

Chicana Feminism: Unraveling the Nuances of Chicana Feminist Discourse

Currently in American society, women are faced with unequal treatment in the workplace and various other parts of their lives. For Hispanic women, this unequal balance can also be noticed in their domestic, everyday, living situations. Most feminist theories and discourse is based on a middle or upper class, Caucasian point of view. With Latino and Hispanic communities on the rise in the United States, it is important to also look at the views of minority women when it comes to unequal treatment in the workplace as well as in their daily lives.

In Becky Thompson's "Multiracial Feminism: Recasting the Chronology of Second Wave Feminism", she focuses on the idea that waves of feminism, although accurately described, are based on the female revolutions and protests that were mainly perpetrated by white, middle class females. Thomson states, "This feminism is white led, marginalizes the activism and world views of women of color, focuses mainly on the United States, and treats sexism as the ultimate oppression." (Thompson 51) According to Thompson, the waves of feminism that are studied in feminist theory, are based solely on white activism and do not include the various types of activism that have happened outside the white middle class world. One early feminist organization was the Chicana group "Hijas de Cuahatemoc". They were named after a Mexican woman's underground newspaper that was published during the 1910 Mexican Revolution. (Thompson 52). Although this group was in large, partly responsible for, and involved in, the United States Mexican American Student Organization and the Chicano/a student movement, (Thompson 52) it is not studied as a part of the second wave feminist movement. Today in the US, Hispanics are quickly growing to become a large part of the population. If we are going to continue to grow when it comes to the equal treatment of women in the workplace and our domestic lives, we must start studying all the different women who have a part in the development of feminist discourse and history so that all cultures can grow and be accounted for.

In Deniz Kandiyoti's "Bargaining With Patriarchy" she compares patriarchy using two different types of patriarchy. The first type of patriarchy is social or class patriarchy and the second is classic patriarchy. Social patriarchy is when a group of men use their social status for things like land and the appropriation of products from the land. These products and land are used for the benefit of men but are often earned from and produced by the women (Kandiyoti 104). Classic patriarchy is when a household is run solely for the purpose of the males in the family getting what they need regarding financial and social status so the females can gain security and status within the household. (Kandiyoti 105). In the current state of affairs in the United States, Latino women are often taught to "bargain" with men in order to get what they need or want. Many are taught from a very young age that to get ahead in life one must dress a certain way, wear makeup, and get a man's attention to get ahead in life. I have often heard phrases like "make sure your hair is nice or you will not find a husband", or "if you don't dress nicely a man will not notice you". Hispanic culture feeds into classic patriarchy when it comes to feminism and teaches that the only way to be equal to a man is if you seduce him enough that he "allows" you a status in his life. Many young Latinas are rebelling against this form of patriarchy

in the United States and demanding fair and equal status regardless of how their male counterparts see them. It is clear women want equal treatment based on their education, experience, and what they bring to the table, and not based on what men they know or how well the men they know treat them. We can further elaborate on this with “La Chicana” by Elizabeth Martinez.

In “La Chicana” Elizabeth Martinez states that “...the Chicana suffers from a triple oppression. She is oppressed by the forces of racism, imperialism, and sexism.” (Martinez 112). Not only does the Chicana have to deal with the racism that is inherent to the race, male and female, she also has to deal with the oppression from sexism that is seen not only from the outside but also oftentimes from within her own culture. In Hispanic culture the idea of “machismo” is widespread. Ideas based on sexism and how a female should act in order to be successful is based on how she can successfully navigate the machismo attitudes in her culture. These ideas include, “...ideas about virginity, false definitions of femininity, and the double standard (one standard of sexual behavior for women, a different standard for men). (Martinez 113).

In order to completely understand the state of Chicanas in the United States when it comes to unequal relations we must understand that it is not only those on the “outside” that Chicana’s must fight against but also the inherent cultural oppression that occurs in their everyday domestic lives. We must also have an understanding of what their history is in the larger picture and how they fit into all the “waves of feminism” so that we can create a larger picture of their oppression and therefore find ways to solve it and make it better. If a woman’s own culture defines her solely on her ability to create children and take care of her home. then puts her into a mold of sexuality created to attract men, how is the world as a whole supposed to see her as anything but that “sexy Latina” or “exotic Chicana” that so many perceive a female of Hispanic descent to be. These three readings lay out the various patriarchal rules and constructs that create unequal environments for Chicanas in the United States.

Thompson, Becky. “Multiracial Feminism: Recasting the Chronology of Second Wave Feminism.” *Feminist Theory Reader*, edited by Carole R. McCann and Seung-Kyung Kim, Routledge, 2017, 51-52.

Kandiyoti, Deniz. “Bargaining with Patriarchy.” *Feminist Theory Reader*, edited by Carole R. McCann and Seung-Kyung Kim, Routledge, 2017, 104-105.

Martinez, Elizabeth. “La Chicana.” *Feminist Theory Reader*, edited by Carole R. McCann and Seung-Kyung Kim, Routledge, 2017, 112-113.