and ethnicity along with many other axes of identity. Further, there is little attention paid to the ways in which the intersecting forces of racism and sexism are shaped by historical context, positioning Black women’s experience of race and gender as “trans-historical constants” (Nash 2008:7) that affect *all* Black women similarly throughout history. Fourth, the existing scholarship on intersectionality leaves a jarring lack of a defined intersectional methodology, highlighting the empirical difficulty of systematically examining a complex myriad of intersecting dimensions of identity simultaneously. The experiences of multiply marginalized people cannot be adequately understood using a purely additive approach (race + gender = racially gendered identity), posing a methodological conundrum for quantitative studies of intersectionality (Hancock 2007). Further, modeling can become cumbersome and unwieldy when including increasing numbers of variables to account for the many relevant axes of identity beyond race and gender that shape people’s experiences and social positionings.

Existing literature applying intersectionality within higher education predominantly utilizes qualitative methods, using interviews and focus groups, storytelling, and content analysis. There is a need for more quantitative analyses of women and racial minorities in academia which employ intersectionality as a theoretical framework, in order to understand factors such as nationwide hiring and retention rates, tenure promotion patterns, and gaps in salary and grant funding. Both perspectives are necessary to cultivate a deeper, more holistic understanding of the gendered and racialized dynamics experienced by women faculty of color.

*Diversity in the U.S. Professoriate*

The condition of racial and gender diversity within faculty hiring, promotion, and tenure is complex and influenced by both overarching and context-specific trends. Broadly, patterns of inequity persist across academic institutions, where women and racial minorities face barriers to career advancement. However, this dynamic is further complicated by factors such as economic uncertainty, state partisan control, and the COVID-19 pandemic, all of which have distinct impacts on faculty diversity.

Racial and Gender Diversity in Faculty Hiring, Promotion, and Tenure

The intersection of race and gender plays a crucial role in shaping the experiences of faculty in hiring, promotion, and tenure processes. Despite a broad support among university faculty, students, and administration for the promotion of diversity in academia, this support often remains abstract and does not translate into tangibly improved outcomes for women and racial minorities in the academic job market. Carey et al. (2020) investigated this discrepancy though their experimental study of faculty and student preferences for diversity in hiring decisions. Participants were presented with the profiles two hypothetical candidates with identical qualifications, differing only in the race of the candidate, and asked which candidate they prefer to be hired. Faculty at both universities included in the study were between 11 and 21 percentage points more likely to prefer a Hispanic, Black, or Native American candidate to a white one. This finding indicates that faculty diversity is broadly valued across the academic community and that other, more structural and implicit, barriers are contributing to the lack of representation of women and racial minorities in the U.S. professoriate.

While progress has been made in increasing the representation of women and racial minorities in academia, disparities persist, particularly at senior leadership levels and in research-intensive universities. Women now comprise roughly three-quarters of the educational workforce in the United States, yet they hold only 20 percent of senior-level leadership positions in the field (Carey et al. 2020). This disparity is most pronounced at the full professor level, with men making up the overwhelming majority in these roles across the United States and European Union (O’Connor 2019). Similarly, racial disparities in the professoriate also persist despite representative gains over the last several decades. Underrepresented minority faculty, particularly Black and Hispanic scholars, occupy a smaller share of senior and leadership positions compared to their white counterparts (American Association of University Professors 2020; Fox Tree and Vaid 2022).

Women of color face compounded challenges in the academic job market that are distinct from those encountered by their white and male counterparts. Research has demonstrated that implicit biases and stereotypes significantly disadvantage women of color in academic hiring, where they are often perceived as less competent and less “fit” for prestigious positions (Turner, González, and Wood 2008). Once hired, women of color also experience disparities in citation rates, grant funding, and letters of recommendation compared to their colleagues, in addition to being less likely to be first or sole authors on their publications, less often invited to give presentations and addresses, and less likely to be given leadership positions (Fox Tree and Vaid 2022). Further, women of color report carrying disproportionate service and mentorship loads compared to their white and male colleagues. In a time diary study, women faculty reported spending more time on campus service, student advising, and teaching-related activities while men faculty spent more time on research (O’Meara et al. 2017). This discrepancy was even more pronounced among women faculty of color.

Contextual Factors Affecting Faculty Diversity

The racial and gender diversity of university faculty is also shaped by a complex interplay of context-specific factors, including economic uncertainty, state partisan control, and, within recent years, the COVID-19 pandemic. These factors influence institutional priorities and decision-making processes, often exacerbating existing disparities in faculty hiring, promotion, and tenure among women and racial minorities.

In times of economic uncertainty, institutional hiring committees tend to rely more on network-based recruitment along with gendered and racialized stereotypes on competence and productivity. Kim et al. (2021) conducted a quantitative analysis of the diversity of new faculty before and after the Great Recession, finding an overall decline in tenure-track hires which disproportionately affected Black, Hispanic, and Asian American scholars. Research-intensive universities (R1) experienced the greatest revenue loss among U.S. universities during the Great Recession, due to their dependency on endowments along with state and federal grant funding. During the recession, all six minority groups included in the study (Black, Hispanic, and Asian men and women) saw the biggest proportional declines in hiring in R1 schools while white women and men saw the biggest gains. To explain this, the authors concluded that institutions facing financial pressures may prioritize cost-cutting measures that negatively affect the recruitment of women and racial minority faculty. These findings highlight how budgeting constraints due to broader economic uncertainty can undermine institutional efforts toward greater faculty diversity.

