"I dream a world": Re-imagining change

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Abstract (Article Summary)

Grimes argues that perspectives on change would benefit from a consideration of literature by and about black women that is little known within organization studies. The author develops categories based on the literature that draw on the goals and assumptions of black women scholars and activists, and considers the ways organizations and research methods could be re-imagined.

Full Text (9850 words)

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"I Dream a World": Re-imagining Change[1]

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ABSTRACT

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In this paper, I argue that perspectives on change would benefit from a consideration of literature by and about black women that is little known within organization studies. My goal is to introduce the literature itself, and argue that organizational change theorists should consider it as they envision and define change. I develop categories based on the literature that draw on the goals and assumptions of black women scholars and activists, and attend to ways organizations and research methods could be reimagined. The goals include: (1) changing systems to meet basic needs, (2) social and organizational change, and (3) changing the dominant culture. Assumptions include: (1) the importance of paying attention to those typically ignored, (2) black women's self-valuation and self-definition, and (3) black women have been and are powerful change agents. Re-imagining organizations includes: (1) considering who counts as leader or manager, (2) what counts as an organization, and (3) redefining/reclaiming organizational terms. Re-imagining research methods includes a consideration of (1) researcher roles, (2) participants, and (3) "variables."

INTRODUCTION

C. Wright Mills (1959) spoke about ordinary people being unable to "step back" and see the larger picture, and argued that sociology should give them access to the tools to do so. He believed that "personal problems" could thus be transformed into public issues (Garcia, 1997). He made the point that sociology (and I would add other disciplines) had become academic in the sense of "arcane and useless." I would also argue that the disciplines have found ways to ignore those who are not academic, those who would link their "ordinary" lives to academic questions

and use their experiences to force the academy to help address social issues. Such people have been shut out in various ways (see Allen, 1995a; Collins, 1990; Grimes 2000,2001; Nkomo, 1992; Stanfield & Dennis, 1993) and continue to be shut out.

The discipline of organization studies and its academic literature influences what happens in organizations (which collectively make up the larger society) and are, therefore, crucial to considering societal issues. Decisions about resource use, ways of organizing, how people relate to each other, appropriate roles, what is valued, whose interests should matter, what counts as democracy are made and reinforced in and by organizations (Deetz, 1992). All of these areas are influenced by and influence the organization literature.

However, this literature systematically leaves out some topics that are crucial for a full understanding of organizations and social issues. For example, Cox and Nkomo (1990) found that less than 1.7% of articles addressed the topic of race when they searched 20 academic organization journals published between 1964 and 1989. Over the years, discussion of race became less frequent, decreasing from 11.7 articles per year in the 1970s, to 6.3 articles per year in the 1980s, to 3.6 articles per year in the last five years of the study (see Grimes, 1996). The near omission of such an important issue has a negative impact on change initiatives that are informed by the academic organization studies literature.

To begin to address this omission requires the consideration of ideas at the margins of or outside organization studies (see Nkomo, 1992). present perspectives on organizations and change informed by a group traditionally excluded-black women[2]. The black women I discuss theorize the need to rethink change in organizations and society. As a group, black women are uniquely positioned with respect to race, gender, work, and organizational issues. They have not been the recipients of race, gender or (seldom) class privilege. Black women's workforce participation has historically been high (see Almquist, 1979; Simms & Malveaux, 1987; Wallace, 1982; Woody, 1992). They have often been relegated to jobs serving others, especially white people, giving them a unique status as outsiders within (Collins, 1990). Because they rarely benefit from the status quo, they may be more likely to see its troublesome aspects[3]. The black women discussed here are astute theorists of organizational change whose work can inform the re-imagining necessary before change agents engage with organizations and create processes and programs for change.

I see this paper as another facet of my work on whiteness. It is problematic to expect other groups to use their energy to educate white people; we must educate ourselves. Rather than asking readers to examine their assumptions by demonstrating how whiteness unfolds in the academic organization studies literature (Grimes, 2001) and the practitioners managing diversity literature (Grimes, 2002), here I ask readers to examine their assumptions by considering an alternative perspective on organizational change. I imagine my audience as mostly (but not entirely, of course) white academics who have not been exposed to this literature, and who may not have known it even existed.

The paper is organized in the following way. First, I outline my methodology and introduce the questions that the paper addresses. I touch briefly on ideas about typical organizations and organizational change efforts. In contrast to these, I present literature by and about black women to exemplify categories for re-imagining change that their work suggests. Given the limits of linear description and the fact that most articles exemplify multiple categories, I have adopted the strategy of keeping discussion of each article or chapter together. Therefore, there is some back and forth movement, references to categories still to be explained, and more frequently, references to articles already presented as the other categories relevant to it are explained.

