EL JARDÍN FOR LATINA SCHOLARS: CULTIVATING, NURTURING, AND SUSTAINING PEDAGOGICAL SPACES FOR IDENTITY FORMATION AND COMMUNITY BUILDING

by

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A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Council of
Texas State University in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
with a Major in School Improvement
August 2022

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First and foremost, I give thanks to my Heavenly Father, God Almighty for all His blessings, strength, and many provisions. Lord, I pray that you remind me of just how blessed I am and that you never allow me to forget to show my gratitude in prayer and returned acts of kindness.

This work is a product of the community and their dedication to contribute to the debate among *activistas* to disrupt, challenge, and transform the existing power structures that limit and constrain Latinas. I would like to thank fellow co-researchers Margie Fernandez-Prew, Margo Fernandez, Cameron Bocanegra, Yvette Zuniga, Erin Bocanegra, Ryan-Olivia Bocanegra, and Megan Mendiola for their gift of time and stories. By telling and writing our stories, we push boundaries, shape ideas, and bear witness to what our bodies and hearts remember. We have revised reality by altering our consensual agreements about truths and untruths. We have chosen a different future and we have willed it into being. Thank you for your contribution to this work, community, and to the future generations of those like us.

To my chair, mentor, and friend, Dr. Miguel A. Guajardo. Thank you for the invitation to share my stories so I may have a deeper connection with others and myself. Thank you for your gift of time and guidance so I could experience a journey of self-discovery, deep healing, and self-love. I have truly been transformed into a healthier and stronger being and have a new and realized purpose because EYE/I can now see! Gracias Profe, I am eternally grateful—know that this work is only the beginning. I will continue

to join you in many more *platícas* and in this work we are committed to as we have many more seeds to plant and nourish—this is my new *way of life!*

To my committee members, Dr. Melissa Martinez, Dr. Bergeron Harris, and Dr. Leticia Grimaldo. Thank you for your support, guidance, feedback, and commitment to this work we do.

To Rob, thank you for our 30 years together, for your support, and for lifting me up when I felt I couldn't go on. Thank you for your patience, endless pours of coffee, and making sure I was fed and had water on my writing binges. Thank you for being an amazing father and best friend. I am eternally and forever grateful for the years we had, and I am looking forward to a lifetime of friendship and raising our beautiful children together.

To Devon, Erin, Cameron, Robbie, and Ryan-Olivia, my beautiful and brilliant children. I hope that in some way you see this accomplishment as a door to what can be. Dream BIG my babies! Your grandmother would say to me, "If someone else can do it, so can you!" I'll add to that—AND if it hasn't been done, dream it into existence! You are the story makers. I love you all! To my future grandchildren, great-grandchildren, and great-great-grandchildren, ask good questions, embrace *your* history, and write down your stories. Let our/these stories be the wind that whispers in your ear, the earth that grounds you, the sun that warms you, and the moon that illuminates your path.

To my spiritual ancestors who have informed me, I am forever grateful for your sacrifices, love, and spiritual presence. To my mother, *I did it Mom*! You said I could,

and I did. You are the first and greatest love of my life and my first teacher. I see you now and I understand. To my father, you are by far the wisest man I've ever known. Thank you for your provision and for your support.

To Margie Fernandez-Prew, my BFF and sister. Thank you for being a rock for me over the years. You are a true example of what it is to be a friend. Thank you for crying with me, telling me how it is, and not holding back while still holding me up. You are a positive light in my life. I love you and appreciate you dearly. To Yvette Zuniga. You are a rockstar friend and sister who can build and create anything. If I can dream it, you can make it! From opossum catching to building irrigation systems and keeping *el jardín* alive and thriving, you have been instrumental in this process and my journey. Thank you *amiga*!

To my brothers, sister, *primos*, *tios*, and *tias*, thank you for your support, love, and kind words throughout this journey. I love you all! To Jody Gomez, you swooped in unexpectedly and I am so glad you did—TuLoRu! Thank you for all your hard work in *el jardín*, your support, endless cups of coffee, food delivery, caring for me while sick, making me laugh, and for pushing me through to the very end. To Adrian Delacruz, thank you for signing me up to go to grad school with you against my will. I wouldn't be here without your invitation. To Sally Sosa, Travis Jack, my NTFL sisters, and Cohort 2018, thank you for your support, words of encouragement, and love. To Dr. Blaine Carpenter and Dr. Sara Torres, you have been amazing role models, mentors, friends, and a huge support system for me. I am forever indebted and grateful to you both. To Jacqui Todd

and Laura Shearer, you have been instrumental in this process. Thank you for all you do, your support, and your dedication to this community of students. You are very much appreciated.

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ABSTRACT

Historical, cultural, and educational policies based on deficit thought are ubiquitous in the identity formation of Latinas. These politics and practices are governed and informed by the dominant ideology and culture, leaving Latinas and their identity formation fragmented and colonized. This dynamic-critical study involved exploring Latinas' cultural wealth and how we have navigated spaces of tension and inequity. This research highlights how Latinas' ways of knowing and use of the *mestiza* consciousness have empowered them to recover from the trauma caused by oppression and move toward positive social change. Through harvesting stories and engaging in the story making process, the research was designed to explore familial, cultural, social, political, and educational stories of the self, organizations, and communities that inform Latinas' ways of knowing and being. By employing M. Guajardo et al.'s (2016) community learning exchange as a worldview, theoretical framework, and way of life, the goal was to better understand how lived experiences informed and influenced the identity formation of the participating Latinas. Collectively, we interrogated our individual lived experiences and witnessed the emergence of a collective axiology, ontology, and epistemology that births our values, work ethic, and advocacy. By using *pláticas* as method, the goal was to provide thick descriptions and rich data that give breadth and life to the previously uninterrogated lived experiences of Latinas and their witnesses. Co-researchers critically examined, questioned, reflected, and worked to make sense of our experiences within our communities and organizations and how these experiences inform

our identities. Additionally, we named, documented, and harvested stories of *when* and *how* we have used our gifts of cultural wealth (Yosso, 2005); subsequently, we can use these stories to navigate and negotiate spaces of power lived, but not previously named. This contribution has benefits for schools, communities, and organizations in providing a better understanding of Latinas' ways of knowing. Our research can inform how we cultivate healthy relationships and create safe and equitable pedagogical spaces and systems to nurture Latinas' ways of knowing.

Keywords: Latina ways of being, community learning exchange, *platícas*, sustainability, public pedagogy, community engagement

I. CONTEXT AND CONDITIONS FOR GROWING

The Genesis of My Story–El Jardín de Esperanza

Stories are everywhere. In the air we breathe, the births we celebrate, the deaths we mourn, and everything in between. Stories comfort, teach, burden, lift, and create more stories. When I think of *my* story, I acknowledge it began even before I breathed in life 53 years ago. My story begins in the ancestorial earth nestled deep below the ground, that was cultivated and honored and, in return, provided nourishment and sustained communities. My father would often say, "From dust we came, to dust we will return, and in-between we will garden." We were avid gardeners in our home, and my father's words carried both literal and figurative meaning for the recipient—the understanding that we are to cultivate both the earth *and* our community.

The Bible is full of stories; there are 66 books filled with stories. The very first story begins in the book of Genesis. In Genesis, God creates Adam and Eve, the first man and woman, and places them in an earthly paradise called the Garden of Eden. Chances are that you were shown pictures of the Garden of Eden at some time in your life. It may have resembled some lush Amazon-like jungle filled with animals grazing while a man and a woman stood naked with a few strategically placed fern leaves covering them. When we ponder about the Garden of Eden, we may tend to imagine it in terms of perfection. However, I would like to think of it in terms of potential. I do not speculate God was finished nor do I think the Garden of Eden was meant to be static as God instructs Adam and Eve to "be fruitful and multiply" (King James Bible, Genesis 1:28). It can be assumed that God had intentions of Adam and Eve cultivating, expanding, and improving the land.

When I am in *el jardín* (the garden), it is also within me. I see potential in both the land and myself as I dig up the dirt in an attempt to uncover the earth and my many layers of self (Moraga, 2000, p. iv). It is in *el jardín* that I seek to restore my connection to the land and recognize it as a significant component of my ways of knowing. Learning with and about the land is not a new concept, as Delgado Bernal et al. (2006) wrote that "learning about the land could save the land, strengthen our bodies, sustain our political struggles and nurture our imaginations" (p. 220). Land lies at the heart of Latinos' battles as it has been stolen, poisoned, and split in two. Yet, it has also offered our people food, nourishment, medicinal herbs, homes, and hope (Delgado Bernal et al., 2006). E. Martinez (1998) stated that if we "listen to the earth, you and your *causa* will continue" (p. 204). Learning to connect with our lands "heals our peoples" and "brings us closer to ourselves" (Delgado Bernal et al., 2006, p. 224). Latinas who embody intimate and complicated connections to the land provide vital insight into practicing careful pedagogies of the land: our sisters, our mothers, our schoolteachers, our professors, and our community leaders (Delgado Bernal et al., 2006).

Roadmap for Dissertation

Though this dissertation has elements of autoethnography, the research forced the actors to become more committed to the concept of story making and is grounded in the organic process of story harvesting; it is a collective weaving of stories. As the co-researchers shared stories, we could relate to these stories and place them into our own context, thus making knowledge dynamic-critical (F. Guajardo & Guajardo, 2010; F. Guajardo et al., 2012). This compilation of collective story making has contributed to my

process of becoming a fuller human being and my identity formation. M. Guajardo et al. (2016) stated that

> stories help make meaning of our experience, and they describe the agency that is manifested through the work. The stories illustrate that this work has to be lived, because by living it, the work becomes more full and more sustainable. (p. 43)

These stories and the stories of my co-researchers serve as a body of locally informed emerging literature. Some of my stories are lengthy as I bear witness to my lived experience and work to make sense of the messiness of it all. Some of my stories have been reframed through an asset-based lens focusing on gifts, love, and the beauty of humanity as I no longer want to waste precious time on what *could have been* or what *should have been*; there is work to be done! As I am in the process of becoming, I make no apologies for what you are about to read, rather I give myself grace in knowing that this too is part of learning and growing and I ask the same of you. As this is a living document, you and I will negotiate, discuss, and come to terms as to what stays and what will go. I am open to all and any possibilities, for that is part of this work we do. The dynamic-critical pedagogies invite the writing process to be used as a means to help make meaning of the life we live, and this is part of the invitation to the reader into the process of becoming a reader, a learner, a witness, a story maker, a researcher, and a fuller human being.

El Jardín the Garden and El Jardín the Gatekeeper

Gardening and farming have been a part of my life for as long as I can remember. There is something spiritual in the earth that feeds and nourishes all vegetation and, in turn, our bodies and minds. For me, the practice of gardening goes beyond the physical self and feeds my soul and spirit. Those who came before me have worked in community

tilling, planting, and harvesting the earth for centuries. Together they created, laughed, sang, told stories, and taught us life lessons through *cuentos*, *consejos*, and *platícas*.

My grandparents, great-grandparents, and parents all were active farmers and gardeners. They taught me at an early age that the earth is a wise teacher. It only requires that we be attentive, present, and listen. As learners of *el jardín*, we are taught patience, careful watchfulness, industry, and sacrifice, and we learn to trust and hope in tomorrow. As caregivers and trustees of this space, we have the responsibility of providing a nurturing environment free from disease, infestation, and toxicities. Additionally, delicate seedlings must be watered, given nourishment, and carefully protected from the elements and unforeseen circumstances. Trustees of *el jardín* rely on their faith and hope, believing in tomorrow, as there is no guarantee a seed will grow or produce an abundant harvest. We must trust the process in believing that the seed will thrive to feed our families and community.

El jardín is not solely a physical space, it is a place that resides within me. It is a space I carry with me as I navigate my Latinidad, my brownness, my kinky curly ethnic hair, and all that comes with living in this skin. *El jardín* is where I learned life lessons, that good things require hard work, and that unexpected things can be wonderful. It is where I hear my mother's and father's voices, deeply rooted like that of a well-established tree. Just as a plant yearns for sunlight and nourishment, I also yearn for this safe space that allows me to heal and gives me strength through the co-construction of knowledge in process of becoming (Alfred, 1999; Delgado Bernal et al., 2006; E. Martinez, 1998).

Coincidently, or maybe not, *El Jardín* is also the name of the elementary school I attended as a child. It is where I learned the dominant discourse and acceptable academic ideals. *El Jardín* Elementary is where I was introduced and indoctrinated into a colonizing dogma. Ironically, *el jardín* (the garden), though alike in name, is where I flourish in my search and hunger for liberation as I decolonize, dissect, unlearn, and unravel the messiness that has been deeply and intently embedded by these gatekeepers.

Throughout my journey of becoming, I have experienced and witnessed miracles in my life that could not possibly be coincidental. There have been times I have pleaded with my chair, Dr. Guajardo, to make sense of these coincidences or to give me some rationale or explanation, only to have him assure me that "there are no coincidences." I have come to realize that our minds seem to pour over into the world around us. Though it makes coincidences no less magical, life's motifs are created not by the world around us, but by humans, by our attention.

Background and Context of the Study

In this qualitative study, I explore the familial, cultural, social, political, and educational stories of the self, organizations, and communities that inform this Latina's ways of knowing and being. Additionally, I collect and share the meaning making of the lived experiences of four Latinas spanning three generations of women ranging in age from 23 to 79 years. We shared our *testimonios* and stories through participating in community learning exchanges (CLEs) in *el jardín*. By employing the CLE theory of change, it was my hope that I would be able to better understand how these lived experiences informed and influenced the identity formation of us as Latinas as we

collectively interrogate the individual and emerging collective axiology, ontology, and epistemology that drive our values, work ethic, and advocacy.

Purpose of Study

This study reflects an in-depth inquiry of four Latinas who span three generations and range in age from 23 to 79 years. The purpose was to capture details about their values, dreams, and stories to give thick description to their drive, commitment and spirit of struggle, survival, and success. Through *pláticas* and *testimonios*, the goal was to provide thick descriptions and rich data that give breadth and life to interpretation. It was our hope that these stories would give insight and contribute to our knowledge of building capacity, community, and creating safe nurturing equitable and pedagogical spaces.

Research Questions

The following questions guided this inquiry:

1. What are the stories of self that shape and inform the Latina identity and sense of belonging?
2. What pedagogies inform Latinas' resilience and resistance to pursue a fuller robust life in the process of becoming a fuller human being?
3. What do spaces of critical consciousness and community learning look like, sound like, and feel like?

Genealogy of Becoming–Understanding the Past

M. Guajardo et al. (2016) claimed that "the first step toward creating change in your community is looking back to understand the past. Then, armed with that knowledge and understanding, you are able to work with others to move forward and build a brighter

future" (p. 151). Moraga and Anzaldúa (2015) stated we must first "turn our eyes forward" to "cast a look at the road that led us here" (p. xxvii). To understand our past, we must examine the history and spiritual practices of our ancestors that flow through our veins. "Taken back far enough, one discovers some kind of shamanism in their cultural pasts" (Anzaldúa, 2009, p. 215), and then we build on that which is positive and good. Though we cannot physically go back in time, we need a reminder of what this struggle is all about (Anzaldúa, 2009). As you continue reading about the historical past, you may notice that I do not solely focus on Latinas, but rather encompass all Latinos in my narrative. This is how I have lived and viewed my world culturally and socially and what has informed my experiences.

Armed with the spirit and memories of my ancestors and all those who enter *el jardín*, this research is axiologically and ontologically grounded in a commitment to honor the stories of both the present and past in this metaphorical and physical space. It is here that we will collectively co-create and reimagine. We, Latinas, are not stuck in the middle; we carry the bridge in each of us (Moraga & Anzaldúa, 2015).

Patterns in Systems of Anti-Mexican Sentiment 1846–Present

The anti-Mexican sentiment in Texas, or attitudes toward the Latino population, traces back to when Texas claimed independence from Mexico, an event that set the stage for tension between Mexican and Anglo cultures. The Mexican–American War (1846–1848) was a battle over the territories of the southwest. Mexico was defeated and lost half of its territory, leaving Mexicans on the borderland to become Americans overnight. Between the years of 1846 and 1928, thousands of Mexican descendants were murdered in the border states of Arizona, New Mexico, California, and Texas; however, only

slightly over 10% of these killings were documented. South Texas Mexican Americans often refer to the years between 1915 and 1920 as *Hora de Sangre* due to the many Mexican descendants, including men, women, and children, who fell victim to extrajudicial mob lynching and killings (Carrigan & Webb, 2013, p. 86). Figure 1 shows my own lived experiences, or genealogy of becoming, in the context of this broader pattern.

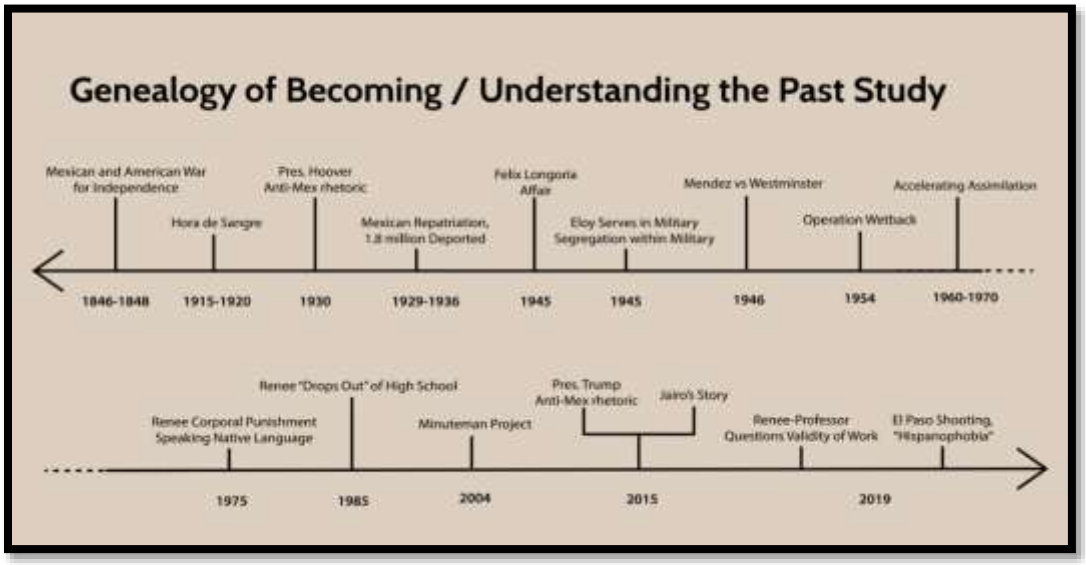

Figure 1. Genealogy of Becoming.

The photographs shown in Figure 2 are of my great maternal grandparents. The Escobedo Gorena family and Tiburcio Flores lived a modest life in Brownsville and Mercedes, Texas, as farmers. They were in constant fear of losing their land and experienced anti-Mexican violence.

Figure 2. Photographs of my Great Grandparents. The Escobedo-Gorena Family, 1905 (Left); Tiburcio Flores, 1859 (Right).

Texas Rangers, vigilantes, and law officers executed thousands of Mexican descendants without due process; however, the exact number of Tejanos murdered may never be known. At the time, qualifications to become a Texas Ranger were minimal and many Texas Rangers were criminals with little to no training. James Monroe, of Fox Company B, hired men he knew would kill. Figure 3 shows an excerpt of the testimony of a Texas Ranger during the judicial proceedings in 1919 investigating the unwarranted killings of Mexican descendants. Though the Rangers were found guilty, none of them were punished for these heinous acts.

Q. How many men have been killed by Rangers in your county in the last five years?
A. I don't know.
Q. Can you approximate it?
A. No, sir, there are all sorts of violently conflicting rumors down there. The enemies of the Rangers accuse them of killing anywhere from one hundred to five thousand, and we know that during our troubles down there that there were a great many fights with both the citizens and the Rangers. I am inclined to believe that the citizens and the Rangers killed probably some innocent people in the excitement. We were almost in a terror-stricken down there, and of these innocents. I should imagine the citizens killed just as many as any Ranger.

Figure 3. Excerpt From Proceedings of the Joint Committee of the Senate and the House in the Investigation of the Texas Ranger Force (Texas State Library Archives Commission, 1919, p. 17).

The Great Depression and Mexican Repatriation

Though men and women of Mexican descent were serving the United States in World War I and promoting efforts both overseas and at home, they suffered from discrimination throughout the country. Between 1929 and 1936, up to 1.8 million Mexicans and Mexican Americans were repatriated in a mass deportation to Mexico during the Great Depression (Johnson, 2005). Because this enforced act was based on ethnicity, citizenship was ignored. Often, Mexicans were targeted solely on their physical *mestizo* (mixed race) features or geographical location based on their proximity to the border. Scholars refer to this as a modern-day "ethnic cleansing," or a "systemic removal of racial, ethnic, or religious groups from a given territory by a more powerful ethnic group" (Johnson, 2005, p. 6). Nearly 60% of those deported were birthright citizens of the United States. Most of these raids swept through crowds of parks, markets, hospitals, and public gatherings, forcing Mexican descendants to line up and show proof of legal entry and citizenship of the United States.

These raids came on the heels of President Herbert Hoover's program of "American jobs for real Americans" (Bernard, 2018, para. 6). President Hoover's rhetoric of Mexicans not being "real Americans" placed blame on those of Mexican descent for the economic pitfalls and unemployment rates during the Great Depression. Hoover's discourse enforced the exclusion of Mexican descendants by categorizing them as the *other*, leading Anglo-Americans to believe their jobs were being taken away from them. Anglos felt threatened that Latinos were affecting their lives negatively and supported the deportation raids. Latinos were easy and vulnerable targets (Carrigan & Webb, 2013; Rios, 2017). Those who could not show proof of citizenship with proper documentation

on-hand at the time of these raids were placed on trucks and immediately sent to a railroad station and taken deep into Mexico (Bernard, 2018).

Balderrama and Rodriguez (2006), authors of *Decade of Betrayal*, told the story of an American-born Latino who was the victim of repatriation and compared Mexico to a foreign planet, stating, “They might as well have sent us to Mars” (p. 12). The forced repatriation of over one million persons of Mexican ancestry clearly violated their legal rights and left lingering negative views of Latinos and their citizenship forever in question. Mexican descendants felt pressured to assimilate, adopt American values, and abandon their cultural traditions and native language.

The following are examples of anti-Mexican sentiment and rhetoric from past presidents:

- Example 1: “I urge the strengthening of our deportation laws so as to more fully rid ourselves of criminal aliens. Furthermore, thousands of persons have entered the country in violation of the immigration laws. The very method of their entry indicates their objectionable character, and our law-abiding foreign-born residents suffer in consequence. I recommend that the Congress provide methods of strengthening the Government to correct this abuse” (Hoover, 1930, Deportation of Alien Criminals section, para. 1).
- Example 2: “I love the Mexican people, but Mexico is not our friend. They’re killing us at the border and they’re killing us on job and trade. FIGHT!” (Trump, 2015).
- Example 3: “When Mexico sends its people, they’re not sending their best . . . They’re sending people that have lots of problems, and they’re bringing those

problems with them. They're bringing drugs. They're bringing crime. They're rapists. And some, I assume, are good people" (Trump, as cited in Ye Hee Lee, 2015, para. 1).

Latinos in the Military

By 1940, Mexican descendants living in the United States were twice as likely to be born and raised in the United States and to firmly identify as Americans. As a result, 500,000 Latinos proudly served in the military in World War II. My father is an example of this. At the age of 15 years my father forged his birth certificate so he could fight alongside his friends who would later become his brothers-in-law. While on furlough at the age of 17 in October of 1949, my father walked to the corner *tortillaria* to purchase *tortillas de maiz* for his mother. There he would run into his childhood playmate, Ninfa, and reconnect as they reminisced of the days when they would play Tarzan and Jane while climbing trees in my grandfather's garden. Three days later, on October 12, my parents were married.

While my father and uncles were at war, gender roles were clearly defined back home (Dubofsky & Burwood, 1990). Women working and supporting their husbands and family members posed a direct threat to the egos of men who were unable to provide financial support and had become dependent on women for economic survival (Dubofsky & Burwood, 1990; Evans, 1997; Woloch, 1996). Additionally, because of the racial climate and President Hoover's rhetoric, Latinas had difficulty finding employment as White businessmen preferred employing White women over women of color. Many Latinas resorted to clerical work, housework, or working in fields for low pay, often not being paid on time or at all (Dubofsky & Burwood, 1990; Evans, 1997; Woloch, 1996).

The exact number of Latinos who served in the United States military is unknown because many were classified as White. One example of military pride is a street named *Hero Street* in Silvis, Illinois, where 45 sons went off to war and were highly regarded for their ability to speak Spanish and communicate with the Filipino allies in the Philippines (Harrison, 2015). Though Latinos were counted as White on the U.S. Census, they were socially non-White. Generally, Latino soldiers were integrated with Anglos and often were discriminated against, even being denied medical care and military honors at funeral services because of their race and ethnicity (Carrigan & Webb, 2013; Harrison, 2015).

My father shared many war stories with his children, and alongside my *tios*, he valiantly and courageously fought both on and off the battlefield, where anti-Mexican sentiment was an everyday occurrence. My father was all too familiar with the stories of not receiving a military burial. He worked diligently to ensure all necessary forms and paperwork were completed, leaving no stone unturned. While in hospice, he repeatedly reminded all his children of his wishes to have full military honors and be buried in the Veteran's Park in Mission, Texas. On April 13, 2017, Daddy was given military honors and is now resting in peace. Three years later, on April 26, 2020, my mother passed away. Figure 4 shows the wedding announcement of Ninfa Escobedo Gorena and Eloy Rivera and the tombstone of Eloy Roberto Rivera.

Figure 4. Wedding Announcement of Ninfa Gorena and Eloy Rivera (Left); Tombstone of Eloy Roberto Rivera (Right).

Felix Longoria Affair

Felix Longoria, a Mexican American soldier from Three Rivers, Texas, was killed by a sniper while flushing out Japanese soldiers in the Philippines. He earned a Purple Heart for his bravery. It took the U.S. Army 4 years to return his body to his family. His widow, Beatriz Longoria, was told by the only funeral home in town that Private Longoria would be buried in the *Mexican section* of the cemetery, which was segregated by barbed wire (Roman, 2020). Additionally, the wake for Private Longoria could not be held in the funeral home because it would anger the White citizens of the town. The Mexican American community of the town sent a telegram to U.S. Senator Lyndon B. Johnson on January 10, 1949, demanding a proper military burial. Senator Johnson's telegram in response read, "I deeply regret to learn that the prejudice of some individuals extends even beyond this life . . . this injustice is deplorable" (Roman, 2020, p. 4). Longoria was the first of 450,000 Mexican Americans to be buried at Arlington National Cemetery at the request of Senator Johnson.

Mendez v. Westminster

While the military was battling on the field abroad, Latinos were fighting their own battles back home. Though the landmark 1954 *Brown v. Board of Education* Supreme Court case ended racial segregation in schools, it was 8 years earlier, in 1946, that the Mendez family and a group of Mexican American families celebrated a victorious win in *Mendez v. Westminster*, with the ruling that the segregation of public schools was unconstitutional. Throughout border states and in the town of Westminster, California, signs reading "No dogs or Mexicans Allowed" were posted at restaurants, movie theaters, and public places (Roos, 2019, para. 3). The town's public pool had a special day set aside called "Mexican Monday." The pool's staff ensured the pool was drained and cleaned after Mexican Americans vacated it and before Anglos would return to swim (Roos, 2019, para. 3). It was argued that Mexican Americans were put in their own schools to assist them with needed specialized instruction and English language instruction. However, Mexican American schools started late in the season so the children could help with the walnut harvest and schools let out early during the citrus harvest. Instead of receiving academic instruction, the children were learning how to become field hands and housekeepers. When the Mendez family moved to the town of Westminster, California, in 1944, they attempted to enroll their children in school but were denied entry and told they would need to enroll in the Mexican American school. The Mendez family, along with their co-plaintiffs, sued the Westminster School District of Orange County. On February 18, 1946, U.S. District Court Judge Paul J. McCormick ruled in favor of Mendez and the co-plaintiffs, finding that the segregation practices of

Westminster violated the Fourteenth Amendment. Though the Mendez family prevailed in court, segregation in schools and public places throughout the United States continued.

Operation Wetback

In 1954, Attorney General Brownell forwarded an initiative that would become known as Operation Wetback. Mexico was experiencing a shortage in labor and wanted the United States to return Mexican nationals to lighten the load. Border patrol agents and local officials used military tactics to deport Mexican immigrants from the United States (Blakemore, 2019). Many victims were U.S. citizens and others had legally entered the country through immigration programs. The brutality and force used on these victims were justified by the stereotypical assumption that Mexican immigrants were dirty and disease bearing (Blakemore, 2019). Immigrants were forced into planes, boats, and buses and were dumped over the border into unfamiliar territory. These boats, referred to as "slave ships" (Blakemore, 2019, p. 4), were overcrowded with immigrants. Those waiting on transportation were held in custody, where they suffered from heat stroke, disease, and health issues due to a lack of medical care and insufferable conditions. One example of such brutality and inhumane behavior cost the lives of 88 deported persons who died in unbearable 112-degree heat when they were left in a truck in July of 1955 (Paoletti, 2019). It has been reported that between 1.1 and 1.3 million people were uprooted and deported to Mexico as a result (Blakemore, 2019; Funderburk, 2021). The Immigration and Naturalization Services (INS) and historians, such as Kelly Lytle Hernandez, claim that this number is inflated and is likely closer to 300,000 (Blakemore, 2019; Funderburk, 2021). Regardless of the exact number of victims, the heinous acts of Operation Wetback are considered a violation of human rights.

Accelerating Assimilation

The goal of public schools in the 1960s and early 1970s was to push the fast forward button on assimilation, with the mindset that "everyone should be American, forget their native language and culture, and become part of the great American melting pot" (Hurtado & Gurin, 2004, p. 7). As part of this assimilation process, Texas and other states made rules enforcing "no speaking Spanish" (Hurtado & Gurin, 2004, p. 7) on school campuses. Students who violated this rule would be subject to corporal punishment, or their mouths being taped shut (Hurtado & Gurin, 2004). Below is an excerpt of a reflection from my journal and personal experience during this time of forced assimilation:

> My father would often say, "Vale mas que nunca te olvides de tu idioma mijita, porque es el único idioma que se habla en el cielo." But, I did. It was taken from me, stripped from me against my will. The paddle that hung from my second-grade classroom made sure of this. There were only three rules I had to remember: Rule #1: raise your hand to speak; rule #2 no speaking Spanish; rule #3 do not get out of your seat. If you broke any rules, you were subject to public ridicule, a pulling of your ear or hair and being dragged to the front of class where you would be told to write, "I will not . . ." 100 hundred times. Mine was always the same: "I will not speak Spanish." Often, punishments were doubled up with a spanking of a paddle that had 1/4" holes drilled into it to decrease the air drag, so it would produce a more painful sting and burning pain. After numerous encounters with corporal punishment, humiliation, and dehumanization, my mother never permitted me to speak Spanish in public or at a school again. By the middle of second grade, I had stopped speaking Spanish. By the third grade I had learned to lie about knowing Spanish, and by 4th grade I was making fun of others who spoke Spanish. (Bocanegra, journal entry, 2007)

The Minuteman Project

One would think that time would change the social climate of racial injustice; however, in 2004, a vigilante organization called the Minuteman Project was conceived by Jim Gilchrist, a retired war vet, and Chris Simcox, a former kindergarten teacher from California. Gilchrist and Simcox recruited nearly all White volunteers, primarily retired

military, police, and prison guards, to patrol the border using militia-style tactics. In one incident, Brian Barton, a Minuteman volunteer, convinced a 25-year-old undocumented immigrant man to hold up a T-shirt that read, “Brian Barton caught me crossing the border, and all I got was this lousy T-shirt” (Holthouse, 2005, para. 12). Barton then turned the undocumented immigrant over to U.S. Border Patrol (Holthouse, 2005). Additionally, the Minutemen Project influenced the cancellation of Humane Border’s maps designed to aid immigrants in finding water stations and rescue beacons on their journey (Holthouse, 2005).

Jairo’s Story, 2015

Below is the story of Jairo, a bright eyed and brilliant middle schooler who wrote of his oppression and experiences in school as a newcomer who did not speak English. Originally, this story was beautifully written in Spanish. However, Jairo and I both worked on the translation of this story in our English as a Second Language (ESL) class as part of his effort and goal to acquire the English language. Later, with Jairo’s permission, I shared this story with our faculty and staff to give them some insight into the struggles our Spanish-speaking newcomers face. Today, Jairo is a high school graduate and is working with his father to support their family both here and in Ecuador. Below is Jairo’s narrative:

> Hola my name is Jairo. I come from the beautiful land of Ecuador named after the equator that runs through it. At 2 years of age, my parents left me in the care of my abuela to go to the United States and make a better life. We did not have much; a wood frame home, a tin roof, and a bare dirt floor. We had electricity and a phone that we paid by the minute. We would wash and bathe in the nearby river and slept on cots. My parents promised they would one day send for us.
>
> Seven years passed, and I missed my parents and wanted to go see the United States for myself. My brother and I decided we could make the journey. When I was 9 and my brother was 11, my abuela packed us some food, filled jugs of water, made the sign of the cross on our forehead, and said her prayers for our

journey. We walked and hopped trains. We begged for food and water and many times we would work small jobs along the way. A man offered us a $100 a month in one of the towns we travelled through to work for him. This was a lot of money. My brother decided to stay and go with the man, and I decided to continue with the journey to the United States. I never saw my brother again; no one did.

When I arrived in Texas, 5 months later, I was transported to the detention center, where social workers contacted my aunt and uncle who came for me. My parents did not come because they were not documented immigrants and afraid of deportation. The house they rented was everything my parents said it was. They had a stove and a refrigerator, the machine my mother talked about that washed clothes and an indoor shower with hot water. In my new home I slept with four of my cousins on a mattress on a floor in the living room, but I didn't mind. It was soft, clean, and I felt safe with my family around me. As much as I loved warm showers, I loved going to Wal-Mart even more! That night my mother bought me pencils and paper and a new backpack to start school and I was excited to meet new friends and learn all I could.

When I entered school, it was large with many hallways. I could smell the delicious food from the cafeteria. We went to the office where my mother was asked to sign some papers. My aunt helped her, but they had a difficult time understanding what the papers said. My mom signed the papers and said goodbye. I was given a schedule and sent down the hall with a Spanish helper student to help me my first day. I spent days getting lost and walking into class late, but I finally memorized my schedule and where my classes were after a week.

I sat in class, pulled out my paper and notebook and the new pencils my mother bought me. I could not understand what the teachers were saying. I would look at the board and nod, open my book when others did, and pretend to write when others did. I was really good at pretending! Once in a while I would ask my Spanish speaking friends to explain things to me, but I would get in trouble. One day, in Mrs. Gaines class, everyone started passing papers forward. Mrs. Gaines came up to my desk and put out her hand out toward me. I had nothing to give her. She looked frustrated and turned around to go back to her desk. In that moment, I turned back to another Spanish speaking student and asked, "What were we supposed to do?" Mrs. Gaines looked back at me with a mad face and told me to go to the office, "OFICINA!" she shouted and pointed to the door. I got up and left to the office. There, the assistant principal had someone explain to me that I was to be given detention because I had been late to class and had been disruptive and not turning in my homework. On the way out, the secretary handed me a paper and said something, but I did not understand her. I folded the paper and placed it in my backpack and went off to 301B for detention. I walked in and I was given a book to read and told to be quiet. I opened my book. It was in English. I pretended to read it, but really, I was just thinking of my abuela and my brother—I missed them so much. Later, the door opened a lady from the cafeteria came in and delivered food. She called out the names of the students in there, but

> I did not hear my name. I sat and waited, but still I was not called. The cafeteria lady who spoke Spanish asked me if I had filled out the lunch slip for ordering. I did not know what slip but then I remembered the office had given me a slip, so I pulled it out of my new backpack, unfolded it, and gave it to her. She said "You are supposed to fill this out and then bring it to the cafeteria, so we know what you want. It's too late now, so I'll bring you a sandwich." She sounded angry at me. She came back with an apple, a peanut butter sandwich, and some milk. I ate the apple, drank the milk, but I don't like peanut butter sandwiches.
>
> When my bus arrived home, I was so happy to smell the food when I opened the door. I was hungry! Mom was at the stove making food. She asked me how my day was, "como te fue?" and what I learned, "qué aprendiste?" I thought about it a while. I wanted to tell her that I learned it's not a good idea to speak in class or ask for help. I wanted to tell her that I learned that I may or may not have homework, but I'm still not sure. I wanted to tell her that I learned that you better fill out a lunch slip for detention or you'll be stuck with a peanut butter sandwich. But I did not want to worry her, so instead I gave her a tight hug and said, "Muchas cosas!"

El Paso Shooting, 2019

The most recent public act of anti-Mexican sentiment came in the form of an AK-47 in the hands of Patrick Crusius, a 21-year-old White man who opened fire on August 3, 2019, at a Walmart in El Paso, Texas. He commented that he was inspired by "the Hispanic invasion" (Gómez, 2020, p. 12). Crusius drove 10 hours from Dallas to El Paso, where he knew he would find a large population of Latinos. This anti-Mexican sentiment has been labeled "Hispanophobia," or an aversion to, or hatred of, Latinos, their culture, and the Spanish language (Gómez, 2020, p. 12).

Historical Impact: We Reap What We Sow

Growing up in a supportive and loving community with valuable gifts, talents, and relentless determination, my curiosities leave me wondering how I found myself a high school dropout, questioning the value of my culture, and battling with internalized racism or the agreeance of my oppression. How did my lens become so distorted and twisted? Ferreira (2014) suggested one possibility could be that "Mexicans were

considered inferior therefore, Americanization through education would be a solution to mold them into a population that spoke English, shared the same religion, dressed like the mainstream, and were trained for particular occupations" (p. 10). Ferreira's explanation may have been why my teachers corporally punished me for speaking my native tongue and why I was told I was good for only cleaning homes. Another possibility could be that my teachers found me to be unnatural (Hurtado & Gurin, 2004) and a threat to their culture and way of life. Hurtado and Gurin (2004) suggested "social identities through social categorization is so automatic, learned so early in life, and so persistent to our social world that many people assume these social identities are 'natural' categories determined by biology" (p. 42).

My father would often quote the Bible verse, "Truly I tell you, if you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there,' and it will move. Nothing will be impossible for you" (NIV Bible, 2014). When I was a child, I believed that if I had enough faith and prayed hard enough, the *Almighty* God could make me different. I prayed that God could make me someone with blonde hair, light eyes, and White skin. I wanted to be thin, have straight soft hair, and to be popular. I could be like *them* and not an *other*. I would sit in class quietly listening to the pretty girls as they chatted about sleepovers and boys. Popular boys wore Izods, Polos, and topsiders and had tan skin with bleach-blonde hair. The climate and tension were thick for those of us who did not fit in, who did not look like the White kids; we were *the others*. The only brown kids who made it in those circles were the star athletes. The rest of us typically watched, stood by, and sat at our table in the cafeteria. I wondered if all brown kids prayed to God to change them, too.

By the time I was a junior in high school, I had outgrown what my father called *baby fat*, my teeth were straight, and my body had developed. For years, I had made a deliberate and conscious effort to stay out of the sun and avoid a tan or deepen my skin tone. I was considered one of the lucky ones. I had my mother's skin tone and complexion, and when I was in a group of my Latino peers, they would call me *güerra* or White girl. It made me feel good, and I was shamefully and yet secretly happy that I was not as dark as some of my friends. I wanted to pass and I needed to pass, because I wanted to belong. My father was offered a good job and given the title of foreman. He was making more money, which meant nicer clothes, purses, and more than a couple pairs of shoes. However, the scars and trauma from being ridiculed by my peers and demeaned by my teachers for what they thought was a lack of intelligence for so many years still had me feeling alone, less than, and invisible. Not only had a physical metamorphosis taken place, but something deep within me was rebelling, raging, gaining momentum, and wanting to scream after years of silence. I did not know how to use my voice or advocate for myself, so I decided to drop out of school. I did not warn anyone at school or say a word, I just left. It was my Latina way of handling things—quiet and invisible, just as I had always been.

At the age of 16, I was unfamiliar with the word *emancipation* or its role in my life, other than loosely hearing the word in elementary school connected with Abraham Lincoln. Emancipation is defined as a transitive verb with three general meanings: "1: to free from restraint, control, or the power of another, especially: to free from bondage. 2: to release from parental care and responsibility and make *sui juris*. 3: to free from any controlling influence (such as traditional beliefs)" (Merriam-Webster, n.d., Definition 1–

3). When looking up synonyms for emancipation, one can find the words *liberation*, *deliverance*, and *release*.

When I told my parents about my decision to drop out, they were less than happy. Mom screamed, flailed her arms in the air, and shook her head. Dad said I was a disappointment and consoled my mother, ensuring I would learn one way or another. Nothing phased me, not the screams or threats from my mother or the silent treatment from my father. My mother took my decision personally and became distant and disconnected. As for my father, he kept his distance and conversation to a minimum for years after that. I explained that I was not running away—I had no window to crawl out of, no secretive getaway plan. I made the conscious decision to create an environment for myself in which I could thrive. I was in self-preservation and survival mode.

Below is an excerpt from my personal journal, describing my experience at 16 years of age. I write of my feelings of emancipation from my parents, community, and school. In retrospect, I now realize the skills and tools I needed were within me all along. However, I did not have the language or practice in how to use them. I was stifled with a deficit mindset and lens.

> I walk up the eight concrete steps that lead up to the door of Cameron County Courthouse in Brownsville, Texas. I have a lump in my throat, and I can feel my heart tightening inside my ribcage. My stomach is churning and the acid from my gut is rising into my chest; I am going to be sick. A White woman sits behind the counter and asks, “Can I help you?” I am not sure where I get the courage, or where this idea of mine even stems from, but I say, “How do I emancipate myself?” It is obvious, as her eyes widen and from the stutter of her voice, that this is not a question she answers often. She hands me some paperwork and explains, “You will have to fill these out and explain to the judge why you want to be emancipated. You need to be able to take care of and support yourself. Do you understand?” I thank her and I am relieved to be done with this conversation. My mind races of what she must think of me. I walk outside and sit outside the courthouse on the steps, careful to avoid chewed gum and cigarette butts as I read the pages of the document in my hand. I do not understand all legal jargon and I

> begin to realize this is going to be a lot harder than I thought it would be. (Bocanegra, journal entry, 1986)

I am a Latina who did not graduate from high school, and it has taken nearly 4 decades to state that fact. For years, I had dodged the question, "When did you graduate from high school?" My words and syntax in my response were carefully chosen as I responded with, "Oh, I *went* to Hanna High School," or I would flat out deflect and change the subject. For decades I was embarrassed. It did not matter that I went directly from dropping out to taking exams to enter a community college, nor did it matter that I attended a university and received a bachelor's degree with *magna cum laude* honors, as well as a master's degree with a perfect 4.0 GPA.

I felt the stigma of being a dropout, afraid it would make people think I had some character flaw or that I was incapable and hopeless. I was so embarrassed and ashamed that I kept this secret from my husband for 25 years. It has taken years of unlearning and healing to get to a point where I can say, "I am a high school dropout." This experience no longer shames me. Rather, I now understand that where I failed, our school system succeeded. I was a brown kid who was tracked, placed in predetermined groups, labeled for failure, and called names such as *stupid*, *worthless*, and *dumb* by teachers. Teachers informed my young impressionable mind that I would "not amount to anything," that I was a "waste of time," and suggested I learn how to clean houses. These false mentors who had been entrusted with helping me realize my hopes and dreams had already charted me as statistical data for failure. How was I expected to succeed when my future had been predetermined? Chavez (2008) provided a possible reason as to why Latinos leave school:

> Latino adolescents are highly motivated, but their expectations of success are colored by experiences of hostility and discrimination from the society at large.

> They question whether the school is working in their interest, underscoring their doubts with vignettes about past conflict. And they do find it difficult to cooperate in the educational enterprise. Many of them simply leave it all together. (p. 56)

Though nearly 98% of Latinas express the desire to graduate from high school, an astonishing 41% will not walk the stage with their class and 53% will become pregnant before the age of 20 years old (Gándara, 2015; Gándara & Contreras, 2009; Gándara et al., 2013; Krogstad, 2016). Latinas are the least likely to get a graduate degree compared to all-female non-Latino racial groups combined (Gándara, 2015; Gándara & Contreras, 2009; Gándara et al., 2013; Krogstad, 2016). Hondo et al. (2008) stated that by ignoring the high dropout rates among Latina students, we are violating the American promise of equity and opportunity for everyone. Latinas are more likely to be in the labor force and less likely to be employed in the public sector, and they earn significantly less than White women or men (Gándara, 2015; Gándara & Contreras, 2009; Gándara et al., 2013). With educational levels as the best predictor of Latinas' professions and their ability to earn a living, education is the single most important intervention to improve their social and economic mobility (Delgado Bernal et al., 2006; Gándara, 2015).

Problem Statement

Latinas' experiences are deeply rooted in a history of violence, colonialism, discrimination, racial hierarchy, and the repression of their native language (Anzaldúa, 2015; Delgado Bernal et al., 2006; Gándara & Hopkins, 2010; M. M. Martinez, 2018; Menken & García, 2010; Pérez Huber, 2009). Latinas have a distinctive history that has been shaped by a multitude of factors, and they intimately know the origins of oppression: "It's brewed in our bed, tables, and streets" (Anzaldúa, 2015, p. xxvii). As members of a historically subordinate group, Latinas are shaped by a *master status*, or "a socially defined position occupied by a person in society that is very important in shaping

her or his self-concept and life choices . . . and determines consensually dominant and consensually subordinate groups" (Becker 1963, as cited by Hurtado & Gurin, 2004, p. 43). Hurtado and Gurin (2004) further stated that White groups have unproblematic social identities as they do not suffer from such a stigma as White identity, which is "taken for granted as both natural and normal" (p. 43).

Politics that exclude and underrepresent the Latina community become problematic as they are affected by policies representing the dominant ideology and culture, leaving Latinas and their identity formation vulnerable and fragmented (Oliva & Aleman, 2018). The complexities of cultural and linguistic differences are often seen as a threat to the norm, or the perspective and representation of the dominant White population. Schools are missing the mark and perpetuating inequality. Latinas are being discriminated against and stripped of their culture and language, as the dominant culture is suffocating their rich history and identities (Anzaldúa, 1987, 1996, 1999, 2015; Delgado Bernal et al., 2006).

