Race, Color, and the Application of Pool Theory

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Abstract

In today's complex society, we encounter various societal issues. However, race as an attribute and as a major social form tremendously affects many aspects of individuals' lives, as well as society as a whole. It continues to shape social, political, and economic hierarchies. Many sociological theories that have focused on race and racism, but few have focused on an in-depth understanding of subtle racism and its socio-historical constructs. The purpose of this paper is to discuss and explore race, color, and racism, particularly the subjective form of racism, utilizing the Pool Theory.

Pool theory, based on acquired idea from the billiard game, asserts that racism is formed through people's implicit attitudes, feelings, and behaviors. It emphasizes that race, like many other social concepts, is socially and culturally created by the dominant groups for labeling others to suit their own imagination and goals. Based on generalizations, the theory accentuates that race is subjective and implicit, and that skin color is highly valued in society. According to this theory, those who possess favorite colors are more likely to be seen as superior, influential, valued, and successful in constructing concepts that becomes social reality. The choice of colors and the position of the billiard balls could be the consequence of implicit feelings and biased beliefs about others. Power differentiation, disparity, and colorism are evident in this game. Pool theory refutes color blindness, which is the belief that racism is no longer an issue in American society. The main objective of this study is to encourage future research in theory building, emphasizing the implicit aspects of racism. Additionally, this study can serve as an avenue for literature review, particularly in relation to race and racism.

Keywords: race, color, racism, theory, pool theory, colorism, implicit

1. Introduction

Race as an attribute is one of the main socially constructed concepts that most often influences individuals' lives more than any other issues. It continues to play a major role in determining the cultural, legal, and social positions of individuals. The concept of race is difficult to define because of its vagueness and changes in its definition overtime (Desmond and Emirbayer, 2009; Gallagher and Pritchard, 2007). The American Heritage Dictionary defines race as the belief that race accounts for differences in human character or ability, and that a particular race is superior to others. Healey (2006) defines race as a belief system in which a specific group is inferior to its own group. Kwame (1990) defined race as an idea that there are heritable characteristics possessed by members of our species that allow us to divide them into a small set of races in such a way that all members of these races share certain traits and tendencies with each other. Gallagher and Pritchard (2007) believe that race is a socially constructed category of people based on the biological and physical traits that a society chooses to value or devalue. The debates over its origin, definition, and its impacts on people does not end here; it is a comparable debate to nurture vs. nature. Those who oppose the idea that race is a socially constructed concept employ intelligence quotient, income, wealth, level of education level, and social status to justify their argument. Others believe that race is the creation of European colonization, created and constructed consciously for the destructions of other cultures and exploitation of others' resources (Desmond and Emirbayer, 2009; Healey, 2006). To refute the idea that race is biological, Desmond and Emirbayer (2009) argue that if athletic ability is an innate skill or biological, why was it that in1920-1930s, basketball players in the United States, both in college and at the professional level, were primarily Jews? So, did nature change its mind, deciding to take away so-called innate skills from the Jewish people? If white people cannot jump, why then are American volleyball teams both in the national and international arenas primarily Caucasians?

Biologically grounded theories of race offer suitable scientific justification for colonization, exploitation, and subjugation, where integration or assimilation has failed (Penrose 2003). If race is biological, not socio-political, why

then have racial categories been changed considerably overtime in the United States from being white males, free white females, all other free individuals, and the slaves in 1790 to white, black-African Americans, American Indians, Alaskan Natives, Hispanics, Asians, North Africans, Middle Easterners, and others, in 2000 (United States Census Bureau)? The creation of race and racism based on color was not meant to be provisional but a socially constructed condition that can be changed and modified (Boyer, 2001; Desmond and Emirbayer, 2009).

