

Conceptualizing Critical Feminist Theory and Emancipatory Education

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Abstract

This theoretical paper analyzes the relationship between critical feminist theory and emancipatory education as it relates to transformative educational practices. The first section will discuss how the author understands critical feminist theory by looking to Chela Sandoval's theoretical framework of oppositional resistance. The author discusses Sandoval's framework as a way to help better understand the many forms of resistance found within the discipline of critical feminism. The latter portion of the paper will argue that critical feminist theory is a valid methodology for reconsidering how educators might understand and rework or reframe their current practices in aiming towards true emancipatory education. Critical feminist theory calls on us to reconsider our existing understandings of knowledge, power, and spaces of empowerment. The author argues that critical feminist theory, as a distinct methodology, offers diverse ways to think about disrupting the canon, question hegemonic understandings of oppression, while also looking at the many methods and forms of resistance within each text as a way to think differently about transforming our educational institutions: both at the K-12 and higher education levels.

Overview and Purpose

Throughout this paper, the author argues there is another way to move towards emancipatory education, both within the K-12 and higher education systems: considering or framing critical feminist theory as a distinct methodology¹ for conceptualizing and working towards liberatory education. This theoretical paper

¹ For the purposes of this paper and argument, the author uses the term *methodology* as a framework or tool for reconsidering the relationship between critical feminist literature and emancipatory and equitable education.

discusses and defines critical feminist theory, while also exploring the following questions: What might true democratic and equitable education look like if we deploy a critical feminist theory or lens to rework our existing patterns and habits within the context of education? How might this methodological or pedagogical framework help redefine or reconsider our current approaches to emancipatory teaching and learning? How does reading the many diverse text within feminist theory allow us to become more critical and productive as we strive towards transforming our current educational institutions both at the K-12 and higher education levels?

The author uses Paulo Freire's, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* to help define emancipatory or liberatory education. Although this particular paper will not develop or explore Freire's particular arguments regarding liberatory education, it is appropriate to consider his conceptualization of the aforementioned terms, as Freire has been considered a leading scholar and activist within the context of social justice education. Thus, the terms emancipatory or liberatory education are used throughout this paper as Freire conceptualizes and defines them.

In one of his most widely recognized and referenced books, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Freire defines emancipatory or liberatory education as: “ This pedagogy (the pedagogy of the oppressed) makes oppression and its causes objects of reflection by the oppressed, and from that reflection will come their necessary engagement in the struggle for their liberation (Freire, p.48). In other words, Freire argues that we must examine the individual and/or collective forms of oppression as the starting points, of which we can then move forward to combat and free oneself from this oppression.

The first section of this paper focuses on how the author understands critical feminist theory. By using Chela Sandoval's theoretical framework of oppositional resistance, or what Sandoval terms “differential consciousness”, the author will conceptualize, explore, and help to define critical feminist theory as it relates to the many diverse scholars within the field. Specifically, the author demonstrates how we might use Sandoval's framework as a way to understand the many sources of empowerment and resistance that make up much of critical feminist thought. As Angela Davis states in

the forward of Sandoval's text, "emerging scholars who want to link their work to pursuits for social justice will be inspired by the way Chela Sandoval refuses to abandon her belief in the possibility of revolutionary resistance" (Davis, p. xiii).

The latter portion of the paper will discuss how critical feminist theory, as a distinct methodology, helps those in the education community deeply explore or reconceptualize our current understanding and goals of working towards emancipatory education. By using critical feminist theory as a pedagogical framework, we (as educators) can work towards democratic or emancipatory education with the perspective that we can gain important and relevant insight from a variety of sources: specifically critical feminist theory. Additionally, we can better explore the hegemonic forms of knowledge production, power, and internalized racism and sexism that we find in education; all factors that matter significantly as we work to create democratic spaces within the context of education communities.

In the final section of the paper, the author will deliberately connect components of critical feminist theory to ways in which educators can refer to multiple texts as a means to think about disrupting the canon, question hegemonic understandings of oppression, as well as looking at the diverse methods and forms of resistance within each text as a way to ultimately think differently about emancipatory education.

Theoretical Framework

In order to formulate an understanding of a critical feminist theory, the author poses the following questions: Can we use Chela Sandoval's theoretical framework of differential consciousness as a way to situate the multiple methods of oppositional consciousness that many women of color, as well as queer scholars deploy for their own theories of resistance? Can we look to this evolving and malleable typography as a way to define...what is critical feminism or critical feminist theory/perspective? Finally, how can we use Sandoval's framework as a way to better understand the aims of the community that help makeup the discipline of feminist theory?

