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## What's Critical Feminism Doing in a Field Like Teacher Education?

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# What's Critical Feminism Doing in a Field Like Teacher Education?

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## Abstract

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This manuscript looks at the role that critical feminism may have within the teacher education community. The author looks at the many components that are incorporated within critical feminism, and how we may look to such a scholarship as a way to think differently about ourselves as prospective and current teachers. Throughout the manuscript, the author brings in many diverse scholars, and demonstrates how their work complements the many components of critical feminism. Specifically, the author looks to the practice of self –reflexivity, and how this practice can be strengthened through the many characteristics that encompass a critical feminist theory. The manuscript concludes with a brief discussion of considering the potential contributions that critical feminism may have within the field of teacher education.

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**Palabras clave:** critical feminism, teacher education, self-reflexivity.

# ¿Qué Está Haciendo el Feminismo Crítico en un Ámbito como la Formación del Profesorado?

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## Resumen

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Este artículo examina el papel que el feminismo crítico puede tener dentro de la formación del profesorado. El autor analiza los muchos componentes que se incorporan dentro del feminismo crítico, y cómo nosotros podemos plantearlo en un disciplina como una manera de pensar diferente acerca de nosotros mismos, como maestros actuales y futuros. A lo largo del artículo, la autora demuestra cómo su trabajo complementa los muchos componentes del feminismo crítico. En concreto, la autora mira la práctica de la auto-reflexividad, y cómo esta práctica puede fortalecerse a través de las muchas características que abarcan una teoría crítica feminista. El artículo concluye con una breve discusión que considera las posibles contribuciones que el feminismo crítico pueda tener en el ámbito de la formación docente.

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**Keywords:** feminismo crítico, formación del profesorado, auto-reflexión.

*Feminist theory can bring a substantive integrity to our practice when it is used as a tool to acknowledge difference in ways that unite and organize diverse people for social change. [There] is an organizing principle around an evolved feminism that encourages women and men to acknowledge their diverse backgrounds and to gather strength from their experiences of oppression and shared commonalities, and to provide opportunities to rally their abilities for collective action... It is also concerned with how intersections of knowledge can be functional and productive and can contribute to the abilities of teachers and learners to understand themselves and strive to transform themselves and society (Brady & Dentith, 2001 p. 166, 168).*

**T**he focus of this manuscript will highlight the ways in which educators (defined in this case as pre-service teachers, current educators, as well as faculty within higher education) could potentially understand critical feminist theory as a framework, and methodologies<sup>1</sup> of resistance as an integral component within the theoretical framework. I will argue that critical feminist theory is a relevant and important framework to be utilized methodologically and pedagogically in teacher education. By deploying elements of critical feminist theory within the context of teacher education, pre-service teachers and teacher educators will have a better way of deepening their understanding for how to be more self reflexive, critical and counter hegemonic in their future teaching practices.

Critical feminist theory, as a theoretical and pedagogical framework, offers teacher educators and prospective teachers a unique opportunity to critically engage with themselves and their students not only in their teacher education programs but in their future classrooms as well. To note, McWilliam (1994) argues, “I have learned that contemporary feminist theorizing can be usefully applied to actual practices across a range of teacher education endeavors, from policy analysis to pedagogy and from research to the “reality” of field experiences’ (p.147).

Moving further, as we consider themes of democracy, liberation, and individual experience, I aim to further frame and argue that critical feminism is an anti-oppressive theory<sup>2</sup>, and one that embodies critical and difference

centered perspectives. Moosa-Mitha (2005) discusses, that feminist approaches to research are “collectivist, women-centered, and grounded in lived experience”. She discusses how a feminist approach to research privileges the specific and the contextual, and argues that in order to fully understand the many diverse experiences of oppression, we must move away from validating positivist<sup>3</sup> academic knowledges and “Truths”, and instead, base a feminist theory upon lived experiences and oppositional social movements. When conducting research, feminist theorists position the researcher and the participant in engaged and self-reflexive activities.

