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To cite this article: Lindsay Pérez Huber (2009) Disrupting apartheid of knowledge: testimonio as methodology in Latina/o critical race research in education, *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*, 22:6, 639-654, DOI: [10.1080/09518390903333863](https://doi.org/10.1080/09518390903333863)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/09518390903333863>



Published online: 17 Nov 2009.



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Disrupting apartheid of knowledge: *testimonio* as methodology in Latina/o critical race research in education

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(Received 11 August 2009; final version received 14 September 2009)

This article utilizes a Latina/o critical race theory (LatCrit) framework to disrupt a narrowly defined process of knowledge production in academia, informed by Eurocentric epistemologies and specific ideological beliefs. This process has created an apartheid of knowledge in academia. Disrupting this apartheid allows critical race researchers to move forward in developing methodologies that can be used in anti-racist social justice research. This article describes the use of *testimonio* as methodology in a LatCrit research study. This conceptual piece will describe how theory, methodology, and epistemology led to the development, collection, and analysis of 40 *testimonio* interviews with undocumented and US-born Chicana college students. Specific methodological strategies for employing *testimonio* in LatCrit research are also provided.

Keywords: Latina/o critical race theory; critical race methodology; *testimonio*

Introduction

As I walked out of a meeting with a colleague in my department, she asked me what the focus of my latest research project was about. I took a moment, thinking in my mind, *here we go again*. I drew in a breath, exhaled, and began describing my research focus on the educational experiences of undocumented Chicana college students attending a research university. She replied with a confused look on her face, *Oh, (pause) that sounds interesting. So what type of methods are you using?* I explained to her that it was a qualitative study and described my use of Latina/o critical race theory and *testimonio*, where each of the Chicana women have shared with me how race, gender, class and immigration status have emerged in their educational trajectories. My colleague's facial expression at that moment could be described as a hybrid of confusion and disdain. She asked several follow-up questions about issues of sampling, reliability and validity tests and finally ended her inquiries by casually offering her condescending advice, *well, you know, you have to be careful, you can't just make-up your own method*.

In line with the traditions of critical race scholarship and *testimonio*, I begin this article with a personal experience that comes from a place of frustration. I believe this is a shared experience of critical race scholars in education with similar stories, who are constantly challenged in our research endeavors because of the critical perspectives we take on issues of racism, sexism, classism, nativism, and other forms of subordination perpetrated upon Communities of Color.¹ I have asked myself many times the reasoning behind my white female colleague's comments retold above. Was it a racial

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microaggression?² Doubt in my academic abilities? Or, perhaps her disregard for qualitative research methods? The woman's comment above is reflective of the academy's perspective on work that challenges traditional research paradigms and the ideologies that these paradigms produce.

In the field of education, dominant ideologies of meritocracy, individualism and color-blindness can mask the complex struggles of Students of Color and the systems of oppression that create the conditions for those struggles. Dolores Delgado Bernal and Octavio Villalpando (2002) would argue these ideological beliefs are rooted in Western epistemologies that maintain white superiority through the production of knowledge creating what they term, *apartheid of knowledge* in academia. They borrow the term *apartheid*, to describe the racial divisions that exist between dominant Eurocentric epistemologies and other epistemological stances, which create a separation of 'legitimate' and 'illegitimate' forms of knowledge. I use this concept to describe the need for developing research strategies which disrupt the apartheid of knowledge present in academia that shadows the knowledge and experiences of Communities of Color.

This article will describe how I have used a Latina/o critical race theory (LatCrit) framework and the method of *testimonio*, positioned within a Chicana feminist epistemology to explore and understand the experiences of undocumented and US-born Chicana college students. Rather than focusing on findings of this study, this article is intended to focus on the research design. In particular, I describe how theory, method, and epistemology were bridged, and allowed for a methodology of *testimonio* to emerge. This article outlines how I see LatCrit and *testimonio* as methodology to be intricately aligned as tools to help understand how social institutions mediate the educational experiences of undocumented and US-born Chicana college students. Thus, I argue *testimonio* can provide an important methodological tool for critical race theory (CRT) and LatCrit researchers. Additionally, *testimonio* can contribute to the growing scholarship on critical race methodologies which seeks to disrupt the apartheid of knowledge in academia, moving toward educational research guided by racial and social justice for Communities of Color. Data for this study included 40 *testimonio* interviews and two focus groups with undocumented and US-born Chicana college students attending one research university in California.

