CONOCIMIENTO Y TESTIMONIO: AN EXPLORATORY CASE STUDY OF MEXICAN AMERICAN CHILDREN OF (IM)MIGRANTS LEARNING WITH(IN) CHERRY ORCHARDS

By

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To the Faculty of Washington State University:

The members of the Committee appointed to examine the dissertation of MARIA ISABEL MORALES finds it satisfactory and recommend that it be accepted.

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Mercedes Sosa sings: “gracias a la vida que me ha dado tanto.” As this song beautifully shares, I am thankful for all that I have- especially for the love and support from friends, family, and colleagues. I owe this accomplishment to every single one of you who gifted me with advice, laughs, serious (and not so serious) conversations, and shoulders to cry on. This acknowledgement, written whole-heartedly, is my small effort to honor all of those people that inspired, challenged, and helped keep me grounded through this process.

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Mexican American children of (im)migrants’ experiences are misrepresented and subjected to deficit and xenophobic frameworks in schools and society. While studies focused on Latina/o youth and adolescents certainly exist, very little research is committed to the voices of Mexican American children—particularly children of (im)migrants in the Pacific Northwest. Drawing from critical ethnography and narrative inquiry, this exploratory case study examines the narratives of children but rather than focusing on the school setting as a learning environment, the author focuses on cherry orchards as a place for learning and that fosters culture, resistance, and “child-centered” conocimiento. This study intends to enhance researchers, educators, and community members’ understandings of (im)migrant children’s lives through a non-deficit approach that disrupts majoritarian narratives.
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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

We need research not only for research purposes but more importantly for social justice. There is so much injustice around us and it is time for us to rise and use the tool of research to confront all injustices in our society. You can count on me to rise with you—Let’s do it. (O. Adesope, personal communication, March 9, 2015)

I come from a staggeringly big family. My paternal grandparents have twelve children, over thirty grandchildren, and more than forty great-grandchildren. On my maternal side, the numbers are a bit smaller with thirteen children, thirty-two grandchildren, and five great-grandchildren. While family reunions are unheard of in my family (particularly for my paternal side), the size of my family is a significant part of my identity. From Michoacán, México, to Arizona, to Southern California, to the East Bay Area, to Washington, my family is distributed over approximately 50 thousand kilometers. My sense of place and belonging is intimately tied to movement and migration. For three generations, my family has been returning to Aztlán (Acuña, 2010; Anzaldúa, 1999; Massey et al., 1990).

In my mother’s family, I am the eldest of the thirty-two grandchildren. A visit home, particularly to my grandparents’ house, is always an adventure because of the many little cousins

1 According to Aztec mythology, Aztlán is the legendary ancestral homeland of the Aztec people before their migratory journey to what is now Mexico City. It is believed that Aztlán is located somewhere in what is now the Southwest of the United States. According to the legend, the Aztec people predicted that someday their descendants would take the migratory journey back north.
who run to the door to greet me and immediately invite me to play. In my culture, being the eldest comes with a great deal of responsibility. In my family, that responsibility primarily consists of setting a positive example for all the cousins that follow. (I like to think that I have helped open the door of possibility for my cousins.) The sense of adventure that my little cousins bring out in me often reminds me of the learning adults neglect to take advantage of—learning from children. My cousins inspire this study and invite my intellectual self to question on the adult-centric frameworks we have in research, education, and society. I am also inspired, in a painful and complicated way, by the rampant dehumanization of Latina/o (im)migrant peoples that continuously (re)emerges in the media. These discourses make me feel indignation (Freire, 2007) and move me to "act rather than react" (Anzaldúa, 1999).

During the summer I began conducting this research, several news sites discussed the "crisis" of the thousands unaccompanied minors "flooding" the U.S/México border. I was particularly heartbroken with the title of one news site: "Is the surge of illegal child immigrants a national security threat?" (Boerma, 2014). To have the words "illegal" and “national security threat” in the same sentence as “child," enraged me and gave me yet another motive for pursuing a study about Mexican (im)migrant children and their stories.

Today, my immediate family and the majority of my maternal extended family resides in Washington State and like many more Mexican Americans, depend on agriculture and fruit orchards for survival. In Rio County WA, agriculture is the dominant economic force, especially fruit that includes apples, cherries, pears, and peaches. During the summer season, cherry orchards are a common place of employment for (im)migrant populations (Meseck, 2013).
In many cases, working in these orchards becomes a family experience. Parents bring their children to these sites and from what I have come to learn, they do so for more reasons than just to earn money. For example, a few summers ago I was helping my father pick cherries in an orchard in Kline, Washington. I was at the bottom of the tree while my father was on the seven-foot ladder picking at the top of the tree. He was speaking to a man hidden within the leaves, branches, and fruit of a tree next to us. My father asked the man about his son who was there picking along with him. "I bring my son," he responded, "so he can learn to do more than one thing. So he has options. He needs to learn to do more than one thing." I was amazed and dumbfounded by his words that illuminated a lesson about community, relationship, survival, culture, and so much more. It was then that I began to learn the meaning of the orchards for my community—the powerful epistemological implications of this place on families and community, and most importantly, children.

In trying to write this dissertation that learns with/from children, I needed to get into my own child shoes. For this reason, I infuse my own memories and stories throughout this work. As I write about place, I remember the places in Michoacán, the place of the border, the places in Freemont, Union City, and Hayward California where I would find solace and meaning. As different places trigger memories for me, orchards trigger memories for many Mexican American people. For some people, for instance, orchards are a reminder of the freedom from mechanized forms of work he had while working in the cornfields when they were younger. In this same way, Freire (1997) describes the discovered longing he felt for his homeland one day while in exile (p. 38). The orchard, like other places, “possess a marked capacity for triggering acts of self-reflection, inspiring thoughts about who one presently is, or
memories of who one used to be, or musings on who one might become” (Basso, 1996, p. 55). If there are lived relationships between adults and the orchards, what are the lived relationships that their children have to these places?

This case study is about children. It is about their experiences in cherry orchards in Rio County. It is about the possibilities for teaching and learning from and with the narratives of children, their families, and the place of the orchard. This case study is tied to social justice projects resisting violent xenophobia and racism against Mexican communities in the United States. Moreover, this case study resists adult-centric research by shedding light on the daily lives of children.

While some children spend their summers in camps or other recreational activities, many (im)migrant children in central Washington spend them picking cherries and learning with(in) orchards. From sunrise to late morning, they pick at times and at times play games with cousins and other children. They spend their time with family, an important opportunity considering that, as nine-year-old Clarisa believes, “there is not enough time spent with family.” The children’s experiences consist of multiple layers of narratives that demonstrate that these children’s lives are complicated, and at the same time, full of possibilities for teaching and learning.

**Significance of this Study**

A child-centered positionality (Grover, 2004) opens a safe space for children to tell their own stories. This frame is important because too much work speaks about children as “our future,” rather than our present (p. 89). Within the Latina/o community and the research in this field, there is a similar need. By utilizing non-Western theoretical tools, this critical case study seeks to fill the gap in the field of Latina/o education by providing the stories told by Mexican
American children in order to 1) disrupt stereotypes and hegemonic deficit theories; 2) contribute to the reduction of the Opportunity Gap; and 3) advance social justice for (im)migrant communities. This study will also fill the gap in social and educational research that continues to be dominated by adult perspectives and agendas.

In this chapter, I provide a general overview of the purpose and direction of this study with Mexican American children of (im)migrants. I begin with a brief sketch of demographics and discourses of Latina/o immigrants in order to situate this study at the macro-level. After outlining the problems this study seeks to address, I provide an overview of the research methodology and the implications of this research. Finally, this chapter delineates the theories driving the direction of this study.

**Background of the Problem**

**Demographics.** Hispanics are the largest and fastest growing minority in the United States; this population grew from 35.3 million in 1992 to 53 million in 2013. Sixty-three percent of that 53 million are Mexican, and the majority are children of immigrants. In Western Washington, school districts are witnessing demographic increases exceeding statewide growth rates. In rural communities of Eastern Washington, Latina/os are already the majority.

The past few decades have witnessed a drastic increase in demographic changes for urban, suburban, and rural regions in Washington State. In Río County, Hispanics or Latina/os constitute twenty-seven percent of the population compared to twelve percent in the state of Washington. Nevertheless, anti-immigrant sentiment continue shaping the perception of the US society
Anti-immigrant rhetoric. In the United States, the history of anti-immigrant sentiment is as long as the history of immigration itself. Today, this sentiment appears to endure as a “last frontier” in which citizens openly vent racial and ethnic hostilities. While blatant racism is largely confined to the fringes of society, anti-immigrant sentiments are more freely indulged in public opinion, policy debates, and other social forums. Even children articulate anti-immigrant feelings (Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco, 2001, p. 7).

Whether the stereotypes are that immigrants are lazy and prone to violence or that they are “high-achieving book-obsessed competitors,” today’s immigrants of color are seen as “unmeltable” and unsuited for modern American culture. Children internalize the negative messages about their particular communities (Nieto, 2004) particularly when they are perpetuated in schools. While teachers and administrators should “do everything in their power to use, affirm, and sustain” culture and language in schools (p. 321), studies show that many are instead attempting to erase students’ cultures and languages. Anti-immigration sentiments, along with structural barriers construct a complicated experience for children of immigrants in schools and society. Suárez-Orozco-and Suárez-Orozco (2001) ask: “How does a child incorporate the notion that she is an alien, or an illegal— that she is unwanted and does not warrant the most basic rights of education and health care?” (p. 7).

In a critical reflection with the racist and xenophobic dominant discourses that surround Mexican people in the United States (especially those with recent immigrant experiences), emerges the question: Where are the children’s stories within these discourses?
Problem Statement and Research Purpose

Mexican American children of (im)migrants’ experiences are misrepresented and subjected to deficit and xenophobic frameworks in schools and society. Research studies that examine experiences of Latina/o/Mexicana/o students are either focused on adolescents’ narratives (Férrandez, 2002; Súarez-Orozco & Súarez-Orozco, 1995; Valenzuela, 1999; Yosso, 2006;), or speak about the children rather than letting children speak for their selves (López, 2001; Valencia & Black, 2002; Villenas, 2002). Thus, there is a need for more work that gives children “the opportunity to define themselves through collaboration in the research effort, rather than to be defined solely by adult interest, biases, and agendas” (Grover, 2004, p. 83). More specifically, the problem this study seeks to address is the little work that draws from a “child-centered” framework.

More attention needs to be drawn to Mexican American children’s learning in places outside the classroom. Therefore, this study offers a snapshot of Mexican American children’s experiences in central Washington in order to enhance researchers, educators, and community members’ understandings of immigrant children’s lives through a non-deficit approach that disrupts majoritarian narratives.

The purpose of this study is to illuminate the stories of Mexican American children of immigrants and their lived experiences in the orchards they spend part of their summers in. I seek to disrupt discourses in which children are to be spoken to rather than spoken with. While studies focused on Latina/o youth and adolescents certainly exist, very little research is committed to the voices of Mexican American children. In this study, I examine the narratives of children but rather than focusing on the school setting as a learning environment, my focus is on
cherry orchards as a place for learning and children’s lived experiences there because as Gloria Anzaldúa believed, children have a pivotal role in achieving “cultural and social transformations” (Rebolledo, 2006, p. 279).

**Research Questions**

The research questions that drive this study revolve around the general question: What do Mexican American children of immigrants learn in orchards? The data collected in this research gave me a snapshot of what children experience, enjoy, and feel spending part of their summers in cherry orchards working and/or accompanying their parents and families. My methodology considered orchards as places of teaching and learning. I interviewed and observed children and parents in orchards and in their homes (when I was invited). The guiding research questions are as follows:

1. Guiding question: What are the stories and lived experiences of Mexican American children of immigrants who spend their summers in cherry orchards? How do children describe their experiences?

   Sub-questions:

   1. What are the relationships that Mexican American children of immigrants have with and in orchards?
   2. How do orchards serve as *bridges* among and between children, adults, communities, historical/cultural memories, and daily life?
   3. What *consejos* do children learn from family?
   4. How do dominant discourses shape children, their families, and orchards?
**Research Design and Methods**

This study is a qualitative exploratory case study that draws methods from Critical Ethnography and Narrative Inquiry to provide in depth and detailed understandings of the experiences of Mexican American children of (im)migrants in cherry orchards over a period of a month and a few days. The primary critical ethnographic method I use to obtain narratives and experiences is that of participant observation- I observed and participated in cherry picking in four different cherry orchards. I also conducted interviews and one focus group. Along with the interviews and observations, I used my researcher journal, cultural myths, and my life experiences as a unit of analysis to help give me a better understanding of the ways children and communities create meaning (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990) in cherry orchards.

**Theoretical Framework**

I situate my theoretical framework in the tenets of Chicana Feminism (particularly Anzaldúa’s work on Borderland theory) Paulo Freire, and Latina/o Critical Theory in education. While Anzaldúa and Freire are foregrounded (as tools that focus on the (re)creation of knowledge with more a critical examination of lived experiences), LatCrit compensates with critical interrogation of hegemonic ideologies and masternarratives of Mexican American children and their communities. Together, these three theoretical lenses help provide an in depth understanding of the experiences of children and the ways they resist and counter dominant narratives.

**Terminology**

I begin this discussion of context by bringing to the forefront the problematic and complex nature of identity labels, or as Gimenez (1997) names it, “standardized terminology.”
Both Latina/o and Hispanic are used interchangeably in research and policy. While they both refer to the same groups of people, the use of the Latina/o label tends to be more widely used in scholarship and accepted by communities (this varies by region). Latina/o makes reference to the commonalities in language of peoples in Latin America. Hispanic, coined and imposed in the 1970’s, describes people of Spanish-speaking decent (González & Gándara, 2006) and denotes whiteness (Iglesias & Valdez, 1998). It is often used by policy makers, social scientists, and politicians, and is found to be problematic for its focus on Spanish ancestry. The term describes both people of Latin America as well as those from Spain, failing to acknowledge the indigenous and African roots of peoples in Latin America. For this same reason, many Mexican Americans and other Latina/os prefer to self-identify as Chicana/o, a more politicized identity, reflective of a growing critical consciousness with historical ties to the Chicano civil rights movement(s).

While Latina/o does a better job than “Hispanic” at recognizing non-European ancestry, this racialized umbrella term continues to be problematic for it hides the diverse experiences of communities who become a monolithic group under this label. For example, both Cubans and Mexicans are considered “Latina/os,” but have very different experiences in the United States. While Cubans are the “most successful Latinos in the United States” (Stepick & Dutton Stepick, 2009, p. 75), Mexican Americans are not succeeding academically in the same way as the rest of the population (Castro-Salazar & Bagley, 2010). In this research, I use the term “Latina/o,” when referencing scholarly work or when contextualizing my work. I use “Hispanic” in a political or historical reference. Nevertheless, the focus of this study is a particular subgroup with a particular history within the umbrella Latina/o community. Thus, I refer to participants as Mexican American and/or as children of immigrants.
Twenty percent of all youth in the United States are children of immigrants. Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco (2001) make a distinction between “immigrant children” and “children of immigrants.” The former strictly refers to foreign-born children who migrated to the U.S and not second-generation students. The latter refers to both U.S-born and foreign-born children (p. 1). While it is important to recognize that the experiences of U.S born and foreign-born students differ in several respects, it is immigrant parents that they have in common.

Throughout this study, I borrow from López (2001) in the use of (im)migrant rather than just migrant or immigrant. I do this to illustrate that the experience of being a "migrant" and "immigrant" (especially for those communities employed in agricultural jobs like the orchard) is intersectional and complicated. The traditional definition of "migrant" was solely used to describe groups of people who migrated around the nation for purposes of employment. While this is still the case for many people in the U.S (as is for a few of my participants), the definition of "migrant" is beginning to encompass those families who switch from one job to another with the change of agricultural seasons but do not necessarily move homes to search for employment. I use parentheses rather than a slash mark to affirm, rather than split, the intersectional and complicated experiences of the communities participating in this study.

Limitations

Perhaps the biggest limitation of this study is the sample size. I interviewed 12 children and two parents. While parental data was also gathered from informal conversations with other adults in the orchard, the few interviews pose a potential limitation for this study. Although I argue that parents constitute secondary information in my methodology, the children’s constant references to perspectives of parents could be read as their own call for a more holistic account
of their lives. Moreover, my argument that children are holders and creators of knowledge in orchards could be better supported with more participants sharing their narratives. As a case study, however, the limitation in terms of sample size opens the possibilities for a more in depth ethnographic study with children.

Throughout this study, I examine the implications of conducting research with my own community. While I constantly reflect on the implications on my positionality with respect to representation and reliability, there are potential biases that come from this positionality. For instance, in my effort to humanize the children and the community, I may have overlooked important discussions in terms of the work conditions of the orchard. While I sought to move away from an “adult-centric” perspective, there are also potential biases rooted in my position as an adult.

**Overview of Chapters**

In the following chapter, I identify the theories and frameworks that drive the direction of this study. I describe a theoretical framework in the decolonial imaginary (Pérez, 2000) that draws from Chicana Feminism (particularly in the Anzaldúan tradition), Freirian theories, and key concepts of Latina/o Critical Theory that together allow me to expose children's *conocimiento* (Anzaldúa, 1999) and their “readings of the world” (Freire, 1970; 1997) as a means to dislodge hegemonic narratives deep-rooted in the structural systems of society (Iglesias & Valdez, 1998). Chapter two also provides a review of literature pertaining to Mexican American children of (im)migrants in the U.S. I decided to include a brief literature review over a longer one because throughout the dissertation I infuse social science literature to help me frame my arguments.
Chapter three discusses this critical case study as a methodological *movida* (Pérez, 2000) that draws methods from critical ethnography and narrative inquiry to illuminate the experiences of children within a particular context while making connections to concerns of social justice for children of color in schools and society. In chapters four and five, I put the theoretical framework and methodology to practice in a critical analysis of the place of the orchards, and the themes that emerged from participant stories and a collectively written testimonio.

Finally, chapter six takes this dissertation back full circle to the indignation and love (Freire, 2007) that is "gradually incorporated [into my] ethical and political dreams" of a more just world (p. xv). Here, I examine the struggles I faced as I conducted this research and the learning I obtained from the self-reflective moments. I close with a discussion of the potential implications of this work on teaching, research, and activist work.

**CHAPTER TWO**

There is knowledge in lived experiences. A critical understanding of the world requires learning from the experiences of marginalized peoples and strategically using them as tools for gaining critical consciousness of the world. In a society overshadowed by xenophobia and a lack of intimacy between communities (hooks, 2009), children, particularly brown children, relegated to the margins of society. Children are borderland subjects that “dwell in a state of *conocimiento,*” the knowledge that is a matter of survival, a way of knowing that is intimately connected with intuition, culture, history, and the natural world (Rebolledo, 2006, p. 281). Gloria Anzaldúa wrote children’s books (*Prietita* and *El Otro Lado*) because she believed that connecting with children was an important step of activism; children have a pivotal role in
cultural and social transformation (Rebolledo, 2006, p. 279). This study emanates from the view of children as important agents in the work for social justice. To learn from children’s stories is to engage in the path of transformation and healing (Facio and Segura, 2013, p. 180) of our Mexican/Chicana/o/(im)migrant communities. These stories also invite a conscientização (Freire, 2008), critical consciousness of the world, and the radical knowledge that disrupts Western binary systems.

In this chapter, I examine the scholarly and theoretical frameworks that drive this study with Mexican American children of (im)migrants. In part one, I delineate a brief review of literature and the gaps this study seeks to fill. In this review of literature, I accentuate a “child-centered” positionality that is often negated in research. Followed by this review, section two elucidates the theoretical framework, or movida, that allows for a critical understanding of children and their stories.

**Brief Review of the Literature**

**Mexican American children.** A growing body of research on Latina/o children in education demonstrates that Latina/o students face segregation, alienation, structural inequity, tracking into special education classes and vocational schools, as well as discrimination based on immigration status in schools (Carger, 1996; Contreras & Stritikus, 2008; Ketner Ream, 2005; Matute-Bianchi, 2008; Molls & Ruiz, 2009; Romo & Falbo, 1996; Solorzano & Yosso, 2008; Valenzuela, 1999; Yosso, 2005). The highest dropout rate (or better said, “push out rate”) in the U.S. is that of Latina/o youth (Chapman et al., 2009; Drachman, 2006); youth of Mexican origin, in particular, are not “succeeding” academically, in the same way the rest of the population is (Castro-Salazar & Bagley, 2010, p. 24; Espinoza-Herold, 2003). This “opportunity gap”
(Contreras & Stritikus, 2008) illustrates that Mexican students have the lowest educational attainment compared to other Latina/o subgroups, as well as the lowest high school completion rates at 26.7% (Kiyama, 2010). The latter is a crucial point, considering that Mexican immigrants constitute about 65 percent of the Latina/o population (Brown & López, 2013; Suarez-Orozco & Paéz, 2002). These findings suggest that Mexican American children’s voices and stories are often marginalized and framed as a social “problem” since their underachievement in schooling is well documented.

Some researchers like Lilia Férnandez (2002) interrogate the opportunity gap in educational research that relies on dominant discourses rather than students’ voices for understanding. Research and policy documenting educational conditions of Latino/Latina students often ignore the students’ perspectives on their own education and overlook their stories of coping and resistance, which are often “absent from or silent within this discourse” (p. 46). There is a need for research that focuses on the stories of students of color as they tell them.

While there is growing scholarship that illuminates students’ voices, most of those students are adolescents. There is a gap in this research that demonstrates the need to include children’s voices in educational research. Lisa Carger’s (1996) biographical sketch of a student’s experiences, from childhood to young adulthood, is an example of a study that incorporates the stories of a Mexican American child in an examination of educational and societal barriers but is an exception.

Further, there is a growing demand to make research more inclusive of stories of resistance and cultural knowledge that values students of color as “holders and creators of knowledge” (Delgado Bernal, 2002; see also Moll, Amanti, Neff, & González, 1992; Solorzano
Nevertheless, most of the studies that map out Latina/o or Mexican concerns focus on the experiences inside the school setting. In the dialogic relationship between “reading the word and the world,” lies an important understanding that the experiences outside of school play a central role in children’s learning. Thus, this study seeks to contribute to this gap with an exploration of children’s experiences in the orchards where spend their summers in. This is particularly important to do with Mexican American children considering the widening “opportunity gap” and overall low achievement and engagement in school. Children of (im)migrants’ experiences are much more complex and it is important that we understand their experiences in settings outside of the school setting.

**Children of immigrants.** Twenty percent of all youth in the United States are children of immigrants. Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco (1995) describe immigration as a “complex, multifaceted process involving economic, political, psychological, and other cultural factors (p. 4). Although immigration has long been part of the historical fabric of the United States, neoliberal globalization shifted the patterns of migration, which are now mostly characterized by immigrants from Latin America. Two-thirds of Latinos are either immigrants or children of immigrants (Suárez-Orozco, Carhill, & Chuang, 2011).

Acculturation and shifts in identity are woven throughout the generations, and studies explain a significant correlation between acculturation and achievement in school. In fact, “for many immigrant groups, length of residency in the United States is associated with declining health, school achievement, and aspirations” (Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco, 2001, p. 4). A sociological study by Ruben Rumbaut and Alejandro Portes concluded that while length of residency is a strong predictor of improved English reading skills, it is also connected to
declining academic achievement and aspirations (as cited in Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco, 2001).

Compared to recent immigrants, second-generation children of immigrants and later generations have poor achievement in schools. This paradox in Latina/o education is discussed in the work of Carola and Marcelo Suárez-Orozco (1995) who state “whereas new immigrants are widely reported to be extremely motivated to learn English and use the educational system to improve their lot, more acculturated Latina/os drop out of schools at alarmingly high rates” (p. 6). This is an interesting paradox that further complicates the deficit thinking theories that blame the students and their culture rather than structural factors. A study conducted with Mexican students in México and Mexican immigrant students in California indicated that these students had high regards for education and academic achievement (Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco, 1995) suggesting that poor student achievement is highly affected by schooling and structural barriers and is not a cultural “deficit.” The study found that Latina/o adolescents in the United States were highly motivated, but their expectations for success were negatively affected by experiences of societal hostility and discrimination.

Studies that examine the multidimensionality of children’s lives need to consider the prominent role of culture. For Matute-Bianchi (1991), the more immigrants know their culture and their language, the better they are able to adjust to American schooling. Sonia Nieto (2004) interrogates the connection between culture, identity, and academic achievement. In the case studies that undergird her work, she found that “students pick up competing messages about language and culture from teachers, schools, and society.” One of the emerging messages is “culture is important, something that most of the students are proud of and maintain. But,
students also learn that culture is unimportant in the school environment” (p. 320). Low self-image in children is not created “out of the blue,” but rather it is shaped in great part as a result of “policies and practices of school and a society that respects and affirms some groups while devaluing and rejecting others” (p. 321). Identities are formed by the way students are perceived in dominant culture (Suarez-Orozco, 2001). For instance, the xenophobia and negative stereotypes often in the media of Mexican immigrants shapes the identities of Mexican American students in schools.

Some scholars seek student voice through narratives (as in testimonios, or counter-narratives) in order to learn directly from children and youth who are most affected by structural systems of inequality. For example, Pamela A. Quiroz (2001) illuminates the ways written narratives addressing the question “Who am I” give voice to youth from Puerto Rico and México. Lilia Fernández (2002) explains that students’ narratives should be used not as “accessories to research but as the centerpiece of qualitative studies” (p. 45). Thus, this study seeks to contribute to this scholarship and the work of educators in seeking to reduce the opportunity gap in schools through more culturally responsive pedagogies. Considering the achievement level of Mexican students (in comparison to the rest of the Latina/o population), as well as the historical and political ties with the United States, a study with this community is critical. Most of the studies focus on youth and in school settings; thus a study with young children in orchards would be useful for a more culturally responsive understanding of this communities’ experience and for the benefit of the early schooling experiences of these particular children as well as those of the majority. This study illuminates stories in the daily
lives of children, their knowledge, and their understanding of the world to bridge the gap between school structures and their cultural/historical being in the world.

An examination of the experiences of children of immigrants rather than second or third generation Mexican Americans will provide powerful insights to our work for social and educational justice of children, particularly within the Mexican American community. If Mexican American children are losing the sparkle in their eyes (as cited in Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco, 2001, p. 5), then we have work to do. To do so, we must listen, *con cariño y respeto* (Valdes, 1996) to the children whose voices have been “deliberately silenced.” In doing so, perhaps it will encourage us to listen “with heart” (Carger, 1996, p. 149) to other children’s stories and their lived experiences and relationships with and in the world (Freire, 2007).

A study investigating Mexican family’s’ understandings of “parent involvement” deduce that parents teach their children important lessons by exposing them to the hard work in the fields (López, 2001). This particular study, like many others, focuses on the views and perspectives of the parents, and while children are talked about, they are not talked to. Similar to the findings shared in López (2001), I found that parents take children to orchards to teach them: “1) to become acquainted with the type of work they do; 2) to recognize that this work is difficult, strenuous, and without adequate compensation; and 3) to realize that without an education, they may end up working a similar type of job” (p. 416). While many of the themes gathered in López’s work (2001) are similar to those uncovered in this case study, my level of inquiry contributes what children experience and believe on their own about the orchards. I echo the work of Reese et al. (1995), Valdez (1996) and Villenas (2002) whose examination of Latina/o parents’ agency demonstrates counter-hegemonic forms of education (i.e. *una buena*
educación) as examples of the dynamic and resilient presence of cultural forms in Latina/o communities (Villenas, 2002, p.17). This case study, then, illuminates the stories of children of (im)migrants and their experiences in cherry orchards to demonstrate ways these children “read the world” (Freire, 1993, 2007) on their own terms and outside of the “repeated, institutionalized, authorized ways of being and knowing” (Davies, 2014, p. 8).

**Child-centered perspective.** Politicians often refer to us children as being the future… But we are living right now. – Our childhood is happening now and not in the future. We do not think it is enough for decision-makers (for example politicians and public officials) to speak a lot about children and how important they are. – We want them to listen to us. (Children’s Summit, Sweden, 2001 as cited in Grover, 2004, p. 89).

The tendencies to speak about children through the cliché—our children are our future—is often seen in research and common day-to-day conversations. Sonja Grover (2004) interrogates the lack of children’s own stories of their lived experiences, of who they are and what it means to live the lives they do (p. 90). If politicians, public officials, and researchers are to do work that supports children, we need to begin to listen to children. Grover explains that the need is for more “authentic research which gives power and voice to child research participants and which provides insights into their subjective world” (p. 81). Too much of the research with children is used to inform social policy but is done in a way that negatively impacts children, their rights, and dignity. The same issues of human dignity that are involved with adults who seek some control over how they are portrayed in the world are similarly part of children’s fundamental rights. Unlike adults, however, children are hardly allowed the right to speak on the ways they
are portrayed in the world, in turn, affecting their human rights for as Grover states, “how one is reported about in the world can profoundly affect one’s human rights” (p. 82).

Research reflects that traditionally, children’s voices have been “muted” in social sciences (Christensen & James, 2000). Children’s voices are not taken into consideration in part because it is believed that they are not in a position to give “accurate information” (Messiou, 2006, p. 306) or because children and adolescents are viewed as developing, in transition (Lesko, 2012) and “not fully actualized” (Grover, 2004, p. 91). Moreover, according to Christensen and James (2000), researchers (especially historians) have tended to focus on the concept of childhood rather than the lives of children (p. 37).

Childhood is a set of categories based on age as the criterion and that focuses on adulthood as the end goal, rather than everyday lives of children. Thus, “personhood is always associated with adulthood” (Hendrick, 2000, p. 55). It is important that social and educational researchers regard children as “experts on their own subjective experience.” Rather than analyzing children’s experiences through adult theoretical categories that serve adult agendas, research should take “child-centered perspectives” that foster in-depth understandings of children’s lives (p. 83, 91). Hendrick (2000) states that children have been historically portrayed and affected by a dominant mentality of “adultism” (p. 55). He argues that it is important to be aware of children’s own standpoint, “rather than those of their parents, school teachers, social workers and others.” Moreover, he states:

It hardly needs to be said that if children are to be seen as social actors, they first have to be seen as being capable of social action; second, those areas in which children are socially active have to be identified, and third, we have to see ourselves as
being in a *relationship* with children, rather than simply possessing roles assured by the principle governance (p. 55).