Thus, rather than making universal claims, feminist researchers are working to make sense of one’s social reality through lived experience and subjectivities that can be based on narratives, performance, as well as other methodologies that incorporate individual and personal experiences (Moosa-Mitha, 2005). Importantly, we see a similar discussion within standpoint theory. Au (2012) describes standpoint theory as:

A recognition of personhood and one’s equality, which means that by definition, it must also be connected to antiracist and antihomophobic positions, among others. Hence, standpoint has to contend with issues of power and oppression in a general sense because, as a paradigmatic orientation, standpoint openly acknowledges that the social location of the oppressed and marginalized (as defined by historical, social, cultural, and institutional contexts) is the best vantage point for starting knowledge projects given that it can provide a clearer, more truthful lens for understanding the world than that of hegemonic epistemologies (p.8).

As such, the discussion moving forward will build off of standpoint theory, as its premise and underlying principles deeply connect to how I understand critical feminism and its relationship to education.

Furthermore, Dadd’s (2011) argues, “The dilemmas facing humans seeking a liberatory theory for education are global *and* particular. When we understand this, we realize that feminist thought and action is a key element to critical social theory and is crucial to its engagement with the educational enterprise” (p.190). In order to demonstrate that critical feminist theory is an effective framework to be used within teacher education, it is important to

explicitly discuss how I understand the many dimensions and nuances of a critical feminist theory.

McLeod (2009) argues that feminism and education are malleable and political. Poststructural feminism is not a:

bounded, fixed-in-time transcendental theory, but a shifting, socially and temporally embedded system of reasoning, that generates particular ways of thinking about education and about feminism-its political project, the topics that warrant “new concepts,” and its sense of history and possible futures (McLeod, p. 146).

It is this philosophy that helps shape how I begin to understand critical feminism.

### **Men and Feminism**

It is important to examine the roles men have within the realm of critical feminism, given that teacher educators, preservice teachers, and current educators are comprised of both men and women. Harding (2004) argues that there are many possibilities in contemporary feminist thought for men to make significant contributions as well as be subjects of feminist thought. For the purposes of this discussion, it is helpful to consider the following statement as a way to think about men and their roles within critical feminism and the education community: “As some feminists of color have argued, one will want to appreciate the importance of solidarity, not unity, among groups with different but partially overlapping interests” (Harding, 2004, p.195). It is for this reason that I build off of the White reconstructionist perspective as a way to connect men and feminism.

Similar to how White reconstructionism (Leonardo, 2009) argues for recognizing one’s position and privilege, and using this as a way to speak out against oppression and inequity, men, too, can serve as allies and refuse to accept and respect masculinity ideals. Harding asks, “Can not men, too, learn to listen, and go on to use what they learn critically to rethink the institutions of society, their cultures, and practices?” (p.185) Therefore, as Harding (2004) argues, we must take a moment to rethink the role of men and feminism, and see critical feminist thought and practice as creating

spaces for men to speak out against patriarchal politics and thought, their relations to dominant patriarchal discourses, and their distinctive ways of organizing the production of knowledge. Additionally, feminism must include a critical race perspective, which I will discuss at a deeper level later on in this chapter.

### **Defining Methodologies of Resistance**

Critical feminist theory, as a framework, is comprised of methodologies of resistance that work towards the following goals: disrupting the educational canon and mainstream academic knowledge<sup>4</sup>, questioning hegemonic understandings of oppression, as well as intimately looking at the diverse methods and forms of resistance within critical feminist theory as a way to reconsider how we might understand our roles as teachers and learners. Additionally, in order to understand critical feminism, we must pay particular attention to the many components (or methodologies of resistance) that help conceptualize it as an evolving and malleable theory and framework.

To better understand methodologies of resistance, I refer to the important works of Paulo Freire. However, in doing so, we need to move further and re-envision his call for an education for critical consciousness<sup>5</sup> and liberatory pedagogy. Freire defines liberatory pedagogy 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 (one’s reality), of which we can then move forward to combat and free oneself from this oppression through critical action and intervention.