To begin, I will further explain apartheid of knowledge and its consequences for academic research. Next, I describe how CRT and specifically, LatCrit disrupts this apartheid, used to frame the research design. I then explain how *testimonio* has been traditionally used in academic scholarship, and how I see elements of LatCrit and *testimonio* align in conducting anti-racist and social justice research in education. Finally, I describe how *testimonio* can be used as critical race methodology, positioned within a Chicana feminist epistemology that carves a space within academia to recognize sources of knowledge that are often ignored and delegitimized (Delgado Bernal 1998). This article will explain how yes, as critical race scholars and People of Color in the academy, we *can* build and develop ways of doing research that counter traditional research paradigms and lead to a more complete understanding of the experiences of People of Color within and beyond educational institutions.

Apartheid of knowledge and its consequences

We believe that 'apartheid of knowledge' is sustained by an epistemological racism that limits the range of possible epistemologies considered legitimate within the mainstream

research community. Too frequently, an epistemology based on the social history and culture of the dominant race has produced scholarship which portrays people of color as deficient and judges the scholarship produced by Scholars of Color as biased and non-rigorous. (Delgado Bernal and Villalpando 2002, 169, citations omitted)

Delgado Bernal and Villalpando (2002) explain how, historically, there have been clear racial divisions between dominant Eurocentric epistemologies that guide mainstream academic research and other ways of knowing, which are unacknowledged and pushed to the margins of the academy. They argue that Eurocentric epistemological perspectives that have shaped academic research perpetuate dominant ideologies rooted in white superiority that function to subjugate research that challenges, counters or disrupts the mainstream. As a result, scholarship which draws from epistemological, theoretical, and methodological perspectives which honor sources of knowledge that exist outside of the academy and within Communities of Color, is devalued, delegitimized, and marginalized. This is not to say that the scientific method as we know it should be abolished or devalued. However, it is critical that researchers be aware of the epistemological underpinnings of the ways research is conducted in the process of developing new forms of knowledge (Harding 1998).

Researchers must also be aware how, historically, the research process has been used as a practice of 'othering' People of Color (Fine 1994). In fact, scholars from various disciplines have acknowledged the roots of scientific research on People of Color as a colonial project imbedded in racist ideas about the *other* (Anzaldúa 1999; Bishop 1998; Córdova 1998; Cruz 2006; Dillard 2000; Gutiérrez 2006; hooks 1990; Hurtado 2003; Ladson-Billings 2000; Pérez 1999; Pizarro 2005; Rosaldo 1993; Tuhiwai Smith 2002). The apartheid of knowledge that exists in higher education is much deeper than the marginalization of knowledge that falls outside the mainstream. It is a symptom of a much larger disease, that of white supremacy³ (Delgado Bernal and Villalpando 2002). White supremacist ideologies guide epistemological racism which creates and maintains the structure of apartheid of knowledge in higher education.

To understand the serious consequences of apartheid of knowledge, we must understand how issues of power are tied to the legitimacy of knowledge. Teresa Córdova describes the role of the academy in 'establishing knowledge as a discourse of power, where power to decide what is considered truth or not, is tied to the power to legitimate that truth' (1998, 17). The legitimization of knowledge as a function of power has been well documented. *Apartheid of knowledge* (Delgado Bernal and Villalpando 2002), *academic colonization* (Córdova 1998), *regime of truth* (Foucault 1980), *epistemological racism* (Scheurich and Young 1997), and *epistemic violence* (McLauren and Pinkney-Pastrana 2000) are terms used to describe a narrow knowledge production process that functions to maintain structures of power and elite interests that exist within and beyond the academy. Richard Delgado's (1984) research on the *imperial scholar* showed how the area of civil rights scholarship became defined by a single perspective – that of elite white male academics. As a result, this narrow perspective produced limited discourse and ideologies that justified and maintained the perceived superiority of the dominant group. Nearly 10 years later, Delgado (1992) revisited this literature and found the work of Scholars of Color had still not been included in any meaningful way. One can argue imperial scholarship, as a consequence of apartheid of knowledge, continues to exist in the academy across most disciplines.

In the field of education, Eurocentric ideologies in meritocracy, objectivity, and individuality dominate scholarship on People and Students of Color. Mainstream

scholarship uses culturally deficit models to blame the cultural beliefs, values, and practices of Latina/o, African American and Native American students for low educational outcomes (Garcia and Garcia 2004; Moreno and Valencia 2004; Valencia and Solórzano 1997; Yosso 2006). This is where CRT in education has proved to be a powerful tool to see through the Eurocentricity that guides educational scholarship and shed light on the ways racism, sexism, classism, heterosexism, and other systems of oppression operate within educational institutions.

