JUNTAS EN LA LUCHA: THE LIVED EXPERIENCES OF TRANS LATINA IMMIGRANTS GENERATING CHANGE IN THE SOUTHERN UNITED STATES

by

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(Under the Direction of Rebecca Matthew)

ABSTRACT

Trans Latina immigrants experience violence and discrimination in their countries of origin and the United States. Their experiences with oppression are even more challenging when living in the Southern U.S. As a result, many trans Latina immigrants have utilized their individual and collective strengths to resist oppression and generate change in their communities. However, there is limited research on the lived experiences of these generators of change. The current study aimed to explore the meaning that trans Latinas make of their lived experiences as they generate change in the Southern U.S. by asking the research questions: (1) What are the lived experiences of trans Latinas generating change for their communities in the Southern U.S.?; (2) How do the multiple identities of trans Latinas influence their experiences of empowerment in the Southern U.S.?; and, (3) How do trans Latinas experience and overcome challenges? These questions were answered through an interpretive phenomenological qualitative study informed by Latina feminisms. Six trans Latina immigrants from Georgia, Louisiana, North Carolina, and Texas were part of the study. Their *testimonios* were gathered through multiple semi-structured interviews in Spanish, and data were triangulated using participants' online posts and videos. Data were analyzed using an interpretative

phenomenological analysis. Three thematic patterns were constructed: (1) "*Mi comunidad transgénero tiene muchas necesidades*": Trans Latina immigrants' struggles; (2) "*Me llamo luchadora social*": Being and doing social change; and (3) "*Juntas todas*": Strength in caring for each other. Overall, the participants' lived experiences were linked to their experiences with intersectional violence, discrimination, and struggles at the micro, mezzo, and macro levels. However, by building community and caring for each other, the participants overcame these challenges. Additionally, becoming *luchadoras sociales* and doing social change was informed by their trans, Latina, and immigrant identities. The study's findings are discussed using a Latina feminisms framework. Social work researchers, practitioners, and educators ought to engage in trans-led and informed strengths-based research and practice, advocate for the human rights of this group, support systemic change that addresses the needs and struggles of the community, and teach content related to the needs and strengths of trans Latina immigrants.

INDEX WORDS: Latina feminisms, Interpretative phenomenological analysis, IPA, Chicana/x, *Mujerismo*, Gender nonconforming, Qualitative research, Phenomenology, Social change, Relationships of support, Hispanic, *Transgénero*, *Acción social*, *Generadoras de cambio*

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DEDICATION

You tell me to go an hide my tail between my legs.
I will no longer put up with this shit.
Sylvia Rivera, 1973, New York City

Yo empecé este trabajo porque yo me reflejaba mucho.
Pasé, pasé, pasé cosas feísimas.
Y yo dije, me puse en los zapatos de estas muchachas.
Y yo dije, ¿pero por qué yo no ayudarlas? ¿por qué yo no hacerlo?
Yo tengo el alcance.
No tengo el poder, pero tengo una voz de convocatoria.
Entonces yo dije, voy a hacerlo, voy a hacerlo. Y lo hice.
Lorena Borjas, 2014, New York City

This dissertation is dedicated to the six trans Latina immigrants who made this study possible. Su trabajo, perseverancia y pasión por generar cambios sociales hacen mejor al mundo en que vivimos. This dissertation is also dedicated to the trans and gender nonconforming people of color who throughout history have fought back for liberation in ways that have positively affected my life, and that I will never know. Sylvia said that during the Stonewall riots, she thought, "My god, the revolution is here. The revolution is finally here!" May our work together contribute—even if minimally—to this revolution.

This dissertation is also dedicated to my husband Juan Rodriguez Sanchez and my parents Marilza Hernandez Soto and Luis Roberto Alvarez Ortiz. Su amor y apoyo hacen posible mis logros. Finally, I dedicate this dissertation to mis ancestros—those whose names I will never know, and the women in my life whose power and love I will never fully understand.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Introduction

Transgender, or trans,[1] and gender nonconforming[2] (TGNC) Latinx[3] individuals living in the United States (U.S.) experience high rates of violence and discrimination (Alessi et al., 2016; James & Salcedo, 2017). These experiences often lead to high rates of mental health issues, homelessness, and health disparities (James et al., 2016). Moreover, TGNC Latinx individuals who address these experiences and related needs are repeatedly met with barriers such as more violence and discrimination by the state and other community members; a lack of financial, housing, educational, and health care resources; non-affirming governmental and health care services (e.g., inability to change names and gender markers in IDs, discrimination in healthcare settings); and, a deficit of culturally-appropriate social and health care services (Loza et al., 2017). These barriers are even more pressing in the Southern U.S., where Latinx, Hispanic, and

[1] The term *trans* will be utilized throughout this manuscript to refer to individuals and communities who utilize the terms *transgender*, *transsexual*, and other trans-related terms to identify themselves. The participants of this study utilize *trans*. Academic materials also utilize the term *trans* when discussing trans Latinx individuals and trans immigrants (see La Fountain-Stokes, 2021; Luibhéid & Chávez, 2020). At times, the term *transgender* will be utilized in this document to reflect the language in the materials cited.

[2] The term *gender nonconforming* will be utilized throughout this manuscript to refer to individuals and communities who do not conform to conventional rules of gender, including binary identifications of gender. Other terms are typically used interchangeably with *gender nonconforming*, including *genderqueer*, *gender non-binary*, and *gender expansive*. The term *gender nonconforming* has been selected for this study since many of the Latinx individuals who informed this study utilize the term in Spanish—*género noconforme*. A more detailed definition is provided later in this manuscript.

[3] The term *Latinx* will be utilized throughout this manuscript as the gender-expansive term for *Latino* and *Latina* to refer to individuals and communities who identify as having a connection with Latin America through various ways. The term *Latine* has also been increasingly used as a gender-expansive term. The term *Latinx* has been selected for this study since many of the Latinx individuals who informed this study utilize this form of the term, and most academic sources employ its use. A more detailed definition is provided later in this manuscript.

immigrant communities are relatively new to Southern states,[4] compared to established communities in California and New York (Kochhar et al., 2005). The Southern U.S. is known for proposing anti-immigrant and anti-LGBTQ+[5] (lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, and queer) legislations that foster hostile social environments (Bauer, 2009; Human Rights Campaign [HRC], 2018; National Center for Transgender Equality, 2019). These barriers and challenges affect the wellbeing of TGNC Latinx individuals, particularly in the Southern U.S.

Prior research indicates that TGNC Latinx individuals experience adverse health outcomes resulting from their experiences with violence and oppression at the hands of the government and other community members, both physically (Nuttbrock & Hwahng, 2017; Page et al., 2017; Palazzolo et al., 2016) and psychologically (Gowin et al., 2017; Yamanis et al., 2018). Moreover, TGNC Latinx individuals face discrimination in housing and employment settings (James & Salcedo, 2017). TGNC Latinx individuals also experience criminalization due to the oppression towards their identities—being detained and incarcerated for being transgender, women of color, and immigrants (James & Salcedo, 2017; Morales, 2013). Nevertheless, TGNC Latinx individuals in the Southern U.S. are working to address these needs and challenges by utilizing their strengths.

The strengths of TGNC Latinx individuals exist at the individual, relational, community, and systemic levels (Caraves & Salcedo, 2016; James et al., 2016; James & Salcedo, 2017; Pulido & Salcedo, 2019; Salcedo & Padrón, 2013). These strengths include their ability to engage in advocacy, service delivery, and the overall support of other TGNC Latinx individuals

[4] These states include Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, and Virginia. A more detailed rationale for selecting this region and states is provided later in this manuscript.

[5] The acronym *LGBTQ+* will be utilized throughout this manuscript. The plus sign (+) includes people who are asexual, aromantic, intersex, pansexual, questioning, and other identities. The acronyms *LGBT* and *LGB* will be utilized at times to reflect the language utilized by the materials cited.

(Alvarez-Hernandez, 2019). TGNC Latinx individuals in the Southern U.S. have also identified their ongoing work in their communities and their motivation and support to do this work as strengths (Alvarez-Hernandez, manuscript in progress-a). By actively utilizing their strengths, TGNC Latinx individuals are improving their lives and the lives of others.

Despite the noted challenges and strengths, there is a lack of literature that identifies the lived experiences of TGNC Latinx individuals engaging in grassroots efforts by working to provide housing, basic needs, resource education, and advocacy to their communities. If the work that TGNC Latinx individuals do for each other is beneficial to their wellbeing, particularly in Southern U.S. states, how are these individuals experiencing their efforts? This study seeks to understand the lived experiences of trans Latinas[6] who are seeking change[7] in the Southern U.S. by providing support to others and advocating for their communities. To follow is a brief overview of the literature, which will explore definitions related to trans and gender nonconforming Latinx individuals, the challenges they face as described by the reports of TGNC groups and the literature, and the strengths of TGNC Latinx individuals and communities. This section will conclude with an identification of the gaps in the literature, as it pertains to the experiences of TGNC Latinx Individuals in the U.S.

Overview of the Literature

Trans and Gender Nonconforming Latinx Individuals

Many terms have been utilized when referring to someone with connections to Latin America, either by place of birth or family ties. Hispanic, for example, describes a person who

[6] Although the literature often examines the experiences of transgender and gender nonconforming individuals as a homogenous group, this study will focus on the experiences of transgender Latinas. A more detailed rationale for selecting this group is provided later in this manuscript.

[7] Based on the literature, change in the context of this study could refer to (1) direct support to others (e.g., education, housing, etc.), and (2) activism and advocacy for their communities (e.g., organizing rallies, mobilizing the community, etc.). The participants of this study also defined change in their work context, which can be found later in this manuscript.

communicates in Spanish (Real Academia Española [RAE] & Asociación de Academias de la Lengua Española [ASALE], 2019). The term Hispanic in the U.S. is intimately linked to the need for the U.S. government to count those who were Spanish-speaking or of descent from a Spanish-speaking country in the U.S. Census (Passel & Taylor, 2009). Latino or Latina refers to the connection one may have with Latin America due to culture, family ties, and ethnicity (RAE & ASALE, 2019). However, the term Latino is gendered, which has led to the recent emergence of the term Latinx. Latinx seeks to be a gender-expansive term that includes all gender identities, including those of gender nonconforming individuals (Salinas & Lozano, 2019).[8] One can identify as both Hispanic and Latinx (Jaimes et al., 2013). While it is difficult to define terms that relate to Latinx individuals culturally, it is also challenging to define terms related to gender identity.

Various trans and gender nonconforming academics have defined terms related to gender identity. Hence, purposefully, the direct quotes for how they define their identities—and the identities of people in their communities—are included in this section. According to Singh and dickey (2017), "gender is a socially constructed term that originates with assumptions that people make about a person's sex" (p. 5). However, Singh and dickey (2017) go on to explain that "gender identity is a term that is used to describe a person's felt sense of themselves in terms of their gender" (p. 5). Regarding the use of the word transgender, Nealy (2017) stated: "The term transgender is often used as an umbrella that includes all gender-nonconforming people" (p. 9). For many, identifying as transgender—or trans—denotes the discrepancy between the biological sex they were assigned at birth and their gender identity. On the other hand, someone who is gender nonconforming may identify outside of the social construction of the gender binary of

[8] For a more comprehensive analysis of the term Latinx and its history, functions, and connections to LGBTQ+ and Chicana feminism, see Vidal-Ortiz and Martínez (2018).

man/woman, as being both genders, as being fluid between gender, among other forms of gender identification. However, many gender nonconforming individuals do not identify as trans and vice versa. There is no "one-way" of being trans or gender nonconforming, nor are medical or social transitions necessary to be one. Indeed, gender is a spectrum.

Given the definitions of Latinx and trans and gender nonconforming individuals discussed above, the question remains, who are trans and gender nonconforming Latinx individuals? It is impossible to homogeneously define trans and gender nonconforming Latinx individuals as one group. Overall, TGNC Latinx individuals may identify as Latinx due to their place of birth or family ties, while also being trans or gender nonconforming. These individuals may or may not be immigrants and may or may not have undergone a social (e.g., through gender expressions in clothing and physical appearance; being addressed by others as their true name, gender, and pronouns; and formally or informally making changes in documents that reflect their true name, gender, and pronouns) or medical transition (e.g., taking hormones and undergoing gender-affirming surgeries).

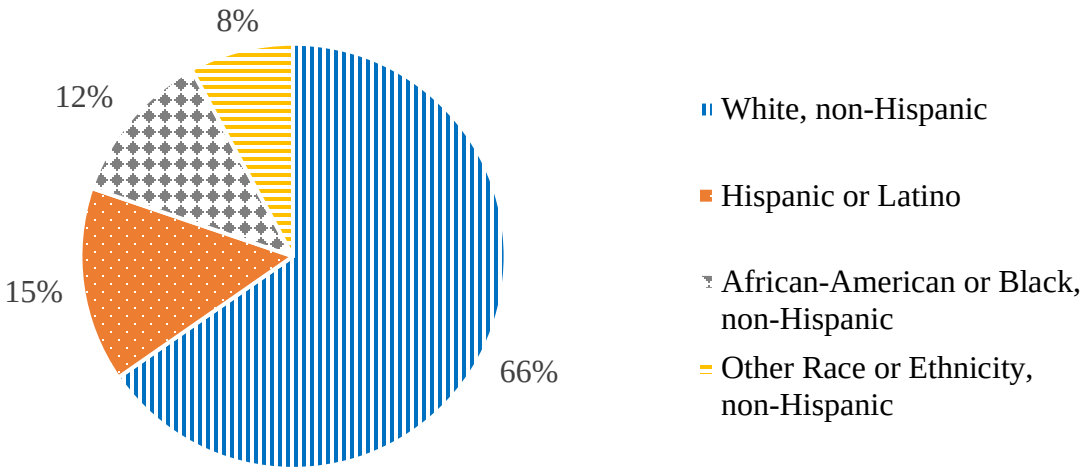
Flores and colleagues (2016) estimated that Latinx people in the U.S. were approximately 15% of the population in 2014. The U.S. Census Bureau (n.d.) estimated that by 2019, 18.5% (over 60 million people) of the U.S. population were Latinx.[9] It is projected that by 2060, the number of people who identify as Latinx in the U.S. will continue to grow to an estimated 111 million, or 28% of the population (U.S. Census, 2018). Estimating the number of Latinx individuals in the U.S. is challenging due to the community's potential distrust in initiatives like the U.S. census. The distrust of Latinx individuals towards data gathering from the government is partly due to questions of citizenship or lack thereof (The Leadership Conference Education

[9] Many reports label Latinx individuals and communities differently, including "Latino" or "Hispanic." For consistency, the term Latinx will be utilized throughout this manuscript.

Fund, 2018). Hence, some believe that the numbers of Latinx individuals in the U.S. are underestimated (Cohn & Brown, 2019). In any case, Latinx individuals are the largest among racially or ethnically minoritized groups in the U.S., surpassed only by over 60% of non-Latinx White individuals (Noe-Bustamante et al., 2020; U.S. Census Bureau, n.d.). Additionally, Latinx individuals, in general, account for around 31% of all foreign-born immigrants migrating to the U.S. each year (Budiman, 2020). Figure 1 shows the distribution of the adult U.S. population by race and ethnicity, based on Flores and colleagues' 2014 estimate since it is the report that provides more detailed information about both Latinx and transgender groups.

Figure 1

Estimated Demographic Percentages of the U.S. Adult General Population in 2014



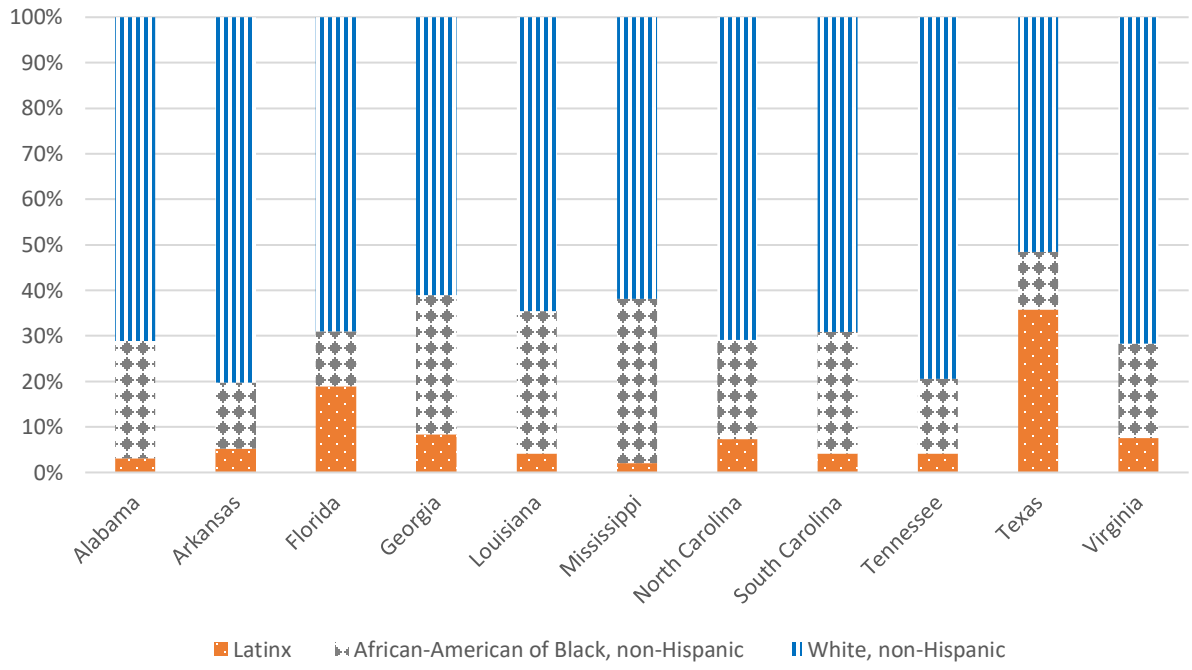
Note. Based on Flores and colleagues (2016).

In Southern U.S. states, the estimated percentage of Latinx individuals in 2014 ranged from 2%-34%, with Mississippi reporting the lowest estimated percentage and Texas reporting

the highest estimated percentage (Flores et al., 2016). Figure 2 shows the estimated distribution of the general population of Latinx individuals in the Southern U.S. states compared to other groups in these states.

