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A CHICANA FEMINIST EPISTEMOLOGY IN ADULT EDUCATION: A LITERATURE REVIEW

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this literature review was to identify research in adult education literature that used a Chicana feminist theoretical framework. The review was conducted using the Elton B. Stephen CO. (EBSCO) database. Although a thorough review of the most notable adult education journals revealed a lack of scholarly articles using Chicana Feminist Epistemology (CFE), the authors were able to identify three themes within the literature that could aid in incorporating CFE into adult education research. Future implications of embedding a Chicana feminist epistemology in adult education research and practice can create well-rounded studies centered around authentic Latina experiences.

Keywords: Chicana feminist epistemology, adult education research, Chicanas/Latinas, settlement houses.

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this literature review is to identify research in adult education literature that used a Chicana feminist theoretical framework. However, a thorough review of the most notable adult education journals revealed a lack of research using a Chicana feminist epistemology (CFE). Chicana feminist epistemology is a theoretical lens designed as a "response to the failure of both mainstream education research and liberal feminist scholarship to address the forms of knowledge and experiences Chicanas bring to educational institutions and research" (Calderón, Delgado Bernal, Pérez Huber, Malagón, & Vélez, 2012, p.514). The research questions that guided this literature review were:

1. How have adult education journals used a Chicana feminist epistemology framework to conduct research on Latinas?
2. How is Chicana feminist literature depicted in adult education?
3. What does adult education and Chicana literature state about Chicana feminist epistemology as a theoretical framework in educational research?

The journals reviewed were Adult Education Quarterly (AEQ), Adult Learning (AL), Adult Continuing Education (ACE), The Journal for Adult Development (JAD) and New Directions of Adult and Continuing Education (NDACE). The findings indicated a lack of research studies on Latinas which used a Chicana feminist epistemology framework. An expanded search into seminal works by Chicana feminist and Chicano authors resulted in research findings that included elements of adult education, with the Settlement House Movement of the early twentieth century (Ruiz, 2008; Sanchez, 1994).

METHODOLOGY

The key words and phrases used to search the adult education articles were *Chicana feminist epistemology, theoretical framework or conceptual framework, Chicanas, Latinas, adults and adult education*. The search was expanded to include *settlement houses* as a key phrase

given its predominance in the literature. The search yielded zero findings that used a Chicana feminist epistemology (CFE) framework and one article with underpinnings of CFE but no explicit statement of its use. The themes include the CFE in adult education journals, the interrelatedness of CFE to adult education and Chicana feminist theoretical framework in educational research.

RESULTS

A thorough review of research on Latinas from the most prominent adult education journals were lacking in the use of CFE. The first theme, where is the Chicana feminist epistemology in adult education journals, will discuss its definition and historical significance in education and how adult education authors incorporated unique elements in their research study. The second theme, Chicana literature and its interrelatedness to adult education, will review the role of adult education settlement houses and the role they played in lives of Chicana's and Latina's. The adopted definition for Chicanas in this paper is a woman that is a native or descendent Mexican that lives in the United States. Latina is defined as any woman that is a native or descendent from a Latin American country. The final theme, Chicana feminist epistemology in adult educational research, will explain how Chicana literature depicted the use of CFE in educational research and the possible implications of its use in adult educational research.

Where is the Chicana Feminist Epistemology in Adult Education Journals?

The philosophy of adult education brands itself in social justice and inclusion for every adult learner (Alfred, 2015; Guo, 2015). Its foundation was grounded by such scholars as Eduard Lindeman, Lyeman Brysan, Jack Mezirow and Malcolm Knowles, who popularized the term *andragogy*— the teaching of adult learners — in the U.S. (Brookfield & Holst, 2010). It is important to note that social justice and inclusion, and andragogy are ideologies that stemmed from Eurocentric male-centered perspectives. Which begs the question, where were the women in the field of adult education? Jane Hugo (1990), a prominent scholar of women studies in adult education, answered this question by stating that women were made invisible by the men founding the field of adult education. Although, historically, adult education acknowledged the need to challenge dominant ideologies, it lacked the visibility of women (Hugo, 1990). One could deduce that White women scholars, comparable to ethnic minority women such as Chicanas and Latinas, are also prone to exclusion. This helps explain why the sole article that mentions the concept of CFE did not mention the theoretical framework.