Research across fields demonstrates a need to give attention to children’s voices and experiences. Scholars (Christensen & James, 2000; Grover, 2004; Hendrick, 2000; Messiou, 2006) who argue for more inclusive and democratic research with children rather than on children, are predominantly found outside of the United States. In research with Latina/o and Mexican American children of immigrants, we need more work that draws from this consideration of children’s experiences to offer a counter-narrative of children in research. This study emanates from the need to center children’s narratives of their lived experiences within dominant discourses of immigration, race, xenophobia, along with those of knowledge and culture. The understandings of children in this study are part of “*comunidad-based saberes*” (community-based knowledges), intended to deepen awareness and appreciation of the richness of immigrant communities, their stories, and knowledges (Urrieta, 2013, p. 320). To uncover these counterhegemonic stories of *comunidad-based saberes*, I draw from a critical theoretical frame in the interstitial space of the decolonial imaginary, “where the gaps between the unspoken and unseen unfold” (Pérez, 1999, p. 127).

**Theoretical Framework in the Decolonial Imaginary**

The discussions raised in this study validate the stories of participants working with families in the orchards and the experiential knowledge I have as an (im)migrant woman with a similar history. Thus, this framework recognizes the influence of my own lived experiences in this work with that of the children and their stories. Rooted in the decolonial imaginary that Chicana Feminist scholar Emma Pérez (1999) theorized as a tool for deconstruction of Western
epistemologies, this framework weaves the work of Gloria Anzaldúa and Paulo Freire with Latina/o Critical Theory to inspire intellectual and corporeal decolonial understandings. More specifically, I will examine Gloria Anzaldúa’s borderland theory, Paulo Freire’s theories of critical consciousness, and LatCrit’s lens of intersectionality to illuminate a framework that disrupts the masternarratives of structural inequities that Latina/o Critical Theory expose, while inviting a “more whole perspective” of Mexican children, “one that includes, rather than excludes” (Anzaldúa, 1987, p. 2). Lastly, this framework imagines a “borderless conscientisazión” (Facio & Segura, 2011, p.177) where borders become bridges of understanding and community. In Azaldúa’s (1999) “mestiza consciousness” she calls mestiza women to act rather than to react (p.). This theoretical framework strongly rooted in Chicana feminisms and epistemologies is my taking action.

Rooted in Chicana feminisms. Chicana Feminism is born from the struggles for validation of Chicanas and Latinas whose contributions and epistemologies were excluded from the male-centered Chicano Movement and the white centered feminist movement of the 1970’s and 1980’s (García, 1989). This Chicana Feminist Movement invited dialogue to address racial, class, and gender oppression affecting Chicanas as women of color in the United States. It also opened the space for women’s voices and epistemologies to demand validation in academia. Chicana scholars began to (re)imagine theories, methodologies, and epistemologies as those that transform and heal while they disrupt Western knowledge. For instance, Anzaldúa (1990) called women to “occupy the theorizing space” and transform it with our own approaches and methodologies (p. 25) in order to be “loosed and empowered by theories” that previously “gagged and disempowered” us (p. 26). Theories and theory-making was closely connected to
power and the definition of knowledge. To hold on to theories meant to hold on to sets of knowledge. Thus, Chicana feminists insisted on the rewriting back into and at the same time away from theory. From this decolonial imaginary (Sandoval, 2000) comes Chicana Feminist theories that according to Davalos (2008), can be understood through six major (intersecting, fluid, and healing) themes. In the following section, I will briefly outline these themes in order to contextualize the theoretical approaches that drive this case study with children.

The first theme of Chicana Feminist thought encourages the use of autobiographical voice seen in the work of Moraga and Anzaldúa (1983), Anzaldúa (1999), Trujillo (1991), Alarcon et al. (1993), Anzaldúa and Keating (2002) amongst others. I use my autobiographical voice throughout this dissertation in order to emphasize the importance of conducting work that is personal. The second theme speaks to the transdisciplinary method that “surfaces in the structure and organization of the projects, as well as the stylistic blending of genres” (Davalos, 2008, p. 153). This is a “methodological innovation” that works against boundaries, “unapologetically,” for political and theoretical transformations.

The third theme is that Chicana feminist thought “emerges from collaboration and discussion.” Whether it is in single-authored books or anthologies, Chicanas arrive at powerful revelations through dialogue with educators, researchers, activists, and community members. For instance, in the anthology *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color*, Cherrie Moraga and Gloria Anzaldúa (1983) provide the space for an engaging and powerful dialogue amongst women of color from their multilayered identities and struggles. Scholars adopt the multi-methodological and theoretical approach of *platicas* [popular conversations] in their work (Godínez, 2006). Knowledge is also obtained from *consejos,*
cuentos, and la experiencia [advice, stories, and experience] (Elenes et al., 2001). For example, in one of my walks around Lou Orchards, I had a conversation with an elderly couple that shared with me their stories picking cherries years ago. They shared how en esos días [in those days], migrants would get a lot of help from organizations but today “ya se olvidaron de los migrantes” [they have forgotten about the migrants]. The gifted with many consejos [advice] including to “echarle ganas al estudio” [put in all I have into my studies].

A fourth theme of Chicana Feminism is the effort to “speak secrets” and break the silences that contribute to and are a result of internalized oppression. Sometimes the breaking of silence does not mean to literally break the silence, but rather, to listen to the silence and examine what is not being said and why. When examined, these “silences” reveal discursive practices (Davalos, 2008, p. 155) of the particular ways systemic oppression shapes the everyday lives of marginalized communities. For instance, the participant observations reflected “secrets” of gender norms and inequality that are not openly spoken about but are very much part of the experiences of children in the orchards.

The fifth theme is the ability to reconnect previously separate theoretical domains as in the example of Sandoval (2000) who seeks to bring together Third World women’s history of oppositional consciousness to hegemonic feminist scholarship. Under the sixth theme, Chicana feminist epistemology “inhabits a proactive space that does not seek approval, acceptance, or intellectual legitimacy” (Davalos, 2008, p. 156). Chicanas write and speak “without apology” (Torres, 2003).

*Recapping Chicana feminism*
Anzaldúa and Moraga (1983) describe Chicana Feminism as a “theory in the flesh,” to metaphorically illuminate the personal and political implications of this theoretical framework on the holistic self. In other words, this theory is lived and felt in the everyday—in the corporeal. It illustrates that the work we do as Chicana feminist scholars is always already political and engaged in social justice for all communities. This “theory in the flesh” inspires this study with (im)migrant children to be unapologetic, intentional, transdisciplinary, and resistant to hegemonic understandings of knowledge, research, and voice. From the *platicas* with parents and children in the orchards, I gathered stories of their lived experiences. *La experiencia* and *consejos* give me the validation needed to maintain that this work is important.

Throughout this study is my voice that speaks in a “we” to unapologetically honor my dialogic relationship with participants. While these Chicana feminist values are infused throughout this framework, I find my theoretical voice in the work of one Chicana feminist scholar whose theories transformed academia’s imaginary with a disorienting and healing new mestiza consciousness (Anzaldúa, 1999) that I claim as my own. Gloria Anzaldúa’s borderland theories invite my analysis to consider the internalization of the borderland experience that (im)migrant communities carry with them.

**Our psyches resemble the border towns.** Anzaldúa (1999) describes the borderland between the U.S and México as a “*herida abierta* [open wound] where the Third World grates against the first and it bleeds” (p. 25). Border towns become places of violence, ambiguity, and struggle for survival. Those that dwell on these bordertowns, the liminal spaces, are *atrevesados*, “the squint-eyed, the perverse, the queer, the troublesome, the mongrel, the mulato, the half-breed,” the mestiza/os, the immigrant, and the brown children whose experiences are relegated as
unimportant by master-narratives of Mexican people as criminals and invaders. According to this borderland understanding, the psyches of marginalized people resemble the border towns formed by the unnatural line between the US and México-identities are split by hyphens and intolerant politics. This Anzaldúan theoretical voice expands the discussion previously raised by Chicana Feminist scholars on internalized oppression to consider the painful borderland experiences of the psyche as a source of knowledge that heals and transforms. This knowledge, or *conocimiento* comes from *la facultad*, or the state in which those living on the margins, or the in-between, dwell. *La facultad* is the capacity to see “in surface phenomenon the meaning of deeper realities” (p. 60). This radical knowing of *conocimiento* is “connected with intuition and with an understanding of the natural world, as well as of our culture and our history” (Rebolledo, 2006, p. 281). Children are pivotal agents in the struggle for equity and equality who hold counter-hegemonic *conocimiento* that emanates from their lived experiences as dwellers in a borderland of cultural contestation, identity reclamation, and systemic oppression.

**Conscientización, Freire, and Multiple Readings of the World**

We must not bypass . . . that which educands [*sic*], be they children coming to school for the first time, or young people and adults at centers of popular education, bring with them in the way of an understanding of the world, in the most varied dimensions of their own practice in the social practice of which they are part. Their speech, their way of counting and calculating, their ideas about the so-called other world, their religiousness, their knowledge about health, the body, sexuality, life, death, the power of saints, magic spells, must all be respected (Freire, 1997, p. 85).
Amongst the theoretical and scholarly contributions of the educator, Paulo Freire is the critical understanding of praxis. Praxis is a creative liminal space, guided by theory and practice that seeks to transform the world through engaged action and reflection. While coming together in dialogue helps people gain knowledge about their social reality, Freire believed that dialogue alone was not enough; collective action and reflection, praxis, is pivotal in the transformation of societies. Praxis facilitates a critical awareness, or conscientização, of oppressed people’s social and political reality that reveals the injustices and dehumanizing practices that affect both the oppressed and the oppressor. This critical awareness also illuminates a critical way of being in the world—a being with the world and with others (Freire, 2007).

In education, this being with others involves a dialectical relationship between teacher and student where teachers learn from students’ experiences and their ways of being with the world. Freire “learned to understand [his students] better by listening to them” (Freire, 1997, p. 20). Thus, Freirian theoretical approaches to learning involve a conscious listening to the lived experiences of children to understand the ways children read the world. Children hold lived experiences and understandings of the world beyond the classroom space. Progressive educators, in the words of Freire, cannot “underestimate or reject” the knowledge children have from their lived experiences (p. 84). To do so, “occasions epistemological error” because the children’s world “in the last analysis, is the primary and inescapable face of the world itself.” Educators in democratic education should not impose or situate their frameworks around their own reading of the world because there are other “readings of the world” that ought to be validated and respected (Freire, 2007, pp. 111-112). In other words, the knowledge and understandings children hold are rooted in a cultural context that is pivotal in social justice education. Mexican
American children “read the world” in ways situated in culture, history, *familia*, and community-knowledge sits in these diverse readings of the world.

**Weaving Anzaldúa and Freire: Recognition of Place and His/herstory**

Unlike other theories that seek to understand the complex experiences of Latina/os in the U.S, Chicana epistemologies embrace the historical implications of mestizaje on the identities of Mexican/Chicana/o people in the United States. Part of these implications is the *indigenismo* [indigeneity] that has been historically withheld from the consciousness of the Mexican people by classist and racist discourses of “progress” and “modernization” (Batalla, 1996). To create a borderland theory, Anzaldúa reclaimed these indigenous knowledges to validate the experiences of mestiza women and in doing so, imagine a framework for healing, renewal, and transformation of a community that has been colonized physically, mentally, and spiritually by Western binary systems.

Indigenous epistemological considerations of theory, practice, knowledge, stories, and place are particularly useful in this study with Mexican American children of (im)migrants’ and their narratives in orchards. For example, that mestiza/o Mexican (im)migrant communities place strong value on land, relationship, and community (Urrieta, 2003) reflects the intimate ways indigenous values are still present in this community’s cultural fabric. Engaging in teaching and learning that values indigenous epistemology and other non-Western knowledge systems opens dialogue for people to share their own stories, build community, and critically discuss social justice concerns. Thus, Anzaldúan theory and its reconcilation of the indigeneity in Mexican history to current lived experiences of Mexican American communities, is useful in this study with children of (im)migrants. The splitting borderline does not remove this his/herstory and
cultural knowledge from Mexican (im)migrant communities in the U.S. In fact, as scholars in immigration studies (Reese, 2001; Suarez-Orozco, 1995) demonstrate, immigrant families “create their own infrastructures for development, including mechanism for the education of their children that capitalize on rather than devalue their cultural resources” (Molls & Ruiz, 2009, p. 362). Families draw from a “dual frame of reference” to survive in the United States—a constant comparison of the “here” versus the “there” (Suarez-Orozco & Suarez-Orozco, 1995). They draw from cultural knowledge such as that reflected in their relationships with community and place.

In Freire’s understandings of education as a reading the word and the world is a consideration of the importance of context and place in teaching and learning for social justice. An Anzaldúan indigenous epistemological understanding coupled with Freirian being with the world reveals that learning is intimately tied to place and that place is in turn connected to culture and his/herstory. For mestiza/o (im)migrant communities, however, this “place” is complicated, ambiguous, and always shifting. In fact, neoliberal and globalization politics coupled with colonization creates a diaspora condition for Latina/o communities that, in the words of Anzaldúa (1999), make these communities “like turtles” that “carry home on [their] backs” (p. 43). Nevertheless, (im)migrant communities, like many in the diaspora, survive in the land they move to by (re)creating spaces that honor their dignity as human beings. Places that are rooted in oppression are reclaimed to trigger self-reflection and (re)connection to culture, history, and memories of land and community. In this framework, I consider Keith Basso (1996)’s theorizing of place as sites that “possess a marked capacity for triggering acts of self-reflection, inspiring thoughts about who one presently is, or memories of who one used to be, or musings,
on who one might become” (p. 55). With that important understanding, this framework illustrates that being in the world “implies being with the world and with others” (Freire, 2007, p. 33). This is not to say that people do not have lived relationships on their own with places. However, places are bridges between the present realities of people and the cultural and historical memories, or the *conocimiento* (Anzaldúa, 1999; Anzaldúa & Keating, 2002) that immigrant communities bring across the border.

In order to provide a theoretical framework that invites a deep examination of hegemonic narratives engrained in structural systems, I also draw from Latina/o Critical Theory tenets to compose a framework that (re)connect individual experiences to educational systems.

**Latina/o Critical Theory**

Latina/o Critical Race Theory (LatCrit) emanates from gaps Latina/o/Chicana/o scholars find in Critical Race Theory (CRT). For scholars like Francisco Valdes (1996), Jean Stefancic (1997), Sofia Villenas (1996), Donna Deyhle (1995), Daniel G Solórzano (2001), and Tara J. Yosso (2002), CRT alone does not suffice to completely understand the lived experiences of Chicana/o/Latina/o communities in the U.S. CRT’s interdisciplinary framework interrogates ideologies, narratives, institutions, and structures through an intersectional approach of oppression and identity. Latino/Latina Critical Theory, however, focuses its examination and understandings onto the particular cultural, historical, and political experience of the Chicana/o/Latina/o community “with a progressive sense of a coalitional Latina/Latino pan-ethnicity (Valdes, 1996). With this said, it is important to recognize that LatCrit is compatible yet not competitive with CRT (Delgado Bernal, 2002). “Instead,” as Valdes states, “LatCrit is supplementary, complementary to [CRT]. LatCrit . . . at its best, should operate as a close
cousin—related to [CRT] in real and lasting ways, but not necessarily living under the same roof” (Delgado Bernal, 2002, p. 109).

Like Chicana Feminism, LatCrit scholars find that a critical understanding of Latina/o people in the US is gained through a lens of intersectionality that include culture, language, national origin, phenotype, and immigration status in order to completely understand the experiences of the marginalization of Latina/os. LatCrit, however, gives me the tools to analyze the role power has in the construction of communities’ narratives. Drawing from LatCrit, this study views the experiences of Mexican American children of (im)migrants as intersectional, complicated, and racialized. More specifically, LatCrit (drawing from its roots in CRT) interrogates whiteness. Moreover, attention is drawn to the active resistance to hegemonic masternarratives when children are viewed as “creators and holders of knowledge” (Delgado Bernal, 2002) – a counter narrative that disrupts deficit theories in education and society.

The main components of Latina/o/a Critical Theory can be summarized as:

(a) the production of knowledge, (b) the advancement of transformation, (c) the expansion and connection of struggle(s), and (d) the cultivation of community and coalition (Fernández, 2002, p. 48)

These components illuminate the capacity of LatCrit to deconstruct oppression while it imagines a praxis of possibility for (re)creating community through the centering of counternarratives. LatCrit allows this study to (re)connect its critical examination of children of immigrants with the systematic oppression that shapes the experiences of Mexican communities. It deconstructs the dominant narratives that confine communities of color to racist, gendered, sexist, classist, homophobic, xenophobic, Capitalist, and colonial understandings. It then recognizes these
categories “not only as social constructions but also as categories that have material effects on real people” (Fernández, 2002, p. 46). Woven with Anzaldúaan “theory in the flesh” and Freirian pedagogical considerations of lived experiences and place, this theoretical framework invites creative praxis that emanates from a spiritual, physical, and intellectual desire to name our community’s and personal pain, heal, then (re)create social change within and across borders, building bridges within and across communities. LatCrit, then, is an important component of this theoretical framework to compensate Anzaldúa and Freire.

Together, these theories form a framework in the decolonial imaginary that allows for a critical understanding of children’s experiences as counter-hegemonic and intersectional.

**Conclusion: Praxis of Transformation and Healing with(in) the Borderlands**

Breaking out of your mental and emotional prison and deepening the range of perception enables you to link inner reflection and vision—the mental, emotional, instinctive, imaginal, spiritual, subtle bodily awareness—with social, political action and lived experiences to generate subversive knowledges (Anzaldúa & Keating, 2002, p. 542).

In the “new Latino diaspora” (Haman, Wortham, & Murillo, 2002; Murillo & Villenas, 1997), (im)migrants reside in a “third space,” where they contest and negotiate between the old and the new. In this “Latino diaspora,” societal structures are sites “for the construction of community identity and inclusion, but they can also be sites that exclude Latino newcomers through the persistence of nonresponsive policies and the failure to build on newcomers’ existing funds of knowledge” (Haman, Wortham, & Murillo Jr., 2002, p. 7). Children in central Washington are members of these diaspora communities, and thus, their experiences are complicated and multi-layered. Race, culture, language, and discourses of (im)migration shape
their daily lives along with the neoliberal and capitalist logic of the orchards. To further complicate their experiences is the marginalization they experience as children in adult-centric frames of examination and understandings. Thus, this theoretical framework is intersectional, historical, cultural, and inclusive of a child-centric positionality that is valued by poststructural feminist scholars such as Nancy Lesko (2012) and Bronwyn Davies (2014). I draw from LatCrit, Anzaldúa theory, and Freirian contributions to critical pedagogy to construct a theoretical movida, inspired by theoretical and political “movidas—revolutionary maneuvers toward decolonized being” (p. 140) in which Chicanas and other women of color engage. In Spanish, a movida is also movement. Thus, a theoretical movida is a taking action (Anzaldúa, 1999) for transformation, decolonization, and healing.

The primary strand to this theoretical movida is the counterhegemonic practice of counternarratives. LatCrit interrogates intersections of oppression through the use of counternarratives. Hegemonic knowledge is disrupted with these counternarratives used as a tool for concrete cultural-political action while they simultaneously offer marginalized communities a space to be heard. Similarly, Chicana scholars recognize that there is knowledge en la experiencia [in experience] and those personal experiences can then help develop “praxis of transformation” (Keating & Gonzalez-López, 2011). These approaches serve to place Mexican American children of (im)migrants as holders and creators of knowledge.

The second strand of this theoretical movida is the lens of intersectionality. LatCrit and Chicana epistemologies emphasize intersectionality as an important frame that allows for more holistic examination and understandings of marginalized communities. This intersectional positionality illuminates a “consistent reconsideration of multiple social positions—not just race,
gender, class, and sexuality, but also language or (im)migration—and the ways in which these intersections are changed by varying social realities” (Davalos, 2008, p. 165). Mexican American children’s intersectional identities reflect ethnicity/race, gender, power relations with adults, as well as the experience of (im)migration (and the imbedded discursive practices they come with). When examining the narratives of (im)migrant children in orchards, this intersectional framework helped me understand their experiences as multi-layered in terms of the subordination of the communities they represent, as well as the knowledge that is (re)created with those lived experiences.

Children’s experiences are shaped by race and racism. In a study that seeks to learn from Mexican American children, a critical understanding of race and racism in both its institutional form as well as its internalized form continues the work of scholars who seek to destroy the “simplistic and racialized stereotypic view of Mexican communities” (Villenas and Deyhle, 1999, p. 427). Children, like many Latina/os, experience internal conflicts caused by discursive messages in stereotypes about Mexican communities. For instance, in La Guerra, Cheríe Moraga (1983) speaks to her own internal struggle:

I have internalized a racism and classism, where the object of oppression is not only someone outside of my skin, but the someone inside my skin. In fact, to a large degree, the real battle with such oppression, for all of us, begins under the skin (p. 30).

Gender is an important category that shapes the lived experiences of children in orchards as well. Like racism, systemic gender norms and expressions of femininity/masculinity are internalized and represented in the daily lives of children. An intersectional examination with(in) the Mexican/Chican/o community, views gender oppression as intimately and deeply tied to the
colonial history of patriarchy that Anzaldúa (1999) seeks to heal from. Gender oppression is also intimately tied (and difficult to separate from) institutional hegemonic narratives that LatCrit helps me unveil. Orchard work is a gendered experience that holds different norms for boys and girls. Some norms are spoken and others are constrained to a “silence” (Davalos, 2008) that a critical analysis from a Chicana Feminist frame skillfully and strategically exposes. Moreover, these discursive messages of race and gender are intimately tied to concerns of class that Bettie (2014) argues is a fluid structure that is “not simply reproduced but constantly recreated and cocreated with processes of racialization and gender and sexual formation” (p.194). In other words, class is a performance and a “relational identity” contextualized in communities.

The liminal space where multiple identities/experiences intersect is, in Anzaldúan (1999) theory, a borderland. For instance, Mexican (im)migrant children dwell in a borderland of multiple cultures (Mexican and American culture), generations (as a 1.5 generation), and languages. Anzaldúa argues that a borderland is both a site of splitting, an “herida abierta” [an open wound], and a place of transformational conocimiento (1999; Keating & Gonzalez-López, 2011). She theorized that the pain and struggle experienced in borderlands of the psyche can lead to conocimiento through a cyclical journey of learning and unlearning. This framework draws from this Anzaldúan understanding that struggle can lead to conocimiento but I add that struggle is knowledge that can help us understand the ways systemic oppression shapes the everyday lives of people. Borderland experiences can take us through a journey that leads to critical understandings of the world. But the struggle, contestation, pain, and complexity in and of itself is knowledge that can help us understand systemic oppression, the ways it is resisted, and imagine the ways we can (re)shift.
In Anzaldúaan theory, borderlands can become bridges with(in) and across communities and experiences. In the anthology, *this bridge we call home*, Anzaldúa and Keating (2002) continue the *platica* from *this bridge called my back: Writings from radical women of color* (1983) but here they begin to explore the concept of “bridging.” In the preface, Anzaldúa states: “Twenty-one years ago we struggled with the recognition of difference within the context of commonality. Today we grapple with the recognition of commonality within the context of difference” (p. 2). In this anthology, Anzaldúa and Keating seek to create bridges between women of color and white people and between women and men. While women of color always need safe spaces where we can name our pains and heal, Anzaldúa believes that:

- Staying ‘home’ and not venturing out from our own group comes from woundedness, and stagnates our growth. To bridge means loosening our borders, not closing off to others.
- Bridging is the work of opening the gate to the stranger, within and without . . . . To bridge is to attempt community, and for that we must risk being open to personal, political, and spiritual intimacy, to risk being wounded (p. 3).

This process of bridging is to embrace difference and to recognize interconnection between and with(in) communities. Bridging is about transformations (Keating & Gonzalez-López, 2011), relationships, and community. It involves personal, political, and spiritual growth in the journey towards social justice for marginalized communities. Bridging includes the relationships between children and adults, between children and other children, and between/with(in) communities.

While the concept of bridging provides transformative potential for (re)building community and personal/political healing, bridges draw from the liminality of the borderland.
space. This liminality is the complex, painful, yet potentially healing site that Anzaldúa first theorized is a borderland space. I expand this theorizing of the borderlands to consider that this complexity is knowledge (rather than a path to knowledge) that invites critical understanding of the world. The creative and positive is as much conocimiento as the complex and the painful. It is this conocimiento of the world that can bridge people and communities. This is a praxis of healing and transformation with(in) borderlands—theory and practice that draws knowledge from the oppressive to reclaim cultural knowledge and human dignity.

This praxis of transformative borderlands learns from the stories and lived experiences of creativity and oppression of children. It exposes counternarratives in the form of testimonio to disrupt deficit theories that construct exclusionary knowledge. By allowing the experiences of children and their conocimiento to educate us in strategies for building cultural and political action, we can build bridges between and within each other as children, parents, teachers, researchers, and community. Thus, bridging offers possibility for creating dialogue and praxis of transformation where the hyphen between Mexican and American, like a borderland, is a place of “double-saber” [double-knowing] (Anzaldúa, 1999).

My “theory in the flesh” is rooted in Gloria Anzaldua’s borderland theories woven with Paulo Freire’s understandings of consciousness and Latina/o Critical Theory, to compose a theoretical framework that validates experiential knowledge and recognizes narratives as political and pedagogical tools for praxis and social justice in our communities. This case study with Mexican American children of (im)migrants necessitates a framework that serves much needed social justice purposes to disrupt violent majoritarian narratives of Mexican children and
their communities, a framework that exposes children’s *conocimiento* (Anzaldúa, 1999) and “readings of the world” (Freire, 1997).
CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

I drove up the driveway after close to forty minutes of searching for Phillips Orchards and the first face that looked over my way was that of a white woman—a woman I knew was the *patrona*. A part of me desperately wanted to say, “nevermind, let’s go.” I was nervous and scared but I knew I could not go. I had to stay. (Personal notes, July 2014)

As I reflect on my journey into the orchards I visited during the summer of my data collection, I remember that feeling of anxiety and fear when I first arrived in the orchard. I feared not what the community would ask or how they would feel about my presence; I was afraid of having to speak to the bosses, who were always White. I was afraid of being asked too many questions, afraid I would not be able to answer them, afraid I would lose my trust in my ability to speak (Anzaldúa (1999) writes about Mestiza women’s trust in our ability to write), afraid I would be silenced and the door to this research opportunity would be closed. Even during the third time of entering an orchard, I still was afraid of White people and would try to avoid them, especially white men whose power was often exerted in more visible ways. As I reflect on this feeling, I ask myself: Why? Why did that fear have such effect on me? Why did I allow that feeling to take over the feelings of excitement and wonder I had when entering the different orchard spaces? Why did the whiteness of the orchard owners spark such fear and anxiety?

I ask these questions even when I already know the answers. The whiteness of the owners was accompanied with a knapsack of power (McIntosh, 1989) I knew far too well not to brush off. When I approached the orchards, my body reacted almost instinctively. Was it an instinct of survival? Here I was in what I felt was a comfort zone, where my own family has worked for years, and yet, it was the bosses, the white bosses who had the control and power not only over
what the workers could or could not do, but over me and what I could or could not do. I was confronted by the property of whiteness that I did not possess and that Critical Race Theory describes contains “value for its possessor and conveys a host of privileges and benefits” (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012, p. 174). That many of my family members have given the orchards years of labor does not give them these privileges and benefits. But, as I'll describe later, they do learn to negotiate with this whiteness.

The process of obtaining approval from the Institutional Review Board was difficult, but nothing compared to the arduous process of walking my body out of my car towards the white woman whom I imagined was eagerly waiting and ready to tell me “we are not hiring at this time−” as if the only reason my brown body was there was to search for work. With all these feelings and thoughts and those I still cannot articulate, I get out of my car and walk towards her. I listen to the “still small voice” telling me: “you must always confront that which you fear” (Interview with Luisah Teish in Anzaldúa & Moraga, 1983, p. 222). I remind myself that in my pocket I have years of academic preparation and in my body is a whole life and herstory of lived experiences. I walk determined to mask my fear with the “I-know-what-I’m-talking-about” that has so often been questioned in school and society.

I begin my methodology discussion with this narrative for a couple of reasons. For one, it illuminates one of the “beginnings” of my research—particularly of the observations. It was part of the process of gaining access and obtaining consent. Secondly, this narrative reflects my positionality, always already part of my framework, feelings, and thinking throughout this process. That positionality, which I will share in more depth later in this chapter, is racialized and gendered—both often shaped my interactions with individuals in the orchard along with my
own self-awareness. I could never remove myself from my research. Thirdly, this narrative illuminates the challenges of power and representation. I recognize that I can never capture my participants’ worlds directly, but that instead I can “only capture representations of it” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011, p. 244). Such representations are shaped by both my positionality and by the power structures infused in the culture of the orchard. Glesne (2011) states:

A life as told is a representation of that life; the life and the telling are not the same.

Rather, the narrative—the telling or the writing—is always an interpretation of other peoples’ lives, an interpretation that qualitative researchers struggle with representing (p. 244).

The fourth reason I begin this chapter with a narrative on my feelings towards the orchard owners is because it reflects the challenges I faced being both an “insider” and an “outsider” in my research. This hybrid identity placed me in a liminal space of privilege and marginalization—I was both like the workers and unlike the workers. While the majority of the people in the orchards were Mexican, power was still concentrated in the few White owners whose presence was felt even when they were physically not around. The moment I pulled up the driveway, the presence of the white owners reminded me that even if I was a “researcher” in the academy, I was also Mexican (with all the historical, cultural, and political baggage this identity holds).

My methodological journey was in a constant movement back and forth and in the dancing, I was learning and growing with my participants and the place of the orchard. The epistemological considerations of viewing research as a ceremony (Wilson, 2001) helps me make sense of my back and forth dancing throughout this methodological journey of observing, interviewing, reflecting, and reciprocating what was offered to me in this work. Ceremony
“allows a raised level of consciousness and insight into our world” and like a ceremony, the purpose of research is to “build stronger relationships” (p. 137) between children and adults, Mexican communities and surrounding communities, and between me and my participants. This study is about relationships—both in my reflective examinations and the data gathered from my participants.

