

Critical Race Theory, Latino Critical Theory, and Critical Raced-Gendered Epistemologies: Recognizing Students of Color as Holders and Creators of Knowledge

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For too long, the histories, experiences, cultures, and languages of students of color have been devalued, misinterpreted, or omitted within formal educational settings. In this article, the author uses critical race theory (CRT) and Latina/Latino critical theory (LatCrit) to demonstrate how critical raced-gendered epistemologies recognize students of color as holders and creators of knowledge. In doing so, she discusses how CRT and LatCrit provide an appropriate lens for qualitative research in the field of education. She then compares and contrasts the experiences of Chicana/Chicano students through a Eurocentric and a critical raced-gendered epistemological perspective and demonstrates that each perspective holds vastly different views of what counts as knowledge, specifically regarding language, culture, and commitment to communities. She then offers implications of critical raced-gendered epistemologies for both research and practice and concludes by discussing some of the critiques of the use of these epistemologies in educational research.

I have to say that I think my high school was pretty discriminatory because I feel that I wasn't tracked into a college program and I think I had the potential to be. Except because I was from the other side of the tracks, no one really took the time to inspire me. . . . I had a high school English teacher who had asked us to write an essay. And I had written it about the death of my sister. And when she gave it back to me, she gave me a D. And she said it was all wrong. And I just couldn't get how she

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was, first of all, insensitive, and then second of all, criticizing me on an experience she didn't have and that only I could write about. And so that's when I think I started to feel the discrimination, almost in the way, I guess in the expectations of what you talk about or what you don't talk about in school. And what's academic and what's not academic.

—Angela, a graduating
Chicana college student

Actually, after my second semester of my sophomore year, I took my first Chicano studies course, "Chicano Life History" with Ledesma, and that just opened my eyes to everything, a passion. . . . That class helped me a lot . . . *y tambien* [and also] basically gave me identity 'cause I was lost. . . . So, if the students were exposed to that . . . it would make a huge difference, learning our history *y todo* [and all]. . . . I wish that somehow I could [teach at] the elementary school 'cause I think it's important that we start that early, just giving that gift of giving someone their . . . history *y todo* [and all]. . . . And I don't think it should even be a gift, it's a right. It's a right; unfortunately, it's not happening [in schools].

—Chuy, a graduating
Chicano college student

Although students of color are holders and creators of knowledge, they often feel as if their histories, experiences, cultures, and languages are devalued, misinterpreted, or omitted within formal educational settings. The above quotes address how two undergraduate students of color reflect on what counts as valid knowledge in schools and how this has directly affected their lives.¹ Angela speaks to how she learned as a young high school student that her real life experiences "from the other side of the tracks" were not considered an acceptable source of knowledge from which to draw on in academic settings. Her personal experience embodied knowledge that her teacher seemed to disregard, perhaps because she did not consider it to be objective or authoritative knowledge. Chuy points to how his cultural and/or ethnic history was omitted from the curriculum until he was in college and how this has motivated him to want to teach younger students. He expresses his disappointment in the schools' focus on a Eurocentric history that denies the history of students of color. Both students are addressing epistemological questions that deal with power, politics, and survival as well as the need for educators to recognize the knowledge, histories, and experiences of students of color.

Epistemology, in general, refers to the nature, status, and production of knowledge (Harding, 1987) and the way one knows and understands the world. However, the concept of epistemology is more than just a "way of knowing" and can be more accurately defined as a "system of knowing" that is linked to worldviews based on the conditions under which people live and learn (Ladson-Billings, 2000). Ladson-Billings argues that "there are

well-developed systems of knowledge, or epistemologies, that stand in contrast to the dominant Euro-American epistemology" (p. 258). Indeed, a number of education scholars have begun talking about critical raced and raced-gendered epistemologies that emerge from a social, cultural, and political history different from the dominant race (e.g., Delgado Bernal, 1998; Dillard, 1997, 2000; Gordon, 1990; Ladson-Billings, 1995, 2000; Scheurich & Young, 1997). These raced and raced-gendered epistemologies directly challenge the broad range of currently popular research paradigms, from positivism to constructivism and liberal feminism to postmodernism, which draw from a narrow foundation of knowledge that is based on the social, historical, and cultural experiences of Anglos (Stanfield, 1994). As part of the challenge to popular research paradigms, this article demonstrates how critical race theory (CRT) and Latina/Latino critical theory (LatCrit) give credence to critical raced-gendered epistemologies that recognize students of color as holders and creators of knowledge.