Chicana Feminist Epistemology Defined

Dolores Delgado Bernal (1998) can be credited as the first Chicana scholar to acknowledge the use of Chicana feminist epistemology (CFE) in educational research. She wrote *Using a Chicana Feminist Epistemology* in 1998 and it soon became a point of reference for other Chicana scholars. Delgado Bernal did not explicitly define Chicana feminist epistemology but instead led readers to understand its use as a theoretical framework in educational research. This influential piece deduced that Chicana episteme was not historically substantiated in the academy nor educational scholarship. She claimed *epistemological racism*, a term she borrowed from James Joseph Scheurich and Michelle Young (1997), was within "Traditional research epistemologies [that] reflect and reinforce the social history of the dominant race, which has negative results for people of color in general and students and scholars of color in particular" (p. 563). What Delgado Bernal explained can be the basis of the definition for CFE.

Therefore, the definition of CFE is acknowledging Chicana's exclusive episteme in educational research through a myriad of their intersectional identities such as, their gender, race, class, ethnicity, sexuality and their lived experiences. It also contested the traditional research paradigms developed by Eurocentric, middle-class males by centering Chicanas/Latinas lived experiences at the forefront of the research study (Delgado Bernal, 1998).

The Lone Adult Education Journal

The Journal for Adult Development featured a piece that did not use CFE as their theoretical framework but discussed Latinas and their identity development surrounding *familismo* (Martinez, et al., 2012). Familismo as defined by Marin (1993) is having a close bond with nuclear and extended family enough to highly value its cultural worth. This concept is also highly coveted in educational research with Chicana feminist scholars. Martinez et al.'s (2012) conceptual framework, nevertheless, featured a pragmatist epistemological approach versus CFE.

Martinez et al. (2012) reasoned that their epistemological approach could effectively answer the research questions and the focus be on the findings. They alleged that "Chicana and Latina feminists have written about the impact of family on ethnic identity for decades (Anzaldúa 1987; Barrera 1991). While valuable, these works tend to be more reflective in nature rather than research oriented" (Martinez et al., 2012, p. 192). We argue that their analysis of Chicana and Latina feminist-scholars was misconstrued. Their findings, however, are not disregarded because they are crucial for adult education misconstrued research on Chicanas/Latinas. We would like to recognize that CFE or the Chicana feminist method could be used in educational research such as their study.

Martinez et al. (2012), are correct about the reflexivity of the two Chicana authors, except, they employed a method during a time period where educational research was ready-made. Delgado Bernal and Elenes (2012) explain that "Chicana scholars draw on their ways of knowing to disrupt hegemonic categories of analysis, decolonizing methodologies, and expand our understanding of what it means to employ a CFE in the field of education" (p. 514). We challenge their statement because CFE frames research studies through the different intersectionalities of the participants and looks at ethnic identity development through concepts inherent to Chicana and Latinas.

Chicana Literature and its Interrelatedness to Adult Education

The field of adult education may not employ CFE, but Chicana feminists recognize its effect on the educational scholarship of Chicana and Latinas. For example, in the late 1800's, a host of settlement houses sprouted across the nation with a common goal of providing resources to help orient newly arriving immigrants (Arredondo, 2008). This included the establishment of Hull House, the first settlement house in Chicago. In the years after WWI, demographics shifted near Hull House, and as Mexican immigrants became the neighborhood majority, Hull House became a supporter of their cultural wealth and knowledge in the local area (Ruíz, 2006). Above all, Ruíz argued that Hull House should be remembered for the creation of educational programs designed to nurture the talents of Mexican women.

Adult Education Settlement Houses

In contrast to the Hull House in Chicago, further south of the nation in El Paso, Texas, the expansion of settlement houses did not display the same acceptance of Mexicans' culture

(Ruiz, 2006). The Rose Gregory Houchen Settlement House viewed Mexicans' culture and knowledge as problematic (Ruiz, 2006). The emergence of settlement houses and the movement towards Americanization during the late nineteenth century positioned immigrants as lacking the necessary skills to succeed in the U.S. (Muñoz, 2012; Ullman, 2010). The Americanization Movement upheld the ideology that by teaching English, and U.S. civics they could assimilate and fix the Mexican immigrant (Brantley, 2015, para. 2; Ruiz, 2006; Sanchez, 1994).

Muñoz (2012) and Ullman (2010) argued that the premise of settlement houses was to educate immigrants and assimilate them into the broader community. The ideology of Americanization surged around WWI when funding was made available by the government to assimilate many immigrants (Ullman, 2010). Ullman (2010) noted this time period in adult education as a "time when immigrants were frequently vilified and their loyalty to the nation was severely questioned" creating xenophobic stereotypes (p. 5). Regardless of the intentions of settlement houses, whether positive or negative, the role they played in adult education was significant in the lives of immigrants.