I look to Denzin and Lincoln, (2008) who argue that by re-grounding Freire’s pedagogy, we must merge together the ideals of critical and indigenous scholars. This union can be thought of as a *critical indigenous pedagogy* (CIP). The particular dialogue that Denzin and Lincoln call upon incorporates specific ideologies and understandings: Inquiry is both political and moral; methods are used critically and for social justice purposes; transformative power of indigenous and subjugated

knowledges are valued; praxis and inquiry are emancipatory and empowering; western methodologies, and the modern academy must be decolonized (2008). Thus, a methodology of resistance includes, but is not limited to the aforementioned themes, while also incorporating practices and pedagogies that aid in the reconfiguration of “traditional” research and teaching practices.

These ideas are shared by Darder, (2006) who argues:

We must stretch the boundaries of critical educational principles to infuse social and institutional contexts with its revolutionary potential. It is a moment when our emancipatory theories must be put into action, in our efforts to counter the hegemonic fear-mongering configurations of a national rhetoric that would render teachers, students, parents, and communities voiceless and devoid of social agency (p.11).

In order to sufficiently argue that methodologies of resistance are important, relevant, and vital within the context of teacher education, we must situate the themes and ideals with pre-service teachers in mind. Specifically, educators must engage with methodologies of resistance in ways that proactively move towards a critical pedagogy that disrupts the hegemonic cultural and educational practices that often permeate many teacher education programs.

As Kinchloe and Steinberg (2008) argue:

Such ways (indigenous knowledges) of knowing and acting could contribute so much to the educational experiences of all students, but because of the rules of evidence and dominant epistemologies of Western knowledge production, such understandings are deemed irrelevant by the academic gatekeepers (p.136).

Although not prescriptive in practice, one of the ideals of incorporating methodologies of resistance is that they call in to question these current structures of power and knowledges within the academy (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008).

Smith (1999) argues this point further. She states, “The form that racism takes inside a university is related to the ways in which academic knowledge is structured as well as to the organizational structures which govern a university”. Privileges are protected and are already in place. Thus, Smith (1999) argues, histories must be retold, authenticated, and rewritten in order to remove the oppression of theories that continue to be perpetuated, unchallenged, and stagnant within the academy.

Similarly, Grande (2009) articulates for a space in which we may incorporate *Red Pedagogy* within our educational communities. She argues that unless we pose critical questions and engage in dangerous discourse, we will not reach a point of un-thinking one’s colonial roots and rethinking democracy. Many of the characteristics of *Red Pedagogy* connect and fall in line with some of the aforementioned modes of resistance; it is fundamentally rooted in indigenous knowledge and praxis, promotes an education for decolonization, and is grounded in hope... just to name a few. Most important, Grande (2009) argues, “ [*Red Pedagogy*] speaks to our collective need to decolonize, to push back against empire, and reclaim what it means to be a people of sovereign mind and body” (p.201).

Additionally, one of the ways in which methodologies of resistance can help educators and pre-service teachers think more critically and proactively about the often-times unchallenged nature of traditional Western schooling is to consider the concept of *multilogicality*. Kincheloe and Steinberg (2008) define multilogicality simply as the need for humans to encounter multiple perspectives in all dimensions of their lives. This idea is central to understanding indigenous knowledges and perspectives. Kincheloe and Steinberg (2008) further argue that multilogicality shapes social analysis, political perspectives, knowledge production, and action; all elements that make up methodologies of resistance. Thus, by incorporating multiple viewpoints and ways of being and seeing the world, “multilogical teachers begin to look at lessons from the perspectives of individuals from different race, class, gender, and sexual orientations. They are dedicated to search for new perspectives” (Kincheloe & Steinberg, 2008, p.139).

Moving further, not only is it important to consider multiple viewpoints and perspectives, but self- reflection, and the consideration of one’s positionality as it relates to understanding oppression is another component to engaging with methodologies of resistance. Thus, we must

recognize our own positionalities in order to challenge the dominant paradigms of traditional educational practices, as well as the hegemonic understandings of oppression and resistance.

A final characteristic for understanding methodologies of resistance can, and should “produce spiritual, social and psychological healing” (Denzin & Lincon, p.15). The concept of healing takes on many forms, one of which results in a personal and social transformation that can lead to mobilization and collective action. This transformation results in critical pedagogies and practices that honor human difference, while giving us opportunities to come together with a shared agenda towards emancipation and liberation (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008). It is through these alternative ideals and practices which are incorporated within methodologies of resistance that we may envision a reworking of the university in general, and teacher education in particular.