In this article, I refer to critical raced-gendered epistemologies that offer unique ways of knowing and understanding the world based on the various raced and gendered experiences of people of color. In my mind, there is not just one raced-gendered epistemology but many that each speak to culturally specific ways of positioning between a raced epistemology that omits the influence of gender on knowledge production and a White feminist epistemology that does not account for race. Collins (1998) speaks to this balance when she states, "Black feminism must come to terms with a White feminist agenda incapable of seeing its own racism, as well as a Black nationalist one resistant to grappling with its own sexism" (p. 70). Whereas White feminisms often define themselves against a male-centered perspective, critical raced-gendered perspectives avoid male-female polarisms, instead examining how oppression is caught up in multiply raced, gendered, classed, and sexed relations. In other words, these systems of knowledge, or critical raced-gendered epistemologies, emerge from the experiences a person of color might have at the intersection of racism, sexism, classism, and other oppressions.

To demonstrate how critical raced-gendered epistemologies recognize students of color as holders and creators of knowledge, I first discuss how CRT and LatCrit provide an appropriate lens for qualitative research in the field of education. I then look to how different epistemological perspectives view students of color. More specifically, I compare and contrast how a Eurocentric perspective and a specific raced-gendered perspective offer very different interpretations of the educational experiences of Chicana/Chicano students.² I then offer implications of critical raced-gendered epistemologies for both research and practice. I conclude by discussing some of the critiques against the use of these epistemologies in educational research. Throughout this article, I emphasize how a critical raced-gendered epistemology recognizes students of color as holders and creators of knowledge who have much

to offer in transforming educational research and practice. Indeed, I argue that students of color represent what Castillo (1995) describes as holders of knowledge who can transform the world into a more just place.

Today, we grapple with our need to thoroughly understand who we are . . . and to believe in our gifts, talents, our worthiness and beauty, while having to survive within the constructs of a world antithetical to our intuition and knowledge. . . . Who, in this world of the glorification of material wealth, Whiteness, and phallic worship would consider *us* holders of knowledge that could transform this world into a place where the quality of life for all living things on this planet is the utmost priority? (p. 149)

CRT AND LATCRIT AS A LENS FOR EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH

Although numerous frameworks could be used to move toward a critical raced-gendered epistemology in educational research, in this article, I use a lens that builds on the work of CRT and LatCrit.³ As theoretical frameworks in the field of law, CRT and LatCrit explore the ways that so-called race-neutral laws and policies perpetuate racial and/or ethnic and gender subordination. They emphasize the importance of viewing laws and lawmaking within the proper historical and cultural context to deconstruct their racialized content (Crenshaw, Gotanda, Peller, & Thomas, 1995). These frameworks challenge dominant liberal ideas such as colorblindness and meritocracy and show how these ideas operate to disadvantage people of color and further advantage Whites (Delgado & Stefancic, 1994). "The task for critical race scholars is to uncover and explore the various ways in which racial thinking operates" (Flores, 2000, p. 437) to move toward a more just society.

LatCrit is similar to CRT. However, LatCrit is concerned with a progressive sense of a coalitional Latina/Latino pan-ethnicity (Valdes, 1996), and it addresses issues often ignored by critical race theorists. I see LatCrit theory adding important dimensions to a critical race analysis. For example, LatCrits theorize issues such as language, immigration, ethnicity, culture, identity, phenotype, and sexuality (Espinoza, 1990; Garcia, 1995; Hernández-Truyol, 1997; Johnson, 1997; Martinez, 1994; Montoya, 1994). LatCrit is a theory that elucidates Latinas/Latinos' multidimensional identities and can address the intersectionality of racism, sexism, classism, and other forms of oppression. It is a theory that has a tradition of offering a strong gender analysis so that it "can address the concerns of Latinas in light of both our internal and external relationships in and with the worlds that have marginalized us" (Hernández-Truyol, 1997, p. 885). Indeed, this tradition and its necessary intersectionality offers an important lens from which to envision a raced-gendered epistemology, especially for Chicanas/Latinas. LatCrit is conceived as an anti-subordination and antiessentialist project that attempts to link theory with practice,

scholarship with teaching, and the academy with the community (*LatCrit Primer*, 1999). LatCrit is not incompatible or competitive with CRT.

Instead, LatCrit is supplementary, complementary to [CRT]. LatCrit . . . at its best, should operate as a close cousin—related to [CRT] in real and lasting ways, but not necessarily living under the same roof. (Valdes, 1996, pp. 26-27)

To use CRT and LatCrit together as a lens for educational research, I adapt and borrow from both groups of theorists. CRT and LatCrit in education can be defined as a framework that challenges the dominant discourse on race, gender, and class as it relates to education by examining how educational theory, policy, and practice subordinate certain racial and ethnic groups (Solórzano & Delgado Bernal, 2001; Solórzano & Yosso, 2000). Critical race and LatCrit theorists acknowledge that educational structures, processes, and discourses operate in contradictory ways with their potential to oppress and marginalize and their potential to emancipate and empower. CRT and LatCrit are transdisciplinary and draw on many bodies of progressive scholarship to understand and improve the educational experiences of students of color (Parker, Deyhle, & Villenas, 1999).