Figure 2

Estimated Percentages of the Southern U.S. States General Population by Race and Ethnicity



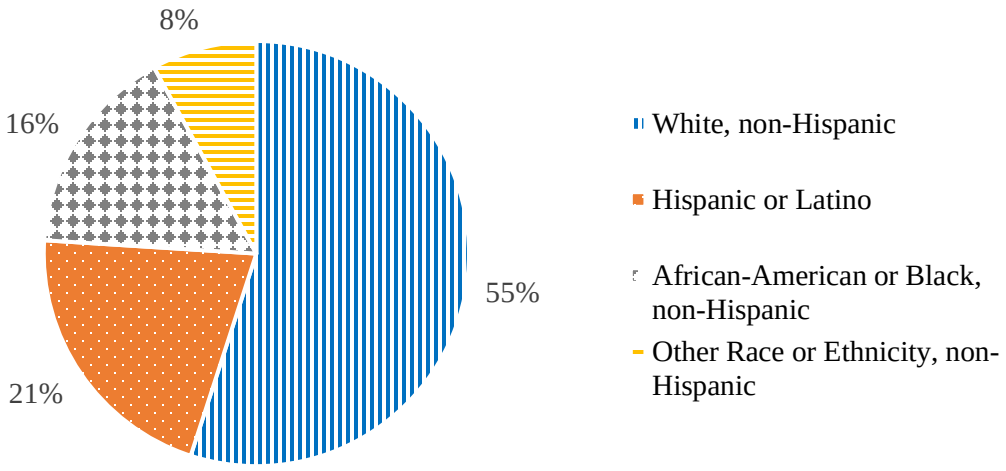
Note. Adapted from Flores and colleagues (2016).

It is estimated that 4.5% (*n*=11,343,000) of the U.S. population is LGBT (Conron & Goldberg, 2020). Within these groups, it is estimated that 0.4% (*n*=1,397,150) of adults in the U.S. are transgender, either heterosexual or LGB (Conron & Goldberg, 2020). A report by Flores

and colleagues (2016)[10] explored the makeup of transgender individuals by race and ethnicity in two ways: "[1] the percentage of transgender adults who identify with each racial or ethnic group, and [2] the percentage out of each racial or ethnic group that identifies as transgender" (Flores et al., 2016, p. 3). Based on this report, it was estimated that by 2014, 21% of the adult transgender population in the U.S. identified as Latinx, second only to an estimated 55% of the adult transgender population identifying as White, non-Hispanic (Flores et al., 2016). Figure 3 shows a comparison between the estimated percentage of transgender adults in the U.S. who identify as Latinx; White, non-Hispanic; African American or Black, non-Hispanic; and other race or ethnicity, non-Hispanic.

Figure 3

Estimated Percentage of U.S. Transgender Adults Who Identified With Each Race or Ethnicity



Note. Based on Flores and colleagues (2016).

[10] This report is based, in part, on 2014 data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's (CDC) Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System (BRFSS). According to Flores and colleagues (2016), the BRFSS is "a national, state-administered survey, which collected data on transgender identity among adults in 19 states for the first time in 2014" (p. 2).

Looking specifically at the Southern U.S. states, the estimated percentage of adult transgender individuals who identified as Latinx varied between 2% and 44%, with Mississippi reporting the lowest estimated percentage and Texas reporting the highest estimated percentage (Flores et al., 2016). Table 1 compares the estimated percentages of adult transgender individuals in the Southern U.S. states who identified with a racial or ethnic group to the general population estimates who identified with these groups.[11] Overall, these estimates reflect a higher percentage of transgender adults who identify as Latinx within Southern U.S. states (12%) than the percentage of the overall adult population who identify as Latinx in these states (9%). The same is true for transgender individuals who identify as African-American or Black, non-Hispanic.

When estimating the percentages of trans people by race and ethnicity in the U.S. in a different way, a higher percentage of Latinx (0.84%, *n*=296,950) and African-American or Black, non-Hispanic adults (0.77%, *n*=217,800) identified as transgender, compared to 0.5% (*n*=761,150) of White, non-Hispanic adults who identify as transgender (Flores et al., 2016). Table 2 details the estimated number and percentage of adults in the Southern U.S. states who identified as transgender by race and ethnicity, based on the report by Flores and colleagues (2016). More specifically, in the Southern U.S. states, the estimated percentage of adult Latinx individuals who identified as transgender varied between 0.72% (Louisiana, *n*=1,050) and 1.02% (Georgia, *n*=5,750). Regarding estimated numbers, the Southern state with the lowest amount was Mississippi (*n*=450; 0.77%), and the highest was Texas (*n*=54,650; 0.84%). Moreover, these numbers estimated that the Latinx group has the highest average estimated percentage of transgender individuals (0.82%; *n*=1000,9000) across Southern U.S. states. Overall, there are greater numbers of transgender adults in the Southern U.S. states who identify as White and non-

[11] Unfortunately, the report only provides percentages for this part of the data and not the number of individuals included in those percentages.

Hispanic (*n*=244,200; 0.53%). However, a higher percentage of those who identify as Latinx (0.82%; *n*=100,900) and African-American or Black, non-Hispanic (0.78%; *n*=114,800) are transgender. An analysis of the 2014-2017 BRFSS data (Carpenter et al., 2020) confirmed similar demographics to that of the 2014 data analyzed by Flores and colleagues (2016). According to Carpenter and colleagues (2020), those who identified as White were less likely to identify as transgender.

Challenges Faced by TGNC Latinx Individuals: Reports by TGNC Groups

TGNC Latinx individuals and groups have conducted multiple surveys and research studies to identify the needs, challenges, and barriers they experience—including five reports by Caraves and Salcedo (2016), James and colleagues (2016), James and Salcedo (2017), Pulido and Salcedo (2019), and Salcedo and Padrón (2013). These five reports cover the time span of six years, with publication dates ranging from 2013 to 2019. The TransLatin@ Coalition produced or contributed to four of the five reports. The TransLatin@ Coalition is the most prominent national U.S. organization with representation in various states dedicated to the empowerment of trans, gender nonconforming, and intersex Latinx immigrants through advocacy, capacity building, and direct service-delivery efforts (TransLatin@ Coalition, 2020). The locations of the surveys varied, from a local study in various parts of California (Caraves & Salcedo, 2016) to a national study that included U.S. territories and U.S. military bases overseas (James et al., 2016). The sample size per study ranged from 101 to 27,715 participants. Each report included several domains of interest. Common domains across all of the reports included: (1) housing, (2) employment, (3) medical care, (4) sexual and gender-related care, (5) mental health care, (6) spirituality, (7) education, (8) violence and the criminal system, and (9) identifications that match their name and gender identity.

Table 1

Estimated Percentage of U.S. Transgender Adults Who Identified With Each Race or Ethnicity per Southern U.S. State

Southern U.S. State	Adults, General Population who Identified as Latinx	Transgender Adults Who Identified as Latinx	Adults, General Population who Identified as White, non-Hispanic	Transgender Adults Who Identified as White, non-Hispanic	Adults, General Population who Identified as African-American or Black, non-Hispanic	Transgender Adults Who Identified as African-American or Black, non-Hispanic
Alabama	3%	4%	69%	60%	25%	32%
Arkansas	5%	8%	77%	70%	14%	19%
Florida	22%	26%	60%	50%	14%	19%
Georgia	8%	10%	58%	48%	29%	36%
Louisiana	4%	5%	62%	52%	30%	39%
Mississippi	2%	3%	60%	50%	35%	44%
North Carolina	7%	10%	68%	58%	21%	27%
South Carolina	4%	6%	67%	56%	26%	35%
Tennessee	4%	5%	77%	71%	16%	21%
Texas	34%	44%	49%	37%	12%	13%
Virginia	7%	10%	66%	57%	19%	25%
Average Percentage	9%	12%	65%	55%	22%	28%

Note. Adapted from Flores and colleagues (2016).

Table 2

Estimated Number and Percentage of Adults in Southern U.S. States who Identify as Transgender by Race and Ethnicity

Southern U.S. State	Latinx Adults Who Identified as Transgender		White, non-Hispanic Adults Who Identified as Transgender		African-American or Black, non-Hispanic Adults Who Identified as Transgender	
	N	%	*N*	%	*N*	%
Alabama	1,000	0.82	13,550	0.53	1,000	0.78
Arkansas	1,000	0.85	9,350	0.54	2,550	0.78
Florida	26,250	0.78	50,300	0.55	26,250	0.78
Georgia	5,750	1.02	27,100	0.63	20,050	0.92
Louisiana	1,050	0.72	10,950	0.51	8,050	0.77
Mississippi	450	0.77	6,950	0.51	6,000	0.75
North Carolina	4,500	0.86	26,000	0.51	11,950	0.78
South Carolina	1,200	0.76	11,800	0.49	7,200	0.75
Tennessee	1,650	0.87	22,000	0.57	6,350	0.81
Texas	54,650	0.84	46,500	0.50	16,800	0.76
Virginia	3,400	0.73	19,700	0.47	8,600	0.74
Average Percentage and Total Number	100,900	0.82	244,200	0.53	114,800	0.78

Note. Adapted from Flores and colleagues (2016).

Across the reports, participants' ages ranged from 18 to 65 and over, with most participants (61%-90%) being between the ages of 18 and 44. Most participants (31%-78%) identified as transgender women. However, most participants (68%-71%) had not been able to change their identifications to match their names and gender identity. Most participants (average of 66%) lived in poverty—making less than $25,000 a year. According to the reports, poverty among transgender individuals was related to education and employment, with most of the

participants having less than a college degree (53.6%-78.7%) and being unemployed (15%-49%). Unemployment was higher for Latinx TGNC individuals (21%), compared to 15% of the overall TGNC sample (James & Salcedo, 2017). Participants across studies also reported a lack of health insurance, with Latinx individuals (17%) and individuals living in the Southern U.S. (20%) being less likely to have health insurance than non-Latinx individuals (12% of White Individuals, for example) and individuals living outside of the Southern region (9% in the Northeast, for example) (James et al., 2016). Moreover, trans individuals faced discrimination in health care settings—including being refused treatment for being transgender, receiving various forms of assault (e.g., physical and sexual assault), and evidencing lack of trans-related knowledge from healthcare providers (James et al., 2016). Social support was considered a protective factor, with those who reported family support being less likely to experience issues with homelessness (27% compared to 45% of those with unsupportive families) and mental health issues (e.g., 37% attempted suicide compared to 54% with of those with unsupportive families) (James et al., 2016).

Trans individuals also experienced disproportionate experiences with mental health issues and violence. For example, 42% of TGNC Latinx individuals in California reported experiencing anxiety (Caraves & Salcedo, 2016), 75% of TGNC Latinx individuals in various U.S. states reported feeling depressed (Salcedo & Padrón, 2013), and 45% of TGNC Latinx individuals in a national sample reported ever attempting suicide (James & Salcedo, 2017). Moreover, most participants had experienced multiple forms of violence. For instance, according to James and Salcedo's 2017 report, of all TGNC Latinx participants (*n*=1,473), 48% reported ever being sexually assaulted, and 54% reported ever experiencing a form of intimate partner violence. Table 3 shows a brief description of each report.

Table 3

Brief Description of Reports by TGNC Groups

	TransVisible: Transgender Latina Immigrants in U.S. Society	2015 U.S. Transgender Survey: Executive Summary	The State of Trans Health: Trans Latin@s and Their Healthcare Needs	2015 U.S. Transgender Survey: Report on the Experiences of Latino/a Respondents	#TransPolicyAgenda: Our Fight for Equality
Year	2013	2016	2016	2017	2019
Authors	Padrón and Salcedo	James, Herman, Rankin, Keisling, Mottet, and Anafi	Caraves and Salcedo	James and Salcedo	Pulido, Salcedo, Plascencia-Juarez, and Landaverde
Sponsoring Agencies and Groups	TransLatin@Coalition	National Center for Transgender Equality	TransLatin@Coalition	National Center for Transgender Equality & TransLatin@ Coalition	TransLatin@Coalition
Dates of Data Gathering	May 2012-June of 2013	Summer of 2015	January 2016-August 2016	Summer of 2015	Started in 2017 (other dates unspecified)
Data Gathering Locations	States Across the U.S. (unspecified)	All 50 states, DC, American Samoa, Guam, Puerto Rico, and U.S. military bases overseas	Southern California (San Fernando Valley, San Gabriel Valley, Santa Ana, San Diego, Los Angeles, and Long Beach)	All 50 states, DC, American Samoa, Guam, Puerto Rico, and U.S. military bases overseas.	California
# Participants	101	27,715	129	1,473	Unspecified
Focus Areas	• Access to U.S. Identification documents • Access to education • Access to employment • Access to health care services • Experiences with and responses to interpersonal and structural violence	• Education • Employment • Family life • Health • Housing • Interactions with the criminal justice system	• Access to housing • Access to employment • Access to medical care • Access to sexual health care • Access to mental health care • 6) access to spiritual services	• Family life and faith communities • Income and employment • Education • Housing, homelessness, and shelter access • Public accommodations • Harassment and violence • Police interactions, prisons, and immigration detention • Health • Identity documents • Experiences of multiracial Latino/a respondents	• Educational access & research justice • Economic stability & housing equity • Holistic and accessible universal health care & bodily autonomy • Ending policing, state violence & criminalization • Decriminalizing migration & global trans rights • Gender justice & identity autonomy

As stated in Table 3, the negative experiences of TGNC Latinx individuals, in general, were more acute than those of White TGNC individuals and other Latinx people in the U.S. Following is a summary table (Table 4) comparing the experiences of TGNC Latinx individuals to TGNC White individuals, other Latinx people in the U.S., and the U.S. general population, based on the 2015 U.S. Transgender Survey (James et al., 2016; James & Salcedo, 2017).[12] Of the Latinx respondents, 35% identified as non-binary, 33% as transgender men, 31% as transgender women, and 1% as crossdressers (James & Salcedo 2017)—compared to the overall sample of the same report, in which 35% identified as genderqueer or non-binary, 29% as a man or transgender man, 33% as a woman or transgender woman, and 3% as crossdressers (James et al., 2016).

Table 4

The Experiences of TGNC Latinx Individuals Compares to Other Groups in the U.S.

Areas of Concern	TGNC Latinx Individuals	White TGNC Individuals	Latinx People in the U.S.	U.S. Population
Unemployment	21%	12%	7%	5%
Poverty	43%	24%	18%	12%
Homelessness at some point of their lives	35%	31%	*	*
Sexually assaulted at some point in their lives	48%	45%	*	*
Negative experiences with health care providers in the past year	32%	34%	*	*
Living with HIV	1.6%	0.4%	0.5%	0.3%
Serious psychological distress in the last month (based on the Kessler 6 Psychological Distress Scale)	45%	*	*	5%
Ever attempted suicide	45%	37%	*	4.6%

Notes. Based on James and colleagues (2016) and James and Salcedo (2017). Asterisks denote missing information for comparison.

[12] Unfortunately, the report only provides percentages for this part of the data and not the number of individuals included in those percentages.

Discrimination, oppression, and violence at the interpersonal, community, and systemic levels contribute to the barriers and inequalities faced by TGNC Latinx individuals. A summary of some of the recommendations of the TGNC Latinx communities reported by the five reports include:

1. Free-of-cost change of name and gender markers on IDs.
2. Access to housing and employment free of mistreatment, discrimination, and violence.
3. Safer K-12 and higher education settings.
4. Increased access to health insurance, especially health insurance that covers trans-related care.
5. Reduce factors that contribute to HIV infections.
6. Safer and more competent healthcare providers and services.
7. Better access to mental health services and reduce risk factors for poor mental health.
8. Decriminalization and humanization of trans people, including the abolishment of ICE.
9. Safer spaces for engaging in sex work.

Challenges Faced by TGNC Latinx Individuals: The Literature

As reflected in the reports by TGNC groups discussed above, the scholarly literature also highlights that TGNC Latinx individuals disproportionately endure physical, sexual, emotional, and systemic violence. A qualitative study by Cerezo and colleagues (2014) explored the reasons for the migration of 10 transgender women from Latin America (Mexico, Belize, Cuba, and Honduras) living in Northern California at the time of the study. These women reported deciding to migrate from their countries of origin to the U.S. in pursuit of freedom to express their gender

identity, acceptance, and economic opportunity. Throughout their lives, they reported a lack of socioemotional support from immigrant communities in the U.S. due to their gender identity and expression, experiences of violence (i.e., verbal, physical, and sexual violence from their families, community, human smugglers, and law enforcement officers), and discrimination that affected their mental health (Cerezo et al., 2014).

Similar results were found for transgender asylum seekers from Mexico in a study by Cheney and colleagues (2017), who reviewed 45 asylum declarations and psychological evaluations. They found that the asylum seekers had experienced violence and discrimination in their countries of origin by family, multiple systems (e.g., teachers and classmates at school and the police), and their communities, leading to health and psychological harm. A more in-depth analysis of these same 45 documents by Gowin and colleagues (2017) showed that the asylees experienced posttraumatic stress disorder, depression, anxiety, sleep issues, isolation, avoidance, drug and alcohol use, and suicidality.

These experiences of pre and peri-migration violence and discrimination were also documented by Perez (2018) in a news article about the experiences of LGBTQ+ migrants who struggled while being part of a massive migrant caravan headed to the U.S. in 2018. The LGBTQ+ migrants reported fleeing persecution in their Latin American countries of origin while also facing mistreatment by other migrants in the caravan (Perez, 2018). Frequently, TGNC individuals arrive in the U.S. seeking asylum, only to be deported back to their countries of origin, often resulting in death. For example, Camila Diaz Córdova, a 29-years-old trans woman, was deported back to El Salvador after being denied asylum in the U.S. in 2017 (Renteria, 2019). Shortly after returning to El Salvador, Camila was kidnapped and beaten so severely that she died in the hospital afterward (Renteria, 2019).