### **Recognizing Critical Race Theory within Critical Feminism**

As a scholar of critical race theory and education, Ladson -Billings (2009) continues her discussion regarding race and education arguing “race *still* matters”. Thus, I look to the following quote by Crenshaw et.al. (1995) as a way to keep the conversation going:

“There is no canonical set of doctrines or methodologies to which [CRT scholars] all subscribe” (p. xiii). But, CRT scholars are unified by two common interests- to understand how a “regime of white supremacy and its subordination of people of color have been created and maintained in America” (p. xiii) and to change the bond that exists between law and racial power” (as cited within Ladson-Billings, 2009, p. 114).

Therefore, although critical race theory hasn’t been explicitly discussed within the aforementioned characteristics of critical feminist theory thus far, it is important to note the characteristics of CRT that are woven throughout the conceptualization and discussion of critical feminist theory. Importantly, “CRT’s insistence on story-telling and counter narratives provides us with a powerful vehicle for speaking against racism and other forms of inequity”

(Ladson-Billings, 2009, p. 120). CRT challenges the cultural scripts that state individualism, equal opportunity, and success are available for all Americans. Not surprisingly this cultural script conveniently omits the fact that there are structural and institutional factors that make this advancement near impossible for many people. Therefore, Ladson-Billings reminds us that, “CRT argues for the primacy of race in understanding many of the social relations that define life in the United States. CRT is a constant reminder that race still matters” (p.121).

Additionally, and as Bhandar (2000) reminds us, “Feminist interventions in critical race theory have been crucial in shaping and developing a legal discourse that recognizes the intersectionality of race, class, and gender formations” (p.109). Arguably, the political component of education cannot be understated, as we see the importance of recognizing the presence of critical race theory and critical feminism throughout the entirety of our educational discourse.

### **Critical Feminism as an Evolving Framework**

The discussion that follows will demonstrate the many ways in which critical feminism continues to evolve and move forward as a framework for responding to the many diverse injustices and oppressions that we encounter both in and outside the field of education. In a broad sense, the central characteristics of feminism include

The recognition that gender is a phenomenon which helps to shape our society. Feminists believe that women are located unequally in the social formation, often devalued, exploited and oppressed... Feminism is a social theory and social movement, but it is also a personal political practice. For feminist educators, feminism is a primary lens through which the world is interpreted and acted upon (Kenway & Modra, 1992, p.139).

Thus, although critical feminism includes many diverse components, the way in which it is grounded aims to offer universal principles.

For example, although critical feminist theory is malleable and multi-dimensional, there are, what appear to be, some universal components,

or “pivot points” to critical feminism that Dadds (2011) notes. Dadds supports Agger’s (1997) claim that, “Feminist theory has developed in a more grounded way than Marxism because theory and lived experience are consistently respected, interacting in both dialectical and reflexive ways to provoke us to live better lives in the here and now, not postponing liberation” (Agger, 1997, p.102). Dadds (2011) argues that feminist theory is constantly interrogating an entire interconnected system, and by doing so, is aiming towards liberation, emancipation, and empowerment.

The “pivot points” that Dadds (2011) refers to help clarify some of the aforementioned themes within methodologies of resistance, and thus, critical feminist theory. In short, the pivot points include: *Reflexive historicity, lived experience and hidden structures, dialogic engagement with the margins, and embodiment and interdependence*. These pivot points “serve as key feminist contributions to critical social theory and educational scholarship. Insofar, we are engaging education with a critically social feminist eye” (Dadds, p. 177, 178).

Before beginning an analysis of the many contributions to critical feminist theory, it is important to consider the concept of essentializing, which Code (1991) critiques, by discussing the damage it can do in relation to feminist epistemology. In feminist thought, there is often a desire to find a common voice among women. Code argues against this practice, noting that the differences in race, class, and sexuality are neglected. Code (1991) states, “Feminists need to demonstrate the reality of social injustices and practices and to work as hard for change in larger social structures and institutions as for change in the ‘personal’ areas of women’s lives” (p. 320). Her interpretation offers women the voice to stand together, but recognizes the need to define themselves individually.