Solórzano (1998) outlines the following five defining elements of CRT in relationship to educational research. I believe these elements form the basis of both CRT and LatCrit, and I offer examples of how they support raced-gendered epistemologies.

1. *The importance of transdisciplinary approaches.* CRT and LatCrit's transdisciplinary approach allows educational researchers to draw on the strengths and research methods of various disciplines in understanding and improving the educational experiences of students of color. Ethnic studies and women's studies, in particular, "have opened the way for multiple theoretical and epistemological readings in the field of educational research," and scholars of color have provided "a needed critique as well as an 'endarkenment' on society as a whole" (Dillard, 2000, p. 676).
2. *An emphasis on experiential knowledge.* For too long, the experiential knowledge of students of color has been viewed as a deficit in formal learning environments. Critical raced-gendered epistemologies allow this experiential knowledge to be viewed as a strength and acknowledge that the life experiences of students of color are "uniquely individual while at the same time both collective and connected" (Dillard, 2000, p. 676). An emphasis on experiential knowledge also allows researchers to embrace the use of counterstories, narratives, *testimonios*, and oral histories to illuminate the unique experiences of students of color.
3. *A challenge to dominant ideologies.* CRT and LatCrit give meaning to the creation of culturally and linguistically relevant ways of knowing and understanding and to the importance of rethinking the traditional notion of what counts as knowledge. Raced-gendered epistemologies also push us to consider pedagogies of the home, which offer culturally specific ways of teaching and learning and embrace ways of knowing that extend beyond the public realm of formal school-

ing (Delgado Bernal, 2001). Because power and politics are at the center of all teaching and learning, the application of household knowledge to situations outside of the home becomes a creative process that challenges the transmission of "official knowledge" and dominant ideologies.

4. *The centrality of race and racism and their intersectionality with other forms of subordination.* Raced-gendered epistemologies emerge from ways of knowing that are in direct contrast with the dominant Eurocentric epistemology, partially as a result of histories that are based on the intersection of racism, sexism, classism, and other forms of subordination. This means that the research process must recognize that multiple layers of oppression are followed by multiple forms of resistance (Solórzano & Yosso, in press).
5. *A commitment to social justice.* Critical raced-gendered epistemologies are grounded in raced and gendered histories, and their legacy of resistance to racism and sexism can translate into a pursuit of social justice in both educational research and practice. Indeed, research and practice grounded in a critical raced-gendered epistemology seek political and social change on behalf of communities of color.

These five defining elements come together to offer a unique way to approach educational research and to move researchers and educators into spaces of moral and critical practice.⁴ I concur with Gloria Ladson-Billings (2000), who states, "The 'gift' of CRT is that it unapologetically challenges the scholarship that would dehumanize and depersonalize us" (p. 272). I, therefore, also believe that CRT and LatCrit can help to uncover the possibilities of raced-gendered epistemologies in educational research and practice.

HOW DIFFERENT EPISTEMOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVES VIEW CHICANA/CHICANO STUDENTS

In this section, I present an example of how the educational experiences of one group of students of color, Chicanas/Chicanos, may be interpreted very differently based on the different epistemological perspectives educators and/or researchers employ. First, I outline a Eurocentric perspective and illustrate how this perspective has been used as the basis for a deficit understanding of Mexican culture throughout the 1900s and into the 21st century. Then, I outline a specific raced-gendered perspective and demonstrate how we can reconceptualize the so-called deficits of Mexican culture into assets and view Chicana/Chicano students as holders and creators of knowledge.

A Eurocentric Perspective

Western modernism is a network or grid of broad assumptions and beliefs that are deeply embedded in the way dominant Western culture constructs the nature of the world and one's experiences in it (Foucault, 1979, 1988). In

the United States, the center of this grid is a Eurocentric epistemological perspective based on White privilege. The Council on Interracial Books for Children (1977) defines this perspective as (a) the belief that the perspective of the Euro-Americans is the norm and (b) the practice of ignoring and/or delegitimizing the experiences, motivations, aspirations, and views of people of color. Traditionally, the majority of Euro-Americans adhere to a Eurocentric perspective founded on covert and overt assumptions regarding White superiority, territorial expansion, and "American" democratic ideals such as meritocracy, objectivity, and individuality. What this means is that their way of knowing and understanding the world around them is very naturally and subconsciously interpreted through these beliefs. For example, the notion of meritocracy allows people to believe that all people—no matter what race, class, or gender—get what they deserve based primarily on an individual's own merit and how hard a person works. Those who believe that our society is truly a meritocratic one find it difficult to believe that men gain advantage from women's disadvantages or that Euro-Americans have any significant advantage over people of color. This way of knowing and understanding the world is at least partially based on White privilege, which is "an invisible package of unearned assets" (McIntosh, 1997, p. 120) or a system of opportunities and benefits that is bestowed on an individual simply for being White. Tatum (1999) writes about the invisibility of White privilege, yet points out its very real effects and states that "despite the current rhetoric about affirmative action and reverse discrimination, every social indicator, from salary to life expectancy, reveals the advantages of being White" (p. 8). But because, especially to Whites, this privilege is often invisible, it is legitimized and viewed as the norm or the point of departure. Standards (especially those in education) are based on this norm, and individuals or knowledges that depart from this norm are often devalued and subordinated.