I designed this autoethnography to collect the stories and capture the voices of four Latinas spanning three generations. Using the CLE as a worldview and the ecologies of knowing as guidance for exploring the multiple sites and worlds we live in, at times, simultaneously (M. Guajardo et al., 2016), co-researchers critically examined, questioned, reflected, and tried to make sense of our experiences within our communities and organizations and how these experiences informed our identities. We further captured *when* and *how* we have used our gifts of cultural wealth (Yosso, 1995) to navigate and negotiate spaces of power. This contribution can benefit schools, communities, and organizations through providing a better understanding of Latinas' ways of knowing. The

results can inform how we cultivate healthy relationships and create safe and equitable pedagogical spaces and systems. Further, through this autoethnography, we discovered a deeper sense of belonging and sense the presence of the soul so we can commune with Her and find sacredness both in being a part of something and in standing alone when necessary. The next two sections (*Lluvias de sangre* and *Lluvias de flores*) provide a better description of the problem statement.

Lluvias de Sangre

Data and literature indicate one in every five women in the United States, and one in every four female students is Latina (Gándara, 2015). It has been projected that by the year 2060, Latinas will account for one-third of the female population in the United States (Gándara, 2015). The Latina population face myriad barriers, such as poverty, lack of health care, debt, educational access, family demands, and work schedules. Though Latinas are academically outperforming their Latino peers and are making progress, this group continues to lead in terms of dropout rates and lag in economic mobility compared to any other ethnic group (Gándara, 2015).

Lluvias de Flores

I remember the day my professor and chair, Dr. Miguel Guajardo, asked to meet with me. I was hesitant because being in the company with Dr. Guajardo was never easy, and when I would tell him this he would reply, “It’s not supposed to be easy.” I would become physically ill on my 1.5-hour commute to the university, often thinking of what excuses I could use not to show up. I do not want to give the impression that Dr. Guajardo is a mean or scary man—he is by far one the of the most generous and giving of souls I know. I was uneasy because when I am in the presence of Dr. Guajardo, he makes

me see myself through the fraudulent and counterfeit version of myself. Sometimes when we are exposed and *see* ourselves, it is not a pretty sight. When I walked in, there, projected on the wall, was my picture and a video I had used in my master's program in which I was talking about my biological, cultural, historical, and political self. We watched the video together as I cringed with embarrassment. I did not recognize *that girl* who spoke just a mere 2 years prior about her experiences as a Latina; *that girl* who had so much animosity and resentment about her past and upbringing; *that girl* who did not like the skin she was in. I was ashamed of her. His purpose of placing this mirror on the large wall in front of me was to say "ENOUGH!" He sat quietly. I sat quietly. No words were needed.

Latinas are beginning to realize we are not wholly at the mercy of circumstance, nor are our lives completely out of our hands. If we posture as victims, we will be victims, that hopelessness is suicide, and these self-attacks stop us in our tracks. We are slowly moving past the resistance within, leaving behind the defeated images. We have come to realize that we are not alone in our struggles, nor are we separate, nor are we autonomous, but we (White, Black, straight, queer, female, male) are connected and interdependent. Anzaldúa (2015) described this "changing consciousness" in the following quote:

> We are each accountable for what is happening down the street, south of the border or across the sea, . . . we have begun to come out of the shadows; we have begun to break with routines and oppressive customs to discard taboos; we have commenced to carry with pride the task of thawing hearts and changing consciousness . . . There are no bridges, one builds them as one walks. (p. 73)

I, for one, am exhausted from talking about suffering and being the victim. Anzaldúa (2009) reminded us "estás hasta el pescuezo de sufrimeinto, de contar las lluvias de sangre pero no las lluvias de flores [we are up to our neck in suffering and

counting the rains of blood but not the rains of flowers]" (p. 72). I am *cansada* of making a tragedy and *novela* of my life. It is time to abandon this "autocanabilism" and shouting at the wind (Anzaldúa, 2009, p. 72). These words are just noise if not backed with action (Anzaldúa, 2009, p. 72). I want to make my words and thoughts luminous, lifting, and active. It is time to cross the bridge; we can no longer afford to stop in the middle of the bridge with arms crossed (Anzaldúa, 2009).

We want pedagogical approaches that hear and validate our voices. We want scholarship that challenges the existing power. We want our histories to be valued and represented in our communities, curriculum, and classrooms. We want to see people who look like us in our faculty and administration. For this reason, I chose a language and method with which I am familiar. I did this to be authentic to myself, my spirit, my culture, and other Latinas like me. It is who I am. In this document, I risked being shot down by the Eurocentric mindset of academia. It was a risk I was willing to take, for if I could not, what would be the point of it all?

Brief Overview of Methods and Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework I employed is rooted in the CLE and ecologies of knowing (M. Guajardo et al., 2016). "CLE is a theory of Relationships, Assets, Stories, Place, Politic, and Action" (M. Guajardo et al., 2016, p. 32). This theoretical framework focuses on "encouraging communities to openly examine their common challenges, collective gifts and then freely exchange successful approaches and tools that can drive changes within themselves, their organizations (including schools), and their communities" (M. Guajardo et al., 2016, p. 3). Through stories and relationship building in a safe space, the CLE framework reframes the deficit conditions of our lives and

provides a network of support to navigate the tensions of race, class, and gender. This framework gives participants a different way of looking at the world and a new language to reimagine, build hope, and create multiple future possibilities (M. Guajardo et al., 2016).

Organization of Dissertation

Chapter I was dedicated to understanding the past by examining my story, familial stories, historical events, and patterns of anti-Mexican sentiment that have influenced Latinas' identity development. This chapter included the problem statement and significance of the research along with the research questions and a brief look at the theoretical framework. Chapter II includes the literature review and common themes and experiences that influence Latinas' identity and ways of becoming. Chapter III attends to the methodology, including participants, site location, and a deeper look into the theoretical framework. Chapter IV triangulates the data from *platícas*, *testimonios*, and photovoice within the CLEs to encounter emerging themes. Chapter V presents recommendations, implications, and suggestions for further research.

Key Terms

Please refer to Appendix A for key terms and phrases and Spanish to English translations.

II. CONSULTING A COMMUNITY OF THINKERS AND ACTORS

Method of Review and Criteria for Inclusion

My literature review reflects the consultation of multiple scholarly databases: Google Scholar, JSTOR, EBSCO, and ProQuest. Though it included a traditional scholarly pattern and traditional thinkers, the inquiry itself was much more expansive. Keywords included, but were not limited to, the following: Latina/o, Hispanic, resilience, community, identity formation, religion, sexuality, gender, body image, Chicana feminism, cultural wealth, third space, community building, *testimonios*, and *platícas*. Keywords were used in combinations of two or more to generate results that best fit the area of study. Scholarly literature that addresses issues that inform Latina identity formation and the building of safe pedagogical spaces was included. These collective sources provided foundation from which to begin (Creswell & Creswell, 2018) the review of prior scholarship.

Though researchers *begin* with the literature of others (Creswell & Creswell, 2018, the body of work presented in this chapter is augmented by readings from classes; by my conversations with faculty, peers, and family; and by emerging curiosities from community work. The existing research has been besieged with critiques regarding its authenticity (Beverley, 2004; Delgado Bernal et al., 2006) that rely primarily on Western cultural values (Delgado Bernal et al., 2006). However, when Latinas employ our own *testimonios* to "document, reframe, transmit, or illuminate their own multiple subjectivities and the oppressive burdens they entail, the need for a second party to translate their personal stories is eliminated" (Delgado Bernal et al., 2006, p. 130). This approach to knowledge promotes a sense of agency because we are simultaneously the

subject and object of inquiry. Thus, we document our experiences as we find meaning in it we find legitimacy and acceptance, and we want our voices heard. Ultimately, we do this as a political act (Anzaldúa, 2009).

Conceptual Framework

Conceptual frameworks are developed by the researcher and are based on the theory being used. The conceptual framework for my study was informed by M. Guajardo et al.'s (2016) ecologies of knowing and CLE framework as a *way of life*, as depicted in Figure 5. The roots of the tree represent the experiences of Latinas and the messages they receive. These experiences and messages feed into the trunk (ecologies of knowing). Here, the power of place and the wisdom of people come together to engage in *pláticas* and *testimonios*. The theory of change works with the ecologies of knowing in a vortex-like motion within the trunk to dismantle the dominant narrative and discover cultural assets that restore, reframe, and reimagine multiple possibilities. The vortex continues to rise (politic in action) to the canopy of the tree as politic begins to take action. A fence, or barrier, protects this safe space from pests, uninvited guests, and harmful toxicities.

Because we are aware of the dangers that can infiltrate this safe space, it is by the invitation of a CLE hosting member that a stranger can be welcomed to begin building healthy relationships. The leaves represent growth, transformation, and possibilities. Just as a tree goes through a cyclical process and seasonal changes, so too does this CLE framework. Eventually, a tree's leaves will molt, fall, and decompose to feed and nourish the soil below. This fertile ground will continue to feed the roots and tree. As seasons

change and the tree sheds its leaves, generational healing, continued growth, and possibilities will emerge.

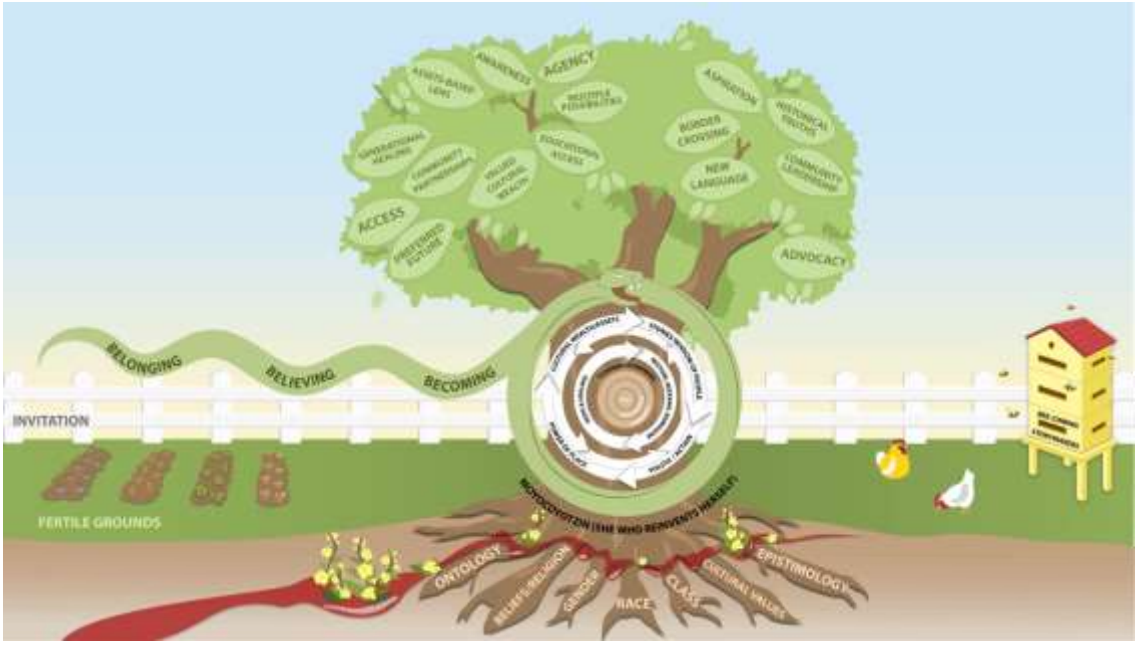

Figure 5. Conceptual Framework.

Belonging, Believing, and Becoming

The Moonflower

Shortly before my father's death, he gifted me a moonflower plant (see Figure 6). I did not think much of it at the time, although now, I am sure there was no coincidence in this act of kindness. I planted it on the corner of my back patio, just outside my bedroom window. It was not much larger than a foot when I received it and to be quite honest, I am surprised it grew at all as I never really paid it much attention. I did nothing special in caring for it, nor did I water it on a regular basis. I did not find it to be particularly interesting and I never saw its flowers bloom. But the moonflower continued to grow and had been lucky enough to be resting under a rain gutter. It had survived solely on nature's ability to quench its thirst. One night after my father's death, I took a stroll outside with only the luminous moon guiding my steps. There, to my amazement,

was a plant nearly nine feet tall and full of large cream trumpet-like flowers basking in the light of the moon. I began to think of all the nocturnal animals and plants that sleep in the shadows during the day only to rendezvous with the moon in the darkness of the night. How could something so exquisite hide itself from the light and why would it keep such beauty from us as we slumber?

Figure 6. Moonflower Plant.

The moonflower reminds me of myself prior to entering this PhD program and engaging in CLEs with Dr. Guajardo. I too was in hiding, avoiding the light and keeping my gifts from the world. It was within community with my peers, professors, and Dr. Guajardo that I began to self-excavate and strip away my social mask, baring the raw nakedness of my authentic self. As I continue in the process of critical self-reflection and the shedding of my skins, I am understanding my reality and using this emerging knowledge as a source of strength. It is in these safe and gracious spaces that I, a moonflower, am becoming a bright sunflower (Anzaldúa, 2009).

Pensadoras

Delgado Bernal et al. (2006) asked us to be *pensadoras* or "thinkers who build on their cultural foundations to form political and practical meaning about learning, knowing, teaching, and power" (p. 2). Through this literature review and research, it was my hope that this understanding may bring about a "shift" for creating "healthy social relations, educational practices and policies" (Delgado Bernal et al., 2006, p. 2) that challenge the dominant perceptions of Latinas.

In recent decades, literature written by Latinos/as has shined light on the abundance of gifts we bring to the table, giving hope to the Latino/a community. However, the majority of the literature tends to miss the mark, focusing on Latinos'/as' experiences from a deficit perspective. Our educational systems and communities reject deficit thinking as "it does not move us forward in building the self-esteem of children, families, schools, or the community at large" (M. Guajardo et al., 2008, p. 19). Deficit-based thinking "crushes the spirit of community . . . and problems and deficiencies become larger" (M. Guajardo et al., 2016, p. 34). However, when we focus on gifts, assets, and solutions, "there is hope" (M. Guajardo et al., 2016, p. 34). Just as the moonflower survived, we too can survive amid rocks and thorns. Survival is merely continuing to live or exist despite hardship, often choosing the path of less resistance. To thrive, we must do the work to reimagine the inner and outer landscapes of our lives. This attempt to shift away from deficit thinking focuses on various forms of capital, such as resistant capital, linguistic capital, navigational capital, social capital, familial capital, and aspirational capital (Yosso, 2005; Zambrana et al., 2015, p. 82). These assets are valuable

and abundant and can be used to resist the forces of oppression (M. Guajardo et al., 2016; Zambrana et al., 2015, p. 82).

In this dynamic-critical study (M. Guajardo et al., 2016), I explored literature that reflects the cultural wealth (Yosso, 2005) of Latinas and those who have navigated spaces of tension and inequity. This research and literature review highlight how Latinas' ways of knowing and use of the *mestiza* consciousness have empowered them to recover from trauma caused by oppression and move toward positive social change (Anzaldúa, 2015; Delgado Bernal et al., 2006; Garcia & Dutro, 2018; M. Guajardo et al., 2016; Rendón, 2014). Co-researchers reviewed the literature, and through *pláticas*, we interrogated our positionalities and listened to our disruptive voices to create equitable educational structures for future generations of Latinas. The literature reviewed in this chapter reflects the following three themes as significant contributors to the identity formation of Latinas and creating safe pedagogical spaces: the need to *belong*, the need to *believe*, and the need to heal in the process of *becoming*.

Belonging

The Latina identity is complex and multifaceted. As such, using intersectionality as an analytical tool is a way to analyze and understand the complexity of people, our world, and our human experiences (Collins & Bilge, 2016). Not often can our experiences and the conditions of the self be fully understood as they are not shaped by one factor but rather by many political and social influencers. Inequality is not affected by a "single axis of social division, be it race or gender or class, but by many axes that work together and influence each other" (Collins & Bilge, 2016, p. 2). This intersectionality allows us to better understand the complexity of ourselves and the world

in which we live. Latinas inhabit many different worlds that have "pounded hegemonic theories into us, making us feel like we don't fit" (Anzaldúa, 2009, p. 206). Anzaldúa (2009) claimed Latinas are exiled and alienated by undermining assimilation of concepts, theories, and assumptions that we have bought into and use against ourselves (p. 206). Latinas then internalize these labels and theories, becoming shapeshifters and creating multiple identities while navigating a world in which they cannot see themselves (Anzaldúa, 1996, 2012, 2015). Below is an excerpt from a *plática* with my daughter, Cameron, when asked how she feels about being Latina:

> As the world becomes more empowering for women of color, I'll find my place eventually. But if I take that platform now, I can't own it. I can't own being brown. I can only own being mixed and feeling confused. (Cameron, Bocanegra, journal entry, *plática* with daughter, March 17, 2019)

Anzaldúa (1996) theorized that the Latina identity conflicts within a personal, cultural, feminist, collective, and racial context. Anzaldúa came to understand that her cultural and racial identity is not a clearly defined space; much like Cameron, Latinas adapt and become chameleons in the struggle of being brown in a White world, continually questioning their roots and struggling with the need to label themselves. This continual battle with dualism and the dominant system of thought forces the individual to split into an "unhealthy creature" (Anzaldúa, 1996, p. 29). It is not until we clearly define and name the oppression and dissolve this dichotomy that we can find a space of hope and belonging. This new awareness emerges from this redefined space where we can co-create, imagine, and see ourselves through a new consciousness (Anzaldúa, 1996; Freire, 1970; M. Guajardo et al., 2016; Horton, 2003).

Cameron's words, "I can only own feeling mixed and being confused," represent a collective crisis for many Latinas who blame themselves and feel inadequate because of

the skin they wear. Latinas will keep themselves busy and avoid the painful self-reflection of facing their fear in the mirror (Anzaldúa, 2015). The word *mestiza* means a woman of mixed race. Anzaldúa (2015) wrote of the *new mestiza*, explaining that this is a woman who negotiates between different cultures with multiple perspectives from both worlds. These worlds generate inner conflicts and complicate Latinas' cultural positioning. Within this confusion and tension, Latinas can differentiate between what they want to reject or shed and what they want to keep. This process is how Latinas will come in time to create a *third space*, or what Anzaldúa (2002) referred to as *Nepantla*:

> Nepantla is the site of transformation. The place where different perspectives come into conflict and where you question the basic ideas, tenets, and identities inherited from your family, your education, and your different cultures. Nepantla is the zone between changes where you struggle to find equilibrium between the outer expression of change and your inner relationship to it. Living between cultures results in "seeing" double, first from the perspective of one culture, then from the perspective of another. Seeing from two or more perspectives simultaneously renders those cultures transparent. (pp. 548–549)

It is within this space that Latinas struggle with the tension of the processes of dismemberment, transformation, and disidentification from social structures and existing beliefs as they shed and leave behind aspects of the self and pick up others.

The Leslies y Las Fresas

Much like Cameron, as a young adult the need to belong was crucial to my social and emotional survival. Often, I would sit in class quietly and write poetry, draw, or watch the *Leslies*—a trio of blonde, popular, and athletic girls who shared the same name. If you could not be a Leslie, the next best thing was to be a *fresa*. The *fresas* were students from Matamoros, Mexico, which bordered my hometown of Brownsville, Texas. The *fresas*' fathers were often physicians, dentists, or lawyers, and they would cross the border every morning to attend school. They did not speak Spanish like I did; they had a

sing-songy fast way of speaking that I thought sounded better than my border Spanish. They dressed in designer clothes, carried beautiful purses, and giggled in their cliques in the halls and cafeteria. Many of the *fresas* had light hair, light skin, and light eyes—they looked like the Leslies. I was not like them; I was neither a Leslie nor a *fresa*. At times, if you were athletic and popular, you could make your way into one of these groups. I was not athletic. My body had curves with big thighs and hips that could not fit in jeans back then.

Unlike today's jeans made of soft, stretchy fabrics, I could not squeeze into the *cool* jeans, so I resorted to wearing Chunky brand jeans. The word *CHUNKY* was boldly displayed on the back leather tag for all to see. I had been blessed with my abuela's physical traits. My hair was coarse and frizzy, and my lips were full. I struggled with not being a Leslie or a *fresa*. These struggles are "physical, political, ideological locations where one straddles contesting and intersecting cultures and identities that rupture the body, mind, and spirit" (Delgado Bernal et al., 2006, p. 41). Every day was a battle that raged within me. Internalized racism, feelings of self-doubt, and jealousy made me want to be like the Leslies and turn my back on people like me. I, the oppressed, became the oppressor (Freire, 1970; Yosso, 2006). Anzaldúa (2009) posited this feeling comes from being "pushed out of the herd" (p. 112) and being ostracized, which then leads to internalizing negative images of ourselves by self-hating and acquiring poor self-esteem (Anzaldúa, 2009; Rendón, 2014). Soon, we shun those who look like us, have a White partner, do not speak Spanish well, or speak English with a Spanish accent. We look down on Latinas who are not *educated* or not *legal*. We throw rocks at those who fail to pass and find ourselves *entreguerras* with women of our own ethnicity (Anzaldúa, 2009).

Like our exploiters, we become obsessed with inferiorities and impose what "should be" by projecting self-hatred and stereotyping our sisters of color, making them "generic" (p. 112). Anzaldúa (2009) suggested that we participate in White systems every minute of our lives; we are either colluding within them or rebelling against them. Anzaldúa further suggested that the learned navigational strategies we use against the dominant culture are also used against each other.

Throughout my master's program, I felt the same sentiments as I did in my young adult school years—it was me versus them, and *them* could have been Whites or others like me. Experiences of feeling alienated and rejected left me bitter and resentful. When I was called to interview for the PhD program, I made a point to be well dressed, polished, poised, and to carry myself *as if* I belonged, but inside I was in turmoil, battling with my insecurities, waiting to be discovered for a fraud. I can distinctly remember a beautiful woman with long black hair wearing a blush pink suit waiting on our interviews. She looked confident in every movement she made. Immediately, I was in competitive mode (Rendón, 2014). There was another Latina in this space, a space that was too small for the both of us. I sized her up and down head to toe. Her smile, her skin, the way she moved; she reminded me of a *fresa* and that did not sit well with me. Rendón (2014) suggested these feelings stem from being part of a society that tends to emphasize competition far more than cooperation. This thought of competition disjoints and pits one against another in a learning and teaching environment. Though competition can be healthy and fun, it has been suggested that students need to work and live in a world that relies on collaboration and embraces connectedness (Rendón, 2014).

Aware of the importance of collaboration, Texas State University faculty place doctoral students into cohorts in the hopes that this community will build a sense of cohesion, group identity, and specialness (Love, 2012). These learning communities are known to encourage student engagement and cultivate community and problem-based learning (M. Guajardo et al., 2016; Rendón, 2014). I became one of 11 members of Cohort 2018, and so did Sally, the long black-haired woman I had my eyes on in the interview process. The first class we attended was a philosophy course and Sally sat to my left as we engaged in a group discussion. The syllabus had six books assigned for readings, and Biesta (2010) was to have been read prior to our first class for discussion. The academic language in this book was far above my reach and yet everyone was shaking their head in agreement as if they understood the professor as he went on about Biesta's thoughts on qualification, socialization, and subjectification. At one point, a student asked a question, and there was a pause. The professor, who was comfortably kicked back in his chair winding a rubber band in circles with his index fingers, chuckled and asked, "Did you read the book?" His condescending voice and raised eyebrow made me uneasy and had me wondering if I was in the right space.

It was a typical academic model scenario where there is little room for error, imperfection, and questions of uncertainty (Rendón, 2014). Rendón (2014) stated "learning theorists have shown that in a context where human imperfection is downplayed, many students become intimidated by professors who either bombard them with too much information or leave them confused and frustrated with too little information" (p. 40). Further, Darder (2017) stated hierarchical relationships that exclusively privilege the teacher as subject and objectify students stymie critical

intellectual development. I was already uneasy about being discovered, but after the professor's response I felt intimidated and terrified of being rejected. After that, I postured up and pretended to *know* by shaking my head in agreement like the others. Rendón (2014) stated behaving as if we know is arrogant and noted this overconfidence can be limiting as opposed to being in a state of not knowing, which has no boundaries as our curiosities and imagination cannot be contained. Rendón (2014) stated "true learning results from a deep and continuous surrender to the unknown" (p. 40). At some point during the class discussion, Sally turned to me with a perplexed look on her face and said, "I don't understand any of this shit" (Sally, personal communication, August 2018). My guard and mouth dropped as I laughed in relief upon realizing that we were in this messiness together. In that moment, we exposed our counterfeit selves and our fake knowingness, and decided we would become seekers.

Not knowing requires that we venture into the unknown, that we be flexible about being grounded in knowing and not knowing, and that we leave our sense of security behind (Anzaldúa, 2009; Rendón, 2014). We understand that because our mind is unknowing, it is open to possibilities and ready for anything. Possibilities are endless for the apprentice, but in the expert's mind possibilities are few. Cohen et al.'s (2000) words describe the exchange between Sally and I well:

> Unless we hit the bull's eye – which means that perfect middle space between knowing and not knowing – the inevitable result of profound spiritual experiences including even Enlightenment itself, will be imperfect. That simply means that in the one who is enlightened, a shadow of ego will remain in his or her attainment; knowing will be more powerful than not knowing. That is why the pursuit of Enlightenment is such a delicate matter for the seeker and the finder – it is so easy to err on one side of the other. (p. 86)

The Copper Beard Orchid

According to Brown (2019), true belonging is when you can "share your most authentic self with the world . . . it doesn't require you to change who you are; it requires you to be who you are" (p. 40). Nevertheless, Latinas live in a state of in-betweenness, shapeshifting between two worlds. We struggle to belong and to change exclusionary education systems so they do not invalidate us (Anzaldúa, 2009; Rendón, 2014). This primal and essential need to belong can be seen in nature as exemplified in the life of the Copper Beard Orchid. This beautiful flower does not attract pollinators easily. Unlike its fellow vibrantly colored and aromatic companions, the Copper Beard Orchid does not entice pollinators as effortlessly and relies on plant mimicry. Plant mimicry is a process by which a plant has evolved to resemble another plant or animal, chemically or physically, to ensure its survival. At times, it changes its appearance to attract insects and birds for cross-pollination. At other times, this mimicry deters predators by mirroring the characteristics of a harmful species. In its attempt to beguile a pollinator, the orchid mimics the structure of a female scoliid wasp. In doing so, the orchid will receive the service of pollination and safeguard its continuity in nature. Just as the Copper Beard Orchid impersonates the female scoliid wasp (Bower & Branwhite, 1993) and instinctively yearns for belonging, so does the Latina navigate between two worlds, drawing from her multiple identities and life experiences to engage in pedagogies of resistance in spaces that are often forbidden and denied to her (Anzaldúa, 2015; Delgado Bernal et al., 2006; Pérez Huber, 2009; Rendón, 2014).

Results of a qualitative study by Gardner (2010) showed doctoral students with the highest graduation rate consistently reported receiving support from their peers,

describing their peers as *family*. A previous qualitative study by González (2007) showed Latinas attributed their success in completing their doctoral studies to having positive relationships with other Latinas. Latinas sought to make strategic alliances (González, 2005, 2006, 2007; Gonzalez et al., 2001; Rendón, 2014) or networks of resistance (Anzaldúa, 2015; Rendón, 2014) as a survival mechanism in predominately White institutions (Anzaldúa, 2015; Rendón, 2016). Latinas expressed the need for sacred spaces where they could share their *testimonios*, dismantle oppressive structures, and reclaim their identities (Anzaldúa, 2015; Delgado Bernal et al., 2006; Rendón, 2014). These support groups helped doctoral students deal with feelings of isolation and were vital to their overall well-being and success within the program (Ali & Kohun, 2007; Baker & Pifer, 2011; Rendón, 2006).

Anzaldúa (2009) stated that if we want coalitions to work, we must define the terms we use, come up with ground rules, and name the issues at hand. We must be able to see through stereotypes and common assumptions. If not, we will continue to operate under White definitions, White assumptions, and White strategies (Anzaldúa, 2009). There are many coalitions of sisterhoods and *hermanidades* in our communities, on campus, and within our friendships. However, many of these groups operate under false assumptions and the utopian myth of sisterhood (Anzaldúa, 2009). Sisterhood is not simply a matter of wearing an *amiga's* T-shirt or going on girls' trips. A true sisterhood formulates a working definition of alliance and coalition and creates a space to work together for change (Anzaldúa, 2009; Rendón, 2014). It is a space in which we look at who we are, how we became, and how we entered and occupy the space. Once we

examine our own motives, then we can inquire about the motives of others who choose to be our allies (Anzaldúa, 2009).

As Sally and I were sitting in class one day in a group discussion setting with two White male students, one of them asked Sally a question on her thoughts about an article we read. She paused in thought and before she could answer, the student boldly said with a laugh, “It doesn’t matter, statistically you are not supposed to make it out of this program anyway” (Zach, personal communication, August 2018). Whether he meant it as a joke or not was irrelevant—the look on Sally’s face said it all and reminded me of the same look my mother had when the woman at the White church told my mother she could not learn how to play the piano. Sally abruptly sat up and her eyes zeroed in on the student. She retorted, “Not this F****** Latina!” (Sally, personal communication, August 2018). I looked at her with a grin from ear to ear and my slumped body was erect with pride alongside hers. Though we had a laugh over it later, we both knew something very powerful had just happened.

Sally is what Anzaldúa (2009) would refer to as the *new mestiza*, a woman of mixed blood who “threatens the hegemony of the neo-conservatives because it breaks down the labels and theories used to manipulate and control us. Punching holes in their categories, labels and theories” (p. 205). Anzaldúa (1990) claimed

> knowledges have been kept from us— entry into some professions and academia denied us. Because we are not allowed to enter discourse, because we are often disqualified and excluded from it, because what passes for theory these days is forbidden territory for us. (p. xxv)

Freire (1998) stated our role in the world is not restricted to merely observing, but requires our intervention and input as we, Latinas, are “equally subject and object in the historical process” (p. 73). Darder (2017) claimed that knowledge is a living historical

process that grows and transforms; it emerges out of our relationships with one another and the world. The freedom to understand the world is not the privilege of one person; it is in the collective experience that Latinas will begin to occupy spaces that were once inhabited by dependency and a dominant ideology (Anzaldúa, 2009). Below, I metaphorically describe the resilience exhibited by Latinas in my personal journal entry while in *el jardín*. Though Latinas are often overlooked or shut out, we do not surrender, we do not submit; we stand strong.

> Tiny hummingbirds frantically zip about sipping sweet nectar with their elongated beaks. Bees buzzing, butterflies fluttering landing delicately on soft-pillowed yellow centers of bright red and purple flowers. Their scent is an enticing aromatic concoction that fills the air. These brilliant bouquets delight in attention; they are sure to flourish, grow strong, and thrive, but what of the others? Just as beautiful, they stand strong and erect in the sun. (Bocanegra, journal entry, March 13, 2020).

NTFL

Sally and I were not the only Latinas trying to make sense of our histories and experiences and wanting to "unmask our private faces and realize who we are, who we carry, and where we come from" (Rendón, 2014, p. 134). Other Latinas in our program were unsettled by the concepts, labels, and theories that we have bought into against ourselves (Anzaldúa, 2009; Rendón, 2014). We formed a sisterhood of six Latinas (see Figure 7) in our program representing Cohorts 2017 and 2018 and named the group *NTFL* after Sally's response of not wanting to be a statistic, as Latinas represent less than 1% of those who earn a doctorate (Arocho, 2017). Rendón (2014) stated forming a sisterhood is an arduous and difficult path and the "antithesis of developing ones' place in academia because institutions of education tend to prepare student to work in isolation" (p. 137). Through our *testimonios*, we learn how to translate ourselves for each other. We

reveal ourselves to each other, openly deconstructing our own ethnic and class biases (Rendón, 2014).

Figure 7. NTFL Group (Left to Right) Sally S., Sabrina P., Me, Elizabeth C., Jessica E.

Believing

We honor the gifts we bring to our group and help each other rise above, unapologetic and unashamed about our sisterhood (Rendón, 2014). We feel a great responsibility to use our voices to create a diverse curriculum that embodies our ways of teaching and knowing for future Latinas. We are what Anzaldúa (2009) referred to as the Trojan *mulas* who are assimilated and educated in universities. Trojan *mulas* have been held captive in ivory towers, beaten by Eurocentric ways and high theory discourses. We are *cansadas* as it was hard to get through this gate, but we infiltrate it to shake up the system bringing our new ideas with us (Anzaldúa, 2009; Rendón, 2014). This is not easy work as we, *new meztizas*, must navigate through the scholarship we are required to read in addition to exploring our own culture—all of this while we are being seduced and subverted by the system (Anzaldúa, 2009; Rendón, 2014). As we are being chipped away within the institution, we continue to beat our heads against their walls, making holes for

our daughters and brown little girls like us. Anzaldúa (2009) used the term *nagual* to refer to a person who shapeshifts from human to animal. We are like the nagual shifting through our many true faces as we fight against an internal colonization in our coursework, in dialogue with our professors, and in our writing. We shift to not allow our stories, theories, and histories to be appropriated and made invisible (Anzaldúa, 2009; M. Guajardo et al., 2016; Rendón, 2014). As my chair, Dr Guajardo, often says, "This is work! But if not us, then who?"

The Euro-Anglo institution wants to keep their Eurocentric ways. However, when we believe and imagine alternate possibilities (M. Guajardo et al., 2016), we "problematize their hegemony" (Anzaldúa, 2009, p. 206). In Anzaldúa's (2002) epigraph below, she argues "for positive social change to occur, we must imagine a reality that differs from what already exists" (p. 5):

> Activism is the courage to act consciously on our ideas, to exert power in resistance to ideological pressure—to risk leaving home. Empowerment comes from ideas—a revolution is fought with concepts, not guns, and it is fueled by vision. By focusing on what we want to happen, we change the present. The healing images and narrative we imagine will eventually materialize. (p. 5)

Many of us have heard the phrase *what's in a name?* This phrase is a reference to Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*. Yet, many of us rarely give names a second thought when we are introduced or greet one another. A few weeks before I was born, my mother and father disagreed on what my name should be. My father wanted the biblical name, Esther Ruth. My mother wanted a French name, Erica Renée. They decided to put all the names in my father's hat and pull out two slips of paper designating what my name would be. Out came Esther Renée, and so the name would be bestowed upon me at my birth.

My mother, being a persistent woman, never called me by my first name as it was not *her* choice; therefore, I was known solely as Renée. When I was in my second year of this PhD program, I went to visit Dr. Guajardo, and he handed me some books to read and gave me a list of authors to add to my library. The first book I read was *The Bridge Called My Back* by Gloria Anzaldúa (Moraga & Anzaldúa, 2015). Within the first chapter, I was captivated by her words. Who was this woman and how did she know how I felt? She knew my thoughts and made sense of them. I read more of her books, and then ventured off to read other Latina authors. I felt a sense of kinship with these women who wielded their pens and put my thoughts and emotions on paper, and I felt validated (Anzaldúa, 2009; Rendón, 2014). I came across a reading that spoke of Moyocoyotzin, a name that originates from Aztec (Nahuatl) roots. According to Aztec mythology, Moyocoyotzin is a serpent goddess who sheds her skin and reinvents herself. After I read this story, something piqued my interest to look up the meaning of my name, and I found out the name Esther means *a star*, and the name Renée means *reborn*. There it was: *A Star Reborn*.

I spoke with Dr. Guajardo about how I had always thought I was born under the *wrong* star and about how my parents chose my name. Again, Dr. Guajardo reminded me, "Nothing is a coincidence, Renée. Four names went in, two names came out. You need to realize that *you* are the star." I spent the rest of my day in a sort of transformative trance. I could not shake his words, and nothing was the same after that for me. Typically, this would not be a conversation I would have with a professor, nor do I think most would entertain such stories. Darder (2017) claimed professors like Dr. Guajardo stretch the limited boundaries of what is considered permissible discourse to provide pedagogical

spaces for students to engage more freely in their process of knowledge construction and learning. This is the most important example of a teacher's critical use of power (Darder, 2017).

M. Guajardo et al. (2016) asked the questions:

> We can see the inefficiencies in our bureaucracies, inequities in our communities, and injustices in our organizations and institutions. But how can we change them? How do we go about transforming those very things that mediate individuals and society so that we can make life healthier and more fulfilling for ourselves and for others? (p. 3)

M. Guajardo et al. stated that it is by exploring our stories, investing in our relationships, and respecting our place that we see possibilities and hope beneath layers of despair. These "stories we share are not always our own creation" (M. Guajardo et al., 2016, p. 69). Some of these stories we have learned from our friends, family, parents, and community.

Additionally, the media and our educational systems bombard us with stories of "certainty and single truths" (M. Guajardo et al., 2016, p. 69). An example of this bombarding of single truths and certainty can be seen in how Latinas are portrayed and objectified in the media, treated as a commodity without regard to their dignity or personality (Merskin, 2007). Merskin (2007) identified three main stereotypes of Latinas: *Cantina girl* (alluring sexual presence), *Suffering senorita* (lost loves have her incapable of continuing), and *Vamp* (beautiful but devious). Latinas form their primary view of their physical selves from observing others, usually from media or personal experiences (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997; Merskin, 2007). Implications are depression, body dissatisfaction, self-objectification, lack of motivation, and increased acceptance of rape myths (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997; Merskin, 2007).

M. Guajardo et al. (2016) claimed that, through *pláticas*, we can debunk these myths by sharing, analyzing, story mapping, and examining the values at work to look at gaps and reflect how these stories can be reframed to yield different outcomes. This must be done in a "relevant and purposeful action" and "through a disciplined approach" (M. Guajardo et al., 2016, p. 69). The ability to re-author the self includes the desire to be inquisitive and be curious to those around us in a relational, comparative, and reflective way (M. Guajardo et al., 2016). This process of re-authoring and re-imagining is grounded in the ontology of courage and the readiness to change the conditions and the context in which we live our lives (M. Guajardo et al., 2016).

Community Cultural Wealth

I became familiar with Yosso's (2005) community cultural wealth (CCW) model in a master's class with Dr. Grimaldo; she read a paper in class I had written and asked if I had ever heard of Yosso's CCW model or read her books or articles. I had not. In retrospect, I now realize my paper was written with a deficit mindset, and Dr. Grimaldo gently guided me to view my experiences through a more appreciative asset-based lens by helping me explore what strengths, talents, and experiences I bring to academia and my community. Yosso's CCW includes six forms of cultural capital: aspirational, linguistic, familial, social, navigational, and resistance. Each of these play a role in how I conceptualize how Latinas come to believe in themselves through understanding their cultural gifts and assets.

Aspirational capital refers to Latinas' ability to maintain hopes and dreams for the future despite real and perceived barriers. Linguistic capital refers to the communication and language skills Latinas develop through various experiences, such as interpreting,

storytelling, attention to detail, comedic timing, vocal tone, volume, rhythm and rhyme, facial effect, and dramatic pauses. Familial capital refers to the personal and social human resources (extended family and community networks) from which Latinas draw in building wisdom from their homes, communities, values, and stories. Navigational capital relates to the ability of Latinas to navigate social institutions and educational spaces. This type of capital empowers Latinas to navigate within hostile and unsupportive environment. Social capital is how Latinas use peer and social contacts to gain access to and navigate social institutions. Finally, resistance capital comes from community members, parents, and a historical legacy of engaging in social justice. Latinas are prepared to solve spaces of inequity regarding educational, health, and other social outcomes. Figure 8 shows how these forms of capital relate to Yosso's concept of CCW.

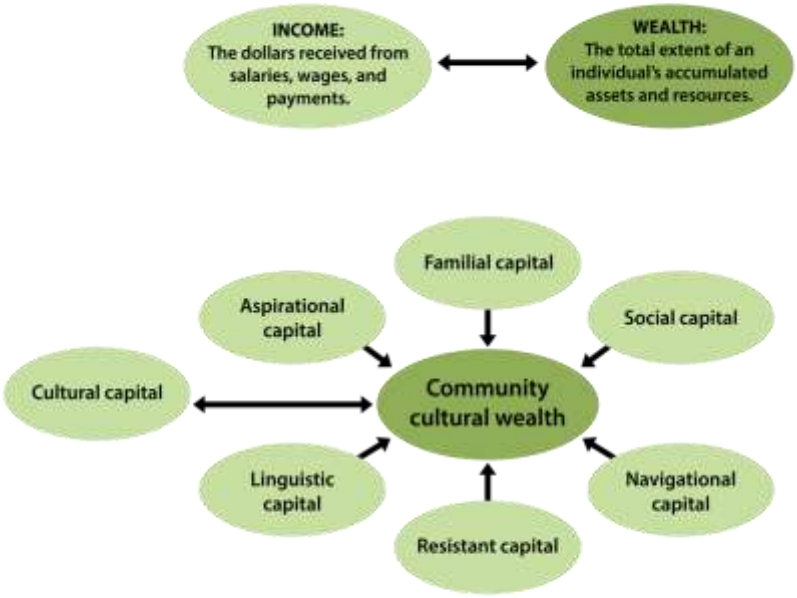

Figure 8. Yosso's Concept of Cultural Capital (2005).

Yosso's (2005) concept of resilient resistance identifies personal and social characteristics that inform Latinas' ability to "succeed despite the stressors in their

academic and personal life experiences. Latinas strategically challenge inequality, even though they often cannot or do not fully articulate the structural nature of inequality" (p. 182). Before I was aware of our inequitable systems or, rather, had the language to name them, my mother was already preparing me for these spaces of tension by teaching me to assert myself as strong and worthy of respect—to *valerse por si misma* (Yosso, 2006). These lessons came in verbal and nonverbal forms as I witnessed her struggle to be a *good* Latina wife, mother, and daughter in the face of patriarchy, racism, and capitalism, all while instructing me to engage in behaviors that challenge the status quo (Anzaldúa, 2009; Isasi-Díaz, 1996; Yosso, 2005). Rendón (2014) suggested this "teaching and learning between mother and daughters also becomes a space of 'doubling' where women mimic dominant beliefs and mothering, traditional gender roles, and society's views about who counts in terms of language, citizenship, skin color, and cultural values" (p. 152). Yet, simultaneously, we transform these messages and embody the teaching and learning of empowerment and self-worth. Solórzano and Delgado Bernal (2001) proposed that resistance includes many forms of oppositional behavior, such as conformist or self-defeating strategies that feed the system of subordination. However, when informed by critical consciousness (Freire, 1970) and a motivation to work toward a social justice and recognize the nature of oppression, resistance takes on a transformative form (Yosso, 2006). Thus, transformative resistance capital includes cultural knowledge of systemic racism and the will to transform these oppressive structures (Yosso, 2006). As I think about resilience in *el jardín*, I am reminded how nature too perseveres with oppositional behavior in an act of hope and believing, as I expressed in an earlier journal entry:

> It's about to rain. I have a short window before I lose my opportunity to check the garden and feed the chickens. Barefoot, I make my way down the stone path to the small space where I escape the loud noise of the world and find peace in the beauty of nature; thick grey clouds eclipse the sun. The blackberry vines are sprawling, trailing in all directions, and flailing in the wind tempestuously. The fence I put in last year to train and erect the berries cannot control their rebellious nature. I laugh to myself and think about how I, too, am a blackberry vine . . . resilient and resistant. (Bocanegra, journal entry, April 22, 2019)

Becoming

Since beginning the PhD program, I am demonstrably different. It has been a beautiful, though uncomfortable, process of becoming. I have been through phases of confusion, haziness, uncertainty, and questioning my purpose. Many times, the unknown left me with a sense of dread, anxiety, and even fear. Slowly, I have learned to embrace the tension and discomfort of my transformation and have been, at times, unrecognizable to myself and others. I live *in* the questions with an inner struggle between uncertainty and clarity, begging for some truce. I am in a cocoon-like state, waiting to emerge with answers to my wonderings and curiosities that keep me awake at night. The new day brings flickers of enlightenment tangled in disenchantment and doubt. I am unfinished (Anzaldúa, 2009; Freire, 1970).

La Máscara y La Mariposa

Buddhists compare life to the cycle of a butterfly—they believe we are all capable of transformation. Butterflies are often used as a metaphor for becoming, or for transformation of the self. When I was a child, I loved chasing butterflies when I would accompany my grandmother to pick wild blackberries in the fields. I can remember being mesmerized by their transformation from caterpillar to butterfly. I would wonder what deep internal driving force informed this earth-bound slithering creature to envelope itself in a silk cocoon, hang upside down from a tree, and wait. How do they know what future

awaits them? Do they know that they are being transformed? Do they trust the process? The caterpillar creates a safe space for itself wrapped in a blanket of silk, masked from the world.

Masks are a form of concealment—an escape from ourselves. Within this silk-spun mask, the creature that sleeps is neither a butterfly nor a caterpillar; it creates its own space, a third space (Anzaldúa, 2009), as it waits on the warm sun to send a message that its transformation is complete. In a mere 10 to 14 days, this glorious, winged creature emerges from a dream state. She awakes more vulnerable and fragile, exposed and available to prey. Yet, she bravely spreads her wings and flies solely on faith and imagination with more freedom than ever. She is no longer bound to the earth or the rough terrain she once slithered across. Now, her view is expansive as she soars across oceans where she once could not. She fearlessly explores lands while zipping under rainbows and feasting on fields abundant and bountiful with sweet nectar. Her life is forever changed and evolved. She can never return from where she came.

The very DNA of a caterpillar commits to change. It does not doubt, nor think of the *what ifs*—it trusts the process and knows no different. Its very existence is to transform as her cells begin to merge, communicate, collect, and multiply in a brave act to emerge a new being. She is forever changed, wonderous, curious, and mystical. She knows her purpose and trusts the process. As I go through this journey of healing and becoming, I know that I, like the butterfly, can never retreat and return to what once was; yet, unlike the butterfly, feelings of oppression are not like a light switch or something you can just turn on and off (Rodriguez, 2006).

Much like the caterpillar that masks itself in its in-betweenness, we mask ourselves by concealing part of our identities as an integral strategy for survival (Rodriguez, 2006). Anzaldúa (2009, 2015) stated that between masks there exist spaces that provide us with the ability to break through them. Compelled to wear these *mascaras* (Anzaldúa, 2009, 2015), hooks (2003) asked, "How do we create an oppositional worldview, a consciousness, an identity, a standpoint that exists not only as that struggle which also opposes dehumanization but as that movement which enables creative, expansive, self-actualization?" (p. 15). hooks (2003) stated that to unmask ourselves, we must decolonize our minds and heal our wounded hearts. Rodriguez (2006) posed the question, "Can we ever *truly* unmask ourselves?" (p. 1069). Masking ourselves allows Latinas to survive and, accordingly, *if* we are able to accomplish this challenging task, "do we ever know when we're done?" (Rodriguez, 2006, p. 1069).

Write White Versus the Write to Heal

Denzin (1997) stated that healing and transformation should be done through ethnographic writing, poems, fictional novels, autoethnographies, autobiographies, and memoirs. These stories act as effective methods of constructing a place of resistance (Rodriguez, 2006) and liberate our epistemological ways of being, feeling, and knowing. Storytelling serves as a powerful means of survival and liberation (Anzaldúa, 2009; Delgado Bernal, 1998; M. Guajardo et al., 2016; Horton, 2003). Anzaldúa (2009) urged us to "figure out" when we read or write, to literally know where "your feet stand, what position you're taking" and to ask the questions "Are you speaking from a white male, middle-class perspective? Are you speaking from a working class, colored, ethnic location? For whom are you speaking?" (p. 193). We must ask these questions to avoid

seduction of the White ways; we do this work because we are affirming our ethnic identity.