Throughout my own understanding of critical feminism, as well as thinking about such work in the broader context of society, I believe it important to consider how our own intersecting identities are diverse, yet our goals for fighting against oppression help join us together. Thus, we can see that developing an understanding of critical feminist theory is not simplistic, prescriptive, or easily definable. However, by examining various components, movements, and the politics surrounding them, we can have a better understanding as to how critical feminism as *framework* moves to dismantle oppression in various forms and dimensions.

Additionally, it is important to note that critical feminist theory, as a framework, 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. One way that critical feminist theory acknowledges the many diverse forms of resistance is by examining recent liberatory social movements that have been used as ways to leverage transformation and liberation.

Sandoval (2000) engages within this discussion by calling for a *differential consciousness*, and argues for a transformative way of reassessing our current understandings of theoretical and methodological forms of oppositional praxis. Sandoval 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.

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 (Sandoval, 2000).

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 (forms) mentioned above. Sandoval points to Anzaldúa’s recognition of this activity as weaving between and among oppositional ideologies<sup>6</sup> 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. Thus, we must unite in solidarity if we hope to systematically and institutionally transform how we are preparing our preservice teachers for teaching in the twenty-first century. What follows is a way in which we may consider Sandoval's call for a differential consciousness as a way to help interpret and understand the many dimensions that fall within critical feminism.

To begin, I refer back to the late 1970's, when The Combahee River Collective (1978) offered a powerful epistemological critique that discussed four major topics: "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 history 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.

The Combahee River Collective needed more than the isolated modes of oppositional resistance practiced politically at the time, ie: civil rights, Black nationalism, and 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 a break away from the generic understanding of traditional feminism, and instead, a move towards the reframing and reconsidering of alternative modes of oppositional resistance.

It was around the same time of The Combahee River Collective that Women of Color began fighting for equality and social justice outside the borders of "White feminism." Butler and Raynor (2007) explain "Selecting the phrase *women of color* by many women of U.S. ethnic groups of color is part of their struggle to be recognized with dignity for their humanity, racial heritage, and cultural heritage as they work within the women's movement in the United States" (p.198). Recognizing various strains of Women of Color helps individualize and understand the experiences of many groups of diverse women.

Further, Garcia (1989) notes, to define feminism for Women of Color, it is imperative to recognize the "struggle to gain equal status in the

male-dominated nationalist movement and also in American society” (p. 220). It is both a fight against sexist oppression and racist oppression. Women of Color understood the need to find a place to fight for equalities within class, race, gender, and sexuality. Acosta-Belen and Bose (2000) explain,

Out of the subordination of Latinas and their initial exclusion from both male-dominated ethnic studies movement and white-dominated women’s movement, Chicanas, puertorriquetas, and women from other disenfranchised U.S. ethn racial minorities began to forge and articulate a feminist consciousness and collective sense of struggle based on their experiences as members of diverse individual nationalities, as well as on their collective panethnic and cross-border identities as Latinas and women of color (p.1114).

This partnership demonstrated that it was vital for coalitions to be formed to distinguish themselves from the feminist movement, however, it was just as important to keep their respective autonomous identities. Anzaldúa (1997) notes “The answer to the problem between the white race and the colored, between males and females, lies in healing the split that originates in the very foundation of our lives, our culture, our thoughts” (p. 272).

Similarly, hooks (2009) argues, “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). Building off of the Combahee River Collective’s discussion of the racism within the feminist movement, hooks discusses 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. This example reveals the origins of the feminist movement as something that was one-dimensional, narrowly focused, and even narcissistic.

hooks argues for an 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 consciousness-raising. She states, “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” (p. 43).

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.

Collins (2000) also recognized that as a collective, Black women have been subjected to various forms of oppression: economic, political, and ideological, and argues “ While common experiences may predispose Black women to develop a distinctive group consciousness, they guarantee neither that such a consciousness will develop among all women nor that it will be articulated as such by the group” (p. 24).