The insidious nature of a Eurocentric epistemological perspective allows it to subtly (and not so subtly) shape the belief system and practices of researchers, educators, and the school curriculum while continuing to adversely influence the educational experiences of Chicanas/Chicanos and other students of color. For example, throughout the 20th century, the Euro-American social belief system about Mexicans helped support the many political, economic, and cultural reasons for their *de jure* and then *de facto* school segregation (Delgado Bernal, 2000). First, some individuals openly argued that Mexican students should be segregated from White students because they were genetically and physically inferior. One school official stated, "We segregate for the same reason that the Southerners segregate the Negro. They are an inferior race, that is all" (Taylor, 1934, p. 219). Another common assertion was that the standard of cleanliness among Mexican children was lower than that of Anglos. "I don't believe in mixing. They are filthy and lousy, not all, but most of them," declared one school board member (Taylor, 1934, p. 217).

Indeed, the beliefs about Mexicans held by many educators shared a common trait during this period. Tate (1997) observed that educators' beliefs were "premised upon political, scientific, and religious theories relying on racial characterizations and stereotypes about people of color that help support a legitimating ideology and specific political action" (p. 199). A case in point is how prohibiting Spanish-language use among Mexican school children was a social philosophy and a political tool used by local and state officials to justify school segregation and to maintain a colonized relationship between Mexicans and the dominant society (Delgado Bernal, 1999). Today, bilingualism often continues to be seen as "un-American" and considered a deficit and an obstacle to learning.

A Eurocentric epistemology that is based on White superiority, capitalism, and scientific theories of intelligence has provided the cornerstone of *de jure* and *de facto* segregated schooling for Mexicans and the historic devaluation of the Spanish language (Crawford, 1992; G. G. González, 1990; Menchaca & Valencia, 1990; San Miguel, 1987). The epistemological orientation that for generations has viewed Chicanas/Chicanos as "culturally deficient" and characterized them as ignorant, backward, unclean, unambitious, and abnormal, remains unchanged and has been unaffected by major judicial and policy decisions throughout the Southwest (Donato, 1997; González, 1990; Moreno, 1999). In fact, a belief in the cultural and linguistic deficiency of Chicana/Chicano students remains in place in the 21st century and is supported by political action and ideological domination that continues to exclude and silence Chicanas/Chicanos and other Latinas/Latinos. Villenas and Deyhle (1999) powerfully stated one way in which this exclusion and silencing takes place at the institutional level through the curriculum.

In the schools, the colonization of the mind is continued through the instilling of a historical amnesia that renders Latino/indigenous peoples as "immigrants," foreigners who have no claim to the Americas, while European Americans are constructed as the natural owners and inheritors of these lands. The rich knowledge, beliefs and worldviews of Latino and Mexicano/Chicano communities are not validated, let alone taught. (p. 421)

The message that Chicana/Chicano students are inferior and not agents of knowledge continues to affect the institutional level and also translates into overcrowded and underfinanced schools, low graduation rates, and overrepresentation of these students in special education classes (Kozol, 1991; Valencia, 1991). A CRT and LatCrit lens "can unveil and explain how and why 'raced' children are overwhelmingly the recipients of low teacher expectations and are consequently tracked, placed in low-level classes and receive 'dull and boring' curriculums" (Villenas & Deyhle, 1999, p. 415). In the next section, I use a CRT and LatCrit lens to examine how a specific raced-gendered epistemology offers a very different understanding of the knowledge and experience that Chicanas/Chicanos bring to their formal schooling.

A Chicana Feminist Perspective

I view raced-gendered epistemologies as dynamic and encompassing various experiences, standpoints, and theories that are specific to different groups of people of color. In earlier work, I have proposed a particular raced-gendered epistemology by outlining the characteristics of a Chicana feminist epistemology in educational research (Delgado Bernal, 1998). This epistemological orientation challenges the historical and ideological representation of Chicanas and is grounded in the sociohistorical experiences of Chicanas and their communities. Chicana feminist ways of knowing and understanding are partially shaped by collective experiences and community memory. Community and family knowledge is taught to youth through legends, *corridos*, and storytelling. It is through culturally specific ways of teaching and learning that ancestors and elders share the knowledge of conquest, segregation, patriarchy, homophobia, assimilation, and resistance. If we believe “in the wisdom of our ancient knowledge,” as Ana Castillo (1995, p. 148) suggests, then the knowledge that is passed from one generation to the next can help us survive in everyday life. Therefore, adopting a Chicana feminist epistemology will expose human relationships and experiences that are probably not visible from a Eurocentric epistemological orientation. Within this framework, Chicanas and Chicanos become agents of knowledge who participate in intellectual discourse that links experience, research, community, and social change.

