

2014

Missing Voices, Hidden Fields: The Gendered Struggles of Female Farmworkers

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Recommended Citation

Budech, Keiko A., "Missing Voices, Hidden Fields: The Gendered Struggles of Female Farmworkers" (2014). *Pitzer Senior Theses*. Paper 54.
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**Missing Voices, Hidden Fields:
The Gendered Struggles of Female Farmworkers**

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In partial fulfillment of a Bachelor of Arts Degree in Environmental Analysis
2013-2014

Pitzer College, Claremont, California

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Professor Brinda Sarathy
&
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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First, I would like to thank the women of Lideres Campesinas for their remarkable strength, resilience and fervor. I would not have been able to complete this thesis without their openness and welcoming presence. I am constantly impressed by their activism and honored to have written about such kind-hearted and influential women.

Thank you to my readers and mentors Brinda Sarathy and Jose Calderon. Your passion for social change and justice is an inspiration, and I will forever apply the knowledge that you have given me. I cannot explain how much I appreciate your support not only during this writing process but also throughout my academic career. Thank you for all the positive affirmations and motivation!

To the EA thesis class, many thanks for the humor, headstands, and late nights in the computer lab. You are all intelligent strong women. I would also like to thank JJ Oesterle for adventuring to Coachella Valley with me as my translator and for having such a remarkable passion for making a change in this world. And finally, thanks to my friends and family, for your lifelong support and the love you have given me.

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ABSTRACT

Known for its fertile soil and ideal climate, California has been one of the most agriculturally productive areas in the world. Often left out of this picture are the farmworkers who make it possible. Within this farmworker community, females are a sub-class that has been even more marginalized. This thesis investigates the gendered aspects of fieldwork and exposes female leadership working towards changing these specific struggles, such as sexual harassment in the fields, domestic abuse, pesticide exposure, and the perpetuation of submissive gender roles in the household and workplace. An in-depth case study of Lideres Campesinas, a community-based grassroots organization, is highlighted in order to share members' stories and explore how an organization run by women farmworkers addresses gendered issues in the fields. A discourse on these obstacles will begin specifically in the fields of Coachella Valley.

keyterms: agricultural labor studies, farmworker movement, grassroots organizing, chicana feminism, lideres campesinas

PREFACE

My academic studies have focused on environmental policy and the political economy of food systems. I realized that within the food movement in the U.S., more attention has been placed on consumerism, individual change, and creating alternative systems, rather than changing aspects of the current food system and organizing around farmworker justice. I do not wish to discredit the work that has been done building alternative systems, however, giving agricultural laborers more agency and rights can help dismantle hierarchical power in the food system from within. Farmworkers provide one of the most important jobs in society, yet they are often left out of public discourse.

In order to further pursue my commitment to farmworker issues, I worked in the Coachella Valley with Lideres Campesinas, an organization that documents and highlights the labor struggles of female farmworkers. The original focus on this thesis was to explore the effects of pesticide exposure on farmworkers' health and analyze policies regulating pesticide use in the fields. However, once I started to collect narratives from the members of Lideres Campesinas, I noticed common themes arise in each conversation. From sexual harassment in the fields to the distinct gender roles in the household and workplace, I decided to expose the gendered issues of farm work and female farmworker leadership. I discovered that research changes while working in collaboration with a community, specifically around the needs and issues the community faces. Adventuring into these fields of study has allowed me to extend my interdisciplinary knowledge, thereby providing tools to understand and analyze components of a socially, environmentally, and economically sustainable food system.

CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

With sweat on her brow from the radiating heat of the sun, Valeria Martinez¹ looks out at the vast fields of grapes where she has been working since she was ten years old. The continuous motions and backbreaking work have become muscle memory for Martinez. Concealing the pain in her eyes, Martinez squints into the sun as she explains, “Violence is all in my life. When I am working in the fields, there is violence. When I am at home, there is violence.”² The daily race, class, and gender oppression she faces as an undocumented female farmworker dictates her life. From sexual assault in the fields to domestic abuse at home, she cannot escape systemic violence.

Sadly, Martinez’s story is not unique. Many women like Martinez feel powerless in the face of unjust treatment and abuse. However, one organization is working for change. Martinez’s life was dramatically altered when she met a member of Lideres Campesinas who handed her a pamphlet about abuse in the fields. Soon, Martinez found herself attending weekly meetings and discussing similar issues other women have faced at home and at work.

Lideres Campesinas is an organization comprised of female farmworkers building a unified voice for all women in the field. In addition to farmworkers, they are mothers, daughters, sisters, organizers, and activists. They are members of a silenced community that puts food on American’s plates. With a spark of enthusiasm in her eyes, Martinez explains how working with Lideres Campesinas has boosted her self-esteem, “Now we know that [sexual abuse in the fields] shouldn’t happen, that we can do something about it and prevent it.”³ The women at Lideres Campesinas are empowered through collective action and work towards tackling gender-specific issues, such as domestic violence, sexual assault, and pesticide exposure.

California is the largest agricultural producing state in America, supplying 50% of the nation’s fruit and vegetables due to its fertile lands, Mediterranean climate, and availability of cheap labor.⁴ The agricultural sector provides around \$27 billion annually to California, making it the largest industry in the state.⁵ However, this multi-billion dollar industry relies heavily on

¹ For safety precautions, all participants were identified by pseudonyms, except for the Executive Director

² Interview with Valeria Martinez, March 30, 2014.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Rima Habib and Fadi Fathallah, “Migrant Women Farm Workers in the Occupational Health Literature,” *Work: A Journal of Prevention, Assessment and Rehabilitation* 41 (2012): 3.

⁵ Ibid.

the hands of migrant workers who are often exploited by agribusinesses for inexpensive labor. Overall, poverty, frequent seasonal migration, low literacy, lack of documentation, and cultural barriers contribute to the injustices farmworkers face. And while farmworkers are clearly a vulnerable population, there exists a subset of this group that is in even more dire straits: female farmworkers.

Traditionally, farm labor organizers and scholarship on agricultural labor have overlooked the issues female farmworkers face. Due to systems of oppression, such as gender, race, class, and immigration status, women have limited political and social capital. Female farmworkers encounter issues around sexual harassment in the fields, domestic abuse, and pesticide exposure. In addition to these issues, women deal with the presumed gender roles within the workplace and household that perpetuate vulnerability.

Similar to their male counterparts, women are organizing for better working conditions; however, female farmworkers have not been recognized for their organizing campaigns. These gendered processes need more illumination within the larger fight for justice. To highlight the voices and narratives of female farmworkers and document the issues they face, I conducted ethnographic research with the Coachella Valley chapter of *Lideres Campesinas*, a grassroots female farmworker organization located in California. I argue that *Lideres Campesinas* utilizes a successful gendered style of organizing that responds to and programs around the explicit needs and conditions of women.

Chapter 1 continues with selected literature regarding the history of California agricultural labor to give an overview of non-gender specific issues farmworkers have historically faced and are still facing. Next, I explore specific themes scholars have written about female farmworkers and note how my research contributes to the limited literature on gendered

issues in the fields in the United States of America. Following my literature review, I delve into the political economy of Coachella Valley, California. This section allows readers to understand the political, economic, and geographic context of the area where I conducted most of my research with Lideres Campesinas. Chapter 1 ends with an overview of my qualitative research methodology. Chapter 2 defines Lideres Campesinas' gendered model of organizing and explains how this model directly engages with the needs of female farmworkers. To understand the gender-specific issues in the fields, and highlight how Lideres Campesinas addresses the needs of female farmworkers, Chapters 3-6 respectively explore and analyze key injustices that women identified in their interviews: sexual harassment, domestic abuse, reproductive health effects due to pesticide exposure, and the demanding gender roles within the household and workplace. Within these chapters, I highlight information on each issue, present qualitative data from interviews and meetings with members of Lideres Campesinas that help support why these issues are relevant, and display the ways Lideres Campesinas supports members who deal with these gendered challenges. Chapter 7 concludes with reflections on the significance of exposing gendered issues in farmworker communities and the necessary work performed by organizations like Lideres Campesinas to resolve these injustices. Lastly, Chapter 7 elucidates how further research can be expanded beyond the extent of this thesis.

California's Agricultural Labor System

Research on California's agricultural labor reveals a long and sordid history of farmworker exploitation and marginalization. In this section, I examine key scholarly works that have shed light on the influx of migratory agricultural labor, land monopolization, government migrant worker programs, labor policies, and the global economy, all of which perpetuate

farmworker marginalization. In addition, this section explores the farmworker movement in California as the first step towards remedying injustices in the fields.

Many scholars have documented the ways in which California's food system is dependent on migrant workers. In fact, roughly two-thirds of the agricultural workforce is made up of migratory laborers, many of whom are from Mexico.⁶ These laborers have faced discrimination for over a century in California's agricultural economy. Carey McWilliams, distinguished author, lawyer, and editor of *The Nation*, played a crucial role uncovering labor issues. In 1939, McWilliams published *Factories in the Field: The Story of Migratory Farm Labor in California*, one of the first accounts of migratory farm labor and the industrialization of agriculture in California. McWilliams explains how farm labor in California "has revolved around the cleverly manipulated exploitation, by the large growers, of a number of suppressed racial minority groups which were imported to work the fields."⁷ McWilliams identifies two dominant factors that accelerated the growth of industrialized agriculture: private land monopolization and the availability of huge units of cheap labor. Starting in the 1800's, Chinese labor was crucial when California fields transitioned from wheat and grain production to fruit production. Yet, in 1882, the Chinese Exclusion Act prohibited the immigration of Chinese into the U.S., which hurt the labor supply in California. Japanese immigrants were the next large labor force on California agricultural land, however, by the 1920's, Mexican laborers were more common due to their close geographic proximity.⁸

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Carey McWilliams, *Factories in the Field: The Story of Migratory Farm Labor in California* (Berkeley, : University of California Press, 1939), xvii

⁸ Ibid, 55.

McWilliams asserts that farm labor has exploited a number of poor racial minority groups since the beginning of agriculture in California.⁹ Other authors, such as Galarza, Mitchell, Walker, Castillo, and Garcia all describe the harsh living conditions California agricultural laborers face compared to the colossal wealth and power attained by the growers. Richard Walker's book *The Conquest of Bread*, describes California's agrarian capitalism and the commodification of land and labor that has transformed nature and human activity into exploitative objects. Walker illustrates how migrant workers ensured an abundance of labor, poor working conditions, and poor wages, which kept California's agricultural capitalists wealthy and successful.¹⁰ Agricultural laborers in California have endured social and economic ostracism within the fields, hindering them from feeling equal in society.

In 1942, Congress signed the Bracero Program, which spurred an influx of migrant workers from Mexico into the United States. Designed to alleviate wartime labor shortages, the program allowed Mexicans to work seasonally under temporary contracts.¹¹ From 1942 until the termination of the program in 1965, about five million Mexican workers entered the U.S.¹² Ernesto Galarza, a Mexican-American labor activist, played a crucial role in helping end the program when, in *The Merchants of Labor (1964)*, he exposed the inhumane working and living conditions braceros faced. Geographer, Don Mitchell, documents the exploited labor in California's food system and juxtaposes the abuse of migratory labor with the power of the growers. Mitchell focuses on the structural violence of the Bracero Program and concludes that the program destabilized the lives of working people while strengthening the profitable

⁹ Ibid, 5

¹⁰ Richard Walker, *The Conquest of Bread* (New York: New Press, 2004).

¹¹ Richard Griswold del Castillo and Richard Garcia "Coleadership: The Strength of Dolores Huerta" in *A Dolores Huerta Reader*, (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2008), 28.

¹² Ibid.

landscape. “It saved the crop,” he wrote, “precisely because it destroyed lives.”¹³ Mitchell, in summary, finds that many lives were sacrificed to industrialize a socially and environmentally destructive agricultural system.

The Bracero program was designed specifically for men. In fact, women were not allowed to sign labor contracts. Therefore, Mexican immigration by women only began to increase in 1964 after the Bracero Program ended. Female migrant populations steadily increased in the 1980s, which—due to an abundance of cheap labor—increased the exploitation both migrant men and women experienced.¹⁴

Border relations between the U.S. and Mexico and immigration policies help sustain the devaluation of farmworker labor since undocumented workers have little power when deportation is a common reality. Estimated at 2.5 million, California is home to the nation’s largest population of undocumented workers.¹⁵ Agribusinesses have minor concerns about farmworkers demanding better working and living conditions due to the lack of documentation. Most growers do not support immigration reform because documentation would increase labor costs and unionization.

Agriculture exceptionalism is another common theme in the literature on agricultural labor in California. Greg Schell, author of *The Human Cost of Food*, describes how the legal system contributes to farmworker poverty and the industrialization of agriculture because farmworkers were exempt from labor laws in California that covered nearly all other private sector workers. According to Maralyn Edid, an associate for workforce, industry and economic development at Cornell University, “agricultural exceptionalism singles out the political power

¹³ Walker, *The Conquest of Bread*, 422.

¹⁴ Xóchitl Castañeda and Patricia Zavella, “Changing Constructions of Sexuality and Risk: Migrant Mexican Women Farmworkers in California,” *Journal of Latin American Anthropology* 8, 2 (2003), 127.

¹⁵ Pamela Brubaker, *Globalization at What Price?: Economic, Change and Daily Life*, (Cleveland: Pilgrim Press, 2007), 58.

of agribusiness interests and the industry's hearty appetite for profits as the root causes of farmworkers' less protected status."¹⁶ This legal exemption protected growers and subjugated workers. Farmworkers did not receive full labor rights and labor standards that other professions acquired. For example, in 1938, the Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA) was passed in California. This law established a minimum wage, overtime pay, unionization and child worker ages, but excluded agricultural workers from these rights. While other labor conditions and standards improved, agricultural labor lagged further behind. In 1975, the California Agricultural Labor Relations Act (CALRA) was passed and allowed farmworkers to collectively bargain. Trade unions represented laborers and negotiated working condition policies with the growers. The act was created to "ensure peace in the agricultural fields by guaranteeing justice for all agricultural workers and stability in labor relations."¹⁷ The Agricultural Labor Relations Board also investigates the labor practices in the fields, such as wages, hours, and working conditions. The CALRA was a significant stride in the fight for farmworker rights that was passed with the mobilization of the United Farm Workers of America (UFW).

Aside from the systems that perpetuate injustice, farm labor unions have been created to protect farmworker rights. Before the 1960s, the National Farm Labor Union was established but failed since Bracero workers broke strikes in the fields. Perhaps the most well known agricultural labor organization was the UFW. Created in 1962, the UFW has successfully fought for farmworker rights, changed labor laws, and created unions. Shaw, Ganz, Ferriss, Griswold Del Castillo, and Garcia have all written about the significance of the UFW as an organization that made expansive improvements to agricultural labor. Randy Shaw, an attorney, author and

¹⁶ Maralyn Edid, "The Human Cost of Food: Farmworkers' Lives, Labor, and Advocacy," 56, 3 (2003).

¹⁷ Sylvia Torres-Gullien, "What is the Agricultural Labor Relations Act?" *Agricultural Labor Relations Board*. CA.gov, 2007. http://www.alrb.ca.gov/content/formspublications/facts/factsheet_english.html (April 29, 2014).

farmworker activist, describes how Cesar Chavez, the leader of the UFW, utilized non-violent organizing tactics, coalition-building, and consumer pressure. In his book *Beyond the Fields*, Shaw explores the UFW's organizing tactics such as the grape and lettuce boycotts in the 1960s and 1970s and emphasizes the power farmworkers collectively have.¹⁸

Although farmworkers harvest crops that feed America's population, they are one of the most food insecure populations in the nation and suffer from poor working conditions and poor wages. They face severe poverty and three out of five farmworkers live below the U.S. Census Bureau's poverty threshold.¹⁹ In 2010, crop workers were earning an average of \$9 an hour.²⁰ Farmworkers' median weekly earnings were 60% of those of workers in comparable private-sector nonfarm jobs.²¹ Since many jobs are seasonal in the fields, farmworkers are unemployed for significant amounts of time, reducing their annual earnings. Overall, this selected literature documents California's agricultural dependence on migrant labor that permits growers to devalue farmworkers and keeps America's food prices low.

Literature Review: Absent Voices

Largely missing from the scholarship around farmworker rights and California agricultural labor is a focus on the women in agricultural labor. While scholarship around female farmworkers is in a nascent stage, two areas of focus have emerged: women's role as female leaders within the farmworker movement and the gendered issues in the fields.²²

¹⁸ Randy Shaw, *Beyond the Fields: Cesar Chavez, The UFW, and the Struggle for Justice in the 21st Century* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008).

¹⁹ Brubaker, "Globalization at What Price?: Economic, Change and Daily Life," 58.

²⁰ Phillip Martin and Douglas Jackson-Smith, "Immigration and Farm Labor in the U.S." NARDEP. May, 2013 http://www.nardep.info/uploads/Brief_FarmWorker.pdf. (April 27, 2014).

²¹ Ibid.

²² By contrast, literature on gendered agricultural labor is far more extensive in the global south and may serve as an aspiration for scholars of farm labor in the United States of America.

Female Farmworker Leadership

Female leadership roles have not been highlighted in the farmworker movement. Although there are hundreds of books and articles written on Cesar Chavez and the UFW, women are often left out of this literature. Margaret Rose is a critical author who highlights the roles and responsibilities women had within the farmworker movement. In *Women Power Will Stop Those Grapes*, Rose explains how female organizers are rarely cited in historical writing on the UFW and how Cesar Chavez is falsely featured as having single-handedly organized farm laborers.²³ Rose believes that women were the backbone of the farmworker movement and were crucial in the creation of the UFW in 1962.²⁴ Female organizers and leaders within the farmworker movement included Dolores Huerta, Helen Chavez, Jessica Govea, Maria Saudado, Peggy McGivern, and Hope Lopez. Authors, such as, Margaret Rose, Mario Garcia, Barbara Baer, and Richard Griswold del Castillo have documented these female heroes. Rose describes how Chicanas were significant in UFW boycotts and that gender influenced boycott strategy and tactics.²⁵ According to Rose, “the structure, style, language and methods of organization used by these women differed in important ways from men.”²⁶ Women not only significantly participated within the UFW, but also contributed their own specific styles of organization.