Disrupting the apartheid: race, racism, and critical race theory in education

Race is a topic that should not be subsumed under culture or diversity but needs to be confronted directly because, today and throughout the course of US history, it is and has been a critical factor associated with who does and does not benefit from available social, economic, and educational commodities. (Robert Carter and Lin Goodwin 1994)

The power of the above epigraph, written by educational psychology scholars, Robert Carter and Lin Goodwin (1994), is that it explicitly declares race as a topic that needs to be directly addressed within educational research because it is, and has historically, been a constant mediating factor in access to educational resources. As a socially constructed category, discussions of race are often dismissed, and as Carter and Goodwin argue, ‘subsumed’ into other more tangible categories of culture and diversity. However, the power of race and racism in mediating the lives of People of Color should not be underestimated (Haney-López 2000).

Defining race and racism

James Banks defines race as, ‘a human invention constructed by groups to differentiate themselves from other groups, to create ideas about the “Other,” to formulate their identities and to defend the disproportionate distribution of rewards and opportunities within society’ (1995, 22). Banks explains that race is a construct, mediated by human perceptions of what it is to be the ‘other.’ Albert Memmi (1968) would support this argument as he also understood the power of perceptions, real or imagined, to mediate racial differences. Applied to education, race is a constructed category used to systematically include and exclude specific groups from educational resources and opportunities through racism. Solórzano, Allen, and Carroll (2002) provide three fundamental premises of racism that include: ‘(1) one group believes itself to be superior, (2) the group that believes itself to be superior has power to carry out the racist behavior, and (3) racism affects multiple racial/ethnic groups.’ Solórzano, Allen, and Carroll frame racism as institutional power that People of Color have never significantly possessed. Thus, race is used as a vehicle to allocate and deny power, knowledge, and rights to particular groups of people through racism. Understanding racism in this way, we see the necessity in utilizing a CRT framework that allows educational researchers to expose racialized structures, practices, and discourses that maintain and perpetuate educational and racial inequality.

Critical race theory in education

For more than 10 years, educational researchers have been utilizing CRT as a theoretical framework to analyze the role of race, racism, and its intersections with others

forms of oppression in the lives of People of Color. According to Solórzano and Yosso (2001) critical race theorists use a CRT framework to center the research focus on systems of oppression that challenge dominant ideologies imbedded in educational theory and practice. CRT functions to recognize the significance of experiential knowledge in the research process and utilize interdisciplinary perspectives to identify and challenge all forms of subordination, working toward racial and social justice for Communities of Color.

Latina/o critical race theory

LatCrit is an extension of the efforts of CRT in educational research, used to reveal the ways Latinas/os experience race, class, gender, and sexuality, while also acknowledging experiences related to issues of immigration status, language, ethnicity, and culture. LatCrit enables researchers to better articulate the experiences of Latinas/os specifically, by addressing issues often overlooked by CRT such as immigration status, language, ethnicity, culture, identity, and phenotype. LatCrit is also concerned with a coalitional pan-ethnic identity and community memory to create a sense of empowerment (Solórzano and Delgado Bernal 2001). LatCrit is a framework meant to function congruently with CRT, and gives educational researchers a more focused lens to examine the experiences of Latina/o students and their respective communities.

Following a tradition of *testimonio*

Before I begin to explain how I see the framework of LatCrit to be aligned with a methodology of *testimonio* in educational research, I will first briefly describe *testimonio* as method. *Testimonio* emerged from the field of Latin American Studies and has generally been used to document the experiences of oppressed groups and denounce injustices (Booker 2002). While there is no universal definition of *testimonio* (nor do I suggest there should be), scholars have identified several important elements of *testimonio* to consider. For example, Yúdice describes *testimonio* as, 'authentic narrative, told by a witness who is moved to narrate by the urgency of a situation' (1991, 17). Brabeck describes *testimonio* as a 'verbal journey ... of one's life experiences with attention to injustices one has suffered and the effect these injustices have had on one's life' (2001, 3). Cienfuegos and Monelli⁴ describe the process of *testimonio*, which 'allows the individual to transform past experience and personal identity, creating a new present and enhancing the future' (1983, 46). The Latina Feminist Group (2001) describes the method of *testimonio* as a way to create knowledge and theory through personal experiences, highlighting the significance of the process of *testimonio* in theorizing our own realities as Women of Color.