As a case in point, I draw from my current research, which focuses on the knowledge Chicana/Chicano college students learn in the home and successfully employ when confronted with challenges and obstacles that impede their academic achievement and college participation (Delgado Bernal, 2001). The life history interview and focus group data with more than 50 Chicana/Chicano college students are educational “counterstories” that are told from a nonmajoritarian perspective—offering stories that White educators usually do not hear or tell (Delgado, 1989, 1993). My analysis of these “counterstories” indicates that the students develop tools and strategies for daily survival in an educational system that often excludes and silences them. In fact, the communication, practices, and learning that occur in the home and community can be viewed as a cultural knowledge base that helps students survive the daily experiences of racism, sexism, and classism. What are often perceived as deficits for Chicana/Chicano students within a Eurocentric epistemological framework—limited English proficiency, Chicano and/or Mexicano cultural practices, or too many nonuniversity-related responsibilities—can be understood within a Chicana feminist perspective as cultural assets or resources that Chicana/Chicano students bring to formal educational environments.

The application of household knowledge, specifically in the form of bilingualism, biculturalism, and commitment to communities, interrupts the transmission of “official knowledge” and even helps students navigate their

way around educational obstacles. For instance, the students in my study experienced their bilingualism in various ways throughout their educational journey. Most of them felt that their bilingualism had a positive impact on them academically and socially. They seemed to draw strength from using both Spanish and English in academic and social settings. As one young woman put it, "It's a great resource to my community, the people that I work with, the university itself." Students stated over and over again that knowledge in Spanish helped them acquire English and that their bilingualism had been an asset to their education. A few students also spoke passionately about their bilingualism in terms of identity and the importance of maintaining their home language.

In addition, students discussed how they and others benefited from their bicultural insights. Many also spoke of how they consciously rejected assimilation and attempted to hold onto different aspects of their culture while they learned from other cultures. As one female sophomore said,

I think I'm acculturated, and I don't think I've assimilated by the simple fact that I have decided to learn about all these other cultures. . . . I am not giving up my own, and I think when you assimilate you give something up to gain something.

In spite of a Eurocentrism that has fostered a history of cultural repression in the United States, these students embrace the cultural and linguistic strengths and assets of Chicana/Chicano family education. As Mesa-Bains (1999) explained, it is important to affirm how our biculturalism and family knowledge have contributed to this country.

Our *quinceaneras*, our *bailes*, our *bodas*, our *pastorelas*, our *fiestas patrias*, our foods, our music, and our arts are all part of the cultural contributions we have made to the vibrant life of the United States. . . . In such a time of growing xenophobia it is important to affirm for ourselves and for others the myriad ways in which we have enriched this country, from our historic beginnings as ancient people to our contemporary lives. (p. 107)

The students also voiced a very strong commitment to their families or the Mexican communities from which they came, a commitment that translated into a desire to give back and help others. Many of the students spoke of their role as examples for their younger siblings and in promoting education or ideas of social justice. One woman commented that "I'm teaching [my younger brothers] to be responsive to women, to believe in them, to not be like the other *machistas* at home." In addition, the words of the students I interviewed paralleled Villalpando's (1996) national research, which found that in comparison to White students, Chicana/Chicano students enter college with higher levels of altruism, stronger interests in pursuing careers serving their communities, and stronger interests in "helping their communities." Students spoke of their commitment to their families and communities as a source of inspiration and motivation to overcome educational obstacles. This

male freshman spoke about his commitment to helping out other people in his community after he graduates from college.

I kind of want a good income, but the only way I'll accept that is if I do something good . . . and I'm active in the community, and I'm helping out other people, I'm not just helping myself. . . . I've always seen it as you're just a wasted person if you just help yourself.

The voices of these students illustrate the vastly different worldviews about what is considered "valid knowledge." They see their home knowledge—their bilingualism, biculturalism, and commitment to communities—as a critical tool that has helped them navigate through educational obstacles, go onto college, and make a positive difference to others. As documented in the previous section, this contrasts with educators who operate within a traditional Eurocentric epistemological framework and often see the home knowledge of Chicana/Chicano students as lacking, limited, and inferior to the "norm." Situated within a particular raced-gendered framework, my work rejects the dominant culture's text and vision of what Chicana/Chicano students know and of who they are. At the same time, this epistemological orientation allows educators to better understand the different knowledges Chicana/Chicano students bring from their homes and communities.