Experiences of violence are associated with negative health outcomes among TGNC Latinx individuals. For example, TGNC Latinx individuals experience high levels of depression and HIV. A study by Yamanis and colleagues (2018) found that the immigration status of transgender Latinas in Washington, DC was related to depression symptoms. More specifically, 24 of the 38 (63%) transgender Latinas who answered a PHQ-2 were undocumented and reported higher scores in the depression inventory (Yamanis et al., 2018). Trans Latinas' experiences with HIV are also disproportionate. Transgender Latinas are more likely to have higher rates of HIV than White transgender women, as evidenced by a study of 199 transgender participants in New York City by Nuttbrock and Hwahng (2017). Palazzolo and colleagues (2016) conducted in-depth interviews in Spanish with eight transgender Latinas in Washington, DC, and learned that these women's documentation status was a contextual determinant of risk for HIV. Documentation status influenced the experiences of these women's gender identities in society, their access or lack thereof to services, and intimate partner violence—with negative experiences in these areas placing them at risk for HIV (Palazzolo et al., 2016).

Strengths of TGNC Latinx Individuals

TGNC Latinx individuals continuously balance their strengths with the violence and marginalization that contribute to many of their needs and challenges. For example, TGNC Latinx individuals are organizing social movements against transphobia and anti-immigrant legislation, providing resources such as housing to other TGNC individuals, and leading local, regional, and national organizations (Alvarez-Hernandez, 2019). For example, Alvarez-Hernandez (2019) described the work of Ruby Corado (who leads a housing initiative in Washington, DC), Estrella Sanchez (who also leads a housing initiative in Atlanta), Bamby Salcedo (who leads the national organization TransLatin@ Coalition in California), and Raffi

Freedman-Gurspan (who was the first openly transgender person to serve as a White House staffer in 2015).

The five reports mentioned above (Caraves & Salcedo, 2016; James et al., 2016; James & Salcedo, 2017; Pulido & Salcedo, 2019; Salcedo & Padrón, 2013) also identified individual, relational, and community or systemic level *strengths* present among TGNC Latinx individuals and communities. Individual strengths included spirituality and knowledge about sexual health practices. At the relational level, social support from family members accounted for better outcomes in multiple areas. For example, of the TGNC Latinx individuals in the report by James and Salcedo (2017), 49% reported family rejection, while 81% also reported at least one immediate family member who was supportive and helped them affirm their identities. At the community or systemic level, strengths included access to Medicaid/Medicali for California residents (leading to increased access to health care services) and being active voters in elections.

Cerezo and colleagues (2014) also discussed resilience with a group of 10 transgender Latina immigrants living in Northern California. These women reported resilience through their faith, social support of chosen and biological family, and a drive to help other transgender Latinas. More specifically, these women identified other transgender women as their source of support for finances, information, and stress reduction. This support by family members and other transgender Latinas was also discussed by nine transgender Latinas living in North Carolina while participating in a photovoice study by Rhodes and colleagues (2015). The nine women identified as strengths the psychosocial support from biological family and other transgender Latinas, the lessons learned through their own survival experiences, institutions that support transgender Latinas, and their own future goals. Hence, TGNC Latinx-led groups have

called for family to be included in mental health counseling and for increased social support groups led by transgender people (Caraves & Salcedo, 2016; Salcedo & Padrón, 2013).

Formative Experiences and Preliminary Research

In addition to the literature review discussed above, two processes also informed the background of the current study: (1) the professional experiences of the researcher, and (2) a preliminary, participatory research via a focus group conducted by the researcher with three trans Latinas who are perceived by other trans Latinas as community leaders in the Southern U.S.

Professional Experiences of the Researcher

This study is informed by the researcher's practice experiences as a social worker for the last ten years—seven of those as a clinician—working with Latinx and LGBTQ+ individuals, groups, and communities in the state of Georgia. During this time, the needs of TGNC Latinx individuals were evident in organizations providing social, medical, and mental health services to this population. At times, the researcher was the only Spanish-speaking social worker able to work with TGNC Latinx individuals. Clinically, there has been a need for treatment materials and research that address the acute trauma histories of this population. Therefore, the researcher included TGNC Latinx community leaders, groups, and events in his service and treatment plans. The researcher also participated and continues to participate in community initiatives led by and developed for TGNC Latinx individuals, including serving on the advisory board of a Georgia TGNC Latinx project. A focus group with three trans Latina leaders from the Southern U.S. emerged out of this collaboration.

Focus Group with Trans Latinas

The researcher conducted a focus group on October 15, 2020, to understand the experiences of TGNC Latinx individuals in the Southern U.S. The purpose of the study was to

inform health and social services practices with TGNC Latinx individuals, by exploring the needs, strengths, and recommendations of TGNC Latinx individuals, as directly provided by them. The researcher contacted a trans Latina leader from Georgia with whom he is currently collaborating in other projects. This leader was able to suggest two other trans Latina leaders residing in the Southern U.S. The researcher contacted both leaders via social media (how the Georgia leader introduced them to the researcher), and they agreed to participate in the interview. A semi-structured 90-minute group interview was conducted and audio recorded via Zoom with all three participants. The interview protocol can be found in Appendix A. Permission for this study was obtained by the University of Georgia's IRB.

The three participants resided in the Southern U.S. states of Alabama, Georgia, and Louisiana. All three participants were seen as leaders in their communities, as evidenced by their statements during the group interview. They all identified as heterosexual trans women with their ages being between the mid-20s and mid-30s. Two participants migrated to the U.S. from Mexico and one from Honduras, and they had been living in the U.S. for 10 years or less. Two participants reported being partnered, one single. All three participants lived with someone else, including their partners and other trans women. Two participants reported attending up to middle school in their countries of origin, while one completed high school in her country of origin. All three reported working part-time, and only one had health insurance.

The needs and strengths reported by the three participants were related to their work as change agents in their communities. They reported wanting and needing to learn how to get funding, create a registered organization, engage in capacity building, and obtain technical assistance. They also shared that many community leaders are unable to receive financial assistance and grants to support their work since they are not registered organizations. This

challenge forces some TGNC Latinx individuals to not share potential economic opportunities with others out of fear of not being able to access them if others apply for these opportunities. Moreover, the participants reported that TGNC Latinx individuals in the Southern U.S. are constantly being taken advantage of by other organizations and individuals, including those who are LGBTQ+ and Latinx. For example, they reported how some organizations and individuals are utilizing their images and names to obtain funding, but in return, these organizations and individuals are not supporting the work that TGNC Latinx leaders are doing.

The participants also identified some of their strengths. All three participants agreed that the following are the top strengths of TGNC Latinx individuals in their states in the Southern U.S.:

1. TGNC Latinx leaders will continue to work to support their communities.
2. TGNC Latinx leaders want to work together with organizations and organizers that work to address their communities' needs (i.e., one is currently working with a state politician, showing them the identified needs of her community through advising and fieldwork).
3. TGNC Latinx leaders are utilizing their needs, experiences of injustice, and a desire for justice as strengths and motivators to resist, fight back, and engage in their work.

Additionally, all three participants agreed that the following are recommendations for addressing their needs while using the strengths of TGNC Latinx individuals in their states in the Southern U.S.:

1. Fostering strong, honest, mutually beneficial partnerships with organizations, agencies, and individuals.

2. Creating economic and relationship development opportunities for grassroots community leaders.
3. Creating better access to legal and healthcare services, information, and resources.

As research recommendations, a participant listed the following as a question that should be asked to other TGNC Latinx individuals in their states in the Southern U.S. doing similar work: "*¿Cómo están estas organizaciones y líderes haciendo el trabajo desde la base comunitaria sin recursos?*" ("How are these organizations and leaders doing grassroots community work without resources?")

The participants made statements regarding the ways in which they responded to the challenges when seeking change in their communities. Following are some examples of these quotes in Spanish, with an English translation in parenthesis. Additional contextual information is providing in brackets. The participant from Alabama stated regarding her perceived lack of support from older and more established trans Latina leaders in the U.S.:

> *Yo no dejo que a mi vengan a darme atole con el dedo. Y mira que yo ya soy conocida en la comunidad trans porque yo cuando me paro, me paro con poder. Y te lo vuelvo a repetir, yo los hago temblar a donde tenga que hacerlos temblar. Y ellas [las líderes trans Latinas que son mayores y están más establecidas] ya saben que hay chicas así como yo que ya no nos vamos a dejar [ser tratadas negativamente].*
>
> (I do not let them feed me *atole* [a corn-based drink] with the finger [a Mexican expression meaning someone is barely providing sustainment, feeding the other person like a baby]. And I am known in the trans community because when I stand up, I stand up with power. And I repeat it, I make them shake wherever I need to

make them shake. And they [the older and more established trans Latina leaders] know that there are girls like me that will not let them [be treated negatively].)

This same participant stated about her protection of other trans women in her community:

> *Yo me adueñé de mi comunidad de Alabama. Yo me apoderé de ellas. [...] Yo no soy nada sin mi comunidad. [...] Con mi comunidad nadie va a jugar. Entonces, ¡apodérense de su comunidad!*
>
> (I took ownership of my community of Alabama. I took over them. [...] I am nothing without my community. [...] No one is going to play with my community. Then, take over your community!)

The participant from Louisiana said:

> *El trabajar, eso sí, nadie nos para. Yo desde hace dos años que está la casa. [...] Hubieron personas que quisieron tomar la organización. Hubieron personas que hablaron mal de nosotras. Hubieron personas que nos quisieron destruir. Pero hasta el sol de hoy, pues, me he tirado como en el mismo camino de esas perras cuando pelean por sus criaturas, que no dejan que nadie las toque. Pues yo no he dejado que nadie toque la casa, que nadie toque el nombre, que esté sostenible, que siempre esté en función.*
>
> (Working, well, no one can stop us. It has been two years since we started the house. [...] There were people who wanted to take over the organization. There were people who spoke badly about us. There were people who wanted to destroy us. But until this day, well, I have been on the same road as those dogs that fight for their babies, that do not let anyone touch them. Well, I have not let anyone touch

the house, anyone touch the name, that it is sustainable, that it is always functioning.)

The participant from Georgia highlighted:

> *Aprendí a decir eso, verdad, de que, oye, ¿quieres que yo te ayude? Pues ayudémonos unos a otros. Porque si no, entonces, ¿dónde está la famosa unión? ¿Dónde está la famosa solidaridad? ¿Dónde está el famoso respeto?*
>
> (I learned to say that, right, hey, you want me to help you? Then let us help each other. Because if not, then, where is the famous unity? Where is the famous solidarity? Where is the famous respect?)

When asked what name they would assign to a research study about the experiences of trans Latina leaders like themselves, the participants responded using words like "taking over," "trans fighters," "revolutionaries and transgressors," and "resistance." The insight provided by these participants, along with the literature review and the researcher's practice experience, informed the development of the aims of this phenomenological study and the research questions.

Gaps in the Literature

In summary, when compared to White TGNC individuals, the literature highlights the disproportionate negative experiences of TGNC Latinx individuals with discrimination by their families, communities, and agencies in their countries of origin and the U.S. These experiences affect TGNC Latinx individuals' mental and physical health, as well as access to services (James et al., 2016). However, the literature also underscores the strengths of TGNC Latinx individuals, including the support they receive from family and other TGNC Latinx individuals and their civic engagement (James & Salcedo, 2017).

TGNC Latinx individuals and their experiences are, however, not comprehensively represented in the literature. Alvarez-Hernandez (manuscript in progress-b) conducted a content analysis of LGBTQ+ empirical research published in six leading social work journals (Social Work, Child Welfare, Social Service Review, Research on Social Work Practice, Social Work Research, and Families in Society) between 2008-2019. The study's purpose was to understand the extent to which LGBTQ+ people of color (POC) were represented in the social work literature. A total of 23 articles met inclusion criteria for this content analysis. Two gaps were found: (1) only three articles focused exclusively on the experiences of trans and gender nonconforming individuals (13%), and (2) only three articles focused solely on POC (13%). Only one of these article focused on POC TGNC individuals.

Gaps in the literature have also been identified for research with trans Latina immigrants in the U.S. For example, some research has explored the experiences of TGNC Latinx individuals who are immigrants in the U.S. Alvarez-Hernandez (manuscript in progress-c) also conducted a scoping review to explore the representation of trans Latina immigrants in the overall scholarly literature. A total of 12 databases were searched, with only 22 peer-reviewed journal articles published between 2009-2019 included in the full analysis based on inclusion criteria (e.g., containing terms related to being Latina, trans, and immigrant; the language of the article being English, Spanish, or a mix of both; and the experiences happened only in the U.S.). Results showed that most of the research conducted with trans Latina immigrants was health-related, with an emphasis on sexual health and social determinants of health. Another literature gap included a lack of strength-based research, with most of the articles focusing exclusively on the detrimental status of the lives of trans Latina immigrants and not their strengths, resistance, and resilience. Hence, the efforts, work, and leadership of TGNC Latinx individuals in

supporting others and changing their communities are scarce in the academic literature (See, for example, Doetsch-Kidder, 2011; Terriquez et al., 2018).

Current Study

The literature often examines the experiences of trans and gender nonconforming individuals as a homogenous group, with a gap in research that considers the experiences of generating change among TGNC Latinx individuals. This study will focus specifically on the experiences of trans Latinas since: (1) based on the literature, many TGNC Latinx individuals generating change in the U.S. identify as trans Latinas; and (2) this study will utilize a phenomenological approach, which would require a more homogenous group as the source of analysis. Hence, in response to the noted gaps, this study seeks to explore the meaning that trans Latinas make of their lived experiences as they generate change for their communities in the Southern U.S. This exploratory qualitative study will respond to these gaps by engaging in an interpretive phenomenological methodology grounded on a Latina feminisms theoretical framework.

CHAPTER 2

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This section will present and explore Latina feminisms[13] as the theoretical framework that informs the current study with trans Latinas. This chapter will begin with a brief description of feminism, followed by the criticisms that led feminists of color to adapt it to reflect their work and communities. Then, Latina feminisms, a school of thought that emerged as part of these criticisms, will be discussed, including: (1) its intellectual and philosophical lineage, (2) its strengths and limitations, and (3) connections between Latina feminisms and research with trans Latinas.

Feminism

It is challenging to provide a single definition of "feminism" in the general sense, given the various intellectual branches of feminism that have emerged throughout time and across philosophical standpoints. It is not the aim of feminists to have a unified consensus on how to conceptualize terms like "woman," "female," and even "feminism" and "feminist." Wittig (1992), a French philosopher and feminist theorist stated,

> What does "feminist" mean? Feminist is formed with the word "femme," "woman," and means: someone who fights for women. For many of us it means someone who fights for women as a class and for the disappearance of this class. For many others

[13] The plural *Latina feminisms* instead of *Latina feminism* in the singular form will be utilized throughout this manuscript to highlight the plurality of feminist thoughts and approaches among scholars. For instance, later in this manuscript, Chicana/Xicana feminism and *mujerismo* will be discussed.

> it means someone who fights for woman and her defense—for the myth, then, and its reinforcement. (p. 14)

Some date the term "feminism" to the 1880s and the French term "*féminisme*," in which *femme* equals woman and *-isme* "referred to a social movement or political ideology" (Freedman, 2002, p. 3).

Feminism was and continues to be a response to the patriarchal structures of society that uphold men as naturally superior. Generally, patriarchal structures establish that men are born to dominate, and women are born to be their subordinates (Acker, 1989). The structural domination of men over women is present in all aspects of life, with its reproduction in areas like paid employment, household production, culture, sexuality, violence, and the state being widely explored (Walby, 1990). However, women worldwide and throughout history have fought back against this glorification of men as powerful and asserted the need for equality in areas like politics, education, and the workforce.[14] The theorization, mobilization, and work of feminists could be seen in the various branches of feminist thought that emphasize certain aspects of their lived experiences. Marxist feminists, for example, critique the work conditions and labor exploitation of women, as capitalism and production perpetuate their economic subjugation (Beechey, 1979; Freedman, 2002).

The concept of feminism in the U.S. could be socio-politically and historically situated within "waves" (i.e., first wave, second wave, and third wave). Generally described, the "first wave" dates back to the 19th century, focusing on women's rights to vote while balancing individual and collective action (Faupel & Werum, 2011). The "second wave" started to emerge in the 1960s by including issues of race, ethnicity, nationality, and other diversity-related issues

[14] For a more comprehensive historical account of feminism, see Freedman (2002).

faced by women of color (Baxandall & Gordon, 2005). The "third wave" began in the 1990s, aiming to understand gender and sexuality through a post-structuralist lens that questioned what it means to be a "woman" and experience life in a gendered world (Snyder, 2008).

This variability in how feminism is conceptualized, enacted, and embodied, has led to the emergence of multiple understandings of feminism. It was during the "second wave" and "third waves" starting in the 1960s and 1970s in the U.S., that feminists of color (i.e., Black, Native American, Latinas, Chicanas/Xicanas, Asian American, among many other groups) redefined the aims of feminism (Roth, 2004). Their criticisms of first-wave feminism and the emergence of critical feminists and their work are discussed next.

Criticisms of Feminism

Essentialist conceptualizations of feminism and gender were met with criticisms due to their lack of attention—and often discrimination—towards racial and ethnic groups, and their experiences with class, sexuality, and nationality (e.g., Anzaldúa 2012, 2015; hooks, 2000; Crenshaw, 1989, 1991; Davis, 1981; Hill Collins 2004, 2014, 2016, Sullivan, 2003; among many others). A criticism of "mainstream" feminism is its omission of the experiences of Black, Indigenous, Latinx, and other people of color with discrimination and marginalization based on racism, xenophobia, sexism, classism, homophobia, among other structural oppressions. Sullivan (2003), a professor of critical and cultural studies in Australia, raised concerns about engaging in academic work that neglects an all-encompassing account of issues related to race, gender, and sexuality, stating:

> One of the problems with disassociating race, gender, and sexuality and focusing primarily on one of the terms is that such an approach can lead to the production of accounts of race that are (at least implicitly) sexist and/or homophobic, theories of

> gender that (at least implicitly) racist and/or homophobic, and analyses of sexuality that are (at least implicitly) racist and/or sexist. (p. 66)

This statement by Sullivan gets to the core of intersectionality. Intersectionality is both an analytical tool and a form of critical inquiry and praxis that explores the power relations that oppressed groups experience toward their multiple minoritized identities (Hill Collins and Bilge, 2016).[15]

The complexity of people's realities should be approached holistically to understand the lived experiences of those living at the margins of, for example, race, gender, class, and sex. The lived experiences of a trans Latina, for instance, cannot be fully understood without accounting for their gendered, racialized, and sexualized multilayered experiences. Hence, the viewpoint of mainstream feminism of focusing on an essentialized notion of gender (in this case of women) has been criticized as a racist and homophobic stance that upholds White and heteronormative conceptualizations.[16] In the U.S., Black and Latina feminists have expanded on this criticism of mainstream feminism.