In 2008, *A Dolores Huerta Reader* was published and became the first book of articles documenting Huerta’s contributions to the farmworker movement. In *Coleadership: The Strength of Dolores Huerta*, Griswold del Castillo and Garcia describe how “Chavez was the

²³ Margaret Rose, “Traditional and Nontraditional Patterns of Female Activism in the United Farm Workers of America, 1962-1980” in *A Dolores Huerta Reader*, (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2008), 53.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Margaret Rose, “Women Power Will Stop Those Grapes,” *Journal of Women’s History*, 7, 4 (1995): 8.

²⁶ Ibid.

visible leader and Huerta was the hidden one.”²⁷ Dolores Huerta was the co-founder of the UFW and became the vice-president at its inception, the only female elected official at that time.

According to Baer and Matthews, Huerta was the first person Cesar Chavez called upon and the UFW’s “chief negotiator, lobbyist, boycott strategist and public spokeswoman.”²⁸ Griswold del Castillo and Garcia explain, “Huerta was a crucial aspect of the UFW, not only due to her powerful leadership skills and self-assuredness, but because women admired her and joined the UFW due to Huerta’s presence.”²⁹ Rose highlights how from the founding of the union, Huerta “devised strategy and led workers on picket lines. She also endured the first of her more than 20 arrests in support of unionization.”³⁰ Huerta was also one of the first leaders in the UFW to point out issues directly affecting women in the fields, such as child-care and sexual harassment.³¹

Huerta’s unique organizing story inspired many women to join the movement. Both educating and organizing, Huerta made an impact on women in the fields and the community. Female farmworkers looked up to Huerta’s leadership skills as a woman of color. According to Garcia and Griswold del Castillo, “Farmworkers listened to her; young Chicanas followed her.”³² One female farmworker states, “It was Dolores who showed us not to be afraid to fight for a better life for ourselves and our children.”³³ Despite her crucial role in the creation of the UFW, Garcia and Griswold del Castillo believe that “The voice and impact of Dolores Huerta has often been

²⁷ Griswold del Castillo and Garcia, “Coadership: The Strength of Dolore Huerta,” 23.

²⁸ Barbara Baer and Glenna Matthews, “The Women of the Boycott” in *A Dolores Huerta Reader*, (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2008), 81.

²⁹ Griswold del Castillo and Garcia, “Coleadership: The Strength of Dolores Huerta,” 27.

³⁰ Margaret Rose, “Dolores Huerta: Passionate Defender of La Causa,” 6.

³¹ Margaret Rose, “Dolores Huerta: The United Farm Workers Union” in *A Dolores Huerta Reader*, (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2008), 18.

³² Griswold del Castillo and Garcia, “Coleadership: The Strength of Dolores Huerta,” 23.

³³ Rose, “Dolores Huerta: The United Farm Workers Union,” 21.

lost in the literature about the UFW.”³⁴ Huerta’s prominence in the UFW was a remarkable silenced achievement.

Furthermore, Rose exposes concerns about the absence of literature regarding gender inequalities within the UFW. Rose elucidates that the UFW “reinforced traditional gender relations by confining women to traditionally female-defined work and social activism.”³⁵ Esther Padilla, a UFW organizer, voiced complaints regarding “the lack of interest in women’s concerns and their marginalization in the UFW.”³⁶ Jesse De La Cruz, another female UFW organizer, described her experience with gender discrimination in the UFW, “Father McCullough [an AWA founder] didn’t want me to be involved. He said farm labor organizing was no place for a woman. So I kind of worked undercover, doing the work through my husband and my brother.”³⁷ Both Padilla and De La Cruz were conscious of the sexism within the UFW and wanted to highlight gender-specific marginalization in the fields.³⁸ Baer and Matthews highlight how Huerta believed that Cesar Chavez and other men in the UFW demanded more from women.³⁹ Huerta states, “The more I think of it, the more I’m convinced that women have gotten strong because he [Cesar Chavez] expects so much from us.”⁴⁰ Their suppression of leadership made women in the UFW even stronger since they were fighting for justice within the UFW and the fields.

³⁴ Griswold del Castillo and Garcia, “Coleadership: The Strength of Dolores Huerta,” 26.

³⁵ Margaret Rose, “From the Fields to the Picket Line: Huelga Women and the Boycott,” *Labor History*, 31, 3 (1990): 293.

³⁶ Rose, “Women Power Will Stop Those Grapes,” 27.

³⁷ Rose, “Traditional and Nontraditional Patterns of Female Activism in the United Farm Workers of America,” 57.

³⁸ Rose, “Dolores Huerta: The United Farm Workers Union,” 18.

³⁹ Baer and Matthews, “The Women of the Boycott.”

⁴⁰ *Ibid*, 84.

Gendered Issues in the Fields

Gendered issues have been in existence for as long as migrant labor has been present in the United States of America's agricultural system, yet they are often overlooked. There is limited literature on the inequalities that women face in the fields, such as the gendered effects of pesticide exposure, sexual harassment in the fields, domestic violence and the presumed gender roles female farmworkers perform. I provide a brief synopsis of how these topics have been covered in the scholarship below, and further explore each of these issues in upcoming chapters.

Sexual Harassment

Various studies conclude that a majority of women in the fields have been sexually harassed in their lives. A recent study conducted in California's Central Valley reported that 80% of 150 female farmworkers experience or have experienced sexual harassment in the fields.⁴¹ Most studies examining sexual harassment are survey research, with little focus on qualitative data. Irma Morales Waugh's study titled *Examining the Sexual Harassment Experiences of Mexican Immigrant Farmworking Women*, for example, is one of the few qualitative studies investigating factors that heighten the risk of sexual harassment at work. Waugh concludes that agricultural companies do not have or are not enforcing harassment policies due to the evident high rates of sexual harassment in the fields.⁴² Waugh suggests that women must be informed of their rights to work in a harassment free environment and supervisors and bosses need to be held accountable for their actions.⁴³ The remote and isolated geography of the fields also contributes

⁴¹ Charlene Galarneau, "Farm Labor, Reproductive Justice: Migrant Women Farmworkers in the U.S." 15, 1 (2013): 149.

⁴² Irma Morales Waugh, "Examining the Sexual Harassment Experiences of Mexican Immigrant Farmworking Women" *Violence Against Women*, 18, 3 (2010): 257.

⁴³ Ibid.

to sexual harassment since it conceals harassers' actions.⁴⁴ According to Phoebe Morgan, a professor at Northern Arizona University, economic vulnerability heightens the risk of sexual harassment since remaining employed is crucial to family survival. Women's poverty is thus also a factor that exacerbates sexual harassment.⁴⁵

The nature of farm work also makes women vulnerable to sexual harassment.⁴⁶ Castaneda and Zavella, Chicana feminist theorists and authors, believe, "just being female in the fields creates risks."⁴⁷ They document how immigrant female farm laborers work in the fields within close proximity to men, which increases risk of harassment, unlike the fields in Mexico that are mostly gender-segregated worksites.⁴⁸ The male dominated agricultural industry also increases the likelihood of harassment in the fields.⁴⁹

Lastly, the Frontline special *Rape in the Fields*, which aired in the summer of 2013, was the first television investigation documenting sexual abuse in agricultural labor. *Rape in the Fields* reveals the hidden price of working as a woman in the fields and exposes female farmworkers' narratives on their experiences with sexual harassment.⁵⁰

Pesticide Exposure

There has been significant research conducted on the degradation of the environment and the negative health effects of pesticide exposure. Adverse health effects from pesticide exposure

⁴⁴ Ibid, 245.

⁴⁵ Phoebe Morgan, "Sexual harassment: Violence against women at work," *Violence Against Women*, 2 (2011): 80.

⁴⁶ Waugh, "Examining the Sexual Harassment Experiences of Mexican Immigrant Farmworking Women," 245.

⁴⁷ Castaneda and Zavella, "Changing Constructions of Sexuality and Risk: Migrant Mexican Women Farmworkers in California," 134.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Morgan, "Sexual harassment: Violence against women at work."

⁵⁰ Van Hightower et al, "Predictive Models of Domestic Violence and Fear of Intimate Partners Among Migrant Seasonal Farm Worker Women," *Journal of Family Violence*, 15, 2 (2000).

can be contracted from volatile chemicals in the air or contaminated water consumption. Studies have shown that health effects from pesticide exposure range from asthma, Parkinson's disease, and various cancers.⁵¹ Rachel Carson, author of *Silent Spring*, was one of the first to expose the harmful effects of pesticides. During the same time Carson reported about the consequences of pesticides, the UFW was the first organization to take up the issue of pesticides in the fields as a cancer-causing agent.⁵² While working in the fields, Jessica Govea, a farmworker and prominent activist, was the first person in the UFW to bring issues of pesticide exposure to attention. Govea was concerned about the chemicals workers were breathing and the water workers drank that was contaminated with pesticides from groundwater pollution.⁵³ At age 58, Govea died of breast cancer. Many believe that pesticides took her life, the exact concern she was fighting against. Together, the environmental justice movement and farmworker movement allied to fight against pesticides in the fields.

While there is notable literature on the health effects of pesticide exposure and organizing around pesticides, there is a lack of literature on the gender-specific effects of pesticide exposure on female farmworkers. Biologist and author Sandra Steingraber explains how women's bodies are susceptible to pesticide exposure and "serve as storage bins for synthetic organic chemicals."⁵⁴ In 1993, a study by Colborn et al., explored the irreversible and permanent effects of endocrine-disrupting chemicals in pesticides, which disturb prenatal and early postnatal life.⁵⁵ This study was one of the first conducted that examines the disruption of the endocrine,

⁵¹ Liew et al, "Derived Estimates of Lifetime Occupational Pesticide Exposure and the Risk of Parkinson's Disease," 69, 4 (2014).

⁵² Shaw, *Beyond the Fields: Cesar Chavez, The UFW, and the Struggle for Justice in the 21st Century*, 122.

⁵³ Ibid, 122.

⁵⁴ Sandra Steingraber, *Living Downstream: An Ecologist's Personal Investigation of Cancer and the Environment* (Cambridge: Da Capo Press, 2010), 94-100, 94.

⁵⁵ T Colborn, "Developmental Effects of Endocrine-Disrupting Chemicals in Wildlife and Humans," *Environmental Health Perspectives*, 101, 5 (1993).

reproductive, and immune systems that pesticides can cause.⁵⁶ Chapter 4 further examines literature regarding the female health effects of pesticide exposure.

Domestic Abuse

Although domestic violence has been a nation-wide issue since the 1970s, migrant farmworkers were not included in this discussion until the mid 1990s. Authors and professors Nikki Van Hightower, Joe Gorton, and Casey Lee DeMoss, examine the prevalence and predictors of domestic violence among female farmworkers. They found that 19% of women have reported being physically or sexually abused at home.⁵⁷ Predictors of domestic abuse range from drug/alcohol use, pregnancy, and migratory status.⁵⁸ According to Van Hightower, Gorton and DeMoss, “despite a growing body of knowledge concerning family abuse, there is little research focusing on domestic violence in rural settings.”⁵⁹ This study is one of the few that examine the prevalence of domestic abuse experienced by Latina farmworker women. Neil Websdale’s ethnography titled *Rural Woman Battering and the Justice System* is one of the only published books focusing on rural domestic violence.⁶⁰ Furthermore, V.W. Pinn and M.T. Chunko’s study suggests that low-income women living in isolated conditions are at the highest risk for domestic violence.⁶¹ Since farmworker communities are often made up of low-income Mexican-Americans in rural conditions, there seems to be a correlation between high rates of domestic abuse and female farmworkers. Pinn and Chunko further argue that women in rural

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Van Hightower et al, “Predictive Models of Domestic Violence and Fear of Intimate Partners Among Migrant Seasonal Farm Worker Women,” 1.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ VW Pinn and MT Chunko, “The Diverse Faces of Violence: Minority Women and Domestic Abuse,” *Academic Medicine: Journal of the Association of American Medical Colleges*, 72, 1 (1997).

communities lack access to appropriate domestic abuse services.⁶² Other studies examine domestic violence within Latina women classified as U.S. born, immigrant, or migrant-seasonal workers, but do not specifically focus on female farmworker communities.⁶³ Furthermore, agencies such as Family Violence Prevention Fund, the National Network on Battered Immigrant Women and the Violence Against Women Office are finally beginning to listen to battered farmworker women's domestic violence concerns.

Gender Roles

Rose documents the difficulties female farmworkers face as they balance work, family and activism. Dolores Huerta and Helen Chavez are examples of women who have experienced these presumed gender roles. According to Rose, Huerta's organizing tactics were described as "non-traditional" due to her pragmatic and confident leadership role in the organization, whereas Helen Chavez was more "traditional" due to her administrative, behind the scenes and supportive work.⁶⁴ Rose attributes Huerta's assertive organizing tactics to her assimilation to American society since she was a third generation Mexican American, received more education and middle-class resources. These factors allowed Huerta to be more socially progressive and radical with her organizing tactics.⁶⁵ In total, Huerta had 11 sons and daughters, and still managed to identify as a mother and an activist. Mario Garcia, author of *A Dolores Huerta Reader*, describes how "Dolores Huerta redefined family and motherhood, certainly within a Chicana/Latina

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Andrea Hazen and Fernando Soriano, "Experiences with Intimate Partner Violence Among Latina Women," *Violence Against Women*, 13, 6 (2007).

⁶⁴ Rose, "Traditional and Nontraditional Patterns of Female Activism in the United Farm Workers of America," 55.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

context.”⁶⁶ Rose further elucidates how Huerta often arranged for childcare when she was working or traveling and “placed personal autonomy and trade union activism before family life.”⁶⁷ A large conflict Huerta faced was the split roles she acted between her commitment to her family and her organizing. In an interview, Huerta stated, “My biggest problem was not to feel guilty about it. I don’t any more, but then, everybody used to lay these guilt trips on me, about what a bad mother I was, neglecting my children.”⁶⁸

As Dolores Huerta embodied the face of female farmworkers who sacrificed gendered responsibilities for the sake of labor struggles, Helen Chavez, Cesar Chavez’s wife represented another type of female organizer, one who believed that her most important job was taking care of the children at home.⁶⁹ Helen Chavez always put her family and domestic duties first.⁷⁰ Cesar Chavez was completely immersed in his organizing work and sacrificed everything for social change, which left traditional gendered domestic roles intact for Helen Chavez. Helen Chavez had the arduous task of taking care of the children while also organizing. Since many contemporary female organizers still dedicate the majority of their lives to their family, their organizing role is more typical of that represented by Helen Chavez. Similarly, these “everyday organizers” remain unrecognized as union members.⁷¹

Other female organizers were culturally proud of their traditional household roles, and described these responsibilities as empowering. Lupe Ortiz, another female organizer in the UFW, had different views on gender roles in the household than Huerta. Ortiz did not want to

⁶⁶ Garcia, “A Dolores Huerta Reader,” xxii.

⁶⁷ Rose, “Traditional and Nontraditional Patterns of Female Activism in the United Farm Workers of America,” 62.

⁶⁸ Baer and Matthews, “The Women of the Boycott,” 82.

⁶⁹ Rose, “Traditional and Nontraditional Patterns of Female Activism in the United Farm Workers of America,” 62.

⁷⁰ *Ibid*, 55.

⁷¹ *Ibid*, 62.

challenge gender roles in her family. Ortiz explains, “I don’t ever want to be equal to my husband. It’s not exactly equality. It’s our culture. I don’t want our Chicana culture to change.”⁷² Ortiz’s concern about losing Chicana culture shows a strong correlation between domestic and cultural responsibilities.

Rose believes, “To appreciate fully the contribution of thousands of ordinary women to the process, researchers need to develop an expanded definition of union activism that takes into account the commitment of women who combine family responsibilities with labor activism.”⁷³ Chicana activists’ commitment to the farmworker movement has remained obscured due to the juggling of domestic concerns, child rearing, participation in demonstrations, and work in union offices. Zavella further addresses the multiple gendered responsibilities Chicana laborers face within the daily household and workplace realms. Zavella describes how Chicanas in the labor force struggle between the possibilities of increased equality in the family or traditional familial gender roles that keeps women passive.⁷⁴ Female farmworkers thus constantly balance multiple roles as workers and mothers, and in some cases, organizers.

To partially counter the systematic scholarly oversight of female agricultural workers in the United States of America, this thesis examines how the class, race, and gendered positionalities of female farmworkers facilitate and exacerbate exposure to sexual harassment, domestic violence, subordinate gender roles, and pesticide exposure. I argue that the absence of attention to these lived experiences allows women to feel powerless, hide their stories within the fields, and helps to perpetuate the existing oppressive systems rooted in agricultural labor. By contrast, the work of *Lideres Campesinas*, a grassroots organization advocating for female

⁷² Baer and Matthews, “The Women of the Boycott,” 82.

⁷³ Rose, “Traditional and Nontraditional Patterns of Female Activism in the United Farm Workers of America,” 65.

⁷⁴ Castaneda and Zavella, “Changing Constructions of Sexuality and Risk: Migrant Mexican Women Farmworkers in California,” 131.

farmworker rights (and which is the focus of my research), highlights the possibilities for a gendered model of farmworker organizing that specifically meets the needs of female farmworkers.

A Valley Divided

Located in Riverside County, north of the Salton Sea and between the San Jacinto and Little San Bernardino mountain ranges lies the Coachella Valley, extending forty-five miles east to west. The valley is characterized by a geographic, economic, and racial divide between its eastern and western sides. This divide provides a valuable context in which to understand the ongoing marginalization and violence faced by farmworkers in the region. I chose to perform the majority of my research in the eastern side of the Coachella Valley due to its large population of farmworkers and expansive agricultural fields.