I have a difficult time showing my writing to anyone, whether it be my peers, professors, writing group partners, or family. Throughout my master's program, I never shared my writing. I would make excuses in writing groups and focus on giving feedback on my peers' papers. This tendency continued into my doctoral program. I would not participate in groups so people could not critique my writing. I spent 3 weeks in a writing trio with Travis, a Black male, and Emily, a White female; never did they see my work. On the last day, Travis asked, "Okay Renée, you've gotta come clean. Why don't you want us to read your writing?" (Travis, personal communication, November 2020). I froze for a moment and then responded, "I don't think you'll like it. It's not like your writing. It doesn't sound the same." After all, "Who gave us permission to perform the act of writing?" (Anzaldúa, 2009, p. 184).

Anzaldúa (2009) stated that we resist the act of writing and sharing our writing with the world because "to write is to confront one's demons, look them in the face and live to write about them. Fear acts like a magnet; it draws the demons out of the closet and into the ink in our pens" (p. 33). Sharing our writing is dangerous because we are terrified of what it reveals: angers, fears, and our strength under oppression (Anzaldúa, 2009). However, Anzaldúa (2009), Delgado Bernal et al. (2006), and Rendón (2014) all posited that it is within our writing that the very act of our survival lies because "a woman who writes has power. And a woman with power is feared" (Anzaldúa, 2009, p. 33). However, the problem that arises is that Latinas have not been taught to read or write

in that manner. In fact, we have been taught not to trust our writing (Anzaldúa, 2009; Rendón, 2014).

It is within my writing that my innards, my gut, and my soul are on display for the world to see (Anzaldúa, 2009). On these sheets there can be no secrets and no hiding. Here, I unmask my buried thoughts and beliefs. I am exposed like the butterfly that emerges from her cocoon visible to those who can prey on her. It is not easy for me to reveal this nakedness. I have done it before only to be told "this is not academic writing" or "flesh this out, I am not getting what you are trying to say." Most of my feedback has been from White faculty in academia, as women of color and minorities are not adequately represented on faculties in higher education (Rodriguez, 2006). These responses of invalidation cast doubt on my ability to write well and write *White enough*. Anzaldúa (2009) stated people who want us to "flesh out" (p. 172) really want more transition so they do not have to do as much work. Ruiz (1997) claimed we agree to society's rules. We agree to a language we speak, we agree to a name we were given at birth, and we agree to given moral and cultural values. We use these agreements to judge ourselves and others. If we follow these agreements, we are rewarded; if we do not, we are punished (Foucault, 1975; Ruiz, 1997).

I agreed with those who told me I could not write well and that I had limited intellectual ability. We take words of hatred and untruths and sharpen them on our souls. In order to change, transform, and break these chains of colonization and oppression, I must opt out of these agreements so I may speak to who I am. Yet, opposition is not enough; according to hooks (2003), we must still "make oneself anew" (p. 15). Rodriguez (2006) posited that stories can help us understand, make sense, and heal by generating

knowledge that exposes acts of oppression. When we give our authentic selves to others and share our gifts and stories, we make progress in ourselves and in the cause of eradicating social ills and advancing the collective good (Anzaldúa, 2009; Freire, 2000; M. Guajardo et al., 2016; Horton et al., 1990; Rendón, 2014). By telling stories, Latinas have a particular insight into our patriarchal and racist society (M. Guajardo et al., 2016; Rodriguez, 2006). We are fearful as to what we may reveal about ourselves. Within our stories, we expose our fears. Some we work hard to repress and others we pretend to not know (Rodriguez, 2006). These stories help Latinas to re-theorize Eurocentric and patriarchal frameworks (Anzaldúa, 2009; Rodriguez, 2006) and realize multiple alternate possibilities (Anzaldúa, 2009; M. Guajardo et al., 2016).

Healing the Soul

Torres (2003) suggested ethnic identity exploration can assist Latinas in healing and understanding the world they live in while preserving their cultural values. The process of identity exploration can increase self-esteem and protect one from the negative effects of discrimination (Comas-Díaz, 2021; Torres, 2003). When exploring our identity and past experiences that have informed our ways of knowing, we must unearth and acknowledge our trauma (Comas-Díaz, 2021). According to Comas-Díaz (2021), we need a holistic approach to healing that is informed by and recognizes racial wounds and inequitable experiences. Mignolo (2018) claimed that the first phase of healing racial wounds is decolonization. This does not mean the rejection of Western thought; rather, it means that we do not blindly accept it (Comas-Díaz, 2021). Villanueva (2018) proposed seven steps for healing and decolonization:

1. Identify the hurts we have endured.

2. Apologize for the hurt we have caused.
3. Acknowledge the wisdom of those excluded and exploited by the colonizing system.
4. Relate and engage in cultural humility, understanding that respect does not require that we agree with each other.
5. Represent by opening spaces for real participation as opposed to offering token positions.
6. Invest by including marginalized groups as full members in decision making.
7. Repair by healing to prevent more suffering.

Comas-Díaz (2021) suggested adding two additional concepts to Villanueva's (2018) steps—solidarity and racial equity—meaning that "racial equity must be a common solidarity goal among Latinxs . . . hence, decolonization entails standing in solidarity with other marginalized populations, sharing stories of coloniality and oppression and working together toward racial equity" (p. 70).

One potential avenue for healing the wounds of racial injustice is rooted in Freire's (1970) *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, which is that increasing our critical consciousness through dialectical discussion with our world helps marginalized groups recognize their history and recover their ancestral memories. Rendón (2014) stated education can be profoundly exciting and important when employed as a tool connected to personal transformation and social change in society. Thus, when choosing a chair for this journey of a dissertation, I purposely wanted someone who did not think like I did, yet someone who would value my work enough to question my thoughts.

Dr. Guajardo's classes were never easy, but they were safe and that was the difference between his classes and others. When I speak, I know Dr. Guajardo is going to actively listen and challenge me. He will hold me accountable for what comes out of my mouth and will question my actions and thoughts. I know I may not have the answers to his questions, but neither does he. He is not there to give me answers, nor is he there to steer me away from my roots (Rendón, 2009). Rather, he sits and listens attentively, engaged with every word. He does not miss an adjective or descriptor, as how I see my world is important to him. He holds on to nuggets as he processes my thoughts and then, after a pause, he asks *who*, *what*, *why*, and *how*. Typically, these questions pertain to the mind, body, and spirit and are based on ways of knowing. I am rarely prepared to articulate a response, but he does not require it of me. He only requires that I take these questions back and think some more.

Darder (2017) suggested providing menu-like answers undermines critical pedagogy, which is "defined by its context and must be approached as a project of individual and social transformation—that it could never be reduced to a mere method" (p. xv). Rendón (2009) called this type of pedagogy *sentipensante*, or a form of integrative learning that focuses on wholeness and nonduality. It represents the reunification of thinking and sensing to encourage the acquisition of wisdom and knowledge (Rendón, 2009). Dr. Guajardo's practice elicits deep awareness, compassion, focus, transformation, social change, creativity, and inspiration (Rendón, 2009). He is open to and recognizes that there are diverse disciplinary approaches to learning. This type of pedagogy employs an ethic of compassion, care, and validation that often liberates students and helps them find voice and increase their self-esteem (Anzaldúa,

2009; Freire, 2000; M. Guajardo et al., 2016; Rendón, 2009). Rendón (2009) stated there are three goals to *sentipensante* pedagogy:

> To disrupt and transform the engrained belief system which is being held in mass consciousness, and its corresponding shared beliefs about teaching and learning that act against wholeness and appreciation of truth in all forms.
>
> To cultivate *personas educadas*, well-rounded individuals who possess knowledge and wisdoms. These *personas educadas* are able to work with facts, as well as with diverse forms of information and theoretical perspectives. Moreover, they are able to apply knowledge with insight, intuitive awareness, and common sense.
>
> To instill in learners a commitment to sustain life, maintain the rights of all people, and preserve nature and harmony of our world. (Rendón, 2009, pp. 135–136)

Sentipensante pedagogy is not for everyone, as it can be uncomfortable and requires collaboration. Professors must be willing to share power with students, to take risks, and to deal with the tensions and emotions that arise. Furthermore, professors must be prepared to engage in openness and self-reflexivity and the prospect of political risks in doing things differently in the face of institutional resistance (Rendón, 2009).

Another form of healing and support in the process of becoming among Latinas comes from a source of spirituality (Comas-Díaz, 2021). Latina-centered spiritually offers hope, connection, affirmation, and resistance. Furthermore, Isasi-Díaz (1996) found that spirituality fosters identity development, sociopolitical action, and critical consciousness. Isasi-Díaz (2004) posited that, given the influence of Catholicism in that Latina culture, spirituality is often used to speak to Latinas' efforts and ability to be self-defining and that of "conscience" (p. 104). Church leaders often use "conscience" both intentionally and unintentionally as an instrument of domination and control (Isasi-Díaz, 2004). In contrast, *mujerista* theology is a liberative praxis and, as such, it insists on the development of a strong sense of moral agency. It seeks to influence and challenge the

mainline theologies that support what is normative in society and churches—that of Eurocentric ways and the exclusion of Latinas. Isasi-Díaz (1996) suggested *mujerista* theology aids Latinas in defining our preferred future by helping Latinas to see that "radical structural change cannot happen unless radical change takes place in each and every one of us" (p. 63).

Anzaldúa (2009) suggested a radical is born with the will for survival and the strength to make trouble. However, Anzaldúa reminded us that hatred consumes us and, despite the talk of hatred against the oppressor, true liberation must begin with liberation of oneself from oneself. We must choose to cross over to allow the transcendence of hatred into love (Anzaldúa, 2009; Darder, 2017). It is imperative that when we speak of liberation, we are careful to define such a term, as many hateful acts against humankind have been executed in the name of liberation. Archbishop Romero (2010) described liberation as one that does not cry out against others. Liberation cannot bring true freedom if it causes violent hateful revolutions that offend the dignity and destroy the lives of our communities (Romero, 2010) Freedom lives in tension; one does not attain it without challenging all forces that oppress and marginalize, including those that lie within us (M. Guajardo et al., 2016)

"I Love You, Mijita"

Many philosophers and revolutionists have thoughts on what it means to be a complete or full human being, but one common theme is the selfless act of love. Ernesto "Che" Guevara was asked to name the most important quality a revolutionary must possess, and he responded, "At the risk of seeming ridiculous, let me say that the true revolutionary is guided by a great feeling of love. It is impossible to think of a genuine

revolutionary lacking this quality" (Anderson et al., 2018, p. 457). Much like Guevara, Freire's (2000) learning theory is based on a position of the profound efficacy of love. Many of us can attest to the power of love and how it can bind families, unite enemies, and bring communities together. hooks (2018) suggested teachers should commit to teaching with love. Freire (2000) believed love is an act of courage, and when love is combined with the insight of oppression and power, then students (learners) can find freedom through critical conversations; through these conversations, we can abolish oppression and restore love and humanity. If one does not have love and does not love life, then they cannot enter into dialogue in the conscious act of pursuing this humanity (Freire, 2000). This type of pedagogy humanizes learning by allowing students to understand themselves through the process of exploration.

The last time I saw my mother was in November of 2019 when we left the cancer center where she received her last treatment for stage four cancer of the mouth, a rare disease for a woman who did not smoke or dip tobacco (see Figure 9). She was not healed, but the doctor suggested any further treatment visits would not benefit her health, as the cancer had progressed to other vital organs. At every treatment, my mother, who also suffered from Alzheimer's, would ask, "*Mijita*, why do I have to come here today?" My response was well-rehearsed, "Mama, you have cancer, so we need to treat it." Her reply, always new to her, was well known and expected to me: "Oh really? No *me digas*, that's terrible!" Later that day, my mother would set out on her travels to visit with my sister with plans to return after a couple of months in Scotland. Then, in February of 2020, we learned of the COVID pandemic and borders closing. Fear swept over the world and life as we knew it would forever change. My fears of not seeing my mother again

came to fruition when I received a phone call on April 26, 2020 that my mother had passed in her sleep at 3:15 a.m.

Figure 9. Me with My Mother at Her Last Cancer Treatment, the Last Time I Saw Her.

My mother was fourth in line of 21 children (17 biological and four adopted). She grew up in a small home with an outhouse and was responsible for raising her younger siblings and washing all their laundry by hand on a washboard. Nightly, she would bundle up in bed with six of her siblings, choosing to sleep at the foot of the bed. Here she would endure harsh kicks and twitching throughout the night to avoid other types of *accidents* the younger ones would have while in deep sleep. My mother would often share with me how little attention and affection she would receive because there were so many children. Because of this, she was not close to her mother and was resentful of her mother's continual pregnancies, which my mother supported by acting as a surrogate

mother to her siblings. As a result of her lived experiences, my mother was a resourceful and outspoken woman. Though outspoken, she could never bring herself to say the words *I love you*. Hugs and physical affection were reserved solely for my brothers. This learned behavior of hers would inform many decisions in my life (Anzaldúa, 2009). The resentment my mother carried for her mother would transfer to me, a cycle I continually find myself reframing to better understand the both of us.

Shortly before my mother died, I interviewed her for Dr. Guajardo's class. I asked her about her biggest regret in life, and she replied that she never felt loved. My heart sank, and I completely understood and could empathize with this feeling she had—I felt it too. It was in this moment that I was able to extend grace and find forgiveness for us both. At the end of this last conversation, she said, "I love you" (Ninfa/Mom, personal communication, April 2020). I sat paralyzed, questioning what I heard. I remember looking at my husband, his eyes wide open and mouth agape as he heard these words on speaker. I thought, *did I hear her right? Does she know who I am? Does she know I'm Mijita?* I wanted to ask, but I stopped myself. I did not want to know what truth there was to it. I just wanted to cherish those three words and bask in the moment. Two days later, I heard of her death. My mind retreated to those three words; *I love you*. I will never know if she knew it was me, but even if it was some divine gift from God, I will take it.

When we share our authentic selves, our experiences, and our stories with one another, we are at our best (M. Guajardo et al., 2016; Horton et al., 1990). It is through our gifts that *we* can continue to develop and improve our communities and schools, by first envisioning and then working toward the creation of what we have imagined together (Anzaldúa, 2009; M. Guajardo et al., 2016; Horton et al., 1990). Guevara (1965)

may have summed this up best when he stated, “They must struggle every day so that their love of living humanity is transformed into concrete deeds, into act that will serve as an example, as a mobilizing factor” (A Large Dose of Humanity section, para. 2). In our *pláticas* together, we can learn what it means to be a complete human being and hopefully be an example to others. It is in safe spaces of hope and radical love that transformation and the process of becoming will begin.

Conclusion

Theorists (Anzaldúa, 2009; Cordova, 1998; Delgado Bernal, 1998; Moraga & Anzaldúa, 2015) have researched the lives and experiences of Latinas to gain insight into the relations between this group and the structures that shape their lives. Within the literature explored, Chicana epistemology documents Latinas’ school experiences from a multitude of dimensions, such as gender, skin color, bilingualism, immigration, English proficiency, and migrations. It is through these feminist epistemologies that Latinas can begin to create safe spaces (M. Guajardo et al., 2016) to interrogate our silences and develop our critical consciousness to reimagine and reconceptualize ways of knowing (Anzaldúa, 2009; Isasi-Díaz, 1996; Rendón, 2009). Collectively, throughout this journey and within our CLEs (*pláticas*), we will strengthen ourselves so others do not define us with their stories nor their interpretation of our lived experiences. We must wield our own pens to become story makers while liberating our epistemological ways of being, feeling, and knowing.

III. LATINA WAYS OF KNOWING AND MEANING MAKING AS A METHOD

Overview of Methodology

According to Rossman and Rallis (2017), the qualitative researcher has two main areas of focus: (a) the researcher is the vessel through which the study is conducted and a co-constructor of knowledge, and (b) the purpose is to learn about a specific social issue. As the experiences of Latinas shape and inform their collective identities, I chose to employ a qualitative methodology in my research (Delgado Bernal et al., 2006). Throughout this autoethnography and the use of CLEs and ecologies of knowing as my theoretical framework, I sought to understand how familial, cultural, and educational messages inform the Latina identity, with a specific focus on how these factors have influenced this group's resilience and resistance to the dominant narrative. This approach enabled me to better understand the complex experiences of Latinas. I used the methods of *pláticas* and *testimonios* because "historically, traditional research has silenced members of oppressed and marginalized groups" (Rossman & Rallis, 2017, p. 80; see also Delgado Bernal et al., 2006).

Research fundamentally involves issues of power; therefore, research is not typically transparent and it can "no longer be assumed that we can write up our research in an antiseptic, distanced way" (Rossman & Rallis, 2017, p. 80). The Latina culture embodies the beliefs and values shared by my co-researchers. The deep roots in the oral culture of *pláticas* and *testimonios* are methodological, pedagogical, and activist approaches to social justice that challenge established ideas in academia (Delgado Bernal et al., 2006). *Pláticas* and *testimonios* are not simply stories, but politicized discourses that bear witness to and offer an understanding of the collective experiences of

marginalized Latinas and their resistance and resilience to oppressive institutional structures and interpersonal events (Anzaldúa, 1990; Delgado Bernal et al., 2006; Delgado Bernal et al., 2012; M. Guajardo et al., 2016).

Introduction–Dos Cabezas son Mejor que Una

> I have cleared the garden grounds, preparing them for a new season. The soil is rich, dark, and full of humus. The plants left to die and rot has enriched the soil and fattened the bellies of earthworms, leaving behind fertile grounds for new beginnings. As I walk and envision what is to come, my heart fills with warm memories of Mom and Dad. The earth is embedded with their stories, and their spirits are carried in the breeze that cools the sweat from my brow. I am surrounded by love. I inflate my lungs filling them until they want to burst, and then hold my breath. I don't want to let go of this space. I want it to consume me––but I must exhale. Oh, how I miss them—their laughs, bickering, and stories. I can still see them. Mom pulls onions [see Figure 10], and Dad cuts cabbages, saying, "Doz cabezas son mejor que una, aunque una es de repollo." I've heard it 100 times, and it never gets old. As I laugh, I wish I could listen to it 100 times more. It is here in the garden that the spirits of our ancestors, family, and friends of old and new come together with hands messy in stories and knees bent in laughter to feed our stomachs and our souls. (Bocanegra, journal entry, May 12, 2020)

Figure 10. Photograph of Mom Pulling Onions in el Jardín, May 20, 2018.

My father would often say, "*Dos cabezas son major que una, aunque una es de repollo* [two heads are better than one, even if one is of cabbage]," as he pointed and tapped the side of his head with his index finger with a wide grin on his face. I heard this adage hundreds of times. My father was right, as there was never a problem we could not solve together. Ludden (2016) suggested "the intelligence of a group can exceed that of its members if the conditions are met" (p. 1). Traditionally, scholars assumed that intelligence, or the ability to reason and solve problems, was no more than the average intelligence of the individual members, or the intelligence of the most dominant member of the group shining through (Ludden, 2016). However, Williams Wooley et al. (2015) argued against this frame of thought, stating the collective intelligence of a group is enhanced by the ability to read each other's emotions, be socially perceptive, and hold diverse experiences and skills.

In my youth, I could never have imagined that my father's go-to adage would be the foundation of my epistemology, where *cabezas* come together as a methodology and pedagogy to co-construct knowledge and challenge spaces of power. This well-respected and methodological approach is built on the work of Latino scholars and their cultural intuition.

Restatement of Research Questions

1. What are the stories of self that shape and inform the Latina identity and sense of belonging?
2. What pedagogies inform Latinas' resilience and resistance to pursue a fuller robust life in the process of becoming a fuller human being?
3. What do spaces of critical consciousness and community learning look like, sound like, and feel like?

Community Learning Exchange (CLE) Theoretical Framework

As I searched for a theoretical framework, I visited options I thought would best fit my research, or rather what I thought others would find acceptable. In doing this, I realized I was not being authentic to who I am, how I learn, and what makes sense to my life and this research. This realization left me feeling inauthentic and deceptive, and conflicted with my journey of becoming. I went back to what has worked for me within this program. Though I read about many theoretical frameworks, I was repeatedly drawn to the CLE as a worldview. It made sense and was familiar to me, as M. Guajardo et al. (2016) stated it is we who "know the issues firsthand and therefore need to be fully involved in constructing the organizing focus and selecting the pedagogies to these issues" (p. 25). My experience in a CLE took me back to days of sitting around a table

with my family and community members. Rich and abundant stories and gifts were shared in safe spaces, a collaborative pedagogical space of activism where people gathered for deep learning and worked toward solutions for change within their schools, organizations, and communities.

Axioms of the CLE Framework

M. Guajardo et al. (2016), in *Reframing Community Partnerships in Education*, provided a framework or lens that invites us to deeply examine our community, organizational, familial, and educational experiences to enact change with a focus on "relationships, assets, stories, place, politic, and action (RASPPA)" (p. 4). The core of the CLE framework is grounded in the following axioms: (a) learning and leadership are a dynamic social process, (b) conversations are critical and central pedagogical processes, (c) the people closest to the issues are best situated to discover answers to local concerns, (d) crossing boundaries/borders enriches the development and educational process, and (e) hope and change are built on assets and dreams of locals and their communities (M. Guajardo et al., 2016, p. 4; see Figure 11).

Figure 11. CLE Axioms (M. Guajardo et al., 2016, p. 23).

M. Guajardo et al. (2016) stated these axioms do “not always guarantee success,” but they do “provide an opportunity to expand our understanding of the world in a dignified way” (p. 24). I have read *Reframing Community Partnerships in Education* on several occasions; however, my personal experience has led me to believe that one must live and breathe these axioms to truly appreciate their capacity and power. The first time I participated in a CLE, I was changed. Nothing was the same after this experience; I felt heard and had a sense of belonging. I did not have straightforward answers or solutions. Instead, I had more questions and a guide to better understand my world with a hunger to return and learn in relationships with others. My learning in this space felt valued, connected, and supported, and it honored who I am and who I was becoming.

Learning and Leadership are a Dynamic Social Process

“Learning is a leadership act, and that leadership is at its best when it is in collaborative action” (M. Guajardo et al., 2016, p. 24). All co-researchers have something to contribute through their experiences, stories, and *testimonios* and the questions that they frame. Learning how to learn within the context of relationships is the root of leadership and is necessary for developing a nurturing, shared learning environment in a dignified manner (M. Guajardo et al., 2016). This nurturing environment is limited only by the imaginations and specified needs of the designers (M. Guajardo et al., 2016). M. Guajardo et al. (2016) emphasized the importance of play to bring out our “universal child” (p. 24) and eager spirit to see things through a new lens in a democratic way. This provides dynamic opportunities for developing and supporting relationships that transcend culture, gender, and generations (M. Guajardo et al., 2016).

Conversations are Critical and Central Pedagogical Processes

The CLE must create and provide a safe space for relationships to thrive as "relationships are the first point of contact in the learning process, and storytelling and conversations are the mediating tools" (M. Guajardo et al., 2016, p. 24). If the spirit, environment, and *platícas* between the co-researchers are not inviting, gracious, and safe, learning and the sustainability of such knowledge are jeopardized. This axiom is no different than when we, as stewards of *el jardín*, create a safe space for seeds and young plants. It is in the relationship with our garden, as with people, that one develops, transforms, grows, and thrives. As facilitators of this space, our goal is to co-create a safe space to explore curiosities, imagine, provoke thought, and create alternate realities within the familiar (M. Guajardo et al., 2016). In this space, we meet people where they are at, cultivate and nurture new and old relationships, build on our assets and gifts, and discover new ones. Co-researchers use artfully framed questions before, during, and after the CLE to discover new gifts and give life and breath to those gifts and talents that have been latent, dormant, or not given the space and support and blossom (M. Guajardo et al., 2016).

The People Closest to the Issues are Best Situated to Discover Answers to Local Concerns

This CLE axiom "holds the potential to transform the *how* of community change, thus shifting the traditional, consolidated power dynamic to a collective action" (M. Guajardo et al., 2016, p. 26). Co-researchers are invited and expected to participate with one another as they share their stories and experiences. This engagement helps us find our voice and creative agency so we may own our destiny in a collective manner (M.

Guajardo et al., 2016, p. 25). This places the power back within our hands, with those who are most vested in and affected by our conditions. Within this space, our experiences and learning processes are cultivated and nurtured to incite curiosity and inspire us to dream bigger than we can imagine. It is here that we frame questions, have *platícas*, and engage in activities in a culturally sustainable way (M. Guajardo et al., 2016, p. 25). M. Guajardo and colleagues (2016) stated we must not expect to just show up and "magically find the answers" (p. 25). It is not that simple. It is our responsibility to be fully involved and engaged in selecting the pedagogies needed to address these issues and constructing the organizing focus (M. Guajardo et al., 2016, p. 25). It is further our responsibility to take these ideas back into our communities, neighborhoods, schools, and organizations to infuse new ideas and possibilities. The interjection of new approaches and strategies fuels hope, inspires, and awakens the spirit (M. Guajardo et al., 2016, p. 25).

Crossing Boundaries/Borders Enriches the Development and Educational Process

My chair, Dr. Miguel Guajardo, often reminds me that I must not isolate myself as my growth is fueled by being in the messiness and tension with others. M. Guajardo et al. (2016) stated it is necessary that we willingly experience a world outside of our comfort zone to break the isolation of teams, people, and organizations (p. 26). As previously mentioned, much of my learning occurred outside the classroom within my home, church, and community as a child and young adult. When I entered school, my way of learning shifted to what seemed natural to the unfamiliar. Soon, that which was unfamiliar became the status quo, and what I once knew as familiar became that which was not accepted, nor did it fit into the Eurocentric ways of learning.

M. Guajardo et al. (2016) stated “the ability to make the familiar strange is important” (p. 26). This may mean a change of location or space, or simply moving chairs from a linear lecture forward facing position to a circular position where we are in community with one another, face-to-face, rupturing “the comfort of the status quo and equilibrium we reach when a generative and dynamic conversation is missing from our institutional lives” (M. Guajardo et al., 2016, p. 27). Such practices give way to a more dialogical, experiential, and collaborative engaging experience (M. Guajardo et al., 2016, p. 27).

Figure 12 shows photographs of *el jardín* in preparation for the research collection of where our *platícas* took place. It was my hope that this change in place would have the power to cross boundaries and borders by emotionally, intellectually, physically, and relationally changing how we framed our questions, broadened our imagination, and sparked our curiosities.

Figure 12. Photographs of el Jardín in Preparation.

The first time I experienced a CLE, I did not speak much. Quite frankly, I went in as a skeptic, thinking, *how could sitting in a circle and talking be a form of pedagogy?* I suppose somewhere along the way I forgot the value of all the wisdom of the community members who once sat at our family's kitchen table when I was a child. I felt uneasy in this space that did not look like my sterile, bright lit classroom with a lecturer at a podium or in front of a whiteboard. This space was different. The natural light shined through large windows that faced the rolling river of San Marcos. Food and beverages were in abundance, and laughter and music filled the air as people chatted and visited.

Once we sat down, introductions and an open-ended question allowed for a welcoming atmosphere and fueled conversations. Though the atmosphere was feeling more culturally familiar to me and my guard began to minimize, this welcoming and

gracious space touched on some not-so-familiar topics—topics regarding race, inequity, and things we would normally not speak of in public places to avoid the messiness of it all. However, in this instance, we were given a space with a "different language, mannerisms, and a way to question and accept the challenge to engage" (M. Guajardo et al., 2016, p. 26). This border-crossing concept crosses cultural borders, economic borders, geographic borders, racial borders, and faith and gender borders (M. Guajardo et al., 2016, p. 26). This concept is critically important to dismantling and deconstructing the status quo and our Eurocentric ways of knowing.

Hope and Change are Built on Assets and Dreams of Locals and Their Communities

With each subsequent CLE I participated in, as I engaged in the sharing of *pláticas*, *testimonios*, and *cuentos*, I began to feel a rhythm—a rhythm that broke my old habits of deficit thinking, unveiled my gifts, and gave me a different way of looking at the world. I had learned how to reframe my conditions and dream of a new future for myself. I found hope in my new community, and we developed a new language to describe our lived experiences and create alternate and multiple future possibilities (M. Guajardo et al., 2016, p. 27). McKnight and Block (2010) informed us that

> a competent community builds on the gifts of its people. It knows that a gift is not a gift until given. Before it was given, it was only a beautifully wrapped box in a drawer. It is a capacity held in exile. Gifts need to be named and exchanged to create a competent community and a functioning family. (p. 100)

This exchange of gifts allows us to transform our consciousness from despair to hope and take charge of our lives and their conditions with agency.

Reflecting on my home life, I realized the axioms of the CLE have been present in my life as a child. We did not have a name for it, as M. Guajardo et al.'s (2016) theory was not in our language to articulate it as such, but it was very much alive and thriving in

our home and community. The model pictured in Figure 13 shows the CLE axioms in action as my mother learned a craft and shared this gift with her community.

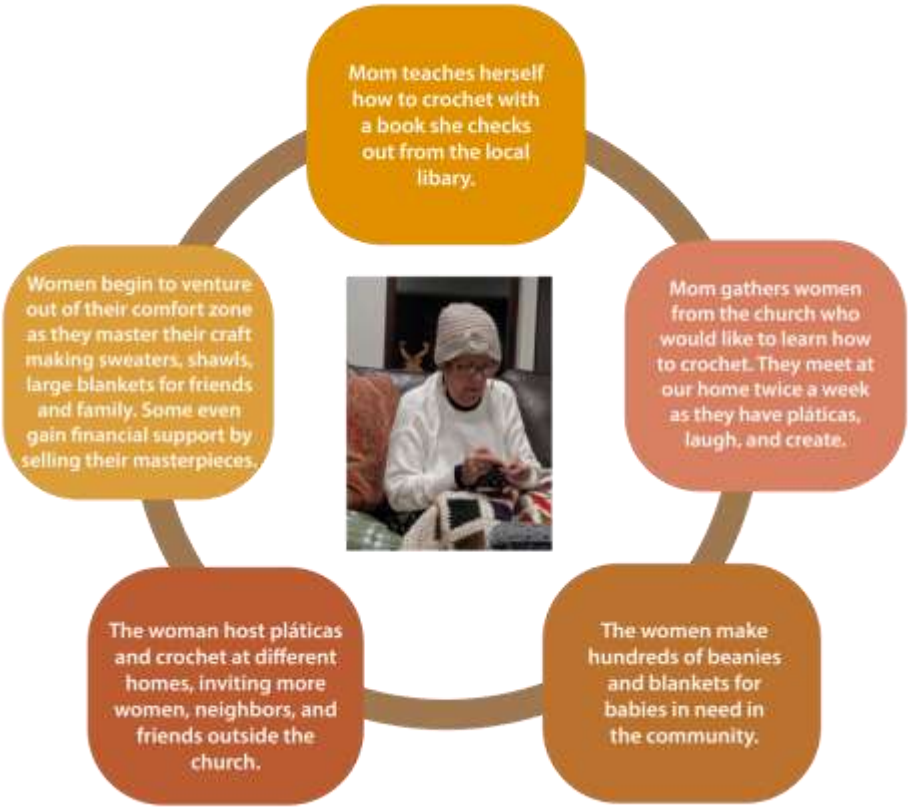

Figure 13. Axioms in Action (M. Guajardo et al., 2016). Mom Conducting a CLE.

It was a natural, common practice when members of our community would gather in our home. These gatherings at home were not simply to learn how to crochet. Something extraordinary and organic happened in this space—women spoke of issues of inequity regarding gender, race, education, lack of access, and forbidden territory. I witnessed women laugh, cry, and lift each other up in support as they created beautiful works of art. Soon, word got out, and more women wanted to be part of the magic. The women invited others outside the church—neighbors, coworkers, friends, and extended family. These women produced warm blankets and beanies for babies in need within our community and for their families back in their towns in Mexico and other home countries

abroad. Women mastered their craft, continually sharing the gift of learning a new skill and being in communion and fellowship with one another. Together, they worked through the tension of navigating inequitable practices and found voice, power, and agency in this space.

Ecologies of Knowing

Nature and places such as *el jardín* connect us to the larger world and each other. Additionally, being in nature reduces the production of stress hormones, fear, depression, anger, and pain (Cervinka et al., 2012; Hu, 2008; Mitchell & Popham, 2008; Stamatakis, 2011). Though nature and our communities provide many physical, emotional, and spiritual benefits, most of our interactions with nature and the people in our communities are in passing. On one particularly warm day, I found shade and solace under a large oak tree and spoke to the emotional, spiritual, and physical experience. The tree is a metaphor for a community that protects, supports, invites, feeds, and nourishes. Below is a passage from my personal journal:

> It calls my name—tall, strong, full of history. The whispers of lovers and the laughter of children are loyal to those who sit with it, climb on it, and weep under it. It guards their secrets, and so I share mine. I find solace in its shade as my back presses against the knots and ridges. Massive, it lifts me up, and I feel its strength pushing against my flesh and bones as I lie my head back, mouth agape, guzzling warm rays of sunshine. My shoulders relinquish the weight and tension they had been clenching on to. I sink deeper as my feet dig into the earth rooting themselves. My hair trails up, tangling and twisting, becoming a labyrinth of vines and leaves. My arms stretch into thick long shoots and branches extending in all directions. I am the tree. (Bocanegra, journal entry, August 14, 2018)

Much like trees carry stories of their past and act as the lungs of the world, so too do Latinas carry cultural, familial, educational, and social experiences that breathe life and inform our ways of knowing. M. Guajardo et al. (2016) indicated “three ecologies help organize our thinking and our learning experiences from micro, to meso, to macro

levels, or spheres in which we experience life" (p. 27). M. Guajardo et al. used three fundamental ecologies of knowing loosely based on Bronfenbrenner's (1977) social-ecological theory. These ecologies of knowing are self, organization, and communities (see Figure 14).

Figure 14. Ecologies of Knowing, Revised From M. Guajardo et al. (2016, p. 28).

As the CLEs concluded, the co-researchers would have engaged in many conversations and may have been experiencing a broad range of emotions, such as peaked curiosity, tension, questions, doubt, empowerment, and epiphanies. I remember experiencing sensory overload at my first CLE, feeling angered and liberated all at once.

Looking at Figure 14 reminds me of the rings of a tree trunk and how trees can be a suitable metaphor for the ecologies of knowing. Trees are resilient organisms that have outlived our social movements and carry within them volumes of history. Dendrochronology, or the study of data from tree growth, helps us better understand the past and predict future climate changes. Light and dark rings within a tree show years of life, each ring representing one season of growth. Dark and thick rings indicate conditions in which water and nourishment were plentiful and temperatures were favorable. Light, thin rings signify stress, drought, and poor weather conditions. Factors

that affect the shape, thickness, color, and uniformity of the rings include location, tree species, levels of nourishment, environment, and climate. Although the tree has defined rings, each layer informs the next and influences future growth or lack thereof. Fortunately, unlike trees, Latinas, through the CLE framework and ecologies of knowing, can find hope in reimaging new and alternate multiple possibilities.

Just as trees are shaped and informed by their environment, Latinas' identity formation is informed by their relationships with others (M. Guajardo et al., 2016). Latinas identify themselves beyond biological attributes, and their identities are shaped by their political, social, cultural, and historical contexts (M. Guajardo et al., 2016). These ecologies are not isolated. They are fluid and have permeable boundaries, leaving room for exchange and interplay. These ecologies help make meaning of our engagement, informing our schema throughout the CLE process (M. Guajardo et al., 2016, p. 27). In this section, I use the ecologies of self within the CLE framework to better understand and examine the multiple layers of influential factors that develop and shape Latinas' identity formation.

Self (Micro)

M. Guajardo et al. (2016) posited that family informs our sense of the collective. Family is our first learning exchange, the foundation of our identity formation, and the basis of the world of knowing (p. 28). There is a continual contentious balancing act between the *I* and *we*, "yet still a third space all the time" (M. Guajardo et al., 2016, p. 28). Negotiating this dynamic space requires that we have a solid foundation and be in rhythm with the ecologies of knowing. This allows for the ability to filter information and

engage in better decision making in the best interest of the whole and self (M. Guajardo et al., 2016, p. 28).

Organization (Meso)

The organization, or meso frame, "is critical to honor our commitment to being a public people" (M. Guajardo et al., 2016, p. 29). Within our communities (e.g., churches, schools, neighborhoods), we become negotiators and mediators between old understandings and new conceptions (M. Guajardo et al., 2016, p. 29). This mediation opens doors and welcomes youth and adults alike, giving them a voice and agency, changing oppressive and inequitable conditions to a life of action and liberation (M. Guajardo et al., 2016, p. 29).

Community (Macro)

To inform future questions and actions, it is critical to dialogue between the micro and the macro in a reciprocal way as our community influences our daily lives and informs our practices both personally and professionally (M. Guajardo et al., 2016, p. 29). This dialogue tells us and others about our ability to bring about positive change within our community and the world we live in when acted upon collectively. M. Guajardo et al. (2016) stated healthy communities beget effective and just nurturers. The reciprocal dialogue between the micro and the macro is a cyclical process that continues to grow and thrive, creating safe, sustainable, and equitable pedagogical spaces.

CLE Theory of Change (RASPPA)

"The CLE theory of change weaves a collection of layers that interact with elements that are foundational to understanding and engaging in the process of community change" (M. Guajardo et al., 2016, p. 33). Relationships, assets, stories,

place, politic, and action (RASPPA) bond the theory of change in constant motion and exchange with one another. Figure 15 shows how RASPPA interrelates with the three ecologies of knowing (M. Guajardo et al., 2016).

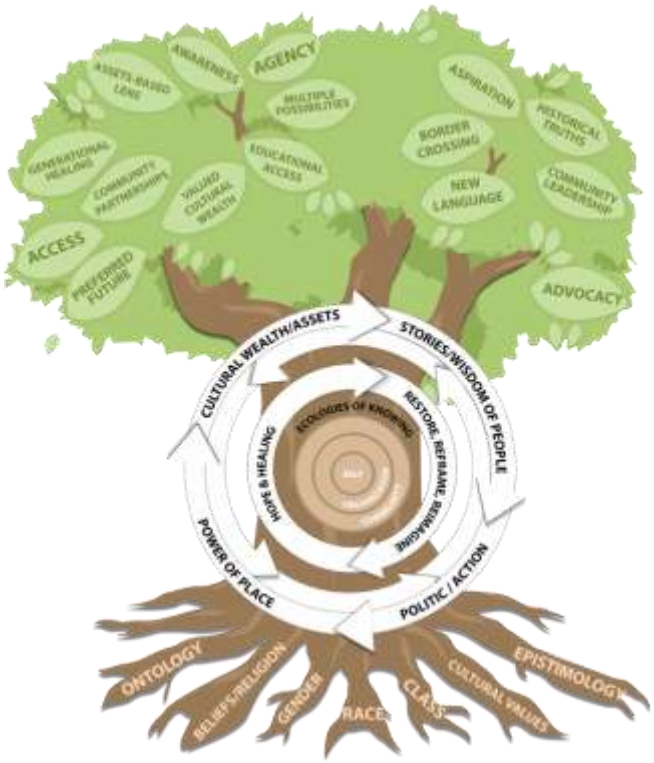

Figure 15. How RASPPA Interrelates With the Three Ecologies of Knowing (M. Guajardo et al., 2016).

Assets

Identifying and building assets is important to building and understanding community. This act of asset-based development focuses on strengths, gifts, and cultural wealth and creates hope by moving us away from deficit-based thinking (M. Guajardo et al., 2016, p. 33). Deficit-based thinking crushes our spirit and weakens us physically, emotionally, and spiritually. This way of thinking has negative effects on our families and communities that can linger and become embedded in future generations. By

focusing on our assets, we discover hope, solutions, and inspiration (M. Guajardo et al., 2016).

Stories

It was not until I entered the doctoral program at Texas State University that I became familiar with CLEs. Using the theory of change interwoven with the ecologies of knowing, I began to deconstruct and decolonize the stories I had believed about myself—stories of deficiencies, failure, poverty, defect, weakness, and worthlessness. Through my experiences and *platícas* within CLEs, I began to unravel these webs of lies and my deficit mindset transformed as I reshaped and reframed my stories to those of power, gifts, assets, and cultural wealth. Within CLEs, co-researchers are invited to share their stories to decode and examine the content and origin by asking themselves: Who did I learn my story from? Where did it originate from? Who empowers them? Who benefits from them? (M. Guajardo et al., 2016, p. 34).

Place

Place is both a physical location and a process (M. Guajardo et al., 2016, p. 34). The CLE practices place-based learning, teaching and leadership, and community development. These places have a dynamic and distinct history that need to be understood if we are to create equitable changes in our communities and lives. Within CLEs, co-researchers are asked to think about places that nurture their curiosity, inspire their imagination, and feel like home. Furthermore, participants are asked to take a deep look at their history, their axioms, and the unique strengths and assets of their communities. We do this through a critical lens, but we are also encouraged to view and

celebrate community as a place to play, celebrate, and build (M. Guajardo et al., 2016, p. 35).

Politic

"Politic embodies a kinetic quality, more than potential energy" (M. Guajardo et al., 2016, p. 35). CLEs cultivate what is the best behavior for the public good. It is not a *tit for tat*, or *I scratch your back and you scratch mine*. Rather, the theory of change in action requires that we do what is best for the self, organization, and our community (M. Guajardo et al., 2016, p. 35).

Action

A theory of action requires a catalytic quality and indicates relationships, assets, stories, and place have continual movement. Within CLEs, we ask ourselves, *does this story have legs?* We require more of our stories—that they be inspirational, motivational, and move citizens to act toward and for the public good (M. Guajardo et al., 2016, p. 35). They must do more to build our communities. By using the RASPPA model, we give our stories legs, language, and power.

Research Design

A research design represents the nuts and bolts, or overall blueprint, that integrates the components of the research in a logical and coherent manner. It details the procedures for obtaining the necessary information to understand the researcher's questions or inquiry. In this research, four Latinas (including myself) whose lives span 7 decades came together in *el jardín*. These small and intimate gatherings allowed for a better understanding and a more in-depth personal connection while we co-constructed

knowledge through three semi-structured, 3- to 4-hour *platícas* to unearth the rich details of our lived experiences.

The Invitation–Recruitment

I invited co-researchers personally to participate in the study by first reaching out by phone and then following up with a letter of invitation (see Appendix B). This letter included the official consent to participate in the study, including the COVID-19 pandemic policies and procedures in the case that we were still in a pandemic (see Appendix C), so all precautionary measures were taken to protect the health and well-being of all involved. Ancestral witnesses were invited to *pláticas* by co-researchers.

To capture the essence of the Latina experience, co-researchers spanned in age to explore different periods of time. These co-constructors of knowledge ranged in age from 23–87 years, were born in different eras, and were in the field of education or leadership. All women were native to the border states of Texas or California and had been educated in the public-school system.

Co-Researchers / Witnesses

Cameron

Cameron is a 23-year-old single female and my daughter. Cameron graduated from a prestigious private college where she struggled with colorism and feelings of belonging. She does not speak Spanish but understands some words. She often speaks of not knowing her native language or culture as a *crutch* as she is “dark skinned and people know I’m Mexican, so they have certain expectations of me, and I don’t deliver that.” In her senior year at university, at the age of 19, she interned at a predominately White affluent high school where she taught English to junior and senior students for a full year,

during which she experienced microaggressions and oppression in the classroom. Cameron is both a product of public school and home schooling and brings a powerful and current lens of public-school education as both a student and teacher. Cameron is a published writer, editor, artist, and poet. Her short creative fiction stories tell of her internal struggle as a Latina who navigates between two worlds. As a child, she was known to be an old soul and wise beyond her years. She has experienced both physical and emotional trauma in educational settings and is actively working to better understand her experiences.

Margie

Margie is a 54-year-old recent graduate from Texas State University and has a master's in public administration. She currently works as a director at a large non-profit organization. Though Margie's parents speak Spanish, Margie did not learn the language as it was not acceptable to speak Spanish at the time she was growing up. She often comments that she wishes she would have learned Spanish because she would be more marketable. She refers to herself as a "coconut" because "I'm brown on the outside and white on the inside." Margie is an influential leader, wife, mother of three, and advocate in her community and schools. She expresses experiences of internalized racism, imposter syndrome, and colorism. I came to know Margie at a social event. I would later learn that Margie did not like me initially as she felt I carried an essence of "being better than everyone else." We met once again a year later on a girl's trip to which we were both invited. She claims I was more "approachable" because I was "big as a house and pregnant" and she "did not feel as intimidated." She was very direct about her feelings

once we were more familiar with each other, and we laugh about this nearly 14 years later as best friends and each other's biggest cheerleader.

Margo

Margo is a 79-year-old woman who served in the Navy and in the Army Reserve Medical Core. I came to know Margo as the mother of Margie. I was immediately drawn to her magnetic, assertive, and direct personality; she reminded me of my *tias* who were to the point and tactful, while exuding confidence and grace. Margo was elected to sit on the board of Temple Community College and was voted into office by her community and peers at an at-large election. She broke the stereotypical barrier as she was the very first Latina to ever sit on the Temple Community College board, paving the way and opening the door for other Latinas. Margo was told in high school by the school counselor that she was "not college material," but her resilience and resistance led her to earn a bachelor's degree in psychology and a master's degree in social work. Margo was a successful entrepreneur, owning a private marital and veteran counseling practice, a flooring store, and a Mexican food restaurant. Currently, Margo is retired; however, she keeps busy renovating homes and being an influential contributor in her community. Recently, Margo wrote a letter regarding the 2020 presidential election to the editor of her local newspaper. Though many letters are received from the community, Margo's thought-provoking letter was printed after she incessantly contacted the editor demanding her voice and the voice of the Latino community be heard. The White male editor obliged her wishes, but publicly refuted her *controversial* comments. Though the editor attempted to silence Margo, her voice was heard by nearly 26,000 subscribers.

Erin (Witness)

Erin is my daughter and a 25-year-old female who identifies as lesbian. She has always been very focused and driven. She graduated as valedictorian of her high school class, and received the prestigious St. David's Neil Kocurek scholarship and the Gold Baylor scholarship. She attended Baylor University and received a degree in biology and biochemistry with honors and had intentions of attending medical school. Once she interned for med school and worked closely with surgeons and physicians, she realized she did not want to be a physician because she felt she could better serve her community in a more personal capacity as a servant leader and firefighter, stating, "something happens to them . . . they lose their sense of wonder and bedside manners . . . they seem unhappy. Maybe they are overworked." She works closely with her father in a male-dominated profession as a firefighter. She enjoys spending her days off with her partner, traveling abroad, and any activity that requires her to be outdoors. She is an honest and respectful human being who loves the Lord and respects the dignity of others.