Sandoval's book, *Methodology of the Oppressed*, calls for a transformative way of reassessing our current understandings of theoretical and methodological forms of

oppositional praxis, or the pairing of theory and practice. Sandoval notes, “hegemonic feminist scholarship was unable to identify the connections between its own understandings and translations of resistance, and the expressions of consciousness in opposition enacted among other racial, ethnic, sex, cultural, or national liberation movements” (Sandoval, p.54). Sandoval recognizes that previous forms of oppositional resistance have worked and challenged boundaries, however, she argues for a way to move forward, or expand upon the many diverse forms of opposition. In *Methodology of the Oppressed*, Sandoval considers four historically significant social movements or forms of resistance (equal-rights form, revolutionary form, supremacist form, and the separatist form), and argues for a fifth, or differential form of oppositional consciousness or resistance.

In order to understand the rationale behind the addition of a new (fifth) element of resistance, Sandoval notes that it (the fifth element), “has a mobile, retroactive, and transformative effect on the previous four, setting them all into diverse processual relationships” (p.54). In other words, it is not in isolation that the differential form must be conceptualized. Rather, knowledge of the initial four modes, and how they are understood historically, helps us better comprehend why a fifth, interactive mode is introduced, and considered as a “consciousness-in-opposition that can gather up the modes of ideology-praxis represented within previous liberation movements into a fifth, differential, and postmodern paradigm” (p.54). What follows is a brief summary of the four-modes or forms of consciousness-in-opposition (social movements): equal-rights form, revolutionary form, supremacist form, and the separatist form.

The equal -rights form, at its core, argues that all humans are created equally. In hegemonic feminist theory, this form can be considered that of liberal feminism. The practitioners of this ideology call to be legitimized and recognized as being the same under the law. The following social and cultural movements fall under this form: National Organization for Women (NOW), the League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAD) or the praxis of the civil rights movement set forth by the young Martin Luther King.

The second mode is called the revolutionary form, and goes one step further than the external aspect of the equal-rights form, in the sense that it argues, “the only way that

society can affirm, value, and legitimate these differences will be if the categories by which the dominant is ordered are fundamentally restructured” (p.55). The ultimate goal is to move beyond the binaries of domination and subordination. Previous social movements considered to be part of the revolutionary form include: the Black Panther Party, the American Indian Movement, the Brown Berets, as well as many theories and practices of U.S. Marxist and socialist feminism.

The supremacist form of oppositional consciousness considers the differences among subordinated groups as characteristics that attribute to their higher evolutionary level and superiority over the dominant group. The supremacist form “understands itself to function at a higher state of psychic and social evolution than does its counterpart” (p.56). The results, per the supremacist form, offer a more effective leadership. Any subordinated group, from cultural and radical forms of feminism, to “nationalisms” of every racial, ethnic, gender, sex, class, religious, or loyalist type can ascribe to the supremacist form of oppositional consciousness (p.56).

Separatism is the final form of social movement. Under this form of oppositional consciousness, the practitioners recognize that their very differences are considered humanly inferior, and thus organize to “protect and nurture the differences that define its practitioners through their complete separation from the dominant social order” (p.56).

These four particular modes of oppositional consciousness, although each individually characterized to respond to dominating powers, have historically worked individually, and often divided the movements of resistance from within. Per the understandings of hegemonic feminism, the tactics and strategies within each form appear to be mutually exclusive, thus the emergence of Sandoval’s argument for a fifth, differential form of consciousness.

The historical involvement of U.S. feminists of color in regards to oppositional consciousness and resistance tended to move in and out of the four ideologies discussed above. Sandoval points to Anzaluda’s recognition of this activity as “weaving between and among oppositional ideologies” (as cited within Anzaldua, 1981). In other words, Sandoval explains, “I think of this activity of consciousness as

the “differential,” insofar as it enables movement “between and among” ideological positionings (the equal rights, revolutionary, supremacist, and separatist modes of oppositional consciousness) considered as variables, in order to disclose the distinctions among them” (Sandoval, p.57). Sandoval calls for a coming together, a commitment to reach across disciplines and forms of resistance to better effect and engage in egalitarian social justice.