Differences between the eastern and western sections of the valley are striking on a landscape level. While driving through the western valley, one is welcomed with huge resorts lined with palm trees and swimming pools. Here in the western valley, there are the cities of Desert Hot Springs, Palm Springs, Cathedral City, Rancho Mirage, Palm Desert, and Indian Wells. The western valley is known as one of the golf capitals of the world. Yearly events range from the Indian Wells Tennis tournament held in the second largest tennis stadium in the world, and the Coachella Music Festival, a three-day event and the highest-grossing music festival in U.S.'s history.⁷⁵ The western valley is highly populated with middle to upper class white residents. For example, Indian Wells, a city in the western valley, has a population of 95.2%

⁷⁵ George Varga, "Coachella Announces Performance Times," *San Diego*, April 9, 2014. <http://m.utsandiego.com/news/2014/apr/09/coachella-performance-times-announced/>. (Accessed on April 1, 2014).

white citizens and a median household income of \$100,742.⁷⁶ In addition, with 62.7%, Indian Wells has the second highest percentage of registered Republicans than any city in California.⁷⁷ From dire poverty and toxic sites in the east, to golf courses and manicured lawns in the west, the Coachella Valley is a place of extremes.

By contrast, the eastern valley is blanketed with vast agricultural fields that hide small clusters of trailer parks. To the east, there are the cities of Coachella, Thermal, Mecca, Indio and North Shore. The eastern valley is home to a majority of Mexican migrants. There is almost double the amount of people under the poverty line, in a minority group, and unemployed than the western valley.⁷⁸ With only a 30-minute drive apart, the cities of Indian Wells and Mecca are starkly different. In Mecca, 98.7% of the population is Latino and the median household income is \$26,592.⁷⁹ According to the UC Davis Center for Regional Change, the non-citizen status of many residents of the eastern valley reduces the political representation of the local community.⁸⁰ Only 25% of citizens in the city of Coachella are registered voters.⁸¹ Of these registered voters, 72% elected democratic candidates.⁸²

The eastern valley of Coachella is a highly productive agricultural area, annually averaging a gross value of \$526 million, and yielding 95% of the dates grown in the United States.⁸³ The steady supply of water from the 123-mile Coachella Canal connecting to the

⁷⁶ "Demographics," *Coachella Valley Economic Partnership Census Bureau*, 2011, <http://cvpep.com/demographics.htm>. (accessed March 4, 2014).

⁷⁷ "Report of registration," *California Secretary of State*, <http://www.sos.ca.gov/elections/ror/ror-pages/ror-odd-year-2013/political-sub.pdf>. (accessed March 4, 2014).

⁷⁸ Jonathan London, "Revealing the Invisible Coachella Valley," *UC Davis Center for Regional Change*, (2013).

⁷⁹ "Demographics," 2011.

⁸⁰ London, "Revealing the Invisible Coachella Valley," 2013.

⁸¹ California Secretary of State, Report of registration <http://www.sos.ca.gov/elections/ror/ror-pages/ror-odd-year-2013/political-sub.pdf>

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ London, "Revealing the Invisible Coachella Valley," 2013.

Colorado River made agricultural development in the eastern valley possible and perpetuated the social marginalization.⁸⁴ Despite the fact that Coachella is one of the hottest and driest places in America, this source of cheap irrigation ranging over hundreds of thousands of acres sustains the agricultural economy. The 2011-2012 annual review reports that the value of 2013's agricultural production was around \$545 million.⁸⁵

Although agriculture represents Coachella Valley's economic success, agricultural wealth does not equal labor well-being. Due to their demanding work and household proximity to the fields, residents of the eastern valley face health and environmental challenges, such as chemical intensive agriculture, air pollution, extreme heat and contaminated drinking water.⁸⁶ In the summer, the valley can range from 104 to 112 degrees Fahrenheit in the daytime, to 75 to 86 degrees Fahrenheit in the evening.⁸⁷ Although these warm temperatures support a thriving agricultural sector, workers in the fields suffer from heat stroke and other heat related illnesses.

Although minimal information has been documented on the history of migrant farmworkers in the Coachella Valley, it is undeniable that the vast majority of citizens in the eastern valley are Mexican migrants. One reason for the influx of Mexican migrants to the eastern valley is the proximity of the Mexican border. Natalia Ortiz, a member of Lideres Campesinas, describes how she is one of many migrant workers whose father came to Coachella during the Bracero Program.⁸⁸ The 86 highway is another element that contributes to the migration of Mexican labor into the valley. This highway is a convenient route that connects

⁸⁴ Coachella Valley Water District, "Where Does My Water Come From?" 2013, <http://www.cvwd.org/about/wherewater.php>. (accessed on March 20, 2014).

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ London, "Revealing the Invisible Coachella Valley," 2013.

⁸⁷ National Weather Service, "Coachella Valley Average Weather," 2011, <http://forecast.weather.gov/MapClick.php?zoneid=CAZ061#.U2gzbWRdW6U>. (accessed on March 20, 2014).

⁸⁸ Interview with Natalia Ortiz, March 31, 2014.

Mexicali, Mexico to Los Angeles and Arizona, passing through the Coachella Valley.

Commodities and workers are frequently crossing borders via the 86 highway, given it the nickname the “NAFTA highway”. Some laborers take this highway to cross the border to work in the fields every day. Attributable to plenty of agricultural job opportunities and proximity to the border, the eastern valley is a favored location to migrate from Mexico.

The apparent segregation of the valley allows for polar and unequal living conditions and adds to the structural violence farmworkers face since wealth and resources accumulate in the western side. The farmworkers in the eastern valley receive little recognition and remain hidden by the vast fields. Fortunately, numerous organizations, such as Lideres Campesinas, Eastern Coachella Valley Building Healthy Communities, Raices del Valle Youth Empowerment Program, California Rural Legal Assistance’s Community Equity Initiative and the Inland Congregations United for Change, are helping to provide socioeconomic services for residents of the eastern valley. This chapter gives context to the area where most research was performed. The divide in the Coachella Valley symbolizes a larger divide between farmworker communities and the greater society who benefit daily from their work but do not recognize their inequitable living and working conditions.

Methodology

The lack of female farmworkers’ narratives in scholarship motivated my desire to employ ethnographic research methods. I utilized narrative inquiry and participatory observation to collect personal testimonies while working with Lideres Campesinas. I attended weekly meetings, trainings, and events Lideres Campesinas held, and built a rapport with the community. Participants were voluntarily interviewed before and after meetings in Coachella

Valley and Bakersfield, yet most interviews were conducted in the Coachella Valley. In total, I conducted ten interviews with current members of Lideres Campesinas. Before interviews were performed, I explained my interest in female farmworker issues and research goals. An IRB-approved consent form outlining specific procedures, risks and benefits, the voluntary nature of participation, and the confidentiality measures, was presented before each interview. Interviews were recorded with consent from the participant.

All participants identified as being Latina/Chicana, and the majority of women were born in Mexico and first generation Americans. Every woman interviewed had worked in the fields or are currently working in the fields. Although I never directly asked about documentation status, several women disclosed that they were undocumented. Participants were mostly middle-aged; ages ranged from 35 to 64. Interviews were coded to extract different themes and concepts that women discussed. Throughout weekly site visits and meetings, I collected observations by writing field notes and participating in activities with the members of Lideres Campesinas. With the support of the founder of the organization, Mily Trevino-Sauceda, I was able to attend a weekend trip to the Central Valley, where I took part in board meetings, fundraising events and mobilizing in Bakersfield. From these experiences, I began to get a sense of the lived realities of farmworker communities.

To help guide the interview process, I chose a series of specific research questions that women answered according to their experiences in the fields and with Lideres Campesinas. Participants were not required to answer any question that they did not feel comfortable with, but most women were open about their involvement. The first question was, “describe a day in the fields.” This opening question allowed women to easily respond, which frequently generated comfort for the following questions. Next, I asked, “Does work differ in the fields for men and

women?” I found that most women quickly answered “No” to this question. I then asked, “Are there issues that females specifically faced in the fields, and if so, what type of issues?” Next, I asked questions regarding Lideres Campesinas, such as, “When did you join Lideres Campesinas?” and “How has Lideres Campesinas helped you combat these issues?” Lastly, I asked, “What are your hopes and aspirations for the future of female farmworkers?” I chose to end with this question to allow the participants to explore future goals for themselves. According to the participants’ preferences, I asked this series of interview questions either in Spanish or English. In some cases, I used informal methods of interviewing, allowing the dialogue to become more of a conversation, which lead to different interpretations of written questions.

Language and transportation were barriers to this research. Due to my intermediate Spanish language ability, I hired a student translator to attend most of my site visits. Although my language was an obstacle, it gave me insight to the experience, which migrant workers have to face as they struggle to work in an environment that does not always feature their native language. While participating in community activities, I had to be extremely attentive, striving to understand and participate. Traveling was complex seeing that the sites were two hours away and I do not own a car. Fortunately, I was able to borrow or rent cars through Pitzer College.

I recognize that there was a slight risk while conducting this research because many members of the community are currently undocumented and fear losing their jobs. This risk was addressed by withholding names of participants’ (unless asked not to), employers, and sites. Aside from the Executive Director and Founder of Lideres Campesinas, all other participants are not personally identified in this thesis for protection, and pseudonyms were used. Many issues that females face in the fields are personal, which is why I conducted interviews only after rapport was gained. In this research, I do not display any information that would be incriminating

or harmful to participants. I did not conduct interviews in the fields, which eliminated the risk of obtaining permission from landowners and employers.

I anticipated that there would be more benefits than risks in this project. I intended to expose injustices and to create more awareness around female farmworkers issues. While working with Suguet Lopez, the Executive Director of Lideres Campesinas, she described how helpful it would be to capture narratives and engage in qualitative research to highlight the experiences of female farmworkers. In this context, I hoped that the interviews were utilized as a space for women to openly express their experiences as female farmworkers and that the collected information will be useful for the organization.

In addition, I apply post-structural feminist methodology to this paper. In the *Handbook of Qualitative Research*, “post-structural feminist theories emphasize problems with the social text, its logic, and its inability to ever represent the world of lived experience fully.”⁸⁹ This method of analysis highlights experiences of oppressed communities through narratives and emphasizes the importance of maintaining dialogue, care, and accountability while conducting research. Through this lens, race, class and gender are analyzed to understand the inequalities that are found in the female farmworker community in the Coachella Valley. In the *Handbook of Qualitative Research*, I utilize a subjectivist epistemology, which allows the researcher and community to co-create understandings.⁹⁰ This is evident during my extensive time spent with the community and working closely with the members to accurately represent their experiences. I have collaborated with the researched community, mutually exchanged knowledge and educated each other about the gendered issues in the fields, what perpetuates these issues and what can be done in order to stop them.

⁸⁹ Norman Denzin and Yvonna Lincoln, “The SAGE Handbook of Qualitative Research,” *Thousand Oaks*, 4 (2011): 21.

⁹⁰ Ibid.

Lastly, qualitative ethnographic research is a powerful tool that can unlock stories and experiences, and gain insight into lives of communities that are often unstudied and inaccessible. Although this is a powerful tool, qualitative research must be carefully designed since the studied populations are often vulnerable to the representation of researchers and an academic community. I analyze risks in order to perform ethical research and create a bridge of dialogue between the community and the larger academic audience. Overall, I am conscious of the representation of the data collected, keeping in mind how the academic audience and the community view and respond to the representation of this information. I direct my thesis and findings towards drawing awareness to the needs of the community and documenting the struggles women in *Lideres Campesinas* face. This study, though limited to the experiences of female farmworkers in the Coachella Valley, resonates with larger institutional problems faced by women in agriculture throughout the nation.

CHAPTER 2

LIDERES CAMPESINAS: A MODEL OF GENDERED LEADERSHIP

“The more we work in our communities, the more we find women who are willing to talk about their issues. Our members join because they want to know about their rights, options, and want to make better decisions. At the same time, they want to learn more about services. They want to help more women learn to have more options. They want to share with others. They take initiative to support more women so that women can take control over their own lives.”⁹¹

-Mily Trevino-Sauceda, Founder of Lideres Campesinas

Lideres Campesinas is a grassroots organization committed to improving women's lives in the fields. The organization is decentralized, operating under non-hierarchical governance. By developing leadership through peer-training, Lideres Campesinas aims to create agents of political, economic, and social change that can advocate for their own rights. Drawing from field observations and interview data, this chapter provides a brief history of Lideres Campesinas. I also analyze their unique organizational model, and explore how female farmworkers use Lideres Campesinas as a platform to empower each other, take leadership within their communities, mobilize, and act collectively to fight for female farmworker justice. I argue that Lideres Campesinas is an effective model of gendered grassroots organizing precisely because it responds to and creates programs around issues that are unique to women. In addition to their successes, I examine some of the limitations of Lideres Campesinas' decentralized organization towards the end of this chapter.

Emergence of Lideres Campesinas

⁹¹ Interview with Mily Trevino-Sauceda, March 2, 2014.

Born and raised in a migrant farmworker family, Mily Trevino-Sauceda, the founder of Lideres Campesinas, was familiar with the long strenuous days of farmwork. Before and after school, and on weekends, Trevino-Sauceda worked under the heat of the sun with her mother, father, and nine siblings. She grew up on ranches owned by farm operators and frequently traveled between states depending on the season. In the 1970s, due to her father and brother's involvement, Trevino-Sauceda started to volunteer with the UFW. In the UFW, she learned organizing tactics, became educated on farmworkers rights, and became motivated to change the conditions she faced as a female in the fields. Although working with the UFW inspired Trevino-Sauceda, she noticed the lack of attention given to female farmworkers within the UFW. "Women's issues were not being talked about", she says "those were the kinds of things that got me interested in specifically organizing women. Why can't we have a fair opportunity?"⁹²

In answer to her own question, Trevino-Sauceda started the group Mujeres Mexicanas in 1988. This organization was created after Trevino-Sauceda helped her sister-in-law with her Masters thesis by conducting surveys with female farmworkers. These surveys gave Trevino-Sauceda a better understanding of what issues are most important to farmworker women. Interested in helping to solve these issues, Trevino-Sauceda started handing out educational flyers that referred women to support organizations. However, she found out that most women were not pursuing these organizations. Trevino-Sauceda explains, "I started questioning why they were not following up. I got caught up with teaching and sharing, without listening to their needs. So I looked closer and started understanding that the women wanted opportunities to get together with other female farmworkers."⁹³ Trevino-Sauceda believes that she "had the mentality

⁹² Ibid.

⁹³ Ibid.

of a saviour” and was not listening women’s needs.⁹⁴ Inspired by the desire of the community to create a space for female farmworkers, Trevino-Sauceda and the community initiated the first meeting. The community decided to call themselves Mujeres Mexicanas.

Mujeres Mexicanas was the precursor to Lideres Campesinas. Mujeres Mexicanas spread awareness about female farmworker issues and set out to find new members to join. Trevino-Sauceda explains, “We would get together and educate and hand out leaflets. We went from place to place and I started to see other women come and join us. For me, that was the answer. That people from the community can make their own change and wanted to get together. That’s how we started.”⁹⁵ Despite many familial and workplace responsibilities, women wanted to gather and discuss gendered injustices within their community.

In 1992, with support from the California Rural Legal Assistance Foundation, Mujeres Mexicanas received state recognition and funding to become what is known today as Lideres Campesinas. Over time, a network of campesinas throughout California was born. Since its inception, members of Lideres Campesinas organize in twelve Californian counties. Within these chapters, a majority of members participate and organize on a volunteer basis. The Executive Director and two other workers are the only paid members to assist with Lideres Campesinas’ funding and organization. The Board of Directors is comprised of representatives from each of the chapters. There are no offices at the different chapters. Instead, members meet at their homes or community spaces. The women in the organization use their experiences and intergenerational knowledge to address what their communities need, create open dialogue within communities, and mobilize farmworker women to stand up to injustices and advocate for change.

⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁹⁵ Ibid.

Organizational Philosophy

Lideres Campesinas focuses on educating individuals in order to unlock potential, build confidence, and foster empowerment. These women collectively combine knowledge and engage in community actions that spread awareness about gendered farmworker issues. Additionally, they seek to build coalitions and partnerships with other social justice organizations and agencies. Their organizational approach focuses on participation and ownership. Participation requires that the women who are affected collaboratively define and solve issues they face. Conferring ownership to community-members sustains the implemented programs after the initial organizing effort. The following sections explore the steps Lideres Campesinas employs towards a successful gendered model of organization.

Community-Based Leadership

The impetus for change needs to come from the inside out in order to sustain community development. Lideres Campesinas uses an asset-based community development model, which cultivates strengths of a community rather than emphasizing weaknesses. Need-based development focuses on the issues of the community and often relies on outside service providers that ensures the community's dependence and reduces residents' power to address their own issues. According to John Kretzmann and John McKnight, founders of the Asset-based Community Development Institute, need-based development allows community-members to "begin to see themselves as people with special needs that can only be met by outsiders. They become consumers of services, with no incentive to be producers."⁹⁶ This form of development denies the community's inherent wisdom and problem-solving capabilities. Members of Lideres

⁹⁶ John Kretzmann and John McKnight, "Assets-based Community Development," *National Civic Review*, 85, 4 (1996): 2.

Campesinas are not becoming clients, but are beginning to take charge of their lives and their community's future. Lideres Campesinas acknowledges the community members' skills and capacity. Through highlighting the community's assets, members are empowered, begin to mobilize, and utilize their assets. Lideres Campesinas' model of grassroots organizing allows community members to define their own agendas for change.

One member of Lideres Campesinas, Gabriela Alvarez, describes how Lideres Campesinas "is made for women by women."⁹⁷ Women become agents of their own change seeing that they directly encounter daily poor conditions and understand what steps need to be taken to eliminate these circumstances. Trevino-Sauceda states, "I needed to understand how I could work with the women who needed changes in the fields. Then I realized it has to come from them. The same people can be the ones to create their own change."⁹⁸ Together, members of Lideres Campesinas collectively utilize the power of female farmworkers to multiply and strengthen their voices. With meager financial resources, this small democratically run grassroots group has found creative ways to breach geographic, political and gendered limitations and organize.

Despite significant racism and sexism within their communities, women in Lideres Campesinas have challenged these restraints and emerged as leaders. Camila Torres, an active three-year member of Lideres Campesinas, describes her commitment and perseverance for justice within Lideres Campesinas:

I always wanted to help others and I wanted to know how to do it. So when I got the chance I took it, that's how I got involved with the organization. I learned that we had to fight, including in the fields, for what we believe in. I want everyone to know their rights and for everyone to be capable to defend themselves. I am very passionate about helping others become strong. We often think that we should just

⁹⁷ Interview with Gabriela Alvarez, March 1, 2014.