Black American intersectional law scholar Crenshaw (1989, 1991) and Black American sociologist Hill Collins (2004, 2014, 2016), and multiple other Black women scholars in the U.S. have criticized the lack of gender analyses that consider issues of race, class, and sexuality. Their efforts reflect the work of Black feminist groups like The Combahee River Collective, who in 1977 said in a statement, "we are actively committed to struggling against racial, sexual, heterosexual, and class oppression, and see as our particular task the development of integrated analysis and practice based upon the fact that the major systems of oppression are interlocking"

[15] The dynamics of intersectionality have been developed and explored by many women of color, including Davis (1981), Crenshaw (1989), Anzaldúa (1987), and Hill Collins (2016).
[16] For a more detailed exploration of how notions of sex and gender reinforce heteronormativity, see Butler (2007).

(para. 1). In their statement, The Combahee River Collective (1977) acknowledged the work of Black women activists such as Sojourner Truth, Harriet Tubman, and Ida B. Wells Barnett, which started as early as the 18th century.

Similarly, many Latinas and Chicanas in the U.S. and Latin America have denounced the lack of focus on ethnicity, culture, migration, colonialism, and sexual orientation by mainstream feminist scholarship. For example, Anzaldúa (2012, 2015), a Chicana lesbian writer and philosopher, included her own intersectional identities in her analysis of gender as a form of reclaiming feminism. Moreover, other scholars like Latina philosophy professor Martín Alcoff have denounced the relationships between colonialism, imperialism, and feminist theory. Martín Alcoff (2020) defines feminist ideologies and practices that support notions of neoliberalism and dismissal of colonized people as "imperial feminism," which "assumes a fixed and stable universal meaning to the idea of feminism. It knows what liberation looks like, and is there to teach, not learn or engage in dialogue" (p. 12). Imperialism exercises ontological[17] power on the ways in which women from colonized backgrounds understand their reality and limits their epistemological[18] inquiry to one rooted in the colonizer. In other words, the ideas disseminated by imperial feminists ignore that the reality of many women of color is based on their historical relationship with imperialism. In this imperialist system, White Europeans killed and displaced

[17] Ontology refers to what we know to be the truth. The ontological stance proposed by many Latina feminists, constructivist ontology, proposes that there is no fixed reality—that what we know, what we hold to be true, and what we consider to be real are always relative and changing based on our interactions with the world. Constructing knowledge is then an iterative process among and between our internal and external experiences and how they are constantly transforming into our multiple and coexisting realities. For more on ontology, see Guba (1990).

[18] Epistemology refers to how we understand and define reality. We understand reality subjectively, based on our experiences and the meaning we make of those experiences. There is no single way of developing our realities—what we know to be true. Therefore, how we learn and how we get to know what we know may not be transferable to the ways in which others understand the same people, events, experiences, spaces, or identities. For more on epistemology, see Guba (1990).

Indigenous women, and White Americans enslaved Back women and took the land of Mexican women.

Currently, many of the methods for understanding the lives of women of color continue to be grounded on imperial notions of generalizability of knowledge that neglects women of color's intersectional experiences. Imperial feminism epistemologically neglects the experiences of Latinas by criticizing notions of gender performativity[19] and calling for eradicating the concept of gender (Martín Alcoff, 2020). If gender and its performativity are eradicated, so will identities and embodiments of culture and ethnicity. For example, later in this chapter, the *comadre* relationship will be discussed. Two women consider themselves *comadres* when one becomes a godmother for the other's child. However, a woman may consider another a *comadre* if they have a strong bond or shared goal. Hence, *comadres* are *co-madres* or co-mothers. The concept is grounded on a gendered role with an expectation of certain performativity and embodiment. Hence, this relationship of support and change in many Latinx cultures utilizes womanhood and motherhood as a tool for co-caring for others, co-nurturing their families, and building coalitions. Eliminating gender categories and their performativity would hinder Latinx empowering relationships that build on gender roles.

Martín Alcoff (2020) emphasizes the importance of categories of gender—and women—in the lived experiences of Latinas. Martín Alcoff (2020) asserts, "If gender is the means to produce group identities such as ethnicity, then undoing gender, on such a view, will be the means to undo ethnicity, adding to its precarious condition in hostile colonial contexts" (p. 25).

[19] Butler is one of the most prominent gender theorists in the U.S. who discusses "gender performativity." In the 1999 preface of the seminal book Gender Trouble, Butler (2007) described gender performativity as: (1) "[…] the way in which the anticipation of a gendered essence produces that which it posits as outside itself" and (2) "[…] not a singular act, but a repetition and a ritual, which achieves its effects through its naturalization in the context of a body, understood, in part, as a culturally sustained temporal duration" (p. XV). Hence, gender performativity could be associated with a person's being and behavior within a specific space, time, and culture.

This critical connection between gender, ethnicity, and culture could be seen in the *muxes* from Oaxaca, Mexico. *Muxes*, people who embody and perform a third gender, are Indigenous Mexican people who are neither men nor women, although many present in traditional female attire (Mirandé, 2012). There are a variety of gendered roles performed by *muxes*, including caring for family and leading cultural celebrations—often being respected by the community for engaging in these roles. Many relate the identities of *muxes* with that of trans and gender nonconforming individuals and advocate for a similar respectful treatment of those who are gender-expansive. Hence, gender identities shape the roles and experiences of many in Indigenous communities across the U.S., Latin America, and the world (Hernández Castillo, 2010). The realities of gender-expansive and trans individuals are based on the common lived experiences of everyday life (including their gender performativity) or the *cotidiano*, which are important units of analysis for Latina feminists epistemology (Martín Alcoff, 2020). A more detailed analysis of the work of Latina feminists and how they utilized and challenged notions of gender will be discussed below.

As a result of these criticisms and the need for theories that explore and explain the experiences of women of color, theories like intersectionality, Black feminism, womanism, Latina and Chicana feminisms, and *mujerismo* emerged. The following sections will focus on Latina feminisms, its intellectual and philosophical lineage, strengths and limitations, and connection to research with trans Latinas. One cannot just add the experiences of Latinas to a colonized conceptualization of feminism. As said by Martín Alcoff (2020), "the corrective is not simply to incorporate analysis of Latina lives within feminist theory but to empower Latinas as theorists themselves" (p. 21).

Latina Feminisms

A significant part of the work of Latina feminists has been to break through the generation of knowledge dominated by Latino men in their communities and academia. As a scholar, I have no intention of replicating their struggles with my writing in this chapter. To honor the liberation practices of Latina feminists, this section will include multiple direct quotes (some extensive in length) to provide space for the authors' voices. The goal is to put these authors in conversation with each other—as they often did—rather than providing an explanation of Latina feminisms for them. The experiences of Latina feminists are not mine to explain. Hence, like Anzaldúa and other Latina feminists, I am decolonizing this chapter, in a way, by providing more direct quotes than a "typical dissertation" would.

Intellectual and Philosophical Lineage of Latina Feminisms

Latina feminisms has its roots in the work that Mexican *mujeres* (women) did in Mexico during the 1910 revolution. These *mujeres* fought alongside men for the liberation of their country from a dictatorship that oppressed poor, working people. Many *mujeres* and feminist organizations, such as *Hijas de Cuauhtémoc*, Juana Belén Gutierrez de Mendoza, the *Liga Feminista*, and *Las Soldaderas*, became leaders in the social and political movements of the time (Garcia, 1997). These *mujeres* forged the path for others, particularly *Mexicanas* (Mexican women) and Chicanas, to continue fighting for liberation from patriarchal and elitist structures inside and outside Mexico.[20] The efforts of these *mujeres* and the Latina feminists that followed them can be seen throughout the efforts and scholarship of Latina feminists in the U.S.

Latina feminisms in the U.S., where the participants of this study resided at the time of the interviews, has been inspired and developed by countless *mujeres* philosophers, educators,

[20] For more on the historical background of Latina and Chicana feminisms genealogy and their connection with sociopolitical events, see Pérez (1999a).

and writers. Each of these *mujeres* built upon the idea that Latina women's experiences were different from those of other women—particularly White women who benefited from their whiteness—due to their gender, ethnic, cultural, racial, national, spatial, class, spiritual, and sexual positionalities. In their writings, these *mujeres* sought to decolonize their identities, knowledge, and the writing process. Their writing, for example, is accessible to other women by being written in English, Spanish, and Spanglish, and by using everyday examples in their analyses. These *mujeres*' ways of expressing their philosophical understandings are as valid and ontologically grounded as any other literature on feminism. Latina feminists—or *feministas*—have built Latina feminisms in conversation with each other's diverse intellectual and philosophical analyses. Chicana feminism and *mujerismo* are two of these intellectual and philosophical lineages.

Chicana Feminism

A Chicana can be broadly described as "an American woman or girl of Mexican descent" (Merriam-Webster, 2020). However, being Chicana (also spelled Xicana) goes beyond nationality and cultural heritage. Being Chicana is a matter of social constructions and reconstructions of identities—of histories, experiences, and subjectivities (Anzaldúa, 2012). Anzaldúa (2012) further highlights the ongoing process of being and becoming identities:

> It's important to reimagine our diverse struggles, especially our struggles with identity. What does it mean to be a Chicana or a Latina today, to be *Raza*?[21] [...] The intra- and interpersonal conflicts and misperceptions among Chicanas y

[21] *Raza* can literally be translated to "race." However, *Raza* as in "*mi Raza*," could mean my people or fellow nationals. The term *Raza* has political ties to the Brown Power and Chicano movements (Comas-Díaz, 2001), including *La Raza Unida Party* (Navarro, 2000).

> Chicanos, Latinas y Latinos, *Raza* and non-*Raza*, queer and straight are basically struggles of identity. (p. 183, italics added)

Based on constructivist ontology and epistemology, what it means to be Chicana—and Latina for that matter—is grounded on the relativist and subjective lived experiences of the individuals embodying, or not, these identities. Being and becoming Chicana is a process between the individual and their biopsychosocial, spiritual, spatial, and historical environments. Chicana feminism was born out of the experiences of Chicanas while participating in the Chicano movement that started in the early 1960s to denounce the experiences of farmworkers in the U.S., among other social justice causes.

Similar to the emergence of Black feminism out of the need for more gender-conscious work within the Civil Rights movement, Chicana feminism emerged from the *machismo* (in general terms, a patriarchal ideal that upholds hegemonic masculinity) that they encountered in the Chicano movement during the 1960s and 1970s (Garcia, 1997). Hence, Chicana feminists seek to denounce and dismantle the patriarchal structures inherent in social movements and in society at large. Chicana feminists seek to include women in the cultural and nationalist struggle towards liberation from imperialist, colonial, and hegemonic systems of oppression (Garcia, 1997). Nieto Gomez (1997) added, "The [Chicana feminist] movement is one that supports social, economic and political issues in regard to the position of women—bettering the position of the Chicana. The Chicana is a woman and she cannot separate herself from that" (p. 53). The positionality of these *mujeres* has been intellectually and philosophically addressed by multiple Chicana feminists, including Cotera, Anzaldúa, Moraga, and Hurtado.

Cotera, a feminist Chicana writer, librarian, and activist, published the seminal book "The Chicana Feminist" in 1977. Cotera's book serves as a manifesto of Chicana feminism by

explaining the theoretical and philosophical underpinnings of the movement (Hurtado, 2020). In this text, Cotera explored Chicanas' feminist heritage from their Mexican ancestors, the legacy of Chicanas to feminism, and issues of power, roles, identities, racism, and classism. Cotera (1977) spoke about *concientización* (conscientization) in this manifesto:

> We need to assume *conciencia completa de nuestras necesidades* [complete consciousness of our needs]. You're not a sacrificial victim to your children and your husband. When you get up in the morning and look at yourself in the mirror, it's still you. That's important. What do you want to do? What is your *conciencia*? Where do you want to get to? And the next thing is, what can you do for your community? How do you identify with yourself as a person, first of all? And then, how do you identify with the community? Is your community the frozen food corner and the couch and the bed? Or is your community where you live and eventually raise children and live out your days with your sisters and brothers? That's what it's all about. (p. 30)

In this statement, Cotera alludes to the reckoning that Chicanas should engage in to ponder their needs, identities, hopes, and belonging. Also, in a way, Cotera is calling Chicanas to action—to reconsider themselves as active agents of change and as contributing members of the larger community. Cotera's work opened new possibilities for other Chicanas, including Anzaldúa, to explore what it meant to be Chicanas.

Anzaldúa, a lesbian feminist and Chicana writer and theorist, discussed Chicanas' experiences with positionality and identity through her *frontera* or borderland theory development. Anzaldúa (2012) explored and explained the dynamics of oppression that Latina women experience due to their identities as women, Latinas, *mestizas* (mixed race), and

immigrants living on the U.S. side of the U.S./Mexico border. In their introduction to Anzaldúa's book on borderland, Cantú and Hurtado (2012) discussed Anzaldúa's borderlands concept and stated that:

> Living between two countries, two social systems, two languages, two cultures, results in understanding experientially the contingent nature of social arrangements [...] The basic concept involves the ability to hold multiple social perspectives while simultaneously maintaining a center that revolves around fighting against concrete materials forms of oppression. (p. 7)

Anzaldúa (2012) conceptualized this process of being, becoming, and liberation from an epistemological and ontological standpoint. According to Keating (2015), "for Anzaldúa, epistemology and ontology (knowing and being) are intimately interrelated—two halves of one complex, multidimensional process employed in the service of progressive social change" (p. xxx). For Anzaldúa, the border was indeed a physical materialization of the divide between identities and experiences. Nevertheless, she also analyzed the border as a philosophical representation of the construction of identities bound by Chicanas' experiences in the U.S. (Anzaldúa, 2015).

Anzaldúa expanded on her conceptualization of the experiences of Chicanas by exploring the role that spirituality has on their identities and everyday life. Anzaldúa (2015) stated regarding the limitations of identity categories:

> Being Chicana is not enough—nor is being queer, a writer, or any other identity label I choose or others impose on me. Conventional, traditional identity labels are stuck in binaries, trapped in *jaulas* (cages) that limit the growth of our individual and collective lives. (p. xxxvi)

In the general sense, identity categories can be a barrier to the spiritual work of those seeking change. The boundaries of these categories cannot hold the dynamic and expansiveness of queerness, *Latinidades*,[22] and womanhood. In describing the experiences of Chicanas, Anzaldúa pulled from spiritual concepts utilized by Indigenous groups from Latin America.

Anzaldúa (2015) utilized the Aztec terms *Coyolxauhqui*, *nepantla*, and *nepantleras*, among others, to understand the multiple processes involved in being and becoming Chicana. *Coyolxauhqui* is the process of deconstruction and construction of knowledge and experiences. *Nepantla*, a Nahualt word, denotes the process of being in-between spaces, including the spirit and after-death worlds. *Nepantleras* are the people who choose to be, live, and do *nepantla*. According to Anzaldúa (2015), the *nepantleras* are "threshold people, those who move within and among multiple worlds and use their movement in the service of transformation" (p. xxxv).

With this new theorization, Anzaldúa moves from a space of anger and trauma on her borderland work to a place of healing and justice (Keating, 2015). In her borderland work, she denounced the injustices endured by her and her people; now, from this spiritual standpoint, she pondered how to transcend physical pain and work and move into social change. Anzaldúa (2015) then spoke of *conocimiento* or as she translated it, deep awareness:

> *Conocimiento* urges us to respond not just with the traditional practice of spirituality (contemplation, meditation, and private rituals) or with the technologies of political activism (protests, demonstrations, and speakouts), but with the amalgam of the two: spiritual activism, which we've also inherited along with la *sombra* [the shadow]. *Conocimiento* pushes us into engaging the spirit in

[22] The terms *Latinidad* and *Latinidades* often refer to the lived experiences of Latinx individuals in the diaspora while inhabiting spaces with others who reflect the within differences among this group. For more on the history of these terms, see Aparicio (2017).

> confronting our social sickness with new tools and practices whose goal is to effect a shift. (p. 19)

Anzaldúa also collaborated with other Latinas and Chicanas in developing new explorations of their identities and experiences, including Moraga.

Moraga, a lesbian feminist and Chicana writer, co-edited the seminal book "This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color" with Anzaldúa in 1981. This book comprises multiple pieces written by prominent feminist figures like Norma Alarcón, The Combahee River Collective, and Audre Lorde (Moraga & Anzaldúa, 2015). In her essay "La *Güera*" (the blond or light skin female), contained in this book, Moraga discusses her experiences as the daughter of a Chicana mother and a White father in California. She explored how classism, colorism, and sexual orientation shaped her experiences with oppression and privilege. For Moraga, "but to fail to move out from there [the "isms," oppression] will only isolate us in our own oppression—will only insulate, rather than radicalize us" (2015, p. 24). Moraga proposed that the experiences of women of color with intersectional oppression are to be addressed by solidarity, coalition work, and collective action. She stated, "the real power, as you and I well know, is collective. I can't afford to be afraid of you, nor you of me. If it takes head-on collisions, let's do it: this polite timidity is killing us" (Moraga, 2015, p. 29). Hence, for Moraga, striving to be safe and evade confrontation with other groups would not aid Latinas in changing their circumstances and experiences. By engaging in collective work, feminists—and other groups—of all backgrounds could strive for change. Hurtado, like Moraga, also considered intersectionality in her exploration of the Chicana experience.

Hurtado, a Chicana feminist scholar, has explored issues of intersectionality within Chicana feminism. More specifically, Hurtado (2020) explored the role of *sitios* (places) and

lenguas (languages) in the development of Chicana feminist thought. Hurtado (2020) asserted that in exploring the roles of place, language, culture, sex, gender, sexuality, class, and ethnicity, the writings of Chicanas have always been about intersectionality. Hurtado (2020) explained:

> A corollary to intersectionality is that the experience of multiple sources of oppression facilitates Chicanas' experience of a multilayered social reality—that is, the knowledge of more than one language and one culture allows the potential for realizing the arbitrary nature of social categories. (p. 28)

Perhaps, in this statement, Hurtado underscores the complexity of the power and oppression experiences of Chicanas. Similar to the use of intersectionality by multiple non-White feminists, *mujerismo* has ties to the work of Black women.