While I was constantly learning and growing with the stories of and moments spent with my research participants (and the community of the orchard that welcomed me,) I was also constantly learning and growing as a researcher. And so this is the methodological dance I took.

This chapter illuminates the methodological journey of learning, growth, and struggle I faced conducting research with my community. Here, I demonstrate ethical and responsible ways researchers can represent the lived experiences of participants—particularly of children. I speak to what it means to be in relation with participants. But before this discussion, I must frame my work within the traditions of critical qualitative research inquiry.

**Setting the Stage: Qualitative Research**

Qualitative research is a form of inquiry that “stresses the socially constructed nature of reality, the intimate relationship between the researcher and what is studied, and the situational constraints that shape inquiry” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011, p. 8). Proponents of grand theories of “truth” and objectivity often question the rigor of qualitative research particularly through a politics of evidence. These politics emerge from a belief that there is *an* empirical science that is corroborated by evidence. While this debate continues, some qualitative researchers insist that qualitative and quantitative research are not contradictory or opposing—both forms of inquiry serve different purposes and can be used together as in mixed methods. Nevertheless, many
qualitative researchers are concerned not with a politics of evidence, but with an “ethics of evidence” that requires researchers to question how evidence is obtained and what it means (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011, p. 10) for the researcher and the participants. The tradition of positivism, the science that believed “the song of the world could be reported but not sung” (Glesne, 2011, p.241), is questioned when concerns of positionality and ethical representation begin to open new possibilities for research.

**Representation.** Not only have researchers debated the “rigor” of qualitative inquiry, but for years they have discussed amongst each other how to best represent the other and disrupt European imperialist and colonialist research that was “born out of concern to understand the exotic, often dark skinned ‘other’” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011, p. 3). Researchers engage and reflect on efforts to redefine and (re)create this tradition of research. Scholars (Fine, 1994; Murillo, 1999, 2003 Villenas, 1996) urge an examination of the raced, gendered, aged, and classed positions when speaking about others because as Denzin and Lincoln state: “There are no objective observations, only observations socially situated in the worlds of—and between—the observer and the observed (p. 12).”

Within the “transgressive possibilities” of “how to represent the other” surges my own work. How does one that is an “Other” begin to conduct research that has roots in Western colonial traditions? How does an “Other” begin to research her/his own communities? Does this work perpetuate the othering (Fine, 1994) of these communities? This struggle is contextualized within the colonizing history of Qualitative research and a Western urgency to explore the colonial, exotic, Other. The Orient, as Said (1978) explains, was “a system of representations framed by a whole set of forces that brought the Orient into Western learning, Western
consciousness, and later, Western empire” (p. 142). This system of representations shaped the way the Orient, with its civilizations, peoples, and localities, was just there (p. 132) as an idea created by the Occident. To begin discussing data representation within a qualitative inquiry, we must begin by acknowledging that it has been those in power who examine, speak, document, and reproduce the lives of the non-Western Other (Anzaldúa, 1999; Bernal, 1998; Hill Collins, 1986). Critical qualitative researchers question the right to study and describe others and insist on a constant re-examination of the purpose of our research, along with the researchers’ obligations and responsibilities to the communities we study (Glesne, 2011, p. 262). Researchers must be cognizant that how we represent others has consequences (p. 245); therefore, it is important we see ourselves as “co-creators” of knowledge in relationship with our participants.

Years after Villenas (1996) named the colonizer/colonized dilemma, I am still challenged to (re)think my experience of “work[ing] the hyphens” (Fine, 1994) of self and other. I entered the orchards highly aware of the potential inner and outer struggles I would experience as a result of conducting research with my Mexican community, especially because I would be in orchards where the majority of the workers were either family members or acquaintances. While I was determined to engage con corazón [with heart] in listening and speaking with orchard workers, I was highly aware that I would be looked at differently because even though I was a participant observer (and had a cherry picking bucket around my waist), I also had a pencil and notebook and had the freedom to stop picking whenever I chose to.

Walking through the cherry orchards, observing, and participating in the work, I continuously reminded myself of the reciprocal relationship I was in with the people in this place. To conduct research with rather than on is a decolonizing practice scholars in critical
qualitative studies insist on. For instance, Shawn Wilson (2001) invites us to consider what it means to be in relation with our participants:

As a researcher you are answering to all your relations when you are doing research... you should be fulfilling your relationships with the world around you. So your methodology has to ask different questions: rather than asking about validity or reliability, you are asking how am I fulfilling my role in this relationship? What are my obligations in this relationship?

(p. 83)

My obligation as a researcher is that of relationship, respect, reciprocity, and responsibility to a community that contributes greatly to the economy of this state and nation but is continuously dehumanized by scapegoating. The racialized space of the cherry orchard exists within and because of an “imperialist white supremacist capitalist patriarchal corporate world” (hooks, 2014); thus my relationship with this work is driven by a desire to transform dominant discourses of orchards and Mexican communities—particularly children. Spivak’s (1988) states that we must stop trying to know the Other or give voice to the Other (Scott, 1991) and listen, instead, to the plural voices of those Othered, as constructors and agents of knowledge” (as cited in Fine, 1994). This consejo [advice] forms part of a collective call amongst researchers and educators of color seeking to disrupt deficit thinking and majoritarian narratives (Bernal, 2002; Valencia, 2012).

It is a researcher’s responsibility, and a vital strand of qualitative research, to constantly reflect and recognize that we all speak from particular positions as we conduct research with our communities. For Hall (1990), that representation of selves is always politically situated, but can be personally negotiated. All that we write and speak is done from a particular place and time;
it is always in context, positioned (p. 392). Denzin and Lincoln (2011) summarize the ways positionality is woven in the research process as follows:

Behind these terms stands the personal biography of the researcher, who speaks from a particular class, gendered, racial, cultural, and ethnic community perspective. The gendered, multiculturally situated researcher approaches the world with a set of ideas, a framework (theory, ontology) that specifies a set of questions (epistemology), which are then examined (methodology, analysis) in specific ways. . . . Every researcher speaks from within a distinct interpretative community, which configures, in its special way, the multicultural, gendered components of the research act (p. 11).

Positionality. Today, I had an interesting conversation with a woman from town. I encountered her as I was walking to the centro from my house (I had English class today). The mujer asks, out of nowhere, “you should teach me how to speak like you.” She wanted to learn “our language” because she thought it was “nice” and we spoke so well. I sat and began conversing with her about a series of things. She told me about how her family and many people in the town and in México suffered. “Tenemos poco que comer” dijo la mujer [we have little to eat, said the woman], “You may all eat well, but that’s because of who you are,” but it’s not the way we all eat. (Personal notes, March 23, 2011)

I met this elderly woman in Toluca de Guadalupe, Tlaxcala during my life-changing four-month journey through México as an undergraduate student. I was leaving the house I lived in and where I had just finished co-teaching an English class to children in the community. On my way to the community center where I studied US/Mexico relations, I was stopped by the elderly
woman who wanted to know if I was also a *gringa*2 like the rest of the group I was with. I tried to explain to her that I did come with the group but that I was not a *gringa* because while I was raised in the United States, I was born in México (I found myself often defending my Mexicanness in this trip). But it seemed that for her, what mattered was that I was able to “*hablar como ellos*” [speak like them]. While I was often defending my Mexicanness and rejecting a *gringa* identity, I was reminded by this woman, of the complex positionality I hold because of being able to “speak like them.” As an academic, I have access to particular spaces of privilege and power. At the same time, my gendered, classed, and racialized self is tied to individual and structural marginalization and oppression that inevitably shapes my everyday encounters.

My identities are intersectional, fluid, cultural, political, and historical. I am a 1.5-generation (Rumbaut 2004 & Gonzales 2010) bilingual immigrant (and daughter of immigrants) in the United States. I am the great granddaughter of guest workers who worked the fields in California and New Mexico in the 1930’s and 1940’s. I was born Mexican and raised Mexican American, became Chicana politically and intellectually, I am Latina “at times,” and Hispanic “when I have to be” (Urrieta 2003). When I am in México, my *Mexicanness* is questioned even though I am a fluent Spanish speaker. I am an “American” when abroad (Urrieta, 2013) but in certain places (i.e. the Middle East) this Americaness is also questioned, as my physical traits do not fit neatly in dominant narratives of what an American looks like.

2 A common term used by Mexican people to refer to United States citizens, especially referring to blonde and white skinned people who speak English
I critique dominant discourses of power and privilege, but I am no stranger to the world of academia, because I speak English, I speak academese, and because I have the ability to cross into these spaces and inhabit them. From here, surges the complexity of my positionality because even if I speak English, I am never American enough. While being in the academy, I am not academic enough. I am still an Other in the eyes of dominant society. Thus, my positionality dwells in-between Western traditions of qualitative research and the reclamation of third-world scholars seeking to “occupy the theorizing space” in order to transform it with our own approaches and methodologies (Anzaldúa, 1990, p. 25). My positionality is that of a researcher who is both an “insider” and an “outsider.” I situate my methodology in Fine’s (1994) words: “Our work will never “arrive” but must always struggle “between” (p. 75). My identity in the hyphens is yet another “borderland” (Anzaldua, 1999) splitting Mestiza women in academic spaces—it is another layer of a hybrid identity I embrace and use strategically. Perhaps this hybridity makes me “more vulnerable to the very oppressions we are fighting against,” but, as Anzaldúa and Moraga (1983) beautifully wrote “our vulnerability can be the source of power—if we use it” (p. 195).

A positionality of being an “insider” warrants examination particularly because of the ethical dilemmas that can arise. These ethical dilemmas of conducting research within our own community are discussed by Glesne (2011) who states that at times “moving into a new culture is easier than studying your own” because “when you are already familiar with a culture or group or school, your angles of vision are narrowed by pre-formed assumptions about what is going on” (p. 41). There are also biases that as “insider” researchers we must seek to minimize. For Groves (2003), “researchers who study their own have been suspect of deviating from the
research project’s purpose” because of these preset assumptions and biases (p. 103). Moreover, researchers must be highly conscious of the decisions we make for those can have a tremendous effect on the communities we are trying to honor with our work. For instance, while this work is “strength oriented” (Pardo, 1998), I have to be careful that in trying to humanize the work and experiences of Mexican communities, I do not romanticize the work in the orchards and in doing so negate injustices and oppression.

While “researchers cannot control positionality in that it is determined in relation with others,” we can be more mindful of the decisions we make which can affect those relationships (Glesne, 2011, p. 157). One of the choices I often made related to the language I used when describing my research or my education. I had a responsibility to honor the community in the orchard and not make them feel less than or invalidated. I had a responsibility to “my own personal history, but also [to] my familia’s generational history” (Urrieta, 2013, p. 323) to honor and respect the knowledge and understandings of my participants.

Perhaps the most complicated experiences conducting this research project emanate from my positionality as a woman. Not only does being a woman shape the perception others had of me, but it had a major influence in my internal struggles—particularly throughout the data collection phase during which I was confronted by the normalized male chauvinism and a deeply rooted patriarchy that reflect the “malestar de mi cultura” (Anzaldúa, 1999, p. 43) and the work that is still to be done. Embedded in these gender dynamics are systemic power structures that are reflected in the daily practices of people in the orchard. In one case, I received suggestive remarks from a man that were not only uncomfortable but extremely inappropriate particularly because he did so in front of his daughter. After I hesitantly answer no to his heteronormative
questions of whether I had a “boyfriend,” or was “married,” he responded with “That’s too bad that I’m married, or I would fix that.” After being made extremely uncomfortable, I respond with walking away and not continuing with my efforts to include this man and his daughter as participants. In this instance, my choices as a researcher were influenced by my insider understandings of the ways patriarchy plays out in our Mexican culture. I will examine the gender dynamics and patriarchy in chapter five as another “borderland” struggle that shapes the lived experiences of children in orchards.

Along with the internal struggles and methodological decisions, my gender has also shaped the perceptions participants and the orchard community had of me. As Suárez-Orozco and Suárez-Orozco (2001) demonstrate, in many immigrant families there is a higher expectation for girls to do well in school than boys. In fact, studies show that (im)migrant girls are more likely to complete high school than boys. This research invites me to consider if my gender had implications on the ways I was perceived and if this contributed to my acceptance into the space. While I did not explicitly ask this question, my positionality as a woman in a cultural space with deep roots in Patriarchal norms holds many implications for research.

**Language.** A conversation I had with my mother years ago made me conscious of the power of language. After calling herself “uncivilized” for not being able to understand my “speaking so well”, I came to learn that without realizing it, my language changed when I entered higher education. New words and discourses were added into my lexicon. As a first-generation college student with a working class family, I wear different hats that I have to learn to use strategically. As an aspiring activist-scholar, part of my responsibility is to ensure that my language is connected to the spaces and people I am in and with. This research required that I
navigate within and between the orchard (defined by the community and relationships of Mexican people) and the academy. I needed to learn to communicate effectively and respectfully with my participants, who are also members of my community. The ways this looked differed between adults and children—I had another level of awareness when speaking with children in order to ensure that I did not invalidate children’s experiences.

Language is a key part of my positionality. In the methods section, I will describe the role of language in building trust with participants, gaining access, and in the interviewing of participants. The way I write and the terminology I choose is another aspect of language I use strategically. For instance, non-Western methodologies and epistemologies necessitate using more humanizing terminology. Rather than using “data,” I use “stories.” I speak of doing research with rather than on communities.

Throughout this dissertation, I embed Spanish words in my writing for two reasons. For one, it is a political act that seeks to disrupt “English-Only” policies and discourses that continuously target Latina/o populations. Second, the inclusion of Spanish words reflects the ways I think, speak, and experience. Even though I can speak only English or only Spanish (depending on the space I am in), in my mind and heart, I am in Spanglish.

Immigrating pa’l norte³.

Much of how I understand the world revolves around my immigration story. My family and I, like many in the “Latino Diaspora” (Worthham, Murillo & Hamman, 2002), immigrated out of México to the land of opportunity that my mother hoped would bring us more educational

³ To the north
opportunities. An important strand of my positionality is that this immigration story started not when I physically crossed the border, but with the constant crossings in which my great-grandfathers partook as guest workers—crossings that have caught my family in a *ni de aquí ni de alla*, an in-between two worlds that often uses a “dual frame of reference” (Suárez-Orozco, 1995) for cultural survival.

The turning point of my story happens in 1993 when I physically crossed the border at the age of five and a half. That I vividly remember the events around this crossing at such a young age is reflective of the deep effect this had on me. The memories range from the image I had in my five-year-old mind of what crossing to *el Norte* would entail, to the actual experience of crossing the Mexico/US border as one of my uncle’s children. I remember my aunt crying before we left, the *migra* [border patrol] flashing his flashlight into the car my four-year-old brother and I were in, and I remember the mesmerizing lights once we were *al otro lado* [the other side]. In many ways, the “child-centered perspective” (Grover, 2004) I draw from in this study—that views children as collaborators in research and allows them to share stories of their lived experiences—is inspired by the vivid memories I have of this immigration experience. To build trust with my children participants, it was important to get back into my own child shoes.

**Methodology and Oppositional Consciousness**

My mother and *abuelitos*, especially *mi mamá Esperanza*, remind me that it is important to stay grounded. Thus, I learn from the *consejos* from indigenous scholars in my braid of research about respectful research practices. Moreover, Chicana feminist epistemology’s focus on oppositional consciousness helps disrupt hegemonic Western practices with a *Methodology of the Oppressed* and other Chicana feminist epistemologies keep my work political (Sandoval,
As Vicky Ruiz (1998) stated, “picking up the pen” is a political act. The methodology for this study borrows from Wilson’s (2009) values of respect, reciprocity, relevancy, and responsibility in order to create a process that like indigenous methodology “adheres to relational accountability” (pp. 77, 99). Storytelling is a methodological practice that can help generate empirical materials grounded in the everyday world of research participants.

Narrative inquiry. Clandinin and Connelly (1990) discuss narrative inquiry as the study of the ways human beings understand the world. An important part of this inquiry is the relationship between the researcher and the participant, “constructed as a caring community” (p. 4). This relationship is important for “negotiating entry” into the community in order to obtain narratives. Denzin and Lincoln (2011) state that “narrative inquiry can advance a social change agenda” and that “wounded storytellers can empower others to tell their stories” (p. 415). When the relationships between the researcher and the participants are established (ethically), the stories have the ability to become “stories of empowerment” (Clandinin & Connelly, 1990, p. 4). Narrative inquiry is a key method for collecting and analyzing data when social justice is the goal and motivation of our work. Narrative inquiry allows me to honor the struggles and knowledge of children and their families and at the same time contextualize these struggles within social and systematic inequality. As Denzin and Lincoln (2011) state, “telling stories of marginalized people can help create public space requiring others to hear what they don’t want to hear” (p. 415).

Testimonio as praxis rooted in a methodology of the oppressed. Chela Sandoval’s (2000) Methodology of the Oppressed presents a methodology that is “formulated and taught out of the shock of displacement, trauma, violence, and resistance” which “insists on the differential
understanding and enactment of power” (p. 76) and that surges from an oppositional consciousness Anzaldúa (1999) names “La conciencia de la mestiza.” This research is a result of my own “oppositional consciousness,” seeking to provide a platform to the underrepresented narratives of Mexican American children of immigrants. Rooted in my mestiza consciousness and “sitio y una lengua” (Pérez, 1993) [A place, a language], I use a particular form of narrative that is political, educational, and theoretical. Theory and practice meet in the strategic tool of testimonio that draws from cultural and counter-hegemonic knowledge.

Narratives serve as teaching and learning tools in diverse spaces outside of academia, particularly within the traditions of critical qualitative research inquiry. For instance, narratives have been used as political and cultural tools in social movements such as the indigenous Zapatista movement in México that uses la palabra [the word] as a framework in their projects for consciousness, autonomy, democracy, dignity, and culture. Narratives in these movements are personal and as Chicana Feminist scholars argue, the personal is political. In efforts to engage with work in this personal/political interconnection, Chicana feminist scholars use testimonio as method and pedagogy. I use testimonio as a methodology in this study because it “provides modes of analysis that are collaborative and attentive to myriad ways of knowing and learning in our communities” (Bernal, Burcigua, & Flores Carmona, 2012, p. 364).

Testimonio is a form of narrative that is rooted in the socio-political struggles of Latin American people and in the oral tradition situated in the indigeneity woven in our his/herstories. Testimonio, a “means to bring about change through consciousness-raising,” has often been a voice “from the margins or the subaltern” (Bernal, Burciegua, & Carmona, 2012, p. 364). I use testimonio as a particular form of narrative that is both theory and practice—a praxis
that challenges Eurocentric “timbre of research protocol” (Alemán, 2012, p. 493). It is a “bridge” between our lived experiences as brown bodies in our communities with those experiences and positionalities in academia. *Testimonio* acknowledges that our experiences are intimately connected to the experiences of the communities we research *with*. Moreover, it ensures that we hold ourselves responsible for representing those communities and experiences ethically and with respect.

Systems of domination are maintained by the power of dichotomous oppositional constructs (Hill Collins, 1986). The relationship between the Western world and the “orient” is one of power and hegemony. The third-world other was “discovered” to be oriental, but most importantly, it was “made” Oriental (p. 133). When we use narratives critically and strategically (as *testimonio*) in efforts to decolonize, we disrupt the ways previous narratives *made* our communities into the exotic Other. This is the role of the counter-narratives, counterstories, *testimonios* and oral histories embraced by scholars in Latina/o Critical Theory and Chicana Feminism (Bernal, 1998).

Embedded in a methodology of *testimonio* as praxis are critical deconstructions of power and its relationship to knowledge. Power lays not so much in the individual as “in a certain concerted distribution of bodies, surfaces, lights, gazes; in an arrangement whose internal mechanisms produce the relation in which individuals are caught up” (Darder, Baltodano, & Torres, 2009, p. 202). Power plays an important role in a methodology that uses narratives strategically, particularly in a place (orchards) where power is contested. The narratives shared with me in this research exist within particular discourses of power. Children illuminate how power plays out in their lives and in the relationships with(in) and across communities. In this
dissertation, I examine the ways that power and culture shaped children’s relationships in/to the orchard as well as to school.

A case study. Scholars (Baxter & Jack, 2008; Flyvbjerg, 2011; Stake, 1995, 2008; Yin, 2003) demonstrate that case study is a methodology in its own right that has contributed greatly to the empirical world of research. Stake (1995) defines case studies as the “study of the particularity and complexity of a single case, coming to understand its activity within important circumstances” (p. xi). Woven with narrative inquiry, a case study consists of one or multiple narratives; the case study is also a story in and of itself.

Yin (2003) states that researchers should consider case studies when: 1) seeking to answer “how” and “why” questions, 2) participant behavior cannot be manipulated, 3) seeking to cover contextual conditions important to a phenomenon being studied, and finally, there are unclear boundaries between the context and phenomenon. This study with Mexican American children of (im)migrants examines: 1) how children learn; 2) what they learn; and 2) why that learning is important for the disruptions of majoritarian narratives of both children and the Mexican community. I observed participants in their act of picking cherries. A case study was chosen because the “case” is the learning of children, but the case could not have been considered without the context, the orchards. It is in this setting that I was able to understand the lived experiences of children and the lessons that they gather from being in orchards during the summer.

A case study is focused on an individual unit (Stake, 2008) with set boundaries (Flyvbjerg, 2011, p. 301). The unit can be “individuals or organizations, simple through complex interventions, relationship, communities, or programs” (Baxter & Jack, 2008, p. 544). This case
A critical case study. While conventional ethnography asks the questions “what is,” critical ethnography opens the possibility of “what could be” (Thomas, 1993, p. 4). A case study that borrows from the traditions of critical ethnography is a case study with a political purpose that reflects upon and examines culture, knowledge, and power. In the analysis of this sort of case study, the researcher must connect the work to broader structures of social power and control (Thomas, 1993) while it also examines the ways systemic oppression shapes the everyday experiences of people. The case will provide a counter-narrative in order to disrupt dominant discourse and in doing so reveal social, political, and educational inequality that needs to be addressed and changed. Those circumstances are particularly central for critical case studies that have “strategic importance in relation to the general problem” (Flyvbjerg in Denzin & Lincoln, 2011, p. 307).

A critical case study holds the emancipatory aspect of Critical Ethnographic methods to situate a study in social inequities and inequalities. The case I “explore” is rooted in the state and national phenomenon of immigrant demographics and xenophobia that is studied across disciplines. I look at the experiences of children in orchards through participant observations, interviews, and focus groups. I also examine historical documents to understand how these orchards came to be highly productive, labor intensive, and sites of White property and control in
this county. This work is then discussed in relation to social justice projects of more inclusive and culturally responsive understandings of Mexican children.

**Addressing Credibility and Trustworthiness**

To establish credibility and trustworthiness, I continuously asked myself: How do I become a familiar figure? As an insider who has access to people and resources outsiders might not have, I relied on the relationships I already have with the community through my extended family. These relationships allowed me to gain access to orchards and the workers—particularly because all the supervisors in the four orchards were family. Once I was immersed in my study and had developed relationships with a few participants and key people in the orchard, I relied on word-of-mouth to find more participants. I was highly cognizant of the importance of building trust with each one of my participants in fulfilling my role in the relationship with my community. I began by obtaining permission from families (either mom or dad, or both) before engaging in conversations with children. When working with (im)migrant communities, it is pivotal that researchers are cognizant of the possibility that participants might be undocumented. Thus, presenting ourselves as educators and researchers who are not representing government agencies is important because the undocumented status of many families places them in a position of vulnerability and fear.

To build trust with children, I spoke with clarity and respect. I shared stories of my own childhood and experience picking cherries. I was intentional with sharing stories that made them laugh. Doing this helped me establish rapport with my children participants. According to Fraser et al. (2004), when doing research with children, there are two important aspects of the research relationship that must be considered and constantly reflected upon—power and ethics. Thus, the
power relation between the child and adult is one that I was constantly reflecting on in order to ensure that I did not silence the voices of the children participating in this study. As Christensen and James (2000) state, research is always about relationships and, relationships with children ought to be defined by respect and reciprocity. I often reminded myself that “the time [children] devote to our research agendas is a gift, and one which [I] should be prepared to reciprocate” (Roberts, 2000).

Research Methods and Critical Case Study

Participants. This critical qualitative case study focuses on children and their learning from their experiences working with their families in cherry orchards. My individual unit of analysis (Stake, 2008) is a small group of children who identify as Mexican American and are children of immigrants. The “set boundaries” (Flyvbjerg, 2011) are four cherry orchards within the county of Rio. My participants were identified through my ethnographic method of participant observation journey in four orchards in Rio country—most of them were referred to me by family or acquaintances working in cherry orchards. Some participants were identified through a snowball sampling method that Glesne (2011) states: “Obtains knowledge of potential cases from people who know people who meet research interests” (p. 45). I used my understandings of the ways Mexican communities build trust and connect with each other to identify participating children and adults. Relying on these understandings allowed me to build relationships with my participants (parents and children), orchard owners and supervisors (who were all Mexican themselves). I relied on these cultural understandings, along with my familial relationships with key employees to gain access to the orchards.
**Data collection methods.** My data collection methods sought to provide a platform for children to share their experiences being in orchards with their families. My data was gathered using critical ethnographic and narrative inquiry-based methods: participant observations, interviews, and one focus group. Qualitative researchers commonly use multiple methods, or triangulation, as a useful strategy that helps reveal “new dimensions of social reality” and expose the complexity of participants’ lives (Glesne, 2011, p. 47). I conducted a focus group to help me better understand the complex ways students’ position themselves in relation to each other. My field notes consist of a researcher reflection journal and an observation journal that together make up over sixty pages of notes. My field notes were a way to “take active recording” to demonstrate my own construction of events in the orchards (Clandinin & Connelly, 1990). At times, rather than writing in my observation journal, I recorded thoughts and observations into a voice recorder I carried with me every day in the orchard. During the transcription process, I learned from my words, my silences, and the background noises.

I conducted interviews because as the researcher I was hoping to “reach areas of reality that would otherwise remain inaccessible such as people’s subjective experiences and attitudes” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011, p. 529). The interviews were informal with open-ended questions. According to scholars of narrative inquiry, interviews are to be conducted between the researcher and participant, transcripts are to be made, and meetings are planned for a continuation of the discussion (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990, p. 5). While the meetings in my study consisted of only one post individual interview focus group, I hope to reconnect with at least a few participants and their families to keep them informed on the process of this work.
To establish trust with participants and practice reciprocity, I conducted participant observations (Glesne, 2011) but in a unique manner. I “participated” with helping the children and families pick cherries. I would pick next to children for anywhere between 30 minutes to an hour at a time before I moved on to work next to another group of children. At times, I would spend the whole work shift with one family, depending on whether they were the only children in the orchard that day. I choose to conduct participant observation because I found it to be the most appropriate and ethical method in a site of work where wages depend on the amount of cherries picked. I did not want to inconvenience or take time away from the family by asking questions as they worked. This method of participant observation helped me gain a more comprehensive understanding of the whole experience of picking cherries. Moreover, I chose to help families pick cherries because I understand the difficulty of this work and picking cherries was a responsible way of thanking the families for their participation in this study.

Infused in the dialectical relationship with my children participants is the belief that my role in that relationship is of a co-creator of knowledge. Much of my understandings examined in this study emanate from the transformative experience of picking cherries next to the children. I learned from the narratives that were shared (and which I reciprocated with the sharing of my own stories of my family, education, and experiences around orchard work) and from the act of physically standing next to children underneath the cherry trees with buckets wrapped around our waists as we picked the cherries from the branches that surrounded us.
Observations. Participant observations were conducted in four cherry orchards in towns within thirty-five miles of each other in the same county—Río County. The total combined population of all three of the towns—Mountain Town, Milestone, and Kline—is close to six thousand. The workers in the orchards were, however, from many different towns in the surrounding area—traveling from as close distance as 10 miles to as far as 30 miles. The orchards were selected based on a few factors. First, cherry orchards were chosen because it is the main source of employment during the summer in this region. In fact, many migrant workers (like my participants from central Washington) come to the area from different areas in WA, Oregon, and California just for the summer to pick cherries.

The second reason I selected these particular orchards was the familial ties I have with all of them. In the image below I illuminate the relationships that allowed me to gain access to the four orchards.
Figure 2. Relationships gave me access to orchards

My first step of gaining access to the orchards was through family. In all four of the orchards, the relatives employed in the orchards had a positive relationship with the orchard owners; thus, trust and access was not difficult to obtain from the orchard owners. Two of the orchards’ supervisors were uncles of mine. Another was a distant relative who immediately made the connection to my mother and grandfather when I came in the orchard and introduced myself. While gaining access to the orchards was facilitated by my relationship with orchard supervisors, as I illuminate in the beginning of this chapter, it was still a challenge to obtain permission from the orchard owners. In the first orchard, my uncle already had spoken to the owners. When I arrived, he introduced me as: “This is the niece I was talking about.” The second orchard was small enough that there was no supervisor, and it was the owners who directly supervised the work. Thus, I had to establish trust with the owners on my own. I used my familial ties to several
of the pickers to demonstrate I was not a threat. In fact, the way I introduced myself was “I am niece of…” rather than “I am a researcher from…” In retrospect, I realize that these familial ties helped me ease out the tension of the insider/outside positionality I was continuously reflecting upon throughout my data collection time.

While familial ties supported my access and gaining trust with participants, the power dynamics (that I became more aware of when I removed myself from the orchard space) in the orchard had important implications on methodological decisions I took while conducting observations. The narrative in the beginning of this chapter illuminates the way whiteness as property affected my experience in the orchards. Along with race and whiteness, gender dynamics and norms shaped my decisions and relationships with workers in the orchard. As Figure 2 illuminates, the majority of the supervisors (or in the more gendered term ‘foremen’) and owners were men. While at least one supervisor in every orchard was a relative, I was still expected to obtain permission from the owners of each orchard. I was more afraid of speaking with the male owners than I was speaking with the female owners. In fact, I would often avoid them when I was in the orchard and in most cases, I relied on the women (their wives or daughters) to help me obtain permission. In retrospect, it is interesting to note that the women felt a need to obtain permission from their fathers/husbands even when they too were “owners” and decision-makers in the orchard. Many children warned me of the power the owners held when they referred to the boss as “el señor,” with a change of voice that suggested their own understandings of the power relations.