IMPLICATIONS OF A CRITICAL RACED-GENDERED EPISTEMOLOGY

Methodological and Pedagogical Insights

The focus of this article is epistemology, particularly those systems of knowing that counter a dominant Eurocentric epistemology, yet, it is interconnected to the critical race methodologies and pedagogies discussed in this volume. As Pillow (2000) states, "One cannot separate the epistemologies of feminist or race theory from their methodological and epistemological practices" (p. 23). None of the three—epistemology, methodology, and pedagogy—can be isolated from one another, as they are closely interdependent and directly influence the research process. Thus, I believe a critical raced-gendered epistemology offers the following methodological and pedagogical insights.

A critical raced-gendered epistemology allows educational researchers to "bring together understandings of epistemologies and pedagogies to imagine how race, ethnicity, gender, class, and sexuality are braided with cultural knowledge, practices, spirituality, formal education, and the law" (F. González, 2001, p. 643). F. González (1998, 2001) works from a prism of CRT, LatCrit, and U.S. third-world feminisms to develop a methodological

approach that affirms the community and cultural knowledge of students of color. She names this methodological approach *trenzas y mestizaje*—the braiding of theory, qualitative research strategies, and a sociopolitical consciousness. This approach incorporates various qualitative strategies to examine and appreciate the cultural knowledge of students of color. F. González (2001) describes *trenzas y mestizaje* and elaborates

on how a braiding of different ways of knowing, teaching, and learning brings cultural knowledge to the fore of discourses on human rights, social justice, and educational equity as well as to inform the formulations of holistic educational policies and practices. (p. 643)

In addition, it is through a raced-gendered epistemology that Trinidad Galván (2001) proposes how “womanist” pedagogies speak directly to third-world women’s knowledge and experiences. She explores three pedagogical formations (spirituality, well-being, and *convivencia*) as the teaching, learning, and creation of knowledge among a group of *Mexicana campesinas*. These pedagogical formations expand our traditional notion of pedagogy “by situating it among groups of people traditionally unheard and spaces continually unexplored” (p. 607), thus extending our understanding of Mexicana/Mexicano knowledge. Therefore, researching from within a critical raced-gendered epistemology allows the experiential knowledge of communities of color to be viewed as a strength and an asset. It also allows us to “create *nuevas teorías* (new theories) that understand, penetrate, define, and elucidate the content and meaning of our multidimensional identities” (Hernández-Truyol, 1997, p. 884).

A critical raced-gendered epistemology, grounded in CRT and LatCrit, also supports methodological and pedagogical approaches that affirm experiences and responses to different forms of oppression and validates them as appropriate forms of data. By incorporating a counterstorytelling method based on the narratives, *testimonios*, or life histories of people of color, a story can be told from a nonmajoritarian perspective—a story that White educators usually do not hear or tell (Delgado, 1989, 1993). At the same time, counterstorytelling can also serve as a pedagogical tool that allows one to better understand and appreciate the unique experiences and responses of students of color through a deliberate, conscious, and open type of listening. In other words, an important component of using counterstories includes not only telling nonmajoritarian stories but also learning how to listen and hear the messages in counterstories. Legal scholar Williams (1997) believes that counterstorytelling and critical race practice are “mostly about learning to listen to other people’s stories and then finding ways to make those stories matter in the legal system” (p. 765). Likewise, learning to listen to counterstories within the educational system can be an important pedagogical practice for teachers and students as well as an important methodological practice for educational researchers.

Insights for Policy and Practice

As my research on Chicana/Chicano college students demonstrates, CRT and LatCrit give credence to culturally and linguistically relevant ways of knowing and understanding and to the importance of rethinking the traditional notion of what counts as knowledge. The implications of this go beyond the methodological and pedagogical to affect both policy and practice. Rather than focus on the failures of students of color, an endarkened feminist epistemology allows us to ask how cultural knowledge contributes to the educational success of some students and how educational institutions can respond appropriately.

For example, universities that have language or diversity requirements might develop innovative curricular and pedagogical ways to include the bilingualism and biculturalism of students into the curriculum. In other words, institutions can acknowledge and give credit for these resources while helping students develop these resources even further. Rather than view students with limited English skills as a liability to the university (because the university has to provide language development classes for these students), the university should see these students as an asset. These are students who might be able to work as tutors in the university language department.

In addition, elementary, secondary, and postsecondary schools can incorporate the family knowledge of bilingual students by sending out information to parents in languages other than English. This would allow parents, especially at the elementary and secondary level, to stay involved and better understand the process of their children's formal education. It would also nurture the family and school relationship that is so important at all levels of formal schooling. Too often, students of color believe they have to choose either family and culture or school success (Nieto, 1996). Yet, researchers have found that for Latina/Latino students attending college full-time, maintaining family relationships is among the most important aspects that facilitates their adjustment to college (Hurtado, Carter, & Spuler, 1996). Other studies demonstrated that when college students maintain a supportive relationship with their parents, they are better adjusted and more likely to graduate (Cabrera, Castaneda, Nora, & Hengstler, 1992).