For another interpretation of critical feminism that further challenges hegemonic understandings of oppression, I refer to Million, (2009) who discusses the term *felt analysis*. Felt analysis is a way for Native women to discuss and examine their personal narratives that aim to speak out against the radicalized, gendered, and sexual nature of their colonization. Felt analysis creates a new language in which to 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...” (p.54). Million argues 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).

Million explains that through the very existence of these stories (felt analyses) we see 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” (as cited within Million, 2009, p.64). Thus, per Million, it is imperative for the victims of history to tell their stories in order to break through the silence that has systematically distorted the real Truth, and to challenge what is recognized as a “past that stays neatly segregated from the present”.

Next, I turn to Muñoz, (2009) who uses elements of queer theory<sup>7</sup> to disrupt or challenge heteronormativity, or “a model of intergender relations, where one thinks, sees and lives straight” (Sumara & Davis, 1999). Such a practice, by nature, demonstrates another component of critical feminist theory: reconsidering and reframing dominant understandings of concepts, methods, and theories.

Muñoz (2009) calls for a methodology of hope which he describes as “A backwards glance that enacts a future vision” (p.4). He refers to such a methodology as 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, Muñoz 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. Muñoz’s queer futurity calls for an awareness of the past in order to critique the present. In doing so, Muñoz 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.

Per Muñoz, we must reconsider prescribed time and space, and instead, be critically proactive for conceptualizing a different and better future.

Finally, I recognize the important contributions that Anzaldúa (1987 & 1997) offers to critical feminism. Anzaldúa refers to a concept termed *borderlands feminism*, where she describes a sense of feeling like she was caught between two cultures, while simultaneously feeling like an alien in both. Anzaldúa compares her experience to that of “two worlds merging to form a third country, a border culture”. She describes her experience as a

cultural collision, such that she felt like she was “Cradled in one culture, sandwiched between two cultures, straddling all three cultures and their value systems, la mestiza undergoes a struggle of flesh, a struggle of borders, an inner war” (Anzaldúa, 1987, p. 78).

Another part of la mestiza that Anzaldúa (1987) recognizes is her lesbian identity. She weaves the phrase, “not me sold out my people, but they me,” demonstrating a challenge to the *vendida* or “sellout” label often assigned to Chicana lesbians who are charged for melting into “White society”. She states, “ Being lesbian and raised Catholic, indoctrinated as straight, I made the choice to be queer. It’s an interesting path, one that continually slips in and out of the white, the Catholic, the Mexican, the indigenous, the instincts. It is path of knowledge-one of knowing (and of learning) the history of oppression of our raza. It is a way of balancing, of mitigating duality” (p. 19).

As demonstrated, there are many facets to conceptualizing and understanding critical feminist theory. By recognizing the many diverse modes of oppositional resistance, and how those affected by oppression choose to respond, we see that critical feminism is constantly evolving, and truly interdisciplinary within the realm of academia. Further, in analyzing these particular feminist and queer scholars, we can see how the process of conceptualizing critical feminism aims to liberate oneself from the confines of a more prescriptive practice or mode of understanding resistance. Finally, although unique in their own theories and methodologies, what such scholars 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. Importantly, as I look back on my relationship to critical feminist theory, and the connections I have made throughout my own teaching and learning, what CFT does best is help me better understand my students and families as individuals, as opposed to groups who may or may not share similar situations or circumstances.

### **Moving Forward: Contextualizing Critical Feminist Theory in Teacher Education**

Much of my discussion thus far has focused on examining diverse methodologies of resistance and how they help define and better conceptualize the many components of critical feminism. In order to move forward and situate critical feminism within teacher education, it is important to refer back to critical pedagogy and critical Whiteness studies, and understand how critical feminism moves further, and actually builds off of both of their aims and goals. As Kenway and Modra (1992) state, “As critical pedagogy theorists claim that they are quintessentially engaged in democratizing the education process, (their) failure to engage with feminism casts considerable doubt on their authenticity” (p.138). Thus, in order to truly problematize and challenge the politics and intersections of race, class and gender in our classrooms and schools, it makes sense to ground ourselves within a critical feminist lens.