Racism is a part of history, outlined, and postulated during European colonization, and passed on intergenerationally. Historically, racism and the racial classification systems were formed by a collection of ideas developed by secular authorities such as philosophers, writers, and scientists captivated in white supremacy (Desmond and Emirbayer, 2009). In the racial hierarchal system, whites who were equated with being beautiful and superior were placed at the top and blacks at the bottom (Hill, 2002). Plato also affirmed the disparity among people by stating "Citizens, you are brothers, but God has made you differently. Some of you have the power to command, having been made of gold: others, of silver to be assistances, and others, of brass and iron, to be frames and craftsmen." (Ferrari,2000). Hume a Scottish philosopher wrote, "I am apt to suspect, in general, all other species of men to be naturally inferior to the whites." Francis Galton, a wealthy cousin of Charles Darwin, claimed that all human behavior was hereditary (Desmond and Emirbayer, 2009). Even idols of Western cultures and advocates of human liberty, such as George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, Abraham Lincoln, and Charles Darwin, believed in the inferiority of some races in nature. Thomas Jefferson, who is credited with "all men are created equal," owned 180 slaves and thought of blacks as inferior to whites: "I advance it therefore as suspicious only, that the blacks, whether originally a distinct race, or made distinct by time and circumstances, are inferior to whites, in the endowments of both the body and mind (Kwame, 1990). The objective of this study is to explore and provide insight into the importance of colorism, as well as to encourage future research in theory building, emphasizing subjective aspects of racism. Racism is grounded in colorism and color has become a socio-political reality.

2. Review of Literature

2.1 Social Construction of Color

Color, as an objective and social form, is perceived and valued distinctively. Skin color is a universal concept that plays a significant role in people's lives. As a young, brown-colored boy who grew up in a remote village in the Middle East to the present day living in the United States, I have experienced and witnessed the merit of color. Throughout the history of mankind, for many cultures and societies, from objects to humans, the color white and other lighter shades have symbolically been associated with positive norms, privileges, successes, prestige, and passion than darker colors.

The creation, objectification, and appraisal of color, like many other things, are socially and culturally constructed and become a part of social reality (Friedman, 2016). The objectification and prejudgment of individuals based on skin color can take many forms, including failing or preventing other people from achieving their goals. For example, wasn't Malcolm X told by a white teacher to be "realistic" and encouraged him to pursue carpentry as an occupation instead of law as a career (Haley 1992)? The study of color does not belong to a single academic discipline because it is a relative power (Fiona, 2016). According to Fiona (2016), specific events or epochs are categorized and sometimes romanticized to explain contemporary social structures. The link between color and cultural values was systematized in the early twentieth-century color theory. The most prominent of the American color systems, the one founded by Albert Henry Munsell (1858-1918), pushed beyond the latent chromophobia of classicizing whiteness, and became part of the system. Color is a powerful social element, and no color is "wrong, wrong, wrong" on its face; rather, its associated colors give it meaning and rationale. Color, intended by the scientists as an empirically grounded historical corrective, became instead an unwanted aesthetic intervention (Fiona, 2016).

According to Berger and Luckmann (1967), color is not a fixed reality; it is a part of the human mind process that is created, internalized, and develops as a social fact, and becomes cast into a pattern. As a thing becomes a reality and is embedded in the institutional fabric of society, people tend to accept, follow, and repeat the patterns. We can look at this through W.I. Thomas's notable Thomas theorem, which states, "If men define situations as real, they are real in their consequences." (Thomas and Thomas, 1928). Reality is not objective, or hard truth, and the meaning given to objects and events are social constructs. The meaning of color is the product of the prevailing cultural frames of social, linguistic, discursive, and symbolic practices (Ray, 2022).

2.2 Social Theories of Racism

A number of sociological theories that have focused on race and racism, but most have focused on direct and overt forms of racism, more often utilizing deductive research. This is an implicit or covert form of racism that requires more attention. Typically, the theories that have been employed to discuss race-related questions and problems include social learning, assimilation, color blindness, and critical race theory.

From a social learning perspective, negative attitudes and feelings develop from early socialization and persist into adulthood, shaping racial and ethnic attitudes (Corsaro, 2018). Social learning theory asserts that children acquire negative attitudes toward specific social groups because they hear and often imitate such views expressed by socialization agents such as family, mass media, peers, school, workplace, and regional organizations. Social learning theory perceives racism to be a long and gradual process that is learned. According to Healey (2006), racism is embedded in culture as a result of socialization, and it is often illustrated in contact situations through ethnocentrism, individuation, and differentiation in power. To better understand race and racism, many sociologists and other social scientists have relied widely on Assimilation Theories.