Sandoval’s theoretical framework can be used as a base for connecting the many diverse liberation movements, both inside and outside the academy. In sum, “today, the differential remains an extreme juncture. It is a location wherein the aims of feminism, race, ethnicity, sex, and marginality studies, and historical, aesthetic and global studies can crosscut and join together in new relations through the recognition of a shared theory and method of oppositional consciousness” (Sandoval, p.63). Rather than focus on the differences in and among theories and liberatory social movements, Sandoval calls for an opening or a flow of exchanges that connect and relate through and among them.

Method of Inquiry

Sandoval’s theory of differential consciousness can be used as a framework for situating the many diverse methodologies of resistance found within feminist scholarship. Sandoval’s text discusses the various ways in which race, gender, and sexuality intersect, and why it is imperative that all forms of resistance within each form of oppression must be addressed if true oppositional resistance can take place. With Sandoval’s aims in mind, the author discusses how multiple scholars in the field of feminist studies in fact situate their own methodologies of resistance within a framework of differential consciousness.

To help better conceptualize this idea, the author turns to the following feminist and queer scholars and their individual methodologies of resistance: The Combahee River Collective, bell hooks, Dian Million, Jose Munoz and Alicia Partnoy. These particular scholars were chosen deliberately, as their distinct methodologies resonated with the author in ways that connect to the many experiences of being a teacher, learner, and graduate student of education. Further, in analyzing the following feminist and queer

scholars through Sandoval's theoretical framework, the author shows how this process, methodologically, liberates oneself from the confines of a more prescriptive practice or mode of understanding resistance: a crucial point pertaining to the author's argument that critical feminist theory is a valid methodology for reworking our educational institutions to better reflect equity, emancipation, and true liberation.

Materials Examined

The first feminist piece the author examines is titled, *A Black Feminist Statement*, written by the Combahee River Collective in 1978. This particular work offers a powerful epistemological critique that discusses four major topics which address the following issues: 1) The genesis of contemporary black feminism; 2) what we believe, ie., the specific province of our politics; 3) the problems in organizing black feminists, including a brief herstory of our collective; and 4) black feminist issues and practice (Combahee River Collective, p.3). These specific modes of resistance arouse out of the disillusionment and lack of resonance felt by many Black feminists during certain liberation movements of the 1960's and 1970's. Per Sandoval's fifth element, the Combahee River Collective needed more than the isolated modes of oppositional resistance practiced politically at the time, ie: civil rights, black nationalism, the Black Panthers. The belief of the Combahee Rive Collective was that "the most profound and potentially the most radical politics come directly out of our own identity, as opposed to working to end someone else's oppression" (Combahee River Collective, p.5). Thus, we see, the "movement," or "weaving" that Sandoval calls on to reframe and consider alternative modes of oppositional forms of resistance.

Next, the author turns to bell hooks and just one of her numerous works of oppositional resistance, titled *Still Brave*. This chapter is just one of many in the book *The Evolution of Black Women's Studies*. hooks begins the chapter with a poignant quote that expands further on the aims of Black Feminism discussed by the Combahee River Collective. "Feminism in the United States has never emerged from the women who are most victimized by sexist oppression; women who are daily beaten down, mentally, physically, and spiritually- women who are powerless to change their condition in life. They are a silent majority" (p. 31). It is this intensely raw, candid

and powerful quote that helps fuel the force behind hooks' provocative critical interrogation of what is generally considered the "feminist movement".

Similar to the Combahee River Collective's discussion of the racism within the feminist movement, hooks takes her readers through the evolution of feminism, beginning with Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique*. She uncovers the 'actual' fight Friedan waged, which was masked by a façade of camaraderie, in that Friedan seemed to argue the movement included *all* women. Conversely, hooks calls out Friedan's complete dismissal of any nonwhite women as well as poor white women. Therefore, we can better understand the origins of the feminist movement as something that is one-dimensional, narrowly focused, or even narcissistic.

