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## **Breaking the Silence within Critical Pedagogy**

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# **Breaking the Silence within Critical Pedagogy**

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## **Abstract**

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There is a wide and rich scientific literature about Gender Violence (GV) in diverse institutions and contexts, now including Isolating Gender Violence (IGV). However, there is an almost absolute silence about GV and IGV within the field of critical pedagogy despite its pretention to influence children's education. This paper is part of a long research program on GV and presents the first evidence about its existence within critical pedagogy. The communicative methodology of this research has included interviews to 15 authors of critical pedagogy and 1 discussion group. The gender dimension is key in this research, most lists of outstanding critical pedagogists include only white males and most of them from North America, in this research there are 15 women of the 21 interviewees and diverse gender options and cultures are represented. The results clearly show that, as in any other social institutions and domains, within critical pedagogy there are upstanders against GV, those who maintain a guilty silence and harassers making direct GV and/or IGV.

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**Keywords:** critical pedagogy, gender violence, isolating gender violence, guilty silence

# Rompiendo el Silencio en la Pedagogía Crítica

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## Resumen

Existe una amplia y rica literatura científica sobre la Violencia de Género (VG) en diversas instituciones y contextos, incluyendo ahora la Violencia de Género Aisladora (VGA). Sin embargo, existe un silencio casi absoluto sobre la VG y la VGA dentro del campo de la pedagogía crítica, a pesar de su pretensión de influir en la educación de los y las niñas. Este trabajo forma parte de un largo programa de investigación sobre VG y presenta la primera evidencia sobre su existencia dentro de la pedagogía crítica. La metodología comunicativa de esta investigación ha incluido entrevistas a 15 autores y autoras de pedagogía crítica y 1 grupo de discusión. La dimensión de género es clave en esta investigación, la mayoría de las listas de pedagogos críticos destacados incluyen sólo hombres blancos y la mayoría de ellos de Norte América, en esta investigación son 15 mujeres de los y las 21 entrevistadas y están representadas diversas opciones de género y culturas. Los resultados muestran claramente que, como en cualquier otra institución y ámbito social, dentro de la pedagogía crítica hay defensores y defensoras de la VG, hay quienes guardan un silencio cómplice y hay acosadores que hacen VG y/o VGA.

**Palabras clave:** pedagogía crítica, violencia de género, violencia de género aisladora, silencio culpable

**G**ender Violence (GV) is an increasing problem in our societies. In spite of the research conducted and the prevention programs that are being designed to tackle it from the early ages, recent data show that this problematic is affecting women of all ages, cultures, and socioeconomic backgrounds at an increasing rate (WHO, 2021). Data from 2018 show that 1 out of 3 women worldwide has suffered physical and/or sexual violence from partners or non-partners in their lifetime (WHO, 2021). Overcoming and preventing this violence requires the involvement of the entire society informed by scientific research from multiple disciplines (Vidu et al., 2017).

Indeed, one of the key issues identified by the literature on GV is the role of the community in actively supporting and defending GV victims, both to prevent it from happening or to help victims overcome it once it has happened and hence become survivors. In light of such evidence, many prevention programs have been directed to promoting upstanders who will actively stand and act in solidarity with GV victims (Banyard et al., 2004; Goodman et al., 2016). Bystander intervention programs are being implemented across different social contexts, from university campuses, to businesses, and different institutions (Banyard et al., 2005). Directed at making bystanders more aware of existing or potential cases of GV in their environments and to actively defend and support victims in such cases, bystander intervention programs have been found to be efficient in overcoming sexual harassment (Coker et al., 2016).

Yet research also points out that in spite of the increased training in college campuses and the workplace, among other contexts, based on bystander intervention, these programs are not enough for making communities and people in victims' environments act in their defense (Melgar et al., 2021). The failure to provide protection to upstanders is key in this lack of action. Indeed, data show that although many people know cases of GV in their environments, many do not take action to stop those cases and defend the victims. A new study has recently shed light on the causes for such inaction: 40% of people who affirmed they had not acted to protect victims said they did not do so out of fear to retaliation (Melgar et al., 2021). It is what is denominated as Isolating Gender Violence (IGV), defined

as “any kind of violence against those who advocate for gender violence victims” (Vidu, Puigvert et al., 2021, p. 185).