Through the years, *testimonio* has progressed in important ways. It has moved beyond the field of Latin American Studies and into other fields such as anthropology, education, ethnic studies, humanities, psychology, and women's studies (Angueira 1988; Behar 1993; Benmayor 1988, 2008; Beverley 2004; Brabeck 2003; Burciaga 2007; Burciaga and Tavares 2006; Cienfuegos and Monelli 1983; Cruz 2006; Delgado Bernal et al. 2009; González 2006; Gugelberger 1996; Gutiérrez 2008; Haig-Brown 2000; Irizarry 2005; Latina Feminist Group 2001; Yúdice 1991; Zimmerman 1991). Scholars in these fields, and in particular Women of Color scholars (as cited above), have found use of *testimonio* to document and/or theorize their own experiences of

struggle, survival, and resistance, as well as that of others.⁵ These scholars have used *testimonio* in academic research in multiple ways. For example, *testimonio* is often told by a witness,⁶ motivated by a social and/or political urgency to voice injustice and raise awareness of oppression. *Testimonios* are usually guided by the will of the narrator to tell events as she sees significant, and is often an expression of a collective experience, rather than the individual.

In the early stages of this research study, I had constructed my own understanding of *testimonio*, based on past research. However, the process of *testimonio* that the women participants and I have journeyed through is important, and has changed the ways I understand the function of *testimonio* within the context of this study. Through the process of *testimonio*, the participants and I were able to reflect and theorize about what *testimonio* has meant to us through the duration of the research. Based on our own theorizing, we arrived at the following understanding of *testimonio* – *a verbal journey of a witness who speaks to reveal the racial, classed, gendered, and nativist injustices they have suffered as a means of healing, empowerment, and advocacy for a more humane present and future*. The process of arriving at this definition will be further explained in the discussion of data analysis, where theorizing about the process of *testimonio* with the participants took place.

Similar to Kris Gutiérrez (2008) I use *testimonio* as a ‘syncretic’ process, acknowledging the contradictions that emerge between the performance of *testimonio* and *testimonio* as written text. Thus, I use *testimonio* in educational research recognizing the ‘double-bind’ of creating theory and knowledge from People of Color within a research process that as historically functioned as a colonial project (Gutiérrez 2008). Furthermore, I use *testimonio* acknowledging similar strategies for documenting life experiences such as life histories, autobiographies, documentaries, and counterstories, yet agree with Delgado Bernal et al. (2009) that *testimonio* can be used as not only method, but methodology. *Testimonio* in this study is used to shape a methodology which departs from the Eurocentricity of traditional educational research, guided by an anti-racist and anti-hierarchical agenda. That is, the process of *testimoniando*⁷ is to denounce racial and social injustice and allows for the repositioning of power in the traditional academic roles of researcher – ‘subject’ relationships (Cruz 2006).

Testimonio as methodology in LatCrit research

My recent research study seeks to document and theorize the experiences of 20 Chicana women attending a four-year public research institution in California. Ten of these women are undocumented, meaning, they have no, legalized, status in the US. The other 10 Chicana women are US born, initially included in the study as a comparison group that would allow me to examine the similarities and differences in the experiences of undocumented and US-born students. However, through the process of *testimoniando* the women have showed me that their stories and experiences are powerful as a collective. This section will describe how I have employed *testimonio* as methodology in a LatCrit study, positioned within a Chicana feminist epistemological framework.

Aligning testimonio and a LatCrit framework

Daniel Solórzano (2009), a leading CRT scholar in the field of education, suggests that the critical race researchers should always be looking for strategies that can

inform CRT research, pedagogy, and practice. In researching the ways *testimonio* has been used by scholars across time and disciplines, I saw clear areas of overlap between the elements that constitute a LatCrit framework and those of *testimonio*. Specifically, I saw five areas of alignment as provided below.

- (1) Revealing injustices caused by oppression: *Testimonio* describes the injustices People of Color face as a result of oppression. A LatCrit lens helps expose the structural conditions which cause oppression in Latina/o communities.
- (2) Challenging dominant Eurocentric ideologies: Implicit in the use of *testimonio* and a LatCrit framework is a direct challenge to the apartheid of knowledge that exists in academia.
- (3) Validating experiential knowledge: Similar to this tenant of LatCrit, the process of *testimonio* builds from the lived experiences of People of Color to document and theorize oppression.
- (4) Acknowledging the power of human collectivity: *Testimonio* and LatCrit acknowledge the emancipatory elements of revealing oppression through lived experiences, which are rooted in the histories and memories of a larger community.
- (5) Commitment to racial and social justice: Revealing oppression moves People of Color toward dismantling and transforming oppressive conditions to end injustice.

