UROP Research Proposal

La Malinche in Higher Education: How Embodiment of Chicana Feminism Pedagogy Influences Latinas’ Undergraduate Well-Being
A Qualitative Study

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**Introduction**

Chicana feminism in its entirety has aimed to embody the voices of Mexican American or Xicana women who seek to challenge the pre-disposed subjugation of their being within the domains of sexuality, gender, race, and identity (Schuman, 2017). A mestiza identity, as referenced by famous Chicana feminist Gloria Anzaldua, reflects an alternative identity that is embedded in navigating the ambiguity and inconsistences Mexican American women face (Vera & De Lo Santos, 2005). Recently, prominent historical figures that have once been symbols of the subjugation of women and misogynistic practices, have been re-framed as symbols of identity and woman empowerment. *La Malinche* in particular, has been re-imagined as a symbol of resistance, resilience, and reclamation of womanhood for Mexican-American women (Gupta & Sushant, 2014).

Previous examination into the influence and understanding of Chicana feminism has looked at the relationships between internalization of Chicana feminist values and its impact on Latinas’ persistence and success in higher education (Carrillo & Dean, 2020). In particular, this study showed that Chicanas benefited from a Chicana feminist or mestiza identity which cultivated resiliency and persistence in their educational journeys (Carrillo & Dean, 2020). In another study, Bernal (2001) showed how Chicana students drew from their Chicana feminist pedagogies allowing them to navigate and survive in their journey through the higher educational realm. This finding demonstrates the importance of Chicana feminist pedagogies for Latina women in their educational attainment and successes.

In contextualizing Latinas’ well-being in higher education, it is imperative to look at the ways Latinas cope as they navigate university environments. Gloria and Castellanos (2005) examined Latinas higher education perceived barriers, coping and well-being. Results indicated that Latina undergraduates coped by talking with peers, taking a positive planned action, and using active coping responses; these practices all correlated with a positive well-being (Gloria & Castellanos, 2005).

Although there is some research on Latinas in college, little is known about the relationship of Chicana feminist epistemology and first-generation Latina undergraduates’ well-being. Previous literature acknowledges that very little Chicana feminist epistemology in educational research is noted, and is due for examination (Bernal, 2001). Thus, it is worth examining the relationships between Chicana feminist pedagogies and its influence on Chicana womens’ well-being within a university context.

**Problem Statement**

Western notions of feminist epistemology have often failed to encompass the various intersectionalities that woman of color navigate. In particular, Latina women embody a multitude of identities that define their womanhood. For Mexican American or Chicana/e/x women in particular, Chicana feminist epistemology is better suited to conceptualize their place in the bigger society. Within this pedagogy, Chicana feminism is used as a movement of empowerment to specifically challenge patriarchal pedagogies and structures that oppress these women of color.
within their culture (Young & Skrla, 2003). More specifically, Chicana feminism is informed by a set of two principles: decolonization and intersectionality. Decolonization contextualized within Chicana pedagogy highlights the importance of narrative in challenging neo-colonial practices that shape and affect the lives of Chicana/x/es (Flores, 2000). The second tenant of intersectionality works together with decolonization in recognizing the interconnectedness of class, gender, race, nationality and sexuality (Flores, 2000).

As first-generation Latinas enter a more individualistic identity as they enter university, many still face the challenge of navigating their collectivist identity in their familial structures that are based in gendered roles and family caretaking (Maldonado Apeaz, 2019). These experiences put Latinas in an in-between state of identities, or as Anzaldua (1987) defines it– borderlands. This navigation of identities is a and borderland state has become a popular component of the Chicana feminist rhetoric and thus, is worth examining how Latinas come to embody pedagogies of identity, class, race and sexuality through the Chicana feminist lens.

Further research is necessary in examining how Chicana feminist pedagogies are developed in university context and how it can be used to understand the well-being of Chicana undergraduates as they navigate spaces in higher education. First-generation Latinas in particular, have to navigate the academic space that is oftentimes unfamiliar to them, while still carrying the responsibilities of being their collectivist identities in their family (Espino, 2020). Within this pedagogy, Chicana feminism is used as a movement of empowerment to specifically challenge patriarchal pedagogies and structures that oppress these women of color within their culture (Young & Skrla, 2003). However, to the extent of how this challenging of systems and Chicana feminist rhetoric is being embodied within the higher educational space and how it influences these students’ well-being as a collective is unknown.

**Purpose and Theory**

The purpose of this study is to analyze how Chicana feminism rhetoric influences the well-being of Latina, specifically Chicana/x/e undergraduate students. Existing literature has examined how Chicana feminism has had a positive impact on Latina college attainment and success (Carrillo & Dean, 2020). Further, in analyzing the relationship of Chicana feminism and well-being, literature has only examined Latina women outside of the higher educational framework (Bernal, 1998). However, little is known as to how Chicana feminism influences the well-being of Chicana students as they navigate higher education.