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4 The man
In the last orchard (Hilly Orchards), I did not have to speak to any of the owners. I was clear that my uncle’s position gave him enough freedom to make decisions on his own. It is interesting that this particular uncle was also known by many of the orchard workers as being strict in his interactions with workers. While I will examine these practices in more depth in Chapter 4, what is important to note here, is that my observations provided me with important understandings of the complicated experiences that dwell in the orchard.

The third reason these orchards were chosen is rooted in the seasonal and unpredictable nature of cherry picking. Cherry picking can last anywhere between a few days to a few months depending on the size of the orchard, the amount of fruit, unpredictable weather (extreme heat and/or rain can damage the fruit), number of workers in the orchard, or plagues or infections on the fruit. The first orchard I visited had work for two weeks, the second was done in five days, the third lasted two weeks, and the fourth was cut short from the anticipated month to three weeks because rain and intense heat damaged the majority of the fruit. In order to examine the experience of a few orchards, my observations in the first and second orchard overlapped. In one case, I relied on the help from participants to determine which orchard to go next because I wanted to follow their next move.

My note-taking consisted of a few steps. I had a journal that I carried with me every day and made notes in at different points during the work shift. I purposely carried a small enough notebook to fit in my back pocket because I was trying to blend in as much as possible. I was also afraid that carrying a regular size notebook with me would make workers uncomfortable. Whenever comments were made or interesting events would take place, I would walk away from the picking site, find a spot under a cherry tree and take notes. I would also do this at the
beginning of the shift, middle, and near the end to record as many details from the day as possible. My notes in this small journal, however, were brief (since the work shift was limited, I wanted to spend as much time around people as possible). Therefore, most of my long and detailed notes were recorded after the shift in my house. Along with the small notebook, I carried a small recorder that I would speak into every once in a while. When I arrived home, I sat and reflected on the events of the day by reading my notes and listening to my recordings. I wrote these reflections into another journal that I used for personal reflection and which strongly guided my dissertation writing.

**Interviews with children.** I interviewed 12 children from the ages of seven to fourteen. While I was initially planning on staying within the age range of five and ten, once I was out on the field, things changed. For instance, my one fourteen-year-old participant asked to be interviewed and form part of the study (I will share more about each participant in another section). The variety in ages helped give me a broader understanding of the ways children articulate and understand particular experiences from different vantages of childhood. This also gave me an understanding of the multidimensional reality of children in cherry orchards.

My interviews were conducted in two places. I interviewed Ivan, Noely, Celina, and Zaida in the orchard under a cherry tree about thirty feet from where the workers were picking. The experience of interviewed these children under a tree is summarized in the following observation reflection:

> Interviewing here has such a different [experience] than being indoors. Sitting under this tree gives me a sense of comfort I did not feel when inside the first participants’ home. At the same time, I [have to be] more alert of what is going on around me. The smell of trees, grass,
and fresh air is great. I am so thankful for this opportunity—which was completely unplanned but makes perfect sense, really. (Personal notes, July 10, 2015)

I interviewed Julian, Itzel, and Clarisa in the migrant campground where they were living for the season. Julian and I sat in chairs near one of the RV’s. When I came to interview Clarisa and Itzel, I was welcomed by Clarisa who led me to the section she had ready for the interview. We sat on two chairs in the corner between her RV and another. This space, enclosed with a few sheets, also served as the “kitchen” for the family because it is where the stove stood.

The rest of the children were interviewed in their home. Gabriel was interviewed in his home. Yanira, Estrella, and Anahí invited me to their house a few days into my observations. They preferred to be interviewed there instead of the orchard. Parents were not present during the interviews in none of the cases. When I visited Yanira, Estrella, and Anahí, their parents decided to step out so that the girls felt more comfortable speaking.

**Focus group interview with children.** The focus group took place in the basement level of the only Catholic Church in the town where a few of my participants lived (it was close to the city where a few more participants lived). While all children (with their parents’ consent) agreed to take part in the focus group, only six attended. The only students invited to this particular focus group session were the youngest children. Nevertheless, the ages of the children who participated were between seven and eleven; thus to ensure that the younger kids were engaged, I posed specific questions to the younger participants. While I did not experience moments where older children took over conversations, I often respectfully invited all the children to listen attentively. Midway through the focus group, we paused on the discussion to engage in an
activity that invited participants to draw or write about what they learned in the orchard and what they liked and didn’t like about the orchard. I specifically asked them to write a question they wanted to ask the group. Doing this appeared to reenergize the group and fostered a sense of collective learning. Children were excited to read their questions to each other.

I have attached the interview questions used for interviews and focus groups in Appendix B.

**Interview with parents.** Two parents were formally interviewed during this study. A few others were interviewed informally in the orchard as they picked cherries. The two parents that were formally interviewed were the parents of children participants in my study. The purpose for interviewing parents was primarily to have a secondary source of information of the children’s experiences in the orchards. Since it is parents who bring the children to the orchards, it was important that I hear from their own experiences and perspectives. Interviews with parents also gave me clarification and more complex understanding of children’s stories, culture, and history with/to orchards.

**Meeting my participants.** To do research with rather than on communities entails being intentional in the ways we represent our participants. In other words, we need to do all we can to humanize our participants throughout the research process. In this section, I provide brief portraits of the participants I interviewed to emphasize the central role these stories have in this work. In the table below, I provide a list with participant names and the three markers: ages, sex, and whether they have been in the orchard before. These three markers helped me have a more contextualized and multi-layered understanding of the children’s experiences situated in age differences, gender, and whether they had work in orchards, previously. The latter marker was
chosen because there was an interesting difference in the way children with prior experience in
the orchards spoke about their work in the orchards.

Table 1

*List of Participants and Significant Characteristics*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Have prior experience in the orchards?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gabriel</td>
<td>12</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Estrella</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>Girl</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Yanira</td>
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</tr>
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<td>Anahí</td>
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<td>Girl</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Celina</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>Girl</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ivan</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Noely</td>
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<td>Girl</td>
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<td>Zaida</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clarisa</td>
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<td>Girl</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Itzel</td>
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<td>Girl</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Julian</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>Boy</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sandra</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>Girl</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Gabriel. Gabriel is the oldest of three sons in his family. He was born in Wenatchee, Washington and comes with his immigrant parents from México to the orchards. He is fluent in Spanish and English but often spoke more in English. At the age of twelve, he has already picked in cherry orchards for almost five years. Throughout the interview, Gabriel illuminated these experiences as he spoke about having a good understanding of the work processes and when he expressed tremendous pride in being a much better picker now than when he was “just a little kid.” During the time of the interview, Gabriel was no longer going to the orchards with his father as he had done before—his dad was injured in a Pear orchard months before. This summer, Gabriel was picking alongside an uncle and his grandfather. After moving through a few orchards, Gabriel and his uncle moved to Hilly properties where I observed him for a few days.

When asked to share about his family, his responses revolved around the centrality of work in his family. For instance, his first response focused on the injury his father experienced months before and which has left him unable to work. He shared that his mom was working “a lot of hours” in a cherry packing factory.

Gabriel understands cherry picking procedures as he clearly described the process from when the fruit is picked to when it is taken to a factory to be packed. He felt that it was useful having this understanding; in fact, he felt proud of all that he had learned about the orchard. He believed his dad began to take him to the orchard:

To learn what it feels to do work, what it feels, how it’s going to do when you’re older. Whatever you’re going to be. . . . To teach me how to work, so when I’m older I can get a good job. Know what to do in my job. (Personal communication, July 2, 2015)
Nevertheless, one the parts Gabriel enjoyed the most in the orchard was being able to play with his cousins—especially those he did not see too often.

Many of Gabriel’s responses spoke to a relationship between school and work that I’ll tease out in a later chapter. However, what was interesting was that while Gabriel understood what it meant to “work hard” and not “waste time” to make more money, he also saw the orchard as a place that taught him the value of “not giving up”—a value that he believed was highly useful in other activities such as basketball (Gabriel is a great basketball player!). It also taught the value of doing well in school.

I was in awe with Gabriel’s discussion on the ways the orchard helped him understand mathematical concepts that were being taught in school. He particularly spoke about having a better grasp of angles. He described knowing obtuse and acute angles “which help [him] with the ladder, you have to keep it at [the right] angle.”

I was also intrigued by Gabriel’s care for his family and the wellbeing of the collective. For instance, when I asked him what he would change in the orchard, he explained that he would cut down the trees that do not have cherries because

We need to have a lot of cherries to make a lot of money cause sometimes it just takes your time, cause like trees only have a few and you gotta [sic] get up the ladder, put the ladder, and it takes your time (Personal communication, July 2, 2015).

**Yanira.** I met fourteen-year-old Yanira and her family (including her two younger sisters who are also participants in this study, Estrella and Anahí) after my cousin José (my informant at Zin orchards) pointed them out on my first day observing in this orchard. I remember feeling extremely nervous when I walked towards the family—this was the first orchard I visited and
potentially my first participants. The first image I have of Yanira is of her laughing and talking with her two younger sisters as they picked cherries. On the tree to their right was her mother picking en las barbas (in the bottom of the tree) and their father (who was hardly visible) picked in the top of the cherry tree. At first, I was hesitant to approach them because from afar they seemed to be older; as I got closer I realized they were all very young. All three girls were very inviting when I approached them.

Yanira is tall and softspoken with thick, curly hair. She has a clear understanding of her family’s financial struggles that motivates her to pick. I picked alongside Yanira and her family for five days. During this time, I learned from the family’s stories of immigration, work, education, and family. Unlike her younger sisters, Yanira was often on task. During lunch breaks she would sit to eat with her sisters but would immediately return to picking after she was done even when her younger sisters continued sitting.

In my observations, I noticed Yanira was often on her own, concentrated in her own picking as her little sisters picked next to each other and talked. Sometimes when it seemed that Yanira was not paying attention to the conversations her little sisters were having, suddenly she would jump in with a comment or question. While Yanira was often picking cherries, she did play with both of her sisters, especially the middle one. Yanira would throw a cherry at one of her sisters and laugh with the deep laugh I could hear from afar. While I witnessed a few moments when Yanira would disagree with her little sisters, she was often keeping an eye on them and would remind them, especially the youngest sister, to get back to work. During our interview, Yanira demonstrated caring for her younger sisters.
I think one thing that I would change is like let the kids like stay in the car for a while like in the morning because sometimes it gets really cold like this morning there was a lot of wind. . . . Sometimes in the morning I notice my sisters don’t work really hard like my younger sister Estrella she sits on the floor and her bucket. She is not really energized that much until later on (Personal communication, July 8, 2015).

The summer of this study was Yanira’s second summer picking cherries alongside her two parents. In our conversations, Yanira shared a strong love for her parents and desire to help them work so that they could someday accomplish what seemed to be all three of the sisters’ dream—to buy a house. One of the stories Yanira shared with me was of their move from Chicago, Illinois to California, Nevada, and eventually Washington. Her parents lost their jobs, cars, and house after the company they worked for closed and as a result they left in search of new opportunities. Yanira states that the family likes Washington because unlike Chicago “it’s calm and quiet not a lot of violence that happens [there].”

Like Gabriel, Yanira illustrates a relationship between orchard work and school. When I asked her what things she learns being in the orchard she stated:

I learn how money is earned like how hard you have to work like its either that or go to school learn new things. And if you don’t want to go to school, there is always the orchard.

Anahí. Anahí is an intelligent eleven-year-old and the second oldest of three. While Anahí was quieter than her two sisters, when provided the platform, she had a lot to share. She often asked me questions about what I did and why I did what I did. After our conversation about the orchard, she asked me if I liked the orchard, and I responded that I felt the same as many
children; I liked some parts of it and did not like others. It took me longer to build trust with Anahí compared to her sisters, and I found that she enjoyed when I shared funny stories with her about my childhood or my experiences in the orchard. Doing so would trigger her to ask me questions or she would begin to share her own stories. As I got to know her more, I learned that she spoke her mind a lot more than her sisters. She often asked her parents why they did not look for a job that was not as hard. At the orchard, Anahi would be the one to ask when they would finish picking.

Anahí described the orchard as a hard job, but one that was important for her to do because her parents, particularly her mother, often reminded her why it was important. When I asked her what her duties at the orchard were, she responded:

I pick cherries and my mom tells me that we have to go to see how it’s like if you don’t study and where you have to go if you don’t want to study. (Personal communication, July 8, 2015)

Later in the interview she returned to this point of connection between the orchard and school when she states that if “you’re in school and you don’t try hard, you’ll have to go to the orchard where it is really hot.” Anahí cares about her family’s wellbeing and like her sister Yanira, she has a clear understanding of the economic struggles that brought her parents to work in orchards in Washington State. For this reason, Anahí was determined to work hard in school and not work in the orchard in her future.

*Estrella.* Eight-year-old Estrella loved to sing and share stories—she was hardly silent. When she was not asking questions, Estrella would be singing or humming a song. At the orchard, Estrella was the one I often talked with since it was she who often had questions for
me—What am I studying? Why did I choose that? Have I been to Silverwood? Estrella’s favorite part of the orchard was lunch, although she wished it were earlier because she is “usually hungry” earlier. Estrella and her three sisters loved bread and chocolate spread.

Her two older sisters were much quieter than she was, and often it was through Estrella that her sisters formed part of our conversations or games. As we picked, we played games that Estrella made sure to manage so that we would not get off track. Her strong and inquisitive attitude was present in everything she did.

Although Estrella would play with her second oldest sister more often than with her older sister, she would be on her own a lot of the time as well. When I interviewed her, she shared that she did not like it when her older sister threw cherries at her. Yet, in my observations, I noticed that in her playful self, Estrella would pick up cherries from the ground and throw them at both of her older sisters who would either laugh about it or throw a cherry back.

When I was interviewing her, Estrella answered in short comments, but would surprise me every so often giving me a longer answer. Whenever family was the topic, she was eager to respond. For instance, when I asked her why she liked picking cherries, she responded

So we can get more money like we can earn money and put it in the bank so we can buy a house.

While Estrella is the youngest in her family, she knows her parents’ struggles well and is willing to help as much as she can. Her parents are important to Estrella and she likes that they had “friends to talk with” in the orchard. Like her two older sisters, Estrella felt that the orchard taught her about working hard and doing well in school.
We learn that it’s not easy to earn money so we don’t waste our money on like things we don’t need. And mostly that.

**Celina.** I met eight-year-old Celina in Johnson Orchards where she was hanging out with her younger sister, Noely and cousin Ivan. The three were walking around the orchard, laughing and talking with each other. When I approached them, they told me they were returning from the bathroom but “got lost.” Celina’s charismatic smile and willingness to help is something I remember quite clearly. While she is only two years older than her seven-year-old sister, Celina took care of her younger sister and scolded her when she felt her sister was not doing what she needed to do. I interviewed Celina, her sister, and cousin under a cherry tree in the orchard.

When Celina’s father arrived at the orchard at around five in the morning, Celina stayed in the car sleeping until close to eight. Once she was out of the car, she looked for her dad in the orchard and sat on boxes close to him for another short while before she put on a bucket to pick. Her younger sister stayed in the car sleeping until Celina’s dad asked her to go wake her up. Like Gabriel, Celina had a clear understanding of the “right” ways of picking—to ensure that stems are not removed from the cherries. She picked for a long while and it was often not until her cousin, Ivan, came by that she stopped picking to either accompany him to the bathroom or play. After a while of doing that, however, Celina came back to her picking routine. While Celina liked to play with her cousins, sometimes she did not like that Ivan came by and talked a lot to her because he “asked a lot of questions,” and sometimes her “dad gets [them] in trouble.”

Celina’s favorite part of the orchard was that it had a lot of “space to play” with her cousins. They played games like “witches and sticks,” hung out in the room designated as a kitchen, or in their parents’ car. Witches and sticks was a game that consisted of children
pretending to be witches with the power to cast spells and transform people and sticks into other things. They began by picking a “good” stick from the orchard (any stick was good, depending on how the child felt). They then walked around using their sticks as magic wands to cast spells on each other. A little five-year-old boy and relative of Celina transformed me into a frog.

Along with enjoying the space to play, Celina liked being able to spend time with her dad. She believed that her dad took her and her sister to the orchard to pick and to keep him company. She states:

> Sometimes we keep him company. And then he usually misses lunch and he gets all shaky so usually when we have our lunch he makes us make him something so he can have lunch.

The one thing that Celina disliked about the orchard and wished she could change were the rules. She thought the rule that prohibited running was unfair and did not make sense because it took a long time to get to the bathroom. Not being able to run there made the trip take more than five minutes. Further, asking people to not yell seemed unfair and counter-productive for Celina because as she stated “everyone who works here yells at each other to communicate. How else will people communicate from one tree to another?

**Ivan.** As the youngest child of four children and the only son, nine-year-old Ivan often shared about his family and his role as the youngest child. I met Ivan in Johnson Orchards and remember Ivan as the one often walking around looking for his cousins to play or talk with. Ivan picked for periods of ten to fifteen minutes before he put the bucket down and wandered off. If his cousins were sleeping, Ivan would get inside his dad’s car and play with the radio station. Male adults made fun of Ivan for not picking and instead choosing to hang out in the car. He was
also made fun because he often asked his female cousin to take him to the bathroom since he did not know supposedly how to get there alone. Nevertheless, Ivan made sure to tell the adults who made fun of him that he did not care what they thought of him.

The summer I met Ivan was his first time picking cherries at the orchard. His favorite part was being able to play with his cousins, “run around and go places” and “meet people.” While he felt that there was a lot he still did not know about the orchard, he was already quite aware of the “bad” things he was not supposed to do in the orchard because “the man gets mad at you.” Ivan felt that even though picking cherries was very hard, “in the end it’s really worth it because you get all the money.” Ivan felt that adults like his father wanted him to learn about this work so he could get a job and make money. But he definitely enjoyed the fun moments with his cousins Celina and Noely—especially the time when they forgot a soup in the microwave and remembered to take it out when it was already full of mold.

**Noely.** Noely is a playful, curious, and imaginative seven-year-old. She often wanted to play her favorite game of “witches and sticks” with her sister and cousins because it was fun being able to do “anything [they] want” and “cast spells.” One day, Noely invited me to come play with them and was very excited about casting spells on me, turning me into different animals. The game allowed the imagination of the children to run free in the midst of the hectic work conditions.

When the family arrived at the orchard early in the morning, Noely stayed sleeping in the back part of their car. A few hours later, her sister Celina came by the car to wake her up. During my observations, I saw Noely pick only a few times. Most of the times she did not carry a bucket but would instead put the cherries she picked directly on the box. She would pick a few cherries,
then stop and play. When I came by to pick with them, Noely was excited that I was helping. I carried the picking bucket around me and Noely and I would work together to fill my bucket. After every box we completed, she would excitedly tell her dad who responded with laughter and “that’s good.”

Like her sister Celina and her Cousin Ivan, Noely’s favorite times in the orchard were when her cousins played with her. Her least favorite times were when her dad told her to pick; nevertheless, she had learned that “picking cherries isn’t that bad.” If she could change something in the orchard, Noely would turn the trees into candy and the leaves into cookies. She would share with everyone in the orchard.

**Zaida.** My interaction with Zaida was brief compared to my other participants in Johnson Orchards. On days Zaida came to the orchard, she was often in her car playing with her five-year-old brother, or sleeping. At times, Zaida would play games with her cousins Ivan, Celina, and Noely. Unlike Celina, Noely, and Ivan, Zaida came to the orchard with both of her parents. All of her siblings (her older sister and younger brother) were also there. The summer I met with Zaida was not her first time in the orchard. She remembered the first time at the orchard feeling nervous because she did not know how many boxes she would be able to pick. She was proud for all that she had learned since her first time at the orchard—she knew strategies on how to pick and was a much better picker.

Like many of my participants, Zaida recognized the difficulty of the work. It was tiring and the boxes were heavy, but she liked that she could make money. Typically, parents pay their children for what they work, sometimes a bit more. Like her cousin Noely, Zaida loved playing ‘witches and sticks,’ because she could turn anything into whatever she wanted. Zaida would
turn the orchard into candyland and would change the cliff near the orchard “so no one would fall.”

**Clarisa.** Clarisa is the second eldest of four children. Like most other participants, Clarisa is bilingual, but feels more comfortable speaking in Spanish. Our interview was in Spanish and in it, I learned just how intelligent this nine-year-old is. Clarisa’s experience in the orchard is very different than all the previous participants because her family is not from the area. Her family members, like many others in Lou Orchards, are migrant workers from Pate, Washington who came to the region solely during the cherry season. During the time of the interview, Clarisa was living in the orchard’s campground that consisted of seven small RV’s, a dishwashing area, two portable toilets, and four washing stations. After work, families (mostly women and children) gathered in the center of the campground to talk and share stories (I was once invited to join a family for lunch).

I met Clarisa and her family when I was walking through Lou Orchards observing and searching for children. Family is central for Clarisa and her relationship to the orchard, particularly the campground. She enjoyed being there because she could spend time with her parents and siblings. She states: “Sometimes we don’t have enough time just to be with them.”

Clarisa and her older brother Joel like to compete with each other on who would fill the most boxes each day. During our interview, Clarisa shared that she competed as it helped make things more enjoyable. Nevertheless, when we talked about her brother, Clarisa seemed saddened at the fact that her brother now acted differently and did not play with her as they used to do (it seemed to relate to her brother getting older). One of her favorite memories was when they were younger and they would work together and laugh at different jokes.
Most of the experiences Clarisa shared, particularly what she enjoyed the most, connected to the experience of being migrants and living in the campground. For instance, one of her favorite parts of this experience was playing games with all the kids in the camp in the nighttime—they felt free running around through the orchard. Like Gabriel, Zaida, and a few other children, Clarisa was often thinking in terms of community and a collective good. When I asked her what she would change in the orchard, she described a swimming pool and water slide where all workers could relax and have fun. She added that adults, even the boss, deserved to relax sometimes.

**Itzel.** When I think of Itzel, I remember a little girl carrying a homemade picking bucket, which was really a gallon-size jug her dad had made for her. Itzel wanted to pick, but the buckets were too heavy and big for her to carry. She tried a few times to carry her dad’s extra bucket, but was never able to manage carrying it for too long. So one night she asked her dad to make her something she could use to pick.
Itzel is a talkative, curious, and playful seven-year-old who absolutely loved her siblings, especially her baby sister. While Itzel hardly picked cherries, she did, however, help her parents by bringing the boxes closer to them when they asked. Itzel would pick a few cherries, and then would wander off and lay down under a tree to sing or talk with herself as she stared at the tree above her. Itzel loved to ask me questions about what I liked to eat, to play, to do, and so on. She was very fun to talk to because she always shared thought-provoking ideas. For instance, one day she asked me what my favorite shape was. After I told her that my favorite was circles, she said: “my favorite is a heart.”
Julian. Julian is one of the most intelligent eleven-year-olds I have ever met. Like Itzel and Clarisa, Julian was also a member of the migrant families living in the campground during the picking season at Lou Orchards. When he picked cherries, he concentrated on his work. Every once in a while, he talked with his older sister picking next to him. Julian’s family has been coming to Lou Orchards for the past few years. His father had stayed in Tri-cities working as a truck driver. His mother and sister would leave the RV around five in the morning to pick at the orchard. Julian would stay sleeping for another three hours until he woke up on his own, got ready, and walked to the orchard to begin his picking day.

Julian felt that picking was both easy and hard. The climate made it very difficult to pick and the buckets got heavy on his back. However, Julian developed strategies that helped him in the picking. He felt that orchards taught him how to value the things he had and the work his parents did. He often spoke about enjoying being outdoors because he felt that people did not spend enough time outdoors. He says:

In one way, it helps you from exploring the world because I seen like about [so many] butterflies flying by here and they were different types. And I found a lady bug in one of my cherry buckets (Personal communication, July 17, 2015).

Julian was very interested in talking about the environment and the effect gas has on it. He felt that it was important to be more aware and he wanted to someday work with the environment so he could “help make the world a better place.”

Writing Myself Into Knowing

An experience is something you come out of changed. If I had to write a book to communicate what I have already thought, I'd never have the courage to begin it. I write
precisely because I don’t know yet what to think about a subject that attracts my interest.

In so doing, the book transforms me, changes what I think (Foucault & Trombadori, 1991, p. 27).

In the conversation between Michel Foucault and Duccio Trombadori (1991), Foucault remarks on Marx’s thinking about writing and the process of the “write-up.” Just like Foucault describes writing as a process of coming to know ideas, qualitative methodologists consider the writing process as part of the methods in which the researcher finds meaning and voice. Similarly, the process of writing gave me a deeper understanding of the “data.” My voice emerged from a complex and critical engagement with my participant stories and with my lived experiences. For instance, from a process of distilling themes emerged a testimonio that then drove the direction of my analysis. As I wrote, I came to deeper understanding of the purpose and power of testimonio, particularly because it was born from the many narratives children shared with me. I became the bridge between those experiences and the academic spaces of critical analysis. The testimonio I include in Chapter 5, was unplanned; nevertheless, writing it was a critical piece of discerning themes from collected stories. I came to understand that testimonio is “both a “product and a process” (Bernal, Burciaga, & Flores Carmona, 2012, p. 364) that “entails a fluid, nonlinear, synergistic combination of self-reflection and outward-directed action” (Keating & González-López, 2011, pp. 1-2).

**Coding process.** In coding, I am finding things said, and learning from things unsaid (Personal notes, September 15, 2015)

My critical understandings came to life during the transcription phase and the process of coding the 190 pages of interviews, observations, and journal notes. When I listened to the
interviews and my reflective recordings I began to intellectually understand the important work that this was. The process of looking at each document individually, page by page, was a process that in and of itself gave me many layers of understanding about the stories gathered and the research process. I learned from the ways things were said and also from the things that I felt were left unsaid for a reason. I critiqued myself often, particularly when I felt that I had missed an opportunity to obtain more detailed information with follow-up questions. I examined the ways I posed questions and reflected on other possible ways the questions could have been asked.

After all of the data was transcribed, I was set to begin the coding process—a researcher’s journey of questions, insights, and self-reflection. During the process of searching for codes, I came across several challenges with trying to translate words or phrases from Spanish to English. I found that many of the words said had much more complex sets of definitions in Spanish that the English translation. For instance, in my research journal I write about the difficulty in trying to find a word that completely captured the meaning of what participant Itzel describes as “esforzarse duro.” While this can literally translate to “try hard,” the context and my cultural understandings tell me that Itzel was also meaning to put all the effort possible and to strive to accomplish one’s goals and dreams.

The codes gathered went from 122 to a total of 136. In order to reduce this number to a more appropriate amount, I read and re-read to merge similar ones and erase repeated ones. This process of merging and erasing repetitive codes brought me to another moment of important understanding that I describe in the journal entry:
Looking back through the codes and trying to merge and delete repetitive ones, I come to a realization, an Aha moment: the way the codes are named/worded should be from a child’s perspective! It completely changes the meaning when rather than saying “father in the orchard” I say “father working with children” (Personal notes, October 19)

The ways I phrased many of the codes was taking me in a direction difficult to draw themes from. To reconnect with the theoretical framework, it was important to rename some of the codes and then move on to the categorizations that gave me the “big picture” themes I needed to begin writing. This categorization necessitated that I remove myself from the “data” and to do so at one point I had to cut all the codes by hand and move them around until I was able to group the codes in a way that made sense. To move from grouping of the codes to analysis, I had to move away from the codes/themes and re-read scholarship and my frameworks in order to ground my analysis theoretically. The next steps that followed were constant shifting and re-shifting in and out of my theoretical voice.
Table 2

*List of Final Codes and Themes*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Themes</th>
<th>Codes</th>
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| Systemic oppression experienced in the orchard | Internalized racism  
 Work conditions/environment  
 Internalization of capitalist values  
 Power relations  
 Gender dynamics |
| Children’s disruption of hegemonic narratives | “Space to play”  
 Experiencing community  
 Value placed on school  
 Sense of self  
 Children’s telling of myths |
| Cultural and familial *conocimiento*         | Relationships with family  
 “El trabajo del campo”  
 Parents’ experiences working in the orchard  
 Stories of (im)migration  
 Cultural representations  
 *Consejos* given to children |

**Conclusion**

There is power in the ability to tell other people’s stories. How those stories are told can potentially have devastating effects for the participants and their communities. Adichie (2009) explains: “show a people as one thing, as only one thing, over and over again, and that is what they become.” Qualitative researchers, who recognize the political project of this work, continue to feel the effects of the single story Western people told of the “Orient.” Thus, qualitative researchers have the responsibility to tell people’s stories as the multiple, layered, complex, stories they are.

Situated in a tradition of qualitative inquiry, this study is a critical case study that draws from both Critical Ethnography and Narrative Inquiry to illuminate the experiences of children within a particular context while making connections to the larger structures of inequality and
social justice for children of color in schools. It situates children as holders and creators of knowledge (Bernal, 2012) because it is important to hear the voices and narratives of children in our educational and political work. My methodological *movida* is political, as all qualitative research is (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011), but it is also personal. Being able to “speak like them” is complicated and perhaps Fine’s (1994) words are true for me as well: “Our work will never “arrive” but must always struggle “between” (p. 75). This complicated liminal space is creative. It is where my mestiza consciousness embraces the contradictions and ambiguity, while it simultaneously challenges the status quo.

In the next two chapters, I will examine the major themes gathered from the stories collected. Chapter four focuses on the orchard as a site of both cultural clash and embrace that provides important understandings of the relationship between place and culture. Chapter five examines the understandings gained from children’s stories. I specifically examine autonomy as re-conceptualized by Mexican American children and the ways the orchard facilitates that autonomy.
CHAPTER FOUR: ORCHARDS AS BORDERLANDS OF STRUGGLE AND BRIDGE OF TRANSFORMATION

Borderlands are complicated spaces where different cultures come together and clash. These borderland spaces are sources of pain and struggle for those that dwell in them as well as of joy and transformation (if the take the journey towards *conocimiento*). Borderlands are not solely US/México border towns; they are the multiple liminal spaces that hybrid identities, (im)migrants, and Other communities have to negotiate with(in). At times, as Anzaldúa (1999) argued, the borderlands are in the psyches of people who are confronted by intersecting (at times contradictory and ambiguous) identities. In this chapter, I argue that orchards are like borderlands in that they are sites of contradictions, ambiguities, struggles, pain and joy. Orchards are products of many complicated historical and economic factors that continue to shape their culture. They, like many similar sites, are intimately connected to a system of Capitalism that venerates market values over human ones. However, within all of these strands of politics, economics, and sociological factors stand the resistant dignities of people. Orchards are witness to the resiliency, endurance, relationships built, memories embraced, and dreams imagined of the adults and children who inhabit them.