Ryan-Olivia (Witness)

Ryan-Olivia is my daughter and a 9-year-old female who might just be the most imaginative person I know. She spends her days creating, drawing, painting, building, and writing poems and short stories. She is curious and inquisitive and an eternal debater. She enjoys gymnastics and being the mother of her fur-baby poodle/chihuahua and hamster. She stops to smell every flower and wants to be part of every conversation. She earned the citizenship award for her school because "she is an advocate for all and a good friend," according to her peers and teachers. Ryan-Olivia dreams of becoming a veterinarian and a YouTube influencer.

Dr. Letti Grimaldo (Witness)

Dr. Grimaldo is a past Texas State University graduate of the doctoral program, professor, mentor, and friend. She is a 48-year-old mother, wife, and daughter, and is proficient and fluent in both English and Spanish. Dr. Grimaldo has been in the field of education for over 25 years (public school teacher for 8 years; professor for 8 years; and a researcher for 17 years). She is someone I highly revere and aspire to emulate. I first met Dr. Grimaldo when I was teaching in middle school supporting English language learners (ELLs). Dr. Grimaldo was invited to observe our school and give an equity audit to better serve our diverse population. I was asked to shadow her as she observed so I could continue to do this work within our school on a regular basis. She was the first Latina PhD I had ever personally met, and I had an immediate connection with her. When debriefing her observations, we chatted, and she asked me about my personal aspirations and educational background. She mentioned she was a professor at a nearby university and suggested I return to school to obtain a graduate degree. Not being a high school graduate and being on an extended track to obtain my bachelor's degree, I immediately chuckled at the idea of returning to school. She said, "If I can do it, you can do it. Think about it." Immediately, my mind went back to what my mother always said to me when I doubted myself, "*Mijita*, if someone else has done it, so can you!" The thought of attending graduate school excited me, but self-doubt consumed me and I put the idea aside. It was not until a year later that I entertained the idea. I would not be in this space today had it not been for the seed she planted.

Sally (Witness)

Sally is 36-year-old, current PhD student in my cohort. Sally understands some Spanish, and though she is not comfortable or fluent speaking the language, she attempts to speak to her grandmother and students. She was an elementary teacher for 7 years, an adjunct professor for a year, and is currently in her third year as an assistant principal at an elementary school. Although I met Sally at the doctoral interview process, I did not connect with her immediately, as she initially was quiet and detached when we first began our classes. I took her standoffish demeanor as reflecting someone who was smug, and she reminded me of a Leslie as she can *pass* for being White. It was not until later when I was grouped with her that I realized her quiet nature and demeanor were hiding just another Latina who was feeling imposter syndrome. She, like me, was someone who doubted her skills and talents and did not want to be exposed as a fraud. Once we realized we were experiencing the same feelings of inadequacy, we connected in search of support, belonging, and understanding and quickly became friends. Sally, myself, and the other Latinas in our cohort would soon find ourselves gravitating toward one another as we understood the familiar nuances and could identify with the tensions and struggles of being a Latina in the world of academia.

Ninfa (Mom and Witness)

Current and ancestral witnesses were invited to join our *pláticas* in spirit, and their stories are told through those of us who were present. These were family members and women in our lives who informed our ways of knowing. One example of a witness is Ninfa, my mother, who left this earth at the age of 87 years old on April 26, 2020. Though she was not physically present, I have been a life-long learner of her teachings

and wisdom and a witness to her *testimonios* and *pláticas*. Ninfa was a curious, outspoken, direct, intelligent, creative, imaginative woman who questioned everything. She did not take "no" for an answer and when a door was closed on her, she would open a window. Ninfa often spoke of having received little attention and affection as the fourth-born child of 21 children in the household. Many of her siblings were born of her mother, my *abuelita*, and the others adopted from my *abuelita's* siblings who could not afford to take care of their children. My mother was a high school graduate and wanted to attend university but was unable to due to a lack of finances and needing to work to help contribute to the household income while my father was at war. Lack of a formal college education did not stop Ninfa from learning. She would seek out resources in books, her community, or at her church to learn. I have vivid memories of my mother constantly working on a *new* project. She was a perfectionist, and nothing less than perfect was acceptable. She could sit for hours and crochet a blanket and once done if she found one stitch out of place, she would unravel the entire blanket. I would plead that no one would ever know or notice, and she would respond, "But I know, and that's what matters!" From catering weddings and making wedding cakes, to macramé, to ceramics, to crocheting, decorating, gardening, playing piano, and singing off key in the church choir, she did it all. She was the epitome of beauty, grace, and intelligence. I attribute much of my resistance and resilience to her teachings and wisdom.

Yvette (Witness)

Yvette is a 41-year-old Latina who identifies as a lesbian. She is an only child and grandchild. She attended public schools and university in Texas. Yvette has been self-employed for over 18 years and supports an all-female staff in a male-dominated

profession where she often works 12-hour days and is subjected to catcalls by men. Yvette has never been married and has no biological children but is mother to her two fur-babies and a surrogate aunt to my children. Yvette is the sole provider for her grandmother who she financially supports back in her hometown of Odessa. She has been a longtime friend and "sister," and is one of the most generous, loving, and nurturing souls that I have the privilege of knowing.

Vulnerability, Trust, and Conocimiento

According to M. Guajardo et al. (2016), "Storytelling begets trust; trust begets healthy relationships; healthy relationships beget effective organizations; and effective organizations beget strong communities" (p. 33). The experiences of community are a way of life for Chicanas/Latinas. They are where we explore and share our gifts in an ethical and respectful manner (Delgado Bernal et al., 2006; M. Guajardo et al., 2016). To establish that the element of trust is ever present, I was vulnerable in the sharing of my experiences and stories, as I could not expect of my co-researchers what I was not willing to ask of myself.

All co-researchers were aware of the power structures that had attempted to bound and gag them. *Conocimiento*, a Spanish word for knowledge, guides the Latina to begin from within, and use this self-understanding in spiritual activism (Anzaldúa, 2002; Delgado Bernal et al., 2006).

> Tu camino de conocimiento requires that you encounter your shadow side and confront what you've programmed yourself (and have been programmed by your cultures) to avoid (desconocer), to confront traits and habits distorting how you see reality and inhibiting the full use of your facultades. (Anzaldúa, 2002, pp. 540–541)

To walk this *camino de conocimiento*, co-researchers must feel safe, as they may experience an initial feeling of *susto*, where the soul leaves and shifts away from the

body, and we, Latinas "must, like the shaman, find a way to call your spirit home" (p. 547). Anzaldúa (2002) claimed during this process we will retreat into the darkness and voyage into the shadow of hell to find a balance so our souls can return home from feelings of isolation and alienation. It is here that we co-researchers discovered our common pain, an integral step embracing two worlds bridged by the third space of *Nepantla* (Anzaldúa, 2002). For Anzaldúa (2002), vulnerability, trust, and *conocimiento* are essential to the concept of Mignolo's (2012) bilanguage of love and how Latinas maintain a movement of decolonization.

The Research Site–el Jardín

M. Guajardo and colleagues (2016) claimed that "the spaces where ideas and conversations are shared matter, as physical and metaphorical spaces are fundamental considerations to maximize the learning process" (p. 5). To support relationship building, gracious space is crucial to creating a "spirit and setting where there is an invitation to the stranger and learning occurs in public" (M. Guajardo et al., 2016, p. 33). This space allows for deeper understanding and engaged listening to nurture trust and growth. *El jardín* was both a physical and metaphorical space of where and how we, Latinas, came together with a purposeful intent and the reciprocal process of building, teaching, and learning. It was in this collective experience and the sharing of gifts that we explored our stories, challenged the dominant narrative, co-constructed solutions, and celebrated one another.

The decision to have the *pláticas* in *el jardín* was instinctive and natural. I knew I wanted *el jardín* to be both a physical and metaphorical space. Gardening and farming are where I witnessed the miracles of nature and where my *abuelos* and parents spent

hours working together in messiness creating, growing, and harvesting. *El jardín* was peaceful and welcoming, and it represented an opportunity to be away from the busyness of life that often suffocates our ability to be present in the moment and breathe. There is a spirituality that occupies both the grounds and earth that is continually present and an immediate sense of relief when entering this space. Perhaps this feeling of belonging runs in my veins as my ancestors too worked the land alongside each other. The very air I breathe binds itself to the tensions and weight within me and with each exhale, I feel a sense of harmony and am more connected to the earth and those in communion with me. Just as *pláticas* around my kitchen table informed my ways of knowing as a child, so does the sanctuary of the garden which quiets my soul so I can listen to what it and those in it must teach me.

El jardín began out of the need to organically feed and nourish my children with foods free from chemicals and pollutants. My son and daughter suffered from skin irritations, asthma, and eczema that were a result of the food we consumed and the products we used on our bodies. I knew I had to do something to help them and began to research how food is produced. I was alarmed at my discoveries of the toxic and carcinogenic chemicals that attack our bodies and minds and had a difficult time understanding why this was allowed. After a swift purging of my pantry and cleaning supplies, I began the process of learning how to produce food free of toxins and chemicals, in addition to making ethical and health-conscious skin and cleaning products for our family and home. Initially, it was just me working day in and out, but soon the children found joy in what the earth had to offer them—endless opportunities to feed their curiosities and explore as their voices loudly filled the air with laughter and song. I

extended an invitation to family and friends, and much like the children, they were curious and found excitement in what nature had to offer. Figure 16 illustrates how *el jardín* became a space of joy, meaning, and knowledge-building for my family.

Figure 16. Photographs of my Children and my Mother Discovering, Imagining, Playing, and Pláticando in el Jardín, 2017.

El jardín became a space where *pláticas* were organic in nature and the wisdoms and realities of people yielded a power that was inviting and contagious (M. Guajardo et al., 2016). Guests would pop in to look at the garden, often bending a knee to help, joyful

to leave with a bounty in hand and a renewed spirit. Nature's gifts were shared with neighbors, and in return we would unexpectedly get baked goods or meals at our doorstep. When Mom and Dad would come to visit, Daddy would make a beeline for the garden, first to inspect and give *consejos*, then to teach by doing the work alongside me. Shortly after, Mom would follow with more advice as her hands joined ours, messy and deep in the earth. We would work for hours as my children played and ran up and down the garden rows discovering six-legged and slithering creatures. Days would turn to dusk, but our bellies did not hunger, nor did we thirst. Our nourishment came from each other, and I, for one, had no desire to return to the busyness of to-do lists and noise. *El jardín* is much more than a physical space for us, it is where we come together to share, reimagine, and hope (Freire, 2000; M. Guajardo et al., 2016). The following excerpt is from my journal, describing what *el jardín* means for me:

> I am most at peace when I walk through el jardín. It is where I come to be—to be in both tension and joy and all places in-between, to speak to my mother and father and feel the presence of their spirit. It is where I feel a sense of wholeness and accomplishment. El jardín has been my teacher. It has taught me patience, awareness, industry, hard work, perseverance, and trust. Ironically, and perhaps a coincidence (although I refuse to believe such), El Jardin was also the name of my elementary school where I was taught many "other" things. Yet, here I am, resilient and resistant, despite their teachings.
>
> When I plant a seed, I have no guarantee it will grow. I must have faith and believe in tomorrow. If it does not sprout, my time has not been wasted. El jardín is where I have examined my journey and heard the stories of all those who have entered it. It is where my children have played, laughed, and seen the wondrous works and miracles of their Creator and Heavenly Father. It is here where one can plant a tiny seed and harvest a bounty. Together, our hands have turned this earth; we have nurtured and nourished it and found love and acceptance here; it is a place of belonging. We protect this organic space. We do not use toxicities. We are careful to pluck suffocating weeds and rid ourselves of destructive pests. We do not let harm enter this space as it feeds our family, nourishes our sick and elderly, and fortifies our children's growing strong bodies and minds. El jardín is a space of self-examination and liberation for co-creators of knowledge, but most importantly, a space for those who practice radical love. (Bocanegra, journal entry, May 26, 2020)

This passage from my personal journal speaks to *el jardín* as a teacher. As caretakers and co-creators of *el jardín*, every precaution is implemented to protect and guard this safe and gracious space where community members, family, and friends are fed and nourished both physically and spiritually. It is where we examine our lives and experiences, share stories of hope, and practice radical love.

El Jardín–The Power of Place and Wisdom of People

Under the right conditions, both plants and people will flourish. We cannot isolate our minds from our bodies; therefore, as we use our bodies to care for gardens we are also "being" in the world. Metaphorically, *el jardín* becomes our teacher and we, the steward, are responsible for facilitating and co-creating with nature. Gardens can teach us how to be in community, share, and be responsible for one another. The gardener meticulously cares for the grounds resisting the use of toxins and chemicals in this valued and coveted space. Great consideration is taken when choosing quality heirloom seeds and plants free from disease and genetically modified manipulation, in addition to the types of natural and organic minerals and nutrients that will be used to fortify the soil. Fences are erected to keep pests from destroying valuable crops and stone paths are placed to guide gardeners' steps so they do not accidently trample delicate seedlings. Water is filtered as it too contains harmful minerals and salts that can impede growth. During hot months, shade is offered to protect leaves and preserve water in the root system and prevent drought. In cold months, blankets and coverings are used to keep the ground warm and prevent freezing temperatures from eradicating root systems and plants.

Weeds are carefully plucked and picked so they do not suffocate plants and unruly plants that impede the growth of others are pruned back. This allows for better

airflow and sunlight to infiltrate spaces so that all plants can enjoy the warm sun and breeze. Beneficial insects are invited and welcomed by planting fragrant and colorful flowers in the garden to promote pollination. Occasionally, chickens are also welcomed to rid the garden of slugs and unwanted pests and naturally fertilize the grounds. Once plants outgrow their space, it is important that the gardener heed the need to transplant them to a space where they can better flourish and spread, giving them more opportunity to produce a healthier and more bountiful harvest. Though the plant has relocated, the gardener continues to care for this plant and provide the nutrients needed. The steward is particularly keen to observe, feel, and listen to the earth and plants as they speak their needs, and it is also advised that the steward of the garden speak to the earth and plants as they too listen.

The garden and steward are metaphors for the child/student and teacher (parent, family member, community member) who is responsible for the growth, nourishment, and success of such child. Just as great care is taken in nourishing the soil, our minds and souls should also be nourished. In a short amount of time, one can look at a garden and see or feel what is needed; if a plant is limp, it needs water; if the leaves are brown, it needs shade; if the leaves are yellow, it is drowning; if roots are rotting or leaves are damaged, there is an intruder or pest harming it. Unlike plants, people are not so quick to exhibit the physical effects of oppressions and marginalization and microaggressions. The effects of microaggressions and marginalization are exposed when challenged, put in a corner, or statistically recorded in low academic attrition and matriculation rates. If we do not care for our garden, there are consequences—we will not have food to eat or herbs to heal. Likewise, just as a steward cares for and protects plants from toxins, chemicals,

and unwanted pests, so should we care for our children and community with such focus and intent, for they too will reap what we sow.

Adjustments to the Research During the COVID-19 Pandemic

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, precautionary measures were put into place to protect the health and well-being of all co-researchers during the in-person collection of data. Hand sanitizer, new unpackaged masks, and gloves were provided to all participants. Areas were meticulously sanitized with an acceptable form of sanitization as outlined by the IRB policies and procedures for COVID-19/Pandemic research. Meals, snacks, water, and beverages were provided. Due to the unique nature of our meeting space, rest areas, bug spray, sunscreen, hats, umbrellas, and access to restrooms were provided. Additionally, all food allergy requests were honored and respected.

Data Collection

Data from the *pláticas* and *testimonios* were collected by means of audio and video recording. Due to the unique environment of conducting *plática*s in *el jardín*, special attention was given to the noise and volume to alleviate unwanted acoustics. More than one device was used and placed near the co-researchers to ensure their voices could be clearly heard (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Additionally, I took field notes and kept a personal journal. These personal notes allowed for reflexivity as well as to note the physical details and behaviors of all co-contributors, which allowed for capturing deeper and richer experiences and assisted in recalling the experience in real time for learning purposes (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Gibbs, 2007). Additionally, symbols provided by the co-researchers were safely guarded or photocopied with permission.

Why Pláticas and Testimonios?

As a child, the pedagogy of home was typically situated in the kitchen surrounded by family. Many times, my mother would invite the *tias* over to have *café* and *pan dulce*. Because my mother was the fourth born in a line of 21 children, our homes were always lively and there was plenty of *plática* as long as there was *café* brewing. The men would retreat outside to speak of things pertaining to *el rancho*, while the *tias*, *primas*, *hermanas*, and *abuelas* would sit around a wooden oval table *platicando*. Often, monolingual guests would sit wide-eyed as they listened to the code switching of English to Spanish and Spanish to English, and everything "Spanglish" in-between. These remarkable talents gifted me the ability to think, read, write, and speak in two languages effortlessly. Ten worn yellow chairs surrounded the table where people sat, sometimes doubled up or on laps. Topics of religion, finances, politics, hopes, dreams, curiosities, and wonderings were discussed. It was in this space where I learned my *place* as a woman and how to navigate spaces of power, and developed a sense of body image and sexual identity (Anzaldúa, 1999; Delgado Bernal et al., 2006). God was everywhere, but it was at this table that He seemed ever-present as we would gather, hand in hand, to pray over the sick, those in need, and children. *Testimonios*, both personal and spiritual, would be spoken as heads nodded and attentive ears listened, and occasionally an "*amen*" or "*si, así es*" would be echoed in an empathetic or agreeing manner.

The Bible never left the head of the table and lay open with a pencil and a small pocketknife to sharpen it by its side. Here, where the Bible waited on my father every morning, hung a black belt on the back of his chair. *La faja* was kept here as a reminder of what happens when one does not behave, is *maleducado*, or *sin respeto*. As a child, I

did not understand the value of what happened at our table as a “rich, deep, learning process” or think of it as a “training ground for collective leadership” (M. Guajardo et al., 2016, p. 12); yet, it was where people from all walks of life gathered and shared their wisdom and rich history through *pláticas*. Within this community, every voice was valued. Countless stories were exchanged as knowledge was deconstructed and challenged and meaning was transformed (M. Guajardo et al., 2016). Through these gatherings of family and friends, I learned how to be a welcoming and gracious host by watching my *tias* and my mother cook, and also learned how to be in community with people. I understood the importance of serving a meal to those before me and the humanity in putting my needs and wants aside for the good of the whole (Gutierrez, 1971; Romero, 2010). I realized we could have heated and loud disagreements and still come together to hold hands, pray, forgive, and break bread, with the understanding that we are still *familia*.

When I was researching the types of methods I wanted to use as a form of data collection, stories seemed culturally familiar to me. *Pláticas* require the researcher to be willing to share what is asked of the others in the group. The ability to engage in *pláticas* in a genuine and authentic way can be a method for meaning making of the Latina collective identity and create a powerful space for healing. While delving deep into the literature review, I stumbled across *platícas* as a method and methodology, which took me aback for several reasons: (a) the word *pláticas* was in Spanish, and I rarely was exposed to the Spanish language in my readings on campus; (b) I did not see *pláticas* as a valid or academic form of data collection; and (c) I questioned how the world of academia would respond if I used this method as it was not their norm and not considered

a *real* method. Further, I felt it may be viewed by others in academia as taking the easy way out. *Pláticas* were easy for me to understand and use because they were how I came to know the world and understand my life and experiences as a Latina. The curiosity of *pláticas* lingered and gnawed at me and I wondered, *how could something that seemed so natural to me be acceptable in this White world of academia?*

Pláticas and *testimonios* are stories that tell of an individual's experiences and give insight about the identities of the co-researchers and how they view themselves. This type of methodology, "though based on personal experiences, are not based on individualistic explanations and solutions to such inequalities. Rather, they rearticulate individualism by connecting the self to communities and to relations of power" (Delgado & Elenes, 2011, p. 110; Valencia, 2010). Simply stated, both the communal and individual voice work together to identify the construction of the self within structures of power.

My decision to use *pláticas* and *testimonios* emerged after taking a course with my chair and professor, Dr. Miguel Guajardo, who used *pláticas* in CLEs. I can vividly remember the air in the room, tense yet vulnerable, heated yet healing, full of the sounds of laughter and sniffles as tears were wiped away. The experience took me back to a place of belonging and an understanding of who I am. Further, this experience honored my family, culture, and spirituality. I left uplifted, rejuvenated, and full of questions. I was curious, provoked, and my soul felt nourished and full, much like when I enter *el jardín*. I needed to be in that space again, to belong and to be in community with others as we work through our struggles collectively. It was after being a witness to this experience that I knew *pláticas* and *testimonios* aligned with this research and the Latina

worldviews shaped by place, relationships, spirituality, sex, and race. Although once I questioned the validity and value of this method, I now realize these cultural and familiar methods that speak to who I am embody the goals of advocacy scholarship. This method of research speaks to real concerns in an attempt to transform and decolonize the research process. *Pláticas* and *testimonios* are counternarratives that challenge the deficit discourse and disrupt the confines of Western academia as we, Latinas, reframe the collective identity and reimagine a future where we are no longer silenced (Delgado Bernal et al., 2006; M. Guajardo et al., 2016).

Pláticas. *Pláticas* are an expressive and cultural way to share memories, stories, and experiences with a knowledge that is familiar to Latinas' cultural and familial history (Fierros & Delgado Bernal, 2016; F. Guajardo & Guajardo, 2013). Latinas' ways of knowing stem from the knowledge and information shared in *pláticas*, which often involve stories, *consejos*, *chismes*, *cuentos*, and *regaños*. This type of methodology disrupts Eurocentric colonial assumptions that data must be free of bias and the spirit of our culture and ancestors. *Pláticas* resist dominant notions of methodology and method by honoring the co-researchers and recognizing them as co-constructors and contributors of knowledge production and meaning making. F. Guajardo and Guajardo (2013) stated *pláticas* "make more sense, feels more real, and speak to us in ways that helps us build relationships and community more respectfully" (p. 163). This natural, friendly, intimate, and culturally appropriate form of engaging with other Latinas is a necessary tool to navigate and make sense of spaces by allowing for the weaving of the academic and the personal. F. Guajardo and Guajardo stated *pláticas* not only help us to critically think, find logic in an argument, and know how to ask the right questions, they also help us

make sense of our stories and who we are, as well as to build healthy relationships and work collaboratively with others and in our community. *Pláticas* allow us to explore provocative and political issues while learning about ourselves and others as we co-construct knowledge.

Pláticas are "more than tools for obtaining data," and "methodologies are extensions of ways of knowing and being, thus are essential to the way we embody and perform research" (Fierros & Delgado Bernal, 2016, p. 101). *Pláticas* are reciprocal and pedagogical exchanges that embody the Latina culture, are grounded in trust, and embrace our ways of knowing, teaching, and learning (M. Guajardo et al., 2016). According to Delgado Bernal (2002), sense making and theory building of Latina experiences are not dependent on whether the relationship between the researcher and participant is significant; rather, this type of methodology is grounded in *respeto* as a contributor and co-creator of knowledge. Because *pláticas* are familial and culturally familiar to Latinas, they have an immediate way of establishing connections and a welcoming environment. This type of culturally grounded conversation allows for fluid and relaxed discussions that promote trusting spaces of compassion and understanding. Stories of pain, trauma, tensions, and future aspirations are dependent on the relations of vulnerability and reciprocity of the researcher. *Pláticas* can be a powerful tool for making meaning of life experiences; contributing to decolonization; informing our practices as leaders, educators, and community members; and reclaiming our neglected voices as we deconstruct power dynamics (Fierros & Delgado Bernal, 2016).

Testimonios. The genre of *testimonio* as a methodical tool is both a product and a process and "gives voices to silences, representing the other, reclaiming authority to

narrate, and disentangling questions surround legitimate truth" (Delgado Bernal et al., 2006, p. 3). *Testimonios* bring attention to co-researchers' experiences and disrupt the idea of the Western ideology and academic ideals that determine who is and is not an intellectual, giving Latinas agency and voice, and bringing focus to their collective experiences. *Testimonios* are critical reflections of experiences that encompass the oppression, marginalization, and resistance of Latinas. *Testimonio* is a genre that subverts objectivity, exposes brutality, shatters silence, and fosters solidarity among women of color (Anzaldúa, 2009; Delgado Bernal et al., 2006). This type of reframing and co-construction of knowledge is an organic form of translating our identities though descriptive discourse as we connect and navigate with other Chicanas/Latinas through spaces of power (Delgado Bernal & Elenes, 2011). Beverly (2005) and Spivak (1988) argued that the very fact that a Latina is able to give a *testimonio* or write her story implies that she has transitioned from a subaltern collective identity to an individual identity. However, Delgado Bernal and Elenes (2011) refuted this idea, stating that even as one attains some status of privilege, a group identity continues to exist as Latinas collectively seek community that "bridges our mind, body, and spirit, and reconnects us with others" (Delgado Bernal & Elenes, 2011, p. 111). For this reason, I chose *testimonios* as a method for data collection as they are a familiar and cultural way to dialogue and feel a sense of belonging and connection.

Photovoice

In CLE #3, I present what spaces of critical consciousness and community learning *look*, *sound*, and *feel like* through an established method called photovoice, a visual research methodology that puts the cameras or photographs into the participants'

hands to help them document, reflect on, and communicate their experiences (Wang & Burris, 1997). Wang and Burris (1997) developed photovoice to enable participants to record and reflect on their collective strengths and concerns and to promote critical dialogue and knowledge. This method particularly emphasizes women's empowerment by developing critical awareness (Duffy, 2011). By using photos, individuals can reflect upon and explore their why, as well as the experiences and emotions that have guided their thoughts. Photovoice creates space for social interaction and promotes relationship building—a key element of the CLE (M. Guajardo et al., 2016).

Data Analysis

Unquestionably, the most complex and enigmatic of all the steps of qualitative research is the data analysis process, but it can also be fun (Rossman & Rallis, 2017). Data analysis involves reading numerous transcripts in search of patterns, similarities, and relationships and subsequently identifying patterns and developing categories. Data analysis is a means of bringing order, structure, and meaning to the mass of collected data. It is creative, time-consuming, and engaging. Usually, the analytic procedure falls into the following eight phases: (a) organizing data; (b) reading, becoming familiar with the data; (c) identifying categories; (d) coding the data; (e) identifying themes; (f) interpreting the data; (g) seeking alternative understandings; and (h) and recording findings (Rossman & Rallis, 2017).

Organizing Data

Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggested the use of audit trails to keep track of progress from raw data to the final product. I cleaned up the raw data while they were still fresh on my mind to include dates, times, and locations as to help stimulate the mind

when referring to the materials. I was converted this information into a digital or software program for long-term storage and to safeguard data. I used computer software programs to assist with analysis tasks and file management, making the accessibility of specific information more efficient (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Rossman & Rallis, 2017). I documented audit trails by means of a researcher's journal and field notes, which are described below.

Reading, Becoming Familiar With the Data

It is advised that the researcher repeatedly read the transcripts in their entirety and then "read, reread, and once more read" to become immersed in the details (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Rossman & Rallis, 2017, p. 239). This is done to get a sense of the *plática* or *testimonio* as a whole before putting it through the fragmentation process. Recordings were transcribed to further become more intimate with the data, provoke thought, and provide further leads. Transcription is not solely a technical process; rather, audio and visual learners can be better served when listening to the recording and observing the transcriptions in hand. As I am an audio and visual learner, this was helpful in improving my retention of information (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Rossman & Rallis, 2017).

I personally transcribed the recordings within 48 hours of the *pláticas* to ensure a recent and unimpaired recollection of the event. Transcriptions were completed using Microsoft Word, creating a document with numbered lines, wide margins, and double-line spacing to allow for annotations, comments, and coding. Although the process of coding was completed online, a hard copy of the printed transcriptions was available as a quick reference guide (Gibbs, 2007). It is important to note that when translating *testimonios* and *pláticas*, meaning may get lost in translation. Therefore, it is advised that

“one must be cautious to translate conceptually rather than literally because in translating particular terms, nuances get lost and we run the risk of reproducing language marginalization” (Delgado Bernal et al.., 2006, p. 3). As both the collector of data and the translator, the researcher becomes a filter when moving from one language to another, and if the researcher is not fully versed and knowledgeable of both languages and the cultural nuances, translation and meaning can be disrupted as the producer of knowledge then shifts (Delgado Bernal et al., 2006).

Identifying Categories, Coding, and Generating Themes

For novice researchers, such as myself, the differences between coding, category, and theme may be confusing. To alleviate any confusion, Rossman and Rallis (2017) explained the following:

> A code is a word or short phrase that symbolically assigns a summative, salient, essence-capturing, and/or evocative attribute to a portion (of your) data (Saldaña, 2013). Categories are grouping of these codes that represent some segment of your data that is relatively discrete (a variable, if you will) . . . A theme is a declarative phrase or sentence describing a process, a connection, or an insight. (p. 240)

I read the transcripts meticulously, line by line, with careful attention to making notes where clarification or additional review of the audio recording were needed for further clarification. I noted descriptions or words (codes) to describe what was “seen” (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 189; Rossman & Rallis, 2017). I repeated this process of adding descriptions or words throughout the reading of data, providing a foundation for a shortened list of codes that represented a portion of the data (categories). I used categories throughout subsequent readings of the transcripts that guided me to find emerging themes (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Gibbs, 2007). I coded the data more than once, beginning with a simple process of coding large pieces or “chunks” and then recoding

data to refine initial codes. Coding involved both handwritten notes (using words, symbols, and color coding) as well as notes in digital format. Finalizing a list of codes into a codebook guided the development of categories and themes.

I used preliminary deductive categories as a guide, or focus, that I generated from my conceptual framework and literature review. Other identified categories were salient categories, a form of inductive analysis emerged from co-researchers' language (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Rossman & Rallis, 2017). These categories were used to generate themes.

Interpreting the Data

Interpretation requires the researcher to take themes and create something that speaks to others in a sensible way and communicates the relevant information. Interpretation drives analysis to a deeper integrated and synthesized level (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Rossman & Rallis, 2017); this is not mechanical, but rather a "creative art," as it gives significance to the researcher's findings by drawing conclusions, making inferences, and offering explanation. This artistic and creative illumination tells the stories of the Latinas' lived experiences (Rossman & Rallis, 2017, p. 246). In short, all data, including journals, field notes, *pláticas*, and *testimonios*, came together in the form of a story that was meaningful and honored all participants involved (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Delgado Bernal et al., 2006; Rossman & Rallis, 2017).

Seeking Alternative Understandings

Plausibility of interpretations must be tested and challenged. It is advised that the researcher challenge patterns and seek other plausible explanations for their findings (Rossman & Rallis, 2017). To ensure my research and findings made sense, I sought the feedback of co-researchers, professors, and peers to challenge my interpretations to

ensure I had soundly and logically presented my data (*platícas*, *testimonios*, and stories). This helped me identify blind spots, provided an alternate lens, or suggested diversified ways of interpreting the data (Rossman & Rallis, 2017).

Recording Findings

Once all data were analyzed and reviewed for feedback through member check-in, I wrote a narrative analysis. Although Creswell and Poth (2018) suggested writing this analysis in a linear "chronological" format, I used the three-dimensional space approach presented by Clandinin and Conelly (2000), which touches on the personal and social interaction within the past, present, and future, as well as situation and place. By using *pláticas* and *testimonios* to collaboratively narrate the stories of my co-researchers, I applied the CLE theory to identify unique and general features and factors that have shaped and informed the lives of Latinas (Creswell & Poth, 2018; M. Guajardo et al., 2016).

Trustworthiness

Creswell and Poth (2018) stated, "Ethical validation means that all research agendas must question their underlying moral assumptions, their political and ethical implications, and the equitable treatment of diverse voices" (p. 257). Though Creswell and Poth (2018) used the word "validation" to give value to research, Wolcott (1990) claimed "validation" has little use in qualitative research, suggesting validation "neither guides nor informs" as it does not capture the "essence of what he seeks" (p. 136). Rather, Wolcott embraced the term "understanding" in identifying critical elements and writing "plausible interpretations from them" (p. 146). Simply stated, it was important that I remained continually aware of my positionality and had a clear understanding about

my own experiences, values, and biases that informed my research. The interpretations of the study should offer new possibilities, open up new questions, inspire fresh dialogue, and provide non-dogmatic answers to the problems we addressed (Creswell & Poth, 2018). *Pláticas* and *testimonios* model this generative process as "*pláticas* beget other *pláticas*" (F. Guajardo & Guajardo, 2013, p. 161), making them a continually evolving and powerful tool for the relational exploration process and a form of critical pedagogy.

An issue with trustworthiness is "reactivity," or the influence of research on the individuals or study (Maxwell, 2013). A qualitative researcher is "part of the world he or she studies and is a powerful and inescapable influence" (p. 125). For a study to be useful, it must be trustworthy and have "credibility"; therefore, procedures and protocols were put in place, such as the use of a researcher's journal, peer and professional feedback, member check-in, and regular keeping of field notes. Data were triangulated to reduce the risk of chance associations or systematic biases due to a specific method of data collection (Maxwell, 2013, p. 128). In addition to the researcher's journal, field notes, transcripts, and coding from *pláticas*, multiple sources of data were collected, including, but not limited to, researcher *testimonios* and artifacts (symbols), such as photographs, published works, poems, short stories, and newspaper articles.

Researcher's Journal

"How we write is a reflection of our own interpretation based on the cultural, social, gender, class, and personal politics that we bring to the research . . . writing is positioned and with a stance" (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 228). Personal biases can influence the interpretation of data; therefore, I kept a researcher's journal to document my perspective and any guiding personal thoughts or ideas throughout the research

process (Creswell, 1998; Creswell & Miller, 2000; Creswell & Poth, 2018). Reflective comments regarding any experiences as the study progressed were continually reviewed and discussed with professional writing peers and co-researchers to discover how these values, biases, or experiences may have influenced my emerging understanding and to reduce the probability of biases that may have inaccurately influenced interpretation. Qualitative researchers need to position themselves in their research (Creswell & Poth, 2018). To ensure reflexivity and be ethically and politically self-aware, I used a researcher's journal to engage in self-understanding as I made myself a part of my own inquiry. Interpretations or conclusions were externally audited and reviewed by co-researchers, professional peers, and professors (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Maxwell, 2013). According to Creswell and Poth (2018), the process of participant or peer feedback is the "most critical technique for establishing credibility" (p. 261). Peer and fellow researcher feedback provided the opportunity to correct errors, challenge interpretations, and reflect on embedded biases and assumptions that may have been overlooked. This research includes conclusions regarding what went well and what I learned or should be avoided future research endeavors (Curtin & Fossey, 2007).

Field Notes

Field notes and thick rich descriptions draw the reader in and evoke a sense of connection and feelings with the participants in the study (Carlson, 2010; Creswell & Miller, 2000). These notes provide a "full and revealing picture of what is going on," giving detailed descriptions of the participants, settings, and data collection and analysis procedures (Maxwell, 2013, p. 128; see also Creswell & Poth, 2018). These descriptive notes allow for the capturing of rich and thick detail about the physical environment and

the interactions among the co-researchers within that environment (Rossman & Rallis, 2017). Thick and rich descriptions provide an understanding of relevance to other settings and give details about the participants' physical reactions and emotions. Furthermore, field notes and thick rich descriptions helped me stimulate and spark my memory to recreate and recall the setting and emotions. Raw notes were handwritten and then transcribed into a computer. Transcription from handwritten form to computer format allowed for further analysis and clarification of vague statements and unfounded assumptions (Rossman & Rallis, 2017). Because of the nature of the setting and length of our *pláticas* in *el jardín*, audio video was also reviewed to allow for proper documentation, clarification, and allow for an opportunity to examine the environment for details that may have been missed. These field notes allowed me to view detailed annotations of transcripts and events to bring trustworthiness to the conclusions.

Member Check-In

Member check-in, or fellow researcher feedback, is a technique for exploring the trustworthiness of the data participants provided (Doyle, 2007; Merriam, 1998) and a way of "finding out whether the data analysis is congruent with the participants' experiences" (Curtin & Fossey, 2007, p. 92). I returned transcriptions of the *pláticas* and *testimonios* to the co-contributors of knowledge to verify for accuracy of text as well as an understanding of their interpreted experience. Lincoln and Guba (1985) considered this to be the "most critical technique in establishing credibility" (p. 314). This method ensures trustworthiness and credibility in qualitative studies and enhances rigor in qualitative research (Birt et al., 2016; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). It is suggested that realities are "multiple, constructed, and holistic," rather than "single, tangible, and fragmentable" (p.

37). Therefore, it is necessary that data accurately represent the participants and their experiences, so that they properly inform the research process.

Member checking is a way to determine whether the researcher's findings clearly make sense to the participants and honor their experiences and realities in an accurate way. Lincoln and Guba (1985) described the role of member check-in as a process in which someone asks hard questions and keeps the researcher honest (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Hard questions were common around our table in the kitchen, where many *tias*, *primas*, and *hermanas* were sure to keep you honest and knew the intimate details of your life. Though the space could be tense, it was a welcoming and positive environment where we could work collaboratively through our struggles.

The process of member check-in allows the co-contributors to give feedback, delete, edit, elaborate, or comment on any reconstruction of the data and clarify any misunderstandings, interpretations, or assumptions made by the researcher. Though the purpose of member check-in is to ensure trustworthiness, reading transcripts may trigger the co-contributors' thoughts and experiences about issues that had not been previously discussed in the initial *pláticas*; further, this process may generate insightful data, additional comments, or clarification that may lead to more valid or deeper interpretations. It is necessary to inform co-contributors of the time commitment of the member check-in process, which can be done in a single event, or as recommended by Doyle (2007), on a continual basis throughout the data collection process. This continual examination of data allows for meticulous scrutiny and accuracy of interpretation and meaningful coherent conveyance of the narratives contributed by co-researchers (Carlson,

2010). When this process is properly executed, member check-in can greatly enhance the trustworthiness of data (Carlson, 2010; Doyle, 2007).

Challenges and Possibilities

The vast amount of data collected from a qualitative study can be time consuming and labor intensive to transcribe, code, and analyze. Additionally, qualitative data may be more difficult to interpret in a visual way. The researcher must have a clear and concise understanding of the participants' lives to accurately interpret and analyze the data. Due to the multi-layers and complexities of intersectionality of the Latina, it was necessary to actively engage in collaboration and reflect on *pláticas* and seek clarification of *testimonios*. All data are filtered through the lens of the researcher; therefore, it is imperative that the researcher be in constant reflection about their personal convictions and political assumptions, as those can shape interpretations and shift meaning. This shift in meaning can misappropriate power from the holder of knowledge to the researcher, silencing the voice of the producer of knowledge, thus feeding into the dominant systems of oppression that Latina activists are working collectively to disrupt (Anzaldúa, 1999).

Qualitative research is dependent on the skills of the researcher and problems can go unnoticed if the researcher has a limited understanding of the research process. Additionally, participants may feel anxious, nervous, or find confidentiality and anonymity to be an issue, factors that potentially impede the creation of trusting spaces that allow for vulnerability (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Ochieng, 2009).

The Researcher's Perspective–Positionality

Creswell and Poth (2018) stated, "Agendas must question their underlying moral assumptions, their political and ethical implications, and the equitable treatment of

diverse voices" (p. 257). Simply stated, we must be aware of our positionality, or self-understanding, about our own experiences, values, and biases we bring to the table. Maxwell (2013) further stated we are "part of the world" that we study and are a "powerful and inescapable influence" (p. 125). Qualitative data cannot be interpreted without understanding the behaviors and assumptions that underlie them. According to Creswell and Poth (2018), researchers "position themselves by identifying their positionality" and "the researcher's presence is apparent in the text" (p. 229). It may be to the researcher's advantage to better connect with their participants by sharing personal experiences and information to establish a sense of trust and transparency (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Gibbs, 2007).

Post-modernists and post-structuralists doubt that qualitative researchers can bind and gag their sense of self and be objective in the field of research (Chavez, 2008). Rather, a researcher becomes a co-participant as they position themselves in relation to participants, and participants position themselves in relation to how the researcher is perceived or behaves (Chavez, 2008; Ellis, 2004; Gergen, 2015). Multiple voices or polyvocality include and recognize all participants, co-collaborators, or witnesses.

Insider-Outsider–The Emic-Etic Dance

There are benefits and challenges in being both in the position of "insider" and "outsider" in the field of research. Though the outsider perspective may be considered optimal for its ability to be "objective" and "accurate," the sense of self is eternally present and one's axioms, experiences, and epistemological beliefs cannot be disjointed from the self. Due to my position as an insider, my deep and personal insight, observations, representation, interpretations, and, quite frankly, this entire process, I

expected it to be complicated and messy. To demonstrate this struggle, I provide an example of my—the researcher's—struggle with positionality as an "insider," which I experienced during an interview with my daughter:

> Within the first five minutes of an interview with Cameron, I was told that I was the cause of her struggle with colorism and living in her own skin. At this point, I internally (and maybe even physically and visibly) shifted from a place of comfort to defense mode. I sat up straighter, pulled my shoulders back, and looked her straight in the eyes. I was ready to react. I was formulating words in my head and preparing to give excuses for the "why" and "how" she was raised. As the interview progressed, my defenses lessened, and my compassion for her grew, as did my shame. I had nowhere to hide. I was there in this space with her, listening to all the things I could have done differently as a mother, provider, and protector. How is it that I missed this? Feelings of guilt flooded me, and I could not help but shed tears as she spoke. My posture recoiled, and I found myself with my arms folded, mimicking hers. Both of us in protection mode, guarding our chests, maybe an action to guard the hearts that lay beneath our breasts. (Bocanegra, journal entry, March 17, 2019)

The above example left me feeling a sense of failure as an objective researcher. I realized I had been inherently biased, and what should have been my insider's strength became an outsider's weakness (Merriam, 1998). Chavez (2008) claimed insiders must be able to differentiate "what they know from what they see" (p. 491). Insider research is necessary and valid, but it comes with a charge. Researchers must be willing to be in the tension and struggle to conduct sound and trustworthy research while in the unique positionality of being an insider (Chavez, 2008).

Insiders have advantages in knowing the participants and the community through having shared experiences, similar social and cultural identities, and a sense of closeness that allows for authentic and personal experiences. Insiders can detect nonverbal gestures and hidden behaviors, and they have insight into the cognitive, linguistic, and emotional principles of the participants. Additionally, the expediency of rapport building allows for immediate legitimacy in the field, and the familiarity of the witnesses or co-creators

provides a nuanced perspective for observation and interpretation (Chavez, 2008; Merriam, 1998).

Summary: BEE-Coming Story Makers

Bourdieu et al. (1977) theorized that our hierarchical society position explains our social and academic outcomes, stating that if a person is not born into upper or middle classes, nor considered to have capital value, one could access this knowledge through formal schooling. This frame of thought infers that Latinas lack the cultural and social capital necessary for social mobility, giving a reason why students of color do not perform as well as their White peers. Our school systems often work from this similar frame of mind—that students of color are *disadvantaged* because of their background or race. My resistance to Bourdieu et al.'s (1977) thought reminds me of the French entomologist August Magnan (1934), who claimed bees break the laws of aerodynamics and should not be able to fly due to their body shape, size, and small wings. So how is it that bees fly? Well, Magnan (1934) was wrong. Michael Dickinson, a professor of biology and insect flight expert at the University of Washington, concluded that Magnan (1934) believed bees flap their wings up and down. However, a bee's wing movement is an infinity symbol of sorts, much like making the number eight with your hands, creating small hurricane like vortices in the air (Altshuler et al., 2005). The center, or eyes, of these mini hurricanes are lower in air pressure than the surrounding air, which keeps vortexes of air above the bee's wings to help it stay aloft (Altshuler et al., 2005).

Bourdieu et al.'s (1977) theory may lead educators to conclude that Latinas lack the necessary knowledge and cultural and social capital to succeed or *fly* like the bees

(Nelson & Guerra, 2013; Valenzuela, 1999). Below are two examples of past and more recent experiences of how Latinas are exposed to this type of deficit thinking:

> I sit in Mrs. Perez's math class in high school. My mind is not here, and math is something they tell me I am not good at. I know the quadratic equation they speak of on the black chalkboard; I know how to use it. No one notices or cares to ask me a question about our homework, which I did complete. And so, I sit and daydream and doodle on paper. They do not call my name. I do not hear of college. They tell me I cannot go. The bell rings for changing of periods. I go to my locker, another class, more daydreaming. I look around at the herd of obedient cattle going from stall to stall. They listen attentively to the talk boxes in front of the class and sit in aligned rows. They are quiet and compliant as they scribble on their worksheets. I sit and wait for the bell . . . repeat. (Bocanegra, journal entry, 1985)

> Thirty-Five years transpired, you would think I've proven Mrs. Perez and others like her wrong as I sit in my PhD quantitative data class. Other than being a White male, he is not much different. Again, I did my homework, I crunched the numbers, and read and re-read the articles. I come curious and ready to learn. I ask questions as I have in past, often overlooked or talked over; this time he answers. He shakes his head left to right and back again and asks me if I am sure I am "right for this program" or in the "right class." I look around perplexed. I entered the same door everyone else did to get here- I applied, wrote the essays, and interviewed. I think to myself—Yes, I am in the right program! Are <u>you</u>? (Bocanegra, journal entry, 2021)

Anzaldúa (1990) responded to Bourdieu et al.'s (1977) theory by stating, "If we have been engaged and disempowered by theories, we can also be loosened and empowered by theories" (p. xxvi). Anzaldúa's response asks us to reimagine and challenge the ways racism and race explicitly and implicitly influence discourses, social structures, and practices through the *mestiza* way of knowing, which requires

> that we seek to understand them in intentional ways. Organizations and communities contain an ever-changing array of people with diverse needs and concerns and assets and gifts. These complex dynamics require that we are purposeful in our efforts to understand them. (p. 4)

This is done by listening to the lived stories and experiences of Latinas and using these conversations as a pedagogical tool to build self, communities, and organizations (M. Guajardo et al., 2016).

Unlike our society, bees do not have systemic structures or implicit or explicit messages to inform them of their *shortcomings*. Freire (2000) and Anzaldúa (1990) suggested we expose those responsible for such impositions and confront these inequitable truths, living in a messy tension of transformation and growth. Horton (2003) further suggested that we walk side-by-side and learn how to work toward "replacing, transforming, and rebuilding society so that to allow for people to make decisions that affect their lives" (Horton, 2003, p. 10). The idea of Horton's Highlander Folk School is to "educate people to see themselves and to help generate within them the desires and determination to improve their conditions" (p. 10). So how do we Latinas go about flying regardless of the size or shape of our wings? Horton suggested this issue is not a purpose to be solved; rather, we must

> use these issues and crises as the basis for educating people about a democratic society. To make them want more and make them understand that they can do more . . . you help them understand that within them is the possibility of accomplishing things. You do nothing to limit people. (p. 43)

To find the cause of the situation, we must delve deep within, for this is what it means to be truly radical (Gutierrez, 1971, p. xxv). M. Guajardo et al. (2016) suggested "community is a process as much as it is a physical, tangible place"; it is "a generative structure informed by a set of ideas, practices, struggles, hopes, and dreams" (p. 5). We, Latina co-researchers, began the process of fragmentation and disruption through "questioning, challenging assumptions, principles and ways of being" (M. Guajardo et al., 2016, p. 5). We began to "make meaning, transform meaning, and work together for a common good" (M. Guajardo et al., 2016, p. 5) to best influence the system and those in it. It was in the power and place of *el jardín* that we united the wisdom of Latinas to exercise our agency as we, the storytellers, became the story makers.