To situate critical feminist theory within the field of education, I look to Cannella and Manuelito’s, (2008) who see feminist research, conceptualizations and practices as wide ranging, complex, and constituting the diversity of human beings. They further consider the role of feminism as a social science to increase social justice from diverse standpoints, with the goal of creating transformative solidarities that can bring about a wide range of possibilities for human beings who truly care for one another. Greene (1992) makes a similar claim:

Most (feminists) deliberately resist temptations of harmonious agreement, although they surely come together in a concern for authentic liberatory teaching and for the rejection of patriarchy. Demonstrating at every step that there exists no “essence” of radical feminism, they are drawn to shifting viewpoints, interruptions, the idea of multiple identities. And yet, as they make clear their refusals and resistances, they identify some of the most crucial and unsettled issues confronting teachers in search of emancipatory pedagogies today (p.ix).

Similarly, Butler and Raynor (2007) discuss and look at feminist pedagogy over the past twenty years or so and argue for “reveal(ing) a call for teaching from multifocal, multidimensional, multicultural, pluralistic, interdisciplinary perspectives” (p.202). They suggest that this can be accomplished through transformation. They define transformation as the need to unify as human beings, while helping to capture and hold onto the differences. They state, “Transformation implies acknowledging and benefiting from the interaction among the sameness and diversity, groups, and individuals” (p.203). Butler and Raynor (2007) highlight the complexity of their argument through the simple words of a West African proverb, “I am we”. Albeit concise, what its meaning implies is that through the lived experiences and working through the intersections of race, class, gender and ethnicity, sexuality, etc., we can truly move forward in fostering emancipatory and liberatory spaces for all who take part in the education of our children.

When thinking about critical feminism within education, Lather (1991) considers certain questions which help us reflect upon a liberatory curriculum that directly address elements of self-reflexivity<sup>8</sup>, knowledge as power, as well as a deconstruction of what we have been deeply embedded in throughout many years of Westernized schooling. As Lather argues “Reflexive practice is privileged as the site where we can learn how to turn critical thought into emancipatory action” (Lather, p. 13).

Moving further, Lather (1991) suggests, “One cannot talk of students learning without talk of teachers teaching” (p.1). She deeply connects the link between knowledge and power, empowering pedagogy, and praxis as an interruption strategy. All of these components help support many of the characteristics and elements of critical feminist theory.

What might we gain as both teachers and learners if we considered some of the following questions when we look at our teacher education classrooms and communities? *Did I encourage ambivalence, ambiguity and multiplicity, or did I impose order and structure? Have I questioned the textual staging of knowledge in a way that keeps my own authority from being reified? Did I focus on the limits of my own conceptualizations? Who are my “Others”? What binaries structure my arguments? What hierarchies are at play?* Finally, and what Lather suggests might be the most important, *Did it (the curriculum) go beyond critique to help in producing pluralized*

*and diverse spaces for the emergence of subjugated knowledges and for the organization of resistance?* (Lather, 1991 p.84).

Such reflexivity mirrors what Zeichner (1992) refers to as a social reconstructionist conception of reflective teaching. Within such a practice, “Schooling and teacher education are both viewed as crucial elements in the movement toward a more just and humane society” (p. 166). This form of reflecting makes central the way teachers choose to respond and work to disrupt the status quo in schooling and society. Additionally, a social reconstructionist practice of reflecting teaching is rooted in its “democratic and emancipatory impulse and the focus of the teacher’s deliberations upon substantive issues which raise instances of inequality and injustice within schooling and society” (p.166). Ultimately, and similar to a dialogical relationship, such reflecting is purposefully political in nature, communal in practice, and collaborative with its commitment to transform unjust and inhumane institutional and social structures.

Such a practice falls directly inline with a critical feminist framework. As such, Goodman (1992) contends that it is hard to imagine true reflexivity without acknowledging interpersonal relationships, the conception of knowledge, or the relationship between ones students and their learning. Thus, as Goodman notes, “Feminist pedagogy offers preservice teachers an opportunity to reflect on the way in which education is a form of cultural politics within a very direct and personally meaningful context” (p.180).