Basso (1996) argues that wisdom sits in places. In this chapter, I consider this understanding but add that in complicated places such as the orchard, it is not the actual place that holds knowledge, but rather the relationships that are created and fostered in orchards. As I walked through the orchards observing and working alongside families, I came to understand that relationships are an important part of the experiences of children and adults in the orchard. As I will examine in Chapter five, it was primarily relationships that children had with other
children, families, and the geography of the orchard that made the experiences meaningful. The difficulty of orchard work is eased because the orchard provided a space to share with relatives and friends. These encounters triggered memories of the home left behind, and inspired dreams (particularly for their children). As Anzaldúa and Keating (2002) argued, some borderlands can become bridges. In this case, orchards (in the relationships and encounters between people) are bridges of understanding between the present realities of people and the cultural and historical memories, or the conocimiento (knowledge) (im)migrant communities hold.

To understand the complexity that defines orchards, I begin with a brief unpacking of some of the layers of discourse, sociopolitical factors and history of the orchards in central Washington. Beginning with a brief history of orchards in Washington state, this chapter illuminates the multiple (and intersecting) narratives of the orchards in order to contextualize the experiences of Mexican American (im)migrant children. This historical examination includes a brief history of the “importation” of Mexican labor (García & García, 2005) into the Pacific Northwest and embedded discourses still shaping Mexican communities today. I begin with this brief contextualization because this historical background shapes the master narratives of Mexican people that continue influencing the perceptions society and schools often have of this community—particularly when they are employed in the stereotypical work sites like orchards.

Followed by this brief illustration, I dive into the understandings I gained about orchards from the people in them. I portray these understandings as narratives that are told about the orchards. While the history of the orchards is another narrative, I focus on the narratives that emanated from the data collected throughout this work. As the narratives will demonstrate, the orchards are sites of struggle and contested power and where complicated cultural practices
dwell. They are rooted in Capitalist and neoliberal oppression and exploitation of people of color; however, as a matter of survival, people in the orchard cling to the narrative of the orchard as a geographic site because this bridged their present lives to the lives they left behind when they did *trabajo del campo* [work of the land].

**Historical Context**

The Salish speaking Wenatchi indigenous people, or guardians of the valley (Scheuerman, 1982), resided in the region where the Wenatchee River meets the Columbia River in north central Washington, in the foothills of the Cascade Range of mountains. In 1855, the Wenatchi were promised a 36 square mile reservation around their fishery—a reservation that was never delivered. Instead, the Yakima Treaty removed 10.8 million acres from the indigenous community and forced the indigenous peoples into what is now the Colville Reservation.

Among the first non-indigenous immigrants in the territory were trappers and Chinese gold prospectors. With the development of irrigation and railroads, agricultural developments, particularly fruit orchards, flourished in the area (Chelan and Douglas Counties Profile). Today, the Wenatchi traditional lands are full of numerous apple, cherry, and pear orchards and a mountain resort town. While grape vines and wineries are replacing many fruit orchards, agriculture and tourism remain the region’s major industries. According to a report by the Washington State Department of Agriculture (2014), the state’s food and agriculture industry has a net worth of $49 billion dollars, employs about one hundred sixty thousand people, and contributes to 13 percent of the state’s economy. In 2010, about thirteen billion dollars was exported in food and agricultural products, making Washington state the third largest producer in both of these sectors in the country. Both Washington apples and pears rank first in United States
production. Rio County has 890 farms (apples, cherries, and pears) and produces 206 million dollars a year. In short, agriculture is an important sector of Washington state’s economy and contrary to conservative anti-immigrant rhetoric arguments, Mexican (im)migrant communities have an important role in the growth of this sector. In the next section, I provide a brief sketch of the migration patterns and demographics of the state of Washington in order to better understand the meanings and practices of orchards today.

**Orchards and (im)migrants.** In 2006, Washington’s then Governor Christine Gregoire recognized that the state’s economy “lives and breathes through agriculture, an industry in which at least sixty percent of the workforce is immigrant labor” (Washington State Department of Agriculture), the majority being of Latina/o background. This information provides an important context for orchards and simultaneously demonstrates the pivotal contribution of (im)migrant workers (particularly of Mexican/Latina/o backgrounds) in the state of Washington. Chicanos/Latina/os have been an integral part of this economic sector along with the state’s cultural and social fabric for longer than is often recognized. In fact, the history of Latina/os/Chicanos in the Pacific Northwest is “intertwined with Spanish explorations of the sixteenth century, continuing through the colonial period, followed by the migration of [mestiza/o] Mexicans in the nineteenth century and the settling out patterns of a larger Latino community in the 20th and 21st centuries”—a history that is often neglected (García, 2010, p. 9).

Twenty seven percent of the county’s population is Hispanic compared to eleven percent in the state. Large numbers of Mexican peoples started to appear in the Pacific Northwest, after the nation “imported” thousands of Mexican braceros (García & García, 2005, p. 3) particularly during the labor needs caused by the Second World War. Similar to the migrations in the early
part of the century, Mexican people were pulled into the fertile lands of Washington that required a large labor force, particularly in agriculture.

The demographic increase in the Latina/o/Chicano population is especially visible in the state’s K-12 public schools where Latina/o children from different countries are growing rapidly in number. In fact, according to a report submitted to the Washington State Commission of Hispanic Affairs in 2008, the non-Latina/o white student populations in the state’s K-12 public schools increased by 6 percent compared to 372 percent for Latina/os (Contreras & Stritikus, 2008). In rural communities in eastern Washington, Latina/os are already the majority, often representing over 75 percent of the district’s student population while in western Washington, school districts are witnessing demographic increases exceeding statewide growth rates (p.4). During the time of this report, Latina/os represented 9.4 percent of the population but increased to 11.7 percent in 2012. More than 80 percent are Mexican American.

As García and García (2005) demonstrate, there is a strong link between the demographic increase of Latina/os and the development of the state’s industries. Thus, to contextualize a discussion of orchards, it is important to acknowledge the historic and continuing role Mexican communities have played in the growth and development of orchards and agriculture. With this said, it is equally important to acknowledge and examine the oppressive nature of agricultural work that is rooted in the historical exploitation of Mexican communities through passage of racist and neoliberal capitalist policies. The same capitalist and imperialist logic that created the orchards and occupied the land of the indigenous Wenatchi, in part, set up the “push and pull factors” that “promoted cross-border labor migration” (Varsanyi, 2008, p. 878). Coupled with “a consistently high demand for inexpensive, flexible labor to fuel the growth of, inter alia, the
construction, service, and hospitality industries in the United States,” the patterns of migration were exacerbated and complicated by the passage of the neoliberal North American Free Trade Agreement in 1994 that afflicted rural livelihoods in México. Today, the majority of the workers in orchards are Mexican or Central American.

**Implications of Mexican people as disposable and expendable.** Mexican immigration took a different turn during the “immigration regime” of the 1920’s (Odem, 2008), especially after the Johnson-Reed Immigration Act of 1924, the act that “defined all Europeans as part of a white race distinguished from and superior to people of ‘colored races’” (p. 363). The implementation of this law marked the beginning of a highly racialized “immigration regime” that would change the relationship between Mexican immigrants and the American state. While the complexity and racialization of immigration policies consist of much more than this historical time, the discourses surrounding this act influenced many of the current dominant narratives of Mexican people that this study disrupts.

The 1924 legislation placed quotas on immigration rates from certain countries, but Mexican immigration was not regulated in the same fashion because this group was deemed “racially ineligible for citizenship” (Odem, 2008, p. 364). Mexican immigrants were perceived as “less troublesome” than other immigrant groups and “not socially or industrially ambitions like European and Asiatic immigrants”; thus they did not represent a threat to dominant society (Hing, 2004). Legislators considered them “illiterate, unclean, peon masses” whose only function was to supply cheap labor for the demands of the growing agricultural businesses (Odem, 2008, p. 364). Along with the immigration policies, the 1920’s and 30’s witnessed subtle changes that sought to perpetuate the racialization and thus demarcation of Mexicans even more
from Euro-Americans. The U.S Census of 1920 stopped listing Mexicans as white, and Mexicans were categorized as an inferior group of people (Acuña, 2011, p. 197).

These policies (re)created racist discourses that framed Mexican immigrants as disposable and expendable bodies (Hing, 2004) available when the United States needed their labor. Consequently, guest worker programs were and continue to be created to fill labor shortages in the United States. For instance, the need for workers during World War I was so high that the head tax and literacy requirement of the 1917 Immigration Act were waived for Mexican immigrants (Hing, 2004) in order to allow more of them to come into the country.

Guest worker programs contributed to the distribution of Mexican American laborers throughout the country (Acuña, 2011, p. 256). The first Bracero (literally “strong armed”) Program was created to fulfill the labor shortages in agriculture during World War I. A second bracero program was established in 1942 in response to the grower complaints of labor shortage during that war period. The closure of the second bracero program in 1964, left in place another pathway to “import cheap, seasonal, farm labor force to produce America’s food while maximizing the profits of U.S. agribusiness” – the H2A program (Newman, 2011, p. 12). In a report by Farmworker Justice, researcher Ethan Newman argues that like the agricultural guest worker initiatives that came before, the H-2A program “is fundamentally flawed and characterized by rampant abuse of both domestic and foreign workers” (p. 7).

The discursive implication of the guest worker programs is that Mexican people are perceived as “hard working,” though in a very racialized (and demeaning) sense. The negative implications of this stereotype are that Mexican people are portrayed as “model minorities with respect to work and civic life but not with respect to education” (Worthham, Mortimer, & Allard,
Paradoxically, Mexican people are also often portrayed as “lazy” —a stereotype rooted in the figure of Mexican people taking a “siesta,” a nap (Schmidt, 1997). Moreover, the portrayal of Mexican people as criminals and foreigners in the media contributes to the “Mexican threat narrative” and the racialization of Mexican identity (Aguirre, Rodríguez, & Simmers, 2011). Along with historical policies of racism, immigration quotas, guest worker programs, the creation of “legal” and “illegal” categories (Odem, 2008) and militarization of the border further complicate discourses of Mexican people. A contemporary analysis of (im)migration, particularly Mexican immigration, reveals that these historical racist discourses continue shaping the ways this community is perceived. Orchards are reflective of this history of xenophobic and racialized policies. These sites are also rooted in complicated gendered and sexist contexts that shape the practices, discourses and relationships in orchards today.

**Contextualized in unjust gender and power relations.** Part of my responsibility is to share this story [of] power, gender violence, abuse, [and] injustice in my study (Personal notes, July 2, 2014).

Before my "official" data collection journey began, an orchard worker shared with me the story of a twelve-year-old girl that had been sexually molested in the cherry orchard she worked in with her mom and brother. The girl had been touched inappropriately and sent insinuative text messages by a 28-year-old supervisor. As an undocumented single mother, Ana's mom was afraid of reporting the supervisor to her white bosses. But before any investigation could be fulfilled, the supervisor moved back to his home in California. In my research journal I write about this story and ask: What does it mean that the first story shared with me this summer speaks to power, gender violence, abuse, injustice, and simply, to an extremely perturbing act?
This story exposes a particular reality of the culture of many orchards in the area. While I did not learn of another story like this in any of the four orchards I observed, there were other manifestations of power abuse that are common in similar workplaces. In this section, I will further complicate orchards through an analysis of the gender dynamics, norms, and demographics.

While minorities and women are less likely to obtain positions of power in work places (Elliott & Smith, 2004), the majority of the supervisors in agricultural sites (fields, orchards, or packing plants) are Latino men. While all of the owners in the four orchards I visited were white men and women, all of the supervisors were Latino men and only once did I see a Latina woman in a position outside of picking (she was a "checker"). The gendered demographics of the supervisors are specifically useful to examine because supervisors have the direct contact (generally) with workers and serve as the bridge between the orchard owners and the workers. As in Ana's story, many supervisors abuse their power to exert fear over their workers (particularly when they are undocumented) to keep abuse hidden and in turn exacerbate the cycle of violence in places like the orchard.

As Cediel (2013) illuminates in the documentary *Rape in the Fields*, sexist power structures are deeply infused in the culture of fields, orchards, and packing plants in the United States. In this documentary, the Center for Investigative Reporting at the University Of California Berkeley Graduate School of Journalism exposes that hundreds of migrant women have been sexually harassed or assaulted in fields and packing plants in the United States and most cases have remained uninvestigated by government officials. To understand the context and surrounding discourses of orchards, it is pivotal to understand that these places are much more
complicated for women, especially undocumented women who are “specially at risk” (Anzaldúa, 1999, p. 34) in these sites where patriarchy, sexism, and violence against women is often normalized and facilitated through positions of power. Anzaldúa describes this experience of migrant undocumented women:

Isolated and worried about her family back home, afraid of getting caught and deported . . . the *mexicana* suffers serious health problems. *Se enferma de los nervios, de la alta presión. La mojada, la mujer indocumentada* [gets sick from being so nervous, of high pressure, the wetback, the undocumented woman], is doubly threatened in this country. As a refugee, she leaves the familiar and safe homeground to venture into unknown and possibly dangerous terrain. (pp. 34-35)

The culture(s) of the orchards are rooted in a fusion of systemic gender inequity and inequality as well as the intimate ways sexism colonizes the hearts and minds of Mexican people (both men and women). I will continue this examination of gender dynamics illuminated in children's stories, my observations, and personal experience in chapter five. What is important to note in this chapter, however, is that gender is inextricably linked to power, race, xenophobia, and capitalism. To have a complete understanding of the complexity of the orchard space, it is pivotal to unmask the role these systems of oppression have in the history and culture of the orchards.

In the following section, I examine four orchards in the Wenatchee region through narratives gathered from Mexican children and adults. These narratives reflect the different seen and imagined layers that comprise the complex spaces in the place of the orchard. Orchards are ecological sites and cultural spaces; they also reflect capitalist, racist, sexist, and xenophobic
discourses shaping the everyday life of children and communities with(in). In other words, orchards are a complicated space of contested power and culture that like a borderland (Anzaldúa, 1999), “is in a constant state of transition. The prohibited and forbidden are its inhabitants” (p. 26). Moreover, I examine the ways that people view the orchard as a bridge of possibility and a place where cultural knowledge endures.

**Orchards and Narratives People Hold**

Through observations, conversations, and interviews, children taught me that the orchard was more than a site of work. They taught me to view the orchard as a place of teaching and learning, of nature, and as a place where there is “space to play.” While the orchard, like many places, is defined by the relationships between and within communities, there are a few other narratives that ought to be told to illuminate the multiple understandings participants have of these places. The first narrative is that of the orchard as a geographic place. Here, I illuminate the orchard as an ecosystem—a place of trees, sounds, smells, and home to various creatures. The second narrative is that of the orchard as a place of culture and people. In this narrative, I illustrate the complicated cultural practices and representations that exist and are (re)created within. The third narrative is that of the orchard as a site of production within a white, patriarchal, capitalist society. While I write these three narratives separately, they are not isolated from each other—they are interrelated and intersecting. The third narrative is heavily and deeply embedded in the first and second; in other words, every aspect of the orchard is informed by the systemic economic framework under which it exists. Nevertheless, the people I interacted with insist on clinging to the geographic and cultural layers of knowing the orchards because these more humanized narratives allow the orchard to serve as bridges between their present lives and
the lives they left in México—particularly to the sense of home and freedom of *trabajo del campo* [work of the land].

**The orchard as an ecological site.** The smell of trees, grass, and fresh air greet me in the orchard. Often times, the smell is that of wet soil. While places do not necessarily have memory, they do “enshrine memory” and as Peshkin (1997) argues: “Our memory is the great tracker of what has gone by and what is present; our memory inspires what is to come” (p. 8). I realize that perhaps this is why seven-year-old Itzel asked me one day if I liked having memory. Standing under the tree, she remembered her first day of kindergarten and the Easter Day that she apparently had a lot of fun in. Similarly, I dwell on the healing power of memory as I stand and inhale the scent of wet soil allowing it to bring me back to a time in my childhood when I lived in México and loved to smell the wet soil after a rainy day. I still love the smell of wet soil. My mother once shared that when I was in her womb, she had intense cravings for soil that even brought her to taste it. Memory reconnects me to my mother’s womb.

I stand in the middle of the orchard and am surrounded by trees bursting with cherries. The stories of rattlesnakes in the grass and rat-eating snakes hanging from trees come to me as I walk through the grass. I have never seen a snake in the orchard, but I believe the stories my participants shared with me (the children especially) and I am alert. Julian warned me about the rattlesnakes that “crawl” around, or the mice-eating snakes that hang from trees. He also told me about the butterflies of different colors that he has seen here. I hear birds chirping in the background. They fly above the trees as people pick and the children play.

“Es bonito el trabajo del campo,” [the work of the land is beautiful] says Mrs. Mercedes. Being outside in the outdoors is a gift for people who come from “cultures of dwelling” (Esteva
& Prakash, 2001) whose value for land is rooted in indigenous traditions that are still present in Mexican mestiza/o families’ epistemologies—a resistance to Mexican projects of “deindianization” (Bonfil Batalla, 1991). As I walk through some of the orchards, I forget that this is “work.” I easily drift away with being in el aire libre [the open air], as participants describe it and imagine the memories that this place brings back for people.

**Culture and people.** Basso (1996) states that places are not sensed alone but in community. The orchard is a place of trees, fruit, animals, and nature’s scents and sounds. It is also a place of people and culture and relationships. The space consists of relationships between people, the cultural representations of Mexican communities, of music, and talking heard all around the orchard, and yelling, as the children would say. Music, for instance, was present in every orchard I observed; in some orchards, several radios were playing in different parts of the orchard. In one orchard, the radio station being broadcasted was from the part of México that the majority of the workers claimed as home. Many were either singing along to the radio, or singing their own tunes. Children also sang. Participant Anahí, for instance, loved to sing or hum a tune as she picked. She was the one in charge of carrying the radio when it was time for her family to move to a different tree. Anahí’s family believed that the radio scared the snakes away. While the tale seems unbelievable, it amused Mrs. Mercedes who said “all that we need is for snakes to start dancing.”

As Villenas and Deyhle (1999) argue, it is important to recognize the strengths “rooted in the uniqueness of Latina/o/Mexicano language and culture” (p. 441). Language is a vital weave in the cultural narrative of the orchard. All the music playing was in Spanish, except when a migrant couple from California played Chicano rap or when children listened to music in
English. The spoken language was predominantly Spanish; however, children communicated in English, Spanish, and Spanglish. When dominant ideologies often try to characterize “code-switching” as “lazy, sloppy, and cognitively confused,” these are “symbolic systems of communication that are enmeshed with the speakers’ identities” —the “hybrid identities” many Latina/os manifest (Zentella, 2002, p. 328-329). When assimilationist ideologies coupled with anti-immigrant rhetoric argue that immigrants “lack any sense of American community” (Nelson & Hiemstra, 2008) because they refuse to “assimilate,” maintaining their language and cultural identity empowers communities of color and is part of the “knowledge base of resistant capital” (Yosso, 2005, p. 80) that is manifested in orchards.

Particular music genres are played in orchards. One of those is the *corrido*, or the ballad, that has roots in the Mexican Revolution of the early 1900’s (Paredes, 1967). I once heard my grandfather *echarse un grito* to a *corrido* playing on the radio. The existence of a “grito” and the *corrido* genre of music in the orchard illustrate the role Mexican culture plays in the space of the orchard. It is a cultural practice that transforms the orchard into more than a place of nature and that gave me a feeling of joy and nostalgia simultaneously. This genre of music, however, also illuminates a layer of gender dynamics present in the space of the orchards. Corridos are intimately and historically gendered in the demographics of the artists, the topics sung about, and it’s roots in the Mexican Revolution. Many of the *corrido* songs depict traditional male/female roles, violence against women, and private/public dichotomies in the context of colonialism.

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5 A grito literally translates to: “scream.” A grito, then, is similar to the yahoo or yeehaw. The grito has roots to in the historic celebratory remembrance of Mexican Independence Day.
Other cultural representations include the stories that individuals share amongst each other. For instance, Clarisa and her little sister Itzel were one day talking about the story of *La Llorona*, the “weeping woman.” Clarisa asked her little sister if she believed the story was true to which Itzel responded, “yes, because my friend told me.” For many in México, this is a legend of a mother wandering the streets crying for her lost children. For others, it is a story of colonization. Chicana feminist scholars argue that “la llorona” is the story of La Malinche, or Malitzin, the indigenous woman taken captive by the Spanish colonizer Hernán Cortes and who gave birth to the first “mestizo” child. As in the story of La Llorona, Malitzin wept over the colonization of her land and people and exploitation of women’s bodies. Unlike the dominant narrative of La Llorona, however, Chicana feminist scholars argue that she actively resisted and fought against the violence on her people; she is a symbol of women’s resistance and (re)creation. The presence of the story adds a complex and rich layer to the orchard as a place steeped in community within a particular historical and cultural context. That children share these stories continues the preservation of an oral tradition in Mexican communities. As a Chicana feminist, I believe that the story of La Llorona also illuminates resistance and a growing consciousness of colonization and violence.

*Gender norms infused in Mexican culture.* Educator and scholar Lisa Delpit (2012) imagines a strength-based understanding of culture in saying that “true culture supports its people; it does not destroy them” (p. 7). While “machismo” has not been a part of Mexican culture for as long as many like to believe (Paredes, 1971), patriarchy and strict gender norms have permeated Mexican culture for centuries (Anzaldúa, 1999; Castillo, 1999) and are so deeply embedded that it is at times difficult to separate the historically oppressive aspects from a
“culture” that “supports its people.” I fought against the desire to examine gender norms in a separate section because I believed it would help reclaim Mexican culture as a supportive and strength-based system. In the reflection and deeper analysis that followed, I came to the realization that doing so is problematic, counter-productive, and difficult to do. The observations, interviews, and my own lived experiences illuminate that along with the orchard as a racialized space, it is heavily gendered−participant’s experiences are complex and messy but it is from that complexity that transformative understandings can arise.

The cultural reproductions woven throughout the narrative of the orchard are historically and discursively tied to gender and dominant notions of masculinity. For one, the demographics of the orchards’ workers are significantly gendered. The workers in the orchard are predominantly male, and the majority of the women that are seen in the orchards are there to “help” their husbands. There are also several women working alone, the majority of whom are single mothers. Orchard supervisors and owners are all men. While in three of the four orchards, female owners were also involved in the organization and decision-making, the workers only viewed the man as the "boss." In several instance, children warned me about the power of el señor [the man].

All four orchards have Mexican people as supervisors, and they are all male. In Lou Orchards, the “checker” (the person that walks around checking the quality of the fruit) is a woman. Interestingly, the majority of the children I encountered in the orchard are girls. When compared to the demographics of the factories where cherries are packed, there is an interesting revelation of the gendered nature of the work. Packing factories, or empáques, have a majority of
female workers and are known as a woman’s workplace while orchards are typically occupied by men.

The role of dominant understandings of masculinity, which Reyes (2009) demonstrates is intimately tied to the colonial history of Mexican and indigenous peoples, is present throughout the orchard. Less than ideal forms of masculinity are often denigrated through hypersexual and homophobic events and remarks. For instance, Ivan (age nine) was often made fun of by several men in the orchard for not working hard enough and choosing to hang out with girls (his cousins Celina and Noely). At one point, one of the men questioning Ivan’s masculinity jokingly offers his teenage daughter for Ivan to take home. Ivan is then made fun of when he asks, “what will I do with her?” Ironically, this same man later states his belief that girls were harder-working than boys—particularly speaking about his sons who choose not to come with him to the orchard.

Power is intricately tied to gender norms in orchards. This power manifested itself in multiple ways—some, which I came to understand until I was removed from the data. For instance, boys were scorned more often than girls when they were not working or if they were not working “hard enough”—referring to the pace and amount of cherries picked per day. The expectation that boys need to be held at higher standards in terms of the physical labor was a pattern across the four orchards.

The power that supervisors held over the workers, even though they were all Mexican (and at times relatives), played out differently for each one of the supervisors. However, the supervisor (and my aunts husband) in Hilly Orchards embodied the complicated ways supervisors negotiated whiteness in an intersecting way with his gender. Scholars (Urrieta, 2003) would argue that this supervisor’s position of power was facilitated by his light
complexion that allows him to “pass” as white. There is an interesting relationship in the power that this supervisor exerted on his workers and the power his white boss seemed to give him. As mentioned in Chapter 3, this was the only supervisor who told me that I did not need to ask his boss for permission—his permission sufficed. Many workers saw this supervisor as strict and likely to scorn workers when rules were broken. On one of the days I observed in Hilly Orchards, my mom decided to accompany my father. While I was away, the supervisor (who is my mother's brother in law) scolded my mother for having too many leaves in her cherry buckets and too many cherries without stems. In scolding my mother out loud, the male supervisor exerted a form of power that complicate the narratives of the orchard, to demonstrate that gender, race, and capitalism are interrelated.

**Orchard as a site of Capitalist production.** During a trip to Cuba, the activist scholar Angela Davis commented on the smooth and proficient swing of the Cubans when they graced the machete on the sugarcane. She was corrected by a Cuban who said it was a skill he wished not to have. Later, Davis commented: “romanticizing the plight of oppressed people is dangerous and misleading” (Davis, 1974, p. 209). For this reason, this case study considers the orchard as a historically racialized and gendered space and a site where capitalist values and structures are normalized. Whilst the orchard is both a place of nature and a space of people and culture (with all its complicated manifestations), it is also a site of production where each worker’s role is defined by structural and systematic norms of Capitalist corporatism. The orchard dynamics, relationships, and structures exist within an “imperialist White Supremacist Capitalist Patriarchal Corporate World” (hooks, 2003). In seeking to illuminate the humanity, dignity, resistance, and learning in the orchards, it is vital that this research examine the capitalist
To make work more efficient, the work processes in the orchard are divided into several small tasks. The work is routinized. To move the cherries from the trees to the packing factories requires: pickers, checkers, dumpers, stampers, and finally, drivers. Pickers pick the cherries and are paid by the amount of cherries picked. In some orchards, these workers were paid per box, and in other orchards, they were paid per pound. In other words, to make more money, pickers need to be fast and efficient in their picking. This efficiency, however, is measured and restricted by consumer preference, profit, and the outside temperature. Pickers cannot pull the stems off the cherries (it would be physically less demanding to pick cherries without stems) and are to be careful pulling leaves and branches off the tree. In fact, it is not unusual to hear supervisors caution workers for having too many leaves and/or branches in their cherry buckets. Picking time ends when the temperatures are too hot primarily because picking in extreme heat increases the chances that the fruit will be damaged because of the ways heat softens the cherries. If cherries are picked when they are soft, they get “bruised” and it also makes it easier to pull the stems off the cherries (which you are not to do unless the cherries are going to be juiced).

**Routines of a typical workday**

Before cherry pickers arrive to the row of trees to which they are assigned, the "dumpers" (who are typically teenagers) set picking boxes next to trees. The workday begins the moment the sun rises. Cherry pickers are ready to begin picking when they have the ladder properly set against the tree, their picking bucket around their waist, their "picker ticket" in hand, and boxes set next to the tree; then they will begin picking. When pickers work in groups (family of two or
more at times), they divide the tree. Adults pick at the top of the tree, and children stay at the bottom. When there is only one worker, it is more efficient to begin picking the cherries from the top of the tree and work downward. Pickers climb the ladder with an empty bucket, pick as much as they can reach, climb down the ladder, dump the cherries into the boxes, and climb back up. To pick all the cherries from the top of the trees requires that the picker move the ladder around.

More experienced workers are able to set the ladder right in the middle of a tree (and at the right angle) to facilitate more efficiency. This helps them pick more cherries in one "esclerazo," or ladder set. Picking at the bottom of the trees requires a slightly different process. Branches that are too low or when trees sit on slopes (as in Hilly Orchards) makes the picking more complicated. At times, workers get on their knees in order to reach the lowest branches—the getting up from their knees with buckets full of cherries is physically demanding.

As pickers pick the cherries, checkers walk around to inspect the quality of the fruit. If too much “bad” fruit (small, rotten, or unripe) is found in the bins, they report to the supervisors who in turn walk around cautioning workers on the mistakes that are being made.

Simultaneously, dumpers walk around “dumping” fruit from full boxes on to bigger fruit bins carried in tractors or four-wheelers. When the bins are full, these tractors or four-wheeler drivers take the bins to the where “stampers” weigh each bin and calculate the amount of pounds (in bins) of each picker. When workers are paid per box, the checker is the one to stamp each individual picker’s ticket each time a box is filled. At the end of the week, pickers take these tickets to their supervisors to get paid.

**Focus on efficiency.** The focus on efficiency influences the ways people, particularly the adults, take care of their selves. While orchards are becoming stricter on making people take a
lunch and eat their food outside of the picking site, in my observations, many workers hardly took lunch breaks. For instance, at Zinn Orchards, I picked alongside a family of two parents and three daughters. During lunchtime, the parents would tell the girls to sit to eat, but they would continue picking. During the two weeks I spent there, I hardly ever saw the parents sit to eat alongside the girls. I saw mom and dad stop for a few minutes to take a few bites from food they had for the day and continue picking. During my interview with these parents, they explained their motive for doing so was to make as much money as possible to save for a house. In another case, eight-year-old Celina shared her worry for her father during our interview at Johnson Orchards. She believed that when she and her little sister were not there, her dad did not stop to eat—when they were there, they made sure to encourage him to eat.

While children and adults expressed regard for the orchard as an ecological place, the profit motive shapes the ways many children viewed cherry trees. Time is a valuable commodity that controls many of the decisions people make in the orchards; for example, trees with small cherries represent a waste of time and therefore, money. Gabriel wanted to cut down all trees with small cherries so workers could save time and make more money. When asked what parts of the orchard she mostly enjoyed, Clarisa states: “Bueno si me gusta cuando hay muchos árboles que en realidad sirven porque hay muchos árboles que la verdad no sirven para nada” [Well I do like when there are many trees that in fact have a use because there are many trees that honestly have no use]. While children appreciate learning from the outdoors, they are also taught to view cherry trees through the capitalist desire for profit. Adults also expressed frustration when the cherry trees were full of small cherries.
From the physical layout to the rules and regulations governing its use, every aspect of the orchard fulfills a particular purpose in the market economy. Hollaway (2010) describes these norms as an abstraction that is the base of the existence of the state:

The real determinant of society is hidden behind the state and the economy: it is the way in which our everyday activity is organized, the subordination of our doing to the dictates of abstract labour, that is, of value, money, profit (p. 133).