Acknowledging these congruencies, we can see how *testimonio* can serve as an important strategy to conduct LatCrit research, guided by an anti-racist and social justice agenda. *Testimonio* would add to existing critical race methodological tools such as critical race counterstories (Solórzano and Yosso 2002; Yosso 2006), critical race spatial analysis (Velez and Solórzano 2007) and critical race ethnography (Duncan 2007). In previous work, I have considered the term '*critical race testimonio*' to explicitly link *testimonio* with critical race research (Pérez Huber Forthcoming). However, as my work with *testimonio* has progressed, I realize *testimonio* is a powerful tool that can stand alone, particularly when it is positioned within a critical race-gendered epistemology,⁸ such as a Chicana feminist epistemology. Thus, in this article I detail the congruencies of *testimonio* and a LatCrit lens to build on the work of past scholars who have developed and acknowledged critical race methodologies and critical race-gendered epistemologies, as a means to build from the cultural knowledge of Communities of Color (Delgado Bernal 2002; González 1998, 2001; Trinidad Galván 2001). The following section will describe how I position this work within a Chicana feminist epistemology to develop *testimonio* as methodology in a LatCrit research study.

Bringing testimonio to 'life' in educational research

As I began to undertake this study nearly two years ago, I was not consciously positioned within a particular epistemological stance, but was cautious in the methodological design because of several concerns. First, was the concern to design a methodology that told the stories of the undocumented and US-born Chicana students in this study, without romanticizing their experiences. Second, was the concern that traditional methodological approaches would produce findings that did not accurately capture the complexity and power of the women's experiences. Third,

was the concern in the authoritative positionality of the researcher that this project sought to counter.

As I engaged in the process of *testimonio*, my thinking about the research design continued to develop. During this time, I revisited the work of Rebeca Burciaga (2007) who explained how positioning *testimonio* within a Chicana feminist epistemology (Delgado Bernal 1998) ‘brings the method of *testimonio* to life’ in educational research. In retrospect, I realized that although I had not initially positioned this study within a Chicana feminist epistemological framework, it was from my own ‘cultural intuition’ that these methodological concerns emerged (Delgado Bernal 1998). According to Delgado Bernal (1998), there are four sources of cultural intuition Chicana researchers draw upon during the research process – personal, academic, professional, and the analytic process itself. Personal experience includes the researcher’s background and personal history which shape the ways she understands, interprets and makes sense of events, circumstance, and data during the research process. Academic experiences inform how we make sense of related literature on our research topic. Our professional experiences, often within our own communities, provide us with significant insight into the research process. The final source of cultural intuition lies in the analytical research process itself to ‘bring meaning’ to our data and larger study.

A Chicana feminist epistemology allows Chicana researchers and participants to utilize our multiple sources of knowledge to inform the research process – from the research questions we ask, the theoretical frameworks we use, the methodologies we employ, to how we write about our findings. A Chicana feminist epistemological standpoint not only brings *testimonio* to ‘life’ in educational research, but changes the process of *testimonio* from method to methodology by allowing for the co-construction of knowledge through collaborative data analysis. While a Chicana feminist epistemological standpoint allows Chicana researchers to engage the research process in these ways, I use LatCrit framework to examine and understand how structures of oppression mediate the experiences of the women in this study. Using a LatCrit framework is critical to the process of *testimonio* in this context, to expose, understand, and further theorize the role of social and institutional structures in maintaining and perpetuating oppressive conditions.

Data collection and analysis

Data collection and analysis occurred simultaneously in this study. Before discussing this process, I will briefly describe the strategies used to collect the data. I utilized a network sampling method to contact several resource individuals at the institution who were either university officials that work with Latina/o college students, or undergraduate students in leadership positions in campus Latina/o student organizations. Through this technique, 10 undocumented and 10 US-born Chicana students, attending the same four-year research university in California, agreed to participate. All 20 participants, at the time of their *testimonios*, were female, identified México as their country of origin and were from low-income families (as determined by parental occupations). Each woman participated in a series of two ‘interviews’ (for a total of 40) where their *testimonios* were audio-recorded. During the interviews, we discussed how experiences with race, gender, nativism, and class emerged in their educational trajectories from early childhood to their current standing as college students. I also sought to learn about the ways the women navigate the institution they attended and



Figure 1. Visual model of three-phase data analysis process.

explore the perceived differences and similarities between undocumented and US-born student's educational experiences. I also conducted two focus groups with the women which were used as collaborative sites of data analysis, which I will discuss shortly.