⁹⁸ Interview with Mily Trevino-Sauceda, March 2, 2014.

leave things as they are even if we don't like them. Instead, we need to learn to fight.⁹⁹

Torres is passionate about organizing the community because she directly experiences the gendered discrimination in the fields and has learned how to be confident and fight for justice through *Lideres Campesinas*. Torres wants to spread awareness to the community to help liberate other women, just as other members of *Lideres Campesinas* have helped her.

Awareness and Education

Female farmworkers traditionally have had limited access to education around issues ranging from pesticide exposure to basic labor rights. Alvarez highlights what the organization has taught her, "I started looking at my job differently. My rights are to have water, breaks, lunch, and if I am going to work extra, I will get paid."¹⁰⁰ With a better understanding of labor rights, Alvarez became more confident to demand equality in the fields. Education and awareness is the first step towards empowering workers. Women like Alvarez become more independent when they have access to resources and knowledge.

Lideres Campesinas, as an organization, utilizes various mediums to raise awareness, such as planning meetings, awareness months, vigils, theater, and other community events. However, for *Lideres Campesinas*, the most effective method of outreach is theater and visual displays. This medium creates accessible information for women who are illiterate and have not attended school. For example, the women create *teatros*, which are skits inspired by farmworkers' experiences. *Teatros* are commonplace within the farmworker movement. After the skit, the audience and actresses discuss the depicted problems and brainstorm solutions. This

⁹⁹ Interview with Camila Torres, March 8, 2014.

¹⁰⁰ Interview with Gabriela Alvarez, March 1, 2014.

tactic allows women to converse about complex issues in a low-pressure setting where they do not feel exposed. The skits verify that the issues women face are not unique, but are, in fact, shared experiences. Teatros are also a tool of empowerment; women act out issues that they have encountered in front of an audience.

Lideres Campesinas also provides a number of trainings for farmworker women. Two popular trainings the organization hold are the financial literacy and AIDS awareness training. These trainings last for two to three days, and are free for members. After completion, participants receive certificates and attend a graduation. When I attended these trainings, it was evident that women were proud of their accomplishments upon receiving certificates, which improved their self-esteem since many members have not received formal education. An average of twenty-five members attend these trainings. During the financial training, women are taught to manage, budget, and invest their money, thereby giving them greater financial independence from their husbands.

As a result of their vulnerability to sexual abuse at work, many migrant workers are also at major risk for HIV and STDs.¹⁰¹ According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, women of Mexican origin have disproportionately higher rates of HIV and have an epidemiology for contracting HIV.¹⁰² Women in Lideres Campesinas were able to attend AIDS awareness trainings where members started by creating an open space to talk about sex and sexuality, learned about modes of transmission, health effects of being diagnosed with HIV, ways of communicating with partners and creating an action plan. Throughout this two-day training, Lideres Campesinas and the Desert AIDS Project partnered and used theater, videos, games, lectures and partner activities as tools to educate the community about HIV/AIDS. Before the

¹⁰¹ Castaneda and Zavella, "Changing Constructions of Sexuality and Risk: Migrant Mexican Women Farmworkers in California," 128.

¹⁰² Ibid.

meeting, many women did not know how HIV was transmitted; women believed that HIV could be transmitted from a mosquito or could be contracted by sharing a bathroom or a pool with someone who is affected. The training catered to women and men, ranging from high school students to elderly women.

Lideres Campesinas' pedagogy strives to increase female farmworkers' access to resources and knowledge on their basic rights and issues surrounding their livelihoods. In addition to these trainings and education, members of Lideres Campesinas help spread awareness with other community-members.

Enabling Personal Empowerment, and Creating Conscious Spaces

Trevino-Sauceda sees Lideres Campesinas as an organization that simply provides a space for female farmworkers to discuss their own issues. Sharing experiences with one another, calling upon community-members in time of need, and understanding that their issues are not as isolated as they think, leads to members' own self-empowerment and development of leadership skills. The daily repressive systems of race, class and gender make it difficult for women to unlock and exercise their power.

The first step is to demystify leadership and equate it to daily activities. Women show leadership through household tasks such as feeding the family and taking care of the children. Understanding their everyday roles as workers, wives, neighbors, mothers, and organizers, permits women to see their own power and perseverance. They realize the valuable skills and knowledge they possess transcends the household. These roles form a basis of leadership empowerment. By understanding their gender roles, women analyze and challenge the traditional and patriarchal structures that oppress them in the household and in the fields. With more education and empowerment, members challenge the stereotypes that women are born to serve

others, are submissive, endure abuse and work at the cost of their own health and education and development.

Alvarez felt a sense of self-defeat and did not realize the systems of oppression that sustain these situations and her resilience and strength as a mother and farmworker. While discussing Alvarez's role as a mother, with a sigh, Alvarez whispers, "I realized I didn't do anything good for me or my kids."¹⁰³ Instead of recognizing her strength, perseverance, and commitment as a mother and worker, Alvarez focused on blaming herself for personal decisions. This sense of self-defeat is a common feeling for members. Lideres Campesinas educates women on the systems of oppression that perpetuate oppression and empowers members to confront these systems. Through Lideres Campesinas, Alvarez became empowered and decided to go back to school with the support of Lideres Campesinas. This accomplishment opened up more opportunities than work in the fields, and now, Alvarez has found another job. Alvarez's work, family, and scholarly responsibilities are remarkable and demand more attention. Through Lideres Campesinas, Alvarez advocates for better education at home and within the community so children do not fall into the same cycles of oppression. Alvarez is an example of a member that has become empowered and confident that she can change traditional gender roles, starting within her family.

The secure spaces Lideres Campesinas create further increases confidence. There is no central office at each chapter, additionally embracing the community-based nature of Lideres Campesinas. The ability to create spaces where relationships are nurtured, deep connections are formed, and women can talk about issues they have suppressed, has a significant influence on the members of the community. Trevino-Sauceda explains how they "did not want to have a lecture,

¹⁰³ Interview with Gabriela Alvarez, March 1, 2014.

[they] just wanted to have open dialogue about the issues with the women.”¹⁰⁴ By listening and sharing knowledge, members of Lideres Campesinas validate their own experiences and issues. Recurring stories provides Lideres Campesinas with a better understanding of what issues to focus on.

Two issues traditionally silenced within the farmworker community, domestic violence and sexual harassment are common points of discussion. Trevino-Sauceda states, “We didn’t know how to deal with the issues of domestic violence and sexual harassment. We just wanted to have open dialogue about these issues. We needed to build trust and for the women to feel safe so they could talk about their issues.”¹⁰⁵ At the beginning, women in Lideres Campesinas talked about their own issues as if they were happening to someone else. Now, women are more comfortable to confess and discuss their own issues. Through creating safe spaces and encouraging dialogue, women are able to create communities of trust and relate their experiences with each other. This effective model of organizing centralizes and invests in relationships and community.

Creating gender specific spaces is a tactic that has been around since the beginning of the feminist movement. Consciousness-raising groups were a form of political activism during the Women’s Liberation Movement. Women met to share their issues, which they first believed were personal and non-systemic. After meeting with other women, they collectively began to understand and analyze their gender-specific issues. A leaflet distributed by The Chicago Women’s Liberation Union in 1971 states:

We see that personal problems shared by so many others--not being able to get out of the house often enough, becoming exhausted from taking care of the

¹⁰⁴ Interview with Mily Trevino-Sauceda, March 2, 2014.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

children all day, perhaps feeling trapped--are really political problems. Understanding them is the first step toward dealing with them collectively.¹⁰⁶

Collectively, woman began to see their shared issues as larger problems within the structural political system. Forming groups and discussing these affairs was the first step towards changing institutions. The feminist group, New York Radical Women, believed that:

Workers don't know they're oppressed, so we have to raise their consciousness. One night at a meeting, I said 'would everybody please give me an example from their own life on how they experience oppression as a woman? I need to hear it to raise my own consciousness.'¹⁰⁷

Raising consciousness allows women to understand their shared oppression. Susan Brownmiller, a member of the New York Radical Feminists, describes consciousness-raising circles as, "one of the prime educational, organizing programs of the women's liberation movement."¹⁰⁸ Women who practice consciousness-raising were criticized as "women who complained all the time, who stayed in the personal realm and never took any action."¹⁰⁹ After re-examination, these women were diving into race, class and revolutionary change theory and were formulating theory for the women's liberation movement. Kathie Sarachild, a member of the New York Radical Women's group, wrote, These so called 'bitch sessions' could be, suggesting what important information for our fight we still had to get from studying the experiences and feelings of women, describing some of the obstacles, and proposing that women everywhere begin.¹¹⁰ Gloria Hull, the author of *All the Women are White, All the Blacks are Men, but Some of Us are Brave: Black Womens Studies*, describes, "In the process of consciousness-raising, actually life-sharing, we began to

¹⁰⁶ "How to Start Your Own Consciousness-Raising Group," *The CWLU Herstory Website*. 1971, <http://www.uic.edu/orgs/cwluherstory/CWLUArchive/crcwlu.html>. (accessed April 30, 2014).

¹⁰⁷ Susan Brownmiller, *In Our Time: A Memoir of a Revolution* (New York: Dell Publications, 2000): 21.

¹⁰⁸ Kathie Sarachild, "Consciousness-Raising: A Radical Weapon," *Feminist Revolution*, 1978, <http://library.duke.edu/rubenstein/scriptorium/wlm/fem/sarachild.html> (accessed April 30, 2014).

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

recognize the commonality of our experiences and, from the sharing and growing consciousness, to build a politics that will change our lives and inevitably end our oppression.”¹¹¹

Lideres Campesinas utilizes the theory of consciousness raising circles as a gendered tactic of organizing. Female farmworkers often understand their issues as personal and their own, rather than understanding the systemic forms of oppression that generate these injustices. It is difficult for women in a geographically and culturally submissive community to speak out about intimate issues. In these devised settings, members are able to meet with other women and analyze issues without the attendance of men. This tactic alone will not end women’s injustices, but creates understanding of oppressions and theories that can then be applied through action.

Mobilizing and Coalition-Building

Through creating restorative spaces that increase empowerment, and spreading awareness about gender-specific farmworker issues, Lideres Campesinas utilizes collective member power to organize and mobilize. In order to boost collaborative action, Lideres Campesinas builds coalitions with other social justice organizations. They have worked with environmental, labor, and women’s rights organizations, including One Billion Rising, the Pesticide Action Network North America (PANNA), and the United Farm Workers of America (UFW).

When dealing with issues surrounding pesticide exposure in the fields, Lideres Campesinas organizes with the Pesticide Action Network North America (PANNA), Department of Pesticide Regulation (DPR), and California Pesticide Reform (CPR). Together, they collaborate on educational resources, rallies, meetings, studies, and events. In 2012, Lideres Campesinas worked closely with PANNA to ban Methyl Iodide, a highly toxic fumigant

¹¹¹ Gloria Hull and Patricia Bell-Scott, *All the Women are White, All the Blacks are Men, but Some of Us are Brave: Black Women’s Studies* (Old Westbury: Feminist Press, 1982).

pesticide, from the U.S. market.¹¹² Together, Lideres Campesinas and PANNA conducted studies, rallied, and testified that Methyl Iodide was affecting farmworker health. Currently, Lideres Campesinas and PANNA are creating *Texts for Health*, a new pesticide exposure awareness system that updates workers in the fields about pesticide application schedules and informs the worker of pesticide safety protocols through mobile text messages. Currently, Lideres Campesinas is also working with the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) to update their Worker Protection Standards and ensure safety for farmworkers. Members travel to Washington D.C. to convene and collaborate with EPA officials.

Lideres Campesinas has also extended its work to the national level by reforming the Violence Against Women Act. Passed in 1994 by Congress, the Violence Against Women Act provided investigation and prosecution of violent crimes against women and established the Office on Violence Against Women within the Department of Justice. Members of Lideres Campesinas were essential in including and expanding the legal rights of battered immigrant women and their children. It was found that the rate of domestic violence was the highest among undocumented or conditional resident Latinas who were married to citizens of the United States.¹¹³ Noncitizens who had a spouse or child with citizenship or permanent residence, could “self-petition”, meaning they were able to obtain immigration relief without needing their abusers’ cooperation.¹¹⁴ Lideres Campesinas attended numerous meetings within California to explain the necessity for the inclusion of immigrant women into the act. Trevino-Sauceda

¹¹² Suguet Lopez, e-mail message to author, April 19, 2014.

¹¹³ Van Hightower et al, “Predictive Models of Domestic Violence and Fear of Intimate Partners Among Migrant Seasonal Farm Worker Women,” 139.

¹¹⁴ “Violence Against Women Act Provides Protections for Immigrant Women,” *Immigration Policy Center*, May 7, 2012, <http://www.immigrationpolicy.org/just-facts/violence-against-women-act-vawa-provides-protections-immigrant-women-and-victims-crime>. (accessed May 2, 2014).

describes this advocacy work as the first step Lideres Campesinas took into the political realm. The passing of this bill gave women the ability to see the possible change they could make and allowed Lideres Campesinas to become passionate mobilizers and advocates for structural government changes.

Currently, members are engaging in a campaign to expand access to legal remedies for immigrant women survivors of domestic violence in Riverside. Organizing around issues regarding domestic violence and sexual harassment is a silenced and complex subject, which is why Lideres Campesinas allies with other organizations for support. For example, Lideres Campesinas and One Billion Rising for Justice, an organization that works towards breaking the silence of marginalized female communities, collaborate and publicly perform skits outside of government offices and courthouses to spread awareness of issues female farmworkers specifically face. In addition, with the help of One Billion Rising for Justice, every chapter of Lideres Campesinas held events during February 14th, the day women all around the world rise up against gendered injustices.

Lideres Campesinas additionally launched an eleven-day fast in solidarity with other immigration reform organizations such as Fasting 4 Families to Immigration Reform and Citizenship. Members fasted to pressure House Republicans to advance immigration reform legislation that includes a pathway to citizenship. This collective act is yet another example of Lideres Campesinas partnering with diverse organizations to expose issues, increase participation, and fight for change.

Service Liaison

Along with coalition-building as a mobilizing tactic, Lideres Campesinas acts as a liaison between service providers and female farmworkers, representing the needs of farmworker

women. Trevino-Sauceda believes, “Women learn that they have rights, they can also help others, and negotiate and sit at the table with different stakeholders.”¹¹⁵ Women have the confidence and knowledge to work with diverse agencies to demand better services and representation.¹¹⁶ Trevino-Sauceda states, “The intent is to spread knowledge. So when we refer them to agencies, we are sure they will provide a good service. We are able to sit down with agencies so that they can understand that we are willing to refer people to them if they understand how to do a good service.”¹¹⁷ Similar to Kretzmann and McKnight’s asset-based community development model, agencies and community-members interact to create services that promote and support the community’s capabilities.¹¹⁸ Services work directly with community-members to assist their specific ideas for change.

Connecting female farmworkers to reliable service providers is frequently seen in domestic abuse and sexual harassment cases. Trevino-Sauceda explains how battered women call the members in *Lideres Campesinas* before service providers since many have experienced abuse themselves and are easier to approach. Members become supporters and will help guide abused women through legal and mental services. Together, members develop relationships with service providers and constituents, bridging their cultural and societal differences. Maintaining a mutual relationship with agencies that create policies and provide services affecting farmworker communities is essential in order to understand the best ways to address the needs of the community. Through sitting on different boards and attending a variety of meetings, women in *Lideres Campesinas* are building strong relations with agencies.

¹¹⁵ Interview with Mily Trevino-Sauceda, March 2, 2014.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁸ Kretzmann and McKnight, “Assets-based Community Development” .

Policy-making

Lideres Campesinas is a successful model of gendered organizing, but similar to all organizations, they experience obstacles. Perhaps the biggest hindrance Lideres Campesinas faces is organizing outside of their own communities to change regional and national policies. In addition to mothers and workers, women have limited time to organize. Seeing that the majority of members are volunteers, women cannot afford the time and money used for trips to government agencies to lobby for female farmworker rights. Finally, as Mexican migrants, these women have been traditionally isolated from the political process and unconnected to privileged networks of power.

Despite these obstacles, women are gradually making time to expose female farmworker issues throughout the country. Trevino-Sauceda, the founder of Lideres Campesinas, formed Alianza Nacional de Campesinas, a nationwide organization connecting small activist groups working towards creating equal opportunities for female farmworkers. Members of Alianza Nacional de Campesinas meet with policy makers, federal agency officials, and members of the public, to educate them about female farmworker issues such as gender violence, employment abuses, immigration and health and safety issues. Alianza Nacional de Campesinas holds national conferences in Washington D.C. where female farmworkers converge from different organizations throughout the nation. Alianza Nacional de Campesinas allows female farmworkers to educate and organize on a national level. This coalition of female farmworkers can gain increased attention from government officials; further placing gendered injustices on policy agendas.

Victoria Cruz, a member of Lideres Campesinas was recently invited to the White House and met President Obama. She went on to describe the trip she took to Washington D.C. to speak

in front of Congress members about female farmworker issues. The excitement and empowerment beamed from one ear to the other. Women in Lideres Campesinas are beginning to share their concerns nationally. In alliance with other organizations, members from Lideres Campesinas went to the white house to participate in a fast for immigration reform. They spent a week in front of the white house, advocating for immigration reform while simultaneously exposing the issues females specifically face to the public and government officials. Suguet Lopez, Director of Lideres Campesinas and Delegate for Alianza Nacional de Campesinas, explains how her “pilgrimage to our nation’s capital is meant to send a message to politicians, employers and to the public that [female farmworkers] are here and [they] will not sit by quietly without fighting for [their] rights.”¹¹⁹ Through creating alliances with other organizations, such as Alianza Nacional de Campesinas, members of Lideres Campesinas are exposing gendered farmworker issues, which are gaining the attention of policymakers on a national level.