In order to get more work done, workers begin the work shift at dawn. Participants wake up around three or three thirty in the morning to be at the worksite and begin picking the moment the sun provided light for the workers. While it is against orchards rules to pick in the darkness, many (including supervisors) knew of a few workers who arrived earlier than everyone else to get a head start picking cherries.

As seen in figures 4 and 5, orchards are divided into what workers and supervisors call “lanes.” Some orchards (particularly the smaller ones) have more space between each lane and between each tree. Others were more packed tightly together. Hilly Orchards was perhaps the most tightly packed orchard of the four—it was also the most uncomfortable in which to work. Further, many orchards are located on the steep side of mountains, making it extremely difficult in some cases, to transport ladders, buckets, and personal items from tree to tree. The placement of orchards on the sides of steep mountains suits the same profit motive—to use as much productive land as possible. The smallest of the four orchards, Johnson Orchards, was the exception with its wide space between lanes and between trees. Interestingly, I sensed more liveliness and comfort in this orchard.
Orchards as borderlands spaces

As described, the history of Mexican people in orchards is long and complicated. Discursive implications of this history include the creation of the Mexican body as valuable only for its labor. Mexican people are also portrayed through deficit lenses that state that they do not value education (Worthham, Mortimer, & Allard, 2009). The Mexican illegal immigrant body is constructed in the space “where capitalism meets nationalism, a borderland of contradiction” that depicts their body as a threat, "as a social and economic parasite, as a commodity as a worker.
that is biologically suited to stoop labor, as a casualty, as a victim, as a criminal, but rarely as a human being” (Summers Sándoval, 2008, p. 593).

Orchards, like fields and other agriculture work-sites, are tied to “normalized geographies of exclusion that assume farmworkers belong in fields and labor camps, but not in communities” (Nelson & Hiemstra, 2008, p. 333). These places, particularly migrant campgrounds, have historically served to contain (im)migrant bodies. Even while people hope to hold on to the aspect of the orchard that allows them to be en el aire libre [in the open air], these problematic discourses have powerful effects on the people and relationships within orchards. For instance, many people internalize these destructive discourses (I will describe ways children internalize these discourses in the following chapter). In this way, orchards are places where these “normalized geographies of exclusion” are in many ways perpetuated and clash against the joy of memory, relationships, and the coming together of relatives and compatriots.

Thus, the multiple clashing of cultures, politics, histories, and discourses make these places into a form of borderland where ambivalence and unrest reside (Anzaldúa, 1999) – a borderland of struggle between human dignity and capital. Along with the struggles that emanate from economic control and gender norms, many women and men share a common thread of resistant dignity that refuses to be lessened by capital values or racist discourses and masternarratives. To survive “the trauma of migration”, (im)migrants create “cultural spaces and ‘pockets of remembrance’ that facilitate continuity and change” (Zentella, 2002, p. 322). The orchard is a borderland of struggle but also a “pocket of remembrance” that affirms culture and resists the dominant master narrative that Mexican people are solely working bodies. In orchards,
people work, laugh, sing, share stories, remember México and dream—an important act of
survival for as Freire (2007) believed "it is impossible to exist without dreams" (p. 3)

The story of the caged birds. “Even if the cage is made of gold, it does not cease being
a prison” – La Jaula de Oro, Mexican corrido

Hilly Orchards sits on the steep sides of a mountain in Kline, Washington. Along with the
steep hills, the ground is full of loose soil that makes it difficult to walk at times. The hills and
the location of the portable toilet was what seven-year-old Osvaldo disliked the most about this
orchard. The orchard felt warmer, dryer, and unlike the other three orchards, the trees had a
strong chemical odor to them. In this orchard, even birds, struggled, not because of the hills and
soil, but because of the capitalist logic of production and profit.

At the top of the orchard sits a cage approximately four feet tall by four feet wide. Inside
the cage are four or five birds flying back and forth in obvious desperation to get out. The heat is
intense, and I need not be an expert to figure that the birds are scared, confused, hot, and in
desperate need of shade. The top of the cage is an opening designed to let the birds in but not to
let them back out. At the bottom of the cage is a dirty container with a small amount of water for
the birds to drink. I worry and with an aching heart ask my uncle why the birds are caged.

My uncle’s explanation for the caging of the birds leaves me more unsettled than before.
Birds in this and many other orchards are viewed as trespassers and a nuisance. He tells me that
these sorts of birds tend to eat and pick at cherries; thus, orchard owners and workers build cages
to trap the birds for the duration of the picking. Seeing the concern in my face, my uncle explains
that they let the birds back out once the picking is over (picking may take between a few days to
weeks). He goes on to explain that at least they do not do what other orchards do—shoot the birds.
I walk down to the portable toilet/wash station and fill a few plastic bottles with water. Once back at the top of the hill, I make my way into the cage and fill the container with more water. I walk around through the orchard and pick up several branches from the ground to make some shade for the birds. I throw in cherries for food. I am determined to help but I am also afraid to be seen by others and made fun of for trying to help the caged birds. After I made a small shade for the birds, I walk away hoping my efforts made a difference for the caged birds. The next day, followed by my daily routine of checking in with families and children, I walk towards the cage to check on the birds and find one lying dead on the ground.

As Simmons (1953) illustrates, many of the contemporary corridos reflect the popular attitudes Mexican people have of the United States, or the “la crisis” (Anzaldúa, 1999) experienced by Mexican/Latina/o people. Similarly, in the popular corrido “La Jaula de Oro” [the cage of gold], Los Tigres del Norte (a band collectively designated as “the voice of the immigrant”) echoes the plight of immigrant people in the United States, particularly that of the undocumented immigrant. In this song, the band describes the U.S as a “golden cage,” because it promised prosperity and happiness but has only delivered struggle for many. Thus, even if it is made of gold, the cage is still a prison. There is a powerful connection between the story of the caged birds and the experiences of (im)migrant communities in places like orchards.

**Conclusion: Wisdom Sits in Relationships**

It is human existence, therefore, that allows for denouncing and announcing, indignation and love, conflict and consensus, dialogue or its negation through the verticality of power. It is precisely from those contradictions that collectively envisioned dreaming is born (Freire, 2007, p. x).
When orchards, embedded in a racist history and neoliberal capitalist logic, are metaphorically “cages,” for (im)migrant people in the United States, they also are bridges of possibility and survival. The orchard, like other places, “possess[es] a marked capacity for triggering acts of self-reflection, inspiring thoughts about who one presently is, or memories of who one used to be, or musings on who one might become” (Basso, 1996, p. 55). In some cases the “might become” applies to the dreams parents have for their children. In this same way that Freire (1997) describes the discovered longing he felt for his homeland one day while in exile, a feeling that “had begun to be prepared by the lived relationship” he had with his childhood backyard (p. 38). Orchards are a reminder of the freedom of working in the cornfields in México. As Mrs. Mercedes describes, the open air of the orchard reminds her of the time as a young girl she spent with her siblings and parents in México:

Mi recuerdo, lo que me recuerda a mí es eso, cuando yo andaba trabajando en el campo allá. Que andábamos también en el aire libre pero haciendo diferente trabajo pues en el campo.6

Similarly, Mr. Cruz remembers when his parents took him to the fields when he was a little boy:

Estaba chiquito me desde siempre pues mi papá cuando podía todavía no podía trabajar que estaba chiquillo nomas me llevaban a la milpa ya pues fui creciendo y ya podíamos repelar, podíamos tirar abono todo eso. Y este pos todos nos íbamos, todos mis hermanos

6 My memory, what I remember is that, when I was working in the fields over there. That we were also in the open air doing different work in the fields.
y mi papa y mi mama. Todos los que me recuerda es que también allá en el campo en el maíz, el frijol, lo que fuera.

In the “pocket of remembrance” that is the orchard, people reflect on their childhoods and lives in the fields of México. While they remember the work was much harder than the orchard work, in that remembering they find a reconnection and validation of their cultural backgrounds. Orchards serve as that bridge of connection and a vehicle through which parents teach children the cultural values that they hope are not lost in the masternarratives of success, education, and nationhood. For instance, while Mexican immigrant families want their children to have access to as many educational opportunities as possible because of the success they were in search of when they immigrated to the United States, they do not want their children to lose their values, culture, and history to a form of education that “destroys the economy of home and community” (Esteva & Prakash, 2005, p. 6), and reflects a “culture of contests” (Karlberg, 2004). The model of educación that Latina/o (im)migrant parents hope to pass down to children includes a value for education and a respect for el trabajo del campo [the work of the land]. The “useful knowledge” (Basso, 1996) that sits in the orchards is rooted in culture, language, stories, family and community.

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7 I was little. Since always my father, when he could, I couldn’t work yet, would take me to the maize field and as I grew up I could then trim and throw fertilizer. And well we all went, all my brothers, and my mom and dad. It all reminds me that I was over there in the field, in the corn fields, beans, or whatever it was.
Orchards are a “borderland” of contradiction, like the border that Anzaldúa describes as an “herida abierta” where the Third World grates against the first bleeds” (p. 25). The orchard is a capitalist creation and a historical site of oppression and discursive violence against Mexican people, disguised in the opportunity of work and money. Nevertheless, (im)migrants create “cultural spaces,” “pockets of remembrance,” (Zentella, 2002) to survive and live with dignity. Thus, communities in the orchards I visited cling to the more human narratives of the orchards— as a geographic place that hold memories of culture, land, and belonging. These narratives contradict the masternarrative of Mexican people as only laboring bodies. Even that knowledge rooted in a colonial history that continues to be neglected – particularly that of the first peoples of the land— offers important pedagogical teachings that strengthen the work for social justice.

Human dignity is resistant. In orchards, people resist the capitalist racist insistence on viewing Mexican (im)migrant people in the orchards as mechanized bodies by clinging to the memories and relationships that the open space allows for. Rules are designed to keep workers efficient, but to keep their humanity alive, the people bring music, they sing, and share stories with each other. The orchard is rooted in oppressive conditions, but the people transform the space within it to embrace the relationships that (re)connect them to joyful memories. Wisdom does not sit in the orchard place, rather, it sits in the relationships people build with each other— relationships that center their collective struggles and dreams of human dignity and a better world for their children. In the following chapter, I will examine the children’s experiences in the orchard and demonstrate that there is transformative and healing knowledge in the relationships children illuminate, love, and respect.
Alicia’s Testimonio

“Alicia, ya es hora mija.”

Waking up in the morning sucks. It is the part of picking I hate the most.

“Ya son las 4:15! Vamos a llegar tarde!”

Even though I like being in the orchard and it is my decision to go, I wish my parents would not go so early. When my parents wake me up, it is still dark. They let my brother continue sleeping because he is little. They carry him to the car and let him sleep in the car until he wakes up on his own. Sometimes they ask me to wake him up. It is not until we are in the orchard that the sun begins to come out. Workers are supposed to wait outside the orchard until there is light outside, but many workers hide and begin picking as soon as they get there. I heard that these two guys arrive at 1 in the morning and begin picking at that time even though they are not supposed to. I guess they really need to make more money. Maybe they are trying to help their families.

My mom and I wait for the sun to rise as my dad goes to pick up our picker tickets from the supervisor. As soon as the sun begins to appear, people begin to walk to

\footnote{Alicia, it is time sweetie. “Mi’ja” is a common term parents and adults use when speaking with children. It is short for “mi hija/o” or my daughter/son.}

\footnote{It is already 4:15! We are going to be late!}
the tree they left off the day before. We are close to the end of the lane and soon will be
moved on to whatever other lane Pedro, the supervisor, tells us to go to. We walk down a
semi-steep hill. I have my picking bucket around my neck and our lunch box in my hand.
My mom has her own picking bucket that unlike mine is made of metal rather than
plastic—they are making buckets out of plastic now instead of metal. She is carrying the
12 foot ladder like the one my dad carries. Mom says the ladder is heavy and she can’t
wait until we are done picking in this part of the orchard and move to flatter land.
As soon as we arrive, my dad begins to arrange both his and my mom’s ladder because
she does not trust she can set it right. The first time she picked cherries years ago, she fell
off her ladder because it was placed at a wrong angle. She hurt her leg and couldn’t work
for a few days.

My mom asks me to set down the lunch box under one of the cherry trees and
asks me not to take my sweater off.

“Esta frío, mi’ja.” 

It is a cold morning like most mornings this summer, which is weird because it get’s
really hot later in the morning—so hot we have to stop working around 10 because the
heat is too much. That is the second thing I don’t like about picking—the weather.
As soon as the ladders are set, my dad climbs to the top and begins picking at the very top
of the cherry tree. My mom begins to pick in the bottom of the trees, this is called
“barbear.” I feel tired so I sit on one of the boxes. My parents don’t say anything when I

10 It is cold
sit, especially in the morning when they know I am tired. I smile because my uncle next
to us starts to sing to one of the songs playing on the radio. I like when he sings.

There are empty plastic boxes already set alongside the cherry trees around the
orchard. The “checkers” drive around in a tractor emptying full boxes into big “bins.”
The bins are taken to an area where they are weighed. Then the forklift puts them inside a
big semi truck that takes them to a factory like the one my grandma and aunts work in.
The cherries are sorted and packed in these factories.

About 10 minutes after we started, my dad already is coming down the ladder
with a full bucket and empties it into one of the boxes. It takes about two and a half
buckets to fill a box. My mom’s bucket is half full—she does not pick as fast because my
dad has been doing this for longer. I get up to pick before he tells me something, he is the
one to usually tell me to pick.

After picking for a long time, my bucket is finally full. Well, it is not as full as it
can be but it’s as much as I can handle. The bucket full of cherries gets really heavy. I
dump out the bucket and notice that my parents already have 8 boxes completed. When I
started coming to the orchard one year ago when I was 9, I started to learn how hard my
mom and dad work. They always tell me that this is why I should try hard in school, so I
can have a job that is not so hard.

“Echale ganas al studio mija” 11

11 Try hard in your studies
One thing I like about the orchard is helping and spending time with my family. They taught me to appreciate things and be responsible. I am saving money for school clothes and other necessary things. I also like that we are outside with nature. I have seen many different kinds of creatures here, like the ones we learn about in school. The orchard also helped me understand angles—obtuse and acute angles. You can fall off the ladder if you set it at an acute angle.

I look over to where my uncle works to see if my cousin is awake. He usually stays in his parents’ car sleeping until around 8 in the morning when he wakes up and joins his parents. He is not there yet so I continue picking. Around 8 a.m., I hear my cousin talking with his dad. I put my bucket down and walk over to them. This is my favorite part of the orchard, when I get to play with my cousin. I like that there is space to play here. Sometimes he is made fun of by los señores because he is playing with girls. But it doesn’t matter to us—we love playing with each other and exploring the orchard together.

“Alicia! Want to play ‘witches and sticks’?”

Witches and sticks is my favorite game because we get to be whatever we want and cast magic spells on anything.

I disappear all the trees that have small cherries—small cherries can’t be picked so people waste time on those trees. I make other trees have more cherries so we can have more to pick and make more money to help our families with. My little brother wakes up

\[12\] the men
and comes running to play with us. He grabs a stick and turns all the rocks into toys that are safe for the environment.

I love cookies, so I turn all the leaves into cookies. Everyone, including el patron\textsuperscript{13}, can eat for free.

To achieve social justice in our communities, we must break free from Western knowledge systems that insist on binary modes of thought—we must view the world through the eyes of the marginalized, underrepresented, or the “hybrid” (Anzaldúa, 1999). Here is where the methodological tool of \textit{testimonios} are situated—in decolonial efforts to read the world through the lived experiences of marginalized communities, through the eyes of children. This tool emanates from this theoretical framework in the decolonial imaginary.

The \textit{testimonio} in the beginning of this chapter, like many stories used by CRT and LatCrit scholars, is a “mediated communicative event” (Fernández, 2002, p. 49). The story was gathered through my research and mediated through my positionality as a Mexicana, Latina, and child of (im)migrants. It is constructed “under conditions dictated by academic research norms” and the stories of each one of my participants. Chicana feminist scholars (Bernal, Godinez, Villenas, & Elenes, 2006) demonstrate that the distinction between \textit{testimonio} and the genre of life history or autobiography is that the narrator of the \textit{testimonio} “skillfully crafts a tale that is both his and her own and communal while deliberately drawing attention to the experience of disenfranchisement” (Alemán, 2012, p. 492). In other words, this piece is co-authored by my participants and me to serve as a “rhetorical strategy [that] functions to raise awareness to the

\textsuperscript{13} The boss
plight endured by this individual and the members of her or his community in order to engender progressive change in the living conditions, policies, or treatment of those peoples” (p. 492).

As described in chapter three, testimonios are political and educational tools used to expose the lived realities of marginalized communities struggling with racism and other forms of oppression. I use this testimonio here for these same political and educational motives, but also to foster the “child-centered perspective” (Grover, 2004) that is central in this research. It is important to begin not with my own analysis, but rather with a story that illuminates the lives of children in this research. This testimonio is a collective effort between my children participants and me to expose their lived realities—it is a “collective experience” (Bernal, Burciaga, & Flores Carmona, 2012). In the version of this testimonio provided in Appendix A, I illuminate the particular themes embedded in each part of the testimonio to demonstrate the “collective experience” that comprises Alicia’s Testimonio.

While the testimonio is typically used to expose the marginalization and oppression experienced by communities of color, the testimonio written here also provides a counternarrative to dominant understandings of (im)migrant children working in the orchards. When majoritarian narratives portray (im)migrant children of Mexican backgrounds through deficit perspectives, Alicia’s Testimonio demonstrates the knowledge children hold, their ways of reading the world, and being with(in) their communities. Those readings of the world, however, are complicated and consist of both the joyous moments of learning as well as the moments of struggle, as seen in Alicia’s Testimonio. But, as Anzaldúa (1999) demonstrates, knowledge often emanates from contradictions. The testimonio closes in a powerful demonstration of the sense of
community and imagination that children hold. To imagine and dream is an important part of building awareness of and a conscience for a more just world (Freire, 2007).

*Alicia’s Testimonio* illustrates the various themes embedded in the stories children shared with me in this research. It also exemplifies themes gathered as I dove deeper in the the data collected. In the following section, I will examine these themes that derived from my “writing into knowing” process I speak to in chapter three. Here, I (re)connect to *Alicia’s Testimonio* as well as to participants’ stories as I illuminate the knowledge these children hold and ways it will strengthen our work as educators and researchers. Autonomy, as understood by these children is a value that resists the neoliberal project to “legislate or otherwise dictate how everyone should think” and thus “reduce each participant to being one whose beliefs and actions are already decided in uniform striations” (Davies, 2014, p. 8). Chicana Feminism and Freirian theories invite us to consider the importance of relationships in our communities as well as in the work we do as researchers. Children in this research demonstrate a deep connection to and appreciation of the relationships they have with family, community, environment, and themselves. Relationship is a form of resistance to the capitalist discursive functions of the orchard and the people that deem Mexicans as laboring bodies. In these relationships sits knowledge that can lead to transformation and healing.

**Children Learning With(in) Cherry Orchards**

After obtaining permission from the orchard owners, I finally make my way to the orchard. I walk between the trees and down the lanes. I recognize many of the people I am able to see through the leaves of the cherry trees. The faint sound of music and voices fill the space along with the accompanying fading sound of a tractor that just passed by. I
am now at the end of the lane, on the other side of the orchard. I turn to my right and am immediately drawn to the three children walking in my direction. They stop in their place, sit on the grass, and continue laughing and playing. The sight of children sitting in the middle of a grassy field captures my attention in a way I cannot quite explain. All I know is that it is an image I do not often see. I approach them and my learning from seven-year-old Noely, eight-year-old Celina, and nine-year-old Ivan begins. (Field note, July 8, 2014)

As examined in the previous chapter, the stories of people in cherry orchards are much more complex than dominant narratives illustrate. As Alicia’s *Testimonio* elucidates, children’s understanding of the orchard and the people within are rooted in counter-hegemonic narratives of family, culture, community, and children’s play with each other. In this chapter, I seek to honor the experiences children shared with me throughout my time with them. I begin with an discussion of the ways children understand, internalize, and are resistant to capitalist values examined in the previous chapter—particularly with the ways children demonstrate an internalization of the “good” worker discourse.

Followed by this discussion, I illuminate the resistant practices children engage with(in) to disrupt dominant narratives of Mexican (im)migrant. I argue that children (re)create a counter-narrative of autonomy (as situated in relationship with(in) self and others) through four domains. I begin with a discussion of the independence and caring for self that children often mentioned in their conversations. A part of this discussion is the insistence that while children seek independence as whole beings, they are not seeking to be seen as adults—they are still children and as children tell and believe tales. Second, I examine children’s care for community and
family overwhelmingly highlighted in my field notes and conversations with children. Thirdly, I discuss children’s appreciation for “space to play” in the orchard. The fourth example I share to illuminate the ways autonomy plays out in children's experiences in the orchard is their understanding of a relationship between school and work. Within each theme discussed, I illuminate the relationship to a sense of and desire for autonomy and suggest that this form of autonomy is not only a disruption to majoritarian narratives of Mexican children of (im)migrants, but resistance to the always already presence of capitalism and neoliberal logics. Furthermore, I examine these practices of children autonomy as disruptions to hegemonic narratives of Mexican parents as strict and simultaneously as non-involved in children’s education.

**So I can get a good job: Children’s internalization dominant narratives.** “My least favorite is the work. It’s hard and never stops” – Osvaldo, 7 years old.

As in previous ethnographic studies with working class kids (McLeod, 1995; Weis, 2013; Willis, 1977), children in the orchards learn the rules and expectations for being good workers. Having a job and making money is a goal that children understand well. Even when orchards serve as motivation to do well in school, the fact is that orchard work is hard. It is physically draining, especially for children. Nevertheless, children believe it is good to learn about the processes now “to know what it’s going to be like when [they] are older” (Interview with Gabriel). The internalization of this “good worker” discourse is both classed as well as racialized. In this section, I will examine the ways that it plays out in the lives of (im)migrant children in orchards.

In response to the question: “What do you learn in the orchard?” children shared their learning in terms of work and rules of the job. In only a few cases did children speak about...
This distinction between “career” and job is situated in intersectional constructions of class and race and as Bettie (2014) adds, for some Mexican communities, class involves engaged performances inextricably linked to sexuality, gender, and ethnicity.

The understandings of class as a cyclical path that is difficult to get out of was first examined in Willis' (1981) portrayal of the ways classist rules infused in schools and society (and internalized by working class kids) drive working class kids to obtain working class jobs. For students of color, these cycles of classism are complicated by the reproduction and exacerbation of racial inequality/inequity in schools that (Bettie, 2014; Sacks, 2007) push children out of school or on to technical jobs (Valenzuela, 1999). Rather than examining the structural factors that influence children of color to internalize the beliefs that they cannot obtain careers, deficit theories blame these students and their culture.

Children in the orchard demonstrated an understanding of a relationship between their parents' classed and racialized positions and the educational opportunities (or lack of) that they were offered. For instance, Gabriel describes that his family did not have the money to study and thus they are stuck in the orchard. For Anahi, the reason only Mexican people are in the orchard is "because we didn't get the chance to study and have a good career." Oftentimes, the children's responses placed Mexican people at a binary with "American" people on the other end. For instance, to the same question, Celina's response is:

Um well my dad says cause American people don’t like to get dirty and that they are not good cherries pickers.
For nine-year-old Ivan, the reason is different. He believes only Mexican people are in the orchards because others don't know about these places.

Infused throughout the children's responses on the racialization of the orchard space is an internalization of the discourse of Mexican people as "good workers." For instance, seven-year-old Noely says: "My dad likes to work and my mom she works night-shift." Almost in all cases, when I asked children “tell me about your families,” their responses were often in terms of the work parents did; Work has a central role in the family. Estrella says that Mexicans "are into picking cherries" and that unlike other "lazy" people, Mexicans "are not that much lazy.” Again, children's responses make comparisons of their own communities to white people. Itzel believes that “some [people] work more than others.” Others, like Gabriel, believed that Mexican people “liked picking cherries.”

Participant Celina believed that “Americans” were not in the orchard because unlike Mexicans, they “only work in offices or [are] teachers.” Celina’s account reflects a form of racism that Critical Race Theory names an “internalization of the majoritarian narrative” (Luna & Revilla, 2013) that racism is normal and that "Americanness" is a privilege exclusively for white people. It also illuminates an underlying ideology that blames communities of color for the experienced oppression rather than interrogating the structural and historical factors that constitute oppression.

Simultaneous to the belief that Mexican people are good workers is the perception that White people are “lazy” and cannot do orchard work. This idea is encapsulated in the narrative Clarisa shares about the white man that lived in the campground but left within a few days because the work was too hard for him.
Aquí teníamos un vecino que estaba aquí, el fumaba todo el día. Fumaba todo el día y casi no trabajaba. Nomas estaba aquí como una compasión como para pasarse el día. Y luego se fue bien rápido. Porque había puros Mexicanos como puros Mexicanos. No le gustaba trabajar a el señor. . . se notaba. No platicaba con nadie, y estaba solo ahí.\textsuperscript{14}

Celina also explores this complicated contradiction when she agrees with her dad in that white people are "too lazy" and "don't like to get dirty." Children's statements and stories mirror their ideas of "lazy" and hard working," a paradox that dwells in many stereotypes of Mexican people. The presence of these ideas in children's stories reflects the importance of active pedagogical disruption. It is pivotal to recognize this internalization of racism and classism if we are to uncover “space and voice” denied to communities of color (Davalos, 2008).

Working class children internalize the power and position they hold in the social order they are part of (Willis, 1977). Moreover, McLaren (2009) states that “cultural questions help us understand who has the power and how it is reproduced and manifested in the social relations that link schooling to the wider social order” (p. 65). Like Willis’ lads, the agency of children in the orchards is influenced by the economic structures in a capitalist system. For example, children understand the role and rules of el señor [the man] in the orchard. In one case, Itzel describes her fear of not following the rules because el señor would scorn her. Children

\textsuperscript{14} Here we had a neighbor that was here, he smoked all day. Smoked all day and hardly worked. He would only be here as if it were a camp like to just spend the day. And then he left really quick. Because there were many Mexican people like all Mexican. The man, he didn’t like to work. . . you could tell. He did not talk with anyone and he was all alone here.
understand that cutting leaves and removing stems from cherries interrupt the efficiency of the work and are, therefore, afraid to be scorned. While I did not witness or hear about children being scorned by “the boss” (as children used), that children expressed this fear reflects internalization of the power structure and profit motive. Nevertheless, contradictory to the consumerist ideal, children work and save money to use on “things that are necessary,” as Julian explains.

While children have a clear understanding of the capitalist demands and norms (woven with race, class, and gender structures) that make the orchard into a site of hard manual labor, they also recognize lessons it teaches them about the struggle their parents endure. Thirteen-year-old Juan says: “What I learn is that this work is hard, and that it’s what my dad does to buy me things. If I want something, I have to work for it.” As research (López, 2001) demonstrates, Mexican (im)migrant parents place value on hard work as a tool to motivate children to do well in school; nevertheless, there are important discursive messages embedded in the children’s beliefs that the orchard “teaches [them] how to work, so when [they are] older, [they] can get a good job.” These are not only based on class, but, in an intersecting fashion, rooted in race and racism.

(Im)migrant children disrupting dominant narratives.

Narratives of autonomy. While research, particularly that found in psychology, defines autonomy synonymously with individualism and as opposite of collectivism (Fuligni, 1998; Hardway & Fuligni, 2006), I agree with Helwig (2006) in that autonomy is not about being separated from others—especially the autonomy that relates to agency. This chapter draws from an understanding of autonomy that pushes beyond the definitions provided in psychological.
research. In this case study, I separate individualism from autonomy and view autonomy as interrelated to community and collectivity—as this was the way autonomy played out in the orchards. Moreover, the autonomy I refer to here is that which native scholars associate with feelings of self-determination (Kana'i aupun, 2005; Kaomea, 2003; Urrieta, 2013), self-identification (Wynn, 2009) and a sense of agency (Helwig, 2006).

Psychological research states that autonomy is a Western value “downplayed” by many non-Western cultural traditions such as Mexican culture (Fuligni, 1998). In order to fully situate my discussion on autonomy, it is important to deconstruct its embedded assumptions and discourses. For one, dominant adult-centric and racist beliefs in developmental psychology argue that autonomy is only what children aspire to develop into rather than considering children already as autonomous beings. Moreover, Western understanding assumes that autonomy is the same as the Western value of individualism, which is one that many non-Western cultures do “downplay” (Fuligni, 1998). Whereas autonomy as individualism is “downplayed” by non-Western cultures, autonomy as self-representation and self-determination is not. In fact, this form of autonomy is deeply tied to Mexican history, particularly amongst popular and resistance movements (Esteva & Pérez, 2001). For instance, in their struggle for democracy, liberty, and justice for indigenous and poor mestizo people in Mexico (Sixth declaration of the Lacandon Jungle), Zapatistas seek “a world where many worlds fit in.” The autonomy I draw from in this study is situated in this Zapatista principle in the sense that it acknowledges the right to freedom and self-representation of community and each person with(in) that community.

Children, like adults, have a desire for and right to autonomy. As Davies (2014) argues, “each of us, adults and children, [are] constantly in search of encounters that makes us more
powerful, more able to act effectively in the world, more capable of joy” (p. 8). There are pedagogical possibilities in working with children and imagining children as autonomous beings “with power and agency” constantly “intra-active” in the “daily doing of community” (p. 6). However, most often children are not allowed their own narratives of identity; instead they are constructed and narrated by the adults in their lives (Valentine, 2000). Neoliberal projects confine children to “authorized ways of being and knowing” (Davies, 2014). Thus, thinking about the autonomy of children is an important strand for critical (Grant, 2008) and humanizing pedagogy (Huerta, 2011) – particularly an autonomy is intimately woven with family and community.

