

Proposing a New Research Method: Convivencia Testimonial

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Abstract: Convivencia testimonial is a subaltern method for conducting research among Chicana/Latina researchers and participants. Its underpinnings are grounded in Chicana feminist epistemology (CFE). CFE offers an alternative way of doing critical qualitative research. Methodologies stemming from CFE can also offer innovative methods grounded in subaltern epistemes for adult educational research.

Keywords: decolonizing methodologies, chicanx/latinx feminist epistemology, adult education critical research, convivencia testimonial

Convivencia testimonial (CvT) is an innovative method, produced to conduct research with underpinnings in Chicana/Latina feminist epistemology. It is a critical research tool that can describe, collect, and identify valuable indigenous knowledge, such that it decolonizes traditional methodologies. Convivencia testimonial or CvT provides Chicanas/Latinas in the field of adult education some key concepts and possible benefits when a subaltern methodology is used. For example, when we as Chicana/Latina researchers embrace our own subjectivity and challenge hegemonic traditional methodologies, we can embody, empower, and voice ourselves.

Background

The proposal of this unique new research method we coined, *Convivencia Testimonial* (CvT), was created out of a need for proper tools that could represent Chicanas and Latinas as researchers, doctoral students, scholar-activists and participants in adult education research studies. It was crafted to offer a subaltern method that challenges and resists androcentric Western traditional educational research by decolonizing how a Chicana/Latina's knowledge is justified and validated. The goal of this method is to disrupt the traditional instruments of educational research. Our goal is also to embed theoretical concepts such as Chicana feminist epistemology (CFE), and *testimonios*, that are umbrellaed under critical race theory (CRT) and Latino/a critical theory (LatCrit; Huber & Villanueva, 2019). Key terms and definitions can be found in Table 1.

Chicana feminist epistemology (CFE) in adult educational research is a conceptual framework that allowed us to question and innovate methods that were designed to decolonize methodologies. A Chicana researcher must find the right tools and concepts that fit your needs and goals. The experiences that we, as Chicanas, have lived cannot compare nor be shared by an androcentric ideology of social research. With a Chicana feminist consciousness, we can claim our identity as Mexican American or second-generation immigrant women. We can choose to research through a Chicana perspective to produce previously ignored *herstories* and validate subjective knowledge. Because we as Chicana/Latinas were not written into the traditional structure of research methodologies, we were, and still are, the women of color colonized and researched through continued marginalization and dehumanization.