METHODOLOGY

If readers expect a conventional research paper with a literature review followed by an empirical study that addresses a gap in that literature, they will be disappointed. My goal is to introduce the literature itself, and argue that organizational change theorists should consider it as they envision and define change. If readers expect a paper that explains precisely how to implement changes based on the ideas presented here, they will also be disappointed. While there are certainly practical lessons in the literature presented here, I believe that re-imagining change is best addressed before change agents engage with specific change efforts in particular organizations. It is another way of "getting our own house in order" before we begin advising others (Grimes 2001). In addition, because of my positioning outside the group whose work is drawn on, I suggest that readers hold my categorizations and interpretations lightly and read this literature for themselves,

If we hold essentialist notions of who black women and white women are, there are no circumstances under which it would be appropriate for me, a white woman, to present these writings by and about black women. However, even a nonessentialist understanding of difference leaves us with questions about what a white woman is doing writing about black women. For example, standpoint theory suggests that our experiences shape what we can know (Harding, 1990, 1993). People with different standpoints may look at the "same" thing and interpret it very differently. For this paper, the relevance is that a black woman, because of her experiences, would be in a better position to fully understand, interpret, and present these works by and about black women.

As a person who has not had those experiences[4], I would be more likely to misunderstand and misinterpret the work I am presenting. Of course, I am not arguing that all black women (or only black women; see Fine, 1991; Thomas & Alderfer, 1989) would make arguments similar to those on which I am drawing; here the issue is experience and its interpretation. Even without assuming there is one "right" way to interpret these works, and while recognizing that black women have a wide range of experiences and would interpret these works in a variety of ways, the "standpoint" critique is still a powerful one. It is only because I believe this literature is both -so important for, organizational scholars/change agents and so little known that I make an attempt to present it here.

The paper addresses several questions based on my reading of the literature on black women's organizations described below. My reading of this literature was informed by additional readings on race and race relations, whiteness, black culture and language, black feminism, black women's literature, and other work by black writers. I used a grounded-in-the-- literature methodology. In other words, rather than creating categories based on theory and testing whether those categories were present in the literature as a hypothetico-deductive researcher might do (Kerlinger, 1986), or abstracting categories (or themes) from interviews and observations as one would do in grounded theory research (Glaser & Strauss, 1967), I used the literature as my data and abstracted categories that appeared frequently. I did not collect material selectively based on an argument that I wanted to present[5], but gathered and read everything I could find written by black women organizational scholars and on related issues by or about black women. My categories and arguments were developed from my interpretations of the overlapping and mutually-informing arguments that these authors made.

The two questions that frame the categories are as follows: "What needs to change?" and "How should change be reimagined?" The first question requires a closer look at the goals and assumptions of this group of scholars and participants. The goals include changing systems to meet basic needs, social and organizational change, and changing the dominant culture. Assumptions include the importance of paying attention to those who are typically ignored and the assumption that black women's self-valuation and self-definition is crucial (Collins, 1990). A final assumption is that black women, given their position in organizations and society, have been and are powerful agents of change. The second question is broadly divided into re-imagining

organizations (which includes considering who counts as a leader or manager, what counts as an organization, and redefining/reclaiming organizational terms) and re-imagining research methods (including issues related to researcher roles, participants, and "variables"). Both the women discussed in the literature and the writers of the literature reflect the goals, assumptions, and ways of rethinking change outlined here.

"Typical" organizations and change efforts

The traditional (perhaps stereotypical) notion of an organization is a large, for-profit multinational. It is a formal and impersonal bureaucracy with a strict hierarchy and ever increasing routinization and control (Morgan, 1997; Weber.. 1978). Profit and product are valued over people (Hatch, 1997), and aggressive "take-charge" attitudes are valued over thoughtful consideration of long-term consequences (Boje & Dennehy, 1993). The interests of white male decision-makers are prioritized as they create and support the status quo (Mills & Simmons, 1995). Many organizations do not fit this characterization, but it is assumed to be a norm if not an ideal.

It is important to note that resistance also takes place through organizations, whether they are traditional (Gilkes, 1983), nontraditional (Barnett, 1995; Robinson, 1987), or those not seen as organizations (Stack, 1975). And certainly recent resistance has come in opposition to "typical" organizations such as the WTO, IMF, and Nike. Organizations divorced from the mainstream norm may offer a good starting place to look for strong and creative opposition. This is one reason for a consideration of organizations outside the norm and why the "normalness" of typical organizations needs to be problematized.

Typical organizational change efforts focus on improving organizations' effectiveness and efficiency (Mills & Simmons, 1995). However, change efforts are difficult to fully implement and evaluate (Hatch, 1997; Morgan, 1997). Recent efforts have included just in time inventory controls, pushing decision making and accountability down the chain of command, zero defects, radically improving customer service, process reengineering, flattening organizational hierarchies, and self-regulating work teams. Additional change efforts result from "downsizing,". mergers, or acquisitions (Martin, 1998). Others come aboy to improve work life such as "flex-time" or managing diversity, though, like the others, they are expected to improve the bottom line (Cox, 2001; Donnelly, Gibson, & Ivancevich, 1998). I am not arguing that none of these efforts help organizational members and other stakeholders (but see Zom, Christensen, & Cheney, 1999), just that the change advocated by the women presented here is of a different magnitude-it is literally a re-imagining of change.