Data collection and analysis was conducted in a three-phase process that included: (1) preliminary, (2) collaborative, and (3) final data analysis stages. Below, Figure 1 provides a visual model of this three-phase approach where preliminary, collaborative, and final data analysis stages build from each other in a continuous process to arrive at a final set of findings. Each of these phases is discussed below.

Preliminary data analysis

Following the audio-recording of the 40 *testimonios* of the women, transcriptions were created. During this phase of analysis, I reviewed the 40 *testimonios* using a critical race grounded theory approach (Malagón, Pérez Huber, and Velez Forthcoming). This approach allowed simultaneous involvement in data analysis and advancing theory development, strategies primarily used in grounded theory (Glaser 1978; Glaser and Strauss 1967). However, this approach also allowed me to utilize a LatCrit lens to isolate thematic categories that emerged from the data and explore the ways race, immigration status, gender, and class emerged in the women's educational trajectories. Examples of the categories were used to create 'reflections' that were used in the collaborative data analysis phase.

Collaborative data analysis

The collaborative data analysis phase took place in a focus group environment. There were two focus groups included in the study, each with six to eight women. The reflections constructed from the preliminary analysis were used to create a 'reflection exercise' where each woman was given a series of reflections to read aloud as a group and had individual time to respond in writing. Following the reflecting, the group engaged in a dialogue around the themes they would use to categorize this data, how and why they would use these themes, and how their own experiences agrees with or refutes the group's findings. Arriving to a group consensus about the way to analyze the data was not the goal of this collaborative process. Rather, this process was used as an opportunity to reflect on personal experiences and engage in dialogue that allowed both researcher and participant to 'see' the data in ways that we would not have seen on our own and thus, provide a richer understanding (Kruger 1988).

This dialogue allowed us to connect our experiences with that of others and consider how larger social and institutional structures have shaped those experiences. This process also provided the opportunity to member-check.⁹ Engaging in this dialogue allowed us to share lived experiences and theorize possible explanations for the racism, nativism, sexism, and classism they experienced throughout their educational trajectories. During these meetings, the women also discussed and reflected on

the process of *testimonio*, including our data collaboration. Some of the ways the women described the process was *healing* and *empowering*. They shared how engaging in this process was motivated by the hope that sharing their *testimonios* would incite social change and allow others to ‘see’ undocumented immigrants within a more humane perspective. The ways the women described the process of *testimonio* during these focus groups is how I now present the collective understanding of *testimonio* earlier in this article. This process also allowed us to further theorize about how *testimonio* can be used in the research process.

Final data analysis

This phase combined the findings of the preliminary and collaborative phases to engage a knowledge production process that incorporated participants into the analytic process. To bring the previous stages of data analysis together, I utilized several strategies. Thematic categories were identified and brought to the group through a reflection exercise, where participants were able to reflect, discuss, and engage with each other (including myself) about how we could provide a clearer understanding of the categories that would represent their experiences as told through their *testimonios*. We also discussed how certain indicators of those themes could be used as codes and develop a final coding scheme. At this point in analysis, I also had an additional source of data, the actual reflection exercises themselves, which each woman used to document their thoughts about a particular category. During this phase, I regularly used concept mapping to explore the relationships between categories, and develop analytical codes that led to identifying larger theoretical connections, advancing the utility of LatCrit to help makes sense of these experiences.

Figure 2 illustrates the three-phase data analysis process as a critical component of the larger epistemological and methodological design of this study. The figure shows how a Chicana feminist epistemological framework, and in particular cultural intuition, guides a continuous and cyclical process of bridging and building theory (LatCrit), method (*testimonio*), and data analysis. We have used our cultural intuition in the process of *testimonio* and developed a methodology that allows the women to theorize and construct knowledge from their own lived experiences. Thus, I concur with the Latina Feminist Group (2001) who argued that the process of *testimonio* is just as significant as the product of our theorizing.