Obstacles Towards Membership

According to members, the largest barrier to participation in the organization is the resistance from male partners. When asked why more youth are not involved in the organization, the women described that girls do not join due to their boyfriend’s resistance to membership. In a meeting, one member explains how men can find the power and independence that women obtain through Lideres Campesinas threatening.¹²⁰ Members complain that their husbands want them to cook dinner and perform other household chores when they get home from work, instead of coming home late after attending meetings. It is difficult for women to navigate expected

¹¹⁹ “Farmworker Women Will Convene in Washington DC to Demand Protection,” *Centro de los Derechos*. <http://www.cdmigrante.org/farmworker-women-will-convene-in-washington-dc-to-demand-protections/>. (accessed May 2, 2014).

¹²⁰ Lideres Campesinas recorded meeting, Coachella Valley, February 11, 2014.

gender roles. Pressure from their partners often limits their ability to participate in meetings and organize with *Lideres Campesinas*. This further restricts agency and education. Other obstacles to participation are the overall gendered household responsibilities, including childcare, cooking and cleaning, that occupy most hours of the day. Despite these obstacles, women are finding ways to get together and organizing within *Lideres Campesinas*.

Uniting Black Feminist and Female Farmworker Organizing Models

Lideres Campesinas gendered model of organizing reflects other sub-groups that formed in progressive movements where women felt discriminated. This section looks at Black Feminist Theory and how it relates to *Lideres Campesinas*' model of organizing.

One comparable example of a women's movement that branched from a progressive movement is the Black Feminist movement arising out of the larger civil rights movement. For black feminists, the civil rights movement did not give women enough space to address liberation and oppression by men. Demita Frazier, the co-founder of the Combahee River Collective, a black feminist organization, explains how women in larger movements were "in conflict with the lack of a feminist analysis and in many cases were left feeling divided against [themselves]."¹²¹ Benita Roth, author of *Separate Roads to Feminism*, believes, "feminist challenges were a threat to the economy of social movement activism; we can see that threat marked by the different ideological arguments that men in each parent movement made about why feminism threatened movement unity."¹²² Worried about women gaining power and altering movement ideals, gender norms were threatened by feminism and further marginalized women within the civil rights movement.

¹²¹ Wini Breines, "What's Love Got To Do With It?" *Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, 27, 4 (2002).

¹²² Benita Roth, *Separate Roads to Feminism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

The first-wave feminist movement centered its attention on issues within white communities and excluded women of color and of lower socioeconomic status. Women of color feminist theory grew out of the black feminist movement and examines how oppressive gender, race, and class systems intersect and have larger impacts on women of color. These intertwining oppressive systems must be holistically recognized and addressed. Kimberle Crenshaw, black feminist activist, describes how “black women are sometimes excluded from feminist theory and antiracist policy discourse because both are predicated on a discrete set of experiences that often does not accurately reflect the interaction of race and gender.”¹²³ In order to embrace the experiences and concerns of black women, the feminist theory framework used to translate women’s experiences had to be reworked. Both Alice Walker and Patricia Hill Collins are women that highlight the specific intersectionalities between race, class and gender that oppresses women of color. Walker coined the term *Womanism*, which is a social theory highlighting the daily struggles and experiences of women of color and seeks methods to eradicate these intertwining inequalities.¹²⁴ Hill Collins wrote *Black Feminist Thought* and defines Black feminism as “women who theorize the experiences and ideas shared by ordinary black women that provide a unique angle of vision on self, community and society.”¹²⁵ Black feminist theory can be applied to other women of color that struggle for the recognition of men and western feminists. Zavella believes that only using a gender analysis for understanding women’s lived experience “replicates the silencing and social oppression that women of color experience daily.”¹²⁶ Thus, race, class and gender analysis must be simultaneously analyzed.

¹²³ Joy James and Denean Sharpley-Whiting, *The Black Feminist Reader* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000): 209.

¹²⁴ Layli Phillips, *The Womanist Reader* (New York: Routledge, 2006). Phillips, L. (2006).

¹²⁵ Henrice Altink, “The Misfortune of Being Black and Female,” *Third Space*, 5, 2 (2006).

¹²⁶ Patricia Zavella, “Reflections on Diversity among Chicanas/Chicana leadership,” *The Frontiers Reader*, 12, 2 (1991): 107.

Complex questions of the intersectionality of power structures, connections between class and gender, racialized politics of knowledge, identity, and community, are themes that members of *Lideres Campesinas* confront in their daily lives. As previously mentioned, Trevino-Sauceda recognizes that injustices female farmworkers faced were not being addressed within the farmworker movement.¹²⁷ Therefore, just as the black feminist movement arose from the social movements for racial and gender equality, *Lideres Campesinas* branched from the farmworker movement and emerged to bring gender-specific issues in the fields (and beyond) to light.

Lideres Campesinas' organizational model is unique and unlike other farmworker organizations, such as the UFW. What sets *Lideres Campesinas* apart from the UFW is that *Lideres Campesinas* is not a confrontational model of change. *Lideres Campesinas* focuses on self-organization, strengthening communication between agencies and members, and alliance building, whereas the UFW focuses on boycotts, strikes, and more forms of direct action with the growers. Given these women's positions in society, being confrontational with the "oppressors" would mean taking action against the growers, in addition to directly challenging patriarchy and opposing men in their own community. By empowering and educating members, *Lideres Campesinas* teaches women to be more confident in their households and workplace and begin to change power dynamics with the men in their lives. One member's husband describes, "It is a good organization. I have seen her change a lot. Everytime she is learning more."¹²⁸ Women engage their spouses and other men in the community to support the fight for a vision of gender justice and empowerment.

¹²⁷ Hull and Bell-Scott, *All the Women are White, All the Blacks are Men, but Some of Us are Brave: Black Women's Studies*.

¹²⁸ Arts4Justice, "Mobilizing Youth," *Lideres Campesinas*, December 5, 2011, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=B-gJrZ-Slog>. (accessed on March 31, 2014).

Women in Lideres Campesinas are passionate about fighting for justice through education, empowerment, and action. In addition to maintaining the household and family environment, and working in the fields, women spend their limited free-time organizing against injustices female farmworkers face. According to Trevino-Sauceda, Lideres Campesinas was the first organization in the nation specifically focusing on gendered issues in the fields that is run by female farmworkers themselves.¹²⁹ This method of gendered grassroots organizing specifically serves female farmworkers' need and is a model that other women in agricultural communities can replicate.

¹²⁹ Interview with Mily Trevino-Sauceda, March 2, 2014.

CHAPTER 3
THE SILENCED SELF:
SEXUAL HARASSMENT AND DOMESTIC VIOLENCE IN THE FIELDS

Sexual Harassment in the Fields

Sexual harassment is the most silenced issue female farmworkers face. Due to the excessive amounts of sexual harassment, women refer to the fields as “*El Fil de Calzon*”, the field of panties.¹³⁰ This nickname embodies the racial, gender, and class oppression women face. Although other similar nicknames are common among female farmworkers, few authors have exposed sexual harassment in the workplace. Furthermore, male workers outnumber women by twenty to one in the fields, creating a dominant male environment that maintains women’s feelings of vulnerability and discomfort at work.¹³¹ Males hold most positions of power as growers, contractors and supervisors, and gain obedience through sexual harassment. Trevino-Sauceda, believes that sexual harassment is the largest injustice female farmworkers encounter. Trevino-Sauceda states, “When I say I was lucky, it was because I was never raped in the workplace.”¹³² Unfortunately, abuse in the fields is a common reality. This chapter delves into the factors that contribute to sexual harassment, highlights women’s stories, and describes how members of *Lideres Campesinas* are working towards educating and organizing around this suppressed subject.

The narratives of the women I spoke with reveal how sexual harassment comes in the form of sexist and degrading comments and behavior, unwanted and inappropriate verbal and sexual assault, rape, and sexual coercion. Sexual activity is often forced in return for rewards,

¹³⁰ Maria Ontiveros, “Harassment of female farmworkers can the legal system help?” (2007):105.

¹³¹ Castaneda and Zavella, “Changing Constructions of Sexuality and Risk: Migrant Mexican Women Farmworkers in California,” 127.

¹³² Interview with Mily Trevino-Sauceda, March 2, 2014.

threats or punishments. According to Charlene Galarneau, Professor at Wellesley College, a number of intersecting elements exacerbate immigrant women's vulnerability to assault:

Women are reluctant to report sexual assault to legal authorities for many reasons: fear of workplace retaliation and job loss, powerful cultural taboos against speaking about sex, gender expectations of obedience and sexual service, ignorance of legal rights and appropriate legal processes, immigration status and fear of deportation, the lack of bilingual/bicultural services, and shame.¹³³

All these factors were present in the narratives of women I interviewed. Throughout these interviews, lack of documentation, gender expectations, and fear of job loss were all significant themes contributing to sexual harassment. The following section highlights women's experiences regarding sexual harassment in the fields.

Factors that Perpetuate Vulnerability

For Torres, working in the fields is synonymous with abuse. Fearful each day, Torres describes the sexually degrading comments and inappropriate touching from contractors, supervisors, and other male workers. Torres states, "My worst experience was when supervisors would offer me things for sexual favors. It often happened to me. I stayed quiet about everything, because I had a fear of being deported."¹³⁴ In one instance, Torres had to give sexual favors in order for her son to work in the fields. Torres explains, "My son worked in the fields and that is why I would always be approached for favors. Since he was a minor, he was not allowed to work in the fields but the supervisor allowed him to stay."¹³⁵ In an unrecorded interview, Torres describes how her son was in need of dental care and she could not afford it, so he started working in the fields to pay off the loans. Her supervisor allowed for him to work in the fields

¹³³ Galarneau, "Farm Labor, Reproductive Justice: Migrant Women Farmworkers in the U.S." 149.

¹³⁴ Interview with Camila Torres, March 8, 2014.

¹³⁵ Ibid.

and helped pay for the dental care, but in return, asked for sexual favors.¹³⁶ Torres' situation reflects many female farmworkers' experiences in the fields that are too scared to speak out due to fears of deportation and the need for financial assistance. Physical appearance and the geography of the fields are other explored factors that contribute to women's sexual vulnerability.

Women are fearful of job loss because other job opportunities are scarce and they need to provide for their families. An Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) lawyer in Fresno, CA, reports, "we were told that hundreds, if not thousands, of women had to have sex with supervisors to get or keep jobs and/or put up with a constant barrage of grabbing and touching and propositions for sex by supervisors."¹³⁷ Maria Ontiveros, a scholar on immigrant workers' rights, believes that supervisors take advantage of women in the fields and "tell them that if they don't have sex with them, they won't give them a job."¹³⁸ This form of sexual coercion causes women to feel submissive, fearing for their jobs or even their life. Lopez explains how women sometimes do not receive their paycheck or are fired when confronting the abuser in the fields.¹³⁹

Alvarez explains how she "could remain quiet and continue to experience harassment or speak up and risk getting fired."¹⁴⁰ As a single mother of four, if Alvarez was fired, she could not provide for her family. Due to a lack of documentation, Alvarez has few options for other employment opportunities and fears to speak out about harassment. A statement from a police report in the Frontline special *Rape in the Fields*, describes a similar experience that a female

¹³⁶ Ibid.

¹³⁷ "Farm Worker Issues: Women's Issues," *Youth and Young Adult Network of the National Farm Worker Ministry* (2014).

¹³⁸ Maria Ontiveros, "Harassment of female farmworkers can the legal system help?" (2007):105.

¹³⁹ Interview with Suguet Lopez, March 22, 2014.

¹⁴⁰ Interview with Gabriela Alvarez, March 1, 2014.

farmworker encountered, “She told us that they started fighting and he raped her. He had told her not to tell anyone and that if she did not let him have sex with her, he would fire her.”¹⁴¹ Women become compliant to supervisors and men in power to remain employed, further silencing the issue of sexual harassment in the fields.

Lack of documentation makes women even more vulnerable to abuse in the fields and puts them in a position of labor docility and compliance to the orders of superiors. Deportation is a reality, and about 1,400 undocumented migrants are deported daily from the U.S., setting a context of constant fear and retaliation among immigrant communities.¹⁴² Since women are the primary caregivers, they do not want to risk the separation from their families as a result of deportation. Natalia Ortiz, a member of *Lideres Campesinas*, a farmworker for thirty years, and a supervisor in the fields, states:

I know many people who suffer abuses. They don't want to say anything. I help them. I brought this woman to a shelter. The abuser called to immigration. She wants to pick her children up but is scared. The separation of the children is extremely hard. I feel so angry and frustrated.¹⁴³

Ortiz sees a lot of abuse in the fields and is dedicated to helping women escape this mistreatment. Women confide in Ortiz for help since she too has faced abuse in the fields and understands the accompanying feelings of fear and vulnerability. Ortiz helps female laborers build their confidence and power in order to stand up to injustice. In addition, Ortiz connects women to services to help them escape abusive situations. Ortiz explains, “Many people work for me because I treat people equal and with respect. If you treat people well, they respond well,

¹⁴¹ Center for Investigating Reports, “Rape in the Fields,” 22 minutes, rape in the fields,” *PBS*, June 25, 2013. <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/rape-in-the-fields/>. (accessed on March 20, 2014): 31:10 minutes.

¹⁴² “Rape in the Fields,” (2013): 32 minutes.

¹⁴³ Interview with Natalia Ortiz, March 31, 2014.

and work better.”¹⁴⁴ Ortiz manages a full crew of workers who look up to her as a strong female leader. Contractors and supervisors respect Ortiz since her workers produce more than other crews. This increased production is a result of Ortiz’s egalitarian managing methods. Ortiz further highlights her strength as a female foreman and states:

“The supervisor asked, ‘where’s the foreman?’¹⁴⁵ I responded, ‘I am’. He did not believe that I was a foreman and doubted my abilities. When he looked at me working, he couldn’t believe it. After a week, he told me he was sorry. I work hard. When my crew is relaxed, they produce more. Everyone is tense when they are scared.”¹⁴⁶

Ortiz has managed up to 200 people in her crew. She knows that laborers work better when they are not afraid and there is no abuse in the fields. Furthermore, Ortiz understands the daily demanding gender roles women perform. Ortiz states, “I know they [women] do double work. Sometimes they have double jobs and take care of their families. I always give permission for their appointments because I understand.”¹⁴⁷ More women need to take positions of leadership in the fields to challenge gender roles and provide women with more comfort and equity while working

Martinez describes the trauma she constantly struggles from abuse in the fields. She has worked in the fields for fifteen years and started working since she does not have papers, which permits few employment opportunities. Martinez describes her sense of helplessness, “We cannot do much. We are scared. If I don’t have papers, I am fearful.”¹⁴⁸ Martinez is scared to report harassment because she knows that the next day she will not have work. She has seen it happen to many in the fields who report to the contractors. The contractors believe the

¹⁴⁴ Ibid.

¹⁴⁵ The term foreman is used interchangeably with supervisor in the fields.

¹⁴⁶ Interview with Natalia Ortiz, March 31, 2014.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid.

¹⁴⁸ Interview with Valeria Martinez, March 31, 2014.

supervisors and crew leaders more often than the workers, and the next day, women who spoke out will get a call to not come back to work. The fear and stress Martinez carries, represents how many undocumented women feel in the fields. Martinez describes the cycle of harassment and injustice, “Constantly, constantly...it is the same abuse day to day”¹⁴⁹ The fear of job loss or deportation keeps her in a constant cycle of abuse.

Repeated acts of harassment lead to a decreased sense of power and agency among many female farmworkers. Trevino-Sauceda describes how vulnerability strips away all feelings of power:

I was treated in a way where I felt afraid and uncomfortable. The crew leaders would stare and talk to me in inappropriate ways. I was afraid to do work because I knew that the people who were stalking and harassing me knew that I was afraid and that I wasn't going to say anything. It was terrible. Who wants to be stalked by someone? When someone thinks they have the right to touch your body, it makes you feel very uncomfortable.”¹⁵⁰

Many members of Lideres Campesinas describe similar feelings of vulnerability in the workplace, causing daily substantial stress and anxiety at work. Trevino-Sauceda describes how men felt the right to women's bodies. Constantly afraid of abuse, women's work capabilities are paralyzed. Trevino-Sauceda further elucidates on factors perpetuating vulnerability:

The fields are isolated. We know that more than half the women hired are undocumented. They are easier to be abused by whoever hires them. Most of our members have been harassed at least one time in the workplace. There are a number of them that have been harassed several times. If it happened to me, I know it happens to many women who are much more vulnerable. Women are forced to have sex, if not they will be fired or the growers will call immigration on them. Many of the women are single moms. What can we do if we need a job? And they know that. It is disgusting, but that is the true reality.¹⁵¹

¹⁴⁹ Ibid.

¹⁵⁰ Interview with Mily Trevino-Sauceda, March 2, 2014.

¹⁵¹ Ibid.

Trevino-Sauceda exposes all common factors that contribute to sexual harassment: lack of documentation, geography of the fields, job loss and poverty. She first highlights how large and expansive fields allow for countless hidden areas where women are easily abused. While walking towards the bathroom, taking a break, or getting off of work early, women find themselves left alone with supervisors in isolated areas of the field. This isolation maintains the vulnerability of women and availability of sexual abuse. Subsequently, Trevino-Sauceda explains the commonality of sexual harassment and the risk of deportation or job loss. These are all familiar realities of work in the field.

Additionally, the physical appearance of women is carefully crafted to avert the attention of male coworkers in fear of harassment.¹⁵² Although women should be fully clothed to protect themselves from weather and pesticides, they wear baggy clothing to not draw attention. According to Zavella and Castaneda, “Normal work regalia include heavy shirts, baggy pants, sturdy shoes, gloves, hats (often attached to scarves covering their necks), and kerchiefs over their mouths—so they appear cloistered while working, with only their eyes visible.”¹⁵³ Despite the heat, women also tie shirts around their waists to “cover their buttocks and genitalia from male scrutiny, commentary, or touches when they bend over to work.”¹⁵⁴ The excess amounts of clothing workers wear act as a protective barrier not just from the harsh natural environment, but also from male harassment.

Furthermore, members of *Lideres Campesinas* describe that most harassment comes from Hispanic labor contractors and field supervisors. Ontiveros states, “When the harasser is a member of her own ethnicity, the abuse may be affected by the harasser’s relative lack of

¹⁵² Galarneau, “Farm Labor, Reproductive Justice: Migrant Women Farmworkers in the U.S.” 149.