IV. CONOCIMIENTO–FINDINGS

Introduction–Coyolxauhqui Imperative

A span of time passed between writing the last three chapters and writing up my findings. After a 29-year relationship and marriage, I found myself divorced, without the comfort and familiarity of my home, living on a small income, and sharing custody of my two younger children. Additionally, the body I had once known felt incomplete. A simple doctor's visit turned into another, followed by multiple others. The result was a 6-hour surgical hysterectomy. The moment I awoke from anesthesia, my world felt different; I felt different. Aside from the excruciating pain I was experiencing, I was angered, sad, and frustrated. Something was missing other than the home that once held and cradled my five children safely inside of me. My mind began to take hold of me, and I began to hide from myself, holding things in. I became disassociated and a visitor in my own skin. I left my body broken and in pain. Days followed with tears while reevaluating my "womanhood." Who was I without these parts? Without a husband? Was I still a woman? A mother? A daughter? I felt alone, abnormal, and broken. Once again, pieces of me were lying everywhere and I was questioning my purpose and falling into deep darkness. I was vulnerable and consumed with voices in my head whispering and screaming words that continued to wound my already pained and fractured body and spirit. However, Anzaldúa (2015) stated this time of dislocation and separation holds the promise of wholeness. Figure 17 is a photo of me walking *el jardín* 5 days after surgery to avoid blood clot formation.

Figure 17. Three Days After Hysterectomy. It was Extremely Painful to Walk as I Carried my Catheter, but I Longed to be in el Jardín, Feel the Sun Warm my Body, and See the Growth.

In my brokenness, I was reminded of the moon goddess Coyolxauhqui. As the Aztec story goes, Coyolxauhqui was the eldest and sole daughter of the goddess of fertility, Coatlicue, who also had 400 sons. When Coyolxauhqui heard of her mother's pregnancy with a "bastard son" (Anzaldúa, 2009, p. 296), she was embarrassed and decided to kill her mother with the help of her brothers. As Coyolxauhqui was preparing for battle, one of the brothers warned his unborn brother, Huitzilopochtli, in utero, of these plans. A fully formed Huitzilopochtli sprung out of the womb, beheading Coyolxauhqui and throwing her down the temple steps and dismembering her body. It is believed that Huitzilopochtli tossed Coyolxauhqui's head into the sky and it became the moon to comfort his mother when she looked above and remembered her only daughter.

Figure 18 is a photo of the Coyolxauhqui stone discovered in Mexico City, Mexico, in 1978 by electrical workers as they were excavating.

Figure 18. Coyolxauhqui Stone.

Anzaldúa (2015) stated the Coyolxauhqui imperative is "a struggle to reconstruct oneself and heal the *sustos* resulting from woundings, traumas, racism, and other acts of violation que *hechan pedazos nuestras almas*, split us, scatter our energies, and haunt us" (p. 1). It is a symbol that we must reconstruct and reframe by putting pieces together in a new way. Anzaldúa further stated this is a necessary and ongoing process of meaning making, learning, and unlearning. There is no need to seek or become consumed about finding a resolution; rather, we must go through this necessary process of dismemberment and fragmentation so we can see ourselves or our situations through a different lens and heal from our traumas. Anzaldúa suggested that as we struggle and thrash about in our brokenness trying to get our bearings, we oscillate between two paths. The path of "desconocimiento" (p. 121) leads our human consciousness into ignorance,

hatred, and fear. This path infects our minds with righteous judgments and retreats into separation and domination. It fuels retaliation and rampage bringing about violence. This is what Anzaldúa referred to as "the easier path," which uses violence and force to construct social systems. The optional and difficult path is "conocimiento" (p. 121). This path leads to "awakening, insights, understandings, realizations, and courage, and the motivation to engage in concrete ways that have the potential to bring us into compassionate interactions" (p. 121). Where desconocimiento creates abyss, *conocimiento* builds bridges across it (Anzaldúa, 2015).

As I was lying in my bed, Anzaldúa's (2015) words resonated with me. I was taking the easier path. It was easier to give up, to lay down and be all those descriptors I had been labeled with all my life. I was on a path that had silenced the wise words of my father and blinded me from the many examples of resilience from my mother. As I reread my previous chapters, I was reminded of the words, *if we posture as victims, we will be victims, that hopelessness is a suicide, and these self-attacks stop us in our tracks*. I knew I had to delve deep into the earth of collected wisdom from my ancestors and the teachings of my parents. It was in this collective consciousness that I was able to counterbalance the path of self-destruction. "I am Coyolxauhqui!" I said to myself. At first, the words were a thought in my head, then a whisper, then a loud shout that came deep from within where my innards once were. For Anzaldúa, Coyolxauhqui was her "light in the darkness" (p. 121). I would soon find out that my *light* was to come in a different form, a four-legged form.

Luna/o–The Light in the Darkness

Mere days after my surgery, there was a knock at my door. Typically, when you open a door, you expect a person or people. To my surprise, there standing in the doorway was my good friend, Yvette, with groceries in one hand and a fawn in the other (see Figure 19). Yvette had been kind enough to pick up the medication and groceries I needed, as I could not drive and walking was very difficult for me. On her way home, she found a mother doe that had been killed along the side the road. There standing next to the fallen deer was a baby trying to *wake* its mother. Yvette scooped up the deer and brought it to me to nurse and nurture. I had no idea the impact this fawn would have on me or the importance of the timing of its appearance. I quickly went to research how to feed a fawn. The baby deer was exhausted, wounded, limping, dehydrated, and hungry. She went to sucking on my skin trying to find a teat, climbing on top of me nestling her nose in my neck. Here we both were, a baby without a mother and me feeling defeated because the parts that identified me as a mother had been ripped from me. The earth had given me a gift, I just had to listen, connect, and heal (Delgado Bernal et al., 2006; E. Martinez, 1998; see Figure 20). On the first evening with my new roommate, the moon was full and bright, as an eclipse was expected on this evening (see Figure 21). It only seemed fitting to call her Luna. For the next 4 weeks during my recovery, I would warm and prepare bottles of goat's milk and feed Luna every 4 hours. I learned that mother deer teach their newborns how to defecate and, without this skill, they will not survive. So, on went the gloves and some warm wipes to mimic a licking motion to help Luna relieve herself. Luna was also in need of salts and minerals, so after eating she needed to be introduced to and taught how to eat soil. This is another skill mother deer teach their

newborns to help them gain beneficial bacteria that assists in the digestive process. Together we learned to survive (see Figure 22). Eventually, I would introduce her to berries and plants growing in *el jardín* (see Figure 23). She had a difficult time chewing at first, but I knew she had caught on when I walked out one morning to find all my blackberries and blueberries gone!

Figure 19. Yvette With a Stranger.

Figure 20. Luna Giving me Affection and Showing her Love. Day 6 After Surgery I was Fighting an Infection That Left me Feverish and Unable to Walk, Stand, or Sit for Long Periods of Time.

Figure 21. Full Moon Eclipse. Luna Arrived on Full Moon Lunar Eclipse.

Figure 22. Day 10 After Surgery, Fighting Infections and Fever. I Found Peace and Healing Being in el Jardín Drinking Hot Herbal Tea From the Garden, Feeding Luna, and Listening to the Birds.

Figure 23. Blackberry Plant in el Jardín. Luna Loved to Eat Blackberries.

Never did I connect Coyolxauhqui, the moon goddess, to the naming of Luna and the full moon until later, but I do believe there are no coincidences. I believe Luna was my gift from God, Mother Earth, Coyolxauhqui, and my ancestors. I needed her and she needed me. Together we grew, played, and learned in *el jardín*. Friends and neighbors excitedly visited *el jardín* to help feed Luna, bringing her gifts and treats. One visitor gave us the gift of discovery and informed us that Luna is a male deer, so my children renamed Luna, Luno. Once Luno became healthy and strong, we rehomed him, as it is not legal to keep a deer, as much as we would have loved to make him part of our family. He brought laughter and hope into our home and our little community of neighbors and friends. Luno will always be the light I needed to heal physically, emotionally, and spiritually. He helped me put my broken pieces together in a beautiful way so I could remember, reframe, and reimagine (M. Guajardo et al., 2016) myself into a new and stronger being, and in some way, I hope *el jardín* did the same for him.

This experience made me think about CLEs and question whether one can have a CLE within themselves. I called up Dr. Guajardo and asked, "Can I have a CLE within myself, or is that a dumb question?" Fortunately, Dr. Guajardo never makes me feel bad for asking questions and he is always open to possibilities. I could not shake the experience with Luno, the stories and wisdom of my parents, and the ancestral spirit of Coyolxauhqui that had informed me and helped me to shed my Moyocoyotzin skin. Dr. Guajardo reminded me of the CLE theory of change (RASPPA) and the power of place where people (elders, stories, testimonies, spiritual ancestors) come together in communion to exercise the dynamic-critical pedagogy. The CLE process that takes place within us can have multiple conversations and the power to be reflective about the

important issues at hand. It is within this CLE process that we can identify our struggles within the self, our organizations, and our community to co-construct knowledge. Therefore, the answer is *yes*, CLEs can happen within the disciplined self. CLEs are not just events, they are a process of becoming—becoming the CLE. This process of becoming depends on our internal dialogue and struggle.

The story of Luno and Coyolxauhqui shines a light on just how resilient Latinas are when we are given a glimmer of hope. Our aspirational and resilient capital are within us (Yosso, 2006). Latinas can maintain hopes and dreams despite the odds, barriers, sickness, and untruths, but we cannot do this alone. When we are in communion with our community, friends, family, the voices of our loved ones, or simply open to the possibility of something strange and different, like Luno's unexpected appearance, then we can imagine differently, dream passionately, and will it into creation.

As we Latina co-researchers come together, we discover, expose, co-create knowledge, and inspire. Through our *pláticas*, we can change today, tomorrow, and future generations by reimagining together. Together we create light. We are luminous—we are Coyolxauhqui. Figure 24 shows pictures of community members and co-researchers feeding and nurturing Luno.

Figure 24. Luno in the Midst of Everything and Everyone.

Organization of Chapter IV

This autoethnography is a research partnership that includes the voices of four Latinas. Within this chapter, you will become more familiar with my research partners through their stories and experiences. Not all research partners were physically present, as some were present in spirit, in our memories, or through the stories and symbols they passed down to future generations. In this chapter I provide an overview of the rhythm of the three CLEs, take you through the preparation of the research space, address the research questions posed in Chapter I and restated in Chapter III, and present a brief conclusion/reflection. The guiding questions addressed in the CLEs were as follows:

1. What are the stories of self that shape and inform the Latina identity and sense of belonging?
2. What pedagogies inform Latinas' resilience to pursue a fuller robust life in the process of becoming a fuller human being?
3. What do spaces of critical consciousness and community learning look like, sound like, and feel like?

To exercise the pedagogy of *el jardín* and to engage in my struggle to reassemble Coyolxauhqui, I hosted three CLEs, which promise to be the first of many among this community of Latinas. Tables 1–3 provide an overview of each CLE and Appendices D–E contain the *plática* guides used in each CLE.

Table 1. CLE #1: Climate, Context, and Fertile Grounds/ Preparing the Soil – Stories of Self.

CLE #1	Climate, Context, and Fertile Grounds/ Preparing the Soil – Stories of Self
Location	El jardín
Topics	Stories of self that have informed and shaped our identity
Discussion prompts	What are the stories of self that shape and inform the Latina identity?
Activities	Co-researchers took a garden tour and asked questions about vegetation, the best suited location for planting, and best practices for weed/pest control. They were introduced to foraging chickens and chose seeds and fertile grounds to plant them. We watered our promising seeds and shared lunch in *el jardín*. Co-researchers were given a parting gift (succulent plant/fresh eggs) as a *recuerdo*.
Participants	Margie, Margo, Cameron, Renée, Witnesses in Spirit

Table 2. CLE #2: Planting and Nurturing.

CLE #2	Planting and Nurturing
Location	El jardín
Topics	Stories of resilience, protecting safe, gracious spaces
Discussion prompts	What pedagogies inform Latina's resilience to pursue a fuller robust life in the process of becoming a fuller human being?
Activities	Co-researchers are welcomed with brunch made with vegetation from *el jardín* and fresh eggs from the hens. Co-researchers walked the garden and checked on growing seedlings to identify needs by watering, weeding, and checking for disease/pests. Co-researchers made mosaic stones while listening to music and sharing in laughter and conversation. Co-researchers were given a parting gift (honey/veggies/fresh eggs) as a *recuerdo*.
Participants	Margie, Margo, Cameron, Renée, Erin (witness), Megan (witness), Ryan-Olivia (witness)

Table 3. CLE #3: A Bountiful Harvest – Spaces of Critical Consciousness and Community.

CLE #3	A Bountiful Harvest – Spaces of Critical Consciousness and Community
Location	El jardín
Topics	Lessons a garden can teach us about self, organizations, and community
Discussion prompts	What do spaces of critical consciousness and community learning look like, sound like, and feel like?
Activities	Co-researchers walked the garden and checked on growing plants to identify needs by watering, weeding, and checking for disease/pests. Co-researchers viewed photos from *el jardín* and discussed how *el jardín* informs spaces of critical consciousness and community. Co-researchers are given parting gifts as a *recuerdo* (eggs, veggies, honey, handmade soap, jellies/jams). Additionally, co-researchers were given cuttings and seeds from *el jardín* to begin their gardens and continue to share the bounty and spirit of *el jardín* with others.
Participants	Margie, Margo, Cameron, Renée, Erin (witness), Megan (witness), Ryan-Olivia (witness)

Rhythm of a CLE

CLEs are not a project or isolated event, they are "a way of life" (M. Guajardo et al., 2016, p. 23). CLEs are grounded in the idea that people's stories and actions are bridged through pedagogies and are guided by axioms that frame the beginning of our work, which is cyclical in nature (M. Guajardo et al., 2016). Co-researchers of the CLE are deliberate in how they inform and navigate the meaning making and learning processes and understand that relationships are central to this work (M. Guajardo et al., 2016). By using these guiding axioms, the social aspect of learning is maximized as are the opportunities for conversation, reflection, and exploration. A core objective of a CLE is to create gracious safe spaces and healthy relationships so we can authentically share our stories and experiences (M. Guajardo et al., 2016). It is "critical" that this space and climate be inviting for the co-construction of knowledge to take place (M. Guajardo et

al., 2016, p. 24). Safe spaces support challenging conversations and foster creative agency, allowing co-researchers to find their power and voice. Through authentic and challenging dialogue, participants reflect, question, re-author, and re-imagine. This act places power into the hands of the participants who are most familiar with their struggles. In preparation for our CLEs, I framed questions to encourage discussion and open dialogue. I emailed these questions with the consent letter in advance so the co-researchers could be familiar with these topics in the hope that they would begin reflecting on their experiences. Questions were formulated to encourage the co-researchers to delve deep and reflect on their experiences so they could discover their hidden gifts and give co-researchers a new language and way to look at the world. The integration of RASPPA (relationship, assets, stories, place, politic, action) along with the five axioms of the CLE provided us with a framework to facilitate meaning making and drive our thinking from deficits to assets as a community. This is a critical prerequisite in healing and rehabilitating the collective self-esteem of many communities and marginalized groups (M. Guajardo et al., 2016).

I have been a participant and witness to various types of CLEs and not one has been the same. There is no one-size-fits-all model and there is no script to follow. Everyone's stories and experiences are different. Within our *platícas*, common challenges emerge and collective gifts are called upon to make meaning of our experiences. This safe and gracious space allows co-researchers to create bonds through dialogue. M. Guajardo et al. (2016) defined "gracious space" as

> a spirit and setting where there is an invitation to the stranger and leaning occurs in public . . . gracious spaces create a climate for deeper listening and understanding. It helps move relationships beyond the objective of investment and trust. Investment and trust are critical to the kinds of relationships we want to

> grow and develop. The growth and development we need best occurs when we trust each other enough, and when we challenge ourselves to live in closer alignment with our life sustaining principles and values. (p. 33)

CLEs often evoke a wide range of emotions, such as laughter, tears, tension, confusion, and moments of transformation. The stories told in CLEs include experiences of success and failure and are continually evolving and fluid. It is through *pláticas* that we can give feedback, reflect, and invite participants to reauthor their stories. This process is in a constant state of change as pedagogies are provocative, relevant, malleable, and emerge from the CLE axioms lived in RASPPA (M. Guajardo et al., 2016). Below is an example of co-researcher Margo's experience in a CLE. Margo is a licensed marriage and family counselor and has given countless hours of therapy to families, couples, and individuals. She did not expect the overwhelming range of emotions that emerged in our *plática*, as she shared her initial skepticism:

> You know, when you sent out your data collection consent letter and you described the risks of this study, you talked about emotions or feelings that may emerge from our conversation and I told Margie, hmmm like yeah right. I had no idea. This is like a therapy session, and I'm a counselor!

Though Margo thought the CLE felt like a "therapy session," the CLE process makes sense of the world by teaching, learning, and leading this process as a robust and sound pedagogical moment (M. Guajardo et al., 2016). It is a space where the content originates from the community of learners. Questions and guidance are provided by the facilitator and the learning is facilitated in a dynamic-critical manner through good *plática* (M. Guajardo et al., 2016). This pedagogical space then becomes a space for growth, change, and relationship building. This is the type of pedagogy that can change relationships and indeed, change the world. Lessons were not constructed by a formulaic nor scripted lesson plan, they were developed by a genealogy of learning my story, a set of axioms,

and a theory of change that emerged from practicing similar actions within diverse setting (M. Guajardo et al., 2016). I learned this from my teachers, who learned from their parents and who are now writing different books that are informed by different sets, different people, and difference sets of *conocimiento* (M. Guajardo et al., 2016).

Figure 25 is a photo of Margo after sharing with the group, saying, “My mother never told me she loved me. She never showed it. I don’t think she liked me.” As Margo described her relationship with her mother, she became overwhelmed with unexpected emotion. My heart sank as I was a witness to the visible emotion that had taken over her body. Margo’s lower lip and chin trembled, and her hands shook. After a long pause she said, “I don’t want my kids to ever experience that. I want them to know they are loved.” Margie began to cry and replied, “And we do Mama, we do.” Soon we were all teary-eyed as we shared this space. This safe space allowed Margo to trust that her story had value and would be respected (M. Guajardo et al., 2016). The CLE axioms indicate that Margo’s story is critical to the pedagogical process. Margo followed with,

> but I learned. I learned what not to do with my children. I say and show my love all the time. I don’t want them to go through what I went through, that pain and trauma, because you know it’s painful. It’s painful to be a child and yearn for your mother’s love. I was just a child. Even animals need nurturing. It really informed me of what to do and not do.

Using the ecologies of knowing, Margo was able to understand and filter this experience to make decisions that were in the best interest for her and future generations. M. Guajardo et al. (2016) stated family is “the original learning exchange for us . . . it is the context for our learning about the self and also about the social world around us” (p. 29). Through Margo’s story she shared her gifts of aspirational capital, or the ability to maintain hopes and dreams for a future, even in the face of adversity (Yosso, 2006). These gifts allow us to think critically about our redeeming qualities to help us gain a

deeper understanding of our strengths (M. Guajardo et al., 2016). Furthermore, these stories help to build relationships and bridge connections (Anzaldúa, 2015; Delgado Bernal et al., 2006; M. Guajardo et al., 2016). The CLE theory of change (RASPPA) tells us that the CLE process begins with "the need to build relationships" (p. 33). Margo's willingness to trust the CLE process and "invest" (M. Guajardo et al., 2016, p. 33) in her fellow co-researchers allowed for us to be in relationship with her, "a reality that is at the core of social learning" (M. Guajardo et al., 2016, p. 45). Investment and trust are paramount to the kinds of healthy relationships we want to nurture and develop (M. Guajardo et al., 2016). After Margo shared her story, I felt differently about my relationship with her. Before our first CLE I described Margo as "my best friend's mother," but after our CLE something changed, as she had become an ally and friend.

Figure 25. CLE #1. The Tension is Visible Here as Margo and her Daughter Margie Sit in Silence for a Moment to Make Sense of Their Emotions.

Preparing for Our First CLE–Reimagining el Jardín, Place Matters

Community is a geographic place, a group of ideas, and a process (M. Guajardo et al., 2016). In providing a space for this research, I was committed to making the "invitation authentic, the topic relevant, and the engagement process dynamic" (M. Guajardo et al., 2016, p. 39; see Figure 26). It was my hope that CLEs in *el jardín* would build relationships that would, in turn, produce rich stories (i.e., observables, data) that would help make meaning of our experiences (Anzaldúa, 2015; Delgado Bernal et al., 2006; M. Guajardo et al., 2016; Rendón, 2014).

Figure 26. The Invitation is Gracious and Hospitable.

El jardín went through a massive transformation prior to our first *plática*. After my divorce, I moved from my farmhouse on five acres of lush vegetation to a rental home 13 minutes away in downtown Georgetown, Texas. My home of 20 years truly was a re-creation of the Garden of Eden. My heart and soul were embedded in every inch of soil. I planned, planted, and harvested dozens of seasons for 2 decades. As I looked upon

my new empty and heavily-weeded backyard, precious memories with my children and my parents digging deep in the earth alongside me made my heart ache for what once was. When I first began my planning in recreating *el jardín*, I realized this feat was impossible. I was a different person and my physical space was limited, but the possibilities were not. I did not want to dwell on what was *lluvias de sangre*, but rather what could be *lluvias de flores* (Anzaldúa, 2009; McKnight & Block, 2010). Throughout my journey I had come to realize that *el jardín* was a physical process and was within me. Where I go, it becomes; I imagine because I dream, and a dream becomes a plan for action and hope (M. Guajardo et al., 2016). This is the change in me from *desconocimiento* to *conocimiento* (Anzaldúa, 2015). The thought of creating something that would be an expression of who I am and who I was becoming in this new space excited me. My friend Yvette and I went to work imagining and sketching an outline on lined paper using a pencil and ruler. The next day, we laid out our sketch using #2 yellow pencils and string to physically map out the landscape so we could visualize how the space would be used. I remember telling Yvette I was going to go buy stakes, string, and spray paint to mark lines at Home Depot. She said, "*Nombre, eso es caro*, wait right there. I'll be back!" Within 10 minutes she had returned from the Family Dollar Store across from my home with packages of yellow pencils and white string in hand and a grin from ear to ear, saying, "Here ya go, *Chica*! $6 dollars!" Yvette's clever and creative thinking saved money and time. I was a bit perplexed when I saw pencils laying all over the patio, but she explained this was how her grandfather used to map out space as a builder. Yvette had learned how to be resourceful from observing her *abuelo*. This

learned lesson enabled us to complete the task at hand quickly and effortlessly. Figures 27 and 28 show *el jardín* prior to construction and the first sketch of a plan.

Figure 27. Back Yard. A Blank Slate and a Multitude of Possibilities.

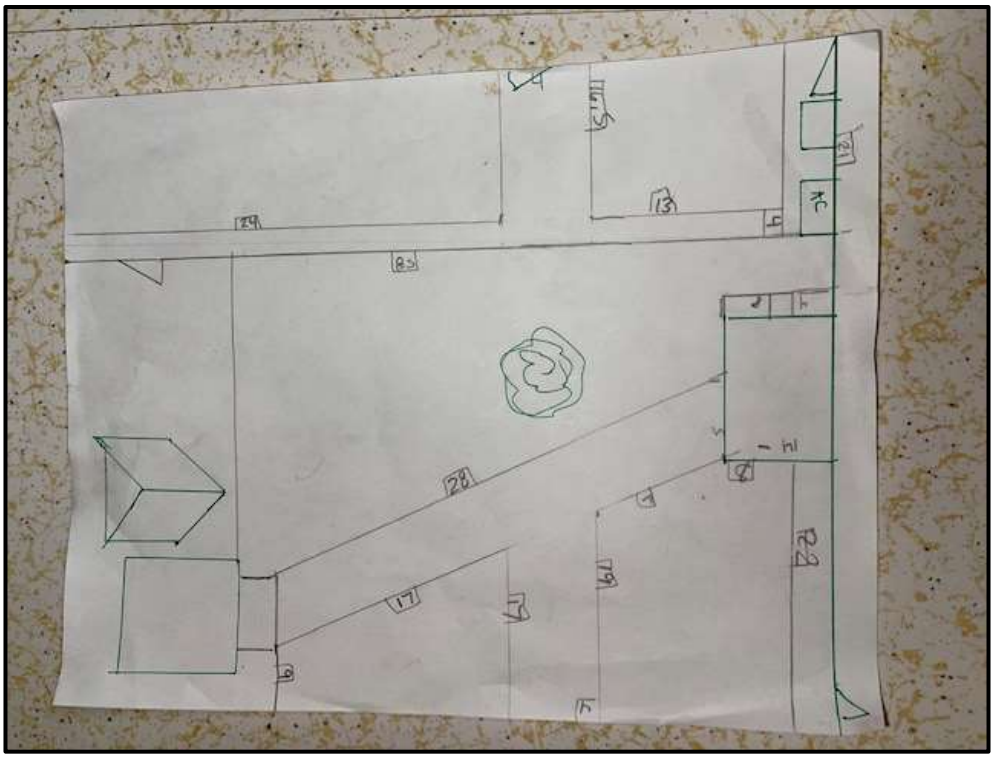

Figure 28. Sketch of Plan–Reimagining el Jardín in its New Location.

Once we had a visual, it was time to replace the string with 75 landscape timbers and cover the yard with weed barrier fabric. In my experience, weed barrier fabric is not something you ever want to save or skimp on. I purchased the best fabric money could buy with the highest density to prevent weeds for years to come; even then, this does not guarantee a weed-free yard. Thereafter, I ordered 13 yards of mulch and 8 yards of crushed granite stone. Curious neighbors' window shades and blinds began to peep open. One at a time, neighbors walked over to see about all the commotion. Shovels, wheelbarrows, and friends showed up to help. In the weeks following, eight 4x4 and four 8x4 raised garden bed boxes were made from wood and corrugated metal. At this point, I had exhausted my savings for this project and was getting worried that I would not be able to complete the project in time for my first *plática*. However, I did not have to worry for long, because the help kept coming. Generous neighbors, friends, and family donated

time and materials and lent a hand, often bringing food and drinks to share. Laughter and music filled the air as *el jardín* was in the process of becoming. My heart was full and the CLE seed of power in place and wisdom in people was coming to life (M. Guajardo et al., 2016).

M. Guajardo et al. (2016) stated our communities and the people and families within them are abundant in strengths, assets, and solutions. I could not have created *el jardín* without the strengths and assets of family, friends, and neighbors. The Bible tells us that "Two are better than one, because they have a good reward for their toil. For if they fall, one will lift up his *(her)* fellow" (KJV Ecclesiastes 4:9-12). The small community that came together to help create *el jardín* modeled "graciousness which should be a prerequisite for human interactions in any walk of life" (M. Guajardo et al., 2016, p. 132). From my learning in this research, it should be a prerequisite for all research—the challenge is if we cannot imagine it, we cannot do it. Figures 29–37 are photos of a gracious community working together to make dreams come true. These new dreams are not just for the completion of a research project, they are the articulation, vetting planning, and applying a different way of living for an emerging researcher and scholar (M. Guajardo et al., 2016). This work has become my life! ¡Mi nuevo *conocimiento*!

Figure 29. Laying the Thick Barrier Fabric to Prevent Weeds From Suffocating Plants.

Figure 30. Laying the Landscape Timbers to Secure Weed Barrier Fabric and Create Boundaries.

Figure 31. Prepared Grounds Ready for Next Step.

Figure 32. My Son, Robbie, Sealing Landscape Timbers to Prevent Warping and Protect the Wood.

Figure 33. Raised Garden Beds Being Constructed–"Measure Twice, Cut Once."

Figure 34. Raised Garden Beds Being Constructed.

Figure 35. Neighbors and Friends Lending a Hand and Tools to Move Mulch.

Figure 36. Me, Moving Mulch to Cover Weed Barrier.

Figure 37. Completed Grounds and Beds Ready for Soil and Amendments.

Valores de el Jardín

Just as CLEs are built on axioms and values, so too is *el jardín* to create fertile grounds for optimal growth. Locating good organic or chemical-free soil from a reputable and reliable vendor is difficult. Typically, landscape companies deliver tainted soil that has been treated with chemicals or that contains unexpected and unwanted seeds and weeds. This could be due to the proximity of soil to other mediums on their lot or property or due to a compromised excavation site. To create the optimal fertile grounds and outcome for gardens, one must make and amend their own soil to ensure there are no toxicities that will interfere with the integrity of the harvest. This time-consuming process can keep one busy for weeks or even months when done properly. Adding nutrients, minerals, microbes, various types of manure, nitrogen, composting, and using cover crops to produce rich humus makes for fertile ground and provides the best possible outcome for seeds prior to planting. This is an arduous task and it can take several seasons to get

the right conditions and yield optimal soil for a productive and successful harvest. This space required a large amount of compost. Fortunately, there is a local family-owned organic juicing bar within walking distance of my home. After speaking to the owner, she was happy to donate all the pulp from fruits and vegetables for composting and chicken food. Additionally, I wanted to use alternative planting methods such as grow pots and straw bales so the plants and seedlings would have the best chance of success; different plants have different needs. What may be optimal conditions for one plant may not be for another.

In addition to good fertile soil, all plants need moisture or water. Yvette viewed dozens of YouTube videos explaining how to install a drip system (see Figures 38–39). She donated all supplies and proactively placed the irrigation system on an automatic timer so the garden would be taken care of in my absence. Additionally, Yvette and I preemptively began constructing hoop houses out of PVC that would be covered with thick plastic to protect seedlings from the harsh winter ahead. Figures 40–43 show irrigation system and protection hoop houses being constructed.

Figure 38. Yvette Putting in a Drip Irrigation System.

Figure 39. Irrigation System. Strategically Placed to Feed Each Individual Plant.

Figure 40. Constructing Hoop Houses. These Protect Seedlings and Transplants From Harsh Elements.

Figure 41. Hoop Houses Taking Shape.

Figure 42. Hoop Houses Covered With Plastic. This Allows for Needed Sunlight to Enter, While Protecting Plants From the Harsh Winter Temperatures.

Figure 43. Seedlings and Tender Delicate Plants. Jardineros Protected Seedlings and Carefully Attended to Them in the Greenhouse Until Strong Enough to Withstand Weather Conditions.

Reflection–Place Matters

Just like a gardener uses their imagination in sharpening their craft—planning the garden, using the right elements, and building the appropriate structure for protecting the plants during difficult times—so does the teacher in creating a setting in their classroom. This is a necessary gracious space for developing lesson plans to facilitate learning and nurture growth and change in the minds of students, classrooms, and communities. Unlike my old classrooms, the lessons and material in *el jardín* are organic and protected from a contaminated pedagogy, materials, and artificial tools. The CLE has given me a guide and language to make story. We have built something based on our knowledge and love. We invite others to learn in public and witness the development and growth of ideas, people, and products in an organic way. The pedagogy is not about judging, testing, or producing unrelated or unaligned facts. Rather, it is about building an organic and fortifying process to grow ourselves and the people/community we live in; we share

this space with them. This is a radical pedagogy and one we built together for a much more sustainable future.

Preparing for Our First CLE–Purposeful Planning and Planning

While Yvette was figuring out the ins and outs of irrigation, I began planning what plants would go in raised beds, fabric grow pots, and straw bales. I purchased only organic and heirloom seeds, avoiding any harmful genetic modifications or alterations. It was important to me that I minimize any toxicities, chemicals, and conventional pesticides and herbicides as these toxins are known to be harmful. This food would feed my family, children, friends, and neighbors. It needed to be nourishing to strengthen and feed growing healthy bodies, minds, and souls. Seedlings started out in the greenhouse, a thick plastic barrier that would protect them from harsh elements, cold weather, and brutal heat. This would give seedlings their best chance to germinate and sprout. Once seedlings were strong enough, they were transferred to a location that would be best suited for them to thrive. For example, squash do exceptionally well in straw bales, whereas radishes, onions, and carrots do best in the ground. Potatoes and blueberries love grow pots and tomatoes tend to flourish in raised beds. In the past, I have experimentally planted seeds or plants in different areas that I knew were not being served in a way that was conducive to their needs. This proved to me time and time again, that without the proper conditions, these plants would have stunted growth, withered leaves, and increased problems with pests and disease, and would produce little to no food.

As a teacher and emerging scholar, I often wonder if this is the case when we construct contaminated classrooms, schools, and learning environments. In fact, some of our learning conditions are so incongruent with learning that they are toxic. We witnessed

the world of conditions in Uvalde, Texas, this spring semester of 2022. When we are not vigilant of the toxics in our community/garden, they will kill our seedlings. I could begin sharing stories of this but will not digress and have committed to staying focused on my research and research questions and process for data collection. Figures 44–50 are a visual sample of the construction of a community of learners, strategies, and protocols for the nurturing and budling of *el jardín*.

Figure 44. Checking Expiration Dates on Seeds, Choosing Organic Heirloom Seeds.

Figure 45. Seed Planting. Planting Seeds Rather Than Buying Plants Saves Money and Allows One to Share With Others.

Figure 46. Sprouted Spinach. Spinach Will go in Ground in About 3–4 Weeks.

Figure 47. Raised Bed Gardening–Chickens Eating Pests and Fertilizing Garden. Pictured Here, Henrietta and Twin Sisters, Mancha and Pinta.

Figure 48. Straw Bale Gardening–Squash and Cucumbers Thrive in Straw Bales. Pictured Here, Henrietta Controlling Pests (Grubs and Snails) Organically!

Figure 49. In Ground Gardening–Perennial Plants, Such as Cooking and Medicinal Herbs, Come Back Year After Year. Planted Near Coop so Chickens can Snack on Them as They Grow.

Figure 50. Grow Pots Gardening. Four Types of Potatoes Planted–These Grow Pots Have Flaps so You Can See the Growth Underneath Without Disturbing the Soil or Potatoes.

One might wonder or question why there is so much thought and effort put into planting a tiny seed. The difference can mean a bounty that can feed a family and community or a struggling plant that produces little to nothing. Keep in mind that when a plant produces fruit/vegetables, its offspring or seeds become acclimated to the soil and climate. Season after season, plants grow, produce offspring, die, and decay. The plant's decomposition enriches the ground, improving the soil. Seeds are more resilient and stronger than their predecessors because they have adapted and carry the knowledge of their parent plant. The parent plant's genetic make-up and biology inform and influence future offspring. Thus, plants in fertile healthy grounds produce healthier seeds that, in turn, produce healthier sustainable harvests; larger and healthier harvests feed larger families and communities. Figure 51 shows Ryan-Olivia pulling carrots from *el jardín* to share with neighbors.

Figure 51. Ryan-Olivia Pulling Carrots. Future Generations of Healthy Sustainable Families and Communities.

Cultivating el Jardín as a CLE and Way of Life

The cyclical process of plant life embraces and mirrors the cyclical nature of a successful CLE as "a way of life" (M. Guajardo et al., 2016, p. 23). The core values of a CLE are always at work—healthy relationships beget trusting relationships, trusting relationships beget knowledge, knowledge begets border crossing, border crossing begets transformation, hope, and change (M. Guajardo et al., 2016). Therefore, we do this work. We want our children and our future generations to be informed with the knowledge they need to produce healthier, more sustainable families and communities. It is within our stories that we begin to map our gifts. According to M. Guajardo et al. (2016), "Mapping includes ideological, relational, and geographical skills, riches, wishes, and assets" (p.

27). By mapping, co-researchers can identify, name, and construct these assets to view themselves and their community through an assets-based lens (M. Guajardo et al., 2016).

Reflection

Hosting and convening a CLE requires understanding social, technical, and political ways of knowing. Social awareness, the necessary relationship with the community, and extending an authentic invitation are critical to obtaining participants' commitment; the ability to provide deep hospitality will ensure radical engagement will guide the dynamic-critical pedagogy that emerges at a CLE. The technical knowledge to organize and coherent half-day, full-day, or multiple-day convening is necessary to help participants understand what they are committing to and the learning they are creating together. As an organic farmer, my work aligns with this rhythm in setting the context, tilling the soil, organizing the planting of seeds in their appropriate groups, and nurturing the growth and harvest as they cross-pollinate and support each other's development and nurture the health of the ecology. This research in action is the work that feeds the minds, the bodies, and the necessary learning communities in which we want to raise our children.

¡Bienvenidos! CLE #1

In past CLEs, Dr. Guajardo would often encourage providing food, music, and time to visit and engage in talk prior to discussing topics at hand. This relationship building is a necessary component to CLEs prior to getting into the beautiful messiness of the communal experience and *platícas* (M. Guajardo et al., 2016). The hens gifted us eggs for deviled eggs topped with fresh garden dill. Fresh bread was baked the night before to make sandwiches. The breaking of bread and food made for an inviting and

welcoming space and gave us a chance to take a breath and relish in the bounty the earth had provided for us (see Figures 52–55).

Figure 52. Preparing Food for CLE #1. Fresh Chicken Eggs From Hens That Sleep in el Jardín Accompanied by Fresh Garden Dill.

Figure 53. Fresh Sourdough Bread. Trying Out Different Scoring Patterns. Not One Loaf is the Same as the Other.

Figure 54. Jalapeño Sourdough Bread. Simple Scoring on Top.

Figure 55. Fresh Baked Bread for CLE #1. Warm, Fresh, Out of Oven Sourdough Topped With Preserved Peaches From Original el Jardín.

Climate, Context, and Fertile Grounds–Stories of Self That Shape the Latina Identity

Just as fertile grounds are necessary for thriving plants, so too are the climate and conditions necessary for our children and communities to flourish and become sustainable. Messages and experiences from home (axioms, *cariños*, *regaños*, *consejos*), schools (teachers, administration, climate, environment), organizations, and our communities all inform our identity, the choices we make, and the paths we take. This is also the case for choices that are designed for us in traditional educational settings with all good intentions, yet full of toxins built with the hands of dominant powers and dogmas.

Anzaldúa (2015) stated Latinas' transformations occur in an in-between space. *No somos de aqui, ni de allá*. This space is precarious, unstable, and unpredictable. It lives in a constant state of displacement. Latinas live in this alarming and uncomfortable feeling so much that it becomes home (Anzaldúa, 2015).

"You're Not Brown!"–Cameron's Story

> I mean, I can remember vividly feeling alien-like and not belonging and I can trace it back to a specific memory. Actually, it was you, Mom [Renée] that taught me my first lesson about colorism. I was running after a little girl, chasing her. She was a White little girl, and she wouldn't play with me. She told me she couldn't play with me because I was brown. Later that day, you picked me up from school and asked why I was sad. I explained and you flipped your head around from the driver's seat and looked back at me with an emphatic, "You're not brown, you're caramel!" You sounded upset, like "how dare you think you're brown?" I had this overwhelming sense of relief, and that is where my colorism began. The next day you gave me this book and read it to me. It talked about different shades of people: chocolate, honey, caramel . . . I don't know they were all like sweet flavors or food. I felt being brown was bad and being caramel was somewhere in-between White and being bad and brown. So, I basically wasn't good enough. After that, I always felt ugly because I was brown. I equated beauty with White blondes with light eyes. Boys would always like the blonde girls before me, so I was always secondary. I pretty much just cut myself out of the

> odds. My feelings of inadequacy and not belonging continued through high school and college. In high school a teacher called me black mouth instead of my last name [Bocanegra] and kids would say I smelled Mexican or spicy. At Baylor, I dated guys who only liked dating "exotic" girls and they would tell me I was "exotic" looking and that they have never dated a brown girl. I was some token or right of passage or some shit. It's hard to own my culture. I'm not White, I'm not Mexican. I can't own it. I can't own being brown. I don't have a language, artifact, or proof. You're different, you're a White Mexican Mom. You can pass under the right circumstances, and you can come out and be Hispanic when you want to. It's a privilege and people like you more. I don't have that option. It's just not an option for me and harder to fit in and belong.

Figure 56 shows Cameron in *el jardín*.

Figure 56. Cameron, Named After her Father's Best Friend Embracing our Hen, Eloida, Named After her Grandfather, Eloy.

Wars arise when we attempt to define ourselves and our territories when up against those who are also determining themselves and their territories but with opposing and different ideas. We are fearful and ignorant of others who are different; this fear and ignorance produce conflict (Anzaldúa, 2015). These wars brew within us thrashing about and wounding our body, mind, soul, and spirit. Our internal wars eventually seep out of our skin and become wars with others (Anzaldúa, 2015). We are made of billions of bits of cultural knowledge that superimpose many different categories of experience. We are "marked" with life's scars, internal wars, and experiences that are woven into our

identities (p. 69). Cameron's sense of not belonging and feelings of not being good enough are traumatic and painful experiences and part of a process that leads us to reflect, heal, and transcend the oppression Latinas encounter. When Cameron said that my reaction and behavior to this experience was her first lesson in "colorism" and left a *scar* on her, my heart sank. In retrospect, I see my error. At the time, I too was struggling with feelings of inadequacy, imposter syndrome, and secretly wishing I was White. As the sun shined on her beautiful brown skin through the branches of the pecan tree we sat under, I had no words. I was ashamed. I wished I could go back armed with the knowledge and perspective I now carry. My mother's messages of protecting her fair skin from the sun to avoid looking like *una prieta*, *morena*, or *negra* was learned from her mother and Cameron heard these same messages.

Cameron was struggling with feeling like an outsider and battling with the need to be one or *the other*. Anzaldúa (2015) stated "we don't fit the norm . . . we are caught between cultures and can simultaneously be insiders, outsiders, and other siders" (p. 71). She further stated that people who feel pressured to pick a side live in borders that hinder their ability to extend beyond the self. Those who refuse to pick a side and identify exclusively with one group disturb the dominant culture and discourse of race (Anzaldúa, 2015). When we trouble the norm, we create cracks. We are like plants pushing up against the cement of the dominant discourse; we crack the slab, eventually overturning it. When we are forced to deal with interracial conflicts and negotiate social constructs and positions in the cracks, we access abilities and experiences that have the ability to "catapult us into creating innovative, inclusive identities" (Anzaldúa, 2015, p. 73). Below

I make a connection between Cameron's struggle to pick a side and a pea plant that has embraced her otherness (see Figure 57).

> There is a pea plant in my garden. She is not where she's supposed to be. I mean, I planned, I sketched it all out. She was supposed to be where all the others were; in the box built for her. The box is beautiful, shiny, and painted; it looks like all the others- uniform, perfect, well-manicured. I don't remember her leaving. I can't say I remember her at all. I placed down a thick weed barrier and covered it in heavy stone. She must have found a crack, a tiny hole. No intentional watering, no attention. Yet, there she is- tall, full of snow peas, basking in the sunlight. I think I'll eat snow peas tonight! (Bocanegra, personal journal, 2022)

Figure 57. Pea Plant.

Above, I mentioned that "I wished I could go back armed with the knowledge and perspective I now carry." I felt regretful about how I handled Cameron's experience as a child and the message she received from my actions and behavior. M. Guajardo et al. (2016) stated one experiences moments of epiphanies and tensions within the ecologies of knowing; additionally, within the CLE we make meaning before, during, and after (M. Guajardo et al., 2016). During the CLE as I was listening to Cameron speak, I caught myself feeling defensive and quickly going back to that moment in time to find some

ammunition with which to defend myself. I was in search of armor to fend off these daggers of truth being propelled at me. I was entangled in trying to defend my shame instead of being engaged and present. I had to remind myself that Cameron's words were not saying, "you're a bad mom." Rather, Cameron was giving me a gift. How could I reflect on this valuable knowledge to inform my actions and my relationship with Cameron and others in the future? The ecologies of knowing inform us that we can negotiate the self, organization, and community in seamless ways if we know and understand the relationships of each other's stories (M. Guajardo et al., 2016, p. 29).

"Being a Good Mexican"–Margie's Story

> I guess my beliefs, the majority of my beliefs and morals were instilled by my parents from religion to being strong to really everything. Things were expected. There were no computers then. There was nothing that Mom and Dad could use to keep track of how I was doing in school. It was just expected. We were focused on being a good person. You know, educación—your character, working hard, ethics. That kind of thing. Morals and ethics and being a good Mexican.

Years of research have revealed criticisms of the ethnocentricity of educational research pertaining to Latino/a communities, yet the deficit discourse continues to influence how teachers and administrators view and engage with Latino/a students and families (Ceballo, 2004). Not much consideration is given to the moral development or *educación* that Latino/a families practice and model in their homes that complement the formal education at school (Espino, 2016; Valdes, 1996; Valenzuela, 1999). Educación is defined as an inculcation of respect, ethics, morals, and social, and personal responsibility that serve as a foundation for all other learning (Delgado Bernal et al., 2006; Espino, 2016; Valdes, 1996; Valenzuela, 1999). The Spanish word *educación* is different from the English term *education*. Educación, unlike its English translation counterpart, is a cultural construct that provides instruction on how one should live in the world and has

emphasis on responsibility, sociality, and respect. It provides a benchmark for how Latinos/as are to be viewed and judged, formally educated or not (Valenzuela, 1999).

Margie said her mother, Margo, was

> not always involved with school because she was always working two jobs; she didn't have time for that. But if there was a problem, or behavioral issue my mom was on it. She would take care of it. It was always about respect.

Latino families do not always demonstrate parental involvement in school in normative ways. However, both *educación* and education are priorities and at the forefront of Latinos'/as' family values (Auerbach, 2006; Quiñones & Marquez Kiyama, 2014; Valdes, 1996; Valenzuela, 1999). Educación incorporates the values of *respeto* and personal development for others as part of what it means to be educated. The cultural schema of educación has a powerful impact on how Latinos'/as' families participate in their children's education. Parents often offer moral support or support education in the home by emphasizing moral development and encouraging their children to respect their teacher and behave well at school (educación).

Margie explained how educación informed her ways of knowing and being by sharing her story of how her mother never did her work for her or gave her the answers:

> She gave me guidance, but she did not do it for me. I cried and cried, and I begged her to help me. I was crying as I was thumbing through encyclopedias, but she refused to help saying, "You're going to thank me later, you need to do the work. You need to learn how to be responsible and honest. If I, do it for you that's not right." I ended up getting a grade of a 100 on that paper and let me tell you, 45 years later I can still tell you everything about that president and I still feel good about it [laughter]! Mom even has a picture of me jumping up and down. She was right, it was a good lesson, and I am thankful now that she instilled those lessons of honesty, work ethic, and integrity. They don't teach you that in school.