WHAT NEEDS TO CHANGE?-GOALS AND ASSUMPTIONS

Change theorizing needs to start with different goals and assumptions. Goals and assumptions are interrelated and not easily separated, although I separate them here for ease of discussion. Three goals that appear often in this literature are (1) changing systems to meet basic needs, (2) working towards both organizational and societal change, and (3) changing the dominant culture. Three assumptions I noted are (1) the importance of listening to those who are usually ignored (2) the importance of black women's self-definitions and self-valuation, and (3) the assumption that black women have been and are powerful change agents.

Goals

Changing the system to meet basic needs means that in whatever realm organizations impact basic human needs, they should prioritize those needs rather than profit or efficiency. After those needs, including the need for shelter, food, health, safety, respect, and education are met, other goals can be negotiated. Working towards organizational and societal change indicates that

while organizations are crucial, change at the societal level is needed as well. Some of the organizations discussed here came together to create societal change; others help members survive the existing social landscape. The goal of changing the dominant culture suggests that mainstream assumptions about difference, poverty, and other issues create many of the problems that the black women discussed here are working to overcome.

To illustrate these three goals, I begin with Gilkes' (1983, 1988) discussion of black women community workers[6] in social service organizations. The three goals are interwoven in this and the following example, in which Poster (1995) compares two women's groups. Additional categories are also evident among the activists discussed, such as their assumption that those typically ignored should be listened to, and the importance of self-definition and self-valuation. The authors drawn on here also demonstrate additional categories. For example, Gilkes and Poster choose to study groups that are often ignored, present black women as powerful agents of change, refuse to consider race and gender as "variables," and challenge what counts as an organization.

Finding collective solutions to community problems is the goal of the social services community workers that Cheryl Townsend Gilkes (1988) interviewed. The women understand that the entire system needs to change; they create alternative administrative styles that include doing things with rather than to or for those they serve. They do not find it more "professional" to maintain distance between themselves and their clients, and deal instead with the whole person, including inviting their clients home with them or welcoming telephone calls at 6:00 am. While these community workers certainly manage and/or lead organizations, their goals and methods differ greatly from those in mainstream organizations. For these black Women., the bottom line is buildin a strong black community through changing the system and serving individuals.

Gilkes (1983) finds that the community workers decolonize their work lives. They work to flatten organizational hierarchies and to democratize client-professional and community-- agency relationships. The workers describe their understanding that different community problems are interconnected and fueled by the dominant culture's practices and assumptions. Gilkes does not consider the educational level, race, class, and gender of the community workers to be simple demographic variables, but explores these complex and overlapping characteristics in detailed interviews. Her definition of work allows her to see community work in the black urban environment Is worthy of study; an important part of that work is staying connected with the community and its concerns. Gilkes' ideas about mobility include career decisions made with the community in mind rather than the individual. By starting with different definitions and asking different questions, her writing helps us understand organizational change in new ways.

In another example, Poster (1995) contrasts a group made up of working-class women of color and a group of upper-class white women. She argues that the race and class backgrounds of the members lead to different organizational goals and ways of organizing. The white group is structured bureaucratically and members seek to challenge discrimination individually. The women of color are more collective and democratic and focus on transforming institutions. They work to fundamentally change the system so they can meet the basic needs of themselves and their families. The white group works to reform the system so they can be more successful in it

The leader of the women of color group critiques dominant ways of organizing which assume that experts are the ones who know what is best, especially for the poor (see Rao, Stuart, & Kelleher, 1999). She argues instead for a "very different model" that assumes the intelligence and problem-solving ability of those who are often ignored (quoted in Poster, t995, p. 670). Another of the group's leaders argues that difference should not stand in the way of solidarity. This is. in contrast to many organizations that choose leaders based on similarity, prioritizing higher comfort levels over diversity and better decisions (Cox, 1993; Herriot & Pemberton, 1995; Thomas, 1991).

Assumptions

Three assumptions that are prominent in this literature are (1) the importance of listening to those who are typically ignored, (2) the importance of black women's self-definitions and self-valuation, and (3) the assumption that black women have been and are powerful agents of change. The idea of listening to those who are typically ignored relates to standpoint theory. To fully rethink change, multiple standpoints, especially those outside the mainstream, need to be considered. While standpoint theory suggests that outsider perspectives are particularly useful, some black women have unique outsider perspectives as "outsiders within" (Collins, 1990). Outsiders within are required to interact with dominant groups and, therefore, come to intimately know them, while not identifying with them or benefiting from their privilege. In the past, many black women were outsiders within because they worked in white households. More recently, some black women choose to work in white organizations yet not assimilate, thus maintaining their positions as outsiders within.