The process described above has clearly blurred traditional academic research boundaries. It has allowed me to form meaningful relationships with the women in this study and share our most intimate fears and dreams for the future, and, to talk about what it was like to be an undocumented, US-born Chicana woman navigating through educational institutions that were not created nor function with us in mind. In this study, *testimonio* was a co-constructed process that emerged as we progressed through the process of *testimoniando*. This is an important point to make, as it is not my intention to speak for the women in this study, but to co-construct knowledge about their experiences. In sharing their *testimonios*, the women have demanded the attention of the academy to listen. Cindy Cruz explains, ‘What *testimonio* does best is to connect a reader or an audience, positioning a reader or an audience for self-reflection ... the listener/reader/audience becomes witness’ (2006, 31–2). Using *testimonio* in the research process to create new knowledge about experiences that are often untold in the academy connects education scholars to the stories of the undocumented and US-born women in the study. This is the power of *testimonio* – to

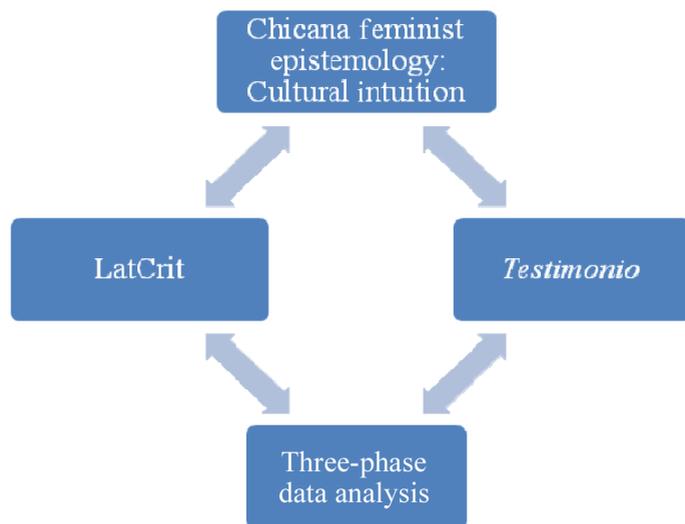


Figure 2. Visual representation of *testimonio* as methodology in LatCrit research guided by cultural intuition.

connect human beings in ways that enable us to bear witness to experiences and struggles of those beyond our own realities. Cruz (2006) explains that there is an ‘inherent intersubjectivity’ in *testimonio*, which positions the listener, reader and/or audience as witnesses, regardless of the ideologies, beliefs, and perceptions we hold, or positions we come from.

Further considerations and conclusions

As I conclude this discussion of *testimonio* as methodology, I have several points of further consideration. The first is regarding the issue of authenticity. Throughout the trajectory of *testimonio* in academic research, there has been an on-going debate regarding the authenticity of narratives – whose story is and is not ‘authentic.’¹⁰ In fact, Yúdice (1991) uses the concept of authenticity in his definition of *testimonio* described earlier in this article. I want to be clear that *testimonio*, as used in this study, does not make a claim for or against authenticity. In fact, I would argue the notion of authenticity is a concept rooted in a Eurocentric perspective where dichotomies dominate logical reasoning and where the question of authenticity directly relates to the contestation of truth. My role is not to determine what is truth in the *testimonios* these women have shared with me, but to understand their realities within a larger context of structural and systematic inequality – within and beyond educational institutions.

The second consideration of *testimonio* as critical race methodology lies in the possible appropriation of *testimonio* by non-critical academics. As Tierney (2000) warns, the use of *testimonio* can become vulnerable to appropriation of anyone telling a story of struggle or conflict, including those in more privileged positions in society. However, we must remember the original purpose of *testimonio* – to center the knowledge and experiences of the oppressed. Thus, when adapted in educational research and pedagogical practice, it is important to recognize *testimonio* as a tool for the

oppressed, and not the oppressor. *Testimonio* should not function as a tool for elite academics to ‘diversify’ their research agendas or document their personal stories.

Testimonio can make important contributions to critical race research as a methodological tool. First, *testimonio* allows for participants to work in collaboration with the researcher, honoring *their* lived experiences and knowledge. As a result, participants play a crucial role in deciding how knowledge about their experiences is produced in the research process. Second, similar to critical race counterstories, *testimonio* recognizes the power in telling one’s story that is rooted in traditions of storytelling in Latina/o, African American, and Native American communities (Booker 2002; Yosso 2006). Third, locating *testimonio* within a Chicana feminist epistemology provides an explicit method of data analysis, and guides the research strategies used throughout the research process. The similar elements, purposes and goals of *testimonio* to a LatCrit framework make *testimonio* a powerful tool for critical race research, where the very tenants of LatCrit inform the research process.