Gallagher and Pritchard (2007) defined assimilation as the process of interpretation and fusion in which individuals and groups acquire and share other groups' elements of culture to be able to adapt to a new social situation. Assimilation theories contend that when groups merge and are integrated into one, race and racism are no longer be an issue in society. Assimilation theories have a narrow focus on power as they relate to defining race and racism. They have an optimistic approach, suggesting that as long as the immigrant and minority groups embrace the dominant culture or Anglo conformity, they are going to be accepted into society, leading to the weakening of prejudice and discrimination (Rothman, 2005). Most assimilation theories emphasize the Contact Hypothesis in the belief that increasing exposure to members of various groups can increase positive evaluations of the out-group and decreases prejudices and stereotypes. People are more likely to eliminate the fear of the unknown by having the groups get to know each other. According to Allport (1954), the effect of contact depends on many factors, such as the types of people involved, personality of the interactionists, situation, and the environment where the contact takes place, as well as the group's respective social position. It should also be noted that most assimilation theories are ahistorical, emphasizing overt forms of racism. They usually perceive solutions in amalgamation. Another theory that is closely linked to assimilation ideas that also disregards cultural diversity is the Color-blind theory.

Colorblind ideas as a theory became more prominent in the 1960s and the 1970s and mostly prolonged with the work of Sears and Kinder (Delgado and Jean, 2000; Henricks, 2016). Colorblind theory, which is mostly associated with modern racism, is a subtle, complex, and a way of expressing negative feelings and attitudes towards a minority. This theory reflects a subtle form of intolerance and tends to blame the victim. It is fundamentally tied to politics and racial policies and focuses on the individual racism that affects institutional practice (Henricks, 2016; Penrose, 2003). According to the color-blind theory, many people, particularly whites, choose not to see the reality of race and all its related attributes. They assume that racial discrimination is no longer an obstacle to minorities, particularly blacks (Henry and Sears, 2002). The dominant group contends that if there is a racial or ethnic inequality in the society, it is the fault of members of the minority group because they have not embraced the majority culture (Henry and Sears, 2002; Desmond and Emirbayer, 2009). According to Desmond and Emirbayer (2009), this form of racism shares the underlying assumptions that minorities violate cherished American values and are unwilling to take responsibility.

Although the number of physical harassments, derogatory statements about blacks' innate ability, and racially segregated housing or schools have declined since the 1950s, racism is still in place in the United States and continues to operate under new modes (Sniderman and Piazza, 1993). If overt racism towards minorities, particularly Blacks, has declined, they have declined in public. Also, if racism has declined or, according to color-blind people, is not an issue in America, then why were approximately 20,000 children between the ages of 10-13 stopped by police between 2007 and 2014 in New York City alone? (Kramer, Remster, and Charles, 2017).   Why is it that 43 % of Black students in grades 6-12 have experienced suspension in comparison with non-Black students? And why do 83% of African American male students have at least one discretionary violation in comparison with 59 % of their white counterparts (McCarter, 2017)? Why, for example, in Michigan, do more than 4 in 10 black children live in poverty and comprise more than 40 % of the prison population (Powers, 2017; McCarter, 2017)? Why is it that when an individual of color commits a deviant act, the whole community is stigmatized, but when a white individual commits the same act, it is seen as an individual's problem? Finally, if the color of the skin and physical appearance does not have any merit in society, why then, did many of my American friends encourage my light-skinned wife to do the shopping and grocery shortly after September 11, 2000? If the "content of our characters should be used in having access to life chances, why then, are there many educated minorities, who struggle to obtain a full-time job? These are some questions for those who do not see the reality of skin color or maintain their color blindness pathway.

Another theory that emerged as a social science framework to address race and racial issues in the United States in the late 1970s and the early 1980s is Critical Race Theory (CRT). This multidisciplinary theory was created by legal and social science scholars and social activists such as Derrick Bell, Kimberly Crenshaw, and Richard Delgado to legally analyze the role of racial stratification in relation to the American judicial system and policies (Delgado and Stefancic, 2018). Although it was initially oriented toward legal issues and the treatment of minorities in the legal system, it has been diffused to other fields of study and numerous race-related topics (Delgado and Jean 2000; Brown, 2003).