As these studies show, individuals and communities who defend GV victims in very different fields and social contexts are cruelly attacked by harassers and their accomplices so that victims remain silent and, therefore, the harassment endures (Flecha, 2021; Madrid et al., 2020; Vidu et al., 2017). Harassers and their supporters are well aware of this and, therefore, they dedicate much effort to personally or/and professionally destroying anyone who dares to stand in favor of a victim, sending others the message that if anyone dares to do the same, they will be crashed (Flecha, 2021;). Until recently, IGV victims have not had any kind of protection, leaving victims’ supporters defenseless when facing retaliation. However, IGV has recently been legislated after the Catalan Parliament unanimously agreed to include it in the Catalan Legislation of Law 17/2020, of December 22, modification of Law 5/2008, of the women’s right to eradicate violence against women, becoming the first legislation worldwide to provide support to victims’ supporters (Vidu, Tomás et al., 2021). This legislation, and others in different parts of the world which are in the process of including IGV (Vidu, Puigvert et al., 2021), is a key step forward in providing protection to victims’ supporters, not leaving them alone and defenseless and, therefore, promoting the protection of GV victims.

Although authors of critical pedagogy include in their writings the gender dimension, differently than in other disciplines such as sociology, psychology and other pedagogies, only a few include analyses of gender violence. Among those who make critical pedagogy, there are a great proportion of women, including different cultures from diverse parts of the world: Jelen Amador (2019); bell hooks (2014); Nita Freire (Freire & Araújo Freire, 2015); Marta Soler (2017); Shirley Steinberg (Steinberg & Down, 2020); Nelly Stromquist (2015); Rosa Valls (2016); Ana Vidu (2017); Mengna Guo (Zubiri-Esnaola et al., 2021). This reality contrasts with the dominant lists of critical pedagogy authors which outline mostly white men from North America and make women invisible, like these two Indian women who publish critical analysis of education in excellent journals: Kiran Bhatti and Nandini Sundar (2020). The analysis about gender violence in universities (Valls et al., 2016) clarifies that there are women and men acting

as upstanders in favor of victims and survivors, and also men and women in favor of harassers; in the case of the dominant lists of critical pedagogy authors, the gender inequality is much bigger, but there are also men like Paulo Freire, Joe Kincheloe, Michael Apple, Norman K. Denzin, Jesús Gómez “Pato” and many others that have been upstanders in favor of victims and those who support the victims to become survivors (Freire & Araújo Freire, 2015; Gómez, 2015; Peña Axt et al., 2019).

### **Methodology**

The study we present in this paper has two goals. The first one is to explore whether GV and IGV exist within critical pedagogy. The second one is to find whether the reasons to maintain the silence are the same as in the other fields or there is also any specific reason of this field. To that end, researchers have followed the communicative methodology due to its aim of not only describing reality, but also of contributing to transforming it (Gómez et al., 2019; Soler & Gómez, 2020).

This is one of the main criteria of the current international scientific programs in all the fields, which is called Social Impact. Research made with the public resources provided by citizens should demonstrate that what they are doing has not only consequences for their careers and retributions but also and mainly for improving the citizens’ lives. This fits very well with the ideals of critical pedagogy and the reality of most of these authors. In fact, those generating more profound social transformations like Paulo Freire or Marta Soler are the ones overcoming the frontiers and giving prestigious to critical pedagogy beyond education, in other fields of diverse sciences and society.

Besides, in order to be not only really democratic but also with higher scientific quality, the knowledge should be constructed in continuous egalitarian dialogue between researchers and citizens, this is the criteria called co-creation. The communicative methodology followed in the research we present in this paper is not only in the same orientation to those two criteria, but has contributed to their elaboration and approval in international scientific programmes.

This research has conducted 15 communicative interviews to 5 male and 10 female researchers between 39 and 66 years old, with different sexual orientations, from 8 different universities and other institutions located in 4 different regions in Spain and in 3 Latin American countries. In addition, 1 communicative focus group was conducted with 1 male and 14 female researchers between 27 and 66 years old – some of them also participated in the interviews and some did not –, with different sexual orientations, from 8 different universities located in 5 different regions in Spain. Among the 15 people interviewed, 8 have had funding for research stays in universities from different countries for at least 2 years. Among the 15 participants from the focus group, 10 have had funding for research stays in universities from different countries for at least 2 years. Participants were selected following three criteria: a) their vast experience and expertise in the field of critical pedagogy; b) their long, rich and excellent trajectory of research on gender violence; c) their trajectories of anti-sexist behavior always responding to the proposals of victims of gender violence to support them in order to become survivors. 6 of them have or are leading regional, national and international R+D+I projects, including one funded by the Framework Program of Research of the European Commission Horizon 2020; 2 of them are leading international research associations; 7 are editors of scientific journals indexed in Scopus and/or Web of Science; and all of them count with a long list of scientific articles published in Q1 journals in different fields. After participants received information about the goals of the study, they provided informed written consent to participate and for the interviews and focus group to be audio-recorded.