Mujerismo

Mujerismo emerged from the work that Black women forged into developing the concept of womanism. In fact, *mujerismo* is the literal translation of womanism into Spanish. For many Black women philosophers and writers, the use of womanism allows for an analysis of race and gender that explores the relationships among Black women and their environment.[23] Alice Walker, a U.S. Southern Black woman, writer, and activist, is credited with the first use of womanism. One of Walker's (2004) definitions of womanism was, "Womanist is to feminist as purple to lavender" (p. xii). In this metaphorical statement, Walker saw feminism as a lighter form of womanism—one that historically lacks consideration for the experiences of Black women. Moreover, Walker (2004) connects womanism to spirituality, considering spirituality a form of healing and a connector of Black women's relationships (Coleman et al., 2006). The role

[23] For a discussion on the relationship between womanism and Black feminism, see Hill Collins (1996).

of womanism and spirituality in the liberation and wellbeing of African American women (Banks & Lee, 2016) is also a tenet of *mujerismo* regarding Latina women.

Mujerismo is also based on theology. According to Latina feminist theologists Isasi-Diaz and colleagues (1992):

> *Mujerista* theology, which includes both ethics and theology, is a liberative praxis: reflective action that has as its goal liberation. As a liberative praxis *mujerista* theology is a process of enablement for Hispanic women insisting on the development of a strong sense of moral agency, and clarifying the importance and value of who we are, what we think, and what we do. Second, is a liberative praxis, *mujerista* theology seeks to impact mainline theologies that support what is normative in church and, to a large degree, in society. (p. 108, italics in original)

Mujerista theology was originally developed under the name of "Hispanic Women's Liberation Theology." In this liberative praxis, Latina theologists should seek radical change without further oppressing other groups, resist adapting to and participating in existing oppressive structures (Isasi-Diaz includes academia as one of these structures), decolonize knowledge, highlight subjugated knowledge (that of the people disregarded by power structures), and strive for and be active in the pursuit of justice and peace (Isherwood, 2011). For Isasi-Diaz, praxis is more than an action and a form of embodiment, "*la lucha*–the struggle–is never-ending. That is why we have to see it as a way of life and not something we do: it is part of who we are" (Isherwood, 2011, pp. 11-12, italics in original). This struggle involves *mujerista* theologists' work to include women—particularly Latina women—in the functions of a church that reinforces sexist, racist, and classist social norms (Isherwood, 2011). This sense of liberation and solidarity is mentioned by Comas-Díaz, who discusses the role of *mujerismo* in the *comadre* relationship.

According to feminist and Latina psychologist Comas-Díaz (2013), "The term *comadre* describes the relationship between the mother and the godmother of a child. The *comadre* relationship strengthens the special bond between women who are intimate friends" (pp. 63-64, italics in original). Yet, this formal relationship between mothers and godmothers does not need to exist for Latinas to call each other *comadres*. Often, Latinas who have a strong bond may call each other *comadres*. For Comas-Díaz (2013), the *comadre* relationship has therapeutic properties as it generates healing, provides spaces for support, and affirms the "gendered cultural identity" of other Latinas (p. 69). A *comadre* therapist, for example, is a practitioner that engages in the processes of liberation, empowerment, and transformation of other Latinas (Comas-Díaz, 2013).

Comas-Díaz (2013) also poises *mujerismo* as a response to *marianismo*. Comas-Díaz (2013) defined *marianismo* as:

> A traditional Latino gender role, *marianismo* (from Maria) expects women to emulate the Virgin Mary (Virgen Maria). Therefore, *marianismo* entails the veneration of female virginal purity, moral and spiritual superiority over men, and selfless motherhood. In other words, *marianismo* reveres chastity, other-directedness, self-sacrifice, and duty. (pp. 64-65; italics added)

Hence, *marianismo* is often linked to patriarchal values and the servitude of women towards others while neglecting themselves. *Mujeristas* seek women's liberation from patriarchy, racism, imperialism, and other oppressive structures (Comas-Díaz, 2013).

Mujerismo involves the strive for empowerment present in feminism, the crossroads explored by Anzaldúa's borderland theory, the spirituality inherent in womanism, and the liberation aspects that are the focus in liberation pedagogy, psychology, and theology (Comas-

Díaz, 2008). Comas-Díaz (2008) described the goal of *mujeristas* by considering their intersectional positionalities, "Acknowledging their intellectual debt to womanism, *mujeristas* identified their marginalization from white feminism, ethnic minority patriarchy, dominant communities' oppression, neocolonization, and economic domination as impetus for their psychopolitical baptism" (p. 15, italics in original). Hence, *mujeristas* explore issues of intersectionality with a focus on spirituality as a liberation practice. Latina feminisms, including Chicana feminism and *mujerismo* have strengths and challenges.

Strengths and Challenges of Latina Feminisms

The philosophical approaches to feminism by women of color are often met with challenges. A limitation of Latina feminisms is its discrepancies and friction with other women of color. Anzaldúa (2015), for example, mentioned the arguments between academic departments and scholars, "Chicanas silence indigenous women, and indigenous women lambast Chicanas for appropriating Indian identity" (p. 76). Similar to criticisms about intersectionality as a theory (Carbado, 2013), some believe that because Latina feminisms focuses on Latina women, its use is limited (Garcia, 1997). This criticism, however, is addressed by Garcia (1997), who, in exploring the historical writings of Chicana feminist thought, described how the work of Chicanas affects other women. Chicana feminists organized and continue to organize alongside—and sometimes in collaboration with—other women of color, including African-American, Native-American, and Asian-American feminists (Garcia, 1997). Chicana feminists believe that the oppression of Chicanas is linked to the oppression of other marginalized groups; hence, the liberation of Chicanas would mean the liberation of others (Garcia, 1997). Currently, the work of Chicana feminists alludes to their intersectional experiences and includes supporting

indigenous, queer, and trans women through community-engaged scholarship and activism. Latina feminisms also has many strengths.

A strength of Latina feminisms, including Chicana feminism and *mujerismo*, is their ties to Latin American figures, movements, and philosophies. In the context of this study, this is a strength given that the participants are trans Latinas. Like Latina feminists assert (e.g., Lugones, 2008), trans Latinas experience the forces of the power inherent in patriarchal, heteronormative, and colonial structures. Another strength of Latina feminisms is its attention to these power structures from an intersectional lens. Its emphasis on spirituality and liberation is another strength of Latina feminisms. It is, in part, through the healing connection with other women (Comas-Díaz, 2013) and spiritual processes that frame being Latina or Chicana (Anzaldúa, 2015) that Latina feminists seek to liberate themselves from patriarchal, colonial, hegemonic, and heteronormative oppressive structures. Considering the strengths and limitations of Latina feminism, this theoretical framework can aid in developing research with trans Latinas.

Latina Feminisms and Research with Trans Latinas

Two aspects of Latina feminisms make it adept at incorporating it into research with trans Latinas—its focus on liberation and its phenomenological approach.[24] First, Latina feminists concern themselves with understanding their intersectional experiences and addressing their circumstances to obtain liberation from colonial, patriarchal, sexist, and heteronormative forces (Anzaldúa, 2012; Comas-Díaz, 2008; Garcia, 1997; Isasi-Diaz et al., 1992). Second, Latina feminists have engaged in ontological and epistemological processes that ensure that research based on their lived experiences and relationships becomes a form of liberation. The next chapter discusses the methodology for the current study.

[24] Latina feminists like Ortega (2016), for example, have utilized phenomenology from a Latina feminisms perspective.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

This chapter will be presented in two parts. Part one begins with an overview of the existing research methods employed in research with trans and gender nonconforming (TGNC) individuals, with an emphasis on qualitative research studies. Then, qualitative research in general, and phenomenology in particular, will be discussed. Part two details the methodology of the current study, including its aim and research questions, researcher's roles, selection of participants and setting, recruitment of sample, data collection procedures, data analysis, trustworthiness, and quality. This chapter ends with the researcher's subjectivity statement.

Research Methods with TGNC Individuals

TGNC Latinx individuals have mobilized to conduct research in order to quantitatively and qualitatively document their experiences, needs, and recommendations through the use of surveys in California and at the national level (Caraves & Salcedo, 2016; James et al., 2016; James & Salcedo, 2017; Pulido & Salcedo, 2019; Salcedo & Padrón, 2013). TGNC Latinx individuals' purpose for engaging in research has been to demonstrate their experiences as a collective and pursue funding to address their needs. Additionally, many TGNC Latinx leaders have collaborated with federal, national, and local organizations to design, implement, analyze, and disseminate multiple quantitative and qualitative research projects.

Fields such as public health, nursing, medicine, sociology, mental health, and gender studies have explored a variety of TGNC Latinx individuals' experiences qualitatively. For instance, in a scoping study about interdisciplinary research with trans Latina immigrants by this

researcher (manuscript in progress-c), it was found that most studies (*n*=13; 60%) had used qualitative methodologies. Moreover, social work scholars have conducted qualitative research with trans individuals. In the same scoping study by this author (manuscript in progress-c), using thematic analysis of a phenomenon was commonly used by social workers to understand transgender immigrants' experiences (Alessi, 2016; Alessi et al., 2016, 2017). Other social workers have also used phenomenology (Kattari, 2015; Kattari et al., 2018) and grounded theory (Austin, Craig, & McInroy, 2016) to analyze the experiences of transgender individuals.

Studies conducted by scholars outside of the field of social work have also employed qualitative methodologies to understand the experiences of trans Latinas, including thematic analysis of a phenomenon in human development and sociology research (Asencio & Acosta, 2009), narrative analysis techniques in health research (Barrington et al., 2018), and case studies in mental health research (Cerezo et al., 2014). Non-social work research with various transgender populations of color has also used phenomenological inquiry (Singh et al., 2011), grounded theory (Hagen et al., 2018), and narrative analysis (Palkki, 2020). Other studies have incorporated an intersectionality analysis into their qualitative data analysis of social movements with activists, undocumented, and queer students (Terriquez et al., 2018). Overall, qualitative research methodologies have allowed researchers from multiple fields to explore the experiences of trans and gender nonconforming communities.

Qualitative Research

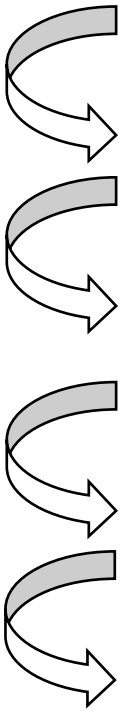
Unlike quantitative researchers, qualitative researchers do not use numbers as their primary form of data. For qualitative researchers, words, images, documents, and observations serve as data. These data allow qualitative researchers to explore the meaning that people make of their lives. The use of qualitative methodologies can be traced back to the use of ethnography

by anthropologists and sociologists doing fieldwork in the early 20th century, with more contemporary approaches being developed and published starting in the 1960s (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Qualitative inquiry can be performed through a variety of genres, including ethnography, phenomenology, grounded theory, case studies, and narratives. These genres can be used alongside critical methodologies and theories such as critical ethnography, critical discourse analysis, action and participatory research, queer theory, feminist theory, critical race theory, among many others (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). A critical part of engaging in qualitative research is recognizing the philosophical and theoretical assumptions that guide a study. Creswell and Poth (2018) provide a five phases approach to situating philosophical and interpretive frameworks within one's qualitative research processes by adapting the research process described by Denzin and Lincoln (2011). Figure 4 lists these five phases along with their applicability to this study.

There are benefits and challenges to using qualitative research methods when studying the experiences of trans Latinas. These benefits and challenges can be explored in the context of the characteristics of qualitative research put forward by Merriam and Tisdell (2016) and Creswell and Poth (2018). Some of the benefits of using qualitative research with trans Latinas include the following: (1) the focus on the lived experiences of participants; (2) the ability of the researcher to explore his own interpretations of the data and the process; (3) the findings will be data-centered; (4) participants' quotes could serve as a vehicle for liberation; (5) triangulation allows for a comprehensive understanding of experiences; and (6) offers the ability to engage in an emergent research design. Some challenges of qualitative research include the inherent biases of the cisgender researcher, the need for his reflexivity and insight, the research process is time-consuming, and the burden of research on participants who have potentially experienced trauma.

Figure 4

Philosophical and Interpretive Frameworks and the Current Qualitative Study



Phase 1- The Researcher as a Multicultural Subject	Guiding Question: *"What perspectives and experiences do you bring to your research?"* Current Study: Researcher's clinical practice and research experiences; focus group with trans Latinas
Phase 2- Philosophical Assumptions and Interpretive Frameworks	Guiding Question: *"How do your beliefs guide your actions as a researcher?"* Current Study: Constructivist ontology, epistemology, and methodology; Latina feminisms
Phase 3- Research Strategies and Approaches	Guiding Question: *"How do your philosophical and theoretical frameworks inform your choice of research approaches?"* Current Study: Phenomenology; *testimonios*
Phase 4- Methods of Collection and Analysis	Guiding Question: *"In what ways does your research approach influence the methods used for data collection and analysis?"* Current Study: Interviews; observations; thematic analysis
Phase 5- The Art, Practice, and Politics of Interpretation and Evaluation	Guiding Question: *"What contributes to your decisions related to rigor, inferences, and use of findings?"* Current Study: Triangulation, audit trail, member checking, colleague examination, and statement of the researchers' experiences, assumptions, and biases

Note. Based on Creswell and Poth (2018, p. 17).

Table 5 lists the tenets of qualitative research, the benefits and challenges of each tenet, and how their benefits and challenges apply to research with trans Latinas. The current study employed the use of phenomenology as a qualitative tradition.

Table 5

Characteristics of Qualitative Research and Benefits and Challenges in Trans Research

Characteristics of Qualitative Research[1]	Benefits	Challenges	Applicability to Trans Research
Focuses on understanding the multiple perspectives and meanings of participants	• Participant-centered	• Researcher bias	The experiences and meaning made by trans Latinas would be the focus. These experiences will be analyzed, in part, by a cisgender researcher.
Researcher as a primary or key instrument	• Room for subjectivity and reflexivity	• Researcher bias	The researcher will be able to explore the meaning of the data and his own experience simultaneously. This process will require a deep understanding of the researcher's biases.
Complex reasoning through inductive and deductive logic process	• Critical analysis • Immersion in the data • Findings based on the data	• Time-consuming	The findings will be data-centered and critical as the researcher immerses himself in the data and each trans Latina's story. This can be time-consuming.
Rich description	• Centering participants' voices through the use of quotes	• Lengthy research papers • Selection of just some quotes	The use of quotes aligns with a focus on the liberation of trans Latinas by using their voices or *testimonios*. Selecting just some quotes when reporting findings is limiting and risks excluding vital data.
Natural setting, context-dependent, and holistic account	• First-hand observations • Understanding of contexts that influence data	• Time-consuming • Need for arranging logistics	A holistic understanding of the experiences of trans Latinas is imperative. However, this can come at the cost of participant burden and retraumatizing participants during the lengthy research process.

Characteristics of Qualitative Research[1]	Benefits	Challenges	Applicability to Trans Research
		• Understanding all contexts may be impossible	
Multiple methods	• Use of interviews, observations, and documents for triangulation	• Need to maintain multiple sources of data organized	Triangulation allows for a more comprehensive understanding of the lives of trans Latinas. However, this requires organizational skills.
Emergent design	• The research process is continuously tailored to the needs and desires of participants.	• Time-consuming	An emergent design aligns with Latina feminism and research practices encouraged by TGNC Latinx leaders. This can be time-consuming.

Note. Adapted from Merriam and Tisdell (2016, pp. 14-19) and Creswell and Poth (2018, pp. 43-44).

Phenomenology

Phenomenology focuses on the meaning that individuals assign to their lived experiences. When researching a group of people experiencing a particular phenomenon (i.e., generating change in their communities), the researcher seeks to describe the essence of their experiences (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The essence of a phenomenon is what makes a phenomenon a phenomenon (Beck, 2021). More specifically, an essence is a descriptive construction of the lived experiences of people that allows for others to understand its nature, quality, and significance (van Manen, 2016). Multiple philosophers have developed their thoughts on what is phenomenology and how the essence of a phenomenon is explored.

Phenomenology can be traced back to the 18th century, with a current understanding of it being developed by philosophers like Hegel and Husserl. According to Moustakas (1994), "For Hegel, phenomenology referred to knowledge as it appears to consciousness, the science of describing what one perceives, senses, and knows in one's immediate awareness and experience" (p. 26). For Husserl, "transcendental phenomenology" is based on the subjective perceptions of experience as a source of knowledge (Käufer & Chemero, 2015; Moustakas, 1994). In short, phenomenology seeks to explore the subjective meanings and essences of experience as it develops into consciousness. The reason for a phenomenological methodology is to describe such experiences. Phenomenology does not necessarily focus on discourse as in narrative inquiry/analysis or theory building as in grounded theory. The use of phenomenology as a qualitative research method has advantages and disadvantages.

An advantage of phenomenology is its adequacy to understanding "affective, emotional, and often intense human experiences" (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 28). Moreover, phenomenology allows for developing knowledge and describing reality from the point of view

of the person going through the experience while considering a comprehensive and holistic approach (Moustakas, 1994). On the other hand, a disadvantage of phenomenology is the need for participants to provide as rich of a description of their meaning-making as possible, which could be a challenge when working with people who have experienced complex trauma. Another disadvantage could be the researcher's insider/outsider status as it may influence how much participants trust the process and the researcher's data analysis process (Pringle et al., 2011).

Qualitative research, in general, is unavoidably the study of phenomena. Hence, it is no surprise that phenomenology has branched out into multiple approaches as a research method. Van Manen (2016b) listed 12 strands and traditions of phenomenology: (1) ethical, (2) existential, (3) gender, (4) embodiment, (5) hermeneutic, (6) critical, (7) literary, (8) oneiric-poetic, (9) sociological, (10) political, (11) material, and (12) deconstruction. However, for this study, the two overall phenomenological approaches—descriptive or transcendental and interpretive or hermeneutic—will be discussed, as they are the two main theoretical frameworks of phenomenology (Peoples, 2021).