This continues today, with much of feminist discourse and theory failing to address different perspectives, questioning others' realities, as well as looking at the intimate relationships between race, class and privilege. Better stated by hooks, "White women who dominate feminist discourse, who for the most part make and articulate feminist theory, have little or no understanding of white supremacy as a racial politic, or the psychological impact of class, of their political status within a racist, sexist, capitalist state" (p. 33).

hooks weaves this argument throughout her text citing multiple ways the feminist movement continues to rely on the "commonalities" of oppression among women. Conversely, hooks argues for the emphasis on the multiple, diverse, and individual ways women experience oppression. She not only resists the "hegemonic dominance of feminist thought by insisting that it is a theory in the making, that we must necessarily criticize, question, re-examine, and explore new possibilities" (p.39), but goes further to explain how her own role in the revolution has not been as a result of past feminist conscious-raising.

It is this point, that hooks makes her most compelling and powerful point. After bringing in personal stories, she ends the text by stating, "we [black women] are the group that has not been socialized to assume the role of exploiter/oppressor in that we are allowed no institutionalized "other" that we can exploit or oppress" (43). This quote epitomizes what hooks spends the entire chapter addressing; each distinct

group, although in some way a part of the feminist revolution, has “something” that can be held onto as a tool to oppress others. She gives just one example where white women can fight against sexism, but can still exploit and oppress black people through racism.

Thus, as part of a true feminist struggle, hooks insists that “black women recognize the special vantage point our marginality gives us and make use of this perspective to criticize the dominant, racist, classist, sexist hegemony as well as to envision and create a counter-hegemony” (p. 43). hooks calls for the making of a liberatory feminist theory and praxis that undeniably depends on the unique and valuable experiences of Black women.

It is throughout this particular text that hooks helps us better understand the aims of Sandoval’s differential consciousness. She appreciates and speaks on behalf of black women’s struggle, but recognizes the need to continuously question and examine the many methods of resistance among other exploited or oppressed groups.

Moving further, the author turns to Dian Million, author of *Felt theory: An Indigenous Feminist Approach to Affect and History*. Million uses the term *felt analysis* to better explicate Native women’s personal narratives that explore the racialized, gendered, and sexual nature of their colonization. She describes felt analysis as a way for Native women to participate in creating a new language in which they discuss the “real multilayered facets of their histories and concerns by insisting on the inclusion of [our] lived experience, rich with emotional knowledge of what pain and grief and hope meant or mean now in [our] pasts and futures... the importance of felt experiences as community knowledges that interactively inform [our] positions as Native scholars...” (Million, p.54). Million moves deeper in her discussion by arguing that not only is felt experience often ignored, but its very purpose is misconstrued and considered a subjective form of narrative, thus, it cannot be considered “Truth” or objective, “except in Western sciences’ own wet dream of detached corporeality”(Million, p.73). This act of “telling” and openness disrupts the very nature of Native women not only in their own communities, but also in relation to the way history has always been told, suggested, and deemed as “Truth”.

Million discusses how speaking out puts Native women in a precarious situation in their charge to change things by challenging the existence of “silence” that marks their pain and experiences. She notes, “to ‘tell’ called for a reevaluation of reservation and reserve beliefs about what was appropriate to say about your own family, your community” (p.56). Additionally, Million notes that the very act of challenging Indian’s women’s rights, results in the men in their communities allying with none other than the colonizers themselves. By demanding silence, Million suggests, the Indian men are reinforcing colonialism’s strongest defense: silence.

One of Million’s most powerful arguments, that she so poignantly weaves throughout the entire text, is the notion that through their *felt experiences*, Native women are challenged and denied a space as legitimate holders of Truth and objectivity. The very existence of these stories serves as alternative truths and alternative historical views. Million quotes Jeanette Armstrong: “We must continue the telling of what really happened until *everyone* including our own peoples understands that this condition did not happen through choice” (p.64). This quote helps capture the essence of Million’s text: it is imperative for the victim of history to tell their stories in order to break through the silence that has systematically distorted the real Truth, and to challenge what she recognizes as a “past that stays neatly segregated from the present”.

Again, listening to and creating a space for an alternative method of resistance rings true to Sandoval’s differential consciousness. Million speaks on behalf of, and for the many women within indigenous communities, however, her struggles have the capacity to weave within and connect to others in their own particular contexts. The very idea or act of telling one’s story, and moving forward with a methodology of opposition, is the very essence of conceptualizing critical feminist theory.

Next, the author brings in the work of Jose Munoz, author of *Cruising Utopia*. Throughout this text, Munoz uses elements of queer theory to disrupt or challenge heteronormativity, or “a model of intergender relations, where one thinks, sees and lives straight” (Sumara & Davis, 1999).