Patricia Hill Collins' (1990) terms self-- definition and self-valuation also point to important assumptions. Self-definition means not buying into the negative and inaccurate mainstream images of black women (Collins, 1990; hooks, 1992, 1993; Pieterse, 1992). It means that black women define themselves-- often based on women in their family and community. Self-valuation means valuing yourself even if others do not. It means valuing black women's ways of thinking and acting. The third assumption is that black women have been and are powerful change agents. Black women's change activities are little known because they are often invisible or forgotten (see Barnett, 1993, 1995; Robinson, 1987). From the civil rights movement, to their influence on the women's rights movement, to welfare reform and tenants' rights struggles, black women have organized and led in ways that could serve as models for re-imagining change. Below I present examples from black women's organizing during the Montgomery bus boycott (Barnett 1995) and black women's efforts to improve their work (Dill, 1988) and church (Gilkes, 1985) lives.

Attending to those who are usually ignored and explicitly discussing black women's change efforts, Barnett (1995) considers two black women's organizations active during the Montgomery bus boycott of 1955-1956. One organization (the Women's Political Council) is proactively political, with centralized organizational structures and formal leadership positions, while the other (The Club from Nowhere) is decentralized and nonhierarchical, with no formal regulations. These organizations are part of black women's organizing in "homes, communities, churches, and collectivist organizations" (Barnett, 1995, p. 200), sites not typically considered in mainstream organization studies. Like the community workers in Gilkes' (1983, 1988) studies, these black women organizers have a collectivist orientation and are uninterested in self-promotion.

The Women's Political Council meets with the mayor about riding conditions for blacks on Montgomery busses. Their concerns are not taken seriously. They also solidify plans for a boycott several years before Rosa Parks' arrest. Hours after the arrest, Professor Jo Ann Robinson makes the decision, in conference with a colleague or two, to risk a midnight visit to her college's mimeograph machine to print up more than 50,000 notices calling for the initial one-day boycott (she eventually loses her job). Several days later, the ministers of Montgomery, including Dr. King, "catch up with the masses" and unite to support the boycott. Robinson deflects attention from her early and continued central role in the boycott's success by giving the credit to the black women of Montgomery (Robinson, 1987).

Boycott activists risk jobs and safety to do their work (Robinson, 1987). It is also dangerous for others to support them, so organizers have to be innovative. The name of a group of working class and poor women called the Club from Nowhere reflects this. Their name emphasizes that those supporting the club (through donations or by buying food items members sell door to door) will not be traced. Though its members are poor, the Club has access to church and community

networks, as well as to information gained in the homes of white employers. The "strategizing, organizing. fundraising, communication, and leadership roles" of the women in both groups are crucial to the success of the boycott (Barnett, 1995, p. 217).

Self-definition and self-valuation are important for black women domestic workers who must "gain personal mastery over a situation in which they [are] socially defined as object" (Dill, 1988, p. 36). Bonnie Thornton Dill finds that the domestic workers' management of their employers, their efforts at creating a career, and the support they draw from the black community help them to resist their oppressive situation through building and defending their self-worth. Finally, the organizing of Sanctified churchwomen (Gilkes, 1985) also exemplifies self-definition and self-valuation. The women are "visible heroines," strong leaders, professional educators, financial contributors, evangelists, missionaries, pastors, and religious activists (Gilkes, 1985, p. 680) in a milieu that often assumes women should be the invisible "backbone" of the black church. Church members call each other "Saint," wear very conservative clothing (similar to a nun's habit) meant to discourage racist sexual attention, and refuse to use first names in any speech or writing that may be heard or seen by white people. Members do this because refusing to use a title and last name when speaking to black people is part of the strategy white people use to denigrate them. The Sanctified churchwomen are powerful agents of change in their churches and communities.

The goals and assumptions presented here can be important backdrops for re-imagining change. They push change efforts to the societal and basic needs levels. They promote reimagining of self. They introduce successful models for change that have been overlooked. However, such models require rethinking how change might unfold, both in terms of organizations and research methods.

HOW SHOULD CHANGE BE REIMAGINED?-ORGANIZATIONS

The assumptions and goals outlined above open up for discussion ways in which change can be re-imagined. In this section, I address reimagining organizations, which includes (1) reconsidering who counts as a leader or manager, (2) reconsidering what counts as an organization, and (3) redefining/reclaiming organizational terms.

Who counts as leader/manager?

Challenging who can count as a leader or manager gets at the center of the change issues raised here. Usually those that conform are chosen as leaders-those who exercise formal authority to meet goals developed above them in the hierarchy, and in so doing, preserve the status quo. However, there are other ways to think about leaders or managers.

Barnett (1995) discusses the unique organizational methods used by the black women she studies as responses to the overlapping oppressions of race, gender, and class. Black women are not positioned to exercise power in ways similar to more dominant groups and, furthermore, they may not wish to. Because of these factors, their organizing may be very effective but relatively invisible. They may work to develop and inspire others rather than bring attention to themselves (Grant, 1998). For example, Barnett (1993) argues that black women's work was foundational to the civil rights movement. She adds that participatory democracy in the white women's movement also grew out of black women's ways of organizing during civil rights struggles. This suggests that black women's ways of organizing serve as prototypes for other movements, even if the influence is eventually forgotten by its beneficiaries. Acknowledging this history may help organizations take black women change agents seriously and broaden who is included in change efforts.