Some differences exist between descriptive and interpretive phenomenology. Husserl is attributed to the development of descriptive phenomenology, while Heidegger (who followed Husserl) is recognized as a proposer of interpretive phenomenology. For Husserl, phenomenology should be done without employing theoretical frameworks, as no assumptions should be made when engaging in phenomenology (Peoples, 2021). Hence, interpretive phenomenology is the only one of the two frameworks that can be used along with other theories like Latina feminisms, as far as the researcher explicitly labels the study as such (e.g., Latina feminists-hermeneutic phenomenology) (Peoples, 2021).

Another difference between descriptive and interpretive phenomenology is that Husserl believed that the researcher could pause its biases and judgments with the use of bracketing or *epoché*, while Heidegger considered this practice impossible as one cannot separate themselves from the process. Heidegger then suggested the process of continually revising one's biases and understanding through the hermeneutic circle. The hermeneutic circle is a process in which the researcher makes meaning of others' experiences in a nonlinear way. Therefore, reality is understood, and meaning is made, through continually moving between the "parts" and "whole" of an experience. This iterative process of interpretation helps the researcher moves in and out and back and forth data from interviews, observations, documents, and reflexivity, frequently connecting two or more of these data (Smith et al., 2009).

From an interpretive phenomenological standpoint, Heidegger's philosophy about experience was based on "Dasein" or being there. According to Heidegger, "perception is not a process whereby the meaning we experience is constructed through the interpretation of our sensory experiences. We always already are submerged in meaning" (Van Manen, 2016, p. 108). That implies that for interpretive phenomenology, meaning is constantly being made beyond what is literally experienced.

Other theoretical lenses could be added to an interpretive phenomenological approach as it was done in this study. For example, Latina feminisms could contribute to the meaning made of our experiences based on the domination of one's gender, class, and culture and our ability to liberate ourselves from that domination. For Heidegger, the use of theory would add another layer of pre-understandings (Peoples, 2021). These pre-understandings are based on our previous experiences and assumptions (Heidegger, 1962). Hence, the use of theory to make sense of reality is considered another source of our construction of knowledge. Philosophically and

methodologically, phenomenology allows for a construction of knowledge that depends on a subjectivist epistemology and a relativist ontology based on the lived experiences of trans Latinas and the researcher.[25]

Descriptive and interpretive phenomenology perceive the researcher as a stranger: descriptive phenomenology as a stranger with suspended knowledge and interpretive phenomenology as a stranger with pre-understandings. Based on the discussion of research methodologies, practical approaches, and theories discussed above, the overall exploratory research question "What are the lived experiences of trans Latinas generating change for their communities in the Southern U.S.?" was adequately answered by employing the use of interpretive phenomenology.

Ethical Considerations for Research with Trans Individuals

Heidegger suggested that continually revising one's biases and understanding through the process of the hermeneutic circle is a critical task of the researcher. In doing so, the researcher's role is to be vigilant of their own biases and what they know *a priori* (Starks & Brown Trinidad, 2007). Only then is the researcher able to explore the essence of a phenomenon as both a curious observer and an active participant.

In these observation and participation processes, the researcher and trans Latina participants had discussions about power dynamics, boundary setting, delineation of roles, and acknowledgment of limitations. These conversations are imperative as the researcher and the community members do not share the same gender identity and oppressive experiences. Singh and colleagues (2013) summarized critical ethical standpoints for feminist researchers conducting research participatory action research (PAR) with trans communities, particularly

[25] For a discussion on what is a constructivist paradigm and how epistemology and ontology influence research methods, see Guba (1990).

qualitative research. Although this study has not been designed as PAR, Singh and colleagues' (2013) list is relevant to this study's design and aim to be as community-informed as possible. The checklist provided by Singh and colleagues (2013) is comprehensive, and grants being quoted in its entirety in this document. Table 6 lists the 13 items in the checklist (Singh et al., 2013, p. 97), followed by first-person statements applicable to this study. Additionally, research ethics with trans individuals have been considered in the steps taken to ensure trustworthiness in this study (see "Trustworthiness"). Next is a description of the current interpretive phenomenological study.

Table 6

Ethical Considerations for the Current Study with Trans Latinas

Ethical Consideration	Current Study
1. "Assess one's intersecting identities (e.g., race/ethnicity, gender identity and expression, etc.) as they relate to privilege and oppression and power as a researcher."	I strived to continuously assess my privilege, oppression, and power through the use of written reflexivity and consultation with my committee members and the trans Latina participants of this study. I also recognized other privileges, including my ability to speak and write in English and Spanish and the fact that although I consider myself a sociocultural immigrant, I was born a U.S. citizen in Puerto Rico.
2. "Clearly articulate a theory on gender and determine how this theory informs methodological choices."	I explored how Latina feminisms informed research with trans Latinas. I also considered how my male privilege interacts with feminist thoughts.
3. "Reflect on research positionality related to transgender concerns."	I engaged in written reflexivity throughout the study. I had conversations with a trans Latina leader on how I feel as a cisgender person engaging in research with trans women.
4. "Conduct a current transgender literature review informed by both peer-reviewed sources and other nonacademic sources of information	I did a scoping review on trans Latina immigrants and a content analysis of LGBTQ+ literature in social work journals. I have also analyzed the research reports by TGNC Latinx individuals in the U.S. and read their

Ethical Consideration	Current Study
(blogs, advocacy websites, novels, etc.)."	recommendations and demands to improve their lives. I have also read personal narratives and watched documentaries on the lives of TGNC Latinx individuals. I continue to be connected to TGNC Latinx groups and leaders on social media and personally.
5. "Provide and/or attend presentations or activities at community centers that serve transgender individuals, so that a potential PAR relationship could be initiated."	I am connected with organizations in the Atlanta area where I previously worked as a social worker, as well as with community-based initiatives led by trans Latinas.
6. "Determine community needs by working collaboratively with transgender people and communities."	This step was initiated by analyzing the reports by TGNC Latinx individuals in the literature review section and by conducting a focus group with trans Latina leaders in the Southern U.S. I remained in contact with participants as they faced multiple needs, like homelessness.
7. "Identify the opportunity for advocacy associated with the PAR study."	I have conducted CEU training for providers on trans mental health to advocate for the population. I also contribute to community-based groups led by trans Latinas.
8. "Work with a research team in order to establish expectations and accountability related to research privileges, assumptions, and biases."	I utilized my dissertation committee as a sounding board. I maintained a consultation relationship with other scholars in this area.
9. "Use sampling practices that ensure a diverse and representative population."	I employed a snowball sampling strategy in this study, where trans Latinas referred others doing similar work in the Southern U.S.
10. "Share all aspects of the research process and data with informants and communities (stakeholders)—and be sure to ask for feedback and input along the way."	I will share this study's findings with the community and allies through a public event organized by a trans Latina leader and supported by a grant aimed at amplifying the voices of trans Latinas and other marginalized groups. The findings will be available to groups who may need them in their efforts for change, grant writing, advocacy work, etc.
11. "Practice humility about one's knowledge and assumptions, apologize as necessary, and make changes to the study based on this learning."	I conducted a focus group with trans Latina leaders in the Southern U.S. to determine the aim of this study. I also engaged in member-checking to ensure the voices of the participants were accurately represented.

Ethical Consideration	Current Study
12. "Understand historical oppression of transgender people and communities."	I continue to learn about this through being part of the advisory board of a TGNC Latinx grassroots project and by reading, hearing, and watching content developed by TGNC individuals. I also strive to contribute to their oppression as little as possible as a holder of power, especially since the liberation of trans individuals is a long-term process, and I may potentially leave the group after one cycle/end of the dissertation.
13. "Identify how your personal liberation is connected to the liberation of the informants and participants with whom you work."	I engaged in written and oral reflexivity with participants and dissertation committee members. Part of this process is the narrative in the researcher's subjective statement.

Note. Adapted from Singh and colleagues (2013, p. 97).

Current Study

Aim of the Study

Peoples (2021) stated that "phenomenological inquiry is only about experience and nothing else" (p. 27). From an interpretive phenomenology stance, the current study aimed to explore the meaning that trans Latinas make of their lived experiences as they generate change for their communities in the Southern U.S.

Research Questions

Moustakas (1994) listed five characteristics of a phenomenological research question: it is qualitative in nature, it must explore the essences and meanings of human experiences, it should personally engage the researcher, it does not seek predictions or causalities, and it is based on description. Hence, based on the prior research and Latina feminisms, three adequate questions in interpretive phenomenology are:

1. What are the lived experiences of trans Latinas generating change for their communities in the Southern U.S.?
2. How do the multiple identities of trans Latinas influence their experiences of empowerment in the Southern U.S.?
3. How do trans Latinas experience and overcome challenges?

Participants

Participants met criteria for this study if they were adults over the age of 18 who (1) self-identified as a trans woman; (2) self-identified as Latina/x/e, Hispanic, Chicana/x/e, or other identities that refer to their sense of belongingness to Latin America; (3) were identified by others in the community as a generator of change in their communities; and, (4) were living in the Southern U.S. at the time of the interview. This project relied on participant's self-identification as trans and did not measure or consider psychopathological measures of gender, such as Gender Dysphoria (American Psychiatric Association, 2013). This decision was in part due to the fact that not all trans individuals experience gender dysphoria and in part because this diagnosis has often been utilized to gatekeep and further oppress trans individuals.

Setting

The Southern U.S. could be geographically defined. However, the states that make this geographical region are historically defined by the American Civil War of 1861-1865. The Southern U.S. formed the Confederate States (an area also known as "the Deep South") to, among other reasons, maintain their capitalization and oppression of Black people. These states included Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, and Virginia. Due to the lasting effects of white supremacy in these states and their current political climate, this study considered the eleven states mentioned above.

These states in the Southern U.S. have seen the fastest growth of Latinx individuals in the last ten years (Noe-Bustamante et al., 2020).

Data Collection Plan

Recruitment of Sample

This study utilized purposeful sampling, as is mostly the case in qualitative research. Merriam and Tisdell (2016), explained that "purposeful sampling is based on the assumption that the investigator wants to discover, understand, and gain insight and therefore must select a sample from which the most can be learned" (p. 96). As with most qualitative research designs, interpretive phenomenology focuses on a purposeful sample, with participants typically ranging between 3-25 (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Smith and colleagues (2009) suggest a sample size of three to six participants and interviewing participants more than once. The number of participants who completed individual interviews in recent qualitative studies with trans individuals was approximately five (i.e., Alessi, 2017; Singh et al., 2011). This study strived to recruit six to ten participants due to the potential challenges of recruiting a marginalized group. A total of six participants were ultimately included in the study, of which two were also part of the focus group that informed the aim of the current study (discussed in Chapter 1).

Information about the interviews was shared with local community leaders through email, text messages, and social media for them to share with potential participants. A flyer was created and shared with the community leaders and participants to help with recruitment (See Appendix B). Snowball sampling was employed to recruit other participants. Potential participants were asked to contact the researcher via email, phone, or social media to be screened for eligibility. Self-identification by participants as Latinx and trans determined eligibility. The researcher contacted potential participants if they preferred to establish contact that way. Once participants

met criteria and agreed to be part of the study, a consent form in Spanish (Appendix C) was sent for their review prior to their interview date. The English version of the consent form can be found in Appendix D. The researcher reminded participants of their interview day and time close to the day of their interview. Authorization for the study was obtained from the University of Georgia's Institutional Review Board (IRB).

Data Collection Procedures

Interviews. Data collection in qualitative studies can be done through the use of interviews, observations, documents, and artifacts. Based on this study's research questions and qualitative phenomenological research, data collection was done primarily through in-depth interviews. Interviews are the main form of data collection in qualitative research (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016), which is especially true for generating narratives (Creswell & Poth, 2018). According to deMarrais (2004),

> Although researchers set out to design the interview as a conversation, it is much different from an everyday conversation between two people. Intent on generating data for a research study, the researcher tends to have a greater stake in the whole process. (p. 54)

Hence, interviews can provide the base for a participant to develop a narrative through storytelling that can be utilized as data.

For this study, semi-structured interviews were employed. Semi-structured interviews provide some guidance for the interviewee to tell their story while also allowing them to provide details related to the original question. Consistent with interpretive phenomenology, semi-structured interviews also allow the interviewer to ask follow-up questions based on the information provided. More specifically, semi-structured interviews have a set of questions that

are the focus of the interview while also allowing for flexibility (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). In interpretive phenomenology, multiple interviews are often needed to gain a deeper understanding of the phenomenon and clarify the researcher's biases and preconceptions (Peoples, 2021). These narratives were gathered by using *testimonios* as a form of data.

Testimonios as data can be gathered through unstructured, semi-structured, and highly structured interviews. Research with trans Latinas involve using their *testimonios* as tools to reclaim knowledge and power. The use of *testimonios* in research is often equated to oral histories and narratives. However, these are not interchangeable terms. Although *testimonios* can appear in the form of narratives or oral histories, *testimonios* are meant to be critically reflective statements of those who experience and bear witness to oppression (Blackmer Reyes & Curry Rodríguez, 2012). Brochin (2019) defined *testimonios* as, "*Testimonios*, broadly defined, are personal and/or collective stories, autoethnographic accounts and counternarratives that document struggle and resistance against oppressive moments, histories, and violence" (p. 2). Blackmer Reyes and Curry Rodríguez (2012) said about the aim of *testimonios*:

> The objective of the *testimonio* is to bring to light a wrong, a point of view, or an urgent call for action. Thus, in this manner, the *testimonio* is different from the qualitative method of in-depth interviewing, oral history narration, prose, or spoken word. The *testimonio* is intentional and political. (p. 525; italics in original)

Testimonios can come from an individual but can serve as the voice of the collective. This collective perspective in *testimonios* "represents the voice of many whose lives have been affected by particular social events, such as totalitarian governments, war violence, displacement, or other types of broad social affronts on humanity" (Blackmer Reyes & Curry

Rodríguez, 2012, p. 528). The collective experiences of the oppressed can be shared in oral or written form.

Testimonios are discourses of solidarity that go from oral statements to written forms. These written forms of *testimonios* seek to denounce oppression and serve as liberation and healing tools. "What is certain is that *testimonio* is not meant to be hidden, made intimate, nor kept secret" (Blackmer Reyes & Curry Rodríguez, 2012, p. 525; italics in original). Hence, *testimonios* go from oral to written form as a way to make the oppressive experiences of the narrator, as well as their empowerment and resistance, visible, widely shareable, and tangible.

Testimonios could serve multiple functions and roles. Brochin (2019) mentions the following roles of *testimonios*: (1) liberatory tool, (2) epistemology, (3) methodology for theorizing, (4) methodology for data collection, and (5) pedagogical practice. Epistemologically and ontologically, *testimonios* are meant to be subjective forms of knowledge. The *testimonialista* (the person who owns the *testimonio*), owns knowledge as the one who experienced and witnessed oppression. Hence, *testimonios* are established as truth and analysis of the truth. "Another important characteristic of *testimonio* is the role of memory and reconstructive epistemology. Some scholars argue that memory may recast the experiences in less than absolute truth" (Blackmer Reyes & Curry Rodríguez, 2012, p. 527; italics in original). The criticism is that *testimonios* are subjective and, therefore, not able to produce knowledge. This criticism is rooted in colonizing practices of knowledge, and since many *testimonios* come from women of color, this denotes racism and sexism in research. Blackmer Reyes and Curry Rodríguez (2012) conclude:

> The truth of the survivor story may not be empirically, scientifically, or legally true. Nevertheless, the speakers are aware that the very manner in which they tell the

story may hold for them a harrowing reality of reliving the oppressive experience. (p. 527)

Hence, trans Latinas would be able to describe their experiences as their truth, developing constructed and relative knowledge. Similar processes have been done by Latina feminists like Anzaldúa in her seminal book "Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza" (2012). In this book, Anzaldúa used different writing styles to develop her *testimonio* as a lesbian, *mestiza*, borderland woman. This example of *testimonios* in Latina feminist scholarship can be connected to understanding the experiences of trans Latinas phenomenologically.

All interviews were conducted in Spanish per the participant's preference between February 9, 2021, and May 7, 2021. The length of time for the initial interviews was aimed at no more than two hours, with them lasting between 1 hour and 12 minutes and 1 hour and 49 minutes. A total of five follow-up interviews were also conducted,[26] which lasted between 26 and 52 minutes. The follow-up interviews served two functions: (1) gain more in-depth knowledge about the participant's experiences; and (2) member checking. Since the second interviews were part of the data analysis process, they are further discussed under "Data Analysis." The member checking process is discussed under "Trustworthiness."

The interviews were conducted via Zoom and audio recorded (videos of participants were not kept).[27] Audio recordings and other forms of data were kept in a password-protected OneDrive linked to the academic institution. Participants received a research incentive of $50 for their time through Cashapp, PayPal, or a gift card, depending on their preference. To further

[26] One of the participants, Paloma, was unavailable for a second interview. However, this participant provided the longest and most comprehensive first interview of all six participants, which provided the necessary rich and thick descriptions of her experiences.

[27] In-person interviews were not possible as a health safety precaution due to the data being collected during the COVID-19 pandemic. Additionally, most of the participants lived outside of the state of Georgia.

protect the participants' privacy, we used the pseudonyms they selected for themselves (or were assigned by the researcher per participant's request) during the interviews and on written records. Additionally, participants were not asked to sign the consent form or the incentive log to protect their identities. The researcher also took notes during the interview.

Interview Materials. With the focus of phenomenology on participants' lived experiences, broad interview questions are recommended, such as "What have you experienced in terms of the phenomenon?" (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 79). Moreover, interview sub-questions should be aimed at gathering rich descriptions of the experiences of the phenomenon. Appendix E contains the interview questions used to address the research questions of this study, along with their rationale. These questions were developed after analyzing the focus group interview described above and are grounded in Latina feminisms. Smith and colleagues (2009) suggested asking six to ten interview questions for a 90-minute interpretative phenomenological interview. The original interview protocol contained 14 interview questions.