Following the communicative approach and its aim towards social impact (Redondo-Sama et al., 2020), in the interviews and focus groups interviewers established an egalitarian dialogue with participants around their knowledge and experience on GV and IGV within critical pedagogy, engaging in a process of co-creation with existing evidence on the issue. After conducting the interviews and focus group, these were transcribed for ease of analysis. Transcriptions were read through several times by both researchers in dialogue.

## **Results**

All interviewees affirm and present evidence of the existence within critical pedagogy of GV and especially intense IGv. Isabel, full professor and critical pedagogist affirms:

In the 70s, we thought that the unique, or at least the main, motivation of authors of critical pedagogy was to change the world, to develop an education that created a better world. We were very enthusiastic with what Freire or Ferrer i Guardia had done and we thought the rest would be the same. Now, we know that most male and female critical pedagogists have the same motivation and generate education and social transformations; but now we also know that the motivation of some authors is to satisfy their egos and even their pockets with their publications and lectures of critical pedagogy. As in other fields, in critical pedagogy there are also a few authors that accept this from harassers in exchange of collaborating with their attacks to the victims and to those who support the victims. (Isabel)

It is surprising to see the generalized knowledge and awareness among the main authors of critical pedagogy that there are some authors with the type of motivations described by Isabel. Even they explain concrete and clear evidence. Lucía says:

Knowing the work, the person and the consequence in the gender relationships of Paulo Freire, in the beginning many of us thought that all authors of critical pedagogy were like him. But when you know all the most important authors you see there are some who have never transformed any school or educational project and that their support to those who do transform disappears when they receive money, luxury and limelight from those who are against persons making real transformations. It's not surprising that some of them receive limelight and money from the professors who are doing GV and IGv so that they attack even slandering those who support victims and survivors. (Lucía)

Eva expresses the surprise of many people who read about critical pedagogy when they realize that some of the most well-known authors who write about



transforming schools and ending violence do not promote such transformations and, what is more worrisome, act contrarily to the values they write about.

It is important to learn the difference between what some people say about themselves and the way they act. If you ask people about their support to victims of gender violence, everybody, including most sexual harassers, say that they support them. There are authors who write about the transformation of education and doing such transformations, or clearly supporting those who do them. However, there are also authors who write about it and they are not doing any real transformation, neither supporting those who are doing them, and even criticizing them without doing anything. These authors clearly do not care about children, neither about education, neither about society, they only care about their own money and ego. It does not seem strange that they do not write about IGV and they do not support victims, and even attack those who support them. (Eva)

Miriam points out that, besides the motivations for silence and even IGV in other fields, in critical pedagogy there is one that gets specifically intense: the great ego of some authors.

It is very sad to see how some authors do not care about children, but about how much they will be paid by their lectures and how much those invitations will increase their ego obsession. Their talks and writings against neo-liberalism reinforce neo-liberalism because oppressed people see that those words do not change anything in their reality and that even some of those criticizing it act like the words of neo-liberals: looking for money and power. Their preferred excuse for not doing any real transformation is to affirm that it is impossible to do them. They can maintain this excuse only attacking the people that care about children and consequently are doing real transformations. This is impossible in many other fields of knowledge where all the well-known authors are doing social transformations and supporting those who are making them. (Miriam)

Alba clarifies what is the consequence of this for IGV.

From a feminist perspective, it is outrageous to discover that those critical pedagogy authors are so egotist that they take the side of those who pay them more. The sexual harassers' lobbies have it very easy with them, giving them luxuries and/or honors they will use their fame to attack their victims and those who support their victims. (Alba)

Alejandra expresses a hope in the future of critical pedagogy and presents evidence of this possibility.