As described in Lorraine Code's *Encyclopedia of Feminist Theories*, queer theory is “a function of resistance not only to the heterosexist norm but also to itself as it encompasses a multitude of differing and discordant communities and political projects” (p.415). In other words, although queer theory can and often does serve as a platform of oppositional resistance regarding sexuality, it can also be considered a way to redefine the concept “queer”, thus a rupture in the standard definition of queer theory. This practice, by nature, demonstrates another component of critical feminist theory; reconsidering and reframing hegemonic understandings of concepts, methods, and theories.

Drawing from the works of philosopher Ernst Bloch, Munoz calls for a methodology of hope which he describes as “a backwards glance that enacts a future vision” (p.4). Munoz uses *Cruising Utopia* as a way to move forward with the idea that queerness is not simply a being, or a state, but rather a matter of thinking about that thing (queerness) that lets us feel that this world is not enough, that indeed something is missing” (p.1). In other words, Munoz moves thought, time and space away from the here and now, and calls for a utopia, or a conceptual understanding of life as the “not-yet conscious” and a different way to consider queerness. Munoz's queer futurity calls for an awareness of the past in order to critique the present. In doing so, Munoz recognizes much of queer critique to be antirelational and antiutopian, thus a movement to think beyond the moment and being available to the not-yet-here.

Munoz turns to performance studies as a way to describe contextually what is often difficult to understand theoretically. For example, Munoz draws on Bloch's description of an “astonished contemplation” to help better define what he describes as a utopian feeling or a methodology of hope. Bloch's understanding of an astonished contemplation is played out in such works by Warhol or O'Hara, in which they romanticize the lives of Liz Taylor and Lana Turner by glamorizing their beings in ways that contradict the darkness of reality. Munoz states, “astonishment helps one surpass the limitations of an alienating presentness and allows one to see a different time and place. Much of each artists' work performs this astonishment in the world” (p. 5). These artistic representations demonstrate an extension into the territory of futurity, or rather, “the anticipatory illumination of the utopian.”

One chapter in which Munoz deploys his methodology is in his analysis of the play, *The Toilet*, by LeRoi Jones (Baraka). Although dark, deeply difficult to watch, and violent, Munoz calls for us to reconsider the ending (the image of the lovers' sensitive embrace) not as a finale of a "prescriptive ending", but instead, as an example of what he suggests to be some kind of futurity, an opening or horizon. Per the politics of queer utopia, Munoz sees a "modality of critique that speaks to quotidian gestures as laden with potentiality...the gesture of cradling the head of one's lover, a lover one has betrayed, is therefore not an act of redemption that mitigates violence; it is instead a future being within the present that is both a utopian kernel and an anticipatory illumination. It is a being in, toward, and for futurity" (p. 91). Rather than analyzing the ending as something that is bleak and finite, Munoz uses his methodology of hope to reinterpret the action between the lovers as a demonstration that this is not all there is; there is something missing.

Munoz calls for us to reconsider prescribed time and space, and instead, be critically proactive for conceptualizing a different and better future. We should not be complacent in the here and now, nor should we look to utopian ideals as intangible. The final sentence of the introduction clearly states what Munoz hopes *Cruising Utopia* will provide for its readers:

"*Cruising Utopia* not only asks readers to reconsider ideas such as hope and utopia but also challenges them to feel hope and to feel utopia, which is to say challenges them to approach the queer critique from a renewed and newly animated sense of the social, carefully cruising for the varied potentialities that may abound within that field."

Through Munoz's deep analysis of reinterpreting time, as well as making a space for reworking how we might generally envision our future, he is incorporating yet another component of Sandoval's theory: reaching across disciplines and ideas to forge alternative alliances in working for social justice.

Finally, the author turns to the methodology of *testimonio* as yet another way to understand the diverse forms of resistance within the scholarship of critical feminist theory. In *On Being Shorter: How our Testimonial Texts Defy the Academy*, Alicia

Partnoy discusses how *testimonio* is a form of resistance and empowerment. Partnoy describes *testimonio* as “an act of testifying, through the creation of the *testimonio*, the survivors of horrendous abuse are empowered. They are no longer tortured bodies to be pitied or patronized; they became the central force in a process that makes a difference in their own personal lives and also helps to further their political agenda” (p.176). It is not just a narrative which allows oneself to freely and authentically express oneself, but it also creates a discourse of solidarity that nurtures social justice, as the testimonial text becomes the central force in unifying both the author and the reader.