Moving further, Maher and Tetreault (1994) support the practice of reflecting by specifically examining the goals of a feminist classroom or setting. They discuss the importance of fostering a space where students can work to recreate knowledge and history for their own communities and cultures, rather than rely on andocentric bases of traditional knowledge. Maher and Tetreault (1994) explain that the feminist classroom is one where viewpoints of all groups in society and not just the most powerful are heard and delivered to the students. They state, “The meanings people create about aspects of themselves, like gender, culture identification, and class position vary widely in different classrooms. Although these meanings are in constant flux, they nevertheless reflect the unequal power relations that govern the society outside the classroom” (p.202). Thus, by framing the teaching and learning of pre-service teachers with the practice of critical

reflecting, we can begin to think about systematically changing the direction of a colonized, and one-dimensional way of engaging with ourselves as well as our students.

Finally, I look to one of the most important components of conceptualizing critical feminist theory as it relates to teacher education; the practice of engaging in honest dialogue as it relates to many of the themes discussed thus far. Although it is often difficult to immerse ourselves within such conversations, by doing so, we create spaces to theoretically or conceptually reconsider our current understandings of oppression, resistance, knowledge, and power, and what this might mean in the context of teaching and learning in the twenty-first century.

Importantly, as Berry (2010) suggests, it is imperative that the relationship between the professor/educator and the pre-service teacher shift, in that the traditional asymmetry between power and privilege transform. The professor/educator must be open to learning from their students, and their lived experiences. As Berry argues, “Students' stories, including their stories of school, are important to know in the context of their development as teachers because these stories, these experiences, may influence what they learn and how they learn it as well as what they choose to teach and how they choose to teach as emerging teachers” (p.24).

This act (engaging in thoughtful and critical conversations, as well as self-reflecting), in and of itself, will hopefully offer new ways to question the “traditional” nature of schooling, as well as to listen and learn about the many diverse sources of empowerment and resistance, in addition to the unique experiences that all students bring to the classroom. Thus, by deploying a critical feminism as a framework within teacher education, we 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 hopefully be the starting point for thinking about moving towards reimagining teacher education. By looking at redefining elements of teacher education through a critical feminist lens, we can guide pre-service teachers in their journey to becoming reflective and critical educators.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> I use Hesse-Biber, Leavy & Yaiser's (2004) definition of methodology: "Scholars create a feminist methodology by arguing against the mainstream ways research has proceeded and how theory has been applied to research questions and data. Feminists explicitly link theory with methods" (p.15).

<sup>2</sup> Kumashiro (2002) describes an anti-oppressive theory as a way of teaching to create a more safe, tolerant, and open-minded classroom for oppressed students.

<sup>3</sup> Hesse-Biber, Leavy & Yaiser (2004) define positivism as "based on deductive modes of knowledge building where objective and value-neutral researchers typically begin with a general cause and effect relationship derived from an abstract general theory" (p.5).

<sup>4</sup> Mainstream academic knowledge is defined by Banks (1996) "The concepts, paradigms, theories and explanations that constitute traditional and established knowledge in the behavioral and social sciences" (p. 11).

<sup>5</sup> Freire (1974) describes a critical consciousness as being *in* and *with* one's reality, and that "within every understanding, sooner or later an action corresponds" (p. 39).

<sup>6</sup> Anzaldúa (1987) compares her experience to that of "two worlds merging to form a third country, a border culture". She describes her experience as a cultural collision, such that she felt like she was "cradled in one culture, sandwiched between two cultures, straddling all three cultures and their value systems, la mestiza undergoes a struggle of flesh, a struggle of borders, an inner war" (p. 100).

<sup>7</sup> 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.

<sup>8</sup> Within the context of critical feminism, I refer to the following definition of self-reflection: "Instead of using reflection as a code word for "professional thinking" it should be used as a heuristic device through which teacher educators and preservice teachers can collectively construct a comprehensive understanding of what it means to teach given our current political, social, and educational circumstances" (Goodman, 1992, p.184).

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