The present emphasis of social impact is already changing and will change dramatically the future of critical pedagogy. Worker families and poor families reject now much more than in the past “intellectuals” living in the luxury without any collaboration with them and being paid for saying things that do not improve anything in their situation. (Alejandra)

All interviews make clear that this is the time to change and are sure about the success of the change. Manuel said:

Me too has promoted and multiplied the breaking of silence in very different domains. Some of the most renowned representatives of opera, scientific research, filmography, politics have been removed from their positions; critical pedagogy cannot be an island maintaining the silence about the gender violence and the IGV against the anti-sexist authors. Besides, the me too has found previous movements in academia prepared for that task. Before 2017, networks of survivors already existed in countries like the United States and Spain, and they were already connected among them and being part of the feminist movements. (Manuel)

Feminists recognize the support they had as victims for becoming survivors from some critical pedagogists. Nuria says:

In the case of the Spanish movement, it was supported by critical pedagogists like Jesús Gómez “Pato”, who was persecuted with slander by a lobby of harassers until his last day. Diverse critical pedagogists

and feminists remember the joy and enthusiasm of Paulo Freire and Jesús Gómez “Pato” sharing their ideas and sentiments about love. It is a pity that not all authors of critical pedagogy stand like them against GV and IGV.

### **Discussion of Results**

In relation to the two goals of this research, results provide some important answers in which there is a coincidence among all interviewees. Besides, they sustain that not only them, but all authors of critical pedagogy know the situation even though most of them do not dare to break the silence.

The first clear conclusion is that all interviewees state that there is an important GV and IGV in critical pedagogy. Some authors will probably tell us that this is evident, that there is of course GV and IGV in critical pedagogy like in any other field, that it was not necessary to conduct a research for saying this. Our question to them would be: so, why did you not talk about it in the past if the research clearly shows that breaking the silence is a requirement for supporting the victims to become survivors? From our long experience of research in this field, we know that some will accept their error, they will rectify, moreover, they will collaborate in overcoming GV and IGV in society and specifically in critical pedagogy. Others will not accept their error, they will even get angry and will be willing to make IGV to those breaking the silence.

The second clear conclusion is the existence of a strong silence, the interviewees say that it is even stronger than in many other fields. This confirms what is already published in scientific literature that those contexts where there is less talk about GV and IGV are the contexts in which it is more frequent and it is more normalized. In this case, the wrong idea about the unique motivation for a better world of all authors of critical pedagogy hide the submissive acceptance of the behavior of some of them against the values and the utopian dreams of the critical pedagogy.

The third conclusion is an affirmative answer to the second goal of the research. The specific intensity of the egotist motivation is more possible due to the submissive acceptance of the words of authors independently of their influence in the transformation of education and society. Interviewees are convinced that the change has already started and there is no way to return.

The citizens' radical demand of social impact, especially demanded for the most underprivileged citizens, will change radically the lists of authors of critical pedagogy. So, the critical pedagogy in the following years will make extraordinary transformations of education and society making steps towards the utopian dreams critical educators have and children and families need.

This is the first research made about this particular subject and all those conclusions are just provisional waiting for new and diverse scientific analyses about the same subject. Authors of this field of knowledge know how difficult it is to break the silence in this matter and the potential aggressive reactions from those who do not take a clear position against GV and their followers. Nevertheless, times are changing thanks to the brave and anti-sexist mobilizations of feminists, new alternative masculinities, and other movements. This is clearly the moment to overcome the silence and we are sure that in the next future new research will be published that will enrich and maybe will correct the one we are presenting in this paper.

Meanwhile, it is already necessary to make a profound reflection in dialogue with a plurality of voices about these provisional conclusions. Critical pedagogy proposes important changes in the education addressed to all citizens, but mainly children and teenagers. Scientifically and ethically society cannot and does not want to leave those underaged human beings in the hands of authors that maintain silence or even actively collaborate with GV and/or IGV. They are a few, a very little proportion of critical pedagogy authors doing this, but many critical educators that do not have any idea of their behavior and their motivation.

Critical pedagogy stands in favor of non-sexist, non-racist relations, in favor of democracy and equality, its objective is to transform schools and society in order to make a better education and a better world. There are many and very diverse professors, teachers, family members and other citizens making daily this transformation of schools, all of them are doing critical pedagogy in practice and with the theoretical contributions that demonstrate to facilitate those transformations in practice. The field of critical pedagogy cannot be a hierarchical one, where most people are followers of some who do not make real transformations, who do not support them and with a type of theoretical developments that do not generate real transformations. Too much individual power kills critical pedagogy, particularly if it provides a

luxury life for a few instead of better education for all and especially underprivileged children.

The final success of this non-sexist endeavor is totally sure, but the greater or lesser speed of the process to achieve it has as a consequence that more or less children, educators and family members will depend on the actions of most non-sexist authors or of the few sexist ones.

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