The Present and Future of the Chicana Feminist Movement

Running Head: The Present and Future of the Chicana Feminist Movement

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Introduction

The United States is one of the most culturally diverse countries there is. Different nationalities have come to the US to work, and in the end migrate to the country. Despite the country being culturally diverse, it cannot be avoided that there will be some discrimination to the minority groups such as the African Americans, Mexican Americans, and Asian Americans. Such discrimination has triggered the development of certain movements to address discrimination issues.

One of these movements include the Chicana Feminist Movement, which aims to provide an important support that examines the political and social inequalities in society and its effects to the women of Mexican descent in the United States. The movement specifically tackles the inequality issues on sexism, racism, social status, gender and sexuality and how these issues on inequality are all embedded and interconnected to one another.

This paper will explore the Chicana Feminist Movement in general. The essay will attempt to provide a roadmap for the Chicana Feminist Movement. Specifically, the essay will examine and look into the history of the Chicana Feminist Movement and then together with its current state of affairs, evaluate to where they are now, by providing some outcomes and results of the movement and then assess as to where they are heading in the future.
Background and History of the Chicana Feminist Movement

According to Garcia (1989), the Chicana Feminist Movement was developed to address specific issues, which have an effect on Chicanas as women of color. The growing population of the movement was evident in speeches, essays, letters and articles published in different Chicano and Chicana printed materials such as newspapers, journals and newsletters. The Chicana Feminist Movement have sprung out from the Chicano Movement – a social movement that is characterized by a politics of protest, specifically focusing on issues on social justice, equality, educational reforms and political and economic self-determination for Chicano communities in the United States (Garcia, 1989).

It is important to note that at that time, the Chicana Feminist Movement was not yet constructed. However, the Chicanas actively participated in the Chicano Movement’s struggles. Accordingly, the Chicana Feminist Movement emerged resulting from the dynamics within the Chicano movement. From their participation within the Chicano movement, during the late 1960s, the Chicanas started to examine their participation, including the rewards and limits of their participation. By the 1970s, Chicanas developed ideas that took shape into the surfacing feminist movement by women of color in the American society (Garcia, 1989; Gonzales, 1980). In a similar context to the Chicano Movement wherein Chicanos attempted to understand their historical and contemporary experiences in the United States, the Chicanas started to explore the forces that shape their own experiences as women of color in American society.
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The Outcomes and Results of the Chicana Feminist Movement

The Chicana is viewed under contradicting notions. At one point, one may view the Chicana as passive and submissive; in another point, one may also view the Chicana as the strength of the family and the community (Gonzales, 1980). In the Mexican culture, similar to most cultures, women are generally submissive to their men. Women are traditionally man’s helpmate such that men are, more often than not, the decision-makers. Men are the aggressors and the actors, whereas women are left back-staged.

At some point, women find themselves within the borders of a world that is dominated and invented by the male population. Women do not participate nor influence national policy (Gonzales, 1980). However, in a different context, women are also generally viewed as the pillars of the family and the community such that they provide the family and the community the strength needed with their feminine nurturing capabilities.

During the Chicana Feminist Movement, the Chicana is at a loss of what is her position in the movement (Saragoza, 1997). Saragoza (1997) noted that the Chicana at that time no longer wishes to limit her world to domesticity; rather, she wants to expand her role towards domesticity together with intellectuality. The Chicana realizes that she is not an inferior, insubordinate being. At the same time, the Chicana feels fed up with being treated as one by the society, by her male counterparts to be specific.

With that specific mindset, one can assess that the movement has significantly influenced the Chicana’s point of view in terms of her role in society, not just as domestic...
women, but also as women who are part of the society and capable of using her intellect to contribute to society.

Analysis of the Chicana Feminist Movement

The following section will analyze the Chicana Feminist Movement in terms of the different ideologies developed within the movement.

The Chicana Feminist Movement and their impact on the racism and sexism issues on Chicanas in American society have been misunderstood as a threat to the political unity of the Chicano Movement (Garcia, 1989). Moreover, loyalists - those who believed that Chicano Movement did not have to deal with sexual inequalities such that both Chicano men and Chicana women experience racial oppression - also charge the Chicana feminist to demoralize the values within the Chicano culture, saying that the movement is “anti-family, anti-cultural, anti-man and therefore an anti-Chicano movement” (Gomez, 1973, p. 35; Cited from Garcia, 1989, p. 225).

However, the Chicana Feminists argue with the loyalists that it is important to explore and study the Chicana women’s role, not just within the household but her experiences with discrimination in both educational and workplace settings, her economic conditions as well as her development of survival strategies. As Chicana feminists scrutinized and studied the intersection of race, class and gender in their daily lives, they found out how much the persistently low educational accomplishments of Chicana women draws attention to the negative effects of race, class and gender stratification (Mankiller, 1999).

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At present, the Chicana Feminism Movement is attempting to bring together Chicana women and getting them to come out and let people know, saying, “We’re a legitimate body. No one can deny that any more. Ask us about our political stance, not our validity, as women fighting for women’s rights within the Chicano community” (Gomez, 1997, p. 55). At present, the Chicana Feminist Movement is also working in trying to influence the Chicano Movement in supporting and advocating their issues as women of the society in the context of race, welfare rights, and many others (Gomez, 1997).

The formation of the Mujeres Activas en Letras y Cambio Social (MALCS) by a group of Chicana academics aims to fight the issues against race, class and gender oppression that faced Chicanas in institutions of higher education. In addition, MALCS also endeavors to connect the gap between academic work and the Chicano community.

Because of the assessments made by Chicana feminists about their specific roles in society and their realizations regarding inequalities in racial and sexism contexts, it is evident that Chicana women aim to achieve self-actualization through liberation from the traditional image of the Chicana women. Although to be liberated means that the Chicana woman is given the power and the opportunity to make a decision for herself and take action on the things that matter to her such as education and politics, the Chicana women’s natural nurturing capacities must be uphold no matter what. This is because history has shown and proven how this nurturing capacity of women has been successful in keeping the family and community stable and intact.
The Future of the Chicana Feminist Movement

What started as a response to the dynamicity within the Chicano Movement and the Chicana’s active participation within the movement, The Chicana Feminist Movement has sprung forth and influenced many Chicana women to stand and to defend their rights, not just as women but also as members of the society who are capable of contributing to the society. Perhaps, gone are the days that women are considered as the inferior sex, who are left at home to do domestic chores. Today, women have stood up and held high the dignity of being women. Women have also proven that they are capable of contributing their ideas to the world.

With this, the future of the Chicana Feminist Movement seems brighter towards their aim of fighting issues on race, class and gender oppression, not just within the Chicano Movement but also within the larger community. The formation of certain groups within the Chicana Feminist Movement also proves the goal of the movement is achieved. As noted by Gonzales (1980), awareness is only the start such that awareness becomes the catalyst for change. By being aware that there is a problem, there are higher chances that people will move forward and take the necessary actions to solve the problem (Gonzales, 1980).

To conclude, the Chicana Feminist Movement has been an important milestone in the development of racial and gender sensitivity issues with the Chicano/Chicana community as well as the American society as well. While there have been arguments that accuse the Chicana Feminist Movement to be destructive, to date, the overall impact of the movement is still positive.
References