After conducting the first interview with the first participant, the researcher and Dr. Maria Bermúdez, a member of the dissertation committee (who is a bilingual Honduran woman)[28] edited, collapsed, and reorganized the order of the interview questions. This iterative process for redrafting research questions is common—and necessary—in qualitative interpretative phenomenological inquiry (Smith et al., 2009). The final interview protocol was divided into three main sections for inquiry, with a total of 10 main interview questions and five sub-questions. The three main sections were (1) *self*—who are you?, (2) *community*—who is your community?, and (3) *experiences as generators of change*—what can you do (are you doing) for your community? These sections were based on Cotera's (1977) call for Latinas to

[28] See "Researcher Reflexivity" for more information about Dr. Bermúdez.

engage in action in their communities (p. 30). Two bilingual individuals (one from Puerto Rico and one from Mexico) read the questions for face validity regarding language, and changes were made accordingly. The interview protocol in Spanish is listed in Appendix F and in English in Appendix G. A demographic sheet can be found in Appendix H.

Participant Observations and Revision of Documents. To better understand participants' efforts and work, the analysts observed pre-recorded videos and revised online documents like photos and posts uploaded by participants or their organizations to social media accounts, websites, and other online platforms.[29] The location of these videos and posts were shared by the participants, who gave permission to observe their social media activity after being interviewed. Social media data was not stored or distributed. Notes were taken from direct observations and revision of social media content (including images and videos). These observations and revision of documents also served as a form of triangulating the data obtained from the interviews.

Researcher Reflexivity. Qualitative researchers often engage in exploring their positionality in reference to the phenomenon and the people experiencing it. The subjective nature of qualitative research is recognized by establishing how one's identity (e.g., gender identity, gender presentation, social class, education, sexual orientation, race, ethnicity, age, language, culture, etc.) and contextual (e.g., immigration status, years in the U.S., etc.) positionality contribute to the construction of the research process and findings. This positionality can be explored through the use of reflexivity (Swaminathan & Mulvihill, 2018).

Roulston (2010) defined reflexivity in research as "the researcher's ability to be able to self-consciously refer to him of herself in relation to the production of knowledge about research

[29] In-person observations were not possible as a health safety precaution due to the data being collected during the COVID-19 pandemic.

topics" (p. 116). The researcher engaged in reflexivity through (1) jotting notes about participants' comments and researcher's thoughts during the interview, (2) memoing as soon as possible after an interview, and (3) developing and continually editing the researcher's subjectivity statement. These processes were not separate from the data analysis process but embedded into it. During the memoing processes, the researcher attended to the following questions: (1) what stood out?, (2) what surprised you?, (3) what questions still linger?, and (4) what new questions emerged? The researcher's reflexivity is also a part of interpretive phenomenology's process of the hermeneutic circle.

To increase rigor for the current study, Dr. Bermúdez, a bilingual (English and Spanish) and bicultural dissertation committee member who is a Latina immigrant from Honduras, assisted with analyzing the data. This committee member is a licensed marriage and family therapist whose research and clinical practice is based on Latinx family resilience and informed by Latina feminisms. She identifies as a cisgender woman, heterosexual, and able-bodied. She engaged in verbal reflexivity along with the researcher during the data analysis process.

Data Analysis

Data analysis in interpretive phenomenology can vary in its approach, although some common elements characterize this analysis. Overall, data analysis in interpretive phenomenology is a dynamic, iterative spiral—in which analysis flows between the specific and generic and descriptions and interpretations (Peoples, 2021; Smith et al., 2009). This study is based on the philosophical tenets of interpretive or hermeneutic phenomenology; hence, Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) was utilized as the methodology for data analysis.

Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) focuses on how people experience every day and major life events, the significance of these events in their lives, and the meaning that is made of these events (Smith et al., 2009). Hence, IPA is rooted in the theoretical foundations of phenomenology, hermeneutics, and interpretation, with psychology and health psychology perspectives as its origin (Smith et al., 2009). Since Smith (1996) was one of IPA's first and main proponents, this study utilized his 2009 text *Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis: Theory, Method and Research* as a guide for data analysis.

A set of flexible hermeneutic steps for data analysis suggested by Smith and colleagues (2009)—which reflect the process of the hermeneutic circle—were employed. These steps were: (1) data immersion, (2) initial noting, (3) theme development, (4) connection of themes, (5) moving to analyze the next case, and (6) constructing patterns across participants. Steps 1-4 were done for each participant interview, while step 6 was performed by taking all of the interview themes into account. Figure 5 shows a visual depiction of this process, which includes a seventh step to account for the construction of the narrative of the phenomenon, or findings, discussed in Chapter 4 and steps taken to ensure trustworthiness (noted in grey). Next is a description of how these six steps were executed for the current study.

Step 1—Data Immersion

The first round of interviews was transcribed verbatim by the researcher as soon as possible after the interview. The transcription process was done by listening to the interview at a slower speed through an online platform. The researcher often dictated the interview into a Word document by saying each word out loud. The second round of interviews was first transcribed automatically through an online platform since the researcher was immersed in the data. The researcher then listened to the second interview audio at a slower speed and edited the automatic

transcription as needed. All transcriptions were read at least twice. Memos were written as soon as possible after each interview, including the second round of interviews. As it is necessary for interpretive phenomenology, data immersion was an iterative process with the other analysis steps.

Step 2—Initial Noting

Notes were taken during the readings and re-readings of the transcripts in the original Spanish. The researcher developed an initial set of line-by-line notes—which also served as a form of further immersion in the data. Then, for the purpose of trustworthiness (Hays & Singh, 2012), he and the bilingual and bicultural Latina member of his dissertation committee, an expert in qualitative data analysis with Latinx participants and Latina feminisms, developed additional notes together. Notes were written in English, Spanish, and a mix of both languages. These notes focused on three types of comments also suggested by Smith and colleagues (2009):

1. Descriptive comments- Both analysts described the content of what was said in the interviews.
2. Linguistic comments- Both analysts identified particular words or phrases that stood out in relation to the description of the phenomenon. Many words and phrases were kept in the original Spanish when a translation that accounted for culture and context was not possible.
3. Conceptual comments- Both analysts utilized conceptual comments to develop questions that emerged from trying to understand the data, connecting interviews with each other, and linking the data to concepts from Latina feminisms.

During this step, the data were triangulated with social media observations of pre-recorded videos, photos, and posts uploaded by participants or their organizations to social media

accounts, websites, and other online platforms. The participants shared the locations of these posts during the interview process. These posts provided context to what the participants shared during the interview. The posts also served as examples of the experiences to which participants alluded in the interviews. The analysts observed this data throughout the noting process.

Step 3—Theme Development

The initial notes were used to generate emerging themes. By using the initial notes, the researcher was able to focus on the parts or smaller units of the participants' experiences and meaning-making. The emergent themes represented a summary of the initial notes. Appendix I contains the charting template created in Excel and used to generate initial notes and emergent themes for each participant.

Step 4—Connecting Themes

The initial emerging themes were entered into the application Jamboard, which allowed the exploration of the connections among themes remotely but synchronously.[30] By using Jamboard, the initial emergent themes were moved into various groups until a set of super-ordinate themes were constructed. Super-ordinate themes were reached by utilizing abstraction and contextualization. Abstraction involves clustering the developed emerging themes into groups based on patterns (Smith et al., 2009). Contextualization requires attention to temporal, cultural, and narrative themes about particular significant events within a certain case (Smith et al., 2009).

Before considering patterns across participants, a list of follow-up questions was created for the second interview based on the questions that emerged during steps 1-4, along with questions noted by the researcher in his memoing after each interview. The super-ordinate

[30] In-person data analysis was not possible in the earlier parts of the process as a health safety precaution due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

themes were presented to the participants in the follow-up interview for member checking. After the second interview, the researcher engaged in memoing, with particular attention given to connections, contradictions, and questions that emerged between the first and second interviews. The researcher engaged in steps 1-4 again with the data obtained from the second interview.

Considering the new data provided by the participants during the second interview, the super-ordinate themes were revisited using abstraction and contextualization. Revisions of the super-ordinate themes were done in person by both analysts.[31] For this process, the emerging themes were typed, printed, and cut out into individual pieces of paper and placed on a table, as suggested by Smith and colleagues (2009). Both analysts identified keywords or phrases for each emergent theme, often highlighting them with a marker. The emergent themes were moved around until exclusive super-ordinate themes were constructed. After this process, super-ordinate themes were given new names to account for the new data and the context of the information provided by participants. The super-ordinate themes were written on an index card, with the participant‘s initials, and the emergent themes associated with each index card were paper clipped to keep them together. Keeping the emergent themes attached to each super-ordinate theme allowed for a more informed construction of patterns across participants in Step 6. This process was similarly conducted both electronically with Jamboard, as well as physically with notecards and paper, to enable the researcher to see and make sense of data in different ways.

Step 5—Moving to Analysis of the Next Case

This study considered six individual cases. Therefore, steps 1-4 were completed for each case and interview before looking for thematic patterns across the sample.

[31] By this stage of the data analysis process, it was safer to meet in person. Both analysts followed appropriate precautions due to the COVID-19 pandemic (e.g., wore masks inside buildings, met in outside open spaces, etc.).

Step 6—Patterns across Participants

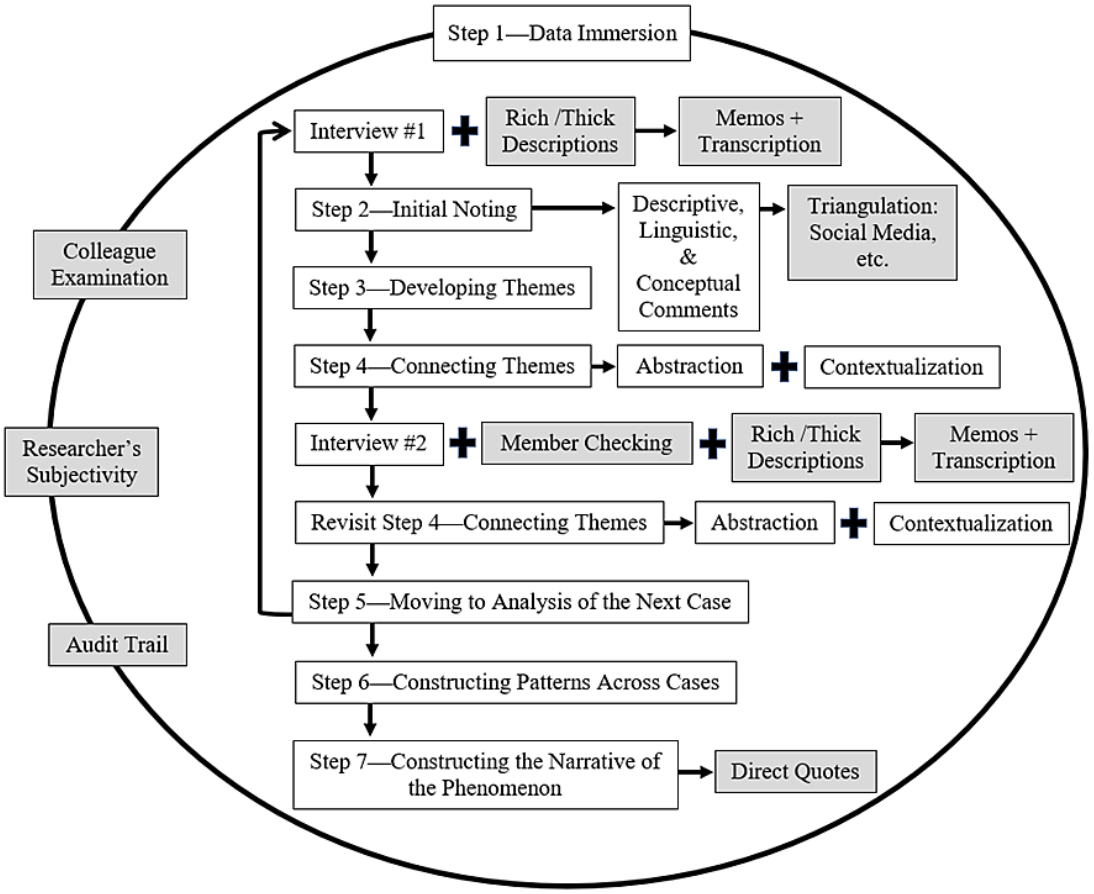
After a set of super-ordinate themes were identified for each participant, all super-ordinate themes were placed on a table. Both analysts identified keywords or phrases, in Spanish and English, for each super-ordinate theme. The super-ordinate themes were moved around until exclusive nested themes or thematic patterns were constructed. In the creation of the thematic patterns, connections and differences across cases and theoretical concepts from Latina feminisms were considered. After this process, the thematic patterns were assigned names that reflected the essence of the phenomenon and were written on a bigger index card. The super-ordinate themes and related emergent themes associated with each thematic pattern were paper clipped together to keep the super-ordinate themes together with emergent themes. At this stage, the super-ordinate themes were detached from a particular question or participant to enable the researcher to see themes that represented the phenomenon for the group as a whole.

Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness in qualitative research alludes to how well a study aligns with its purpose and design. Trustworthiness is crucial for qualitative research since the researcher is a tool for data gathering and analysis. Moreover, unlike most quantitative research, qualitative research findings may not be replicable nor generalizable. Hence, trustworthiness in qualitative research should be established through credibility, transferability, and dependability. Credibility relates to how compatible are the findings with reality. Transferability, on the other hand, is about the reader or user generalizability. Moreover, dependability in qualitative research is not about the replicability of findings but about consistency between the findings and the data collected for that specific study. Therefore, this study addressed trustworthiness by considering credibility, transferability, and dependability.

Figure 5

Data Analysis Process for Current Study



Notes. Based on Smith and colleagues (2009, pp. 82-107). Grey boxes allude to steps related to trustworthiness.

The researcher sought credibility by using triangulation (considering interviews, observations, and documents as stated above), member checking, colleague examination from dissertation committee members, and providing a statement of the researchers' experiences, assumptions, and biases (see "Researcher's Subjectivity Statement"). Member checking was done during the second interview after the researcher identified the first round of themes for an interview. The researcher summarized each theme and related comments under each theme and

shared them with the participant. The participants then added to or clarified the researcher's analysis, and the researcher made edits to the findings as needed.

Transferability was taken into account by providing rich and thick descriptions. These descriptions were obtained during the interviews (including the use of follow-up questions), in which participants described their feelings and experiences in-depth (e.g., sharing detailed examples of the phenomenon, etc.). Many of the descriptions were incorporated into the findings section through the use of participants' direct quotes.

Finally, dependability was also sought through triangulation, colleague examination, and maintaining an audit trail. The audit trail was started on February 2, 2021, when the IRB modification for this study was approved. All tasks related to data collection and analysis were documented in a Word document, including completion and transcription of interviews, memoing exercises, data analysis steps and related findings, and social media observations. Each entry of the audit trail included the date, task(s) completed, next steps, and related links to other documents (i.e., transcripts, memos, data analysis form). Audit trail entries were logged as soon as possible after a task was completed, with many entries logged at the same time a task was being performed.

Besides engaging in the hermeneutic circle and reflexivity practices to keep the researcher's biases visible throughout the research process, Creswell and Poth (2018) encouraged researchers to engage in two or more validation strategies. These validation strategies can be done at the researcher, participants, and readers' levels. The strategies used in this study were triangulation, member checking, immersion in the field, participant collaboration, external audits, rich descriptions, and peer review and consultation.

Quality

Quality in qualitative research can be assessed by ensuring that trustworthiness measures have been applied to a study. However, quality also requires ensuring that all study components come together coherently to reflect adequate research design, methods, and findings. Quality can be assessed for qualitative research in general, phenomenology research in particular, and Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) in specific. Creswell and Poth (2018) provide evaluation criteria for both qualitative research and phenomenological research. Moreover, Smith (2011) established evaluation criteria for using an IPA methodology. Table 7 displays the quality criteria for each approach and an example of how they have been ensured in the current study.

Researcher's Subjectivity Statement

I wrote the first version of this subjectivity statement during the early stages of the research design. The subjectivity statement to follow was continually revised throughout the research process, including data collection and analysis and manuscript write-up. I am aware that the subjectivity statement presented in this document is not a final version and that my reflexivity will continue to evolve as I engage in other constructions of knowledge. I embody a multiplicity of selves that adapt by hiding and highlighting intersections of me based on my social environment. These biopsychosocial, cultural, and spiritual contexts nurture and threaten the safety in which I grow, learn, and become.

Table 7

Quality Criteria for Qualitative Research, Phenomenology, and Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis and the Current Study

	Quality Criteria	Current Study Examples
Qualitative Research[a]	1. *Does the research questions drive the data collection and analysis?*	The research questions are linked to each interview question.
	2. *To what extent are the data collection and analysis techniques competently applied?*	Data analysis was done following Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis's steps.
	3. *Are the researcher's assumptions made explicit?*	A "Researcher's Subjectivity Statement" is included in this manuscript.
	4. *Does the study have overall warrant?*	Previous studies and a preliminary study with members of the community informed the purpose of the current study.
	5. *Does the study have value both in informing and improving practice and in protecting the confidentiality, privacy, and truth telling of participants conducting in an ethical manner?*	Recommendations for social work research, practice, and education are provided.
Phenomenological Research[b]	*Does the phenomenology do the following?*	
	1. *Articulate a clear "phenomenon" to study in a concise way?*	The purpose of the study identifies as specific phenomenon.
	2. *Convey an understanding of the philosophical tenets of phenomenology?*	The philosophical tenets of phenomenology are discussed.
	3. *Use procedures of data analysis in phenomenology?*	Data analysis was done following Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis's steps.
	4. *Communicate the overall essence of the experience of the participants?*	A visual representation of the phenomenon is included.
	5. *Embed reflexivity throughout the study?*	The researcher engaged in reflexivity at multiple points during the study.

	Quality Criteria	Current Study Examples
Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis[c]	1. *Clearly subscribes to the theoretical principles of IPA: it is phenomenological, hermeneutic and idiographic.*	Data analysis was done following Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis's steps.
	2. *Sufficiently transparent so reader can see what was done.*	What was done in each data analysis step is explicitly described.
	3. *Coherent, plausible and interesting analysis.*	The analysis is coherent with each analysis step being linked to the next.
	4. *Sufficient sampling from corpus to show density of evidence for each theme (N4-8: extracts from at least three participants for each theme).*	Extracts from at least three participants are provided for each theme.
	5. *Well focused; offering an in-depth analysis of a specific topic*.	The analysis focuses on a specific topic.
	6. *Data and interpretation are strong*.	Data analysis was done following Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis's steps.
	7. *Reader is engaged and finds it particularly enlightening*.	The Dissertation Committee Members have found the study engaging and enlightening.