In the following sections, I will illustrate a counter narrative of autonomy through the exploration of different domains in which autonomy plays out their lives. I begin with a discussion of the independence and caring for self that children often mentioned in their conversations.

**Independence and caring for self.** For (im)migrant children, being in the orchards is an opportunity that fosters independence, awareness of surroundings, and care for self. While parents and adults watch over and ensure the safety of the children, children are more often interacting and hanging out with other children, independent of their parents. As highlighted in Alicia’s Testmonio, in the early mornings, children are near their parents particularly because siblings and/or cousins are sleeping. Later in the work shift, children come together and leave their parents. For instance, at Johnson Orchards, Celina, Ivan, and Noely, and Zaida often hung out and played with each other throughout the orchard. Other children, particularly younger
children like seven-year-old Itzel and eight-year-old Osvaldo, often played, and talked on their own.

Even when children are picking cherries along with their parents, other children are often by their side talking or picking cherries as well. There is an important value to the relationships children have with other children without the restriction of adults. Moreover there is a sense of community when the children are with their parents along with their friends. This manifestation of community counters the assumption that "normal" development and growth necessitates complete independence from parents.

Children demonstrate a sense of independence through their understandings of the work they do in the orchard. For instance, Gabriel, Yanira, and Zaida were proud of the growth and learning they had experienced from the first summers they spent in the orchard. They were proud of being able to pick more quickly without removing the stems from the cherries as they have been instructed. This pride reflects the ways children are taught to be “good workers” through norms and expectations. In this case, the stems are not acceptable primarily because of a consumer preference that asks for aesthetically pleasing cherries. Cherries also get cut when stems are removed. While this pride of being a good worker may be problematic in some ways, there is an embedded knowledge in the children’s feelings of pride not because of their ability to produce more, but because of the lessons they have learned about themselves, work, family, and school.

Along with the critical connection to racist discourses of Mexican people and work, infused in the discussion of work pride and ethic is the understanding that children see themselves as independent individuals learning and growing from their accomplishments,
particularly through challenges and mistakes. Oftentimes, children articulate a learning to "not give up," a notion that illuminates an internalized belief in the meritocratic "pull yourselves from your bootstraps" myth (Crenshaw, 1995). Their conceptualization of this notion, however, reflects a deep understanding of self-determination that is an important strand of autonomy.

Gabriel explains that through the challenges of learning how to pick, he came to the realization that it is important to: “Do it right cause sometimes it’s going to be hard but sometimes you think you’re not going to pass it but you are eventually.” His experiences at the orchard taught him the lesson of not giving up, a lesson he believed was highly useful in situations outside of the orchard—“like in sports.” Gabriel played basketball and proudly shared that he improved as a player because of his self-determination to not give up. This notion of not giving up and “esforzarse duro”\textsuperscript{15}, as seven-year-old Itzel describes her experiences in the orchard, embodies a complex relationship to the orchard and the lessons learned from the challenges of the work. It illustrates the similar lesson I was given growing up of "echarle ganas" [put in your all in everything and anything you do].

According to López (2001), Mexican parents take their children to the fields to work in order to teach them the difficulty of the work and in turn encourage them to succeed in school. Parents in the orchard expressed this same hope and desire. What is interesting, however, is that children themselves express having an appreciation for and understanding of the work their

\textsuperscript{15} \textit{Esforzarse} comes from the term “esfuerzo,” or effort but to say “esforzarse” is to strive and exert oneself to accomplish one’s goals and dreams.
parents did in the orchard. As Alicia’s Testimonio describes, Alicia began to understand and appreciates the hard work her parents do at a very early age.

To imagine children as autonomous beings is to embrace their capacity to learn from the world on their own and to respect their own "readings of the world." As the participants in this study illuminate, children are able to think critically and deeply about the world that surrounds them and are able to make careful decisions. It is not difficult to imagine them as being able to be on their own without the direct supervision from adults. In a project titled "Children's City," Tonucci (2006) states that cities will once again become safe, healthy, and socially just when adults recognize the transformative potential of children's participation and autonomy. Of particular importance are the encounters and play between children without the supervision of adults.

Restoring autonomy to children will surely be the best road to recovery and full life in cities. When children can go to school alone and go outside to play with friends in public spaces, even then grandparents, people with disabilities, and the general public will be able to relive the experience of exploration and encounter (p. 63) [translated from Spanish]

The orchard teaches children the importance of being “careful” and aware of their surroundings—particularly with respect to the snakes and animals that they knew were in the orchard. For Julian, it is important to learn to be “quick with your actions,” in other words, to make well-informed decisions and “watch out for yourself,” a lesson he felt was easily applicable for places and situations outside of the orchard.
Individual identity, growth, and freedom to relate/engage with other children and their role in the work, are all important strands in the consideration of children as autonomous beings. In chapter four, I examined the oppressive practices of cherry orchards that ought to be reflected upon in our work towards social justice for Mexican American communities. While children have opportunities to engage freely in the orchard, they are also restricted, challenged, and oppressed by the neoliberal capitalist projects dictating the conditions of the orchard. All children described the physically demanding aspects of picking cherries exasperated by the intense heat. Julian described the aching feeling in his arms whenever he picked for too long without giving himself a break. He explained that he had been learning ways to take care of himself and his health—by taking breaks and stretching his arms. He, along with all other participants, also expressed a concern for the collective well-being.

**Children’s concern for the collective well-being.** Cause you need, we need to have a lot of cherries to make a lot of money sometimes it just takes your time, cause like trees only have a few and you gotta [sic] be like up the ladder put the ladder and it takes times away from you (Gabriel, 12 years old).

Everyone can get in the swimming pool [including] the man so he can get wet because it’s going to be hot in the mornings. (Itzel, 7 years old)

To “listen to children” consists of conscious engagement with and reflection on their stories. This “emergent” listening, as Bronwyn Davies (2014) discusses “is about being open to being affected [and] . . . about *not* being bound by what you already know.” Moreover, listening to children is more than “good pedagogy,” but it “means opening up the ongoing possibility of coming to see life, and one’s relation to it, in new and surprising ways” (p. xi). To view children
as autonomous beings is to listen to their narratives (Grover, 2004). When listening to the stories of participants, I uncovered a powerful sense of community and care for the collective that echoes previous research. (López, 2006; Reese, 2001; Suarez-Orozco & Suarez-Orozco, 1995)

Western knowledge systems often emphasize individualistic values over those based on community, family, and solidarity. As the closing to Alicia’s Testimonio, illuminates, one of the most fascinating themes uncovered from the data with children, was the concern for a collective good that continuously reemerged from the narratives children shared with me. Children saw their individual identities and well-being as intimately tied to community. For instance, when asked what she would change in the orchard if she had the opportunity to, seven-year-old Itzel would bring a swimming pool that everyone, including “el señor” [the man] could enjoy. “The man” Itzel speaks of refers to the boss who was often described as a strict man with strict rules.

Similarly, when asked this same question, nine-year-old Clarisa believed that a water park in the orchard would be a “good idea and also very fun for people.” She believed that people “stress very much” during work and deserve to relax. Zaida would remove the cliff from the orchard to ensure the safety of the community in the orchard. Ivan would bring new buckets and ladders so “people could work better.” Celina would change the unfair “rule” that prohibits yelling because she believes it is the only way people have to communicate with each other.

Julian’s idea of a change for the orchard was a little different than the rest of the participants. If he had the power to, Julian would transform the orchard into “a way to make natural gas . . . because gas gets too expensive these days and they have different chemicals in it. [He would] just probably give it to them like at the food bank every week. Just get it.” Julian
demonstrated an understanding of the collective good in the orchard and an awareness of the need for its distribution to those in need through food banks.

*Alicia’s Testimonio* illuminates these same community-based imaginings and desires that not only challenge the individualism that is often portrayed in narratives of children and adolescents (Lesko, 2012), but also reflects an autonomy to imagine and feel included in a community as whole beings with vital contributions to it. The children read the world as a "world where many worlds [ought to] fit" (Marcos, 1996).

An important aspect of the conversation on community is family. According to the discussions with children and adult participants, community and family are intimately interrelated—family is community and community is family. In *Alicia’s Testimonio*, Alicia describes one of her favorite parts of being in the orchard as the time she is able to spend with her family (both immediate and extended). This joy of being with family is illuminated often throughout participant narratives. For instance, Clarisa loved that she had time to spend with her parents, particularly her father whom she rarely saw because he worked a lot. Clarisa’s little sister, Itzel, loved her experience staying in the campground for migrant families because this gave her family the opportunity to enjoy time together. She enjoyed sharing time with the other families living in this campground, as well. Other children appreciated that the orchard gave their parents the opportunity to meet and talk with other family members and friends. For (im)migrant children, relationship and care is an important strand of family/community. Older siblings demonstrated care for younger siblings; children demonstrated care for other children or parents. Celina, for instance, describes ways she and her younger sister take care of their father by reminding him to stop working and eat.
Another strand to community that emerges from the stories of children is the environment and the animals within it. While most children spoke about the animals through tales of snakes and bugs scaring children and adults, the constant mention of animals demonstrates a more holistic view of the orchard and their narratives within it. Along with the tales of fright, children appreciated the opportunity to see different animals in the orchard, animals that they often saw in books at school. For instance, Julian states that being in the orchards:

In one way, it helps you from exploring the world. Because I seen like about butterflies flying by here and they were different types. And I found a lady bug in one of my cherry buckets.

He goes on to explain that it is important to care about the gas and the environment “because it can harm animals.”

Children’s view of the orchard as “space to play.” Children understand the function of the orchard as a work site where money is made. Nevertheless, there is an important part of their understanding of and relationship with the orchard that moves beyond this economic narrative. As the opening testimonio illuminates, an important part of children’s experiences in the orchard is the play they engage in with other children. Eight-year-old Celina states: “I like [the orchard] because there is a lot of space to play.” As discussed, the relationship between children and the freedom to engage freely throughout the orchard is vital aspect of children’s autonomy. The notion of playing freely challenges cultural gendered norms in many Mexican families (as was in my personal experience) that girls need to be more strictly supervised than boys. It also counters dominant ideology that often frames children as incapable and always in need of adult supervision. For instance, the concern for “children’s vulnerability and stranger danger in public
space” has led parents to fear leaving children alone—in fact, public spaces, as Valentine (1996) argues, have been deemed as a “natural adult-space” (p. 205). The orchard demonstrates a different conception of childhood—one which children are not strictly supervised and are given the freedom to play with each other.

For most participants, an aspect of the orchard they most enjoyed, in the words of participant Celina, is the “space to play” in the orchard. Participants play with cousins, who like them, also accompany at least one parent in the orchard. In Clarisa and Itzel’s case, the other children they engaged with, particularly after work hours, were other migrant children living in the workers’ campsite. The few children I spoke to in this campsite, like other non-migrant children, expressed the same enthusiasm for the games and playing they could do in the orchard. In fact, one child in the campsite shared not wanting to return to the city she lived in because in the orchard there was “always someone to play with.”

While children enjoyed having the opportunity to make money and save for particular purposes, they did not like being told to pick by their parents. As in the opening narrative, the freedom to choose when to pick and when to play shaped the relationship children had with the orchard and adults. When given the autonomy to decide, children felt validated, and more often than not, chose to pick more cherries and make more money in the doing. While some parents did remind their children they needed to work, most did not. Clarisa explains that it was her decision to go to the orchard, not her parents that took her there. Children’s autonomy relates to their capacity to take initiative (Paradise, 1991).

In a study examining the autonomy of children in the city, Tonucci (2006) argues for the vital importance of play and engagement between children “without the direct control of adults,”
in efforts to restore cities. While the context of this study (the city) is different than the experience of children in the orchards, the underlying argument warrants critical examination within a conversation of autonomy and children. In this case study, children constantly described the joy of play and exploration, particularly with other children. The space and opportunity to play is coupled with the possibilities of imagining. In *Alicia’s Testimonio*, through the game of “witches and sticks,” children imagine transforming aspects of the orchard into other things. In that space of imagination, we can see the care for the collective that I discuss above. Thus, the knowledge children create and hold is illuminated when children are allowed to be autonomous and imaginative beings.

A deficit outlook of (im)migrant children in the orchards might view the children as victims of the system—particularly girls who are to be saved from Mexican "machismo." A common stereotype about Mexican communities states that parents are strict with their parents to the point that children are not allowed to speak. In fact, some years ago, I was confronted with the stereotype when another person expressed feeling pity for me because I was in a Mexican family that was most likely very strict with me. In the orchards, however, parents counter this belief. The image of children playing in the orchard is a critical counter-narrative that disrupts narratives that Mexican children are limited by parents’ “authoritarian” values (Station, 1972). Parents were alert of where the children were, but were not strictly supervising them. Julian, Clarisa, and Noely walked around the orchard on their own, as their parents picked in trees far from them.

Another stereotype created by deficit lens states that Latina/o parents do not value education and their children’s success (Valencia, 2002). Not only is this stereotype disrupted by
children's constant discussions of the importance of school in their lives, as previous research 
(Elenes, Gonzalez, Bernal, & Villenas, 2001; Valdez, 1996; Villenas, 2002), demonstrates 
Mexican families emphasize a cultural understanding of education, or *educación*.

**Valuing work and school by the children’s own-making.** According to scholars Molls 
and Ruiz (2009) and Gutierrez (1999), (im)migrant families reside in a “third space” as 
transnational migrants in a globalized world. In this space, (im)migrant families use a “dual 
frame of reference” (Suárez-Orozco, 1995) to make sense of their lives in the United States. In 
the stories shared by children participants, there is a connection to the experiences of that “third 
space” researchers have previously examined—particularly with respect to the role school and 
formal education have on (im)migrant childrens’ lives. While the goal of this research study was 
not intentionally to make connections to school, school was a topic that was often brought up 
amongst children participants, parents, and even members of the orchard community. This did 
not come as a surprise considering that previous research (Delgado-Gaitan, 1992; Luna & 
Revilla, 2013; Valdez, 1996; Valencia, 2002; Villenas & Deyhle, 1999; Yosso, 2006), has 
examined the value many (im)migrant families place on schooling. For instance, while dominant 
discourses often portray Mexican parents as having no or little interest in school, research 
demonstrates that this is not the case (Valencia, 2002); in fact, parents are much more involved 
in the education of children. López describes that "rather than viewing involvement as the 
enactment of specific scripted school activities, . . . (im)migrant famili[es], understand 
involvement as a means of instilling in their children the value of education through the medium 
of hard work" (p. 416). The adults I spoke to in the orchards have these similar 
counterhegemonic understandings of parental involvement in school.
Moreover, in that “third space,” (im)migrant families provide their children with teachings based on counter-hegemonic cultural models of education, or, *educación* (Chrispeels & Rivero, 2001; Elenes, Gonzalez & Bernal, 2001; Delgado-Gaitan & Trueba, 1991; Valdez, 1996; Villenas, 2001, 2002; Villenas & Deyhle, 1999). *Educación* is distinguishable from the education in the U.S school system because it means more than the education received in schools. Reese et al. (1995) describe *educación* as a cultural model with roots in agrarian environments and an example of the dynamic and resilient presence of cultural forms in Latina/o communities (Villenas, 2002) that teaches children “respect, moral values, and loyalty to family” (p. 17).

While the model of *educación* that Latina/o (im)migrant parents hope to pass down to children includes a value for formal education, it also includes a respect for *el trabajo del campo* [the work of the land] as two parent participants name it. Parents, particularly those that take their children to the fields (López, 2006), or in this case the orchard, hope children learn the difficulty of the work and decide to pursue better opportunities through school—Mexican families often use work as a tool for motivation to do well in school. Moreover, their hope is also that children learn the value of work in the fields as an important tool for surviving in society. Mrs. Mercedes shares the consejo she shares with her daughters:

Ojale, Dios y María Santísima te ayuden y sí le eches ganas a la escuela. . . como batallan los padres trabajando en la huerta, como se sufre y pues en la escuela pues es diferente el trabajo, allá usas mucho la mente. Y acá usas el cuerpo, pues también la mente pero es más fuerza física. . . Ustedes sabrán. Y esa es la razón porque las llevamos para que aprendan también. . . como se hace el trabajo con la huerta y le échen ganas a sus estudios y vean
Children understand the importance of getting a good education and at the same time they value the work in the orchards as forms of the *educación* their parents hope to share with them. For some children, the “hard work” in the orchard served to push them to “study hard” in school and in doing so obtain a job that is not as physically demanding. Other children express a desire to have more opportunities to help their families out. Work serves as a frame of reference for children and parents from which they both draw when speaking about “success,” and survival in society and school. Yanira shares:

> I learn how money is earned like how hard you have to work like its either that or go to school learn new things. And if you don’t want to go to school, there is always the orchard . . . it is helpful because some kids don’t really like the orchards, they are more

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16 May God and the Holy Mary help you and that you do try hard in school. But also so that you learn how money is earned in the orchard. . . how parents struggle working in the orchard, how they suffer, and the work in school is different. There, you use the mind. Here, you use the body, also the mind, but it is more physical energy. It is all up to you. And that is the reason why we take them, so they also learn how work is in the orchard and they try hard in their studies and they see how money is earned in the fields. . . how fruit is harvested. I tell them, you see how the food that you are eating is harvested.
like, they just like staying home and that will teach them to don’t give up on school, keep on learning and like study hard. And also it can teach you like things about nature.

In the sharing of stories, children themselves highlight similar understandings of a relationship between work in the orchards and work in school. Unlike the arguments made in research, however, the work in the orchard is more than a tool to motivate school success. While children seem to clearly understand the hopes their parents and community members have for them, they also view orchard work as an option for those that do not do well in school.

Other ways school is brought up in the stories shared by children reflects a place-based learning model that has been often theorized (Gruenewald & Smith, 2014) and which Freire argues is a pivotal strategy for learning. For instance, some children mentioned seeing creatures in the orchards that they learned about in school. Gabriel enthusiastically shared that in the placing of picking ladders, he was able to learn about angles. He states:

Like when I go to school, show me 90-degree angles, 180, obtuse, right, and acute which help me with the ladder cause you have it straight all your weight will push it. If you lean on one side, you’ll fall. . . . You have to keep it an angle, at an obtuse angle

Unlike dominant narratives that portray children working in orchards as victims of parental negligence and lack of care for school, children demonstrate a critical engagement with the concepts learned in school by being in orchards. Children emphasize learning and valuing of school and education that is neglected in deficit theories.

While embedded within the children’s remarks and stories are discursive connections to capitalism, neoliberalism, and the racist stereotypes, children’s counter these narratives by a reconceptualization of what it means to be a “good worker.” Through the consejos learned from
parents and community and the exploration of their own identities as children, (im)migrant children view orchards are not solely defined by the act of picking cherries. But even picking cherries is not (or should not be) the mechanized work that capitalist norms and *el patron* demands. To be a good worker, then, can be much more humanizing than hegemonic narratives illustrate. The table below lists the strategies on cherry picking I gathered from the stories and conversations with children.

Table 3

*Children’s Strategies for How to Be a Great Cherry Worker*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Children’s strategies for how to be a great worker</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1) Pick cherries with them stem</td>
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<tr>
<td>2) Pick as fast as you can so you can make a lot of money</td>
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<tr>
<td>3) Make sure no leaves are in your bucket</td>
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<td>4) Set the ladder at the right angle (acute angles work best)</td>
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<td>5) Drink a lot of water</td>
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<tr>
<td>6) Rest and relax sometimes</td>
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<tr>
<td>7) Help your families</td>
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<tr>
<td>8) Have time to play (throwing)</td>
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The novelist Chimamanda Adichie (2009) warns against the danger of a single story. When she came to the United States to study literature, she became the object of the single story of Africa, and was often told her work was not “authentically” African. During a trip to México, she learned that she too had been complicit in believing the single story of Mexicans as people who were “fleecing the healthcare system [and] sneaking across the border.” Adichie “had been so emerged in the media coverage of Mexicans that they had been one thing in [her] mind: the abject immigrant.” She had “bought into the single story of Mexicans,” or the masternarratives that emanate from intersections of race, class, and gender power structures. Similarly, there is a single story of children often told through adult-centric research that rarely includes children’s voices in part because it is believed that they are not in a position to give “accurate information” (Messiou, 2006, p. 306) or because children and adolescents are viewed as developing, in transition (Lesko, 2012) and “not fully actualized” (Grover, 2004, p. 91).
After immersing myself in children’s stories, there is but one certainty: their lives are complex. Orchards are complex places where multiple contradictory layers of identity and culture and power intersect. Children spend their summers in these places, learning the rules of the orchards, and at the same time (re)creating new knowledge and ways of viewing the world. While many violent discourses are perpetuated in the orchards, children resist through their insistence on and desire for an autonomy that pushes beyond that which Western scholars write about—an autonomy that is self within community.

Their "readings of the world" involve the joy of engaging/learning with family, community, and other children. It also involves the contradictions and struggles rooted in oppressions and inequity that are lived and felt in the everyday and which are sources of transformative understandings of the work that is yet to be done (Anzaldúa, 1999; Murillo, 2010). While a community of scholars has been “abriendo caminos” [opening paths] and “construyendo puentes” [constructing bridges] (Irizarri & Nieto, 2010) through theory, research, and practice in the critical understandings of Latina/os (Murrillo Jr. et al., 2010), there is indeed work to be done. And that work is here, in my own community, as my sister reminds me in a recent text message telling me about the rule in the elementary school she works for that prohibits the speaking of Spanish. My sister asks: “How can I send students on "steps" for speaking our language?” and I am left speechless. As Murillo Jr. (2010) writes: ¡La lucha continua [the struggle continues]!

Children are important members of community and if we learn to “listen” to children and their lived experiences, not only as good pedagogy, but as “means for opening up the ongoing possibility of coming to see life, and one’s relation to it, in new and surprising ways” (p. xi),
perhaps together we can “make the world a better place,” in the wise words of eleven-year-old, Julian.

\textit{Lo que falta, es que se pongan a bailar}^{17} - Mrs. Mercedes

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^{17} What remains to be done is that we dance
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CHAPTER 6: DISCUSSION

Situated in the complexity of the orchards as a borderland of struggle and joy is children’s *conocimiento* of family, culture, autonomy, and education. These understandings compel me to raise two important discussion in this final chapter. The first concerns the implications of this work for educators, communities, and schools. Here, I address the “why is this research important” question for those who work with children of (im)migrants particularly those of the Mexican community. In the second discussion, I examine implications for the research process drawn from the many self-reflective moments I experienced throughout this study—particularly the writing portion. In this discussion, I hope to continue a conversation around positionality and representation brought up in chapter three. I will dive into Anzaldúa’s praxis of transformation through the self-change and self-reflection that writing this dissertation inspired for me.

**Implications for Educators, Schooling, and Community**

The findings of this dissertation, which revolve around learning from children of (im)migrants in orchards, provide two major implications for educators. The first echoes CRT and LatCrit’s critique of majoritarian narratives, particularly of Mexican communities. This case study revealed that while the orchard is a capitalist space that seeks to transform communities and children into laboring bodies, children, like the communities they form a part of, engage in resistant practices that disrupt deficit understandings of Mexican people. Children’s experiences of working and playing in orchards is knowledge that when examined, can offer educators understandings of more inclusive and multicultural teaching practices. Solidarity and intimacy
between communities cannot be built if negative discourses continue to shape the way Mexican people are perceived.

The second major implication based on my analysis continues this disruption of dominant narratives but more specifically, the disruption of deficit theories that continue influencing the ways students of color are perceived by educators (Valencia, 2002). These deficit mindsets are challenged by children’s active participation in the communities of the orchard, and critical engagement with work, others, and themselves. I present these two major arguments in more detail in the following section.

**Disruption of majoritarian narratives of Mexican communities.** A discursive analysis dominant popular discourses of Mexican people reveals the complexities of how this community is understood. For instance, a historical examination of Mexican participation in the U.S. exposes the discourse of Mexican people as “good workers” and paradoxically as “lazy” (Nieto, 2004; Villenas, 2002). In terms of the discourse of people as “good workers,” this historical narrative reveals that Mexican immigrants have been primarily defined by the contributions they make to the nation-state with their labor (or don’t make); thus Mexican (im)migrants have been reduced to disposable bodies available when the United States needs their labor. In a case study examining the views of a small suburban town in the Northeastern U.S, Worthham, Mortimer and Allard (2009) explicate that Mexican people are often understood as “model minorities with respect to work and civil life but not with respect to education” (p. 388). These discourses are born out of the deficit theories Valencia (2002) argues create myths in literature and U.S media such as those that assert that Mexican-Americans parents do not value education.
Not only are these discourses problematic at multiple levels, they reveal a prevalent xenophobia and exclusion of Mexican people as full citizens and active members of society. Rosaldo (1997) argues that the declaration of workers as “alien” or “illegal” has created a “psychological and cultural mechanism of association” for all Latina/os that constantly question their belonging in this nation (p. 31). Scholar and educator Wendell Berry states that “white folks do not see Mexican workers as integral to their life and culture” even when the nation hires Mexican people to do jobs most people feel they are “too good” to do. When “negative stereotypes” are “the only way” white communities have of “knowing and relating to the other,” there is little, to no, engagement, or “intimacy between races” (hooks, 2000, p. 181). This intimacy has transformational possibilities of community and understanding.

These majoritarian narratives of Mexican people that contribute to the “constant [deprivation] of Americanness” of Latin American people (Castro-Salazar and Bagley, 2012, p. 4) influence policies, ideologies, and relationships. For instance, the relationships between and with(in) communities are influenced by anti-immigration discourses materialized in policies such as House Bill (HB) 1070, HB 2281 in Arizona, HB 56 in Alabama, and local legislations such as Ordinance 5165 of Freemont Nebraska. Thus, critique and disruption of these narratives is needed.

This study sought to provide the critique, and most importantly, a disruption of those discourses through the use of counter-narratives. Children share stories of their families and community that disrupt and complicate the images the above discourses paint; for instance, families care about school and the success of their children. As the stories demonstrate, children have critical understandings of the role and value of school in their lives (in terms of academic
and economic success). While my questions did not explicitly ask about school, children often made important connections between the lessons they learned by being and working in the orchard to concepts taught in school.

Additionally, the discourses that illustrate Mexican (im)migrant people as “lazy” are shattered by the work ethic that is articulated even by the youngest children. That “work ethic” is not only about being “good workers,” it is about being more conscious consumers, understanding the processes of harvest, and about having options in life. With this said, it is problematic to view this community as solely “hard workers,” or as “braceros”\textsuperscript{18} especially when children demonstrate an internalization of the stereotype that Mexican people “belong” in orchards. But what the narratives of children and communities demonstrate is that people will do whatever they need to do to survive and live with dignity—communities resist dominant frameworks. Learning from this resistance can help educators view Mexican American children of (im)migrants as strong and resilient, rather than as victims of their surroundings.

Contrary to dominant narratives, Mexican families are engaged with the teaching and learning of their children. That engagement is rooted in culture, history, and memory. For instance, families create models of educación that values cultural knowledge. While orchards are sites of production and capitalist labor, the orchards are also bridges of memory and (re)connection to the cultural appreciation of land and labor that Mexican families bring with them across the border, something that children are highly aware of. As Gutiérrez and

\textsuperscript{18} Braceros was the term used to name the guest worker program of the (year), derives from the Spanish word “brazo,” meaning “hand.”
Hondagneu-Sotelo note, immigrant families are living in transnational spaces, “the interstitial social spaces traversed and occupied by migrants in their sojourns between places of origin and places of destination” (Gordilo, 2010. p. 129). Here, Western models and values that counter those they brought with them across the border often challenge them. Nevertheless, families are often able to “create their own infrastructures for development, including mechanisms for the education of their children that capitalize on rather than devalue their cultural resources” (Molls & Ruíz, 2009, p. 362).

This negotiation of two spaces (country of origin and the U.S) in order to keep cultural values alive, (re)creates a third space where they seek to teach their children “core moral values” that counter hegemonic educational models of competition and individualism. Sofía Villenas (2002) states that there is a dynamic and resilient presence of cultural forms in Latina/o communities. These include “contested and newly improvised productions of what it means to raise children with una buena educación” [A good education] which is that education that teaches children “respect, moral values, and loyalty to family” (p. 17).

The cultural values shared by families and communities with children, and those that are learned on children’s own terms are not left behind when (im)migrant children enter the public school classroom space. Children come with the consejos [advice] and educación [education] taught by family and community. Godínez (2006) states that consejos are defined by Mexicanas in her study as “the telling about values, symbols, and ways of thinking and knowing.” Educación is “the daily teachings and lessons most often related to behavior/actions with illustrative examples based on the elder’s life experiences” (p. 31). Some consejos are not said but rather demonstrated. For instance, witnessing the extremely hard work of families, for many,
is a *consejo* in itself of what to value and what to strive for in life. Participants in this case study illuminated this very lesson in their own lives. Children expressed understanding of and valuing the struggle their parents endured in orchards. As educators, there is transformative potential in recognizing and validating this cultural knowledge in children, as accentuated in culturally responsive pedagogy (Gay, 2010) and a humanizing pedagogy (Bartolome, 1994; Franquίz & Salazar, 2004; Freire, 1970; Huerta 2011).

Part of this counter-hegemonic *educación* is the value placed on learning *el trabajo del campo* [working the land] and staying grounded in cultural and familial capital. A few years ago I was working alongside my father at one of the orchards in which I observed for this case study. My father who was picking atop a cherry tree asked the man next to us about his son picking at the bottom of the cherry tree. The man responded that while he hoped his son pursues a career outside the orchard, he believed it to be vital that his son have multiple skill sets in his life so as to have as many options as possible. I was awestruck by the man’s response for a couple of reasons. The man offered a counter-narrative that disrupted dehumanizing hegemonic understandings of the Mexican (im)migrant community. Unlike the discourse that Mexican families do not care about school, parents and children talk about school most often using orchards as a frame of reference for children to *echarle ganas*\(^{19}\) in school. Moreover, as in the example of the man in the orchard, these parents try to teach children about having options—particularly in terms of jobs. Esteva and Prakash (2005) state that “in the cultures of dwelling, elders, parents, and neighbors teach and learn traditions which emphasize staying well rooted;

\(^{19}\) Give it your all. Try as hard as you can.
strengthening the knowledge and skills needed to nourish and be nourished by their own places” (p. 3). The value placed on working the land, and understanding the processes of harvest are values rooted in Mexican people’s indigeneity and working class positions in México. In the “third space” (im)migrants occupy, Mexican people in these areas demonstrate as Oaxacan indigenous peoples have done for generations: “Regenerat[e] their language and culture, while, coexisting with, as well as resisting, their colonizers universalizable truths” (Esteva & Prakash, 2005, p. 3).