As Margie told this story, you could see her mother, Margo, smiling in an affirming way. I can only assume Margo was thinking to herself, "Good job, Mom." In this story, Margo teaches Margie about responsibility and work ethic. M. Guajardo et al. (2016) stated that

“as parents we protect our children, first and foremost and when appropriate, we also use life as pedagogy for our children’s development; we work to find those opportunities as often as possible” (p. 46). Margo’s level of awareness informed the way she parented and used Margie’s struggle as a pedagogical tool for Margie’s development. The life as pedagogy message informed Margie that “with hard work comes great reward.” This contributed to Margie’s academic, intellectual, and social development. Additionally, Margo’s resistance to give Margie the answers informed Margie that she needed to assert herself as intelligent and capable (Yosso, 2006). Figure 58 is a picture of Margie joyfully celebrating the 100% grade she received on her report about Mohamad Anwar Sādāt, former president of Egypt.

Figure 58. Margie Celebrating her Accomplishments After Receiving an A on her Report.

“You’re Gonna Have to Work Harder”–Margie’s Story

During the 19th century, racial and ethnic inequalities and differences were attributed directly to biology—human beings were divided into biologically distinct and unequal races, with the “white dominant culture hierarchy with the right and duty to dominate the others” (Isasi-Diaz, 2004, p. 35). These racist theories are still being

practiced today to justify economic, social, and political practices. The classification of people according to race or ethnicity is based on physical features, distinct languages, cultures, and social institutions. Isasi-Diaz (2004) stated this type of oppression that Latinas face every day does not define us, rather it informs us, suggesting that "what is central to our self-understanding is not our suffering oppression, but rather our struggle to overcome that oppression" (p. 39). Below, Margie describes her experience with racism in school:

> You can't help but notice it. Kids can't help but notice the treatment that you get in school. I was in Catholic school, and everyone is dressed identically to everybody else, but the little kid that has blonde hair, or blue eyes, or even brown hair with light skin and light eyes, whatever the combination, they were treated differently. It was like, we are all wearing the same thing, but being treated differently based on our color. It was alienating. I just never fit it. It made me want to be White. It wasn't something I yearned for, I just a thought about it. I didn't hate myself. I wasn't ashamed, I just knew they were being treated differently. So, you work harder. At the time I didn't have a language for what to call it. Now, I know it was racism, but then you just notice it's different. My parents warned this would happen. They experienced it all their lives. Mom would say, "You're gonna have to work harder than the little blonde kid or White kid in the classroom." So they prepared my brother and I like that, by telling us to work harder than the White or light kids. I have realized that I've told my kids the same thing. You know Nicholas is dark complected like me, so I told him you have to work harder than White kids, but my daughters are completely different because they look so White.

Delgado Bernal et al. (2006) posited that "We are like the earth. When we pollute our roots with unrequited dreams of being something we are not, we dis-member the spirit, mind, and body. The wholeness of life is severed" (p. 22). Beyond the indoctrination of culture and values, Delgado Bernal et al. argued that the *consejos* we receive and witnessing our mothers' resilience in the face of adversity teaches us to embody *mujerista* pedagogies that involve the interrogation and critique of social constructs and the dominant power while offering hope and agency merited by the wisdom gained from their lived life experiences. Margo's words, "you have to work

harder that the little blonde kid or White kid in the classroom," were an explicit message that informed Margie of how to act and behave. Delgado Bernal et al. stated these *mujerista* pedagogies from our mothers come in various forms verbally and nonverbally such as teaching by doing, their emotional strengths, their sadness, joys, and their mystery. Additionally, this *conocimiento* helps us to confront the psychological and physiological effects of racism on our bodies, minds, and spirits. CLEs develop this *conocimiento* to facilitate our meaning making and to gain empowerment and social advocacy (Delgado Bernal et al., 2006, p. 43; M. Guajardo et al., 2016) that helps us to make meaning and find healing from race-based traumas and microaggressions (Anzaldúa, 2002; M. Guajardo et al., 2016).

Margie explained that her experience of being alienated and experiencing inequities in school may be why she informed her son to marry a "Mexican girl." Additionally, she expressed she wanted to

> hold on to my culture because it's been so watered down and White-washed . . . I tell Nicholas to marry a nice Mexican girl and if he sees a girl in class and she's got curly hair and glasses . . . of course, I'm describing myself [laughter]. You know, to reach out to her and talk to her. Talk to the kids that nobody is talking to.

I shared that unlike Margie's words to her son, Mom pushed dating and marrying White men only, stating that "Mexicans are all cheaters" or frowning her face and being agitated when I would date Latinos, giving them little to no attention. If I brought a White boy home, she would go out of her way to talk to him, be affectionate to him, and offer food and drink. I suppose the apple did not fall far from the tree as my daughter, Cameron, shared the following in our *plática* about her upbringing and the messages she received in our home:

> I remember growing up in our household and Devon [older sister] was just starting to date guys. I heard stuff just as an observer, but I was listening to the

> messages like when Dad would say, "I hope he's not Black" or your first question would be "Is he White or Mexican?" I just kind of learned through listening and didn't even entertain or go through the trouble of dating a Black guy because I knew better than to bring him home, especially from Dad. I knew I could date and do whoever, but I knew if I dated a White boy, then that was something that could take me further in life. I guess that's why I settled on a rich, White guy [laughter]. I remember Wela [abuela] saying Mexicans were cheaters and stuff. She always pushed that I date White boys too.

My father shared the same opinion my husband did, telling us to "never bring a Black man home." Dad did not give me explicit messages about dating Latino men, but I do remember he would boast about my sister's White husband's job and success and rarely gave any accolades to my husband, who was the chief firefighter in our hometown. This may have been due to my father's experiences with racism in the workplace. My father had countless stories about oppression, microaggressions, and flat-out explicit racism as a Latino foreman leading a crew of over 100 predominantly White American men on an offshore oil rig in Scotland. He would often share with us, "They would laugh, call me wetback, dirty Mexican, avoid me in the halls, leave notes, play ugly pranks, and turn their back on me when I would talk to them." Dad would often follow with a gracious and forgiving excuse for this oppressive behavior, "*Pero Mijita*, they didn't know. They didn't know better." Dad, like Margo, told us we needed to prove ourselves by working harder, "*Es que*, we have to work harder and prove ourselves to them."

"Sometimes It's Your Own People"–Margo's Story

Margo shared that oppression and racism are "not always one culture or race against the other. Sometimes it's your own people." Margo gave the following example of this:

> It's sad because you get it [oppression] from not just one side but both sides. I got it my whole lifetime. I still get it today at my age. You know people are astounded because I can't speak Spanish. My in-laws who speak Spanish think I do it on purpose and that I'm lying about not being able to speak Spanish. You can

> imagine being brown and people just start talking to you in Spanish and then get upset when you don't speak it. I was getting it from both ends and you know when water drops on a rock long enough, it makes a hole. And so, it really impacts you when you're raised your whole life like that. It makes you feel inadequate. Here you're brown and you already feel inadequate and now your own people make you feel inadequate. So, now you feel worse.

The guiding axioms of the CLE indicate conversation and dialogue are critical for pedagogy and relationship building to take place. CLEs have the ability to bridge gender, race, and age differences when co-researchers are able to share and identify collective struggles. Below, Cameron, who is 56 years younger than Margo, shared a similar experience:

> Yeah, I totally get that. I wish I knew Spanish. Mom speaks it to Wela [abuela] and Devon my older sister speaks it and understands it because Wela lived with us when she was little, but I missed out on learning it. Mom would try to speak Spanish to me for a few days and then just revert back to English because I would just stare at her and so she would get frustrated and just tell me in English. People automatically expect me to speak Spanish and then seem disappointed if I don't. Baylor University is primarily White Christian and affluent. It's like 60% White but my education classes consisted of 90% White sorority girls and there were some Black girls and Asian girls, but most of the time I was the only Hispanic in class. You would think that an education professor who's speaking on inclusion and cultural awareness would not expect me to be the spokesperson for every Hispanic or Latino, but when they would talk about diversity, race, or issues in predominantly low socioeconomic schools they would look at me for answers or if there was a Spanish word, they would look to me. I would sit there in silence and think to myself, "Ummmm, yeah, wrong girl, I don't know Spanish and I'm here to learn too." The professor would raise an eyebrow like "speak up," and sometimes I'd fake it and answer because I felt the pressure to pretend to know shit about Mexico or nodding my head in agreement to reinforce whatever she was saying while looking at me for affirmation, but really, I was clueless. I was this fake imposter. A fake Mexican Latina. How can I be Mexican or Latina and not know my culture or speak my language? I don't know. It's frustrating and confusing, like you're not a complete or whole Mexican or something.

The *testimonios* provided by Cameron and Margo exemplify the dissonance Latinas experience within our families and schools. This dissonance is a part of a much larger racist nativism we experience in our daily lives (Delgado Bernal et al., 2006). Castillo (1995) would suggest that Cameron's and Margo's feelings of not feeling

complete or *whole* may be due to the traumas and fractures experienced by a monolingual English-speaking Latina. This is because

> English is the only acceptable language in society, but Spanish was the language of her childhood, family, and community . . . By the same token, women may also become self-conscious in later years if they have no or little facility in Spanish. (p. 39)

However, Anzaldúa (1987) indicated that a monolingual Latina whose first language is English is just as much a Latina as someone who speaks Spanish.

When Margo said the words, "when water drops on a rock long enough, it makes a hole," she paused, and for a moment she became visibly tense as her voice increased in volume. This simple analogy was powerful. When listening to Margo's stories of advocacy and political action, one could use the phrase "she's a rock" to describe her, meaning tough, unbreakable, resilient, and unstoppable. Rocks are hard, solid, and rough; they are used to make weapons, walls, and damns. A mountain is simply a large rock. Yet, a drop of water can erode and break rocks down over time. This constant struggling and standing at the crossroads balancing different cultures can exhaust and isolate Latinas.

Anzaldúa (1987) said that because we internalize how our language has been used against us by the dominant culture, we use our language differences against each other. Where once language united us, we are using it to make our own *the others*, making them feel like inadequate outsiders. There is no doubt that language is an important part of our culture and how one identifies themselves, but many Latinos/as tend to conflate Spanish and the performance of Spanish with the Latino/a identity, though this is only one icon of the many aspects of the Latino/a culture (Menken & García, 2010). The expectation to speak Spanish usually comes from a lack of awareness about the language discrimination

faced by Latinos/as in the United States. If we are simply using the Spanish language as an identifier, what happens to the other things? Let us not forget that there is a history in the United States of systematic pressure to abandon and strip us from our language.

All co-researchers agreed that their parents and grandparents faced discrimination and corporal punishment in school for speaking their native tongue. To protect their children and avoid further punishment, many parents and grandparents let the language fade and die with them. It is better to think of our identity in terms of conditions and our long history of colonization and how we have been racialized and excluded. These are some of the elements that allow us to identify ourselves as Latinos/as. It is a shared experience of having been subjected to imperialism. Language carries different meanings and people manipulate the language and its context. Just as in Margo's dissonance with her in-laws and Cameron's experience with her classmates and professor, the Spanish language is often used as a litmus test of proof that someone is Latino/a. Rather, we should be thinking of language in relation to the culture and the different experiences of those who speak it (or do not). As the Latino/a population increases and new generations become more established in the United States, language roles will change, some will be spoken, some will be remembered. Regardless, it is not necessary to speak Spanish to identify as a Latino/a, but for many it holds significant value in the way in which we identify ourselves.

Wrapping up Our First CLE

After our *plática*, the co-researchers were given an in-depth tour of *el jardín* and I shared information about what grounds or mediums best suit a seedling for successful growth. The co-researchers chose seeds and the location and went to work. Music filled

the air, and my younger children wanted to see what all the commotion was about. Soon, they joined in and were helping plant and getting a sense of what can be accomplished when people with similar goals aspirations work together. Figures 59–67 show co-researchers and witnesses in *el jardín* during our first CLE.

Figure 59. CLE Planting Seeds. Cinder Blocks That Lined the Pathway Were Used to Plant Lettuce, Spinach, Kale, and Flowers.

Figure 60. Margo and Margie Work Together to Plant Salad Greens in Cinder Blocks.

Figure 61. Co-Researchers Choosing Locations That are Best Conducive to the Success of Chosen Seeds

Figure 62. Yvette Checking on Chickens' Needs.

Figure 63. CLE Sharing our Stories.

Figure 64. Cameron Succession Planting in Raised Beds.

Figure 65. Comadre, Enjoying the Company of the CLE.

Figure 66. Platícas Continuing After we Convened. After Wrapping up the CLE, Margie's Dad Enjoyed Leftovers and Visited.

Figure 67. My Curious Children Dropping by to Show Their Support and Lend a Hand.

Recuerdos and Reflections as Regalos CLE #1

Before the co-researchers left, I wanted to give them the gift of a succulent plant. My mother-in-law would often say, "*un regalo, es un recuerdo*" [a gift is a

memento/memory]. I wanted them to remember our time together when tending to their plant. The co-researchers were able to pick succulents of their choosing; there was no limit. I had been growing succulents for this occasion and had an abundant selection (see Figure 68). Succulent plants are widely known as a symbol of tenacity, strength, and selfless love. I felt this to be only appropriate as these were qualities and gifts we shared with one another (M. Guajardo et al., 2016). Cacti, also categorized as succulents, are a symbol of maternal love because they can thrive in harsh conditions and are therefore symbolic of a mother's unconditional love. It was only befitting to have cacti as we all came together as mothers and daughters. Succulents are hard to kill; they can withstand long periods of time without water and adapt easily to their surroundings. Much like the CLE, succulents complement each other when in community or groups (M. Guajardo et al., 2016). I explained my reason for choosing succulents and the group agreed that they thought of themselves in many of the same ways. Additionally, each co-researcher loaded up with leftovers of food and were gifted one to two dozen fresh eggs from my hens. The eggs were a symbol of healing and rebirth.

Figure 68. Growing Succulents for CLE Gifts for First Plática.

When I was a child, my mother and grandmother would use an egg in conjunction with prayer to remove mental, emotional, physical, and spiritual imbalances or illnesses. Mom would begin at my forehead making the sign of the cross while praying and repeating words in Spanish. This cultural and spiritual act is thought to extract illness, *ojo*, or *susto*. The literal translation of *ojo* is *eye*, but in this case *ojo* was negative energy or bad luck. The egg acts like a magnet drawing out negative energy. Mom would always say, "*te voy curar de susto*" [I'm going to heal/cure you from fright/negative energy]. Anzaldúa (2015) described *susto* as a Mexican indigenous belief used to

> represent soul loss- individual/collective trauma, fragmentation, and other wounds caused by sexism, homophobia, racism, and other acts of violation . . . During or after the original trauma we lose part of our souls as an immediate strategy to minimize the pain. This keeps you from being with your whole soul. (p. 246)

Anzaldúa associated *susto* with the Coyolxauhqui imperative, Nepantla, and *desconocimientos*. Skeptics may think *curando con un huevo* to be some hoax or wacked out witchcraft, but I have been healed on numerous occasions. Maybe it was the prayer, maybe the egg, or perhaps a combination. The Bible says, "Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there I am in the midst of them" (King James, Matt. 18:19-20). As I have previously mentioned, my mother was not a physically affectionate woman nor did she say the words, "I love you." Mom did not hug or touch her daughters; this was something she saved for my brothers. As I think back to my childhood, I can remember my body riddled with fever, laying on the bed with nothing on but on but some cotton *pantaletas*. My mother would hunch over me rubbing *el huevo* from head to toe. With the exclusion of *los chichis y la conchita*, every inch of my body was touched while she made signs of small crosses and spoke to God. I remember thinking how wonderful it was to be touched by my mother. My miraculous healing may have been from God or the

connection with another human being or both (Anzaldúa, 2015; Delgado Bernal et al., 2006; M. Guajardo et al., 2016; Isasi-Díaz, 2004).

The CLE theory of change (RASPPA) allows me to reauthor and reimagine my stories and be open to alternate possibilities. As I reflect, I can now view my experiences of feeling unloved through an asset-based lens. My mother's performative act of healing and prayers willed out my fevers. However, through the CLE process, I can reauthor this as an act of love and affection. This metamorphosis and alternative view of thinking through the CLE process allows one to heal and pursue a more robust happier life. Figure 69 depicts a hatching chick, symbolism for rebirth.

Figure 69. Hatching Chick. Eggs Symbolize Rebirth. Here a Chick Hatches on Day 22–Sometimes Chicks can Hatch a Day Late or Early, Symbolizing That the "Rebirth" Takes Time.

Reflections CLE #1

Our first CLE ended beautifully. The co-researchers commented, "That was better than therapy" or "Wow, I didn't expect this to go this way at all, this was great." Cameron said,

> Mom, I really think this was therapeutic for me. I feel like I've worked through some issues I had with you. You know, like I perceived things one way, but once we talked, I saw it differently. I feel like I can move forward.

As the CLE came to an end for the day, it was evident that the emotions had taken their toll. I was aware of the physical and emotional exhaustion a CLE can bring about and knew it was time to close the circle. M. Guajardo et al. (2016) reminded us of the importance of closing a CLE circle even if we are running out of time. Reflections must be intentional and are critical to "understanding, listening, and learning" (p. 82). This time gives us the opportunity to unpack and clarify for understanding if needed. For our reflection, I chose to ask the group, "What moved you during our time together?" The common theme among the co-researchers was that we did not feel alone in our struggles. Collective celebrations and traumas are sacred experiences (Anzaldúa, 2015; Brown, 2019). These collective experiences of humanity build bridges and inform us of the multitude of possibilities of the human spirit (Anzaldúa, 2015; Brown, 2019; M. Guajardo et al., 2016). When we seek out moments of collective joy and pain, it becomes difficult to deny our human connection and what is true about the human spirit (Brown, 2019; M. Guajardo et al., 2016). Figures 70–72 show the co-researchers making their *recuerdos*.

Figure 70. Co-Researchers Choosing Which Succulent Represents Them.

Figure 71. Witnesses Choosing Succulent Plants.

Figure 72. Margie and Margo With Their Succulent Gifts. These Symbolize Resilience, Love, and Strength.

Summary Table for CLE #1

For quick reference, Table 4 is meant to display the dynamics at play and insights that emerged from CLE #1. The information is organized through the lens of the CLE theory of change (RASPPA) for each participant. The rows for *Politic* and *Action* were combined to showcase each participant's politic through their actions.

Table 4. Summary CLE #1.

	Cameron	Margie	Margo	Renée	Erin
Relationship	Daughter	Best friend of 15 years	Margie's mother	Self	Daughter of 25 years
Assets	Creativity, emotional intelligence	Hard worker	Steady as a rock	Knowledge of how to nurture and construct *el jardín*/a CLE	Insightful Familial and emotional intelligence
Stories	"You're Not Brown!" – Cameron's story of self and belonging	You're gonna have to work harder" – Margie's story of	"Sometimes It's Your Own People" – Margo's story of self	-My story of metamorphosis -Role within Cameron's story	"I needed to fail to be resilient"

		self and belonging	and belonging		
Place	-Central Texas -Baylor University -Nepantla space	Catholic school	-With family (in-laws) -Nepantla space	-Central Texas -old /new homes -*el Jardín* -space of transformation	Baylor University
Politic (in Action)	Had a challenging (but healing) conversation about her racial identity with her mom	Embraced her culture and encouraged her son to fall in love with a Latina	Navigated dissonance of identity due to family judgements	Organized a community of Latinas to nurture their individual/ collective development	Had a healing conversation with mom about her struggle with independence

Preparing for Our Second CLE

As I was preparing for our second *plática*, I could not help but feel the excitement. I called and texted the co-researchers and they too expressed their positive sentiments, including, “I’m excited, I’ve been counting down the days,” “Oh good! I’m in need of some therapy [laughter],” “Woo-hoo! Latina AF! What can I bring? Girl you know we Latinas like to eat!,” “I’m bringing tissues this time [laughter] and not wearing mascara. Last time I came home and slept for hours but I felt amazing afterwards. Like a weight had been lifted,” and “Good, I need some girl time.”

These sentiments all had a common theme—the co-researchers were yearning for community and belonging. They were longing for a safe environment to explore, imagine, and create alternate realities within the familiar (M. Guajardo et al., 2016, p. 25). M. Guajardo et al. (2016) suggested this helps us find our power and voice and own our own destinies as story makers. A quote by Louis Cozolino says “we are not survival of the fittest: we are the survival of the nurtured, and those who are nurtured best, survive

best." We all needed nurturing and to be in *conocimiento* with another to share knowledge, pool resources, meet each other, compare liberation struggles and social movements' histories, share how we confront institutional power, and process and heal wounds (Anzaldúa, 2015). We do this so we, Latinas, do not fall into "elite collective, isolated cells" that widen the gap of otherness (Anzaldúa, 2015, p. 91).

I wanted this CLE to continue to move us as individuals and as a community. I felt confident that these new healthy relationships would continue to flourish under the right conditions. I wanted *el jardín* to be an inviting gracious space for all who entered it. One of the many things I appreciated about my CLEs with Dr. Guajardo is that he did not shackle us or set boundaries. Although it was important to him and necessary for our *platícas* to have axioms (M. Guajardo et al., 2016) in place to *begin*, he made it known that *we* created the rhythm and could make decisions for what best suited us and what we were going through, putting the "power back into the hands of the people" (p. 25). The caveat was our choices had to be healthy and move us forward as both individuals *and* as a group. Putting power back into our hands allowed us to express ourselves and find healing in different ways—art, song, painting, drums, movement; the sky was the limit.

As a convener of this space, I wanted to make sure everyone was included in the decision-making process as we were working toward a collective destiny. Co-researchers were interested in the story of Coyolxauhqui and her transformation, so I proposed that we create our own Coyolxauhqui mosaic stone. Using our artistic gifts and imagination, we would make a stone from fragments and pieces of stained glass. After it was agreed upon, I quickly went to work to source supplies for the project (see Figure 73).

Figure 73. Me, Collecting Supplies for Plática CLE #2.

The Uninvited Guest

I now know I have a family of opossums living under my shed. They have been eating up all my eggs out of the coop. I knew something was up when I went from having 12 eggs a day to two! My good friend, Yvette, and I committed to sitting outside until we solved the mystery of these missing eggs. It took three nights of waiting outside for hours before we spotted a plump mother possum poking her head out from under the shed, followed by four hungry babies. The mother possum went to work digging a hole under the coop and wedging her fat belly while her four babies followed, learning by example. I thought I had taken every precaution to keep out unwanted guests. I fenced in the coop and installed an electric coop door that shuts at dusk. I ordered and sprayed coyote urine around the perimeter to deter critters from entering the enclosure. The chickens began to squawk, and you could hear the uneasiness in their sounds. Unfortunately, chickens are night-blind and lose their ability to see once the light level drops below a certain point. A chicken will sit still and let a rodent eat their toes off because they are unaware of what is

happening around them and are too frightened and traumatized to move. “Yvette!,” I scream-whispered. “There it is. Get it!” I ran toward the coop and shined a light in the possums’ eyes to blind them while Yvette went to work pulling opossums out of the coop (see Figure 74). We placed them in a box and immediately rehomed them in the middle of the night at the San Gabriel River. We chose this location knowing they would have plenty of fresh water and critters to munch on.

Figure 74. Yvette Catching Possums. Opossums Eat Hens’ Eggs.

About a week later, I was in *el jardín* enjoying a glass of wine by the fire, sitting back and reflecting on the progress in *el jardín* and within me. To my surprise, an opossum was taking an evening stroll down my garden path, heading toward the coop. I thought, *no way, not possible* until I Google searched *relocating opossums* only to find out that opossums are very territorial and will return again and again to reclaim their home. Additionally, I learned that an opossum must be relocated 25 miles or more to successfully rehome them and not worry about their return. Opossums have their gifts. They are naturally immune to rabies, love eating mosquitos, and control ticks. They

consume undesirable pests like snails and slugs that eat up my vegetables and rabid pests, cockroaches, rats, and mice. I tell the opossum story simply to explain that sometimes an uninvited guest can do more harm than good, depending on the context and space.

Sacred Space

When I arrived at the local stained-glass store to prepare for our second CLE, I was tended to immediately. It was 10:00 a.m., and they had just opened for business. I quickly took to rummaging through pieces of leftover glass from big projects they had been commissioned to do. Typically, people come in to get full sheets of glass for their projects, but I was rummaging through pieces or their trash. With my list in hand, I began to fill my basket: Glass cutters – check! Glass breakers – check! Glass cutter oil – check! Gloves, goggles – check, check!

As Susan, the owner, was curiously watching me gather supplies, she asked, "Okay, okay, what's up? I need to know what you're doing. What are you going to do with all those pieces?" I replied, "Do you really want to know? It's gonna take a while." Susan said, "I've got time!" I went on to explain the story of Coyolxauhqui and the theory of the Coyolxauhqui imperative. Both the owner and assistant were intrigued. When I finished explaining, Susan replied, "Ahhh, I have done something similar. I attended a Brené Brown training. It was 8 weeks long, and there were eight of us." I asked, "How did that work out for you?" It was apparent from Susan's facial expression that she was not prepared for my question. She replied, "It was okay. It was hard to be vulnerable." I thought to myself, *what could have been missing?* After 8 weeks of talking, Susan said it was just "ok" and "hard to be vulnerable." I had to dig more; now *I* was the curious one with questions. "Susan, I hope I'm not prying, but why was it 'just

okay?'" I asked. Susan took a breath, "I don't really know. We just weren't that close, maybe. I was there trying to work through being in an abusive relationship and dealing with issues of drug and alcohol abuse in my family." Susan then went into detail about these issues. As I listened, there was an obvious nervousness and tension in her voice. Her hands began to move more with emphatic gestures as she spoke. She grabbed her blushed face a few times, clutching both cheeks, shaking her head, and looking down and said, "Wow, I couldn't say those things to them. That's so weird." She was so interested in our work that she asked if she could come by our group to join in on the mosaics and talk. I graciously responded that I would "have to pass this time, but maybe on another occasion." As I reflected on my field notes, I realized that if I were to rewind the clock back 2 years, I would have quickly and without pause or hesitation said, "Yeah, join in! Everyone is welcome!" But I knew I had to be deliberate in our CLE process and hold true to the axioms we had decided to build upon. There was a time I never said "no" when I was trying to be everything to everyone. I have come to realize that we leave nothing for ourselves when we do that. I wanted to respect this space the co-researchers had created. We were all struggling with similar issues (M. Guajardo et al., 2016), and I had committed to them. I knew our group had work to be done, and inviting a new person, a White woman, was neither the right nor a collective decision. She had not done the work; she had not earned the privilege to be in this sacred space; she was exercising her White privilege to invite herself into a space we had created. M. Guajardo et al. (2016) stated engaging in community is a vital pathway of opportunity. The CLE theory of change uses RASPPA as a filter to take a deep look at our experiences within the self,

organizations, and community and share our collective gifts to better understand our collective challenges so we can co-construct solutions to those challenges.

When we act on these challenges together, it can lead to sustainable and empowered actions to change our current conditions and well-being for historically marginalized communities (M. Guajardo et al., 2016). In my field notes, I wrote about my interaction with Susan in the glass shop to help me reflect and better understand my hesitation to let Susan join our group. This example is the politic within RASPPA and a powerful act of resistance as we exercise our agency when necessary. Figures 75 and 76 depict my time at the glass shop.

Figure 75. Me Speaking to Susan at Stained Glass Shop.

Figure 76. Me, Searching Through Broken Glass in Back Storage Area of Shop.

Reflection–Not Yet, Susan

> I felt bad about not letting her come and guilty for a moment, but I knew we were still on the ground floor. She seemed so interested, so curious, she could smell what we were doing. "Here's a book of patterns . . . Here are the instructions . . . These are some we've done in the past; you may want to do them like this" she continued to offer "guidance." She didn't get it. We didn't need a pattern, more boundaries, or boxes. We had our own ideas and dreams! There was no room or space for the old—no room for the Susans of the world. (Bocanegra, 2022, field notes)
>
> There is no room for you; we are working on tilling up and unearthing traumas and creating new conditions. We need to find healing for and within ourselves from the dominant systemic structures and culture. You, Susan, represent these systems. If I let you in, it will be like throwing salt on our open gashes and wounds. The sting will affect us all. We cannot "help" you . . . and I use the term "help" loosely as help is not what any of us need. We must do the work to heal ourselves. When we are in a good place to share our newfound bodies, minds, and spirits with others, then you will be invited, but as a collective, we are not ready or willing to cross borders with you, Susan . . . not yet. (Bocanegra, 2022, journal entry)

¡Bienvenidos! CLE # 2

I awoke at 6:00 a.m. to prepare for our 9:00 a.m. CLE. I listened to mariachi music as I scrubbed, scoured, swept, and mopped. I was thankful my mother made us do chores and taught us how to keep a clean home. When my mother would tell me to clean my room, she did not mean just picking up and putting away. It was always a detailed and labored process followed by a thorough inspection—my mother would run her finger across the shelves and furniture to check for dust and pull out drawers to make sure everything was in its place and neatly folded, just the way she taught me. As a child, I would cringe at waking up on Saturday mornings because I knew that until my room and all my chores were done, I could not go out to play, run, create, and build. As I cleaned in preparation for our second CLE, I was grateful for my mother's teachings. She had the foresight and wisdom to know I would benefit from this necessary skill later in life.

I went outside to get eggs out of the coop (see Figure 77). Once again, the possums had claimed their territory under my shed and were sleeping and dreaming of what *el jardín* would feed them. The warm smells and memories of my mother and father in the kitchen filled the air—*café*, *chorizo*, *carne guisada*, *tocino*, and *barbacoa*. Once these were cooked, I placed them in warming dishes because serving food cold was never an option. I learned this lesson long ago. If Dad said, "come eat," you better make a beeline to the table washed up and ready for a blessing before he asked again or else *la faja* or *la chancla* would make their appearance. While warming tortillas and scrambling up eggs, I said a prayer and asked the Lord to bless the day and to guide our conversations toward healing and hope in our time together. Figures 77–-81 show the preparations for CLE #2.

Figure 77. Fresh Eggs Were Gathered to Make Scrambled Eggs for Our CLE Breakfast.

Figure 78. Cooking Chorizo in a 50-Year-Old Cast Iron Skillet I Inherited After my Father's Death.

Figure 79. Ryan-Olivia Got up Early to Help Prepare a Cake for the Plática.

Figure 80. Ryan-Olivia Learning by Doing.

Figure 81. Ryan-Olivia and Robbie Joining in on CLE Breakfast.

Planting and Nurturing–Stories of Resilience

No One is Born an Activista–Margo's Story

Delgado Bernal et al. (2006) stated "no one is born an *activista*" (p. 17), and Anzaldúa (2009) suggested a radical is born with the will for survival. As Margo shared her story, she said, "I think I was just born this way. I've been organizing people and political movements for as far back as I can remember. It was how I survived."

I tell Margo she is an anomaly. The synonyms for anomaly are oddity, rarity, and an exception. The definition of an anomaly is a deviation from the common rule; a thing that does not fit in; a strange condition. This description fits Margo, a veteran who served as a Navy officer. She has a master's degree in social work and served her community as

a licensed family and marriage counselor. Margo operated two businesses, attended law school, and was elected to office on the Temple Junior College Board (TJC); she achieved all these extraordinary accomplishments before 1979. Margo was one of only six Latinos/as out of 200 who graduated from her high school. She has vivid memories and experiences of inequitable treatment and of being the recipient of racism. She tells the story of Mr. Foust, her high school principal, "He told me that I was not college material and tried counseling me into a trade school," and Mrs. Ferrell, "who was just awful to me and mistreated me. She never liked me, and I was one of her best students." Margo shared that she had all White teachers throughout her schooling and was "thrilled" in 1974 while attaining her master's degree to see her first Latina teacher. When Margo was elected to serve on the TJC board, she spoke to Mr. Foust and Mrs. Ferrell, her former high school teachers who "had all this deficit thinking and racist views of *Mexicanos*" and were now teaching at TJC. "I don't know what was going on in their heads. Here I was essentially their boss now as a board member." Below is a script of a presentation that Margo shared with her co-researchers. This presentation occurred at TJC on April 3, 1979, with Mr. Foust and Mrs. Ferrell in attendance. Before this presentation, Margo was told to "not say anything that would upset the committee," which was primarily made up of White Eurocentric men.

> When I was asked to make this presentation, I was told to not make a presentation that would make your committee angry, upset, uncomfortable, or cause negative reactions. I also understand that the former chairman and present chairperson approached this minority coordinator, asking for a guarantee that we would not present any controversial or upsetting material. I am not here to upset anyone, but I am offended that this has historically been the case . . . minorities are still given mandates to behave ourselves and stay in our place. It is also an unrealistic expectation to think that any discussion involving racial matters will not make anyone uncomfortable. If you're uncomfortable or have a reaction, I think that is good, because that is the only way anyone affects change or learns. We have a

> problem when a committee charged with the responsibility of finding solutions to a problem and some of you are so threatened that you ask that the minority input be controlled and censored. I am here to give my input and share my perspective in hopes that this will solve the overcrowding that exist in our schools. I hope to raise your awareness and expand your insight into Mexican American students' unique problems in our schools . . . There is a mistaken notion held by many Whites, Blacks and alas even some Browns, that Mexican American students have always been allowed to go to school with Whites. Black communities all over the United States have developed their own educational systems. Black children are being taught by Black teachers with college degrees and principals and administrators with doctoral degrees. These professional people acted as models for growing Black students giving them identity models that children could emulate. On the other hand, Mexican- American people have, for generations have, been subjected to oppression by our educational system. Our children were taught by White teachers, punished by White principals, and stifled by White administrators. We have had no Mexican American teachers or professional positions in the system that we could look to as identity models. We have been objects of discrimination, whipped for speaking Spanish and our customs and beliefs ridiculed and discouraged. Our rich history was distorted in the history books, and we have been victims of the educational system that has beaten our self-image and promoted negative stereotypes. The TISD does not employ one single Mexican American unless there is one sweeping the floor right now. What kind of message are you giving to the community when your administration agency is all White? We need more Mexican American teachers in our schools, or our children will continue to drop out into a hopeless future . . . If the desegregation committee was doing its job, there would be no need for an overcrowding committee born out of crisis. The sheer inactivity of the desegregation committee should have disqualified it as a tool of justice long ago. This committee was given a federal court mandate to address problems and issues of racial nature . . . how can that happen if the committee doesn't function or meet? One of the desegregation committee members told me they had not met for 1 ½ years! . . . Here are some examples. A clerical worker and counselor error resulted in a Mexican American boy being publicly pulled from graduation in front of his peers and not allowed to graduate. The clerk and counselor got a slap on the wrist for this grave injustice. Another is a Mexican American parent who went to high school to confer with her child's teachers. The conference was held in the bathroom on the instructions of the White supervisor because no other space was available. These are shocking, embarrassing, and painful incidents and a blatant disregard for the human dignity and self-respect of minority parents and students. I ask for the following alternatives to help remedy the situating where insensitivity abounds – 1) Sensitivity training sessions with teachers to help them learn how to deal with their feelings and those of the students they teach. 2) Cultural understanding courses to teach students and teachers about each other's heritage, beliefs, and backgrounds . . . What I have said is only the tip of the iceberg; there is a mountain beneath the water.

Anzaldúa (1987) posited that a Latina's

> first step is to take inventory. *Pero es dificil* differentiating between *lo herdado*, *lo adquirido*, *lo impuesto*. She puts history through a sieve, winnows out lies, looks at the forces that we as a race, as women have been a part of. (p. 82)

Margo presented this "inventory" in the form of a large, green binder to the CLE. This binder contained chronologically organized letters, poems, and articles that she has written to newspapers, board members, and city officials over her lifetime. Margo did this as a political act to challenge the inequities Latino/a children face in our public-school system and racist Eurocentric ideologies in the community. As I listened to Margo's experiences of activism and resiliency in our CLE, I could not help but make a connection to my experiences as a Latina who navigated systems of inequity and racism in school, ultimately leading to dropping out.

While Margo was speaking out against oppression in 1978, a little girl was sitting in class 417 miles away receiving explicit verbal messages that she was "stupid," "dumb,*" and* "only good enough to clean houses*"* from her teachers. Because women of color, like Margo, are "treated generically by the dominant culture—seeing and treating us as parts of a whole, rather than as individuals—this forces us to experience ourselves collectively" (Anzaldúa, 2015, p. 144). Margo's experiences allowed her to see through our cultural conditioning and the dominant culture's toxic way of life. Her attempt to overturn destructive perceptions and serve as a change agent of awakening "inspires and challenges others to deeper awareness, greater *conocimiento*" (Anzaldúa, 2009, p. 83). Margo is a reminder of Latinas' search for liberation from oppressive practices and wholeness of being (Anzaldúa, 2015).

CLEs change the stories about who we are and our behavior and expose the stick we beat ourselves with while reframing our thinking and reimagining our futures. But then what? The theory of change (RASPPA) asks us,

> Does the story have legs? Does it have a catalytic quality? . . . A story can possess aesthetic quality, but in efforts to build community, stories must do more. They must inspire, motivate, and move citizens to act toward the public good. (M. Guajardo et al., 2016, p. 35)

Margo exhibits these "legs" as she acts for the betterment of self, organization, and community. This example of resilience and political action informed the co-researchers of the importance of moving our work forward for the future generations of Latinas in our schools and our communities. Practicing and living this *way of life* creates a path for others like us, giving light to the darkness (Anzaldúa, 2015). Figure 82 displays some examples of some of Margo's actions that give her experiences and voice legs to inspire her community and work toward a common good.

Figure 82. Margo's Letters to Temple, Texas Newspaper Editor.

The Trojan Duck–Margie's Story

> I have worked for a prestigious state office for over 23 years. In this position, I was two levels below my boss—It was me, then him, then another boss above him and that was it. He was amazing and super supportive. He always thanked me for doing a good job, and I did! I knew my stuff and I did it well, really, really well. Unfortunately, he ended up leaving and so they hired a Black woman named . . . well, let's call her "X" who had a PhD. She was off the charts brilliant, and I loved, loved her. X took his position and then they hired this horrible White woman who was her boss. X and I were close in age and really the only people of color in that area and so we bonded, and we would have talks about what was going on in the office and I learned a lot from her and the oppression she was experiencing. She kept me informed about what was happening, but long story short, she was being pushed out and I saw X going from being on top of her game to being beaten and broken down. I mean there were only pieces left when they

[state office] got done with her. It was absolutely horrible and devastating. X moved away and had health issues over it. It was horrific. I witnessed minorities disappearing one by one. I would be the only woman and the only person of color in director meetings. I felt the hammer was going to come down on me next. Ok, so backtracking . . . I hired this kid, well young guy and mentored him. I taught him everything I knew. He was promoted above me and became my boss and of course the boss above him was this horrible mean lady—let's call her B. Sure enough I went from being a model employee to this kid I mentored writing me up for stuff HE signed off and told me to do! From there out it was a nit-picking game. I would turn in a report, and he would have me reformat it. Reformat? Like who does that? And so, I would. I would call my mother every day sometimes multiple times and cry and vent and she would say "Margie, work beyond reproach, you cross every T, dot every I, hold your head high and go in there and work beyond reproach." I did. I went in there every day and smiled and worked harder than anyone else. I was the hardest working person there. I got there before anyone else, and I was the last to leave. I brought work home and worked on weekends. I took 30-minute lunches instead of an hour. I smiled and worked hard and every day I would call mom and cry and she would say, "Just keep being a duck." You know how ducks sit above the water—they look calm and peaceful and beautiful, but the whole time their little feet are paddling as fast as they can to keep them afloat and moving. I knew what they were up to, but I didn't let them know it. I called the Employee Retirement System, which is the state agency, and once you call them, they can't tell anyone you called, or have any conversations with anyone. All conversations stay confidential. I began to phase myself out. I had worked for the governor's office for 23 years and I never had a problem. I was a model employee and beyond reproach. I wasn't about to let someone push me out because of the color of my skin! If they fired me like the others, I would have to wait till I'm 65 to touch my retirement. So, I worked behind the scenes. I was a duck paddling away working hard to protect myself and beat the system, while all these White people working against me only saw a graceful duck sitting on top of placid waters. I knew I had to work hard and be a duck inside. So, I purchased the years I needed to retire, and I was deliberate in my actions and meticulous about how I executed them. At one point I was thankful for COVID and masks . . . that sounds horrible, but that mask covered my emotions and face when they would come at me over and over. Under my COVID mask, all they could see was my eyes, but underneath, I was biting my tongue because I knew I had to make sure all the paperwork for my retirement was processed. I had learned from X and by observing. That informed me on how to navigate the system along with Mom's experiences and her constantly telling me to be a duck and work their system for my benefit. Finally, the day came, I got notice that my retirement was processed. Weeks prior to this every day I would take something home little by little emptying out my drawers and shelves. I did it under the radar so they wouldn't know I was leaving. I left a lot of things there I didn't care about, so it wasn't so obvious. The day retirement notified me within minutes I walked into B's office, the White mean lady, and said, "This is my last day. I have

> retired" and that was it. They were super surprised. They had no idea what had just happened, and it was totally unexpected. This duck had outsmarted them!

Margie stated that she immediately bonded with X *because she was a woman of color* who exemplified Latinas' need to find common connections with the collective in the pursuit of liberation. Margo's experiences and ability to channel adversity into motivation informed Margie's ways of knowing and being. Margie found herself seeking out the wisdom of her mother and X to inform her navigational capital and maneuver through turbulent waters while remaining a duck on the surface.

In Margie's story, she observed the dominant culture at work through her experience with X and the other women of color. Anzaldúa (2015) wrote about how *mestizas* find themselves "inside white-colored walls, but once they pass through the gates, she becomes a Trojan horse, a Trojan mula who has infiltrated in order to subvert the system, bringing new ideas with her" (p. 207). Anzaldúa posited that this work becomes "weighty" because Trojan mulas or, in this case, Trojan ducks, have to paddle their feet faster and do "double, triple, and quadruple work" (p. 207).

Co-researchers of the CLE made connections between the experiences of Margo, X, and Margie and were able to bridge these experiences with our own. Cameron stated,

> We just don't realize how powerful our words and actions are and how they inform our identity and what comes out of our mouth. I'm scared to screw up my kid . . . it's almost inevitable. How can you remain on point 24/7? I'm going to slip up. I'm going to say something racist or have a microaggression.

"You're a Tool"–Renée's Story

In the past 4 years, I have lost a father, a mother, half of my time with my children, and a husband. Unlike losing my parents, I did not receive any sympathy cards or time off for bereavement, and not one family member called me to give their condolences or offer words of comfort after the loss of my husband. He was not dead in

the literal sense; rather, our 29-year marriage was. As we go through a divorce, our brains go into flight or fight mode. When your brain is preparing for a fight, it shuts down access to your prefrontal cortex, which is responsible for making decisions and negotiations. Additionally, your limbic system or mid-brain, which is responsible for managing these fight or flight emotions, kicks into high gear and is quick to react to threats. I am sure this biological function had some effect on my manic behavior, for what sane woman would grovel on her hands and knees and beg for the attention and love of someone who callously said, "I haven't loved you in over 12 years." To which I pathetically replied, "It doesn't matter, just let me love you." Feeling demeaned, I looked up with tears streaming down my face and hands still clutched around his ankles—I saw nothing; his eyes were empty. He looked down apathetically and said, "Get up, don't do this." If eyes are indeed the windows to our souls, he was soulless. Feeling defeated, I slowly moved up from the kitchen floor and out the door. On the 13-minute drive home, I felt as if my life was over and called my husband, threatening to end my life; something I only contemplated once as a teen when I felt alienated, hopeless, and alone. I was looking for a reaction. I wanted him to wake up and realize he still wanted me. "What about the kids? What about their future?" I pleaded with him. He said nothing. I hung up frustrated, marched into my strange new home, and sat on my bedroom floor with a shotgun in hand. I waited. *He'll call. He'll show up*, I thought. Nothing. No calls desperately begging me to come back home and not hurt myself. No one barged through my door to save me. Nothing. I called my best friend, Margie, hyperventilating and in distress. She listened and stayed on the phone with me as I vented, cried, screamed, and cursed the world. Eventually, I fell asleep.

The moment I awoke and opened my eyes the following day, I was consumed by profound anger. My mother's rage was bubbling and brewing within me. My husband showed up the next day to drop off our kids for the weekend, showing no emotion, a typical behavior. He did not look phased by my threats a mere 12 hours earlier. I asked the kids to go out and play so I could speak with their father privately. The moment I had a clear sight of the children playing and out of earshot, I went for the jugular. With my voice stern, my back upright, and my eyes laser focused I shouted, "You never showed up! Forget that you're my husband of 29 years, a friend, or the father of my children; you didn't even have the decency or humanity to show up or call to check on me!"

Memories of riding in the back of the car with a blanket and pillow are all too familiar. My mother would often use the excuse to take me on *rides* to get a donut at a 24-hour donut shop in search of my father's whereabouts. She would wait outside the home to see what *she* looked like to compare herself, change her hair color, or lose weight to look more like *her*. On countless nights, I slept beside my mother in my parents' bed at her request to keep her company. My mother lay there praying, and when she thought I was sound asleep, she would begin to weep. As her pent-up anger and sadness consumed her, her weeps would turn into deep animal-like bellows. To this day, when I hear a whale cry, I go back to that place and time when I would lay frozen and afraid as I listened to my mother's cries. Mother would wake up, put on her *pestañas* and blush to mask her lack of sleep and swollen eyes, and take me to school on her way to work. There was a time I considered my mother weak and stupid for withstanding my father's infidelities. I remember telling her that I *never* wanted to be like her. I did not understand why she stayed in the relationship with my father, and I hated her for it.

My narrative of these accounts has changed over the last few years of being in this PhD program. Being in the PhD program and a mentee of Dr. Guajardo comes with great privilege and responsibility. I have access to great minds, theories, literature, guidance, and wisdom. When I was introduced to the CLE process by Dr. Guajardo, I learned a skillset and way of life that would literally *save* my life and transform my thinking from a deficit-based lens to an asset-based lens. Through the CLE process, I could remember, re-frame, and re-imagine (M. Guajardo et al., 2016). My mother's sacrifice and *sufrimiento* to keep harmony and provide her children with stability in the face of patriarchy taught me that *la cultura* can be both tyranny and comfort (Delgado Bernal et al., 2006). Using the theory of change entwined with ecologies of knowing, I was able to reauthor my story and understand that my mother valued her family and wanted the best possible outcomes for her children. This was her way of showing love in the absence of those three words she could never express verbally. My mother's pedagogies were "situated, performative understandings of her life experiences" (Delgado Bernal et al., 2006, p. 149). Through her body, her cries, her words, and her silence, she taught me how to *valerse por si misma* (Delgado Bernal et al., 2006). Figures 83 and 84 are examples of my mother's performative narratives.

Figure 83. Mom Helping me in the Kitchen. Mom Loved to Help, Often Humming or Singing Hymns From Church.

Figure 84. Mom Helping me in Garden. Mom Kept me Company by Telling me Stories and Making me Laugh. She Suffered From Alzheimer's and Stage Four Cancer and Passed Away Five Months After This Picture was Taken.