What makes *testimonio* so much more powerful than many other forms of narrative, counterstories, etcetera, is that the focus is most importantly *not* about Truth. Partnoy notes, “the central feature of *testimonio* is neither its truth value nor its literariness (or lack thereof), but its ability to engender and regenerate a discourse of solidarity” (p.176). Thus, the main difference regarding other narratives and *testimonio*, is that the ultimate goal is not to come to an agreement of Truth, or use the story as a way to generalize experiences for specific communities or populations. Nor is *testimonio* a place where we need to consider the concept of essentializing, or ascribing the same attributes and characteristics to all peoples who may similarly identify themselves.

Partnoy’s discussion of *testimonio* continues to demonstrate a crucial element of critical feminist theory. *Testimonio*, as a methodology, not only serves as a place to empower the speaker or writer, but also aims to weave the author of the *testimonio* and the reader into a relationship that moves towards social change and social justice. It asks the readers to consider not only the *testimonio* they are reading, but also think about who they are at that specific time in their lives, and what kind of impact the *testimonio* has upon them individually.

Warrants for Argument

It is at this point that the concept of critical feminist theory can be reframed as not just a tool, but a methodology as we (as educators) work to reconsider forms of resistance, empowerment, and experiences inside all educational institutions. If we look to the many diverse texts within critical feminist thought, we broaden our understandings of

how we can move towards true representation, equality, and emancipation. To cite Carmen Luke and her chapter in the book *Feminisms and Critical Pedagogy*, Luke argues “ how problematizing race, class and gender in the classroom and providing the conceptual tools of emancipatory critique will provide, ...the possibility of political action to enable those structural transformation required to liberate the “disenfranchised and dispossessed”...” (p.38). It is this agenda (challenging the intersections of race, class and gender) that will help transform the dominant knowledge production, assist in a critical dialogue as well as provide equal opportunities for expressing personal choice.

To help better understand how educators might incorporate a critical feminist theory methodologically into their classrooms and schools (both K-12 and higher education), the author argues that by reading and exposing oneself to feminist and queer text, we begin to think about disrupting the canon, question hegemonic understandings of oppression, as well as look at the diverse methods and forms of resistance within each text as a way to ultimately think differently about emancipatory education. Although not everyone will be affected in the same ways after reading critical feminist literature, the hope is that one can begin think “differently” and reevaluate their current understandings of oppression and resistance.

When educators consider the first component of conceptualizing critical feminist theory as a way to think about disrupting the canon, one might use narratives as a method for recognizing or fighting oppression. Looking back to the discussion of *Felt Analysis*, by Million, we can see that by telling personal stories or histories, and challenging the way history has been considered and deemed as “Truth,” one is reframing and essentially demonstrating how certain stories are perpetuated and passed on from one generation to the next. Luke comments, “students’ articulation of “real” experience and teachers’ interpretive, emancipatory task *within* the institutional discourse of schooling do not reside outside of interlocking discourses and networks of institutionalized gender and power relations” (p.37). The same can be said of reading and opening up spaces to explore and examine narratives in which one is challenging and aiming to disrupt the canonical knowledge of the dominant voices.

The next component of understanding critical feminist theory as a way to think about emancipatory education is to question the hegemonic understandings of oppression. This can be framed by considering our own positionalities. Maher and Tetreault, authors of *Learning in the Dark: How Assumptions of Whiteness Shape Classroom Knowledge*, define positionality as “the concept advanced by postmodern and other feminist thinkers that validates knowledge only when it includes attention to the knower’s position in any specific context. People’s locations within these networks are susceptible to critique and change when they are explored rather than ignored, individualized, or universalized” (p.322).

Referring back to the aforementioned feminist and queer theorists, we turn back to Munoz and his text *Cruising Utopia*. Munoz is challenging the existing notions of queer theory, in that he is offering his own, alternative, or a different way to consider experiences. He argues that there is another way to envision the future. In other words, he is considering existing theory, and “changing language in order to change meaning, and change the way things are” (Mahar and Tetreault, p. 340). He is considering his own positionality in order to challenge the dominant or hegemonic understandings of oppression; specifically in reference to queer theory.