According to this theory, racial and ethnic stratification has the purpose of controlling, exploiting, or limiting access to resources and opportunities for minorities.

The findings indicate that various approaches to studying racial issues are limited in that they do not emphasize or largely consider the subjective aspects of racism, as they are embedded in the cultural-historical epochs in which people lived. As Ibn-Khaldun, the 14th century Tunisian Islamic philosopher stated, "the past and the future resemble each other as two drops of water." The past can shape the present, and the present model can shape the future. Utilizing qualitative research, secondary analysis of data, I developed a different type of theory to stress the implicit aspects of racism and colorism that are culturally and historically created and socially learned. The theory, which I termed "Pool Theory" is the cultivation of observations and my own acquired ideas from a game pool.

3. Pool Theory

The pool theory is a new theoretical perspective that can potentially be useful in explaining the historical origins of racism and race relations. This theory lays the groundwork for discussing how skin color, power differentiation, ethnocentrism, and eurocentrism might have influenced the creation of racial categorization. This theory attempts to analyze invisible racism in terms of the color of the balls utilized in a standard pool game. Although the history of the pool is unclear, it includes balls and a sticks. It is believed that the game can be traced to northern Europe. Whether it was for entertainment or served some social or religious functions, is still an intriguing debate among historians (Hamburger,1979). Originally, the game was developed as an outdoor game, but industrialization and urbanization fashioned it as an indoor game, using a wooden table with green cloth to stimulate grass. In addition, to prevent the balls from falling, the edge of the table was raised using simple borders. The design was designed to resemble riverbanks and even called "banks." The game became popular among aristocrats and commoners in Europe, particularly France, as soon as it became an indoor entertainment recreational game (Burgos,1997; Hamburger 1979). According to Hamburger (1979), game models attempt to make sense of the complexity of human affairs by focusing on the interaction of the decisions of individuals whose behavior can potentially affects the others. It can provide new insights into some of the inquiries about the nature of human differences.

Pool theory is based on the following basic assumptions: a) race is politically and socio-culturally constructed, defined, and practiced, and is often salient in social situations. b) implicit feelings and attitudes of the dominant group have contributed to the construction and dissemination of racism and racial categorization. C) skin color is highly valued in society and each color has its own recognition. Those who possess a favorite color are more likely to be considered appealing, powerful, prestigious, socially desirable, civilized, and active. Historically, the superiority and inferiority of races have been arbitrated by color and remains unchanged to this date. Pool theory attempts to analyze how implicit biases regarding race might have predisposed the varying colors of balls in a pool game. Often than not, the position of minorities in any situation, including many games, indicates the construction of their reality. The creation of any product, its qualities, and representative power not only reflects a particular time and culture, but also the creators' imagination and ideology. The historical and social construction of objects can be helpful in better understanding people's implicit and explicit attitudes and feelings toward one another (Henry and Sears, 2002; Desmond and Emirbayer, 2009; Fiona, 2016).

The creation and the selection of color variations and positions of the pool balls, like any other socially constructed objects, have implications. My implicit assumption is that the assigned color of the balls stems from implicit biases and might have been purposely chosen to exemplify the power and control of a certain race. Historically, eugenic theorists have attempted to demonstrate the biological superiority of the White race. Obviously, there is no research that indicates how balls are labeled and selected. However, I might know is that the concept and value of color are historically and socio-culturally labeled by the ruling dominant groups. The balls in a billiard game can be viewed as explicating racial hierarchy and power differentiation, which is the residue of a historical trend. The creation of any objects, such as the balls in a pool of games, if willingly, has underlying cognitive reasonings or rationale. The mental reasoning for such a configuration of the game is cognitive consonance-based and is manifests in the social constructionist approach (Burgos,1997; Friedman, 2016). The construction and function of the balls are grounded in colonial and imperialistic ideology. The selective perception during the colonial era, which emphasized the superiority and inferiority of races might have determined the position and accountability of the balls. If selective perception has been used in choosing the deed, then the white color, which has historically been associated with power and positive attributes, has been assigned as the game striker.