Political factors such as legislative representation and state partisan control also shape racial and gender diversity in academia. Existing research has showed that as the proportion of Black and Hispanic state legislators increases, so too does minority enrollment in public universities within those states (Hicklin and Meier 2008). Further, numerous studies have found that public universities in states with Republican-controlled governments tend to have lower representation of women and racial minorities among their faculty compared to institutions in Democratic-led states (Hicklin and Meier 2008; Ortega 2020; Taylor et al. 2020). This dynamic can be partially explained by the relationship between state partisan control and appropriations to post-secondary education. Several studies have found that the strength of the Democratic party within a state's political landscape is generally associated with higher levels of state appropriations, which can in turn support the recruitment and retention of diverse faculty (Dar and Lee 2014; McLendon, Hearn, and Mokher 2009; Ortega 2020). This relationship, however, appears to be mediated by factors such as political polarization and economic conditions, with the positive effect of Democratic control diminishing as these contextual variables become more pronounced.

Finally, faculty diversity can be impacted by emergent national or global crises, such as the COVID-19 pandemic. The economic downturn prompted by the pandemic led many institutions to implement hiring freezes and budget cuts, which stalled efforts to diversify faculty and reduced opportunities for women and racial minorities to enter or advance within academia (Flaherty 2024). The pandemic caused not only an economic recession but also widespread closings of schools and a transition to virtual schooling. These conditions impacted women, especially women of color, disproportionately due to the gendered division of household labor and childcare responsibilities. Shouldering the majority of housework and childcare, including supervising children attending school virtually from home, leads to reduced research productivity for women faculty compared to their male colleagues (Malisch et al. 2020). For example, one recent study has identified a widening gender gap in journal article submissions in some fields due to the COVID pandemic (Amano-Patiño et al. 2020). In turn, women faculty were more likely to make use of tenure clock extensions which decrease long-term earning potential, preclude women faculty from leadership positions requiring tenure, and reduce the likelihood of achieving tenure (Malisch et al. 2020).

*Contributions and Research Questions*

Although the existing literature on the intersection of race and gender in academia is robust, numerous theoretical and empirical gaps remain. The CRT principle of Interest Convergence has predominantly been applied to studies assessing the diversity of the student body and has paid little attention to the diversity of the professoriate. While the dynamics observed with respect to student diversity may be reflected in that of the faculty, it is also possible that minoritized faculty experience unique challenges compared to minoritized students. More research is necessary to better understand the interests and outcomes of women and racial minority faculty in hiring, promotion, and tenure processes. Similarly, the Intersectionality principle has primarily been utilized to study the experiences of women faculty of color through qualitative methods such as interviews and focus groups, but there is very little quantitative data on the unique barriers to career advancement faced by women faculty of color. Quantitative analyses of the representation of women and racial minority faculty would provide additional support for the trends observed in the existing qualitative studies. Further, the two principles have not yet been used in tandem to investigate racial and gender diversity in the professoriate. Utilizing both perspectives would provide a more holistic understanding of the gendered and racialized dynamics experienced by women faculty of color.

There is an overwhelming lack of comprehensive longitudinal demographic assessments of the racial and gender diversity of the U.S. professoriate. Much of the existing research on faculty diversity focuses on race and gender separately, rather than considering how race and gender jointly shape faculty outcomes and experiences. Further, the bulk of literature on faculty racial diversity prioritizes Black-White disparities and pays little attention to the representation of other racial and ethnic groups such as Hispanic, Asian American, Indigenous, and multiracial faculty. Kim et al.’s (2021) study of the racial and gender diversity of U.S. faculty between 1999 and 2015 stands out within the existing faculty diversity literature as addressing each of these empirical gaps, and serves as a model for this dissertation’s updated study of the racial and gender diversity of faculty between 2015 and 2022. In addition to race and gender, however, this study will also consider contextual factors such as state partisan control and major global events such as the COVID-19 pandemic.

This dissertation will utilize the Interest Convergence and Intersectionality theoretical perspectives along with Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS) data on the demographic composition of university faculty to answer the following research questions:

1. To what extent did the racial and gender composition of university change between 2015 and 2022?
2. How did the COVID-19 pandemic impact the racial and gender diversity of university faculty within this timeframe?
3. How did state-level partisan control impact the racial and gender diversity of university faculty within this timeframe?

With respect to RQ1, I expect to find that the proportion of women and racial minorities in university faculty is increasing over time. This finding would be in line with the longitudinal trends observed in Kim et al. as well as overall societal shifts towards embracing diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) in the workplace. In line with the existing literature, I expect to find that the economic and social contexts of the COVID-19 pandemic (RQ2) along with Republican control of state governments and legislature (RQ3) negatively impacted the representation of women and racial minorities in the professoriate, especially women of color. Widespread school and university closings, a nationwide recession, and freezes on faculty hiring and promotion resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic affected academics across the board, but our existing knowledge of racial and gendered dynamics in the workplace and domestically would suggest that women and racial minorities suffered the brunt of the impact. Similarly, Republican control of state governments and legislatures would lend itself to decreased state appropriations to post-secondary institutions, decreased investment in DEI programs and initiatives or outright bans of such efforts, and a more hostile overall atmosphere towards minoritized populations. Each of these factors would create a less-than-hospitable environment for women and racial minorities to navigate in order to become and remain a part of the U.S. professoriate alongside their white male peers.

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