Gloria Anzaldúa (1999) states that she is like a turtle in that, wherever she goes, she carries home on her back (p. 43). Many Mexican American children of (im)migrant families are like turtles, carrying their homes on their backs, carrying their families and communities and cultural knowledge. The lives of children are changed when educators care enough to listen to these stories. In the words of bell hooks and Wendell Berry, Berry: “If you reduce any group of people to a set of stereotypes, you impair your mind” (p. 178). If (im)migrant families are reduced to the stereotypes that invade our media, such as those that accuse immigrants of stealing jobs, or being criminals, our minds will be “impaired.” How can we educate with impaired minds?

**Resisting deficit-thinking: Children as holders and creators of knowledge.** During a conversation participant Gabriel, he shared the ways ladder placements helped him understand the mathematical concepts. When I asked him if he ever had the opportunity to share this in school, he responded no. Thus, I imagine what it would look like if teachers understood the learning that happens in the orchards, the ways that children engage with each other, their families, and their work. It is pivotal that educators understand this complexity and engage in the
ongoing work that seeks to support the achievement of Latina/o students in schools. Going beyond “prescribed teaching methods” and learning from the students’ worlds beyond the classroom is the important work of a humanizing pedagogy that Franquín and Salazar (2004) demonstrate is a central part of addressing the diverse needs of Chicana/o/Mexicana/o students (p. 37). An empowering way to engage in this understanding comes in the stories children tell. Children have stories to share with educators, and it is our responsibility to listen and in doing so, perhaps “it will serve to encourage that teacher to listen (with heart) to another student’s story and create connections between lives and schools of his or her own for that student’s journey” (Carger, 1996, p. 149).

In the state of Washington, Hispanics or Latina/os comprise 11.6 percent of the total population. In Rio County wherein my family resides, Hispanics or Latina/os comprise 26.5 percent (U.S. Census Bureau). Suárez-Orozco and Suárez-Orozco (2009) state that “the disconnect between immigration policies and the realities of the lives of immigrants coalesce into a perfect storm that shapes the school experiences of the largest group of immigrant-origin children ever enrolled in American schools: Latina/os” (p. 329). In a report published for the University of Washington, Contreras and Stritikus (2008) state that “while Latino students are distinct in that they represent the fastest growing K-12 public school population, they are distinct too, in that they consistently rank at the bottom or near the bottom on state assessments and other indicators of academic achievement” (p. 4). Latina/o children’s education, according to Villenas, (2013) continues to be a “battleground for nation and culture wars” (p. 13). The work of Contreras and Stritikus demonstrates a persistent “achievement gap,” or “opportunity gap” between Latina/o students and their white counterparts (p. 5). But as Delpit (2012) reminds us,
“there is no achievement gap at birth,” (p. 5) and it is pivotal that educators engage in shifting the focus on deficiency that has for years affected students of color to “an understanding of integrity and brilliance” of all students (Godínez, 2006).

The lessons children taught me about relationships, place, play, work, autonomy, and imagination illuminate knowledge that is a form of cultural capital (Yosso, 2005), or “funds of knowledge” (Guerra, 1998), that can be braided into the academic training of educators. Teachers’ “tireless commitment to assert the imperative of cultural knowledge as a foundation of education, achievement, and excellence” (Godínez, 2006, p. 34), can contribute to changing a schooling that continuously tries to “fix” students whose modes and values do not match those of dominant society (Delpit, 2012). For Delpit, “schooling that labels children as broken or tries to fix them to match the school’s limited modes is doomed to failure” (p. 103).

Many students learn by being in the world versus reading of the world in books (Rasmussen & Akulukjuk, 2009). While the lesson was about angles or about the meaning of “hard work,” children in orchards demonstrated a “living as learning” (Esteva & Prakash, 2005, p. 55) approach, a counter-hegemonic practice with potential to help educators imagine a more inclusive education that does not “destroy the economy of home and community” that these children deem extremely important in their reading of the word and the world (Freire, 1970). In their stories, children value the wellbeing of the collective, a consejo for transformational praxis that resists individualist Western values. Moreover, the value placed on children’s autonomy and ability to hold and create knowledge is yet another source of learning for educators and schooling.
Research examining the cultural capital of Latina/o families often times focuses on the parents and when student stories are provided, they are most often adolescents. This case study sought to learn from younger children. This study echoes the arguments of other studies on alternative forms of educación and cultural knowledge. Unlike most of this research, however, this case study focuses on the stories of children and their powerful practice and desire for autonomy.

**Pedagogy of dignity: Towards a more humanizing and transformational praxis.**

Reza Lopéz (2006) briefly describes a “pedagogy of human dignity” as one that embraces identities, respects familial cultural and linguistic backgrounds, and connects to students’ lived experiences. This pedagogy of human dignity is intimately tied to Freire’s humanistic and social justice approaches to teaching and learning. Reza-Lopéz echoes scholars and educators’ beliefs that “having a voice humanizes the learner,” and adds that “to give value to this voice, to give value to its identity, respect, equity, and inclusion must exist” (p. 194). To take this pedagogy of dignity a step further, it ought to resist adult-centric knowledge and engage in “emergent” listening to children’s stories (Davies, 2014). To “listen to children” is to be consciously engaged and constantly self-reflect with their stories, to be open to being affected by “ongoing possibility of coming to see life, and one’s relation to it, in new and surprising ways” (p. xi).

The English dictionary does not have an adjective derivation of dignity but the Spanish language holds many. For instance, to live “una vida digna,” means to live with dignity and in humane conditions. The work that is performed in places like the orchard is “trabajo digno,” meaning a work that is worthy, respectful, and honest. Dignity is a human need, across race, gender, class, and age. It is a space that allows the free exercise of our humanity and where our
multiple and diverse ways of knowing and being are respected and validated. For instance, Shahajan (2009) argues that an “anti-oppressive classroom” is inclusive of learners’ spirituality, referring to “a way of being in the world where one is connected to one’s cultural knowledge and/or other beings” (p. 122). Dignity is a space where we are in balance and in peace with each other as human beings, with other living beings and ecosystems—it is an intimate engagement with the holistic self. Dignity is a space where our humanity simply is. Where we feel whole. Dignity is what many are fighting for and reclaiming in Chiapas, in Palestine, in Mexico City, in Wallstreet, and in the packing sheds and orchards where my family works. Dignity is what we collectively refuse to let go of, what the adults and children in the orchard cling to even when the place is an oppressive site of Capitalist production.

It is this human dignity that urges understanding orchards as more than the capitalist logic of work. Orchards are factories of work where cherries are grown in vast amounts. The communities employed in the orchards, however, are not solely reduced to working bodies. To imagine Mexican people as working bodies perpetuates the discourses imbedded in guest worker programs like the Bracero Program and paints this community as valuable solely for their labor. Mexican people are not only workers. They are human beings with a resistant dignity. To examine and learn from the knowledge that is (re)created invites human dignity to the table of teaching and learning. Moreover, to view children as autonomous beings with their own contributions to and with(in) community is part of their human dignity. As such, they are engaged members of society that are not “in transition” to being, but are already. As a member of the community myself, I am responsible to respect and reciprocate the knowledge shared with
me by participants. So I close this dissertation with a focus on that knowledge, gathered from the children’s narratives of play, work, relationships, and care.

In her study on Mexican American activists, Mary Pardo (1998) begins by stating: “different from many other social science studies of women of Mexican origin, this study is strength oriented” (p. 8). Similarly, my work is also “strength oriented,” focusing on a community that embraces cultural values that center human dignity within a violent environment of anti-immigration rhetoric that rather than questioning the system, blames individuals.

This thinking lingers in literature and the media and is the basis for the myth that Mexican American parents do not value education (Valencia, 2002). The “comunidad-based saberes” (Urrieta, 2013) and children’s understandings of the world that were shared with me in the orchard speak to the agency and dignity that Mexican communities cling to even with the presence of institutional racism and anti-immigrant xenophobia that is “growing rampant, threatening life, liberty, and justice for millions of Latinos/as in the United States” (Villenas & Deyhle, 1999, p. 422). In critically engaging with this reflection, my analysis leads me to the understanding of a pedagogy that is inclusive, humanizing, responsive, and transformational. A pedagogy of dignity that validates the knowledge of adults, children, communities, and families while it disrupts the violent discourses of Mexican communities.

Along the diverse implications this research has for educators and community, in the next section, I will illustrate the implications has for research and researchers.

**Implications for Research**

**Strategic focus on people.** It was not an easy task walking through the orchard and acting as the observer I was. While children demonstrate counter hegemonic understandings of
being in and with the world, the orchard is a capitalist creation that is attached to neoliberal globalization and racism and works to reduce Mexican communities to laboring bodies. Children internalized the racist discourses that linger in society: Mexican people belong in agricultural spaces of labor. The reality of the conditions continues to be that of low wages, less than ideal working conditions, and a belittling of (im)migrants’ contributions in the nation. Thus, as Angela Davis (2015) contends, a critique of capitalism is more needed than ever.

Through work with children and communities in orchards and packing factories, I have come to learn that while it is of pivotal importance that we critique the systems and structures that perpetuate the oppression of our communities, in focusing our discussions on the structures and oppression of the people laboring within, we contribute to that very oppression we are critiquing. If we are to focus on the critique, we must do so carefully to not contribute to the deficit thinking models that have been used to explain the school failure of poor students of color (Valencia, 1997). While the orchards are reflective of capitalist values and thus oppressive to the workers, having this sole interpretation marginalizes the agency of the workers who are actively (re)creating their power within this space. It is true that the space is affected by what the factory represents in the bigger capitalist picture; however, the space is not void. During (1993) uses Michel de Certeau’s “Walking in the City” to explain how “walking” through the city rather than “viewing” it from above allows one to see that “everyday life has particular value when it takes places in the gaps of the larger power-structures” (p. 156). Likewise, when walking through the orchard, one can see that as Certeau argues, it has “its own rhetoric.” In “walking” through the orchards, I realized that more than its structure and all that is oppressive defines the space in the orchard. It is defined by the relationships, stories, and connection of women and
men, adults and children. The space is not void. The space is (re)created into one that centers the value and dignity of adults, children, and the work they perform.

**When work is personal, it is political: Implications on research from self-reflection.**

In writing the stories of people close to my heart, I entered a vulnerable space where I came face to face with my most intimate feelings and longing for social justice. Here, I was reunited with my adolescent and child self and all the feelings I had yet to confront of these arduous years. To come full circle with my responsibility to my communities, it was important that I engage intimately with the purpose and importance of this research. This required an active engagement in self-reflection, for as Anzaldúa illuminates (1999), at the center of social justice work is self-reflection and self-change. This process necessitated that I reconcile the fragmented parts of myself and transform the unearthed emotions into sources of empowerment.

In retrospect, I have come to understand that it was these feelings of vulnerability that brought me to deep understanding of the power of engaging in research for social justice. I realize that as a child and early adolescent, my voice was silenced. Or rather, I did not know I had a voice and I had so much to say. Perhaps I was taken back to this part of myself because this study asked that as a researcher, I place myself in my child-shoes. My psyche’s third voice, the intelligence of experience as a woman of color, brought me to think more fully about my role in the research relationship—that defined by reciprocity, responsibility, relationality, relevance, and respect (Kirkness & Barnhardt, 1991; Kovach, 2010; Wilson, 2008;).

One of the first entries in my research journal is a reminder to myself: “‘Remember,’ says Anzaldúa, ‘you must trust in your ability to write.’” Throughout my writing, I came face to face with an internalized racism, sexism, and homophobia that questioned my “voice” and my ability
to write. Anzaldúa’s knowledge and consejos were an intimate part of this work, particularly the self-reflective journey the work inevitably took me through. For Anzaldúa (1999), praxis of transformation begins with self-reflection and self-change.

Every increment of consciousness, every step forward is a travesía, a crossing. I am again an alien in new territory. . . But if I escape conscious awareness, escape knowing, I won’t be moving. Knowledge makes me more aware, it makes me more conscious. “Knowing” is painful because after “it” happens I can’t stay in the same place and be comfortable. I am no longer the same person I was before (p. 70).

The process of self-reflection and self-change is a journey of seven steps that leads to a conocimiento similar to Paulo Freire’s conscientization where we critically engage with and in the world. The process is a painful and transformative cyclical journey that mestiza women embark on whenever we do work that is for social justice and praxis of transformation and inclusion within and across communities. Transformation, as Reza-López (2012) states, begins with the uncomfortable. For instance, in the writing process, I confronted my own discomfort discussing gender in Mexican communities. The following passage (included in an email sent to my chair), illuminates that very discomfort I experienced as I wrote this dissertation.

. . . This is perhaps the most intimate and painful discussion to have. I knew I needed to shed light on this (and that it was important to do so) but I did not know how to do it. I’m trying to figure it out as I write. I was fragmented by sexual and gender violence as a little girl and young adolescent. So, this discussion is hard for me to tackle.

Manulani Meyer writes that all dissertations are healing. I agree because this writing process- the putting myself back in my child shoes- has been healing and sometimes,
most times it has been painful. The focus I have taken in the beauty and the light and the dignity is in part my way of transforming those fragmented pieces into a "beautiful whole self", in the words of Chicana Feminist scholar Ana Castillo (1991). I know that I cannot romanticize a culture that while beautiful is also clouded by violent misunderstandings of masculinity. Yet, I do want to ensure that my study focus on strengths of my community, on the light I see in children's eyes whose understandings have the potential to transform minds and hearts. I know I need to take on this "shadow-beast" (Anzaldua, 1999) for the sake of a more nuanced dissertation, but more importantly, for the sake of my own healing, for the sake of the healing of my community.

My question is, how do I do so?

As this excerpt illustrates, this case study is personal, and as Chicana Feminist scholars contend, the personal is political. From my challenge with providing a gender analysis I learned that there is responsibility in doing work that is political. This responsibility extends to the ways we represent the communities we work with.

I sought to humanize Mexican people, while simultaneously expose the social justice work there is to be done. I sought to represent children as autonomous and creative, and holders and creators of knowledge. That came with struggle and constant reflection, reflective of a common struggle for researchers who conduct research with their own communities. In the “insider/outsider” dilemma (Villenas, 1996), the ethnographer is both colonized and colonizer when conducting research with their own community. Through this research, I came to understand that while I cannot “escape a history of my own marginalization, nor [my] guilt of complicity” (p. 716), if research is done con corazón y respeto [with heart and with respect]
(Valdes, 1996) and for social change, communities welcome you in. I learned that there is
tremendous power and an honor to be “translator” and “facilitator” (p. 730) speaking \textit{with} our
communities. Often times the academy is more nervous and unsupportive of being an “insider”
of a community for sake of “validity” and “reliability,” more so than the communities being
nervous about the “outsider” status of a researcher. I was still part of the community, but I had a
great deal of responsibility. In the words of an elder who spoke to me at a packing factory years
ago “What you do is good, so they learn that this work is hard.” Children and adults taught me
that the cultural knowledge that survives the border crossings is rooted in a deep understanding
of what it means to be Mexican. In the word of Gloria Anzaldúa (1999):

Deep in our hearts we believe that being Mexican has nothing to do with which country
one lives in. Being Mexican is a state of soul—not one mind, not one of citizenship.
Neither eagle nor serpent, but both. And like the ocean, neither animal respects borders.
(p. 84)

\textbf{Conclusion}

The violence of an anti-immigrant atmosphere dehumanizes and devalues the work and
contribution of workers in places like the orchards in Rio County. The xenophobic anxiety of a
nation that sees children immigrating to the U.S as a “threat to national security,” calls for urgent
critique and action. Dominant discourses have historically served to dehumanize and justify
anti-immigrant policies. They have also served to perpetuate the exclusion of Mexican people
from communities. Dominant society ignores the lived realities of (im)migrant workers who
contribute greatly to the economy of our nation—particularly of the children who are shifting the
discourses with their understandings of the world. Children in the orchard have stories to tell and
we have a responsibility to listen. The orchard is a space that is designed to reduce them to their function within the profit-making industry, but they (re)create this space to center their cultural knowledges, agency, and dignity.

In walking through the orchard, listening to the stories, witnessing the playful moments of children, and being in the space, I felt the resistant dignity. As an educator, I was taught many lessons throughout this research in the orchard and I was changed. I embrace this change because as Wilson (2008) reminds us: “If research doesn’t change you as a person, then you haven’t done it right” (p. 135). This work continues Freire’s dialogue on learning to read the word and the world. It invites researchers to imagine dignant ways to engage in research with communities. Learning about how children of (im)migrant backgrounds see their lives in this world, how they feel the world, and how they read the world, contributes to building more loving and welcoming classroom spaces for every student. Change begins in the imagination, for as bell hooks (2000) states: “what we cannot imagine, cannot come into being” (p. 14).

The stories of children invited me to ask: What if teachers went into orchards to understand the stories of their (im)migrant students? What if they went into these spaces to feel the ways families survive the violent society that reduces them to laboring bodies, that does not see the Mexican communities as integral part of the United States’ culture and life? What if educators learned firsthand the communities and values that children carry on their backs when they enter the classroom spaces? Understanding “comunidad-based” can help educators deepen their awareness and appreciation of the richness of immigrant communities, their stories, and knowledges (Urrieta, 2013, p. 320). Understanding the saberes children hold and create especially when they are amongst other children shifts the adult-centric paradigms that often
determine the research agenda. Getting to know students’ communities and families would help to transgress the boundaries that keep us from “talking together” those “boundaries of race, class, and experience” (hooks, 2009) thus opening possibilities to make the beloved community many of us seek.

Immigrant workers are not “feral hogs” (Shahid, 2011) as a Grand Old Party legislator once said; we are not criminals stealing jobs. Children immigrating as unaccompanied minors are not a “national security threat.” We seek better lives for our families and live in this country with those strong values of community, love, and dignity that helped us survive the arduous crossing of the border. The children of these communities have much to offer in the classroom space and just like I was changed as a researcher in this process, if educators allow themselves to feel, hear, listen and be with students and their stories, they too will be changed. Love moved me to engage in this project and in that I was reminded of values like listening, respect, spirituality, and dignity. The classroom spaces, like the orchard, are not void. We carry our communities on our backs and sometimes that means that we learn differently, but we learn. In the beautiful words of Lisa Delpit (2012), “There is no achievement gap at birth,” (p. 5) and “if we can see all of the children we teach—skin color, culture, learning styles, income level notwithstanding—as complete, deserving, brilliant human beings, then perhaps we will manage to create the educational system we need” (p. 103).

In writing these stories, my story, I engaged in a political act that I hope contributes to a creation of a world where many worlds fit. By seeking “education that can lead us toward the prospects of unlimited human potential,” (Carillo, 2010, p. 77) we can begin to create this world, by changing the world in our own classrooms. But first, we must change the world of our minds
to one that is more engaged and occupied by love (Ami, Mackenzie, & Ripper, 2013). We must engage in self-reflection and self-change if we want to reach a true praxis of transformation.
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Appendix A

Alicia’s Testimonio (Interrupted Version)

“Alicia, ya es hora mija.”
Waking up in the morning sucks. It is the part of picking I hate the most.
“Ya son las 4:15! Vamos a llegar tarde!”

− All participants express a dislike for the early wake up time. This piece is particularly referring to Gabriel, who describes his daily routine begins with his mom waking him up every morning at 4 a.m.

Even though I like being in the orchard and it is my decision to go, I wish my parents would not go so early.
− Participant Clarisa tells me that going to the orchards was her decision. She was who told her parents to take her

When my parents wake me up, it is still dark. They let my brother continue sleeping because he is little. They carry him to the car and let him sleep in the car until he wakes up on his own. Sometimes they ask me to wake him up.
− Participants Celina, Noely, Zaida, and Zaida’s little brother slept in their car in the early morning as their parents picked. The oldest participants, Celina and Zaida, would wake up close to 8 a.m and their younger siblings would stay sleeping in bed. Celina wakes up her sister Noely later in the morning.

It is not until we are in the orchard that the sun begins to come out. Workers are supposed to wait outside the orchard until there is light outside, but many workers hide and begin picking as soon as they get there. I heard that these two guys arrive at 1 in the morning and begin picking at that time even though they are not supposed to. I guess they really need to make more money. Maybe they are trying to help their families.
− Estrella, Yanira, and Anahi tell me the stories of workers that arrive early in the morning. Yanira believes that they come to work early because they must have families that they need to help. Other participants, including Julian, Itzel, Clarisa, Noely, and Ivan believe that Mexican people work a lot and hard to make money because of the families they are trying to help.

My mom and I wait for the sun to rise as my dad goes to pick up our picker tickets from the supervisor. As soon as the sun begins to appear, people begin to walk to the tree they left off the day before. We are close to the end of the lane and soon will

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20 Alicia, it is time sweetie. “Mi’ja” is a common term parents and adults use when speaking with children. It is short for “mi hija/o” or my daughter/son.

21 It is already 4:15! We are going to be late!
be moved on to whatever other lane Pedro, the supervisor, tells us to go to. We walk
down a semi-steep hill.
I have my picking bucket around my neck and our lunch box in my hand. My mom
has her own picking bucket that unlike mine is made of metal rather than
plastic—they are making buckets out of plastic now instead of metal.

− This was part of the daily routine of all the participants. They arrive to the orchards at dawn
and wait until the sun rays appear. Estrella and Yanira carried the lunchboxes for their family.
Anahi would carry the radio. All participants (with the exception of Itzel who, at times, carried a
home-made picking bucket) carried their own picking buckets around. I noticed that adults
(particularly those that had been picking for years) carried buckets made out of metal. All
children, and people that were more recent pickers, carried buckets made out of plastic.

She is carrying the 12 foot ladder like the one my dad carries. Mom says the ladder
is heavy and she can’t wait until we are done picking in this part of the orchard and
move to flatter land.

As soon as we arrive, my dad begins to arrange both his and my mom’s ladder
because she does not trust she can set it right. The first time she picked cherries
years ago, she fell off her ladder because it was placed at a wrong angle. She hurt
her leg and couldn’t work for a few days.

− This incident occurred to Estrella, Yanira, and Anahi’s mom, Mrs. Mercedes. All the
participants, including the mom, shared this story with me. Participant Gabriel learned of the
importance of setting the ladder at the right angle— he too has fallen from the ladder for not
setting it properly.

My mom asks me to set down the lunch box under one of the cherry trees and asks
me not to take my sweater off.

“Esta frío, mi’ja.” 22

It is a cold morning like most mornings this summer, which is weird because it get’s
really hot later in the morning—so hot we have to stop working around 10 because
the heat is too much. That is the second thing I don’t like about picking—the
weather.

− This aspect rings true for all children for whom one of the hardest parts of working in the
orchard was the cold dusk and the heat in the later morning. For Yanira, it was more difficult to
imagine her little sisters being cold in the morning.

As soon as the ladders are set, my dad climbs to the top and begins picking at the
very top of the cherry tree. My mom begins to pick in the bottom of the trees, this is
called “barbear.” I feel tired so I sit on one of the boxes. My parents don’t say
anything when I sit, especially in the morning when they know I am tired.

− In all the orchards I visited, parents did not force children to pick cherries. Children would pick
and sit whenever they felt tired. However, older children were more likely to be picking for long
periods at a time. Clarisa and Julian slept in until around 8 a.m (either in the motor home at the
camp site, or wrapped on a blanket on the grass) and would pick until the shift was over.
Younger participants, like Itzel and Noely, were often sitting around on the grass or cherry boxes. 

I smile because my uncle next to us starts to sing to one of the songs playing on the radio. I like when he sings. 

Yanira, Estrella, and Anahí share how much they enjoy having family around in the orchard. Yanira tells me she loves to hear her uncle tell jokes and make her parents laugh. This piece is also part of my own narratives of family singing as they pick cherries. 

There are empty plastic boxes already set alongside the cherry trees around the orchard. The “checkers” drive around in a tractor emptying full boxes into big “bins.” The bins are taken to an area where they are weighed. Then the forklift puts them inside a big semi-truck that takes them to a factory like the one my grandma and aunts work in. The cherries are sorted and packed in these factories. 

This understanding of the processes was obtained from bits and pieces of participant stories (children and adults). Many of the older children, Gabriel and Zaida, were detailed in their descriptions of the orchard processes. The understanding of the packing factories, however, comes primarily from my own story—my mom, grandmother, and aunts work in surrounding packing factories. 

About 10 minutes after we started, my dad already is coming down the ladder with a full bucket and empties it into one of the boxes. It takes about two and a half buckets to fill a box. My mom’s bucket is half full—she does not pick as fast because my dad has been doing this for longer. I get up to pick before he tells me something, he is the one to usually tell me to pick. 

Generally, parents were not strict with their children. However, in my observations and in the stories of participants, it fathers are more likely to manage the picking routine of their children, particularly of boys. 

After picking for a long time, my bucket is finally full. Well, it is not as full as it can be but it’s as much as I can handle. The bucket full of cherries gets really heavy. I dump out the bucket and notice that my parents already have 8 boxes completed. 

For all children, cherry picking is a hard job. A part of the difficulty includes the weight of the buckets when they are filled with cherries. Julian shares how his arms would hurt if he added too many cherries. For that reason, he made sure to only pick what he could handle. 

When I started coming to the orchard one year ago when I was 9, I started to learn how hard my mom and dad work. They always tell me that this is why I should try hard in school, so I can have a job that is not so hard. 

“Echale ganas al studio mija” 

For all 12 of my children participants, working in the orchards taught them lessons with respect to the importance of working hard in school. For parents, this was part of their hope in taking their children to the orchards. The other part was that they learned to value the importance of manual labor. 

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23 Try hard in your studies
One thing I like about the orchard is helping and spending time with my family. They taught me to appreciate things and be responsible. I am saving money for school clothes and other necessary things.

−Gabriel, Julian, Clarisa, Yanira, and Estrella worked to save money for school. Another two children I spoke to in Hilly Orchards shared how it was important to save money to buy “necessary things.”

I also like that we are outside with nature. I have seen many different kinds of creatures here, like the ones we learn about in school. The orchard also helped me understand angles—obtuse and acute angles. You can fall off the ladder if you set it at an acute angle.

−Yanira and Julian were excited to tell me about the bugs she saw while she picked—which she also saw in books at school. Gabriel learned the concept of angles in the orchard through positioning of the ladder.

I look over to where my uncle works to see if my cousin is awake. He usually stays in his parents’ car sleeping until around 8 in the morning when he wakes up and joins his parents. He is not there yet so I continue picking.

Around 8 a.m., I hear my cousin talking with his dad. I put my bucket down and walk over to them. This is my favorite part of the orchard, when I get to play with my cousin. I like that there is space to play here.

−Many of the children, especially the younger ones, continued sleeping for another few hours after the family arrived in the orchard. This piece is particularly referencing Celina’s story who loved being able to play with all her cousins, including Ivan and Zaida, in the orchard.

Sometimes he is made fun of by los señores24 because he is playing with girls. But it doesn’t matter to us—we love playing with each other and exploring the orchard together.

−This is a reference to Ivan’s story who was often made fun of by several men for playing with his cousins Noely and Celina instead of picking cherries.

“¡Alicia! Want to play ‘witches and sticks’?”

Witches and sticks is my favorite game because we get to be whatever we want and cast magic spells on anything.

−Ivan, Noely, Celina, and Zaida were constantly playing this game. I was invited to play one day.

I disappear all the trees that have small cherries—small cherries can’t be picked so people waste time on those trees.

−Gabriel, Zayda, Estrella, and Clarisa share their frustration with cherry trees that either don’t have enough cherries or have small cherries that can’t be picked.

I make other trees have more cherries so we can have more to pick and make more money to help our families with.

24 the men
Gabriel, Yanira, Anahi, Clariza, Itzel and Julian pick cherries so that they can help their families monetarily. Yanira and Anahi hope that their work can help realize their family’s dream of buying a home.

My little brother wakes up and comes running to play with us. He grabs a stick and turns all the rocks into toys that are safe for the environment.

I love cookies, so I turn all the leaves into cookies. Everyone, including el patron\textsuperscript{25}, can eat for free.

Throughout his interview, Julian is concerned with the environment and it’s wellbeing. Noely loves cookies and toys and if she could, she would make all the trees’ leaves into both so that everyone could eat and play. Clarisa believes that everyone deserves the opportunity to relax—thus, if she could change something, she would build a water park in the orchard for everyone, including, el patron.

\textsuperscript{25} The boss
Appendix B

Interview Protocol

A. One-on-One Interviews with children
   a. Tell me about your family?
   b. Tell me about what it is like to live in this area?
   c. What is it like being in the orchard
   d. Tell me about times you like being in the orchard. Why?
   e. Tell me about times you don’t like being in the orchard. Why?
   f. What do you learn here?
   g. What are your favorite games in the orchard?
   h. There are mostly Mexican people working here in the orchards, why do you think that is?
   i. If you could change something in the orchard what would you change why?

B. Focus group with children
   a. Can you talk about your families? (culture
   b. Tell me about what is it like having parents that are immigrants?
   c. Tell me about the orchards?
   d. What is it like being in the orchard?
   e. What do you do when you are in the orchard?
   f. What is your favorite part about the orchard?
   g. What is your least favorite part?
   h. Why do you think that there are mostly Mexican people working in the orchards?
   i. What things do you learn in the orchard?
   j. If you could change anything in the orchard, what would you change?
   k. Can you tell me about the consejos you are given?
   l. Can you tell me what adults can learn from children?
   m. Are there any questions any of you want to ask to the group?

C. Interview with parents
   a. Can you tell me about your family?
   b. What is it like living in this area?
   c. What is it like working in the orchards? How long have you worked there and what do you do there?
   d. Why do you bring your kids to the orchards?
   e. What advice do you give to your kids?
   f. What do you have them do?
   g. How do your children feel about coming to the orchards?
   h. What do they learn?
   i. What are your earliest memories of the orchard?
      i. How about more as an adult (if they answer as kids)
   j. If you could change anything in the orchard, what would you change?
   a. Is there anything else you would like to share?