The Role of the Settlement Houses

Many of the educational programs created for immigrants in the U.S. also began during the boom of settlement houses (Muñoz, 2012; Ruiz, 2006; Sanchez, 1995; Ullman, 2010). In, "Go After the Women': Americanization and the Mexican Immigrant Woman, 1915-1929", George J. Sanchez (1994) indicated that the Americanization of Mexican immigrant women became the answer to the mass immigration of that time period. Sanchez (1994) argued that Mexican immigrant women were believed to imbed a new American cultural value system into their home if they were the first to assimilate. Sanchez (1994) also argued that assimilationist practices could solve the ethnic issues Mexicans caused. Government officials, hence, chose Mexican women, whom they believed to be the holder and creators of cultural values in their homes and communities.

Chicana Feminist Epistemology in Adult Educational Research

The concept of Chicana feminist epistemology in educational research catapulted into the research academy after Sofia Villenas (1996) and Dolores Delgado Bernal (1998) wrote influential Chicana pieces (Saavedra & Perez, 2013). In these articles, they discussed CFE as the theoretical concept that guided their research in authentically investigating their ethnic and racialized communities. They spoke out about their role as researchers positioning them in a privileged standpoint. Delgado Bernal (1998), in addition clarified CFE as a theoretical framework that disrupted traditional research methodologies, methods and pedagogies of Chicana researchers, and educators.

Villenas' (1996) article posited the duality between researcher and community member. In "The Colonizer/Colonized Chicana Ethnographer: Identity, Marginalization, and Co-optation in the Field", she disputed her position as a privileged ethnographer. She stated that her research, situated in a predominantly Latino community, perpetuated the cycle of deficit thinking and "othering" instilled by academia. Villenas, thus, described herself as a "walking contradiction with a foot in both worlds" but reflection was the key to disassemble the multiple identities as a colonizer and colonized (p. 714).

Delgado Bernal (1998) in, "Using a Chicana Feminist Epistemology in Educational Research" disputed that educational institutions, research paradigms and liberal feminism were not

created equal. She explains that on the one hand, traditional educational research paradigms created by White male researchers, did not account for the intersectionalities such as, gender, race, ethnicity, social class, and sexuality of Chicanas and Latinas. While on the other hand, liberal feminism collectively encompassed the experiences of all women regardless of their differed experiences and identities.

Delgado Bernal (1998) and Villenas (1996) alternatively claimed that CFE allowed the dominant standard of traditional research to disrupt the exclusivity of White male academic scholars, researchers, and knowledge claiming of and towards indigenous, marginalized, gendered and Othered individuals. CFE, plainly stated, integrated the unique episteme of Chicana and Latina researchers into educational research. Delgado Bernal states that CFE also motivated Chicana and Latina scholars to become agents of change and deconstruct the traditional paradigms in educational research (Delgado Bernal, 1998).

Resisting erasure and silencing of Chicana and Latina voices by dominant White U.S. ideologies was challenging for Chicana feminists (Hurtado, 1998). Without CFE in educational research, Chicanas/Latinas lived narratives become invisible, subaltern knowledge production would stem from a White Eurocentric episteme and Chicana advocates would lose theories endorsing agency (Delgado Bernal, 1998; Delgado Bernal & Elenes, 2011; Delgado Bernal, Burciaga, & Flores Carmona, 2012; Delgado Bernal, Elenes, Godinez, & Villenas, 2006). The use of CFE authentically documents Chicanas'/Latinas' lived stories and reaffirms their ways of knowing that does not discredit their episteme (Preuss & Saavedra, 2014).

Implications for Use of Chicana Feminist Epistemology

Implications for future studies should take into consideration how CFE can be embedded into adult education research to acknowledge the diverse needs of the Latina population being educated. Adult education scholar-leaders should seek alternative ways of knowing and conducting research on marginalized groups to enhance the educational experience of diverse ethnic groups in adult education settings. The use of a Chicana feminist epistemology in adult education research, can create a well-rounded, student-centered educational Latina experiences. It can also ground the work on Latinas through analysis of the intersectionalities of class, race/ethnicity, sexuality, and gender. When this type of framework is integrated into adult education research studies, it allows for a decolonization of methodologies and alternate ways of knowing for both researcher and participants.

CONCLUSIONS

In conclusion, Chicana feminist epistemology as a theoretical framework in adult educational research could not be found in the adult education literature. It was, albeit, not surprising considering that the field of adult education historically was founded by White male scholars and often ignored their women counterparts. For example, Jane Adams pioneered the Hull House in Chicago, but she is one female among a plethora of White males in adult education. We propose that the field of adult education begin adapting subaltern ways of knowing and disrupt traditional, European, male centric educational research. Traditional theoretical frameworks cannot disrupt patriarchal, sexist and classist power imbalances that frameworks such as CFE can. If we want social change to happen in the world, we must start with how we research racialized and ethnic groups.

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