¹⁵³ Castaneda and Zavella, “Changing Constructions of Sexuality and Risk: Migrant Mexican Women Farmworkers in California,” 135.

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

power.”¹⁵⁵ Seeing that Hispanic supervisors and contractors have less status and privilege in society than the growers, these supervisors and contractors gain confidence by exercising power over the female farmworkers.¹⁵⁶ This rationale is similar to male feelings of powerlessness at home that perpetuate domestic violence, which will be discussed in the next section.

Ending Silence and Expanding Empowerment

Women workers tend to internalize sexual harassment and domestic abuse, and blame themselves for the event.¹⁵⁷ This-self blame makes the topic of sexual harassment hidden in fear of having communities and family members judge their actions. Women note that they are scared to speak out about the issue in fear of dishonoring their family and community. Further silencing women in the fields are the cultural and gendered stereotypes of Chicana women as “submissive and dependent”, which continue the cycle of harassment and vulnerability.¹⁵⁸ According to Castaneda and Zavella, it is common for Chicanas to silence their sexuality, prize virginity before marriage, and keep a reputation as a “mujer decente” (good woman).¹⁵⁹ This can allow members to feel shameful of sexual conduct and maintain self-blame. Burying these experiences can cause long-term mental and emotional disabilities. Trevino-Sauceda states, “I never talked about the harassment issues in the fields until 15 years later when I started working with other farmworker women.”¹⁶⁰ Women can deal with trauma from harassment cases for their lifetime.

¹⁵⁵ Maria Ontiveros, “Harassment of Female Farmworkers Can the Legal System Help?” (2007):105.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid.

¹⁵⁷ Galarneau, “Farm Labor, Reproductive Justice: Migrant Women Farmworkers in the U.S.” 149.

¹⁵⁸ “Our Special Programs,” *Lideres Campesinas*.

<http://www.liderescampesinas.org/english/programs.php?section=special-programs#special-programs>. (accessed on March 20, 2014).

¹⁵⁹ Castaneda and Zavella, “Changing Constructions of Sexuality and Risk: Migrant Mexican Women Farmworkers in California,” 134.

¹⁶⁰ Interview with Mily Trevino-Sauceda, March 2, 2014.

The silence around the topic of sexual harassment in the fields perpetuates the cycle of abuse and fear.

Trevino-Sauceda describes how *Lideres Campesinas* produces a social support network among women who have previously hidden their pain and stories due to the lack of outlets. Trevino-Sauceda states in an interview, “The first time I talked about the harassment going on, I learned quickly that my dad wasn’t understanding what was going on. He started questioning me about if I was doing something to provoke that. So I silenced myself for many years. It was hard on me.”¹⁶¹ *Lideres Campesinas* is creating spaces for dialogue, allowing women to slowly unpack their traumatizing experiences. Alvarez explains how after joining *Lideres Campesinas*, she is more confident to speak out when men harass her, “I was one of the youngest in the fields. It was really hard. The old men are looking at you. It is difficult working with those eyes looking at you. I didn’t know I had the right to tell them to stop, until now.”¹⁶² *Lideres Campesinas* educates women on their rights, increasing their confidence to speak out. By understanding their legal rights, members are able to file complaints against abusers to legal services.

Aside from empowering women through dialogue, *Lideres Campesinas* organizes domestic violence and sexual harassment awareness months and events, where they create artwork, perform skits, and meet with local government officials and service providers about sexual injustice in the community. Examples of these organizing efforts were previously discussed in Chapter 2.

Limitations To Justice: Difficulty Reporting Cases

¹⁶¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁶² Interview with Gabriela Alvarez, March 1, 2014.

There are few reliable statistics and reports on sexual harassment cases since it is culturally and geographically difficult for women to report cases to attorneys and legal assistance.¹⁶³ The Human Rights Watch reported that women in the fields face a significant risk of sexual violence.¹⁶⁴ Bill Tamayo, a regional attorney at the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC), explains how hundreds of charges by farmworkers have been received nationwide and continue to come in. Out of these charges, “no criminal prosecutions have been brought forward, zero as far as I know. Sexual harassment cases are hard to prosecute and the justice department estimates that 2/3 of the cases are never reported.”¹⁶⁵ With only anecdotal evidence, it is hard to prosecute abusers in the fields and bring justice to female farmworkers.

In addition, the EEOC found that victims were put in a complex situation since women first testify to law enforcement, which often work closely with agribusiness companies.¹⁶⁶ Paul Schultz, Former Sheriff of Wright County, CA, explains, “we put victims in an almost impossible situation.” by closely working with agribusinesses that have great monetary leverage and control local law enforcement.¹⁶⁷ Sonia Parras, an immigration lawyer, explains, “If you see law enforcement coming in to the plant and taking your co-workers, you are not going to go to them the next day and say ‘by the way, can you help me?’”¹⁶⁸ Women do not feel protected by the institutions that are established to keep community-members safe, which sustains silence.

Although it is rare for women to report cases, the EEOC has taken on multiple cases relating to rape and sexual harassment in the fields, but no one has yet been charged for assault

¹⁶³ “Rape in the Fields,” (2013): 39:50 minutes.

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid*, 40:07 minutes.

¹⁶⁵ *Ibid*, 39:45 minutes.

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid*, 28:15 minutes.

¹⁶⁷ *Ibid*, 28:57 minutes.

¹⁶⁸ *Ibid*, 27:45 minutes.

in the fields.¹⁶⁹ In the spring of 2013, fourteen women working at Evan's Fruit in Yakima, Washington testified and described multiple incidences of sexual harassment in the fields.¹⁷⁰ The jury concluded that according to the evidence, none of the women were subjected to sexual harassment.¹⁷¹ Another county attorney in Wright County, CA, describes how "there was not enough to substantiate or prove beyond reasonable doubt that these cases occurred."¹⁷² Illinois Representative Luis Gutierrez describes how personal testimonies, tears in their eyes, anguish in their face, and humiliation is evidence of harassment. Gutierrez states, "You can say that my information is anecdotal, but when the same information repeats itself, the stories are the same. I learned a long time ago, when it comes to these situations, we need to believe the women."¹⁷³ Women's narratives and qualitative data should be substantial evidence within the legal realm. Female farmworkers struggle for justice within the legal system since quantitative data regarding sexual harassment is practically impossible to obtain. Trevino-Sauceda has found, "They [women] can complain, but they don't have a case. They can't do anything against the companies."¹⁷⁴ Lideres Campesinas works closely with the EEOC and California Legal Services to provide civil legal assistance and support battered women. Together, these organizations strengthen women's confidence to speak out about injustices and support them through the legal process.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid, 26:00 minutes.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid, 42:51 minutes.

¹⁷¹ Ibid, 45:04 minutes.

¹⁷² Ibid, 32:00 minutes.

¹⁷³ Ibid, 42:55 minutes.

¹⁷⁴ Interview with Mily Trevino-Sauceda, March 2, 2014.

Domestic Violence

If the field is one arena of violence for female farmworkers, the home is yet another. My interviews and meetings with *Lideres Campesinas* highlighted the rampant effects of domestic abuse on female farmworkers' physical and mental health. Within farmworker communities, the patriarchal social structure and cultural gender roles have established conditions that sustain the devaluation of women through violent control.¹⁷⁵ In general, 1 in 3 female farmworkers face domestic violence, which relates to their vulnerability in the fields and at home.¹⁷⁶ This section touches on the domestic abuse members of *Lideres Campesinas* face, analyzes factors that perpetuate domestic abuse, and features ways *Lideres Campesinas* is working towards changing the culture of harassment in the home.

From forced sex to murder, women in *Lideres Campesinas* have endured a range of abuse and crime. The majority of members in *Lideres Campesinas* are single women who were domestically battered. These women gain strength through *Lideres Campesinas* and obtain the ability to leave their oppressive relationships. Martinez describes the daily constant violence she has faced as a female farmworker, "Violence is all in my life. When we are in the fields, there is violence. When we are at home, there is violence."¹⁷⁷ After experiencing harassment in the fields, she returns home to face domestic violence. She was scared of calling the police in fear of deportation due to her documentation status, but one day, Martinez's experience with domestic violence was so severe that police had to come to her house and separate them. Martinez explains how the members of *Lideres Campesinas* supported her and encouraged Martinez to escape her abusive marriage. Since joining *Lideres Campesinas*, Martinez has begun to unpack

¹⁷⁵ Van Hightower et al, "Predictive Models of Domestic Violence and Fear of Intimate Partners Among Migrant Seasonal Farm Worker Women," 140.

¹⁷⁶ Perilla, Bakeman, and Norris, "Culture and Domestic Violence: The Ecology of Abused Latinas," 362.

¹⁷⁷ Interview with Valeria Martinez, March 31, 2014.

the traumas she has experienced within the household and fields. Through collaborating and conversing with other members who have experienced domestic abuse, Martinez understands that she is not alone in this fight for justice.

Isabella Ramos, a longtime member of Lideres Campesinas, fears that domestic abuse will occur in her daughters' lives:

The one fear I have for my daughters is that they will end up with a man who abuses them. That is why I always brought them with me to the meetings. I witnessed a lot of domestic abuse as a child. I never got over it. Whenever I would have to present about domestic violence, I would choke up. At first it was very difficult for me and I was always scared that would happen to them [Ramos' daughters] like it did with my mother.¹⁷⁸

Ramos' experience highlights the issue of domestic abuse that has existed for generations.

Ramos does not want to continue the cycle of abuse and became empowered through Lideres Campesinas. She is now a strong and confident role model for her two daughters in the household. Through education and open dialogue, Ramos is delegating this empowerment to her daughters in order for them to become confident agents of change.

Torres has been a volunteer with Lideres Campesinas for three years and learned about the organization after seeing a flier about domestic violence. Torres explains:

It stood out to me because I have been living with domestic violence since I was little. I was forced to marry at the age of twelve. My husband used to beat me, treat me poorly, and used drugs. He would physically, emotionally, psychologically, and sexually abuse me. This man murdered my eldest son. It still hurts to say. I lived with hatred inside of me and a desire to fight so that other women don't live through this. I always wanted to help others and I wanted to know how to do it. So when I got the chance, I took it. That's how I got involved with the organization.¹⁷⁹

¹⁷⁸ Interview with Isabella Ramos, March 8, 2014.

¹⁷⁹ Interview with Camila Torres, March 8, 2014.

Torres has dealt with significant trauma from her abusive relationships but found strength to address this pain through *Lideres Campesinas*. After Torres fostered her own empowerment and resilience, Torres educates women on their rights and helps women leave domestic relationships. By sharing her story, women relate to her experiences and open up about their own abuse.

While female farmworkers face more oppression than male farmworkers, male farmworkers undergo similar fears and stresses that their female counterparts experience. Language barriers, fear of deportation, and the lack of bicultural and bilingual services that farmworkers face, contribute to stresses in the household, which increases domestic violence.¹⁸⁰ The relative lack of power male farmworkers have in the fields may lead to them overcompensating in their own household.¹⁸¹ Scholars Perilla, Bakeman, and Norris, describes how the highest contributors to domestic violence in farmworker communities is the stress both men and women face in the fields and the levels of intoxication to combat such stress and depression.¹⁸² Another study, that used a logistic regression analysis, found that the strongest predictors of domestic abuse were drug and alcohol use, pregnancy, and migrant status.¹⁸³ Rural residency also allows abuse to continue due to the lack of access to domestic violence services and the high amount of women of low socio-economic status in the community.¹⁸⁴ Although there are minimal studies conducted on domestic violence in farmworker communities, members of *Lideres Campesinas* verify that lack of documentation, services, labor rights, and equitable wages, allow for the prevalence of domestic abuse in farmworker communities.

¹⁸⁰ Perilla, Bakeman, and Norris, "Culture and Domestic Violence: The Ecology of Abused Latinas," 362.

¹⁸¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁸² *Ibid.*

¹⁸³ Van Hightower et al, "Predictive Models of Domestic Violence and Fear of Intimate Partners Among Migrant Seasonal Farm Worker Women," 137.

¹⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 140.

In order to address domestic violence, Lideres Campesinas educates members on the causes of household violence and provides resources for members in violent relationships. Lideres Campesinas easily identified the issue of domestic violence within the community, but had trouble addressing this issue due to cultural barriers that silenced the issue of domestic abuse. Although some members of Lideres Campesinas had experience organizing with the UFW and attending protests for farmworker rights, Lideres Campesinas found that women were more afraid to confront their own husbands than powerful growers. In response to this reality, they created a statewide Domestic Violence Outreach and Education Project that has existed since 1995. The focus of this project is to bring women together to discuss domestic violence and educate these women on their rights. This tactic would empower women to communicate with their husbands about abuse. If women have been abused or want to leave their relationships, Lideres Campesinas helps them by cultivating empowerment and confidence. In addition to fostering internal growth, Lideres Campesinas assists women with finding the correct services. Before 1995, migrant farmworker women were an unknown population within national and statewide domestic violence and sexual harassment advocacy groups.¹⁸⁵ Lideres Campesinas has exposed this hidden population that are greatly affected by daily abuse, thereby bringing more services and support to them.

Lideres Campesinas creates three-day trainings that display basic information on domestic abuse. In one training, 23 out of the 25 participants revealed that they have experienced one of more forms of domestic abuse in their life.¹⁸⁶ Before joining Lideres Campesinas, Ramos, for example, never thought she was a victim of domestic abuse. Ramos recognized her own marriage in the descriptions of abuse. After attending meetings, Ramos realized that domestic

¹⁸⁵ Rachel Rodriguez, "The Power of the Collective: Battered Migrant Farmworker Women Creating Safe Spaces," 21, 4 (1999): 418.

¹⁸⁶ Ibid, 422.

abuse was not necessarily physical violence. “That’s when I told him it’s not just hitting, it’s emotional, sexual and verbal.”¹⁸⁷ Ramos explains how submissive she would be during sex and would lie in certain positions she was uncomfortable with because her husband wanted it. She was able to have open dialogue with her husband and describe the different types of domestic abuse a woman can experience and the concerns she had about their relationship. Before Lideres Campesinas, Ramos believed that it was a wife’s obligation to please her husband and did not have the confidence to mention these issues. Trainings have allowed women, like Ramos, to come together and become aware of their power in their relationship, know when they are being abused, and understand their legal rights in an abusive relationship. Currently, Lideres Campesinas is working with officials in Riverside County to expand legal remedies for immigrant survivors of domestic violence.

Overall, the labor conditions and stigmatized social relations within the fields create an environment where women’s bodies are controlled and exploited. Issues of sexual harassment and domestic abuse are rooted in patriarchal systems that render women submissive to men. Interviewed women consistently note how a variety of factors contribute to their daily oppression including: lack of documentation, the field environment, socioeconomic stresses, cultural silence around sexuality, and fear of job loss.

Documenting abuses, whether in the field or at home, and allowing women to speak about these issues marks a step towards removing the stigma associated with airing such “dirty laundry” and opens opportunities for regional, statewide, and national policies. Lideres Campesinas is thus playing an invaluable role in the larger struggle for farmworker justice. By fostering individual to individual connections as well as engaging in the national arena, Lideres

¹⁸⁷ Interview with Isabella Ramos, March 8, 2014.

Campesinas is helping educate farmworker women about their basic rights and creating spaces for them to speak out to influence both their daily lives and larger policy changes.

CHAPTER 4
PESTICIDE EXPOSURE: REDUCING FERTILITY IN THE FIELDS

“My experience with pesticides is the death of my husband.”¹⁸⁸ With mournful eyes, Sofia Gonzalez, a member of Lideres Campesinas, describes how her husband was exposed to pesticides while working many years in the fields, which resulted in cancer and eventually to his premature death. Gonzalez herself has developed severe asthma since working in the fields. She is convinced the nature of her work has caused her asthma and is responsible for high amounts of asthma in her community.

The United States of America’s industrial agricultural system is dependent on pesticides. In addition to being an environmental hazard that reduces biodiversity and degrades soil structure, pesticides pose a serious health threat to farmworkers. However, it is difficult to understand the health effects of pesticide exposure without first recognizing the systems of oppression that allow this exposure to continue. Harrison, environmental sociologist and author of *Pesticide Drift and the Pursuit of Environmental Justice*, describes pesticide drift as “...not only a technical problem but a social one, rooted in systems of inequality and oppression.”¹⁸⁹ Harrison further describes the barriers of poverty, legal status, language, and political disenfranchisement, which allow pesticide exposure to be more prominent in socially marginalized areas. According to Harrison, pesticide illness is the most widespread environmental issue in the world today.¹⁹⁰ Everyday, workers drink water contaminated with

¹⁸⁸ Interview with Sofia Gonzalez, March 31, 2014

¹⁸⁹ Jill Harrison, *Pesticide Drift and the Pursuit of Environmental Justice* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2011), 9.

¹⁹⁰ *Ibid*, 2.

pesticides, breathe volatilize chemicals, and carry pesticides home on their work clothing. These exposures cause severe long-term health effects and are largely unrecognized and reported.

Despite data that confirms a strong correlation between high amounts of pesticide exposure and health problems in farmworker communities, pesticides continue to be used in industrial agriculture. In fact, new research shows the gendered health effects of pesticide exposure. This chapter explores the impacts of pesticide exposure on women's health, describes members of *Lideres Campesinas*' contact with pesticides, investigates the factors that allow this injustice to persist, and examines in what ways *Lideres Campesinas* organizes around this environmental injustice.

Reproductive Justice and Pesticide Exposure

Women are especially susceptible to reproductive health issues relating to pesticide exposure. Pesticide effects are associated with menstrual cycle disturbances, reduced fertility, spontaneous abortion, stillbirths, and developmental defects.¹⁹¹ Organochlorine pesticides accumulate in fatty tissues, and scholars argue that women are increasingly targeted since they have a higher percentage of fatty tissue than men.¹⁹² Pesticides act as endocrine disruptors, which mimic naturally occurring estrogen, alter hormone activity within the body, and interrupt reproductive capabilities.¹⁹³ Natural estrogen levels and other naturally occurring biochemicals are distorted by organochlorines in the body.¹⁹⁴ Pesticides pass through women's skin into their

¹⁹¹ Galarnau, "Farm Labor, Reproductive Justice: Migrant Women Farmworkers in the U.S." 148.