Finally, we turn to the third dimension of conceptualizing critical feminist theory as another way to think about emancipatory education: looking at the diverse methods and forms of resistance within each text. We can refer back to Partnoy, and her examination of the methodology of *testimonio*. Partnoy understands *testimonio* not only as a way to emancipate oneself from the confines of silence, but she also points to the social justice component of the testimonial text. Additionally, she discusses the element of solidarity that *testimonio* text articulate.

Celia Haig-Brown, author of *Creating Spaces: Testimonio, Impossible Knowledge, and Academe*, looks to *testimonio* as another way to “listen differently”. She notes, “Teachers, like students, should be expected to think beyond their experiences. Such efforts imply accepting the limitations of conventional scholarship while being open to encountering and considering the unknown” (p.418). She argues that we must listen across differences and be open to new knowledge forms. This argument builds upon and affirms how educators must look to multiple methods and forms of resistance as a

way to expand and challenge our current understandings of emancipation, while also offering diverse forms of generating knowledges.

Although not finite in possibilities, these three components of understanding critical feminist theory as they relate to emancipatory education will undoubtedly allow us, as educators, to open up spaces to think alternatively about fighting oppression, understanding diverse experiences, and be thoughtful about who we are as educators: all components of emancipatory or liberatory education.

Scholarly Significance

In looking at critical feminist theory as its own methodology of resistance, we can turn to any number of feminist or queer scholars, all of whom have very diverse backgrounds, and gain a better understanding for not only how they have individually and/or collectively explicated their own methodologies of resistance, but gather from their texts other ways in which we may reconceptualize or reconsider our own theories of resistance. This process is vital for critical educators, or those who are interested in helping to transform our current educational institutions. Although unique in their own theories and methodologies, what they all have in common is that they offer alternative ways of looking at emancipating oneself from the institutionalization of oppression; an integral component of teaching and learning in empowering and liberating spaces.

Pointedly, critical feminist theory, as a methodology, does not offer specific or “text-book” ways we can go about creating or transforming spaces. Rather, it calls on us to reconsider our existing understandings of knowledge, power, and spaces of empowerment. Additionally, critical feminist thought, as a discipline, is always evolving and transforming in ways that consistently develop new methodologies of resistance. Through this careful process of constantly reframing and reconsidering, the very nature of our thought processes, and later, our institutions can begin the process of transformation.

This idea is made clear throughout the author’s description of conceptualizing critical feminist theory through the Chela Sandoval’s analytical framework. Through the very

act of reading and listening to the diverse voices within feminist and queer scholarship, and how they individually and/or collectively explicated theories of resistance, one is in fact, engaging with the methodology of critical feminist theory.

In reading feminist and queer text, we allow ourselves, as members of the educational community, to theoretically or conceptually reconsider or question our current understandings of oppression, and what this might mean in the context of teaching and learning within the education community. This act, in and of itself, offers new ways to question the hegemonic nature of schooling, as well as to listen and learn about the many diverse sources of empowerment. Thus, what critical feminist theory does, methodologically, is create spaces to begin and renew vital conversations. This practice alone might not guarantee a tangible transformation to the asymmetrical relationships within the education community, but what it will do is ignite a conversation. This conversation, will no doubt, be the starting point for revolutionary and transformative change. In other words, looking at truly transforming education through a critical feminist lens, we can question and resituate our current definition and understanding of true emancipatory and equitable education for all of our teachers and students.

To conclude, the author looks to Pratt-Clarke, author of *Critical Race, Feminism, and Education* as another way help better explain the relationship between critical feminist theories within the context of education. Pratt-Clarke calls for a transdisciplinary approach to social justice. She states, “A transdisciplinary approach through CRF [Critical Race Feminism] using multiple disciplines furthers the objective of Black feminism through revolutionary transformative scholarship that challenges rigid boundaries, exposes the artificial lines, forces questions to be asked from a different standpoint, and produces answers that have the opportunity to transform society by informing both the scholarship and the professions that can apply to the scholarship, such as education, social work, and law” (26).

Undoubtedly, this quote speaks to the overall argument the author is making throughout this paper regarding critical feminist theory as a methodology for reconceptualizing true emancipation within the teaching and learning community. The very acts of disrupting the cannon, questioning hegemonic understandings of

oppression, and taking the diverse methods and forms of resistance as a means to think differently about social justice, one can hopefully see the powerful attributes that critical feminist theory offers for fighting oppression, and working towards true liberation both inside and outside the classroom.

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