The black and white ball's position is clear: one is the dominant and the other the subordinate (figure 1). With regard to the other balls, they are considered to be neutral, having no significant specific position in the game; they are the buffer zone. Given the views of English and other colonial powers views on minorities, particularly their views on blacks as immoral, animalistic, uncivilized, and unchristian (Hurst, 2007), it is reasonable to argue that the

white ball was selected as the most powerful ball in the game because of some associations with the color white, such as dominance and power. In the game, when the white ball drops into any pocket, it would be scratched, a foul, and the player would lose a point, not the game. On the other hand, if the black ball falls in any pocket before potting the other balls, the game is over, and the player loses. Does this mean that the black ball determines the outcome of the game, or is it not given the same opportunity to continue the play? In accordance with the assumptions of the theory, Black is not giving a fair shake because of the relative nature of power differentiation and social inequality. Not granting opportunities and power to minorities was a global colonial strategy to undermine their success so they could easily maintain their own status quo.

One might argue that the game was originally an outdoor game and played in grass, and since the black color was less visible in grass, it was chosen to be the last ball to enter the pocket. In contrast, the white ball was selected as a responsive game breaker because of its visibility. However, nowadays, many players choose to use yellow or orange balls in a game of golf, which is played on grass. Additionally, if the least visible color was consciously chosen as the last ball and deciding factor, why was the green ball that was the least visible color in grass (as originally played) not selected? (Figure 2).

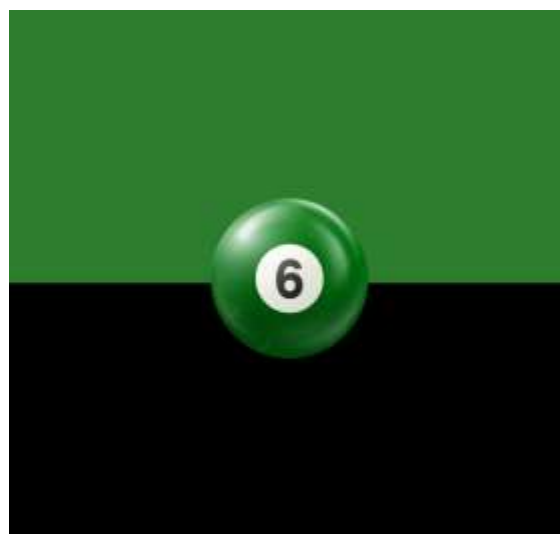Figure 1. Power Distribution in the Pool Theory

Figure 2. Black and green color comparison

The pool theory contends that most social theories do not focus on the implicit and historical foundations of racism. The pool theory counters color blindness, the belief that racism is no longer an issue in American society. The theory also refutes the idea that assimilation reduces prejudice and discrimination and decreases the differences among groups. These differences are embedded in history, and it is not an easy path for minorities to adapt and for the majority to fully accept them. The dominant group not only has the desire, but the power to impose their culture on the minorities. In every retrospective study, the color of the skin played a major role in the assimilation process. For some, such as those who came and still come to the United States from European nations, their skin color makes it easier for them to adapt to the dominant culture.

4. Conclusion

The pool theory is a new theoretical perspective that can potentially be useful in explaining the historical origins of racism. Pool theory uses a pool game as a starting point. This suggests that racism is a form of secrecy and subtle ideas in which ethnocentrism and eurocentrism are aligned with implicit biases and have contributed to its construction and dissemination. This theory presumes that the assigned color of the billiard balls stemmed from prejudice and might have been purposely chosen to exemplify the power and control of a certain race. It is reasonable to argue that the white ball was selected as the most powerful ball in the game because of its associations with the white color. The findings suggests that color and race are not fixed realities; they are part of the human cognitive process that is created, internalized, and developed as social facts. The findings also suggest that the positions and qualities of minorities in stratified societies can be analyzed by applying games. The proposed idea of the pool theory is not congruent with color-blind race theory, which states that racism no longer exists or is a problem in society. Moreover, the theory counters the idea that assimilation reduces prejudice and discrimination and decreases the differences among groups.

Overall, the current research illuminates that fact that racism is rooted in history. Therefore, it is important for the society to understand past history in order to better the future. The framework of this study may be beneficial and encouraging in motivating future research in theory building, particularly in relation to race and racism. Furthermore, it can be a good source and an additional avenue for future literature reviews.

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