My mother's performative narratives—body movement, *consejos*, *regaños*, and silences—were struggles of "both the immediate and remote contexts" (Delgado Bernal, 2006, p. 150). This personal narrative and life story production highlight the larger context of institutional and cultural relations of power and dominant ideologies and languages (Delgado Bernal et al., 2006). When my mother performed acts of survival,

power, and struggle for identity, she was responding to and struggling with dominant ideologies and patriarchal notions (Delgado Bernal et al., 2006). My mother made sense of power and oppression through these pedagogies and performative narratives. Through the CLE's meaning making process, I have been empowered by understanding my mother's position and using these gifts of strength and resilience to reinvent myself.

My ex-husband would often tell me I was "a tool." I would like to say that he meant the literal definition—an implement or an instrument of use. Instead, an alternate definition for tool is equating one with being rather useless. The term tool is simply a subtle word for saying one is stupid, dumb, slow, or witless. He would say, "You're just too much, Renée," accompanied with a roll of his eyes and a sigh. Again, these were not words or sentiments of affirmation. Do not get me wrong, my ex-husband has some great qualities, is a pillar in our community, and is a phenomenal father. I can say, without doubt, that I pushed limits that did not need pushing while we were married, but yes, I AM too much. Below, I write in my journal to make meaning of my experience:

> Dear EX, I AM too much for you and I am too much for the old me. My eyes are widened, and my ears are on the verge of becoming hyperacusis [hyper-sensitive]. My teeth are sharper, and my feet are moving faster. I have outgrown my skin and like a serpent, I am shedding off the dry, old, brittle pieces of myself. I AM Moyocoyotzin; I AM becoming. Yes, I am a tool, however, not in the sense that you meant—no soy pendeja! Rather, I am a tool that bridges and connects. I am a tool that pushes, pulls, and excavates. I am a rake that has decided it is time to clean up the mess and a shovel that unearths layers of myself to make meaning of my pain and trauma. My boots are on as I step into all this shit to make sense of it all. I must go through this painful process to turn this manure into rich fertile soil–it is time to plant new seeds and new beginning. (Bocanegra, journal entry, February 2022)

In Figure 85, I work with tools to help move things forward.

Figure 85. Me, Using Tools to Move the Work Forward.

Wielding the Pen and Tongue–Cameron's Story

> So, I'm going through incidences where my culture and my skin color are becoming more obvious to me, and others and I write about these things in my stories. One of the stories I write about is based on an interaction I had with my fiancé's mother and father. His mom for a long time would say "Jess" instead of "yes" . . . jes, jes, jes, all the time. I finally told her, "you know that's a microaggression and you're making fun of my culture and language." She said, "Well, it's just that I love, love, love Mexican people and Mexican culture. I just don't like Cubans" and she went on, blah, blah, blah. So, she kinda just put our culture and heritage into a box like a character trait or a hobby or something. You know, like who says, "Oh, I love, love, love the White culture or Black culture or White people?" Like, that's not a thing, you know what I mean? It's like we are some hobby or trend. So, I confronted her by saying that her microaggressions made me uncomfortable. She understood this and she never said "jes" again. She said she was thankful that I told her and is more open-minded than my future father-in-law. Fast forward a bit and we were in Colorado on vacation and went to dinner. I was the ONLY person of color in the restaurant. This was obvious and me being dark complected and all, I stood out. The White waiter came to the table at this Mexican restaurant and starts talking about the cook, "she's a little Mexican woman in the back." My fiancé's father giggled, looked at me and said, "a little Mexican cook huh, Cameron?" I explained that what the waiter said was a microaggression and it was wrong by giving the example of who says, "Oh

> there's a big thug Black guy in the back, or there's an angry Black woman in the back, or a skinny Asian in the back." I explained that these are all microaggressions and inappropriate. He didn't really understand, saying "well, we are going to have to agree to disagree. I'm sure that was not the waiter's intention." I was like, "Are you the waiter?" but I didn't want to confront him anymore. It made for a really uncomfortable dinner for the rest of the night. I have been confronting these issues within my fiancé's family more and more because I feel like if I'm gonna marry this guy, we need to have these conversations and just have like have a relationship that is open to dialogue. If I'm going to be part of the group, then I need to be comfortable. I expect that. I demand that. I need my husband to listen to my feelings so that he better understands what it's like for me to be committed to a White family for the rest of my life and the challenges that this brings up. I'm going to be in those family portraits that hang on the wall and line the shelves. Portraits filled with blonde hair and blue eyes all the way across. What will they look like with me in them? I'm having to accept that it will always be obvious that I am the one not like the others.

Pictured in Figure 85, Cameron and her fiancé.

Figure 86. Cameron and her Fiancé.

Cameron is a creative, brilliant writer. She has been writing stories and expressing herself since she could wield a crayon. Cameron's short bio states that she is a "queer Latina English teacher who lives in Austin, Texas . . . I draw on inspiration from nature, children, my culture, and my experiences as a former Catholic and current atheist." Rendón (2014) would suggest that Cameron uses writing as a contemplative practice tool by expressing herself to develop confidence and *valerse por si misma*. Cameron uses her

writing to inform her acts of resilience, such as confronting her future in-laws and her ability to bring up and have difficult but needed conversations. Through Cameron's journaling, short stories, poems, and published works, she is connecting to the deeper aspects of herself, her *familia*, and *cultura*. Cameron uses her writing as a tool to reflect, provoke, probe, and pull from her inner wisdom and liberate herself from self-limiting and invalidating thoughts and voices. Writing informs the ecologies of knowing of the self and, in turn, informs how we navigate and oscillate between the self and our organizations and communities. Cameron's writing goes through extensive revisions that she regularly shares with her family through text and emails. Her approach to writing is reflective, dialogical, and democratic in nature. Cameron's act of writing is one of resistance and resilience by disrupting, challenging, and transforming the existing powers that constrain and limit Latinas (Anzaldúa, 2015). As an English teacher in a Title I school, Cameron uses her wisdom and insight in her classroom with her students. She is not only an English teacher but also a social change agent committed to the liberation of transforming students into thriving learners by giving them agency and the power to create a multitude of possibilities to shape their own lives (Anzaldúa, 2015; M. Guajardo et al., 2016; Rendón, 2014).

Below is a beautiful symbolic extension of Cameron's experiences and how she makes sense of these experiences. Symbols are living, breathing, informing extensions of our experiences that move us forward individually and collectively. Cameron wrote about her experience as a young adult trying to find and create her own path:

> *Use my voice as stilts, learn to stumble near*
> *Struggle to wrap your small fingers around my fist*
> *I will keep you here between the night and day*
> *I will swallow the darkness, snuff out the light*

Bolt the shutters, change the locks
You will always be safe and never know fear

Here the mother tells the sapling/child to lean on her mother's/tree's understanding. The tree/mother tells the child/sapling to *stumble near* and stay close when she falls so that the mother/tree can lend a hand—"wrap your small fingers around my fist"—offering her strength that the child/sapling can draw from. The mother/tree tells her sapling that she will do anything to protect her to the point of not letting the sapling leave, explore, or be independent, "I will swallow the darkness, snuff out the light, bolt the shutter, change the locks." The sapling feels trapped but the mother/tree tells the sapling/child this because she wants to keep her from experiencing pain and trauma.

When your legs stretch into branches, I can no longer cradle
And your crowded teeth begin to point hidden ways out of our home
You will bleed more than sap
Ask me if it will pool in the shower
Wonder if you will always be
An open wound

In this excerpt of Cameron's poem, the tree/mother understands that one day the child/sapling with outgrow her and the tree/mother will no longer be able to tame her unyielding spirit as Cameron writes, "When your legs stretch into branches, I can no longer cradle." The sapling/child will find her voice and will rebel against her confinement as she expresses, "and your crowded teeth begin to point hidden ways out of our home." "You will bleed more than sap, ask me if it will pool in the shower" speaks to the coming of age and menstruation and maturity, yet still childlike as she asks questions of her mother/tree uninformed about the biological processes going on in her body. "Wonder if you will always be an open wound" has double meaning as Cameron experiences both pain from her traumas and the biological process of menstruation.

You will pull at your roots, eager to leave me wilting
Drag mulch through the streets and wither beneath a cruel sun
When they come asking of you, if I knew that gone girl
I'll remember the soft spot that I kissed and kissed
How you touched dark walls like beacons
Dreamed of swallowing the sun

In the words, "You will pull at your roots, eager to leave me wilting," the mother/tree is afraid of losing her child to the world and guilts the sapling/tree for wanting to make her own way. The mother/tree goes on to say that her sapling/child will fail if she leaves and goes out into the harsh, cruel world, "Drag mulch through the streets and wither beneath a cruel sun." The mother/tree continues to guilt the sapling/child and infers that she cannot make it without her by inferring that she has given love, affection, and protection and yet the child/sapling is leaving, "When they come asking of you, if I knew that gone girl, I'll remember the soft spot I kissed and kissed." The mother/tree speaks of how the child/sapling has been the light and hope in her life, "how you touched dark walls like beacons." In the end when Cameron writes, "Dreamed of swallowing the sun," she is referring to her aspirations and hopes for herself. The mother/tree is stuck. She is so deeply rooted she cannot leave this space.

According to Kozulin (2007), Vygotsky's sociocultural theory of cognitive development, meaningful learning by a child occurs through social interaction from guided learning. The child seeks to understand this guidance and internalizes this information, using it to guide and inform their own performance. The social exchange between the micro and the macro (ecologies of knowing) interlaced and woven with the theory of change (RASPPA) allowed the co-researchers to collectively make meaning and connections of these experiences with Cameron and within themselves. I reflect more on this in my written reflection below.

M. Guajardo et al. (2016) stated that within the CLE theory of change (RASPPA), "our assets-based development shifts us from deficit-based development that crushes the spirit of community" (p. 33). Using the RASPPA theory of change, the co-researchers within the CLE are "invited to challenge, examine, and decode origins and content" (M. Guajardo et al., 2016, p. 34). Co-researchers are invited to ask, "Who did they learn their stories from? Who benefits from their current stories? Who is empowered by them? Are there exceptions to their stories? Are there alternative stories?" (M. Guajardo et al., 2016, p. 34). Stories are best when affirmed and owned and most valuable when co-researchers can re-frame, re-tell, and re-shape stories to best support their agency and dreams (M. Guajardo et al., 2016).

Wrapping Up the Second CLE

Our second CLE went over the allotted time. Though the co-researchers were aware of this fact, they continued to remain in community for an extra hour. The co-researchers expressed a sense of belonging in *el jardín*. With every story and *plática*, trusting healthy relationships began to grow and flourish. This was evident when the co-researchers walked in as they exhibited physical touch and affection when interacting with one another. Existing connections and our past *pláticas* helped mitigate the awkwardness. Our physical space began to close in our embrace and laughter as our hearts and arms opened to each other and newfound perspectives and possibilities. Welcoming environments and gracious spaces ease tensions and enable our authentic selves to be present. This powerful and engaging mutual learning experience changed us––we were different from when we first began.

Reflections CLE #2–Protect the Gracious Space

We could not have asked for a more beautiful day. Our bellies were full and nourished by *el jardín* and the pecan tree provided us with a slight breeze. Co-researchers of all ages decided to listen to music from the 1970s play while we worked. We sang and hummed along while we worked alongside one another. Ryan-Olivia, my 9-year-old daughter, decided she loved the song "Copacabana" by Barry Manilow and quickly picked up on the tune and joined in. The co-researchers went to work transforming fragments and pieces of colored glass into beautiful expressions and extensions of themselves. These mosaics symbolized experiences of struggles, strength, courage, and resilience. Although Ryan-Olivia was not directly a part of the CLE conversation, she and her sister, Erin, and Erin's partner, Megan, had been witnesses to the CLEs.

All of them had contributed their time, effort, and energy to *el jardín* in some capacity. It is essential to note that a witness is not the same as a co-researcher. Witnesses come in and out and do not necessarily carry the collective thought of the CLE. They are either physically present or spiritually present, or their stories and *testimonios* are filtered and told through the co-researchers' stories. Co-researchers are consistent; they show up and do the heavy lifting. It is they who are being harvested. However, a second layer to this research informs my way of knowing and being. My children have been planted, nourished (or not), and harvested their whole lives by my actions. I have sowed, and they are what I have reaped. They are a witness to who I was and why I am. Throughout their lives, my awareness has changed; in turn, my parenting and mothering have influenced their identity formation.

As we were working outside, Ryan-Olivia flung the screen door open and shouted, “Mom, can I please come out and join in? I want to be a part of your group too!” Everyone agreed it would be a good thing to invite Ryan-Olivia to join in on our activity. After all, *she* is the *why* that drives this work. She was able to hear Latinas referencing our *plática* that took place earlier. She heard words and phrases such as *racism*, *inequity*, and *feeling like the other*. Later that evening, I was in my office at my computer typing up my notes from the day. Ryan-Olivia knocked on the door with a small pink flower from the garden in hand. “Mom, this is for you,” she said as she reached over to kiss my face. “Mom, can I ask you a question?” I replied, “You just did,” and she giggled. “I wanted to ask you what those words meant earlier. What is racism?” I stopped everything I was doing and turned around to face her. How could I have been so blind? How did I miss this? I am an educator and have spent the last 4 years getting a PhD in a social justice program. I had done a great disservice to Ryan-Olivia. I asked her what her thoughts were and what she could infer from listening to our conversations earlier. She replied, “Well, is it like my friend Adam in my school?” Adam is the only Black child in Ryan-Olivia’s school. There are a handful of children of color in her school who are White-passing. This is not the case with Alex, a Black child adopted by White parents. “Tell me why you think it’s like Alex in your school?” I asked. Ryan-Olivia went on to tell me stories of Alex being made fun of or kids talking about his hair and skin color. I said, “Hey Ry, what do you say we go get a milkshake and talk more about this?” Ryan-Olivia and I had an engaging and powerful discussion about issues of racism and inequitable practices and our responsibility to ourselves and others when these issues arise.

The CLE in *el jardín* had Ryan-Olivia's head swirling with curiosities and wonderings, leading her to ask questions. This is what the CLE does—it provokes thought and invites curiosities. The conversations between co-researchers earlier invited Ryan-Olivia to reflect and provoked her thoughts. Additionally, these conversations gave Ryan-Olivia a sense of comfort in asking questions about what may have been a difficult or uncomfortable discussion before this experience. Figures 87–100 show the co-researchers' mosaic stones created during CLE #2.

Reflections–CLE Mosaic Coyolxauhqui

For our closing reflection, the co-researchers and witnesses were asked to share their creative works of art and how they were symbolic of their identity and resilience:

> First of all, I loved doing this. I had so much fun! I've never done this before and I loved that it connected with our conversation today. My piece symbolizes a sailboat gliding across the ocean, but down below waters are rough, and above the sun is shining. I really wanted to do a duck [laughter], but this is prettier than a duck and it symbolizes the same concept, just keep going no matter how turbulent and rough the waters get. You just ride the waves but . . . and this is a big but . . . be purposeful in how you navigate the waters . . . Oh, and don't forget there are sharks in the water [laughter]! (Margie)
>
> I thank you for sharing your stories. I learned a lot about my mother, so this helped make some things make more sense to me. So, Mom, don't get mad but you know when I lived at home, I was still very dependent on you, which I think you kind of liked I think. I think a lot of that was my fault too. I would ask you everything and then you would talk to me and give me suggestions, but ultimately, I always did you said or advised, because you were and are such a strong influence on me. When I left home and went to Baylor, I learned how to be independent and fend for myself. I had to learn things the hard way and it wasn't easy, so these experiences defined me and taught me how to be strong. I didn't have you there to run to. I learned how to be strong from you too, but when I was home, I didn't have to practice it. I didn't venture out much or think on my own much because I had you and you were always there to tell me what to do or catch me and fix it. Basically, I needed to fail to be resilient. (Erin)
>
> My stone represents a cross with valleys below and blue skies above. For me, God is everything and he informs me as a person and child of God that it is with Him and through Him that I find the courage and resilience to advocate for myself and others and fight the fight. This is hard especially as a lesbian couple. It was really

hard to find a church that would take us in and accept us. The cross is broken up and it symbolizes that no matter how broken we are, how deep the valleys get, God is gracious and merciful and there are always blue skies above, so we continue to look up and move forward. (Megan)

My stone is a little jumbled, which really represents my family I grew up in. This is my dad [top green piece] he was the umbrella or glue that kept our family together. This is my grandmother and mother and me [the three large stones in center]. They had a lot of influence on me. I'm the large green stone because really I was like the general or commanding officer. I kept the house and my siblings in order as the oldest. I raised them. So, I am the green stone, my grandmother is the red and my mom is the blue one. The pieces surrounding us are my nine siblings. My mom did the best she could, she worked all the time. She did a lot of things wrong, but she did a lot of things right. I learned from the wrong, what not to do and be. The spaces between the glass represents division because my mom created divisions amongst us. She created a lot of problems, but it was living in this way that I learned how to be resilient. (Margo)

My stone represents sunflowers and my transformation. I tell the story of the moonflower my father gifted me and how it only shows its beautiful trumpet flowers at night while we sleep. The moon flower was a symbolic representation of me prior to the PhD program. I was avoiding the light, hiding, not wanting to be exposed for who I was. The CLE process helped me see myself authentically so that I could learn to love myself for who I truly was, not who I was trying to be. I no longer had to hide, I could be bright and beautiful and bask in the sun like all the other flowers. So, this sunflower is a representation of my transformation and resilience. (Renée)

I think I'm a dragon. I picked a dragon because they are loyal and strong and courageous. Did you know dragons are super sensitive and they can sense danger? Dragons are fierce and protective. They are not bad or evil, they just fight the bad guys. I protect and fight for my friends and me when we are not treated right. That's why I'm a dragon! (Ryan-Olivia)

Figure 87. Margie and Margo Choosing Pieces of Glass and Supplies to Create Their Mosaic Stones.

Figure 88. Me, Creating a Sunflower to Symbolize Resilience and Transformation.

Figure 89. Erin and Megan Gathering Supplies.

Figure 90. Erin Gluing on her Mosaic Glass Pieces.

Figure 91. Margie and Margo Creating Their Masterpieces.

Figure 92. Ryan-Olivia Joined in on the Fun, Platícas, and Learning.

Figure 93. Margie Gluing Down her Mosaic Pieces.

Figure 94. Erin and Megan Pláticando and Sharing a Laugh.

Figure 95. Margo Choosing Glass Pieces to Represent Family Members.

Figure 96. Margo's Grandmother, Father, Mother, and Siblings Being Symbolized by Using Various Sizes, Shapes, and Colors of Glass.

Figure 97. Ryan-Olivia Learning and Practicing How to Score and Cut Glass After Asking How to Cut a Specific Shape she Needed to Make her Dragon.

Figure 98. Megan Cutting Glass Pieces to Create her Mosaic Which Symbolizes her Faith as the Foundations of her Resilience.

Figure 99. My Mosaic, Basking Sunflowers Enjoying the Sunlight.

Figure 100. Ryan-Olivia Explains That she is Like a Dragon–Fierce, Strong, Loyal, Protective, and Courageous.

Reflection–A CLE Connection

Through the CLE reflections, I later made a powerful connection between Cameron's and Erin's words and regarding their upbringing. M. Guajardo et al. (2016) stated CLEs inform us before, during, and afterward. In Cameron's poem, she wrote of the tree/mother having a stronghold on the sapling/child, not wanting to let the child go out and explore and follow her own path. Erin later mentioned how she did not have to think about decisions that would affect her life because I was always there to catch her, tell her what to do, or "fix it . . . basically, I had to fail to learn how to be resilient." I was reminded of my experiences with my mother and the guilt she would impose on me for wanting to travel or do something without her. I realized the messages and experiences I

received from my mother's fear of abandonment had transferred to me. She was terrified my father would leave her and was incapable of being alone.

This experience, coupled with not receiving affection or being told *I love you*, had made me dependent on the love and company of my children. My girls could have gone to any university. They had their pick as valedictorians of their schools, yet I chose Baylor for them because it was an hour down the road and I could easily access them. I made them room together when they begged me to let them live apart after a lifetime of living together so they could have their own space and friends. I denied this request because I wanted to ensure they would be there for each other in my absence. As I continued to reflect, I could see the error in my behavior. I had done a great disservice to my children. According to Crossley (2021), this behavior may be due to an anxious attachment style.

The anxious attachment type (AAT) typically stems from a parent–child relationship that is not conducive to vulnerability or closeness (Crossley, 2021; van der Kolk, 2015). People who are anxious attachment types long for deep connection and love. This insecurity may cause the person to have low self-esteem and be overly dependent, clingy, and emotionally needy. An AAT parent often looks to their child to fill their needs for love and nurturing and will typically transfer this hunger for love and behavior from parent to child (Crossley, 2021; van der Kolk, 2015). AAT theorists posit that it is essential that parents with AAT be aware of how often we turn to our children to fulfill our needs and make us feel better or loved. AAT is rooted in past relationship trauma. Identifying from where this feeling originates is the key to recognizing the issues that feed our insecurities that affect our relationships. It is suggested that engaging in open

dialogue, such as *platícas*, can lead to collective sense-making. These meaningful conversations among co-researchers stimulate the persons participating in the exchanges to reflect and act (M. Guajardo et al., 2016). We can develop and exercise agency to change future outcomes and behaviors through this act. In Figure 101, I am leaving Cameron off at Baylor so she can begin her independent journey as a college student.

Figure 101. Leaving Cameron off at Baylor.

Recuerdos and Reflections as Regalos CLE #2

Harvested honey from *el jardín's* bees was gifted to the co-researchers to remember our time together. This gift symbolized how we can all work together for the common good of our community. If one bee suffers or falls behind, the other bees rally to lend a hand (or foot) to share the workload and ensure their young's collective productivity and care are never reduced.

In our stories of resiliency, we navigated through organizations that were not conducive to Latinas' ways of knowing and being (Anzaldúa, 2015; Delgado Bernal et al., 2006; Rendón, 2014). Co-researchers acted similarly to honeybees, continuously evolving and adapting and not becoming discouraged by new territories or climate. Bees seize the day and take advantage of every moment to stop and sip and smell the flowers.

If a flower does not benefit them, they go to another flower and communicate this to the others (M. Guajardo et al., 2016). Bees constantly engage with one another (Anzaldúa, 2015; Delgado Bernal et al., 2006; M. Guajardo et al., 2016; Horton et al., 1990; Rendón, 2014), keeping each other informed about changes in their environment. The behavior of bees reminded me of the co-researchers' ability to recognize issues and situations and, through their resilience, bee-come story makers and activists to empower others to do the same. One bee alone cannot make a change, but as a colony, they can change the hive.

I am a beekeeper who is deathly allergic to bees. Typically, I harvest our bees' honey; however, because I had been stung recently, my doctor told me it was critical that I not get stung within a 6-month time frame, or it may have consequences that could not be reversed. The beautiful thing about a healthy and robust community is that it is recognized and acted upon when there is a need. My son, Robbie, and daughter, Ryan-Olivia, graciously offered to harvest honey from our hives with the guidance of their father. Robbie and Ryan-Olivia are fascinated with the world of bees and how they communicate and work together. Below, Robbie smokes bees. This tricks the bees to gorge on honey thinking there is a forest fire. The smoke interferes with the bees' primary sense of communication or smell. Figures 102–105 show the harvesting of honey.

Figure 102. Robbie and Ryan-Olivia, Harvesting Honey With the Help of Their Father. Robbie Smokes the Bees to Calm Them Before Entering the Hive.

Figure 103. Freshly Harvested Honeycomb, a Family Favorite.

Figure 104. Honey is Drawn and Filtered Into Large Sterile Buckets Before Bottling.

Figure 105. Bottled Honey. Honey has no Expiration Date and is the Most Stable Natural Food you can Find.

Summary Table for CLE #2

For quick reference, Table 5 is meant to display the dynamics at play and insights that emerged from CLE #2. The information is organized through the lens of the CLE theory of change (RASPPA) for each participant. The rows for *Politic* and *Action* were combined to showcase each participant's politic through their actions.

Table 5. Summary CLE #2.

	Cameron	Margie	Margo	Renée	Erin
Relationship	Daughter	Best friend of 15 years	Margie's mother	Self	Daughter of 25 years
Assets	Creative writing, poetry, storytelling	Hard worker	Political organizer	Knowledge of how to nurture and construct *el jardín*/a CLE nurturing, resilient	Emotional intelligence Familia capital
Stories	Wielding the Pen and Tongue – Cameron's story	The Trojan Duck– Margie's story	No One is Born an Activista– Margo's Story	"You're a Tool"–my story	"I needed to fail to become resilient"
Place	-Central Texas -Mexican restaurant -With family	A prestigious state office	-High school -Temple University	-Childhood home -Space of new perspective (for mom and for ex)	Baylor University
Politic (in Action)	Had a challenging (conversation about racial microaggressions with her in-laws	Outworked and outsmarted racist supervisor	Displayed resilience and a commitment for political action	Reauthored the long-held story of my father's infidelity/my mother's strength	Had a challenging conversation with mother

Preparing for the Third CLE

What a wonderful feeling to walk outside into *el jardín*, thriving and providing. As I took inventory of all the goodness before me, I realized this CLE is working! This *way of life is working!* Lush green vegetation, birds chirping and singing, chickens squawking, and Luno running independently, nibbling on greens and berries. This was no accident, we had worked hard to get to this point, and, in turn, *el jardín* was feeding and

nourishing everything from the creatures in the sky to the slithering slugs and everything in between. I could not help but be overwhelmed with emotion and gratitude. I sat there quietly, thinking back to the woman who had once groveled on her hands and knees, begging for love and attention, rethinking my purpose and existence on this earth. Yet, I was in solidarity with *el jardín*, happy and grateful. I was not alone; my spiritual ancestors were everywhere with their voices, stories, wisdom, strength, courage, and resilience. I was surrounded by Coyolxauhqui—by all who had entered this space physically, spiritually, and metaphorically. We were reaping what we had sowed literally but also spiritually and emotionally. This did not just miraculously happen; our hard work, careful preparation, intentional placement, continual nourishment, and sharing of our knowledge with others in *el jardín* provided a bountiful harvest for our bellies and souls. As my bare feet connected with the earth, I felt loved (see Figure 106).

Figure 106. Feet Soiled From Working in the Garden. We've Worked Hard. Now it's Time to Harvest!

A Bountiful Harvest–Spaces of Critical Consciousness and Community

Using photovoice as a data collection method, photos (see Figures 107–118) were presented to co-researchers who were asked to think of how *el jardín* informs what

spaces of critical consciousness and community *look*, *sound*, and *feel like*. It is important to note that the photos below have explanations under them for this document and your reference; however, the co-researchers were only shown the photographs without explanations or words. The conversations from the collective group revealed the following themes:

- Learn to look at things from a different perspective
- Good things require hard work and preparation
- We work better together
- You need the right environment to thrive
- Dig a little deeper, reach a little higher–Hope
- Growth takes time
- Pull weeds and beware of chickens
- Preserve what is good
- Take time for yourself
- Being alone is okay
- Be authentic
- Celebrate yourself and others

Learn to Look at Things From a Different Perspective

Figure 107. El Jardín in the Evening. A Different Perspective.

El jardín became a quiet, dark playground for nocturnal animals in the evenings. Hooting owls, hungry opossums, and slithering snakes would make their rounds searching for food while squirrels and birds slept guarded with one eye open above in the large pecan tree. Evenings were beautiful and still. There were no buzzing bees or chirping birds, only the sound of the tree swaying above and an occasional croaking toad. Though the framing/axioms of *el jardín* had not changed, this was a different landscape, and new information informed my eyes and ears. I had a new way of looking at *el jardín* and a new list of reasons to be grateful.

Like the maize plant, Latinas have been subjected to modifications and alterations in our history; we have become hybridity—a culmination of the thoughts and behaviors of the dominant culture. The co-researchers valued and recognized the need for continual growth, reflection, and learning to help us see things from a different perspective. In our CLE, Margie shared that she "reads, listens to podcasts, and writes down her thoughts" to help her reflect and grow as a leader and community member. Margie also commented that "being with a community and having vulnerable and difficult discussions" helps her "see things from a different perspective. Typically, we don't have these spaces to pose questions about race, so we stay in the dark." Margie further stated that conversations with the CLE helped her "question her assumptions and others." This newfound lens allows Margie to meet people where they are at and be open to alternative possibilities within the diverse population she leads and serves. Cameron shared that her inner growth comes in many forms, but through the process of writing stories, reflecting, and journaling, she can think through her thoughts. Often, she publishes her work, but being part of the CLE brought this work to life, and she was able to hear first-hand how her thoughts and experiences connect with the community and others who may feel like her. Cameron shared this thought,

> I've always published my work, and that's it, I'm done. Sharing my work with others gives it life, and it takes another shape. I'm able to hear another side or perspective from women who look like me and how this is an issue for us all, not just me.

This is the work of the CLE—it allows us to dismantle and further fragment our already fragmented experiences. We collectively sift through the pieces to re-author our stories. In these stories, Cameron and Margie went from alienation and independence to connection and interdependence (M. Guajardo et al., 2016). By sharing their stories, they

built a bridge between the self and community and understood how the work we do moves from the micro to the macro. When practiced and executed with purpose, this learned skill becomes a *way of life* to bridge our schools with our communities, creating a robust, healthy environment for all.

Good Things Require Hard Work and Preparation

Figure 108. Tending to el Jardín.

How often have we all heard the saying, *nothing worth having comes easy*? *El jardín* was the creation of all who entered it, from two-legged friends to six-legged dwellers. The community of *el jardín* planned, organized, identified resources, set boundaries, and communicated ideas. All these things were done before planting a seed. I have produced multiple gardens in the past with significant failure. It was not until I began to take classes to become a master gardener that I understood that planning and preparation are the keys to a successful harvest. We addressed *what*, *where*, *when*, *how*, and *who* in gardening classes. *El jardín* depended on careful planning and the wisdom of all to create this abundant space. The strong backs of neighbors moved dirt and mulch. Yvette's quick, resourceful thinking saved a load of money and time. Ryan-Olivia's small fingers made the perfect tiny holes for radish and carrot seeds, and the list continues. This

organized and focused community space was a place to learn, explore, and imagine together.

There was not one class or CLE that I attended during which Dr. Guajardo did not say, “This is hard work,” usually followed with, “You have to be committed to the process.” There is no doubt that the planning and execution of a CLE is hard work and a commitment to yourself and others. This work began with me. It has taken years of soul searching, questioning, and being in a community with others to understand what informs my ecologies of knowing (M. Guajardo et al., 2016). This process and commitment dug deep into my roots to expose things I would have rather buried well below the earth. I realized these buried beasts would feed the seeds of future confused and scared little brown girls in our homes and in the classroom. As a child and student, I was the recipient of this beast and know first-hand the life-long residual effects. When we do this work and look the beast in the eyes, we can ask: How do schools prepare for the diverse cultural needs of children? How much thought and work are put into what their environments look, feel, and sound like? What are the beliefs and presumptions of those in our communities and schools about little brown girls like me? How will these little brown girls be nourished, and *who* is feeding their minds and spirits?

It was by invitation that I began to do this difficult but needed work. This heavy lifting and commitment to the *self* evolved into a commitment to others, for with great reward comes great responsibility. The micro fluidly moves from the meso to the macro through the exchanges of a CLE. The bounty from within flows into *el jardín*, inviting others to build bridges between emerging ideas. These ideas and asset-based narratives are taken into our organizations and communities, but not without hard inner work and

deliberate planning and preparation. All this must be done prior to the invitation and executed with deep hospitality while honoring human dignity.

We Work Better Together

Figure 109. Honeybees in el Jardín's Yellow Squash and Zucchini Plants.

Bees work together for the good of all. There is not one self-serving bee—even the queen serves her hive. Bees share, bathe one another, care for their sick, keep each other warm and cool, and fill in the gaps. There is a thing called bee space, a term used to describe the gaps within a hive that bees will not fill with propolis or wax. Good bee space is about 3/8" so bees can function properly. Bees naturally create this space to enable them to pass freely around their hive. If bees have too much space, they will fill it with wax. If bees have too little space, they cannot move. Therefore, bee space is essential. When gaps are too large, bees will work together, hooking their legs to form a link over the space, much like chains or a bridge to close the gap.

We are all interconnected to each other's existence. Our wounded experiences and thoughts all affect one another by creating barriers and knots or throwing a rock at a web to disrupt connectedness (Anzaldúa, 2015). Navigating the gaps between worlds is painful and difficult. Latinas are forced to negotiate the gaps and navigate by switching

between acquiesce/assimilation of the dominant culture and preservation/isolation of our ethnic and cultural integrity (Anzaldúa, 2015). Latinas create a hybrid consciousness that is necessary for survival and growth. As *mestizas*, we feel compelled to close the gaps and negotiate between worlds. We collectively guard ourselves against the reproducing exclusions of our brown bodies (Anzaldúa, 2015; Delgado Bernal et al., 2006; Rendón, 2014). *Conocimiento* allows us to co-construct knowledge and pool resources to see through our cultural conditioning and institutional power. This collective *awakening* creates alternative forms of selfhood to help us cope and survive and thrive (Anzaldúa, 2015; Delgado Bernal et al., 2006; Rendón, 2014).

hooks (2001) stated that to ensure human survival, we must organize into communities as "there is no better place to learn the art of loving than in community" (p. 129). Margo exemplifies acts of organizing communities beautifully in her stories and shared why she does this work: "I made it my life's work to organize people and bring them together. This is the way we learn and expose inequitable practices and systems. People can't always see what they are in the middle of." Though Margo is retired from being a counselor, she has made it her life's work to advocate for equitable practices in the education of Latinos/as. Margo continues to organize people and communities to give them a space and platform for their voices to be heard. Margo has a strong sense of community but felt that the CLE benefited her and reminded her of her sense of *why*, stating that CLEs are "like therapy" they "lift the weight off you . . . this is what community is about." Margie commented, "We are stronger in numbers; we have more power when we are in community with one another and can see the inequities when we talk about them."

The creation of *el jardín* was dependent on the outpouring of love, generosity, and the grace of others. The abundant gifts of our community created a *way of life* (M. Guajardo et al., 2016) by bridging our talents and experiences (Anzaldúa, 2015; Delgado Bernal et al., 2006; Rendón, 2014). *El jardín's* strong, abundant community not only filled the glass the rest of the way (McKnight & Block, 2010, p. 17), but left it pouring over. Gifts of the head, hands, and heart came together to solve problems, build healthy relationships, and share in laughter and celebration. Working together for the collective good builds happy and healthy communities where our families can grow and flourish (Delgado Bernal et al., 2006; M. Guajardo et al., 2016; Rendón, 2014).

You Need the Right Environment to Thrive

Figure 110. Squash Plant in el Jardín Using Straw Bale Planting Method.

At the beginning of Chapter IV, I mentioned the need for different plants to be placed in specific environments that are conducive to their needs. We planted in fabric grow pots, straw bales, raised beds, and directly inground. Straw bales allow roots to expand quickly to soak moisture and nutrients. Additionally, the elevated straw bales provide a natural cascade for the squash foliage to stay above ground. This helps fight off both disease and pests. Other locations may have been satisfactory, and the squash may

have survived. However, placing the squash in a straw bale increased its odds exponentially. Plants are affected by their environments and our actions on their natural systems. They have no say as to where we decide to plant them or whether we choose to nourish them or not. However, the outcome of these choices is evident in the harvest or lack thereof.

Under the right conditions, both plants and people will thrive. However, unlike plants that have visible effects of neglect, our traumas and struggles are not as quick to make themselves known. We carry wounds from childhood into adulthood and old age (hooks, 2001). They fester and manifest into health issues, low self-esteem, depression, suicidal thoughts, and the inability to build trusting relationships with others. I am a product of a school system that did not value my rich culture or abundant gifts. Ultimately, I left and dropped out in search of belonging. This lack of empathy and nurturing left me young and dependent on the thoughts and actions of men and a breeding ground for self-abuse and abuses of power. In our second CLE, Margo said, "You know all of our problems would be solved if we just learned to love one another. That's it; we just need love." Latinas are encouraged by our cultural patriarchy that we should be attentive and loving, but this does not mean we are equipped to do this. To practice the art of loving, we must first learn to love and discover ourselves (hooks, 2001). This discovery is not done alone but with one another (Anzaldúa, 2015; Delgado Bernal et al., 2006; M. Guajardo et al., 2016; Rendón, 2014). For years I carried a deep shame of who I was hiding beneath masks—an imposter. I was disconnected from the world and my authentic self, afraid of further rejection. This shame kept me from believing I was worthy of love. Within the safe, gracious spaces of CLEs, I was able to share my pain

courageously and take responsibility and accountability for myself and those I hurt. My children were able to bear witness to my stories and make sense of their experiences.

The ability to find common ground and connectedness helps us learn to love ourselves and provide a loving environment and presence for others in our organizations and communities (M. Guajardo et al., 2016; hooks, 2001). The right environment can help us open our wounds to become vulnerable and present (M. Guajardo et al., 2016). It pulls us away from being victims and acts as a conduit to recognizing another's suffering (Anzaldúa, 2015). Our stories give way to *conocimiento* (Anzaldúa, 2015), thus giving us legs to mobilize, organize, co-construct knowledge, and work collectively to create an environment conducive to the growth of every mind, body, and soul in our communities and schools (M. Guajardo et al., 2016).

Dig a Little Deeper, Reach a Little Higher–Hope

Figure 111. Ryan-Olivia Reaching for Peaches.

My mother and father had great hopes and aspirations for me. They would have been delighted to know that I will be defending my dissertation soon. I can hear them

now, “Mijita is going to be a Dr.!” Knowing Dad, he is probably sharing this news with everyone from Moses and the 12 disciples to my grandmother, Memo, in heaven. Mom and Dad would often remind me of a Bible verse when I needed a little hope, “If you have the faith of a small mustard seed, you can say to this mountain, ‘move from here to there, and it will move: Nothing will be impossible for you’” (KJV, Matthew 17:14-20). While Buddhists believe that although hope is important, it lies in the future and cannot help us discover joy, peace, or enlightenment in the present moment (Hahn & Kotler, 1991). Freire (1970) posited that hope is an “ontological need” (p. 2) that fights for another day or moment; “it reaffirms that the evils and injustice of the day have not yet extinguished us” (Pollock, 2008, p. 338).

Radical hope is anchored in the commitment to struggle against poverty and dehumanizing forces within schools and society (Darder, 2017). Only through a praxis of hope can our schools and communities bridge our differences and forge alliances. The journey of co-creating *el jardín* brought about hope, agency, and sustainability in our community. Co-researchers realized we are not alone in our struggles. Throughout the CLE process, we have learned to rely on and trust these relationships that have been forged and strengthened in *el jardín*. As we come out from the shadows and *lluvias de sangre*, we “break with routines and oppressive customs and discard taboos: we have commenced to carry with pride the task of thawing hearts and changing consciousness” (Anzaldúa, 2015, p. 73).

Growth Takes Time

Figure 112. Growth of Walkway Plants Over Time.

It took a lifetime to come to a place in my life where I can authentically say I am happy and thriving. It saddens me to know many will not experience this feeling. I am reminded of my mother, who died with regret. In my last conversation with her, she said, "My only regret is that I never felt loved." I, much like my mother, had this same sentiment. I was searching for people, places, and things that would make me feel loved and better about myself. When I first began this program, I often visited Dr. Guajardo in search of guidance. On one visit, Dr. Guajardo asked if I had ever read *The Alchemist*. Dr. Guajardo has been very generous with his books; I have several on my shelf full of highlights, notes, and markings. To his surprise, I had not read this book. He pointed to his shelf and told me to "take it and read it. Come back, and we'll talk." The story is about an Andalusian shepherd boy named Santiago who travels from his homeland of Spain to the Egyptian desert in search of treasure. Santiago discovers the true treasure is within himself as he searches for worldly goods. One of the quotes that spoke to me was when Santiago says to the alchemist, "My heart is afraid that it will have to suffer," to which the alchemist replies, "Tell your heart that the fear of suffering is worse than the suffering itself." I was in fear of exposing the weight I had been carrying all my life, but

it needed to be attended to. With every consecutive book and conversation, I continued to hunger for knowledge and was consumed with questions.

This frenzied state of mind is what Anzaldúa (2015) called the "shadow beasts" that tear away and rip at our flesh and push against boundaries that have outlived their usefulness. Through this process, we retrain our lens and shift our perceptions. We let go of the old and enter the Coyolxuahqui state in a critical need to heal and be transformed (Anzaldúa, 2015). CLEs do not stop when we leave the physical space of *el jardín*; our hearts and minds continue to wrestle with new information and piece things together (M. Guajardo et al., 2016). Additionally, we acquire a new language to name our experiences to have a common language or code book. After one of the CLEs, Cameron and I had a moment to sit and talk. Cameron stated that she had been "really angry" at me for years. She shared,

> I've been writing and going to therapy and journaling, and I've grown, but I knew something was missing . . . I didn't know what to call it or what to name it. I was just angry, and I wanted someone to blame.

Cameron explained that she was unaware of all the cultural nuances of being Latina, and when everyone started talking about their experiences, she better understood my behavior and actions. She went on to say,

> I was able to give you grace and understand why you made the decisions you did . . . this was huge for me. I thought it was a personal thing—you against me, but now I see it was a cultural thing and that there were legitimate reasons for this.

Anzaldúa (2015) would argue that Cameron's feelings are like that of "passing through a birth canal." When we arise from our dead selves and shed our Moyocoyotzin serpent skin, we emerge with our souls intact to honor our dreams. This pain and growth are necessary to find "promise of inner knowledge, healing, and spiritual rebirth, waiting for you to bear them to the surface" (Anzaldúa, 2015, p. 133). I was reminded of Cameron's

new perspective and ability to extend grace and forgiveness, yet I felt deep regret that I had not come to this realization before my mother died.

Pull Weeds and Beware of Chickens

Figure 113. Erin Pulling Weeds (Left), Fordhook Chard Devoured by Chickens (Right).

There is no greater pain to a gardener than to spring open the back door to a garden only to find destruction to once-thriving vegetation. Weeds can quickly suffocate plants, and chickens must be carefully watched though they can be quite beneficial. They are voracious scavengers in constant search of tasty slithering and six-legged morsels. As they peck and scratch, foraging through the mulch, they leave an otherwise clean pathway riddled with pieces of bark for others to clean up. As Margie looked at the pictures above, she explained that weeds are like negative people in our lives:

> Getting rid of the weeds in our lives is tough work. We have to get on our hands and knees and dig deep to the root of the issue. We have to ensure nothing left behind that can grow or sprout again.

Weeds in gardens can look like edible vegetation until you look closer. While discussing this photo, Margie shared, "We so easily use the word *friend* in conversation, *my friend this and my friend that*—It rolls off the tongue easily; I am guilty of this . . . but we have to ask what their motives are." Margie made me reflect on a mere 3 years ago; I could

easily have said I had hundreds of friends. Today, I can count them on my fingers and toes. Throughout my journey, I have seen through holes and viewed my relationships from multiple angles. This increased awareness and self-knowledge have informed me on how I define a true friend. Through the Coyolxauhqui imperative, I have reorganized into a new being that has pushed me to rethink who is an ally, a friend, or a foe. It has made me reevaluate who I surround myself with, my interactions with them, and the environments I choose to be in.

Chickens and rabbits, unlike weeds, are quick to infiltrate and destroy. This reminded Margo of when she ran for board trustee for TJC against an ex-district judge in 1981. Margo, the first Latino/a and woman of color to sit on the board, unseated her opponent by a win of 18 votes when board members were publicly voted on, not appointed. Shortly after her win, the college president called for an investigation into her eligibility. These are the chickens we speak of, those who represent Eurocentric colonized ways of thinking and doing. Cameron stated, "Just because you change gardens doesn't mean the chickens and rabbits stop coming." These male-centered, dominated spaces and voices are still privileged nearly 40 years later in our schools and communities.

Unlike chickens, rabbits are covert as they dig and burrow holes under our fences and quietly nibble away at vegetation. This reminded the co-researchers of the women and other Latinas who mask themselves as a sister or ally in our lives. Latinas' need to belong and be in sacred spaces where they can dismantle oppressive structures and reclaim their identity can falsely tether them to those that look and sound like them (Flores & Garcia, 2009; Rendón, 2014). These false friendships and sisterhoods that

speak in the name of liberation, thrusting their brown fists into the air, use this same hand to strike our own down. They become *entreguerras* and *envidiosa* with women of our ethnicity (Anzaldúa, 2009). Anzaldúa (2009) stated that much like our exploiters, we project stereotyping and self-hatred against our sisters of color. These actions disjoint Latinas, pitting us against each other, a learned behavior from being a part of schools and a society that emphasize competition over collaboration (Rendón, 2014).

Preserve What is Good

Figure 114. Preserving Figs and Strawberries (Left), Making Pickles From Cucumbers (Right).

Co-researchers viewed the photo above and agreed that Latinas must preserve what is good. Margie commented, "We pick the good pickles or stories from our past and history and add to them, making them our own. We make it better." There have been times that *el jardín* has provided more than I could ever have imagined. Neighbors, friends, family, and strangers all gave to, and partook from, *el jardín's* generosity and goodness. Foraging animals and creatures enjoyed a daily buffet with plenty to spare. When I first began gardening, I would feed overly ripened or near rotting fruits and vegetables to the chickens or compost them. My wonderful friend, Shannon, recognized how much food I had been wasting and decided to intervene. She showed me how to

preserve by talking me through the process and gifting me books and supplies. I remember telling her, “That’s such a White thing,” and explained that in Latinos’/as’ homes, there were rarely leftovers or extras with so many mouths to feed. When preserving and pickling, it is essential to discard any bruised or damaged fruits or vegetables. Only the freshest picks make it to the preservation, so they have less susceptibility to bacteria and mold. When done correctly, dried preserved fruits and pickled goods can last years on the shelf and are a treat when they cannot be found in season.

Anzaldúa (2015) stated there is nothing easy about cultural histories, stories, and living conditions. Latinas are struggling to get rid of that which is bruised and rotted. We understand the gravity of preserving our heritage as we struggle to separate the fibers and knots in the fabric of our lives. Daily, I feel the tug and pulling of which strings to keep and which to discard. I ask myself, “What stories do I want to keep, and which have cloaked me from my knowledge of self?” Anzaldúa stated these knots must be unraveled to begin to heal. The stories my mother and teachers told me were their truths and crept under my skin, twisting my veins into knots I carried with me.

Looking at the bigger picture, many of us who do not do this work carry these knots and experiences into our classrooms and communities. These untruths take on a life form through our words and actions. We then bring these into our organizations and communities where they continue to become entangled and contorted. Many of these deficit messages were fed to me one spoonful at a time, sweetened and salted to my liking so I would swallow them without hesitation. By practicing CLEs as a way of life, I have learned how to unravel the knots in this tapestry of dogmas, colonization, and

untruths. It is within *platícas* grounded in CLE axioms using the theory of change (RASPPA) that we can honor our past and reveal truths so we may reauthor our stories and build upon that which is good for the community.