The personal experience I shared in the introduction of this article provided an example of one woman’s difficulty in seeing past the epistemological racism that she has been taught to accept and practice. Her comments were a reflection of the larger apartheid of knowledge that guides traditional academic research. This article contributes to the growing scholarship on CRT research methodologies that challenge this apartheid. Using *testimonio* as methodology located within a Chicana feminist epistemology in LatCrit research, deconstructs the Eurocentricity of traditional academic research and disrupts the apartheid of knowledge this Eurocentricity has helped create. Furthermore, this methodological approach acknowledges and draws from foundations of knowledge which exist outside of the academy and within Communities of Color. This allows researchers to engage in a process of knowledge production that draws from the strengths of Communities of Color to provide a rich and multidimensional understanding of the experiences of People of Color. In disrupting this apartheid, we move toward developing emancipatory strategies for anti-racist, social justice research.

Acknowledgements

The author would like to thank the women collaborators of this study for sharing their *testimonios*. She would also like to thank her mentor and advisor, Dr Daniel Solórzano, professor of social science and comparative education at UCLA for his feedback and support. She would also like to thank the following scholars for their feedback on earlier versions of this article: Dr Dolores Calderon, assistant professor of education, culture and society at the University of Utah, and Dr Ryan Gildersleeve, assistant professor in educational leadership and policy studies at Iowa State University and especially, Dr Rebeca Burciaga, postdoctoral fellow at the University of California, Davis Center for Regional Change, who several years ago first introduced the author to *testimonio* in educational research.

Notes

1. The term, ‘Communities of Color’ is intentionally capitalized, rejecting the standard grammatical norm. Capitalization is as a grammatical move toward empowerment and social/racial justice. This rule will also apply to the terms ‘People of Color,’ ‘Students of Color,’ ‘Women of Color,’ and ‘Scholars of Color’ throughout the article.
2. Daniel Solórzano (1998) explains that racial microaggressions are covert, subtle, and sometimes unconscious verbal and non-verbal racist attacks directed at People of Color, which are so common, they often go unnoticed and unchallenged. These attacks are cumulative and can cause serious psychological and physiological stress.

3. The meaning of white supremacy in this article goes beyond overt acts of racism and includes the subtle ways whiteness is deemed superior through the acceptance of a racial hierarchy, where whites are consistently ranked above People of Color. This includes the normalization and perceived superiority of Eurocentric beliefs, values, and worldviews.
4. Cienfuegos and Monelli are Chilean psychologists who published under these pseudonyms to protect their identities while conducting research on the use of *testimonio* in therapeutic settings to help victims of political repression. Because of the dangerous political situation taking place at the time in their country, they did not use their true names, which are now known as Elizabeth Lira and Eugenia Weinstein (see Booker 2002).
5. Psychology scholars Angueira (1988), Booker (2002), and Cienfuegos and Monelli (1983) use *testimonio* in a therapeutic environment to treat patients who have experienced traumatic life events such as rape and torture.
6. In this article, I use the term 'witness' to describe the person who is providing their *testimonio*.
7. Providing one's *testimonio*, telling of a collective story.
8. Delgado Bernal (2002) describes critical race-gendered epistemologies as systems of knowledge that emerge from the experiences of People of Color at the intersections of racism, sexism, classism, and other forms of oppression.
9. See Maxwell 1996.
10. Perhaps the most infamous debate is around the *testimonio* of Rigoberta Menchú as documented in the book, *I, Rigoberta Menchú: An Indian Woman in Guatemala* (1984). In this work, Menchú delivers her own *testimonio* to Venezuelan anthropologist Elisabeth Burgos-Debray, describing the violence and death she survived as an indigenous Guatemalan woman during horrific civil war, and how she became an active leader in the struggle for human rights in her country. In 1999, American anthropologist David Stoll published *I, Rigoberta Menchú and the Story of All Poor Guatemalans* (Stoll 1999) which sought to challenge the validity of Menchú's experiences and discredit her *testimonio*, falling just short of explicitly calling her a liar and accusing her of supporting the guerilla warfare that violently killed so many innocent Guatemalan people. Although never resolved, this debate made clear the perceived threat in recognizing an indigenous woman's knowledge as truth.

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