BerthA Knox Gilkey, a welfare and tenants' rights activist, explicitly connects race, class, and

gender issues with the question of who can count as a manager. When she and other poor black and white women tenants take over the management of the projects where they live, their endeavor is not expected to succeed. As Gilkey (1989, p. 22) notes, wit was supposed to fail because tenants don't manage; we are managed." Gilkey (p. 22) also directly addresses the question of who benefits from the bottom line. She says:

There is big money in poor folks. There's millions of people that benefit. They eat because I'm poor. They never want to eliminate poverty. They just want to control it. The day they eliminat poverty, they go out of business.

For a leader to suggest that poor people are required to shore up the dominant system by their poverty counters mainstream assumptions and highlights the goals of changing the dominant culture and meeting basic needs. It also suggests why the perspectives and experiences of those who do not benefit from the status quo should be central to rethinking change.

Those struggling to survive may have especially revealing and subversive insights into organizational life. Of course, mainstream assumptions include ways to dismiss those with alternative ways of thinking (see Deetz, 1992). In Gilkey's (1989) example, the mainstream assumes poor people are poor because of their individual lack of intelligence and moral failings, not because of the structure of society or their situation; therefore, it would make no sense to listen to them. Spender (quoted in Marshall, 1993) makes the point that who gets listened to is a political question rather than a matter of greater value or superiority.

"All human beings are constantly engaged in the process of describing and explaining, and ordering the social world, but only a few have been, or are, in a position to have their version treated as serious and accepted." (p. 128)

The acknowledgment that everyone can interpret their own experiences, and that differences in power impact whose interpretation is taken seriously, echoes the assumptions of the literature reviewed here. It connects to ideas discussed earlier about listening to those who are often ignored and the importance of self-- definition/self-valuation, and those to be discussed below about the need for research methods that respect and draw on the insights of participants.

What counts as an organization

Considering what counts as an organization is also crucial to the goals described here. Communities, families, ad hoc organizations (such as the Club from Nowhere, and the informal exchange networks discussed below), and forgotten organizations, such as the Women's Political Caucus, are considered worthy of attention and emulation.

Like Gilkes' (1983, 1988) discussion of black women community workers, Barnett (1993, 1995) suggests that black communities and families should be seen as political organizations. Hooks (1990) talks about home as a "site of resistance" where children can be taught an oppositional world view (p. 41). Giddings (1984, p. 277) maintains that black women civil rights organizers are inspired by "female doers as role models," and more specifically by women in their community or, in some cases, mothers who are activists. In mainstream organization theory, however, families are not usually considered organizations, and neither are communities. As Barnett (1993, 1995) points out, these assumptions influence who can count as leaders and managers. This in turn influences what efforts are considered organizational change efforts. If black women's work in these organizations were recognized, then their goals and methods would have a greater impact on re-imagining change.

Another coming together of people that does not typically count as an organization is domestic

exchange networks, as exemplified by Carol Stack's (1975) All Our Kin. Stack describes the exchange networks that a group of black inner-city residents rely on for day-to-day survival, using such terms as "self-help," "cooperation," "collective adaptation," and "alliances." These terms suggest a subtle yet crucial organizing in the community that may challenge bottom line and managerialist assumptions about reimagining change. For example, one network participant argues:

"You can't get help just by sitting at home ... you get to get up and go out and meet people, because the very day you go out, that first person you meet may be the person that can help you get the things you want.... You have to have help from everybody and anybody so don't turn no one down when they come around for help. " ("Ruby Banks," cited in Stack, 1975, p. 32)

While more focused on survival than changing the system, this organizing still draws on the spirit of struggle and collectivism as well as the respect for self and others so prevalent in many of these examples.

Redefine/reclaim organizational terms

Reclaiming and redefining terms is a long-- standing tradition in critical scholarship such as feminism (see Calls & Smircich, 1992). Such reclaiming points out assumptions hidden in accepted definitions, critiques them both directly, and offers content that challenges the taken-for-- granted. Such activity is useful for re-imagining change, especially given the terms reclaimed here. In this section, work that reclaims the terms leadership and politics is presented.

Like Barnett (1995), Jeanne Porter (1995) explicitly questions dominant notions of leadership and implicitly challenges the notion that communities cannot be organizations. Porter (1995) fears that words like leader and leadership may be so saturated with Western notions of "individualism, elitism, competition, and domination" (p. 257) that it may be impossible to use them. She notes that some black women scholars use other terms, perhaps because they see the term "leader" as beyond repair. Gilkes (1983, 1985), discussed above, calls such women "community workers" rather than leaders, although the women dearly are leaders of their community, as well as leaders and managers in the organizations they run. Based on her research, Porter (1995) works to reclaim the term. Her idea of leadership is associated with "collaboration, collectivism, mutuality, egalitarianism, cultural sensitivity, and humanity" (p. 257), which fits well with the ideas and actions of many of the black women discussed here. As Porter suggests, even when black women are seen as leaders, they may not wish to be traditional leaders. Ella Baker, one of the primary organizers of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee during the civil rights movement, is resented by black male leaders because she insists on decentralized leadership and participatory democracy (Barnett, 1993; Grant, 1998). Baker (Barnett, 1993, p. 176) feels her role is to "put together pieces out of which I hoped organization would come." Baker is yet another example of a powerful change agent who draws on the assumptions and goals outlined above.