Make Time for Yourself–Being Alone is Okay

Figure 115. Hens Sleeping (Left), Squirrel Resting (Middle), Chicken Bathing (Right).

I have acquired vast knowledge since I began gardening and caring for small livestock. For example, chickens do not need bathing! Chickens know how to care for themselves by pecking at their plumes to rid themselves of mites and pests and taking dirt baths to keep clean. The first time I saw a chicken dustbathing, I thought it was having a seizure and was dying as it flipped and flopped its body convulsively. Chickens know they need to practice self-care and frenzied obsessive squirrels have the common sense to know when they need to stop and rest. Yet, many Latinas run themselves to the point of exhaustion. All the co-researchers admitted they do not practice self-care nearly enough. Margie said, “There’s just no time. I have work, kids, and the house to clean. I’m the last one on the list, and then, I’m just too tired and exhausted to even think about me.” Margo

added, “We need to do better about taking care of ourselves. Who else is going to do it?” I can agree with these statements as I spend my days running on coffee and a prayer.

Rest and self-care are something Latinas put on the backburner as loyalty to family and familism is imparted into our childhood (Anzaldúa, 2015; Delgado Bernal et al., 2006; Rendón, 2014). We are often bathed in *marianismo*, smacked with *machismo*, and left to heal our own wounds as we are told, *callada te ves más bonita*. Exposure to patriarchy and sexism dominates most Latino/a homes and precludes Latinas from practicing and learning self-care (Anzaldúa, 2015; Delgado Bernal et al., 2006; Rendón, 2014). This trauma causes Latinas to have unhealthy physical responses and low self-esteem as Latinas primarily view themselves by observing others (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997; Merskin, 2007).

Figure 116. Sitting Alone With my Thoughts.

As the co-researchers viewed the above photo, they discussed the importance of being alone. Cameron said, “I find out a lot about myself when I’m alone. I question why I feel the sense of abandonment or anxiousness. I’ve come to learn that being alone is

okay . . . I embrace time to myself now." hooks (2001) suggested self-love is the foundation of our loving practice and without it our other efforts to love result in failure. In a recent CLE with some peers and professors, I shared that I love myself for the first time in over 50 years. I had been chasing love all my life, only to find it was within me all along. hooks posited the best roadmap for how to love ourselves is to give ourselves the love we have dreamed of receiving from others. The love we give others is conditional. There are rare occasions when we can love others unconditionally; however, this is very difficult because we cannot control or predict the behaviors of those we love (hooks, 2001). Ideally, I would have liked to have known how to love myself as a child. This would have saved me years of soul searching, and I would have grown to be an empowered, secure Latina who valued her history and culture.

I have jumped from one relationship to the next in a hurry to marry or lock myself into a commitment. The thought of being with myself made me panic with feelings of abandonment and rejection. When I first moved out of my married home, I was not used to sharing custody and not sleeping next to my husband. I would often find myself driving home in the middle of the night to crawl into my children's beds so I was not alone. Often, my ex-husband would find me sleeping on the sofa. No words were said, I would simply get up and walk out the side door before the children awoke. Brown (2019) wrote that "stillness is not about focusing on nothingness; it's about creating a clearing. It's opening up an emotionally clutter-free space and allowing ourselves to feel and think and dream and question" (p. 108). At first, this was difficult and often ended in crying spells or going on day-long Netflix and eating binges. My cousin Dina, who witnessed my pain and had also experienced a divorce, embraced me and said, "Renée, I know what

you are feeling, but you will realize that you're not alone; we are all here for you . . . you're lonely." Lonely and alone may look alike, but they are different. Loneliness is marked by a sense of isolation. It is an emotion and a feeling that something is missing and is attributed to not having a connection, whereas *alone* is being in a state of solitude. I realized I had the power to change my feeling of loneliness. Co-researchers found that meditation, warm baths, walks, massages, self-help books, and prayer/time with God all help with feelings of loneliness and give us time to reflect on what is good with gratitude. In our *plática*, Cameron reminded the co-researchers of the importance of recognizing students in our care who may be experiencing a feeling of loneliness:

> I can empathize with children who sit in class with feelings of loneliness . . . It's not about grammar and writing skills; it's about a simple hug or kind gesture to show them that I support them and am here for them.

Cameron stated that she cannot expect a child to learn and be productive when battling feelings of loneliness, as "It affects their productivity, health, and everyone around them . . . then they grow up and take this into the world with them."

Be Authentic

Figure 117. My Hen, Nacha, Looking at her Reflection.

My mother's nickname was *Nacha*; I named a hen after her. Nacha pays a daily visit to my back door to look at her reflection. Much like Nacha, my mother enjoyed looking in the mirror, often saying, "Ninfa, you're beautiful!" followed by blowing herself a kiss. My mother was a beautiful woman, and she knew this. There was not a mirror she did not stop in front of. She would put on some lipstick or put a hair back into its place; sometimes, she would smile with satisfaction. My mother's beautiful *mask* helped her navigate her world and was used as a veil to hide the pain and insecurities she was experiencing. This escape from herself is a form of concealment and an integral strategy for survival (Anzaldúa, 2015; Delgado Bernal et al., 2006; Rendón, 2014). Rodriguez, 2006).

It is becoming far more challenging to be authentic in a social environment that hides behind filters and screens. Growing up, my mother did not have a cell phone,

television, or social media messages to feed her impressionable young mind as she developed. Yet, she was affected by negative messages and experiences. When discussing this photograph and the subject of authenticity, Margie shared her story when attending a predominantly White Catholic school in Waco, Texas: “They were all White pretty girls with sleek, pretty hair. This girl made me tie her shoes while they all laughed at me. I wanted to be accepted and part of their group, so I did it.” Margie explained that even at this young age, she knew she was “not being authentic” to herself. She stated that she “felt stupid” and “foolish,” and “I knew what was happening. It is something I’ve never forgotten.” This experience affected Margie and “informed future choices and experiences” as she told the co-researchers that she “vowed to never be used or exploited again.” Margie did not grow up in an era where social media was rampant among our youth. The world is much more difficult for Latinas today. There are filtered faces on Instagram, Facebook, Twitter, Snapchat, TikTok, and social media platforms. Latina girls are receiving messages and comparing themselves to women with a tiny waist, large breasts, porcelain-perfect skin, and sleek, frizz-free long hair, only to look in the mirror and say, *you’re ugly* (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997; Merskin, 2007). Texting has become the new face-to-face communication, allowing others to express cowardly and rude vulgarities without penalty under the protection of distanced communication and the ability to hide behind a screen.

As people choose to work remotely, social face-to-face interactions and distancing are becoming more acceptable. The University of Michigan studied 14,000 college students over the last 30 years and found students were 40% less empathetic than older generations (Tackett-Newburg, 2018). The researcher stated this goes “hand in

hand . . . with lack of empathy or emotional warmth" (Tackett-Newburg, 2018, p. 1). This lack of empathy contributes to dishonesty and having short-lived relationships How does this inform our identities, as Latinas, in the face of dehumanization?

Anzaldúa (2015) stated that a mirror is a tool for seeing and being seen as subject and object as

> the eye pins down the object of its gaze, scrutinizes it, judges it. A glance can freeze us in place; it can possess us. It can erect a barrier against the world, but in a glance also lies awareness and knowledge. (p. 64)

The more we see ourselves in the mirror for who we really are, the less we feed into the distorted mirrors and untruths people place in front of us. Until we find a way to be authentic, we will continue to hold up our distorted mirrors to others, creating double vision and adding to issues and distortion, becoming stuck in a mirror effect. M. Guajardo et al. (2016) suggested we can heal our minds and wounds through critical self-reflection and decolonization. M. Guajardo et al. spoke to authenticity and the ability to embrace our authentic selves by sharing our stories of true-self (and acts of fraudulence) in safe, gracious spaces to explore our identities and ways of knowing. These spaces allow for collective thought that disrupts and dismantle our identities; we become like the pea plant in *el jardín* pushing up against the cracks in the rocks, challenging the traditional identity politics to create alternative stories to imagine differently. Anzaldúa (2015) stated cracks show us the flaws in our cultures and a different way of defining the self and group identity so we can embrace our authenticity.

hooks (1994) stated that when we are self-actualized, we are better students and teachers. Further, "The purpose of education is to show students how to define themselves authentically and spontaneously in relation to the world" (p. 199). Authentic classrooms and teachers nurture genuine relationships (hooks, 1994) that value and

encourage our unique histories, stories, and gifts within our schools and communities (M. Guajardo et al., 2016).

Celebrate Yourself and Others

Figure 118. Ryan-Olivia Celebrating her Birthday in el Jardín With a Piñata and her Family.

While reviewing the literature in Chapter II, I did not see much that spoke to celebrating ourselves and others in the commodified Western world sense of the word *celebration*. However, CLEs in *el jardín* have been fun, playful, joyful, and full of laughter as we celebrate each other's growth and the growth surrounding us. The co-researchers agreed that celebrating our small and big is important and sends a positive message to ourselves and others that we value ourselves and one another. As the co-researchers studied the photo above, they noted they rarely celebrate their accomplishments. Margie stated, "We are busy working harder to get to the next step. We can't slow down, or someone will pass us up. I'm constantly asking myself, what can I do or achieve next? We do this to prove ourselves." Margo mentioned that there is "someone always coming up on your heels. We don't have time to celebrate because we are conditioned to care for everyone else." Cameron suggested this lack of celebration of self may be attributed to other co-researchers' ages and the era we grew up in:

> I think because I'm younger, I didn't have those messages of being a woman of the house and tending to men. They were a team. They both cooked, cleaned, and served each other . . . Mom made sure to celebrate us.

Cameron added that she takes time to celebrate her accomplishments with small gestures:

> It may be something small like a massage or a pedicure or having a lunch and a drink with a friend . . . sometimes, I text my family about my successes in a group text and feel celebrated with their warm responses and well wishes.

These conversations connected me to an experience from our last CLE. Looking through Margo's green binder, I was in awe of all her accomplishments and praised her work in the community. I could see that this was physically uncomfortable for Margo. Later, I brought this observation to Margie's attention, who explained that her mom "gets really uncomfortable when someone sings her praises. I've asked her about this, and she says it's just who she is and what she does; she doesn't expect anything in return."

I began to think about when I was celebrated in class or school. I had one memory, a birthday. Dr. Koschoreck, one of my professors, made me a cake the summer of my second year in the PhD program. The class had been talking about upcoming birthdays, and somehow birthday parties came up as a topic of conversation. I had mentioned that I had never had a birthday party as a child or adult. The week of my birthday, Dr. Koschoreck presented me with a cake and sang to me. This act of kindness made for a positive academic experience. Acts of kindness and celebration, such as that of Dr. Koschoreck, strengthen our relationships and bonds (M. Guajardo et al., 2016). Furthermore, studies show celebrations have significant health benefits. A Harvard study by Kim et al. (2017) showed acts of optimism, such as celebrations, reduce the risk of dying from health causes by 30%. Celebrating others and adopting a praising and loving attitude helps us lead more positive lives, shifts our perspective, and positively affects our well-being (Kim et al., 2017).

Reflection #3–Share Your Stories and Your Bounty

As our final CLE closed, the co-researchers wanted to look at more photographs. We began to comb through the hundreds of pictures on all our phones. Ryan-Olivia shared, “Look! Luno is in so many pictures!” I did not think much about this until I was lying in bed later that evening. I was scrolling through the photos and reflecting on our many experiences in *el jardín*. I realized Coyolxauhqui was everywhere; Luno had been amid our work, play, and conversations. The photos in Figures 119–127 further illustrate the bountiful harvest of *el jardín as* a community and *way of life*.

Figure 119. Me, Cooking in Kitchen Sharing Stories of Sibling Flan Wars With Erin and Megan.

Figure 120. Margo Sharing a Story With my Neighbor, Alex.

Figure 121. Sharing Stories With my Girls (Left), Sharing our Harvest With Neighbors (Right).

Figure 122. Sonia, Reading Story of Coyohalqui and Shared Some of her Stories too. Sonia Called me the Next Morning to Tell me "OMG! Those Were the Best Eggs! I Made Breakfast for the Whole Family! Later, I'm Going to use Make Calabaza con Pollo con las Calabazas que me diste."

Figure 123. Neighbor in el Jardín Sharing Fruit and Laughter With her Daughter.

Figure 124. Bountiful Baskets From el Jardín.

Figure 125. Me, Preparing Regalos for Co-Researchers.

Figure 126. Crows Leaving Gifts of Appreciation and Gratitude for el Jardín: Colored Glass, Shiny Objects, Pennies, Dimes, and Stones.

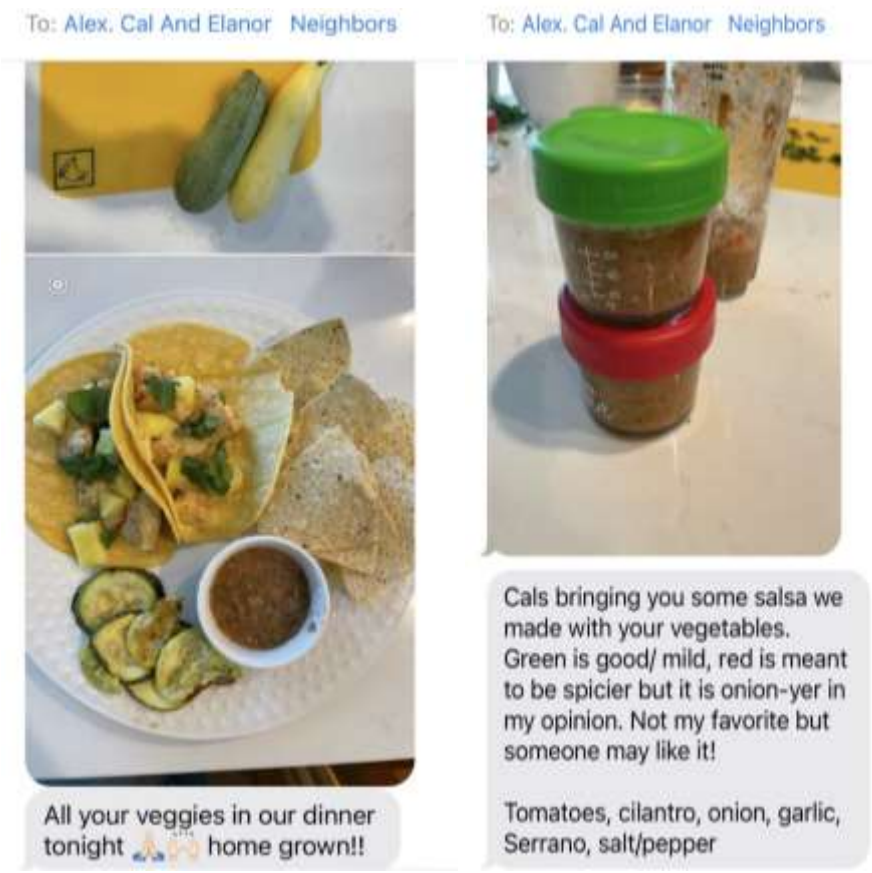

Figure 127. Neighbors' Texts. Feeding Their Family With Food From el Jardín (Right), Salsa They Made With Veggies From el Jardín They Shared With Me.

Recuerdos and Reflections as Regalos CLE #3

After our third CLE, all the co-researchers walked the garden to take cuttings for vegetation reproduction, also known as vegetative propagation. The co-researchers and witnesses each received a pot and access to good soil. We discussed what plants are suitable for propagation. Margie had her eyes set on a specific flower, and when she heard it could be propagated, she screamed, "I was hoping you'd say that one [pointing]. I love that flower!" There was no doubt that *el jardín* had become a community garden. Neighbors would come in a pinch to avoid lines and a trip to the local supermarket, often tapping on my front office window and peeping in through the blinds. Neighbors knew where to find me—writing in my office or in *el jardín*. Two hands would press against

the glass with their head leaning forward and a motion pointing their hand that they were going to the back. Sometimes I would meet them in *el jardín*; other times, I would not. They would return to the front yard with handfuls of onions, cucumbers, tomatoes, squash, and herbs. Their hands would be so full that they would often look through my office window with a raising of their eyebrows as a "thanks!"

Neighbors and friends often drop by when I am not home and text or call me to let me know they picked some vegetables or showed a friend the transformation of *el jardín*. Whether one stopped by to work in *el jardín* or to tell a story and have a cup of coffee, in some capacity, everyone contributed to this community garden. *El jardín* was a place of discovery, wisdom, belonging, generosity, transformation, and power. Those who physically worked *el jardín* benefited from the fresh air, warm sunshine, and healthy lifestyle of being physically active. Co-researchers commented that *el jardín* contributed to lower stress and better moods by providing a relaxing, welcoming, and joyful environment where they could share their troubles and traumas. *El jardín* and the hard work of co-researchers, neighbors, and friends provided healthy, nutritious food free from chemicals and toxins that fed their families and introduced new foods and flavors to growing babies and children. Figures 128–130 are pictures from our third CLE as we take a piece of *el jardín* with us. The *platícas* never stop.

Figure 128. Sharing Propagation Plants as a Recuerdo From our Time in the Garden and to Share With Others.

Figure 129. Margie's Favorite Flower in Garden (Left), Witnesses Taking Home a Recuerdo (Right).

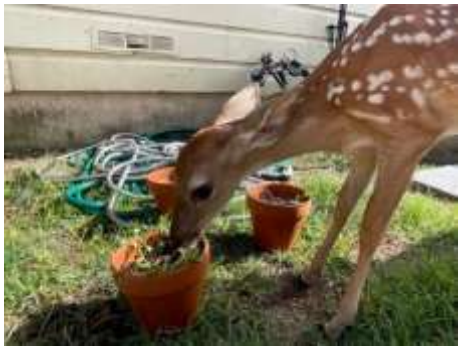

Figure 130. Luno Eating Regalos. It Seems That Luno Likes Regalos too. Luckily, There was Plenty to go Around.

Summary Table for CLE #3

For quick reference, Table 6 is meant to display the dynamics at play and insights that emerged from CLE #3. The information is organized through the CLE theory of change (RASPPA) lens for each participant. The rows for *Politic* and *Action* were combined to showcase each participant's politic through their actions.

Table 6. Summary CLE #3.

	Cameron	Margie	Margo	Renée	Ninfa (Witness)
Relationship	Daughter	Best friend of 15 years	Margie's mother	Self	Daughter of 23 years
Assets	Creative writing, poetry, storytelling	Hard worker	Political organizer	Knowledge of how to nurture and construct *el jardín*/a CLE nurturing, resilient	Insightful. Familial cultural wealth and emotional intelligence
Stories	"Celebrate yourself and others" Stories of self-care and how to celebrate yourself	"Preserve what is good–pickle story" "Take time for yourself" "Growth takes time" "Pull weeds and beware of chickens"	"Dig a little deeper, reach a little higher" "We work better together"	"Being alone is ok" "You need the right environment to thrive" "Learn to look at things from a different perspective"	"Be Authentic"
Place	School *El jardín*	A prestigious state office School setting as a grad student *El jardín*	-Temple Junior College *El jardín*	School classrooms as a teacher and child, new home as a divorcee *El jardín*	Story retold by daughter – remembering mother's performative narratives *El jardín*
Politic (in Action)	Story Making	Story Making	Story Making	Story Making	Story Making Reauthoring story

V. CONSEJOS DE EL JARDÍN Y MI MADRE

Summary

I began this document by stating that learning to connect with the land brings us closer to ourselves and the healing of our people. *El jardín* embodied the physical, spiritual, and metaphorical process of healing and liberation. In Chapter I, I gave an overview of the genealogy of *becoming* by providing the reader a glimpse into the past patterns and systems of anti-Mexican sentiment. In Chapter II, I outlined my method of review and conceptual framework. In this autoethnography, I collected the stories and voices of four Latinas spanning three generations to gain insight into the relations between co-researchers and the structures that shaped their lives. I shared my stories of belonging, believing, and becoming interwoven with reviewed literature. These stories bear witness to me in an attempt to make meaning of my lived experiences and serve as a body of literature to inform Latinas' ways of knowing and being. Through these stories, the problem statement comes into focus—Latina students have an abundance of cultural wealth, but their expectations of success are stained with experiences of discrimination and trauma within their homes, schools, and communities. Latinas' experiences are deeply rooted in a history of violence, colonialism, discrimination, racial hierarchy, and the repression of their native language. Politics that exclude the Latina community become problematic as they are affected by policies representing the dominant ideology and culture, leaving Latinas and their identity formation vulnerable and fragmented. Those who fall in line with the dominant culture, wearing their masks properly and tight, are placed on the path to college. Others are counseled on alternate routes or, in my case, simply left to leave on their own accord without regard to their future or questioning their

motive. In response to this problem, I created a gracious space that would foster and sustain healthy relationships and allow for vulnerable and difficult conversations. Using CLEs as a worldview and *way of life* (M. Guajardo et al., 2016), my research questions arose from a desire to critically examine and make sense of Latinas' experiences within our self, communities, and organizations and how these inform our identities. My research questions were as follows:

1. What are the stories of self that shape and inform the Latina identity and sense of belonging ?
2. What pedagogies inform Latinas' resilience and resistance to pursue a fuller robust life in the process of becoming a fuller human being ?
3. What do spaces of critical consciousness and community learning look like, sound like, and feel like?

In Chapter III, I discussed my research methods. I used the methods of *platícas* and *testimonios*, as they embody the cultural beliefs and values shared by the co-researchers. Additionally, I used the method of photovoice to explore the co-researchers' emotions and experiences that have informed their identities. Chapter III also included my framework for analysis to help me make meaning of our stories. Writing our stories allowed me to capture an organic process of higher learning. These stories were filtered through the CLE theoretical framework for analysis. In Chapter IV, I gave the before, during, and after accounts of the CLEs I convened. Using the foundation of the CLE axioms with the added layer of the ecologies of knowing and the theory of change (RASPPA; M. Guajardo et al., 2016), the co-researchers were able to make meaning of

their stories and experiences. CLEs as *a way of life* and pedagogy have deeply connected me to my community and informed my ways of knowing and meaning making.

Recommendations and Implications

Dear Old Self,

Let me tell you a story that begins long ago. We come from rich ancient history and Indigenous peoples connected to our earth. Our peoples were healers, shamans, inventors, and architects. We erected magnificent pyramids and ornate temples, and developed social structures and writing systems. The calendar that rules our days and nights and the mathematical methods our world relies on come from our people. Our empire came under attack as European conquerors invaded our organic fertile lands, slaughtering, raping, and bringing disease and plagues, decimating our ancestors, and claiming our land as their own.

Centuries passed, and the bloodshed and destruction continued as White men on horses wearing endorsed badges stripped us of our land, vacating us from our homes and burning them to the ground. These vigilantes tortured and lynched our fathers and brothers, dragging their bodies through the streets, while our mothers and virgin sisters were raped and violated. As the years passed, our land continued to push us out of our homes, collecting us like trash and throwing us into foreign and unfamiliar territory. We were warned not to share public spaces with those who persecuted and exploited us. We were expected to serve, fight, and die for a land that we could not be honorably buried in.

Our parents will want the best for us and send us to school, a school that has segregated and forced assimilation on our people by beating us in hopes that we forsake our rich language and not remember our noble beginnings. We will open their history

books and read nothing of what I have told you. We will be taught a history that does not include us by people who do not look like us. We will be told to listen, sit still, and not question these false truths. We will be ridiculed and called a wetback and spic. We will be pulled out of our classrooms because of our last names and told we are dumb and stupid by our teachers (see Figure 131). This system will subject us to suffering and pain until we can no longer bear the weight on our own, and we will drop out of school. No one will notice we are missing, not one phone call, letter, or word. We will not be missed because we were never there—they never saw us.

Figure 131. Me, Fifth Grade–Mr. Barbosa Told me I was "Stupid," "Dumb," and Said I Would Never Amount to Anything.

The pain will not stop there as we enter social circles that continue to discriminate and rupture our spirit. We will compare ourselves to those getting the attention we desperately need, and we will struggle to build our self-esteem upon the flatteries of men as we search for acceptance and love. These men will take what they can and more, leaving us defiled, empty, and bitter. We will compare our brown bodies to White women and adulterate them, contaminating our roots with fruitless dreams of being something we are not. We will pollute our hair once the color of sweet chocolate. We will avoid the warm embrace of the sun god, Huitzilopochtli. We will distort our vision with eyes that

are not ours, scar our hands to straighten our abuela's coarse, curly hair. We will speak carefully to ensure there is no evidence of our people's language. This rebellion against us, these superficial modifications, will not cease our internal turmoil or give rest to the voices that whisper in our ears. We cannot continue to cannibalize our bodies, minds, and spirits.

We will enter our communities as teachers *educating* others who look like us. We will become part of the system that has abused us, and now we abuse our sisters and daughters. We are no different than those who taught us—we spew their dogmas and regurgitate their words and ways. We believe lies and make them truths for others—we take part in the system that has shackled our minds. We can no longer believe their stories and myths. We cannot continue to negate the spirited, vigorous roots from which we came! If we do, our daughters, granddaughters, and great-granddaughters will suffer just as we did, and we will allow the raping, pillaging, and violating of their souls.

Little brown girl, listen! There will be invitations to dig our heels deep into our lands to remember. Follow Coyolxauhqui into *el jardín* of hope and *conocimiento*. Abandon that which does not cultivate us. Remember the wisdom and power of our ancestorial empires and the resilience of our mothers and fathers—look to Coyolxauhqui for perseverance and courage. Here we will begin to re-imagine as we become *pensadoras* with the guidance of Coyolxauhqui—she will illuminate our way.

Our burdens and traumas will drop us to our knees as we bury our hands beneath the earth, twisting and overturning the grounds to reclaim our souls. Our knuckles will bleed and bruise, and we will tire from unearthing layers of wounds. Spindling spiders will crawl up our arms and into our ears to haunt our minds with their white webs; they

are but dream thieves, swindlers in the dark. Beware of those who come in the name of *hermanidad*, green-eyed serpents can be beautiful, but their venom is deadly. We must look to Coyolxauhqui; her bright light will expose spindlers' snarled threads and camouflaged vipers.

We will penetrate and break through years of compacted black clay and jagged rock, fracturing our soul, dismembering our mind and body, and disrupting the foundation intently built for us. We will exhume our entombed *espejo de conocimiento* and look deeply into our reflection to see fragmented glass and cracks; do not expect to see what you have known. She is dead, and we have emerged in a magnificent and beautiful new way—awakened, empowered, and re-imagined. This is the foundation *we* will build upon; we will write brown stories for little brown girls and for *those* who cultivate our daughters.

Dear El Jardín,

Let me tell you the story of the little brown girl who will enter your garden. She is a seed that arose from the earth and ancient empires. She is the daughter of Coyolxauhqui, medicinal healers, warriors, and mystical shamans. She soars on the wings of Huiztopotchli and speaks the language of her ancestral spirit guides. She radiates all she touches and dreams passionately.

Heed the warning, I plant her in your garden a different EYE, because EYE remember! EYE remember the toxicities that infiltrated our roots, leaving us decaying and malnourished. EYE remember the contamination that riddled us with a disease that we carried and spread wherever our seeds were planted. We have done the backbreaking work of excavating the grounds in search of our wholeness and souls, leaving behind the

unhealthy creature you created. We no longer want this beast to feed others like us. We have put our history through a sieve and pushed up through the cracks emerging new beings in search of sacred spaces and fertile organic grounds to plant *our* stories. Our stories speak of our truths, our lands, and our peoples. We cannot go back to what was or *your* ways. We have been touched by death, fear, plagues, and acts of violence. This violence stems from the poisons that seep into our soils, flow through your halls, and weep from your walls. We will no longer breed and propagate your agendas. We have put our bodies and minds together in a new way; our EYES are fixed and focused. Our connected stories have told us that *we belong to this land*; we are resilient and powerful.

This seed *I* give you will flourish and thrive under the right conditions with deliberate planning and hard work. I invite you to be *jardineros* with us and dream of possibilities in *el jardín*. I invite you to re-imagine a different future for us but know EYE will be watching. Talk to buzzing bees and pollinating butterflies; commune with us, Coyolxauhqui [community]. Together we will share the wisdom of *el jardín* so that you can exterminate disease and pests meticulously and organically. Your hands of ideologies and knees of structures will soil and sully as you bend and work to disturb and wrestle with the land and create fertile grounds. Shed your Moyocoyotzin skin, rebirth a new being. Organize, co-construct, and work collectively and deliberately with Coyolxauhqui to build common grounds, bridges, and pathways of dreams and possibilities. Become *jardineros* with us to nourish the good and weed out *sustos* and *heridas*. When the brutal winds blow and possums infiltrate *el jardín*, protect us. Erect fences to safeguard and preserve the rich, fruitful soil we have labored for.

Keep a close watch on the stranger, inviting only those willing and committed to tilling the grounds with us; do not let them steal the bounty for themselves. Instead, invite those willing to plant, grind the wheat, and sit in communion at our table to break bread and partake of the sweet wine made from robust grapes *we* have harvested. Together we lift our glasses and each other in celebration of what we have created—an abundant bountiful harvest. Even in our celebrations, remember! In our rest, remember! Remember the path of *conocimiento*. This work requires our daily commitment to Coyolxauhqui and *el jardín*. Apply what we have learned to our daily lives; this is a *way of life*! Continually excavate and till, mending and bridging our humanity to cultivate spiritual and emotionally healed beings. In our collectiveness, we co-construct knowledge to liberate ourselves. Question dominant powers and cultures by honoring and understanding *our* past and focusing on our gifts. Together, we can remember, re-frame, and re-imagine. *I* entrust you with *my* seed, but EYE and Coyolxauhqui are watching!

In community, the future us,

Esther Renée Rivera-Bocanegra, PhD

> The path of knowledge requires that we apply what we learn to all our daily activities, to our relationships with ourselves, with others, with the environment . . . Though knowledge we liberate ourselves; through knowledge we question the limitations of single culture/nationalistic identity. Walking by the light of one's knowledge enables us to close the gaps, bridge the abysses. (Anzaldúa, 2015, p. 91)

Figure 132 shows the co-researchers' path of *conocimiento*.

Figure 132. The Path of Conocimiento.

Dear Ryan-Olivia,

You are a beautiful sunflower [see Figures 133 and 134]. Face the sun and see the light ahead. Let it warm you and embrace you when others do not. There will be times when harsh winds blow you in other directions, when pests come to feed on you, and when your leaves wilt and wither from the brutal cold; you will feel defeated and crushed. Little flower, look up, find that ray of sunshine. Look to the sparrows in the trees. They do not worry about where they will get their food or water, for it is all around them. Chat with the squirrels, visit the bees, and look to other flowers for wisdom and strength. Dig deep into your roots and take up what is good. Let it nourish and feed your body, mind, and spirit. Drink up the rain and quench your thirst. Share your sweet nectar. Grow strong and pollinate others, for they too need love and a good friend. Take heed—there will be threats, disease-carrying bugs, and toxicities that enter your organic garden. Remember to look to the moon, Coyolxauhqui, in these times of darkness; she will remind you of your strengths and illuminate your healing path until the sun rises again.

Your bold, brilliant self is only here for a short season. You will fade and depart this world. Your leaves and petals will nourish and feed the organic grounds you once brilliantly and gracefully bloomed in. Birds and worms will come and graze on you, contributing to the humus and goodness in the earth. Your cultivated seeds will drop into rich fertile soil to feed generations. Spring will emerge again to chatting squirrels and singing birds. The sun will shine its face to joyfully welcome and warmly embrace your tender seedlings. They will radiate and dazzle, delighting in all the goodness around them. Their bouquet will entice fluttering butterflies to carry their sweet nectar across borders and oceans.

Love, Mom

Figure 133. Sunflowers in el Jardín.

Figure 134. My Little Sunflower, Ryan-Olivia. She Radiates and Dazzles.

Final Thoughts and Words of Gratitude

Personal Growth

When I first entered this program, I was solely searching for a diploma with three letters behind my name. After being a witness and participant in the work of CLEs, I knew I wanted more and *needed* more. When I approached Dr. Guajardo to be my chair, he asked me, "Why are you here?" Before I could answer him, he quickly followed with, "Because if you're here for a piece of paper, I'm not your guy." This institution will read this document, go through the proper channels, and inform me I have done a good job for which I will receive all the accolades and honors of the prestigious accomplishment of acquiring a PhD. This is a dream I could have never imagined for myself, and I realize it was not done alone. It will be a glorious day, but I am already celebrating. This journey has blessed me beyond measure. *El jardín* and this community (Coyolxauhqui) have fed, nourished, and taught me how to love myself. I am partaking in the harvest, picking sweet berries off the vines as I celebrate my health and mental, emotional, and spiritual well-being. This work has informed and developed me as a mother, friend, neighbor, and

community member. CLEs, as a *way of life*, are the groundwork for good leadership and school improvement—We reap what we sow! Figure 135 is a picture of me remembering when I was a little girl. I would pretend it was a horse that could take me where I dreamed of going.

Figure 135. Me on the Propane "Horse" I Used to sit on as a Child With a Shiny Long Gold Piece of Fabric Bound to my Head by a Rubber Band. I Would Pretend a Knight in Shining Armor Would Come Rescue me. Today, no Knight Required. I Have all I Need Within me; I am la Jardinera, the Mexicana Alchemist.

Dos Cabezas son Mejor que Una, Punto Final!

My father's adage, *Dos cabezas son mejor que una, aunque una es de repollo* [two heads are better than one, even if one is of cabbage] was a great idiom he used to inform me that together we can do anything. It was good and what I based my methods on, but I would like to change it up a bit . . . *reframe* it. I would like to use only the first part, "*Dos cabezas son mejor que una. Punto final*!" [Two heads are better than one—Period!]. My father thought that two heads are better than one, even if one is *not as bright as the other*, but I have learned that we all have gifts and can bring something to the

table. That one person who pushes against the grain or sits quietly is still bringing *something* we can learn from. Remember, I was a CLE skeptic at one time. I have seen people walk out, run out, and push back. Many returned to the CLE out of hunger and the need to belong to something bigger, including myself. This work is hard, and we do not always like looking in the mirror. Healthy CLEs expose our frauds, insecurities, fractures, and traumas. They require that we be authentic and open to the possibilities. For many committed to doing the work, it can positively transform their lives. Again, no cabbages here—we all learn something. So, Daddy, thank you for instilling the importance of community; I see now I cannot do this alone. I know you are with me always . . . just *dos cabezas* reimagining. Figure 136 is a photograph of Mom and Dad shortly before Dad passed away.

Figure 136. Mom and Dad. My Parents Always Told me That Together we can do Anything.

Recuerdos and Reflections as Regalos–A Letter to Coyolxauhqui and el Jardín

Thank you, Coyolxauhqui, for plucking this struggling little brown girl from the suffocating weeds of dogmas, single truths, and colonization. Thank you for planting me in fertile grounds where I could grow and thrive. Thank you for feeding me wisdom and

nourishment, making meaning of my trauma and pain, providing me with comfort, and carrying me during my loneliness. Thank you for loving me when I did not have the strength or will. Most importantly, thank you for teaching me to love myself and be my own story maker. With these *regalos* comes great responsibility. This is my charge, and I am committed to this work as a *way of life*. I will continue planting seeds and inviting other little brown girls like me into *el jardín*. There was a time I did not like my name, *Esther Renée*. Today, I know the meaning is a perfect description and quite befitting of who I am—*A Star Reborn*. There are no coincidences! You remain forever a part of me. Now, there is work to be done! Figure 137 is a photo of Luno in *el jardín*.

Figure 137. Luno and me in el Jardín Forever Bonded in Spirit.

APPENDIX SECTION

APPENDIX A

Key Terms and Phrases (Spanish/English)

Abuela - Grandmother

Abuelo - Grandfather

Cansada - Tired

Cantina - Bar

Chicano/Chicana - Someone who is native of, or descends from, Mexico and who lives in the United States. Chicano or Chicana is a chosen identity of some Mexican Americans in the United States.

Chisme - Gossip

Consejos - Tips, advice

Cuentos - Stories

Dos Cabezas - Two heads

Educación - Education

El Jardin de Esperanza - The Garden of Hope

Entreguerras - Battle/War

Espejo - Mirror

Familia - Family

Güerra - Light skin person

Hermanas - Sisters

Hermanidades - Sisterhood

Hola - Hello

Hora de Sangre - Hour of blood

Lluvias de Sangre - Tears of Blood

Lluvias de Flores - Tears of Flowers

Las Fresas - A Mexican slang term for rich, spoiled girls (rich boys are also included)

Latinidad - Spanish-language term that refers to the various attributes shared by Latin American people and their descendants without reducing those similarities to any single trait

Latinos - (in North America) a person of Latin American origin or descent, especially a man or boy

La mascara - A mask

La Mariposa - Butterfly

Maleduacado - Poorly raised/ ban mannered

Mestizo/a - Mixed race

Mijita - An affectionate form of address a female, my little daughter (sweetheart, Dear)

Mulas - Mules

Novelas - Soap opera

Oficina - Office

Ojo - Eye

Plática - Conversation

Pensadoras - Thinkers who build on their cultural foundations to form political and practical meaning about learning, knowing

Son mejor - Are better

Sustos - Fright

Regaños - Scoldings

Testimonios - Testimonials/stories

Tia - Aunt

Tio - Uncle

Tortillaria - A place that makes and sells tortillas

Tortillas de maiz - Corn tortillas

APPENDIX B

CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE AS A RESEARCH PARTNER

Title of the Study: *Nurturing and Sustaining Pedagogical Spaces and Community Building for Identity Formation: Reimagining the Latina Identity Collective*

Dear Fellow Research Partner,

You have been invited to participate in a qualitative research study. The objective of this study is to capture the experiences and stories of Latinas through *platícas* and *testimonios*. This form provides you with more information. Please carefully read the form should you be interested in participating. I am at your disposal to answer any questions you may have or if you need further clarification.

Your participation in this study is completely voluntary and you may choose not to participate at any time. If you wish to terminate your participation in the study, you may do so at any time. All I ask is that you notify me of your decision. You will be provided with a copy of this consent form for your records.

Researcher Information: Esther Renee Bocanegra, Doctoral Student, Texas State University-San Marcos, eb1165@txstate.edu, 512-233-9513

Researcher's Supervisor: Dr. Miguel Guajardo, Ph.D., mg50@txstate.edu, 512.245.6579

What is the purpose of this study?

The purpose of this study is to explore how the experiences and stories of Latinas informs their identity development

What is expected of you as a research partner?

If you agree to this study, you will be asked to participate in three pláticas with possible follow-ups. Pláticas with other Latinas will explore how our personal histories, stories have impacted our identity as leaders, educators, and community members. The meetings will last approximately two hours and <u>we will audiotape and/or videotape the discussion to make sure that our stories are captured accurately.</u>

You have the right to request that the recorder be turned off at any time. You do

not have to answer any questions you are not comfortable with. Data collected from the pláticas and artifacts may be used for academic presentations and publication purposes. Participation in this project is voluntary and you may choose at any time not to participate without any penalty.

You will be asked to share documents and artifacts such as photographs, journals, artwork, and any other objects that will help tell the story of your life. I will make copies or take a photograph of these documents and objects with your permission.

What is provided by the researcher?

The researcher will provide a safe and gracious space for our pláticas. Food, beverages, and comfortable seating/environment will be provided for all research partners. Please make the researcher aware of any allergy or food issues. Transportation, childcare, and translators can be provided if requested or necessary.

Are there any risks of participating in this study?

There are no mental or physical risks for participating in this study. However, you may experience some discomfort, uneasiness, or tension during our pláticas due to the personal nature of our conversations. If this occurs, you may stop at any point, take a break, or decline to answer, and we will redirect the conversation. If you feel that you are in need of seeking counseling services, you may do so by contacting the Texas State Counseling Center at (512) 245-2208 or email counselingcenter@txstate.edu. Services for participants are free to registered students, though the number of sessions allowed may be limited.

Although there are not any known risks for participating in this study, please feel free to call me or my supervisor if you have any questions regarding this study. I will be happy to answer any questions you have in a timely manner,

How will you handle issues of COVID-19? Please refer to Appendix G in this document. A hard copy and email version be given to all co-researchers.

What steps will be taken to protect participants privacy and keep information confidential?

The data resulting from your participation will be used for educational purposes. To protect the privacy of plática group members, all transcripts will be coded and we ask that you not discuss what is discussed in the plática with anyone else.

The records of this study will be stored securely and kept confidential. All data will be stored in a safe place to ensure confidentiality. Upon approval, audio and or video recordings from interviews and focus groups will be saved to a flash drive and kept in a secure place, locked in a filing cabinet at researcher's home office. Only the researcher will have access to a master key. The master key will be stored separate from data.

Authorized persons from Texas State University, San Marcos and members of the Institutional Review Board (IRB) have the legal right to review research records and will protect the confidentiality of those records to the extent permitted by law. All publications will exclude any information that will make it possible to identify you as a participant-

Throughout this study, the researcher will notify you of any new information that may become available and that might affect your decision to remain in the study.

Are there any benefits to participating in this study?

There is no financial compensation for participating in this study; however, there is the benefit of contributing to be a part of a study that will better understand the complexities and multifaceted identities navigating our world as Latinas. It is my hope that this study will give voice and positively impact pedagogical practices contributing to accessible and equitable spaces and opportunities for Latinas.

Is there any compensation for participating?

No, there is no compensation.

How can I discontinue participating and whom should I contact if I have any questions?

You can discontinue your participation in this study at any time without consequences of any kind. For questions about the study, please contact me by phone at (512) 233-9513 or email eb1165@txstate.edu. For questions or concerns, regarding the rights of participants and duties of investigators, or if dissatisfied with any aspect of the study, please contact Texas State University Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects at 512.245.3413 or the Office of Institutional Support at 512.245.2348, or email

ospirb@txstate.edu. Please return the attached consent page and keep this portion for your records. Thank you.

E. Renée Bocanegra, B.A., M.Ed.
Doctoral Student, School of Improvement
Texas State University, San Marcos

This project was approved by the IRB department on (date TBD). Pertinent questions or concerns about the research, research participants' rights, and or injuries to participants should be directed to the IRB Chair, Dr. Denise Gobert 512-716-2652 (dgobert@txstate.edu).

PLEASE RETURN THIS CONSENT FORM

As the researcher conducting this study, I have explained the purpose, procedures, benefits and risks involved in your participation:

_____ _____
Name Date

_____
Signature and printed name of the investigator soliciting consent

You have been informed of the purpose, procedures, benefits, and risks involved in participating in this study and have received a copy of this form. You have had the opportunity to ask questions before signing and you have been informed that you may ask questions at any time. You consent voluntarily to participate in this study. By signing this form, you are not relinquishing any of your legal rights.

It is possible the investigator may want to use some of the recordings produced in this study in presentations and academic/scientific demonstrations. Please sign below if you agree to allow the use of the recordings where you appear.

With my signature I am giving permission for audio, documents, artwork, journal submissions, and photographs, or other artifacts provided for this study to also be used for educational purposes.

_____ _____
Signature of the Research Partner Date

_____ _____
Printed name of the Research Partner Date

_____ _____
Signature accepting to participate in the study Date

APPENDIX C

TEXAS STATE UNIVERSITY IRB COVID-19/PANDEMIC GUIDELINES

The following checklist describes the needed COVID-19 risk reductions inclusive to all levels from low to high risk. Changes to existing approved protocol to reduce immediate or hazardous risks to participants can be implemented without IRB approval; however, the IRB will be notified within 5 business days.

Conditions to be met in the case of Covid-19 pandemic at the time research is conducted:

1. Participants will not congregate in close distance in the research setting and maintain the recommended social distancing of 6 feet.
2. Face masks (procedural) will be worn by all fellow researchers and the researcher, securely covering the mouth and nose.
3. Temperature checks on all fellow researchers will be conducted as part of the screenings using a noncontact thermometer (or disposable equipment)
4. Social distancing guidelines will be followed, and proper handwashing conducted. Cough/sneeze etiquette will be followed, and all surfaces will be cleaned and disinfected after each participant encounter and use of appropriate personnel protective equipment (PPE).
5. All equipment and tools that will be in contact with the fellow researchers will be disinfected, as well as entries and exits.

Further information regarding COVID-19 and IRB research approval can be found at: https://www.txstate.edu/research/CogrOnCovid19/COVID19-Risk-Checklist.html or by calling the office of Research and Sponsored Programs at 512-245-2314

APPENDIX D

PLÁTICA GUIDE - FIRST PLÁTICA IN EL JARDÍN – CLIMATE, CONTEXT, AND FERTILE GROUNDS

Objective:

This plática, which takes place en el jardín, will focus on stories of self that shape the identity—experiences which may include any of the following: knowledge, biological, familial, religion, issues of race/class, sexual orientation values, goals, socio-economical, gender, and body image.

Jardín Activity:

We will prepare the grounds in el jardín for planting and choose quality organic seeds to sow in el jardín,

Expectations:

Research partners will dress in comfortable outdoor clothing that allows for bending. It is preferred that participants wear clothing that they do not mind getting soiled.

Research partners will bring artifacts to share. Examples include photographs, journals, drawings, or artwork that represent their "self."

Research partners will share their personal stories and experiences of self and what messages informed their identity formation.

What will be provided?

Water, beverages, meals for all in attendance, hats, sunblock, bug spray, gloves, tools, shade, masks, and comfortable seating.

APPENDIX E

PLÁTICA GUIDE – SECOND PLÁTICA EN EL JARDÍN – PLANTING AND NURTURING

Objective:

This plática, which takes place en el jardín, will focus on our experiences within our organizations ,the power of place ,and the wisdom of people.

Jardín Activity:

We will check on our seedlings/plants to identify and needs. We will weed, nourish, and water el jardín and walk the garden. We will share a picnic lunch en el jardín in the spirit of community. We will begin to create mosaic steppingstones to provide a new trail or path as a sign of invitation

Expectations:

Research partners will share photos/artifacts of their witness. Research partners will invite a "witness" and share stories and reflections of this person. This is <u>not a physical presence</u>, rather, someone who guides you or has impacted you (values, axioms, beliefs). This person may be living or deceased (living within you in spirit).

What will be provided?

Water, beverages, meals for all in attendance (including children), hats, sunblock, bug spray, gloves, tools, shade, masks, and comfortable seating.

APPENDIX F

PLÁTICA GUIDE - THIRD PLÁTICA EN EL JARDÍN – THE BOUNTIFUL HARVEST

Objective:

This plática will take place in el jardín and will focus on community and what spaces of critical consciousness and community look like, sound like, and feel like.

Jardín Activity:

We will walk the garden to identify any needs. We will water, weed, and nourish our plants and garden. We will look through selected photographs of el jardín and use the Photovoice method and plática to collect participants' thoughts and identify emerging themes.

Expectations:

Research partners will dress in comfortable outdoor clothing that allows for bending and those that the participants do not mind getting soiled. Research partners will share stories of community and self.

What will be provided?

Water, beverages, a meal, hats, sunblock, bug spray, gloves, tools, shade, and comfortable seating.

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