¹⁹² Fernando Diaz-Barriga et al., "DDT in Mexico," (2003): 371.

¹⁹³ Fady Sharara et al., "Environmental Toxicants and Female Reproduction," 70, 4 (1998).

¹⁹⁴ Steingraber, *Living Downstream: An Ecologist's Personal Investigation of Cancer and the Environment*, 94.

placenta and result in extreme birth defects.¹⁹⁵ Richard Sharpe and Stewart Irvine's study on the reproductive effects from exposure to synthetic chemicals, namely pesticides, shows that individuals who are frequently exposed to these chemicals, such as female farmworkers, are at high risk of ill health or death.¹⁹⁶

According to Galarneau, "The inevitable chronic and sometimes acute exposure to multiple pesticides with unknown interactions suggests that farmworker women's reproductive health is likely far more compromised than we currently understand."¹⁹⁷ Short-term symptoms such as rashes, blisters, dizziness, and nausea, are often accompanied with chronic health issues that are harder to detect. Pesticides can affect women through direct spraying on the fields, pesticide drift, and pesticide residue on clothing. The lack of pesticide regulation and the lack of protection in the fields contribute to these health risks. Although there has been successful banning of pesticides such as DDT (dichlorodiphenyltrichloroethane) and PCBs (polychlorinated biphenyls) in the U.S., there are still numerous synthetic chemicals in the fields that are harmful to reproductive health.¹⁹⁸ The Pesticide Action Network North America (PANNA) is currently working towards banning Atrazine, a weed killer and endocrine disruptor that is widely used as a pesticide in the U.S.¹⁹⁹ Birth defects, infertility and cancer are linked to high exposure to Atrazine.²⁰⁰ Studying the specific effects of pesticides on women's health can be used as political leverage for better regulations on pesticide use in the fields.

¹⁹⁵ Richard Sharpe, "How Strong is the Evidence of a Link Between Environmental Chemicals and Adverse Effects on Human Reproductive Health?" *British Medical Journal* 328, 7437 (2004): 1.

¹⁹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁹⁷ Galarneau, "Farm Labor, Reproductive Justice: Migrant Women Farmworkers in the U.S." 148.

¹⁹⁸ Sharpe, "How Strong is the Evidence of a Link Between Environmental Chemicals and Adverse Effects on Human Reproductive Health?" 1.

¹⁹⁹ "Atrazine," PANNA, <http://www.panna.org/resources/specific-pesticides/atrazine>. (April 30, 2014).

²⁰⁰ *Ibid.*

The Perpetuation of Pesticides

Every interviewed member of Lideres Campesinas explains the constant exposure to pesticides they experience within and beyond the fields. The majority of members mention how planes carrying pesticides spray over the fields while they work. Ramos describes how “they still use pesticides and fail to tell the workers. They neglect us and spray it at night knowing that we have to work in the morning.”²⁰¹ Ramos explains how workers are legally allowed to enter the fields three days after applying pesticides, but workers will enter a few hours after application or will be directly sprayed while working, thus overtly breaking the law. In addition, Ramos describes how the supervisors “would tell us to try the grapes before picking them. They wanted to make sure the fruit was sweet.”²⁰² This is an example of supervisors exhibiting power and assuming farmworker inferiority. From inhaling pesticides in the fields to transporting pesticides on clothing and exposing their family, women describe their inescapable contact with these toxic chemicals.

Women in Lideres Campesinas describe pregnant women in the fields who experienced miscarriages and birth defects. Trevino-Sauceda recounts a day when a plane sprayed pesticides while she was working in the fields. A woman in the fields was expecting a child and was rushed to the hospital after the spray. The baby survived, but the mother did not.²⁰³ Stories of miscarriages and child deformities are common within the female farmworker community. A survey Lideres Campesinas conducted regarding pesticide exposure highlights the gendered effects of pesticide exposure and asks questions such as, “Have you lost a pregnancy?” “Have you had a stillbirth?” and “Have you had cancer?” These questions are analyzed with questions about the amount of exposure, health effects, and education on pesticide exposure farmworkers

²⁰¹ Interview with Isabella Ramos, March 8, 2014.

²⁰² Ibid.

²⁰³ Interview with Mily Trevino-Sauda, March 2, 2014.

have received. In the survey, 15 out of 82 farmworkers have lost a pregnancy while working, and one woman has lost four children. This quantitative data exposes and supports the correlation between stillbirths, child deformities, and pesticide exposure.

In addition, one older member of Lideres Campesinas describes how she has cancer due to pesticide exposure and did not receive health care for a number of years due to her documentation status.²⁰⁴ The lack of health care for farmworkers perpetuates the severity of pesticide exposure. Due to lack of documentation, no medical insurance, and language barriers, health care is inaccessible for many farmworkers. The number of primary care physicians between the ten most affluent and ten poorest communities (which are rural farming communities) in California is stark. There are around 498 residents per primary care physician in the most affluent areas, whereas there are only 3,548 residents per primary care physician in the poorest communities.²⁰⁵ Around 20% of farmworkers studied in the California Agricultural Worker Health Survey have never even been to the doctor.²⁰⁶ This disparity reveals the need for better health care services to manage the large amounts of pesticide-related illnesses and poor working conditions within farmworker communities.

Furthermore, Alvarez's mother became sick from pesticides. She was dizzy and nauseous and would complain of headaches. Alvarez explains, "When they put pesticides, they don't tell the people when they apply it. The next day we have to go to work. It will be really strong and we have to work."²⁰⁷ When asked about pesticide exposure in the fields, Ortiz quickly responds, "It is a big problem. They never advise you when they are putting pesticides on the fields. Many people get sick. One time, my father, uncle, and sister were working, when pesticides were

²⁰⁴ Lideres Campesinas recorded meeting, Coachella Valley, February 11, 2014.

²⁰⁵ Margaret Reeves and Teresa Morales, *Farmworker Women and Pesticides in California's Central Valley* (Pesticide Action Network), 4.

²⁰⁶ Ibid.

²⁰⁷ Interview with Gabriela Alvarez, March 1, 2014.

sprayed and all got sick.”²⁰⁸ Members of Lideres Campesinas have countless stories about pesticide exposure and health effects. Many highlight the lack of health care and lack of education and communication between growers and workers, which maintains the subjugation of farmworkers.

In addition, Farmworkers do not know where to report if exposed to pesticides. In Lideres Campesinas’ survey regarding pesticides, 18 out of 82 surveyed farmworkers have been exposed to pesticides more than ten times and 63 did not know where to report if exposed to pesticides.²⁰⁹ The underreporting of pesticide exposure enables the continuation of pesticide application in the fields and the degradation of health. If more farmworkers reported exposure to the agricultural commissioner, fields would be investigated, thus putting more pressure on growers to reduce pesticide use.

Oftentimes, reporting pesticide exposure to a supervisor allows workers to become vulnerable to job loss and shame. Supervisors use raffles as a tool to keep workers submissive and quiet about poor working conditions and pesticide exposure in the field. Ramos describes, “There is nowhere to go if you feel sick from pesticides. You could go tell the supervisor, but then you would be removed from the raffle that they hold.”²¹⁰ According to Ramos, supervisors bribe the workers and have raffles at the end of the month based on whether or not someone was hurt in the fields. Ramos explains, “If no one was hurt on your location, you were all eligible for a raffle. I won one once, but I remember a period of time when I wouldn’t tell anyone how sick in fear of ruining everything for everyone else.”²¹¹ These raffles are strategic ways for supervisors to generate tensions between farmworkers and to avoid dealing with injury and

²⁰⁸ Interview with Natalia Ortiz, March 31, 2014.

²⁰⁹ Suguet Lopez, Lideres Campesinas Pesticide Survey, 2014.

²¹⁰ Interview with Isabella Ramos, March 8, 2014.

²¹¹ Ibid.

health-related issues. Ramos reveals that for “the sake of their jobs, people just stay quiet about abuse and exposure to pesticides.”²¹² These tactics permit workers to stay silenced in fear of job loss or ostracism from the community.

In addition, Ramos explains how employers fire workers if they try to contact the health department about pesticide-related issues, thus sustaining poor working conditions.²¹³ In the study conducted by Lideres Campesinas and the Pesticide Action Network North America (PANNA), only four out of twenty-seven women reported their cases to the commissioner and 53% of female respondents stated that they do not report illnesses to their employer in fear of job loss.²¹⁴ Job loss is a common concern that contributes to the lack of reported illnesses. Another discovery from this report was that farmworkers did not know the appropriate place to call in the event of a poisoning. These statistics identify that more farmworkers need to receive better pesticide awareness training, worker safety laws must be upheld, medical services must be available and employers need to be held more accountable for the safety of their workers.

Pesticide exposure goes beyond the fields and impacts social interactions within the household. Sara Rivera, a member of Lideres Campesinas, believes that pesticides resulted in household violence. Rivera’s husband worked in the fields picking grapes, but had to quit after getting pesticides in his eyes. Rivera’s husband was unemployed for an extensive time. In his state of vulnerability, the amount of domestic violence in the household increased.²¹⁵ The inability to work and provide for the family can increase the perpetuating feelings of powerlessness and stress, which can contribute to more household violence. Overall, when asked about pesticide-related issues, most interviewed women had a story to tell about pesticide

²¹² Ibid.

²¹³ Lideres Campesinas recorded meeting, Coachella Valley, February, 11, 2014.

²¹⁴ Reeves and Morales, *Farmworker Women and Pesticides in California’s Central Valley*, 4.

²¹⁵ Lideres Campesinas recorded meeting, Coachella Valley, February, 11, 2014.

exposure that has gone beyond the fields, impacting their health, and relations with their family and community.

Lastly, although testimonies were collected on the health effects presumably caused by pesticide exposure, it is difficult to diagnose that pesticide exposure is the absolute producer of these issues. This is due to the limited number of long-term studies, lack of services available for testing, and the health effects that are not found during immediate check-ups. Trevino-Sauceda describes the difficulty in pinpointing pesticides as the cause towards health issues since doctors often diagnose the problem as an allergic reaction. Farmworkers complain about dizziness, nausea, and rashes, all which can be misdiagnosed as heat exhaustion or an allergic reaction. Victoria Cruz has worked with Lideres Campesinas for over ten years. Working as a nurse in farmworker communities, Cruz is appalled at how pesticide exposure is disregarded as a causing factor to cancer and other health issues. She has seen doctors overlook the ability of pesticides and treat health issues without toxicology testing. This can lead to misdiagnoses, which contributes to sustaining the cycle of health issues in farmworker communities. Cruz highlights the presence of silenced farmworker issues within the medical field. Cruz believes that it is her job to call attention to the effects of pesticide exposure in medical institutions that provide for farmworkers. She describes doctors diagnosing rashes from pesticide exposure as gonorrhea. Diagnosing pesticide-related health issues is difficult and better diagnosis techniques need to be explored.

Lideres Campesinas: Protecting Against Pesticides

Lideres Campesinas educates their members on the effects of pesticide exposure, what to do if exposed, and how to help farmworkers find appropriate services. Alvarez describes how work has changed after understanding the health effects pesticides have:

A lot of people who were pregnant, they wouldn't stop working until they had the baby. There was a lady who was working and never stopped and her baby has mental issues. After my trainings and all my experiences in Lideres Campesinas, when I was pregnant, I stopped working because of the pesticides.²¹⁶

Alvarez saw the damage pesticides had on workers' health in the fields, but did not associate pesticide exposure with these health issues. Through Lideres Campesinas, Alvarez became educated and confidently decided to stop working while pregnant.

In addition to pesticide trainings, Lideres Campesinas celebrates the month of March as pesticide awareness month. The women plan an exhibition in their communities where they show artwork made by farmworkers and their families that display the harms of pesticide exposure in a creative and accessible way. Lopez believes that "there is a large need for an effective emergency response protocol for pesticide exposure." Aside from brochures the organization has created a *Texts for Health* program. Previously mentioned in Chapter 2, *Texts for Health* will alert the community about pesticide exposure in the area and educate the community about pesticide exposure protocols. Lideres Campesinas is educating the public on the effects of pesticides and post-exposure procedures through artistic and technological approaches.

As previously mentioned in Chapter 2, Lideres Campesinas also works with service providers to ensure that their work is accessible to the community they are serving. During one meeting, members of Lideres Campesinas translated sentences about pesticide exposure to make sure that the language was appropriate and accessible. These translations were incorporated into

²¹⁶ Interview with Gabriela Alvarez, March 1, 2014.

a pamphlet and presentation by the Coachella Health Department. Lideres Campesinas and the Coachella Health Department have a mutually beneficial relationship; members translate materials into Spanish, while becoming educated on the facts that the Health Department provided.

Despite organizations such as the Environmental Protection Agency, California Department of Pesticide Regulation, and the County Agriculture Commissioner, pesticide exposure persists and affects many farmworker communities every day. These government entities need to be held at a higher regulatory standard. The EPA regulates agricultural pesticide use, however these regulations are not sufficient. Not only are these regulations too lenient and persuaded by lobby money and agribusinesses, growers dismiss these regulations and frequently apply pesticides. According to Alvarez, even if the legal amount of pesticides is sprayed on the fields, the growers allow the workers to go back into the fields directly after the spray instead of abiding by the regulations and waiting days after application.²¹⁷ Within the next year, Lideres Campesinas will be involved in reviewing the EPA Worker Protection Standards to make sure these standards are appropriate. This is another example of how Lideres Campesinas works with service providers, ensuring that farmworker services reflect the needs of the community. Lideres Campesinas also allies with the Pesticide Action Network North America (PANNA) and Californians for Pesticide Reform (CPR), to conduct quantitative and qualitative studies that highlight the health hazards of pesticides and allow these organizations to identify policy recommendations that can further reduce pesticide risks.

Through these combined reports and papers, Lideres Campesinas and the aforementioned groups advocate for regional and statewide policy changes directed towards the California Department of Pesticide Regulation. Changes such as the availability of medical services, the

²¹⁷ Ibid.

frequency of fines issued for violation of pesticide use, stronger laws protecting workers from exposure, and increased distribution of adequate information, were all included in a collaborative report that Lideres Campesinas contributed to, called *Fields of Poison 2002: California farmworkers and pesticides*.

Pesticide exposure has been an issue in the fields for decades. Although Rachel Carson revealed the atrocious effects of pesticides on human and environmental well-being, and a substantial amount of literature has been written on the harmful results of pesticide application, this environmental injustice still persists. Within this literature, the reproductive impacts of pesticide exposure need additional exploration to protect women's health. Exposing the gendered effects of pesticides can also support the creation of better pesticide policies. Insufficient education on the effects of pesticide exposure, misdiagnoses, and lack of health care, maintain the detrimental consequences of pesticides on women's bodies and their children. Members of Lideres Campesinas illustrate the relationship between pesticide exposure and health issues within their daily lives. Lideres Campesinas is combating this injustice by educating community-members on the health effects of pesticides and on practical pesticide exposure protocols. In addition to education, Lideres Campesinas is collectively organizing on a statewide and nationwide level to advocate for better policies regulating pesticide exposure.

CHAPTER 5
THE MULTIPLE GENDERED RESPONSIBILITIES OF FEMALE FARMWORKERS

“The female farmworker is as unique as the unique industry that she works in--agriculture. She is practically born in the fields. My mother was working in the fields when I was born. Childhood is spent in the fields and she pitches in as soon as she is able to understand instructions. She gets married and her honeymoon is spent helping her new husband harvest crops. She gets pregnant and spends her pregnancy in the fields. After her baby is born, she doesn't have to worry about a baby sitter, that baby goes right to work with her. And the cycle starts all over again.”

-Maria Rosa, Female Farmworker²¹⁸

For female farmworkers, rest is a luxury they cannot afford. Many wake up at 3 a.m. to prepare meals for their family, get their children ready for school, and arrive at the fields by 6 a.m. They work all day—sweating for hours in the sweltering sun—only to return home and work more for their families. Poems such as *La Jefita*, by Jose Montoya, depict women's dual identities as mothers and workers. Montoya describes how sleep is a comfort most farmworker women do not experience. They work, iron, clean and cook for the next day. Montoya writes that the sound of “the hissing of the hot irons and the beans in the pot” can be heard throughout the night.²¹⁹ This is an artistic and genuine expression of the home environment and the self-sacrificing mothers who put the well-being of their family before their own. In general, women are seen as the primary caretaker of the household and men are not expected to complete rearing tasks. The female role is even greater within agricultural labor communities, as women work

²¹⁸ Rose, “Women Power Will Stop Those Grapes,” *Journal of Women's History*, 17.

²¹⁸ *Ibid.*

²¹⁹ Jose Montoya, “La Jefita,” in *Mexican Ballads, Chicano Poems: History and Influence in Mexican-American Social Poetry* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), 95.

double-days; first facing poor labor conditions and wages, followed by cooking and tending to their family.

This chapter unpacks the struggles female farmworkers face as a result of their multiple identities as mothers, workers, and in some cases, organizers. Next, I examine Chicano/a culture and its relation to the suppression of women in the household and workplace, as well as, ways in which Chicana activism produces new gender roles and responsibilities that give women more power. In addition, this chapter explores members of *Lideres Campesinas*' experiences with balancing multiple gendered and racial expectations.

Gender Roles and Chicana Culture

Cultural gender roles have the ability to either liberate or suppress women. Nonetheless, every woman should have the agency to create her own unique identity. Gloria Anzaldua, a prominent Chicana feminist theorist, looks at “who constructs knowledge, realities, and information and how they control people’s identities through that construction.”²²⁰ Anzaldua understands that structural forces influence the representation of Chicanas in the U.S.’s society and believes that Chicanas should be able to represent their own roles and identities. Through “physical force and socially regulating ideas,” oppressive systems create and maintain gender roles and perpetuate racial stereotypes.²²¹ The submissive gender roles of migrant women are further exacerbated by the overarching legal, religious and political systems of their community and society.²²² Chicanas often do not see the structural forces that dictate their roles in the U.S. and begin to blame themselves for their oppressive environments.