Naples (1991) studied poor and working class women community members hired to work in community action programs. She asks whether these women are "doing politics" which she defines as:

"any struggle to gain control over the definitions of 'self' and 'community'; to augment personal and community empowerment; to create alternative institutions and organizational processes; and to increase the power and resources of their community." (p. 479)

While Naples (1991) argues that the women's work is political, the women themselves explicitly deny that they are doing political work-they define politics as self-interest and white middle-- class

male electoral politics. Naples' redefinition of and attempts to reclaim the term political is similar to Porter (1995) and Barnett's (1995) work to redefine and reclaim the term leadership. Like the community workers Gilkes (1983, 1988) studied, the women in Naples' study are doing "just what needed to be done" and regard self and community empowerment as more important than career advancement (Naples, 1991, p. 486). The women work long hours, often at unpaid community work. They do so in addition to their jobs or when their agencies run into funding problems. The family becomes part of the organizing process as older daughters attend protests in place of mothers who need to stay home with younger children who are ill. Children also become involved when they are harassed because of their mothers' activism and learn they must fight injustice. The women know that they can cope with poverty, allowing them to focus on their goals rather than worrying about job security. Both Naples' definition and the actions of these women fit well with ideas about changing the system, listening to those usually ignored, self-- valuation and self-definition, and alternative organizations including community and family. The women are also focused and courageous agents of social and organizational change. Challenging accepted definitions is one useful way to rethink change. The new definitions suggested by black women scholars and activists. fit well with the goals and assumptions discussed here. However, without rethinking research methods in ways that allow new questions to be asked and new frameworks to be created, the subversive insights of black women would be lost in irrelevant closed-ended questionnaires and objectifying statistical analyses.

HOW SHOULD CHANCE BE REIMAGINED?-RESEARCH METHODS

In this section, I address research methods that create knowledge in ways useful to a re-imagining of change. The scholars presented challenge the research status quo through the ways they think about (1) their own roles as researchers, (2) study participants, and (3) the "variables" they study. As I discuss each sub-category, it will also be apparent that the writers discussed earlier draw on many of the same methods in their research.

Researcher roles

Black women organization scholars researching black women or critiquing the discipline for ignoring race and/or gender do not tend to distance themselves from their audience or research participants. They may speak directly to the reader, include their own experiences in their work, and be reflexive about their own positioning and experiences.

Stella Nkomo's (1988, p. 133) discussion of black women managers makes two unusual moves: She outlines her motivation for writing a piece on black women managers, and directly addresses her audience about her goals, one of which is for other black women to identify with what she presents.

"I want you to know there is some effort to document your experiences and to offer suggestions for successful careers in organizations. I hope that others will gain insight into the particular issues confronting minority women in the workplace."

Nkomo acknowledges differences among women, the invisibility of black women in organizational writing, and the lack of simultaneous study of race and gender.

A related issue is suggested by the title "Twice blessed; doubly oppressed" (Allen, 1995b), a look at the advantages and disadvantages of being a black woman academic. In this article, Allen embraces the richness and validity of personal experience and speaks directly to the reader of and from her own standpoint. She goes beyond seeing race and gender as merely demographic variables.

Allen argues that being a black woman academic is a blessing; she rejects a role as victim or other, and celebrates her socialization and strengths as a black woman. She affirms her role as a proactive social change agent. It can be a burden because of the complexities of the discrimination directed at black women (see Fulbright, 1985) and because organizational members may see her as a stereotype rather than as herself. Some may assume she is not qualified to do her job or may want her to choose between race and gender alliances. Allen discusses the extra expectations placed upon her, such as providing a scarce black and/or female perspective on committees, mentoring or assisting black and other nontraditional students, and working under increased scrutiny and comment.

Such insights may suggest directions for re-imagining organizational change. For example, if members of her organization were more aware of difference issues, Allen would not need to spend as much energy dealing with inappropriate interactions and examination from members of the dominant culture. Allen's workload would be decreased if there were more professors of color with which to share mentoring and committee duties. In these scenarios, it is assumed that the dominant culture needs to change, rather than Allen.

Nkomo and Allen's articles echo many of the categories already presented. Nkomo (1988) is direct with the different constituents in her audience, and while she does not relate her own experiences here, she does so elsewhere. Allen (1995b) relates several difficult experiences to help her audience understand her life. She also notes a need for social change and change in the dominant culture. Her experiences are those typically left out of research, and so she presents them. She draws on the concepts of self-definition and self-valuation, and sees herself as a change agent. Like Nkomo (1988), she is exposing some readers to a set of experiences and assumptions they may not otherwise encounter while validating the experiences of others.