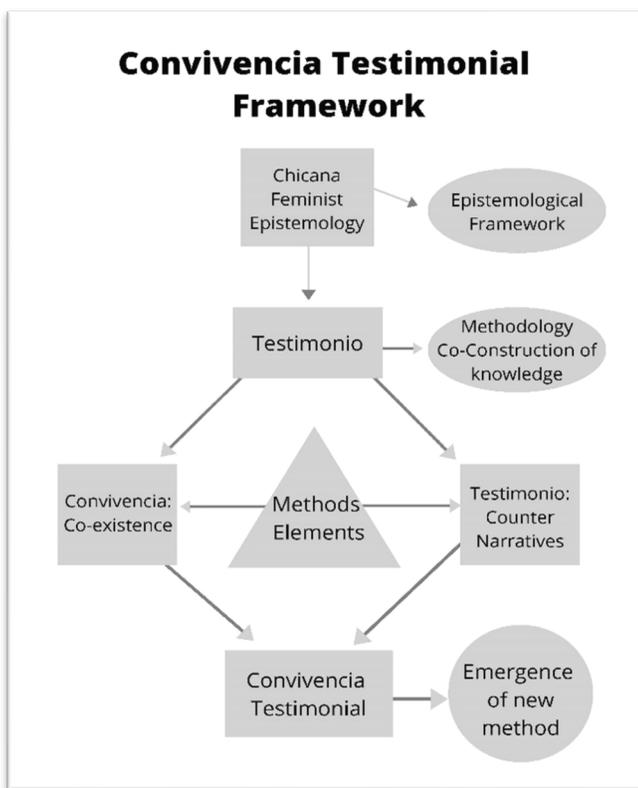
Table 1. *Definition of Key Terms*

| Key Term | Definition |
|---------------------------|---|
| Vivencias | What we experience as lived realities. |
| Convivencia (coexistence) | Transcends the objective self-other divide and promotes transborder praxis. |
| Autoherteorias | Concept that Chicanas/Latinas and Women of Color embed their writing with abstract ideas and personal history as well as the history of their community. |
| Subaltern | Concept rooted in issues of oppression, marginalization and political concern that resists the hegemonic ideologies to create an alternative reality for marginalized groups. |
| Decolonization | Deconstructs traditional Western research by humanizing the indigenous people (Tuhiwai Smith, 2012). |
| Testimonio | Methodology or method that supports marginalized individuals, usually silenced in mainstream stories, to bring forth their witnessed testimonies and create counternarratives (Delgado Bernal, 2012). |

Therefore, testimonios, as a method, was born to resist the stereotypical narratives depicting Chicanos/as and Latinos/as as second-class citizens in the United States. Yet, testimonios in CFE can also be utilized as a methodology, and as such, for the purpose of our proposed method, CvT, we defined it as both. As a methodology, its framework guided our creation of CvT because it allows for the researcher and participants to co-construct knowledge instead of only the researcher holding the power of producer. It employs testimonios, as a method, to bring oppressive themes from participants' lived experiences to the surface and features first-hand knowledge of their life histories and struggles.

As Chicana/Latina researchers, we engaged other elements to deconstruct traditional focus groups and considered how participants form bonds or comfort each other when speaking on vulnerable topics. *Convivencia* added the extra oomph, or *sazon* (seasoning), that is needed in a communal space (Villenas, 2005). Author Ruth Trinidad Galvan (2011), explained, *vivencias* are our everyday life encounters, our realities, therefore we are in our right to create *autoherteorias*, that conceptualizes our ideologies, life histories, experiences and relationships. Her concept of *convivencia* led us to decolonize focus groups and thus emerged a new method. See Figure 1, *convivencia* testimonial framework, for an additional visual explanation of our conceptual framework.

Figure 1. *Convivencia Testimonial Framework*



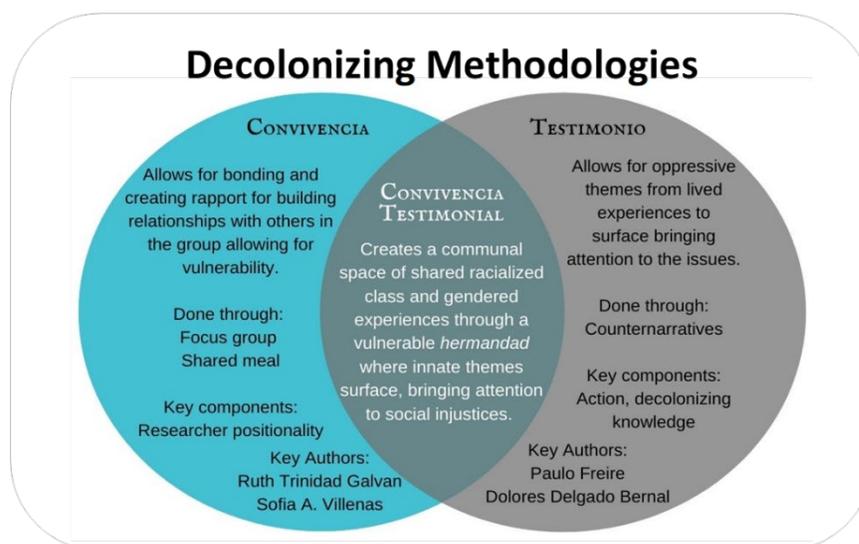
Methodology

We propose a subaltern innovative method in adult education research coined *convivencia testimonial*. We used Ruth Trinidad Galvan's (2011) definition of *convivencia* in our own concept and define it as a group of people that are co-existing. This tool can be used in *testimonios*, an ingenious methodology that creates counternarratives by first-hand witnesses of oppressive accounts (Reyes & Rodriguez, 2012). Our methodological tool of *convivencia testimonial*, therefore, will involve the social gathering of participants that previously shared a communal space— ESL classroom, work environment, or etc. The underpinnings of this methodological tool stem from Chicana feminist epistemology (CFE).