Finally, the national movement to dismantle race-based admissions policies at universities ignores current societal inequalities and the fact that the admissions process is based on a very Eurocentric measure of knowledge. Legislation that outlaws considerations of race and/or ethnicity in the university admissions process is supported by a myth of meritocracy and continues to validate a very subjective and highly selective admissions process (Delgado Bernal, 1999; Villalpando, in press). If race and/or ethnicity is not to be part of the admissions equation, educators need to think about creative ways to move away from a solely Eurocentric measure of knowledge to one that weighs "other" knowledges that emerge from communities of color (e.g.,

bilingualism, biculturalism, commitment to communities). Legal scholar Delgado (1995) argues for “an overhaul of the admissions process and a rethinking of the criteria that make a person a deserving . . . student” (p. 51). He and many others have argued for admission standards that would result in an increased number of women and students of color gaining admission, yet, he points out that these recommendations are often ignored and never instituted. A critical raced-gendered epistemology enables educators to consider creative admissions, curricular, and pedagogical policies that acknowledge, respect, and nurture the ways of knowing and understanding in communities of color.

CRITIQUES OF A CRITICAL RACED-GENDERED EPISTEMOLOGY

Without a doubt, there are those who will argue against the use of a critical raced-gendered epistemology in general and more specifically within the area of educational research and practice. Some of the potential critiques will probably parallel the numerous critiques already given against CRT and LatCrit within legal studies, and others may be unique to the field of education. In this section, I will briefly address two potential arguments that critics may put forth in relationship to a critical raced-gendered epistemology: the essentialist argument and the argument against the use of personal stories and narratives.

The Essentialist Argument

As Brayboy (2001) noted, postmodernists and other progressive scholars may be uncomfortable with CRT because they believe that it essentializes race and treats all people of color the same. The essentialist argument is rooted in a critique of identity politics that is based on a unidimensional characteristic, such as race or ethnicity. Identity politics is “an approach that is founded on parochial notions of race and representation” (Darder & Torres, 2000) and ignores or glosses over differences based on class, gender, sexuality, and culture. Rightly, critics argue that an essentialist notion of identity is simplistic and does not allow for the myriad experiences that shape who we are and what we know.

What many critics do not understand is that critical race theorists and LatCrits “have pushed the envelope of the ways in which we talk about race and racism, so that we focus on the intersectionality of subordination” (Solórzano & Yosso, in press). What this means is that one’s identity is not based on the social construction of race but rather is multidimensional and intersects with various experiences. Certainly, “critical legal scholarship of

race (and gender or sexual orientation) in recent times has interrogated and helped debunk various essentialisms and power hierarchies based on race . . . and other constructs" (Valdes, 1996, p. 3). LatCrit in particular has pushed scholars forward in analyzing identity construction of racially subordinated people at both the individual and group levels (Johnson, 1998) and within postidentity politics (Valdes, 1996). They have added layers of complexity to the formation of identity and construction of knowledge by looking at the intersections of immigration (Garcia, 1995; Johnson, 1996-1997), migration (Johnson, 1998), human rights (Hernández-Truyol, 1996; Iglesias, 1996-1997; Romany, 1996-1997), language (Romany, 1996), gender (Rivera, 1997), and class (Ontiveros, 1997).

With increased globalization and transnational labor and communication, we have to move beyond essentialist notions of identity and of what counts as knowledge. So although race and gender are central components of a critical raced-gendered epistemology, they are but two of the many components that are woven together, and they are anything but static. Dillard (2000) pointed out that the "intent here is not to present race/ethnicity or gender as being essentialist, unchangeable, or immovable. Instead, these positionalities must be seen as shifting and dynamic sets of social relationships which embody a particular endarkened feminist epistemological basis" (p. 670). Although a critical raced-gendered epistemology is anti-essentialist, it also allows us to grasp core values within communities of color such as education, self-determination, resistance, family, and freedom. Researching from within this framework offers a way to understand and analyze the multiple identities and knowledges of people of color without essentializing their various experiences.