Black women researchers suggest that their assumptions and experiences obligate them to ask different questions and value different things. If these researchers did not value black women's activities and thoughts, if they thought poor women's organizing was unworthy of attention, if they believed only men were important in the civil rights movement, if they did not challenge accepted language to make room for alternative perspectives, if they did not wonder about inner-city communities and families, none of this research would exist. And given these interests, mainstream research methods would not be appropriate for gathering the insights of the women they want to study.

Participants

Participants have a very different place in the research examined here. They are not passive and silenced objects of study, fitting their yes/no answers to the researcher's framework. They are valued participants (or sometimes coresearchers-see Bell, Orbe, Drummond, & Camara, 2000; Orbe, 199314) who can speak for themselves. The researchers include ignored and devalued groups/areas of study, they respect participants, and they draw on participants' experiences and assume participants can theorize those experiences.

Many of the articles presented here show the research strategies outlined in this subsection. Every example is of groups that are typically ignored-black women domestics, Sanctified churchwomen, black women managers and academics, community action workers and public housing tenants, poor women, civil rights and subversive social services leaders. Most of this research is based on detailed interviews with participants. The participants and researchers may acknowledge that their assumptions do not fit typical frameworks (thus, the reclaiming of terms that takes place in the literature). Theory articles addressing the discipline often note the need for more research in this vein (Allen, 1995a; Nkomo, 1992).

For example, Allen (1995a) argues that organizational communication scholars need to consider

racial issues. She sees race as worthy of discussion, partly because it is an important social issue. Allen argues that standpoint theories and critical theory are useful ways to look at diversity, insists that participants' voices be included, and suggests that there be an accounting for power and a reconsideration of socialization in light of diversity issues. She rejects the goal of assimilation and the expectation that people of color take responsibility for educating white people. Allen also points out that employees will have a range of opinions about involvement in race-related research. She suggests that researchers take into account their own race, that they consider using race- and gender-balanced research teams, that researchers study a range of employees of color, that they consider within-group differences, draw out participants' experiences, consider both race and gender, and respect privacy. In these specific recommendations can be seen attention to social change, changing the dominant culture, listening to those who are usually ignored, and researchers' and particpants' roles.

"Variables"

Variable-analytic research focuses on finding statistical differences among variables that are seen as simple and concrete. Because the literature explored here does not assume that race and gender are simple and concrete, I use the term "variable" in an ironic sense. Variable-- analytic work considers race and gender to be mere demographic variables, which are not included in research in complex ways. There is less emphasis on theory-driven hypothesis testing and theory building. When there are statistically significant differences between races or genders, the researchers have no way to explain it-first, because they have not studied important gender or race issues and theories, and second, because they have not considered participants on their own terms. The researchers may then resort to using race or gender as the explanation for the differences they find (see Grimes, 1996). This sub-category addresses two issues concerned with "variables"-the one just described--that race and gender are more than just demographic variables and must be treated as such, and another that deals with the ways characteristics, such as race and gender, overlap.

Black women theorists have addressed the fact that characteristics like gender and race are intertwined and cannot be seen as discrete categories that get "added up" to make a complete person (Combahee River Collective, 1983; hooks, 1984; King, 1988). A person's race very much shapes the possibilities for how s/he is gendered. Likewise, a person's gender shapes how race affects her or him. The title of a book on black feminism, All the women are white, all the blacks are men, but some of us are brave (Hull, Scott, & Smith, 1982) suggests that black women are not considered the paradigmatic case of women or blacks (Nkomo, 1988). A further insight is that the consequences of being a black woman (for example, the discrimination one suffers) are not those of being a white woman added to those of being a black man, but are unique to black women.

These issues have been addressed by many of the researchers cited above. For example, Gilkes' 1983 and 1988 studies of "community workers" do not pigeonhole each interviewee by educational level, race, class, and gender, but explore these characteristics in depth. When full subjectivity is attributed to participants, complex exploration is more likely. Barnett (1995) has argued that the overlapping oppressive aspects of race, gender, and class are what lead black women to organize as they do. Because they do not wish to follow the lead of more powerful groups in dominating others, they develop collaborative, egalitarian forms of organizing. In Allen's (1995b) self-reflexive piece, she does not treat race and gender as variables. In Bell and Nkomo's (1992) "Re-visioning women manager's lives," the authors assume that "women" are of various races and classes-all the women are not white. They acknowledge women's personal and professional lives, and they consider the role of history. These considerations keep the category "woman" from being just a variable.

In an article that takes up the issue of race and organization theory, Nkomo (1992) points out the

limitations of regarding race as merely a demographic variable. She critiques the assumptions used in traditional work and evaluates the mainstream literature-the questions it asks, its unstated assumptions, and its absences. Because race is so rarely discussed in the organization literature, she interjects theories from outside the discipline that put race at the center. Nkomo (1992) ends with a list of questions that might be asked were race and organizations to be rewritten from currently silenced alternative paradigms, including: (1) how societal race relations get reproduced in organizations; (2) how racial identity affects organizational experiences; and (3) `To what extent is race built into the definition of .manager'?" (p. 506). Obviously, this article takes up categories beyond the "variable" issue. Nkomo challenges the dominant culture in organization studies and argues for the inclusion of ideas that are typically ignored. She argues that organizational and societal issues are related, is interested in organization members' experiences, and questions the traditional definition of the term "manager."

