

Equity in marijuana policies: A comparative study of two U.S. states using Critical Race Theory

Gaby Mohr, LMSW; Ola Akrad, PhD, Sharon Borja, MSW, PhD,
& Flor Avellaneda, MSW, PhD.



Agenda

- Background
- Methods
- Findings
- Implications
- Questions



Background

- The U.S. accounts for less than five percent of the global population
- Almost 25% of the global incarcerated population, the majority of whom are racialized people(s) (Drug Policy Alliance, 2018).
- Currently there are 21 states with full legal cannabis (including the newest, Missouri and Maryland).
- Marijuana accounts for 50% of drug possession arrests in the United States (ACLU, 2020).
- African Americans are 3.654 times more likely (ACLU, 2020).
- ACLU (2020) reports that disparities continue in all states that have implemented some type of marijuana legalization policy



Background

- Marijuana Business Daily (2017) reported that approximately 81% of marijuana business owners are White.
- In Colorado specifically, over 85% of cannabis business owners and founders are White (Colorado Department of Revenue, 2022)
- In Washington state, the amount of minority-owned cannabis businesses is less than 15% (Washington Liquor and Cannabis Board (WLCB), n.d.)

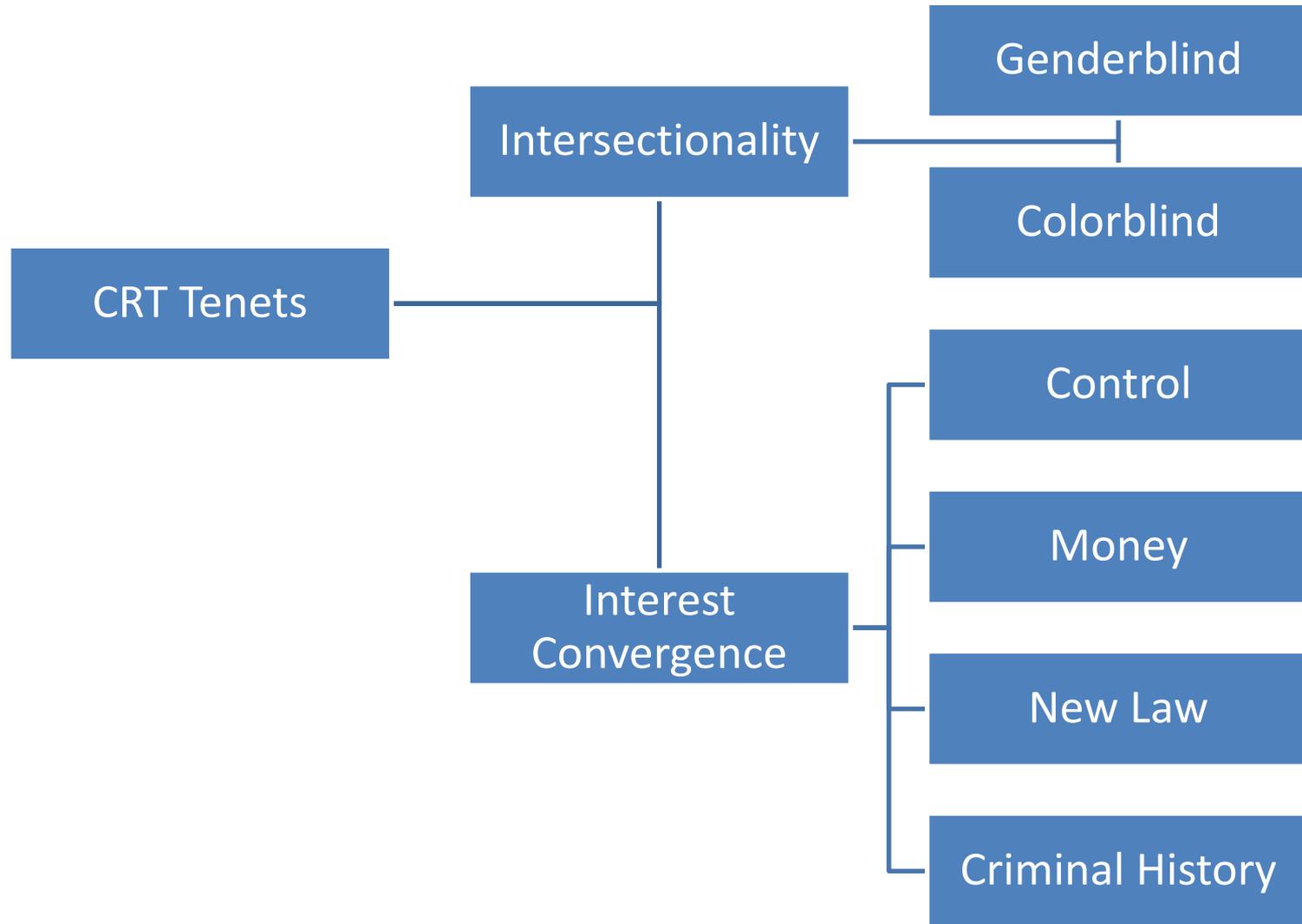


Methods

- Publicly available state government reports were analyzed using exploratory content analysis.
- Policy language, implementation practices (taxes, retail license criteria), and aftereffects on racial minorities were examined.
- CRT tenets of 'interest convergence' and 'intersectionality' framed the coding and analysis of emerging themes for this work.



Fig.2



Interest Convergence

Control

- Board control
- Municipalities

Money

- Start up cost
- Taxes

Criminal History

- “chronic illegal activity” (I-502)
- “legitimate tax paying people and not criminal actors will conduct sales of marijuana” (Amendment 64)

New Law

- New dui
- Underage laws
- Possession amount
- Where you can purchase



Intersectionality

Colorblind

- No mention of race
- No mention of past racial harms

Genderblind

- No mention of gender
- past gender harms



Implications

- The disproportionate rates of minority-owned marijuana businesses highlight the implications of colorblind drug policies in perpetuating the racial wealth gap.
- Colorblind policies ignore race-based systems-future studies should analyze legal marijuana colorblind policy implications. (**Apfelbaum et al, 2012**).
- Commuting of prison sentences-system of auto-expungement (**Koram, 2022**)



The War on Drugs, Marijuana, Racial Disparities and Global World

- “The emphasis that international law placed on controlling the production and supply of drugs meant that the problem of drugs continued to be associated primarily with the areas and peoples understood to produce the substances—afro-Colombian farmers, Afghan poppy growers, Nigerian contraband smugglers—not with the reasons for their growing desirability amongst Western society.⁶⁴” (Koram, 2022, p.308)



Questions?