Using the Psychological-Social-Cultural (PSC) framework (Gloria & Rodriguez, 2000) to examine and conceptualize how Chicana/x/e students’ understanding of Chicana feminism impacts their well-being as they navigate higher education. The use of the PSC framework will serve to closely examine what psychological, social and cultural factors influence the internalization of Chicana feminist values for Chicana/x/e students. By learning how Chicana/x/e students internalize, understand, and contextualize Chicana feminist rhetoric into their ideas of womanhood and what it means to be a Chicana/x/e navigating higher education, we can conceptualize how it impacts these students’ well-being.
**Core Research Questions**

RQ1: How does the psychosociocultural framework help explain the influence that Chicana feminism has on Latina undergraduate students’ well-being?

RQ2: How do psychological factors (self-efficacy, internalization of Chicana feminist values, internalization of womanhood, internalization of *poderosa* characteristics and coping) contribute to Latina college students’ integration of Chicana feminism and their well-being?

RQ3: How do social factors (gender adherence, family gender expectations and social gender norms) contribute to Latina college students’ integration of Chicana feminism and their well-being?

RQ4: How do cultural factors (ethnic identity, families’ religious beliefs, cultural congruity, and university environment) contribute to Latina college students’ integration of Chicana feminism and their well-being?

**Variables**

**Psychological**

1) Self-efficacy
2) Internalization of chicana feminist values
3) Internalization of womanhood
4) Internalization of *poderosa* characteristics
5) Coping

**Social**

1) Gender adherence
2) Family gender expectations
3) Social Gender Norms

**Cultural**

1) Ethnic identity
2) Families’ religious beliefs
3) Cultural congruity
   a. Biculturalism
4) University environment

The dependent variables in this study include integration of Chicana feminism and well-being.

**Methodology**

**Site**

The study will take place at a four-year public university in Southern California. The university is a Hispanic serving institution also serving as a Research 1. With over 20% of a Hispanic/Latino population at the university, such diversity allows for facilitation of recruitment of participants.
**Design**

The study will follow a qualitative design. Semi-structured interviews will be conducted to better understand the extent to which Latina’s use and understand Chicana feminist rhetoric as they navigate higher education and how that affects their well-being. The qualitative nature of this study allows for the subjective articulation and unique meaning that Chicana feminism has on the each of the participants.

**Sample**

After approval from the Institutional Review Board, recruitment of 8 Latina self-identifying undergraduate students that have been exposed to Chicana feminist rhetoric will be done. Participants in this study will also have to meet the requirements of attending a 4-year institution, over the age of 18, an upperclassman (junior, senior), first-generation and self-identifying as Chicana/x/e or Mexican American. Recruitment will be done by sharing flyers on social media and campus organization email newsletters, as well as by word of mouth.

**Procedures**

After recruitment of participants, the researcher is responsible for setting up a designated time with the participant to conduct an interview. The interviews will be conducted at the convenience of the participant, either via Zoom or in person, following appropriate COVID-19 guidelines. Prior to the interview, participants will be asked to fill out a demographic sheet. Participants will be asked for consent to record the interview. Once completed and consent is given, participants will engage in 60-90 semi-structured interviews with the researcher. The content of the interview questions will consist of open-ended questions exploring students’ experiences and understanding of Chicana feminism and how it influences their well-being. Following the interview, participants will be thanked for their time and will be compensated a $25 Amazon gift card for their participation.

Recorded interviews will be transcribed using an automated transcription system of Otter.ai. Transcriptions will be cleaned up to ensure quality and facilitation of theme identification. Participants’ identities will be kept confidential and will be given pseudo names in respect of their privacy, unless stated otherwise.

**Data Analysis**

Data analysis will be facilitated and guided by the Psychosociocultural (PSC) framework. After interview transcriptions, data will be coded by using the software Dedoose for facilitation. Themes and subthemes will be identified and organized through Dedoose. After themes and sub-themes are identified, a discussion of relevant themes will be had amongst the team members of the research cohort and the faculty advisor to ensure validity.

**Responsibilities of Student Researcher**
The student researcher is responsible for completing the components of the research project in a timely manner as outlined in the timeline below. The student is also responsible for consistently meeting with the faculty advisor, [Redacted] on a bi-weekly basis to discuss potential challenges that may arise during the research process. Further, the student is responsible to update the faculty advisor on a constant basis on the progress of the project throughout the school year. Once the UROP proposal is approved, the student is responsible for obtaining IRB approval, recruitment of participants, data collection and analysis throughout the duration of the study. The student is responsible for completing a final research paper which entails all the components of a full academic research paper. Lastly, the student is responsible for preparing and completing a presentation on the research study at UCI’s UROP Symposium in the Spring of 2023.

Timeline
Fall 2022
- Submit UROP proposal
- Apply for IRB Exempt approval
- Begin Literature Review
- Complete Literature Review

Winter 2023
- Create interview questions
- Finalize interview questions
- Recruit participants via social media and word of mouth
- Conduct interviews
- Transcribe interviews
- Begin writing methods section

Spring 2023
- Finish interview transcription
- Begin data analysis
- Complete UROP poster
- Present at UROP symposium
- Complete final research paper

Itemized Budget

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References


Maldonado Apaez, L. (2019). Experiences of first-generation latina women living with contradictions (Order No. 13862285). Available from ProQuest Dissertations & Theses A&I; ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global; Publicly Available Content Database. (2268994811)