The researchers cited here are not just reporting on black women's activities that could be identified as change efforts. They themselves are unwavering advocates for change. They are positioned to ask different questions; they include and esteem those who are usually the most denigrated by mainstream research (see Stanfield & Dennis, 1993). They challenge a status quo that assumes distance, detachment, control, and "objectivity" are the only acceptable ways to do research, that "discovering" knowledge is beneficial, while advocacy and "politics" are not. They understand that treating race and gender as variables is another way of oversimplifying and discrediting the lived experiences of nondominant groups.

CONCLUSION

In this paper, I have argued that perspectives on change would benefit from a consideration of literature by and about black women that is little known within organization studies. I developed categories based on the literature that addressed the questions of "What needs to change?" and "How should change be re-imagined?" I considered the goals and assumptions of black women scholars and activists, and attended to ways that organizations and research methods could be re-imagined.

My contribution has been to introduce this literature and argue for its importance to organization studies and organizational change theorists. Second, I have connected the need to consider alternative paradigms to issues of whiteness. Third, I have developed a set of categories that could be used (or redeveloped) for other settings.

There are some weaknesses of the paper that need to be acknowledged. For example, I am not satisfied that I appropriately navigated the tensions between focusing on the paper's content and positioning myself as a white woman writing about black women. I wanted to give the reader enough information about my background and motivations so s/he could evaluate where I was "coming from." I also wanted to make clear why that was important. On the other hand, I did not wish the paper to be about me." I erred on the side of providing less information on these issues, and may explore them more fully in a separate paper.

Another issue is the idealistic and potentially essentializing flavor of the literature as discussed here. Presented as a body, the literature hangs together well and allows for a coherent argument. But certainly there are other black women's experiences and perspectives that would not fit well with this literature. Because of my own assumptions and experiences, I may have chosen to read (or filtered what I did read) to focus on a positive and empowering vision of black women. Perhaps I should have explored more fully the ways the material I drew on was situated in time and space, and represented just one version of black women's experiences and theorizing (see Bell, Orbe, Drummond, & Camara, 2000).

The paper leaves plenty of leeway for additional research. For instance, within the literature

discussed, there may be additional categories important to re-imagining change that should be developed. Black women organization scholars and/or change agents could be interviewed about their ideas for re-imagining change. Or contemporary organizations that have begun to rethink change in these ways could be studied within an organization studies framework. In addition, ways to move from these categories to particular organizational change efforts could be addressed. The ways that other marginalized groups would re-imagine change could also be explored. The issue of writing about groups of which one is not a part could be examined from an organization studies perspective.

The literature that this paper draws on should be read and considered carefully by those interested in organizational change. There is much to be learned from black women's (and other marginalized) standpoints, and such a reimagining is crucial before we presume to advise others on change activities. Despite my desire to focus on re-imagining rather than specific change efforts, it is still important, at some point, to go beyond simply re-imagining. In whatever realms you feel you have discretion to act-and perhaps those where you do not-take these ideas and put them to use. Otherwise, this effort will have been merely "academic."

[Footnote]
NOTES

[Footnote]
[1] See Lanker and Summers' (1989) book,I dream a world: Portraits of black women who changed America.
[2] 1 use the term "black women" throughout the paper. Perhaps I am stuck in the days of "Say it loud. I'm Black and I'm proud," but, to me, the term "black" has a positive connotation. I'm also influenced by the black feminists and black women writers who use it in the titles of their books

[Footnote]
(see Collins, 19.90; Giddings, 1984; hooks, 1989, 1992, 1993). Further, I use the term "black" because "African-- American" leaves out people of African descent who are not from the Americas (or, given U.S. assumptions about the term "America," from the U.S.).
[3] 1 focus on black women not because I think additional nondominant groups (based on race, ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation, (dis)ability, language, immigrant status, etc.) have been explored thoroughly or because I see other groups as less important While affirming commonalties and overlap between groups, I am also wary of attempts to lump groups together.

[Footnote]
[4] However, the experiences with black people that I have bad-which include those with my partner (who has been expressing his annoyance with white people for at least the 22 years I have known him) and his extended family; work in a developmental daycare center and a teen center between 1978 and 1992; my 14 year relationship with my goddaughter and her extended family; close involvement with a multicultural dance company between 1989 and 1993; and friends from my universities and workplaces-all inform my interest in and interpretation of issues related to race. It is difficult to distill my experiences into a brief list when they could better be explored by telling the stories and learnings associated with them (see Grimes, 1996). In addition, while it is crucial to acknowledge my motivations and background (books, 1989,1990,1992; Houston, 1994), such an exercise still feels like a more elaborate version of the never-persuasive remark: "Some of my best friends are black."

[Footnote]

[5] Another reason for emphasizing this grounded-in-the-- literature process is that white writers 's work out of context and distort it (or completely reverse the arguments) to support their own

[6] "Community worker" is Gilkes' term. The women have positions in upper-management, but

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