²²⁰ Debra Blake, *Chicana Sexuality and Gender: Cultural Refiguring in the Literature, Oral History, and Art* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008), 1.

²²¹ *Ibid.*

²²² Perilla, Bakeman, and Norris, “Culture and Domestic Violence: The Ecology of Abused Latinas,” 362.

In *Lideres Campesinas*, the majority of female farmworkers and members are of Mexican descent and identify as Chicanas. *Lideres Campesinas* has dispelled stereotypes on Chicanas as passive victims of oppression by critically questioning their positioning in society and navigating their experiences and identities to become empowered and to work for justice. Cherrie Moraga, a Chicana feminist theorist, activist, and author, explains “the right to passion,” which is the right of every Chicana to define herself and love herself as both female and Chicana.²²³ *Lideres Campesinas* supports that right to passion and self-definition. Members recognize their power and rights and are beginning to react to daily oppressive forces and take on leadership roles. However, according to Chicana studies scholar Yolanda Niemann, “Chicanas assume positions of leadership in virtually every area of their lives and their communities, but instead of receiving recognition, they are persistently represented as submissive, docile, and passive.”²²⁴ Chicana activism has not been validated throughout history and has been ignored within their communities.²²⁵ *Lideres Campesinas* seeks to a new course of grassroots community Chicana activism that fights to improve the quality of female farmworkers’ lives, challenges gender norms, and earns recognition for their success.

Machismo

In discussing Chicanas and gender roles, one must explore the notion of *machismo*. Chicanas have often been identified as being dominated by *machismo* culture. Many women interviewed state that *machismo* instills gender discrimination in the household and the workplace. However, the discourse on *machismo* is contested within scholarship.

²²³ Jeanette Rodriguez, *Our Lady of Guadalupe: Faith and Empowerment Among Mexican-American Women* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1994), 71.

²²⁴ *Ibid.*

²²⁵ Meeting with Maria Soldatenko, Pitzer College, March 26, 2014.

Anzaldua believes that *machismo* is “actually an Anglo invention... an adaptation to oppression and poverty and low self-esteem” inaccurately relating masculine, sexist, and violent behavior with Chicanos.²²⁶ Jeanette Rodriguez, a Chicana feminist author, believes that it is “a response to the dominant culture’s oppression” and is rooted in systems of colonization where the colonized felt emasculated.²²⁷ Rodriguez explains how *machismo* is a response by males after indigenous women experienced rape and vulnerability during the Spanish Conquest, thereby resulting in an “overly masculine and aggressive response to their women.”²²⁸ Other scholars argue that this term stereotypes Chicano culture as being more patriarchal simply by virtue of having a term for patriarchy. Maria Soldatenko, a Chicana Studies Professor at Pitzer College, believes that one must be cautious while using the word *machismo* since this term encourages people to stereotype Chicano/a culture as more patriarchal than other cultures, when in fact, it is not.²²⁹

Anzaldua mentions the need for a new type of masculinity that allows men to feel vulnerable and creates equality between men and women.²³⁰ Although the scope of my thesis does not explore the term *machismo* in-depth, it is an intriguing scholarly discussion that applies to the submissive household and workplace roles of women. Whether *machismo* is simply another word for patriarchy or unique to Chicano/a culture, it is apparent from my interviews that *machismo* affects female farmworkers. Alvarez believes that gender discrimination is rooted in *machismo* culture, “It is in the *machismo* culture. We have to change the culture first.”²³¹

²²⁶ Anzaldua, *Borderlands, La Frontera: The New Mestiza*, 83.

²²⁷ Rodriguez, *Our Lady of Guadalupe: Faith and Empowerment Among Mexican-American Women*, 71.

²²⁸ Ibid.

²²⁹ Meeting with Maria Soldatenko, Pitzer College, March 26, 2014.

²³⁰ Gloria Anzaldua, *Borderlands La Frontera: The New Mestiza* (San Francisco: Aunt Lute Books, 2007).

²³¹ Interview with Gabriela Alvarez, March 1, 2014.

Perpetuating Gendered Vulnerability

Pregnancy presents cultural and socioeconomic difficulties for female farmworkers. If a farmworker becomes pregnant, she is often fired on the spot. Trevino-Sauceda states, “If the owners, crew leaders, or supervisors see that women are pregnant, right away they lay them off. They don’t want to have any responsibilities.”²³² When asked if women ever get maternity leave, Trevino-Sauceda laughed, “How dare you would ask for that!”²³³ Furthermore, pregnancy is often a direct result of working in the fields. Ortiz describes the relationship between the supervisor and female workers, “I know people who have kids with the supervisor, and you can’t say anything. They don’t support [the children]. If you say something, they call immigration.”²³⁴ Supervisors rarely take responsibility for their violent acts in the fields and they often leave women traumatized and alone to care for a child that they never planned for. Having to care for another child contributes to social and economic vulnerability of farmworker women. As previously mentioned in Chapter 3, it is a taboo to talk about sex, have sex before marriage, and wear condoms in traditional Chicano/a culture since abstaining from these acts are ways women maintain their reputation.²³⁵ Condom use is seen as socially inappropriate in Chicano society, and is often associated with extramarital sex or prostitution.²³⁶ This cultural silence of sex allows vulnerability and gendered responsibility to persist.

Raising a child alone can also contribute to cultural marginalization since a traditional household environment is not preserved. Most women in *Lideres Campesinas* are single mothers. The numerous responsibilities of being a single mother create additional stress on women,

²³² Interview with Mily Trevino-Sauceda, March 2, 2014.

²³³ *Ibid.*

²³⁴ Interview with Natalia Ortiz, March 31, 2014.

²³⁵ Castaneda and Zavella, “Changing Constructions of Sexuality and Risk: Migrant Mexican Women Farmworkers in California,” 134.

²³⁶ *Ibid.*, 129.

leaving them even more susceptible to abuse and overwork. Members of *Lideres Campesinas* describe how women are in need of financial support for their children when they are single mothers. Due to this economic vulnerability, men in positions of power exploit these female workers. Alvarez wanted to receive an education to escape the fields and the cycles of oppression Chicanas face. Alvarez states, “It was really hard to look at my mom when she was working. I told myself, I will get an education and not work in the fields.”²³⁷ She left the fields when she was twenty and went back to school. Within the first year, Alvarez became pregnant and had to withdraw from school once again. Although pregnancy did not occur while working in the fields, systems of oppression perpetuate abuse and unwanted pregnancies within farmworker communities. While single-handedly raising her first child, she went back to the fields, but did not want to bring her child into the fields and expose him to the harsh working conditions, so she paid for childcare. Alvarez describes, “For moms, the pay check goes to our children.”²³⁸ The extraordinary financial burden is one of the many challenges female farmworkers face as they raise children on their own.

Building on Traditional Roles and Working Towards Equality

Traditional cultural roles instill substantial responsibilities for women in the household as a result of overarching patriarchal pressures. According to Trevino-Sauceda, in traditional Chicano/a households, men are defined as the head of the family, but in practice, mothers have an equally critical role keeping the family together. Trevino-Sauceda states:

Chicano culture is very complex. In my family, my dad is a ‘jefe’ [boss]. But my mom was the one who kept the family together. Women are the center of the family. So in a way, who has more responsibility? The men are told they have to

²³⁷ Interview with Gabriela Alvarez, March 1, 2014.

²³⁸ *Ibid.*

bring in the money. Now, in the U.S., we don't have enough so we both have to work.²³⁹

Trevino-Sauceda recognizes women's role in the household as crucial for keeping the family together but also points out the hierarchal position of the father. She highlights that more women are joining the workforce rather than staying home to solely raise the family. Due to lack of documentation and low wages, many farmworker families face severe financial difficulties, increasing the number of women in the agricultural workforce.²⁴⁰ This change forces Chicanos out of their role as the only financial provider for their family.²⁴¹ As gender norms are challenged, men start to feel more vulnerable and can release their insecurities on their wives. For women, joining the workforce may mean more independence, but it can also create new complex roles and relations within household and work environments. Nonetheless, every woman that I interviewed describes the hardship between working in the fields and taking care of their family.

Members of *Lideres Campesinas* embrace cultural heritage while improving more exploitative aspects of traditional cultural roles. Members acknowledge and build on their cultural assets. Mary Pardo, a Chicana activist and author, describes how Mexican American women in L.A. utilize their specific traditional cultural and familial networks in order to enact justice starting within their own community.²⁴² Chicanas describe their activism as expansions of their familial household leadership and responsibility that transcends into the societal realm.²⁴³

²³⁹ Interview with Mily Trevino-Sauceda, March 2, 2014.

²⁴⁰ JL Perilla, R Bakeman, FH Norris, "Culture and Domestic Violence: The Ecology of Abused Latinas," 9, 4 (1994): 362.

²⁴¹ *Ibid.*

²⁴² Mary Pardo, *Mexican American Women Activists: Identity and Resistance in Two Los Angeles Communities* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1998), 221.

²⁴³ *Ibid.*

This encourages women to use their household leadership roles and translate these skills into organizing for improved rights and creating new egalitarian roles for female farmworkers.

A saying Trevino-Sauceda repeated numerous times is “organizing begins at home.”²⁴⁴ At a young age, women are trained in their family to carry out certain gender roles within the household and at work. This kind of socialization perpetuates the cycle of oppression. Lideres Campesinas helps women question and change these gender roles, starting with their own families. Women in Lideres Campesinas believe that the household can be a site to display leadership. First, they change the culture within their own homes by becoming empowered, resisting harassment from their spouse, and creating open spaces for dialogue. Lideres Campesinas’ meetings and conferences teach women to analyze patriarchal power and gender expectations. Through this awareness, women can converse with their husbands and question the definition of masculinity, thus enabling men to confront their own aggressive actions.

Alvarez faced injustice all her life. As the only daughter in her family, her father wished she had been a son. “My father,” she says, “thought the males were the future. He helped [my brothers] with school, but not me. It’s the culture.”²⁴⁵ Alvarez recognizes the patriarchal culture as a limiting factor in the household. All of her three brothers went to school and finished university, but Alvarez was stuck helping her parents work in the fields. When Alvarez was ten, she started driving across the border daily with her mother and father to work. Alvarez would return home, exhausted from the fieldwork, and help her mother cook. Gender norms are instilled in women at an early age, allowing strict gender roles to perpetuate within the household. According to Mayo and Resnick, young Chicana women are constantly told to learn

²⁴⁴ Interview with Mily Trevino-Sauceda, March 2, 2014.

²⁴⁵ Interview with Gabriela Alvarez, March 1, 2014.

how to cook and serve in order to avoid anger and abuse from their husbands.²⁴⁶ Women become socialized to gender inequalities inside and outside of the home, which permits them to remain docile. Today as a mother of four children, Alvarez does not continue the cycle of household gender inequality that she experienced and treats her two sons and two daughters equally, making them perform the same household roles. Through *Lideres Campesinas*, Alvarez was able to analyze her own household experiences and establish new roles for her children.

In contrast, Trevino-Sauceda was the first female in a family of ten children. Trevino-Sauceda describes the egalitarian household dynamics she grew up in that were uncommon in Chicano households. Household chores were equally distributed. Trevino-Sauceda states, “My mom would distribute the house tasks evenly. For us, we thought that everybody did the same work in the household.”²⁴⁷ Whereas, when living in Mexico, Trevino-Sauceda’s mother was criticized for her parenting and Trevino-Sauceda had to perform more gendered household roles. She explains, “I had to cook, wash dishes, and do all of the household chores that I was used to having my brothers help out with. There is a lot of pressure from your extended family in how you raise your family.”²⁴⁸ The difference in Trevino-Sauceda’s household roles within Mexico and the U.S. displays the effect traditional Chicano/a culture has on women’s responsibilities and the influence traditional extended family can have on parenting styles. The roles that Trevino-Sauceda grew up with have greatly influenced her own style of parenting; she too does not allow gender roles to dictate household chores. Trevino-Sauceda describes, “I shared roles with my husband. He cooked and ironed his own clothes.”²⁴⁹ This is an example of a family where the tasks are distributed evenly, utilizing non-traditional gender roles. Despite different experiences

²⁴⁶ Yolanda Mayo and Rosa Resnick, “The Impact of Machismo on Hispanic Women,” 11, 3 (1996): 4.

²⁴⁷ Interview with Mily Trevino-Sauceda, March 2, 2014.

²⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

within the household, both Trevino-Sauceda and Alvarez recognize the traditional and submissive gender roles that Chicanas perform, and are both deconstructing and creating new roles.

Members of *Lideres Campesinas* carry on building these skills in a multi-generational setting. This tactic is apparent during meetings where mothers and daughters participate. Isabella Ramos has been bringing both her daughters to *Lideres Campesinas*' meetings for over ten years. Ramos' daughter, Rosa Ramos, explains how *Lideres Campesinas* has made her confidently discuss culturally sensitive issues. Rosa Ramos states, "As Mexican girls, we don't get that [education] from our parents. Like about STDS or things like that. In our homes we don't speak about that."²⁵⁰ *Lideres Campesinas* invests in educating youth and sees it as important to changing gender roles in the next generation. Isabella Ramos describes how in a house made up of three strong women, her husband has been supportive of their organizing efforts. Isabella Ramos' husband explains, "I see that it [*Lideres Campesinas*] has served her. She has matured a lot. I've seen her change a lot. Now I see that she makes her own decisions and that pleases me."²⁵¹ The support of husbands encourages for female leadership development and increases dialogue within the household. This dialogue helps change gender roles and responsibilities. I observed that multiple generations within one family regularly attend meetings. In addition, inter-generational mobilization helps *Lideres Campesinas* spread awareness and create a greater member base. Overall, *Lideres Campesinas* utilizes women's centrality in the household as a way to develop female leadership.

Balancing Multiple Responsibilities

²⁵⁰ Arts4Justice, "Mobilizing Youth," 2011.

²⁵¹ *Ibid.*

Lopez is an example of balancing multiple responsibilities as a mother and activist. She explains, “Being an organizer and a mother is a lot of work. They [Lopez’s children] always want to know when I am going to finish all my work.”²⁵² Lopez struggles to find time for her children with her busy schedule. Trevino-Sauceda’s additional responsibilities as a worker, mother, activist, and student have defied traditional household and workplace responsibilities. Trevino-Sauceda raised her son single-handedly in a non-traditional way that utilized the support from members of *Lideres Campesinas*. She elaborates, “During those years, I was going to school. I had my son. My brother was helping out. At the same time, every weekend, I would travel around California with little money that I had. Twelve chapters were established. Those chapters would start to organize.”²⁵³ Trevino-Sauceda blended her roles as a mother and organizer and brought her son on long trips around California while she organized. Trevino-Sauceda states, “I would get my son involved in wherever I was active. Every Friday, I would pick him up from school and travel to organize. He was called the son of the community. The women would always embrace him.”²⁵⁴ The support of the community allowed Trevino-Sauceda to manage her myriad of responsibilities.

Female farmworkers are constantly juggling daily duties as mothers and workers, and in some instances, organizers. The strong support and empowerment women gain through *Lideres Campesinas* makes this organization a model for future organizing. With the help of *Lideres Campesinas*, members are educated and aware of systems of oppression and defy these obstacles to confidently produce their own identity. Women defend themselves against patriarchal systems and create new and equitable societal roles and responsibilities.

²⁵² Interview with Suguet Lopez, March 22, 2014.

²⁵³ Interview with Mily Trevino-Sauceda, March 22, 2014.

²⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

CHAPTER 6 CONCLUSION

Despite the obstacles of isolation, socioeconomic status, cultural discrimination, immigration politics, and gender inequalities, female farmworkers are agents of social change. The stories of these strong, resilient, and active women have been lost in the vast agricultural fields. *Lideres Campesinas*, the first organization in the nation specifically focused on confronting female farmworker issues, is an example of successful grassroots organizing around gendered topics such as sexual harassment, domestic violence, submissive gender roles, and pesticide exposure. Such issues are deeply rooted in economic, racial, and gendered systems. *Lideres Campesinas* educates their members about structural violence against women of color, thereby allowing members to understand systems of oppression instead of enacting self-blame. Also, by creating space for female farmworkers to discuss silenced gendered issues, members build confidence and organize around their own visions of justice.

I was limited in my research by the time restriction, my intermediate language proficiency, issues of travel, and inability to gather sufficient interview data. I was allotted only one semester to complete this research, but with extended time, I could have participated in more events and conducted additional interviews with members. Ten interviews were conducted within this time span, which limited the scope of my research. This work would have benefitted from more interviews to share the powerful stories of women still unheard. Due to lack of access to transportation and distance from Claremont to the Coachella Valley, the cost and time traveling hindered my research, allowing me to only visit my research site weekly.

Research on gendered farmworker organizing and gender-specific issues in the fields can be expanded beyond the extent of this thesis. For each theme of gendered injustice, this thesis

only begins to touch on why these issues persist and how they can be combated. The myriad of factors that perpetuate these injustices need further analysis in order to better understand these issues and discover solutions to them. Cultural connections to gendered issues and forms of organizing are beyond the scope of my thesis and should be further explored. The scarcity of research on female farmworkers is an obstacle in the identification of the oppressions they face, around which much more organizing could be done. We, as in the academy, organizers, students, and citizens at large, need more ethnographical research on community-based grassroots organizations so that we can bring about a network of tools, knowledge, and collective power that each group can tap in to – therefore furthering the fight to end farmworker injustice. By merely calling attention to such grassroots efforts, we can locate and spotlight female activists who will be crucial in the expansion of this social movement and the empowerment of other women in the fields.

This thesis can be used to understand the gendered issues in the fields, recognize effective methods of organizing within female farmworker communities, and transform these issues through organizing. I wanted to portray the members of *Lideres Campesinas*' own cultivation of power and resilience that enables them to organize. The stories they told and their power and perseverance is inspiring. More specifically, additional research should be conducted on *Lideres Campesinas* because it is a successful model of gendered farmworker organizing and the members are all rich sources of knowledge. *Lideres Campesinas* is altering the dominant discourse on female farmworkers. Through their involvement with *Lideres Campesinas*, women are reconstructing traditional norms and increasing independent actions to become powerful agents of change.

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