Chicana feminist epistemology is a theoretical paradigm that conceptualizes the unique experiences of Chicanas/Latinas through an intersectional feminist lens (Peña et al., 2020). It creates an episteme that attempts to create critical research inclusive to indigenous, marginalized and gendered groups. Its historical significance derived from Chicana/Latina feminists who fought to create their own feminist movement independent from the U.S. American movement of the 1960s. In the present time, new subaltern methods are needed because adult education is lacking the methodological tools for its growing ethnic populations.

Consequently, CvT was born to create a communal space of shared racialized class and gendered experiences through a vulnerable sisterhood or, *hermandad*, where themes can innately appear and collectively bring attention to social injustices. Participants are encouraged to share in food and drink, and congregate before, during and after the research topic is discussed. Questions may guide but do not structure the meeting. The researcher is also encouraged to share their own answers to be part of the collective as a co-creator of knowledge. See Figure 2, decolonizing methodologies, for additional visual information about the hybridization of convivencia and testimonio to produce CvT.

Figure 2. *Decolonizing Methodologies*



Wherein a focus group, the researcher asks direct questions to the participants and a direct answer is given, a convivencia testimonial promotes the sharing of informal stories. It is a subaltern method that is not defined by responding to focus group-type questions. Instead, it nurtures an experience that has meaning to all parties involved.

Major Themes

Convivencia testimonial is unique because its key features distinguish it from traditional focus groups in three ways: (1) Researcher positionality; (2) Validity of indigenous knowledge; and (3) Human collectivity. Each are important to make CvT applicable as a method. They are briefly discussed in the following sub-sections.

Researcher Positionality

Convivencia testimonial researcher positionality has the researcher act as a facilitator, engage participants by sharing their lived experiences and close the discussion with group reflection and contribution of overarching themes they observed. In other words, they are acknowledged as co-creators of knowledge, by sharing their own reflective pieces and discussions. By acting as co-creator, researchers do not subjugate their participants into a hierarchical rank.

Validity of Indigenous Knowledge

Social sciences and adult education research are rooted in androcentric Western research methodologies. The *vivencias* of the colonized were not justified as viable realities and truths. CvT on the other hand, validates our Chicana/Latina subjective knowledge as our truth and reality; thus, we become *agents of knowledge* (Harding, 1987). Our subjugated consciousness is then understood as unique and value-laden in adult educational research.

Human Collectivity

As a collective group of *hermanas*, we share similar experiences enhanced and identified through the energy created in vulnerable spaces. Vulnerable spaces are conduits to human connection by humanizing women of color (Huber & Villanueva, 2019). It also provides *empowerment* through their sharing of culturally rich space, food, time and conversations. Human collectivity, which values human connection, fosters a holistic concept and research strategy (Derocher, 2018; Huber & Villanueva, 2019).

Discussion

Convivencia testimonial is rooted in Chicana/Latina feminist research. It can also serve as a new wave of disruptive research in adult education. As more and more colonized researchers enter the field of adult education, whether acknowledged or not, they will search for concepts, methods and methodologies that do not exist for women of color. Critical research is at its highest need; we must evolve to become innovative in how we conduct adult educational research. Everyone should heed the call to do more research in CRT, LatCrit, and CFE. If we begin with these theoretical underpinnings, it can guide CvT into a methodology to give other women of color researchers, the necessary tools needed to transform critical adult educational research into being truly *critical*. Because “more than tools for obtaining data; methodologies are extensions of ways of knowing and being, thus they are essential to the way we embody and perform research” (Saavedra and Salazar Pérez, 2014, p. 78).

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