The Argument Against Personal Stories and Narratives

There have been numerous critiques in legal studies regarding the use of stories and narratives by CRT and LatCrit theorists (see Farber & Sherry, 1997, for one of the more substantial critiques). The argument against using personal stories and narratives is a critique against alternative ways of knowing and understanding and is basically an argument over subjectivity versus objectivity. The critique states that CRT and LatCrit theorists

relentlessly replace traditional scholarship with personal stories, which hardly represent common experiences. The proliferation of stories makes it impossible for others to debate. . . . An infatuation with narrative infects and distorts [their] attempts at analysis. Instead of scientifically investigating whether rewarding individuals according to merit has any objective basis, [they] insist on telling stories about their personal struggles. (Simon, 1999, p. 3)

It is interesting that the critics do not acknowledge that Eurocentrism has become the dominant mind-set that directly affects the mainstream stories

told about race. Because Eurocentrism and White privilege appear to be the norm, many people continue to believe that education in the United States is a meritocratic, unbiased, and fair process. These individuals might find it difficult to accept the notion that a critical raced-gendered epistemology is important to educational research and practice. Yet, the stories, beliefs, and perspectives regarding race and gender in the United States often ignore the stories, beliefs, perspectives, and experiences of people of color in general and women of color in particular. Delgado (1993) points out that "majoritarians tell stories too. But the ones they tell—about merit, causation, blame, responsibility, and social justice—do not seem to them like stories at all, but the truth" (p. 666). In other words, they believe their stories are based on facts, and because Eurocentrism and White privilege are invisible, they fail to see how subjective their stories are.

A critical raced-gendered epistemology does not position the debate between objectivity and subjectivity. Rather, it sees all stories as subjective and the production of knowledge as situated. And those working from this perspective understand that education in the United States has a way to go before it is a meritocratic, unbiased, and fair process. Working from within a critical raced-gendered epistemology does not mean that one is interested in replacing an old body of knowledge that purports to be the truth with an alternative body of knowledge that claims to be the truth. It does mean that one acknowledges and respects other ways of knowing and understanding, particularly the stories and narratives of those who have experienced and responded to different forms of oppression. This has not been the case in education, where for too long, family cultural narratives have not been considered a legitimate part of research or practice. Many researchers have begun to demonstrate how the cultural resources and funds of knowledge such as myths, folktales, *dichos*, *consejos*, kitchen talk, autobiographical stories, and pedagogies of the home are indeed educational strengths and strategies found in communities of color (e.g., Collins, 1998; Delgado Bernal, 2001; Delgado-Gaitan, 1994; Moll, Amanti, Neff, & González, 1992; Silko, 1996; Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco, 1995; Villalpando, in press; Villenas & Deyhle, 1999; Villenas & Moreno, 2001). Tapping into these strengths and strategies is an important first step in moving away from a Eurocentric epistemological orientation to a critical raced-gendered perspective.

CONCLUSION

By comparing and contrasting the experiences of Chicana/Chicano students through a Eurocentric and a critical raced-gendered epistemological perspective, I demonstrated that each perspective holds vastly different views of what counts as knowledge, specifically regarding language, culture,

and community commitment. The Eurocentric perspective has for too long viewed the experiential knowledge of students of color as a deficit or ignored it all together. The focus on Eurocentric knowledge and history can be alienating and frustrating for students such as Angela and Chuy, who were quoted at the beginning of this article. To recognize all students as holders and creators of knowledge, it is imperative that the histories, experiences, cultures, and languages of students of color are recognized and valued in schools.

Together, CRT and LatCrit form a lens for educational research that acknowledges and supports systems of knowing and understanding that counter the dominant Eurocentric epistemology. CRT and LatCrit's emphasis on experiential knowledge allows researchers to embrace the use of counterstories and other methodological and pedagogical approaches that view the community and family knowledge of communities of color as a strength. In addition, critical raced-gendered perspectives in educational research become a means to resist epistemological racism (Scheurich & Young, 1997) and claim one's cultural knowledge as a legitimate and valid body of knowledge. Through a CRT and LatCrit lens, students of color can be seen as holders and creators of knowledge who have the potential to transform schools into places where the experiences of all individuals are acknowledged, taught, and cherished.

NOTES

1. To protect the privacy of students, they are identified with a pseudonym and/or their gender and class status at the time of the interview.

2. Chicana and Chicano are cultural and political identities that were popularized during the Chicano movement of the 1960s. They are composed of multiple layers and are identities of resistance that are often consciously adopted later in life. The term *Chicana/Chicano* is gender inclusive and is used to discuss both women and men of Mexican origin and/or other Latinas/Latinos who share a similar political consciousness. Because terms of identification vary according to context and not all Mexican-origin people embrace the cultural and political identity of Chicana/Chicano, it is sometimes used interchangeably with Mexican.

3. In discussing raced-gendered epistemologies, I clearly draw from a rich body of U.S. third-world feminist literature that I do not discuss in detail in this article. I put this literature together with critical race theory (CRT) and Latina/Latino critical theory (LatCrit) to form a lens that allows me to address how some knowledges and ways of knowing are subordinated within educational institutions.

4. Although CRT and LatCrit emerge from legal studies, they have intellectual roots in ethnic studies and women's studies. Their methodologies (i.e., storytelling, narratives), pedagogies, and underlying assumptions echo many of those found in these disciplines. Therefore, it is important to note that each of the defining elements "is not new in and of itself, but collectively, they represent a challenge to the existing modes of scholarship" (Solórzano, 1998, p. 123).

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