[a] Cited from Creswell and Poth (2018, pp. 266-267).

[b] Cited from Creswell and Poth (2018, p. 273).

[c] Cited from Smith (2011, pp. 17).

From engaging in the literature review, to talking to participants, to the seemingly never-ending editing process, my experiences were shaped by how much I could be myself and grow beyond my situational self. At times, the locality of my experiences challenged my preconceived ideas and experiences of what it means to experience, be, and become gender, ethnicity, culture, class, community roles, and so many other intersections. Belongingness as a Brown scholar in a predominantly White institution often shaped how I constructed knowledge in this study, how that knowledge has been translated (frequently quite literally) into this entire document, and how I negotiated colonial epistemologies with my ontological subjectivities. Additionally, as an outsider in trans and gender nonconforming spaces, I strived to comprehend what it means to live gender-expansive lives while embodying Brownness in Latin America and the U.S. As a result, during this study, I have found myself in the thresholds of the academic and *mi gente* (my people), as they are often not allowed to cohabitate in the same space.

This research study has positioned me into my own *nepantla*—I learn from a Latinx community where I don't quite fit while I meet the standards of an academic community where I often don't belong. In this *nepantla* I am not sure I am a bridge; nor am I not sure I have the power or courage to be a *nepantlero*. In this space I grasp for *mis ancestros*, my ancestors—those whose names I will never know and the women in my life whose power and love I will never fully understand. Next, I offer more details about my identities and experiences and how I attempt to connect them to my roles as both researcher and participant of this study.

I am a Puerto Rican, middle-class, cisgender gay man with graduate post-secondary education. My biases and assumptions come from my personal experiences with oppression as a gay man of color who moved to the U.S. mainland in my early 20s. However, I also hold privileged identities, such as being a U.S. citizen and never experiencing being undocumented in

the U.S. To this point in my life, I also have never experienced transphobia or violence due to my gender identity and expression. I also have social status and economic privilege as a result of having opportunities to obtain college degrees and have professional experiences. Moreover, as a bilingual and bicultural licensed clinical social worker with professional experiences in various work settings, I assumed that the experiences of violence and oppression faced by my previous and current TGNC Latinx clients could be generalized to other TGNC Latinx individuals. As a social worker, I also assume that there is an inherent power imbalance between sociopolitical systems and marginalized communities such as TGNC Latinx individuals.

As a researcher, my previous experience with various research projects has informed how I conceptualize the experiences and work of Latinas in the U.S. For example, having worked for two years as a student researcher with a community-based participatory research project, I learned from the *promotoras* (community health workers) about their experiences as leaders in the Southern U.S. During the data analysis process, I often made comparisons between the experiences of the *promotoras* and the participants of this study in terms of their work, sense of self, community connectedness, challenges, and strength. Hence, I utilized my personal and professional experiences as a starting point for data gathering and analysis while trying to recognize and note my biases, assumptions, and gaps in knowledge through reflexivity and trustworthiness-related exercises. The findings presented next account for my reflexivity and the role of my experiences, biases, and assumptions in their construction.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

The current study aimed to explore the meaning that trans Latinas[32] make of their lived experiences as they generate change in the Southern U.S. The study's findings will be presented by employing Smith and colleague's (2009) suggestions for this step. This chapter starts with a description of the sample or cases, both as a group and individually. Then an overall description of the essence of the phenomenon is introduced, followed by a detailed discussion of each thematic pattern that makes this phenomenon. The thematic patterns are supported by participants' direct quotes in the original Spanish, followed by the English translation in parenthesis.[33] Some information has been added in brackets to provide context for the quotes. The chapter concludes with a visual depiction of the essence of the phenomenon as a way to summarize the findings.

Overall Description of Cases

A total of six participants were part of the study. All participants identified as women or trans women. Their ages ranged from the early 20s to early 50s. At the time of the interviews, the participants lived in the following Southern U.S. states: Georgia, Louisiana, North Carolina, and Texas. Although being an immigrant was not a criterion for being part of the study, all participants had migrated to the U.S. Most participants were originally from Mexico, and one

[32] In this chapter, the terms *trans Latinas*, *trans Latina immigrants*, *trans women*, and *women* will be used depending on the context of the participants' experiences and quotes. Not all the trans Latinas referred to in this chapter are immigrants, and not all of the trans women that interact with the participants are Latinas.

[33] The length is this chapter is due to the need for presenting participants' quotes on the original Spanish, as well as the English translation for these quotes. This approach honors the participants' voices and reflects Latina feminists' goal for liberation and empowerment.

participant was from Honduras. Participants had been living in the U.S. from less than five years to more than thirty years. Four participants were in a relationship with a significant other, one was a widow, and one was single. Three participants had not completed high school in either their countries of origin or the U.S., while three participants had attended college or technical school. They all reported living with others, including their significant others and other trans women. Participants reported working with their communities from less than five years to more than thirty years. Next are individual descriptions of each participant/case.

Individual Descriptions of Cases

All six participants reported common experiences regarding their struggles, work, and successes. However, these experiences varied based on their social location, including the state where they resided in the U.S., their age, income, education, social support, how long they had been presenting as women in public, how long they had been in the U.S. as immigrants, and the number of years they had been working with their communities. Table 8 describes all participants, their demographic information, and the super-ordinate themes constructed from their responses to each question during their individual interviews. These super-ordinate themes served as a basis for constructing a narrative of each participant's experiences. The number of super-ordinate themes per participant ranged from four to seven. Following are individual descriptions of the participants, including their demographics and experiences.

Case #1—Ale

Ale (pronouns: she/ella) is a heterosexual trans woman in her late 20s. She is originally from Honduras and had been in the U.S. for less than 5 years. Ale resided in the state of Louisiana, where she had been working with the community for less than 5 years. Ale did not attend college and was self-employed. She was in a relationship and lived with her partner and

other trans women. When asked whom does she see when she looks at herself in the mirror, Ale responded:

> *[…] Veo a una mujer que ha pasado por mucho, que sufrió mucho, que pasó por mucho y que hasta el sol de hoy sigue luchando. […] Entonces, verme hoy en día es una inspiración tan grande que siento. El verme como estoy yo y todo lo que pase, todo lo que viví en el pasado desde mi niñez—todos mis traumas, todos mis dolores. Eso es algo tan inspirador, [el] verme ahora frente a un espejo, porque me siento orgullosa de quien soy, de donde estoy, de cómo me veo e igual tengo esa motivación por verme a más en el futuro.*
>
> ([…] I see a woman that has been through a lot, that suffered a lot, that went through a lot and to this date, continues to fight. […] Then, looking at myself today, I feel a big inspiration. To see how I am doing now and everything I went through, what I lived in the past since my childhood—all my traumas, all my pains. That is something so inspirational, [to] see myself now in front of a mirror, because I feel proud of who I am, of where I am, of how I look, and I have that motivation to see even more in the future.)

Ale reported that she and other women had suffered discrimination, violence, abuse, and homelessness from others (including family members) who are not accepting of them being trans Latina immigrants. In response to these negative experiences, she and other women have had to foster supportive and loving LGBT[34] communities. Ale said that despite the challenges that trans immigrant women face, they are fighting and succeeding in the U.S. Because she was helped when she was in need, she now pays it forward helping other members of the LGBT community,

[34] In this chapter, the terms *LGBT*, *LGBTQ*, and *LGBTQ+* will be used depending on the context of the participants' experiences and quotes.

particularly trans Latina women. Because of these relationships, she is helped by others when she is in need. For Ale, trans Latinas are overcoming challenges, and she feels proud of it.

Case #2—Grecia

Grecia (pronouns: she/ella) is a woman in her early 50s. She is originally from Mexico and has been in the U.S. for over 20 years. Grecia resided in the state of North Carolina, where she had been working with the community for around 20 years. Grecia completed college in Mexico and worked full-time in North Carolina. She was in a relationship and lived with her partner. When asked whom does she see when she looks at herself in the mirror, Grecia responded:

> *[Veo] a una mujer realizada y que está cumpliendo pues sus sueños. Que le costó mucho trabajo, eso sí. Pero, sí. Y a través de mucho tiempo, pues bueno, me tocó pasar por muchas cosas fuertes. Y como muchos de mis sueños se están viendo cristalizados finalmente.*
>
> ([I see] an empowered woman, and that is accomplishing her dreams. That it took her a lot of work, mind you. But yes. And through a lot of the time, well, I had to go through a lot of hard things. And how many of my dreams are finally being crystallized.)

Grecia stated that she had been advocating to meet the needs of trans Latinas in North Carolina. In these efforts, she sees strength in numbers and in building community. Grecia said that caring for other trans Latinas is a form of self-care since it makes her feel at peace. Grecia expressed that there are rewards in *superarse*,[35] or better oneself by overcoming adversity, and in demanding respect and dignity for trans Latinas. As someone who has taken the opportunities to

[35] *Superarse* is a term in Spanish that does not have a literal translation. Although it may mean to overcome, *superarse* is about bettering oneself in the process of overcoming challenges or adversity.

better herself, Grecia said that many trans Latinas see her as a model for what it means to take opportunities and face challenges.

Case #3—Lucy

Lucy (pronouns: she/ella) is a trans woman in her mid-40s. She is originally from Mexico and had been in the U.S. for around 20 years. Lucy resided in the state of North Carolina, where she had been working with the community for less than 5 years. Lucy completed a technical degree after completing her GED in the U.S. She worked full-time. She was in a relationship and lived with her partner. When asked whom does she see when she looks at herself in the mirror, Lucy responded:

> *Yo veo a Lucy. A una mujer desde mi infancia, o sea, desde que tengo uso de razón. […] Una mujer, que me hubiera gustado nacer biológicamente una mujer. Ese era mi sueño. Ese era mi sentir dentro de mí, de mi corazón y de mi alma, mi espíritu, mi cerebro. Siempre vi una mujer.*
>
> (I see Lucy. A woman since my infancy, I mean, since I have use of reason. […] A woman, that I would have liked to had been born a woman. That was my dream. That was the feeling inside of me, of my heart and my soul, my spirit, my brain. I always saw a woman.)

Lucy reported that trans Latina immigrants are affected by transphobia and xenophobia in the Southern U.S. These experiences of discrimination have led trans Latina immigrants to struggling with a lack of and barriers to services. However, Lucy said that her community is strong, united, supportive, and inclusive. While working with the community, she does not see herself as a leader but as a trusted connector, educator, and activist. In her role, she also performs caring roles typically attributed to Latina women, like making sure other women, her family, and

her partner are well. Lucy expressed that she is respected in the community and that all trans Latina immigrants must be respected as well.

Case #4—Paloma

Paloma (pronouns: she/ella) is a woman in her early 50s. She is originally from Mexico and first arrived in the U.S. more than 30 years ago, occasionally living in other countries. Paloma had been working with the community in the U.S. and other countries for over 30 years. She resided in the state of Texas. Paloma did not attend college. She worked part-time besides being self-employed. She was a widow and lived with a friend who is also a trans woman. When asked whom does she see when she looks at herself in the mirror, Paloma responded:

> *Veo a una mujer. Una mujer construida. Una mujer empoderada. Una mujer que viene reflejándose en un espejo. Pero también cansada en cuestiones de poder legislar, [de] hacer [que] los gobiernos [aseguren] un respeto hacia una persona. Yo veo a una mujer de lucha.*
>
> (I see a woman. A constructed woman. An empowered woman. A woman that has been reflecting herself in a mirror. But also tired regarding being able to legislate, [of] making [that] the governments [ensure] respect for a person. I see a fighting woman.[36])

Paloma stated that trans Latina immigrants experience needs, challenges, and obstacles at the micro and macro levels. However, Paloma also said that change comes from working together and having mutual respect among trans Latina immigrants and with non-trans Latina immigrants. For Paloma, collective activism leads to social change. She has endured violence

[36] *Mujer de lucha* can be translated to fighting woman. However, it could also mean a woman who is dedicated to fighting for a cause.

and has become a respected leader and activist at the local, national, and international levels. Paloma shared that she is motivated by her family, other trans activists, and her legacy.

Case #5—Samantha

Samantha (pronouns: she/ella) is a heterosexual trans woman in her early 30s. She is originally from Mexico and had been in the U.S. for over 10 years. Samantha resided in the state of Georgia, where she had been working with the community for more than 5 years but less than 10. Samantha did not attend college. She worked part-time besides being self-employed. She was not in a relationship and lived with other trans women. When asked whom does she see when she looks at herself in the mirror, Samantha responded:

> *[…] Veo a esa mujer fuerte que es capaz de hacer muchas cosas. Que es capaz de trabajar y siempre le gusta estar haciendo lo mejor de sí misma. Trabajar obviamente para mejorar su capacidad, tanto interior como exterior. Esa mujer resiliente: que de dónde vino y a dónde está y a dónde puede llegar.*
>
> ([…] I see that strong woman that is capable of doing many things. That is capable of working and always likes to be doing the best of herself. Working obviously to improve her capacity, both inside and out. That resilient woman: where she comes from and where she is, and where she can go.)

Samantha has faced violence and discrimination for being Indigenous, trans, Latina, and immigrant throughout her life. Samantha also said that besides violence and discrimination, the challenges surrounding her work include a lack of finances and support from others, including community-based organizations. However, Samantha encouraged other trans Latina immigrants wanting to generate change in their communities to resist and not give up. For Samantha, trans Latina immigrants must visibilize and raise consciousness about their stories and the

community's strengths. In helping others visibilize their stories, her life has become her work, and her work has become her life. Hence, Samantha sees herself as constantly working for social justice, equality, and non-discrimination for her community. In her efforts, Samantha works systemically for change.

Case #6-Vanessa

Vanessa (pronouns: she/ella) is a trans woman in her late 20s. She is originally from Mexico and had been in the U.S. for almost 20 years. Vanessa resided in the state of North Carolina, where she had been working with the community for less than 5 years. Vanessa completed some college. She worked full-time plus had her own business. She was in a relationship and lived with her partner. When asked whom does she see when she looks at herself in the mirror, Vanessa responded:

> *Miro tal vez a la mujer que me hubiera gustado ser de nacimiento. Pero también a la vez, me veo como una mujer transgénero, luchadora y que me gusta salir adelante*.[37]
>
> (I see maybe the woman I would have like to see since birth. But at the same time, I see myself as a transgender woman, a fighter, and that I like to press forward.)

Vanessa said that the trans Latina community has many needs, and she has a vision to address those needs. Vanessa also expressed that she is becoming a trans *luchadora*,[38] or fighter. In her *lucha*, Vanessa feels supported, affirmed, and rewarded for doing the work. This support comes from other trans Latinas, her boss, and her partner. In return, Vanessa supports other trans Latinas.

[37] *Salir adelante* is a term in Spanish that does not have a literal translation. Although it may mean to press forward, *salir adelante* can also mean to overcome challenges or adversity, to keep going, and to improve one's conditions.
[38] *Luchar* and *luchadora* are terms in Spanish that do not have a literal translation. Although it may mean to fight or be a woman fighter respectively, a *luchadora* is a woman whose fight is to make things better for herself and others.

Table 8

Summary of the Description of Individual Participants and their Experiences

Participant/Case Pseudonym	Demographic Information	Super-Ordinate Themes
Ale	• ***Gender***: Trans woman • ***Age***: Late 20s • ***State***: Louisiana • ***Years active with the community***: Less than 5 years • ***Country of origin***: Honduras • ***Time living in the U.S. since migration***: Less than 5 years • ***Formal Education***: Did not attend college. • ***Employment***: Self-employed • ***Relationship status***: In a relationship • ***Living situation***: Lived with her partner and other trans women.	1. Suffering in response to being trans immigrant women. 2. Fostering supportive and loving LGBT communities 3. Fighting and succeeding in the U.S. despite the challenges of trans immigrant women 4. She was helped, so now she pays it forward, and when in need, good comes back to her. 5. We are overcoming despite the challenges, and I feel proud of it.
Grecia	• ***Gender***: Woman • ***Age***: Early 50s • ***State***: North Carolina • ***Years active with the community***: Approximately 20 years • ***Country of origin***: Mexico • ***Time living in the U.S. since migration***: Over 20 years • ***Formal Education***: Completed college in Mexico. • ***Employment***: Full-time • ***Relationship status***: In a relationship • ***Living situation***: Lived with her partner	1. Advocating to meet the needs 2. Strength in numbers and community 3. Caring for each other as self-care 4. There are rewards in *superarse* (better oneself by overcoming adversity) and in demanding respect and dignity. 5. Models taking opportunities and facing challenges
Lucy	• ***Gender***: Trans woman • ***Age***: Mid-40s • ***State***: North Carolina • ***Years active with the community***: Less than 5 years • ***Country of origin***: Mexico • ***Time living in the U.S. since migration***: Approximately 20 years • ***Formal Education***: Completed a technical degree in the U.S. • ***Employment***: Full-time • ***Relationship status***: In a relationship	1. Trans Latina immigrants are affected by transphobia and xenophobia in the South. 2. Struggling with lack of and barriers to services 3. Her community is strong, united, supportive, and inclusive. 4. Doesn't see herself as a leader but as a trusted connector, educator, and activist 5. Womanhood and caring roles 6. I am respected, we all must be respected.

Participant/Case Pseudonym	Demographic Information	Super-Ordinate Themes
	• ***Living situation***: Lived with her partner	
Paloma	• ***Gender***: Woman • ***Age***: Early 50s • ***State***: Texas • ***Years active with the community***: Over 30 years • ***Country of origin***: Mexico • ***Time living in the U.S. since migration***: Over 30 years • ***Formal Education***: Did not attend college. • ***Employment***: Part-time besides being self-employed • ***Relationship status***: Widow • ***Living situation***: Lived with a friend who is also a trans woman	1. Needs, challenges, and obstacles exist at the micro and macro levels. 2. Change comes from working together and mutual respect. 3. Collective activism for social change 4. She has endured violence and has become a respected leader and activist. 5. Motivated by family, trans activists, and her legacy
Samantha	• ***Gender***: Trans woman • ***Age***: Early 30s • ***State***: Georgia • ***Years active with the community***: More than 5 years but less than 10 • ***Country of origin***: Mexico • ***Time living in the U.S. since migration***: Over 10 years • ***Formal Education***: Did not attend college. • ***Employment***: Part-time besides being self-employed • ***Relationship status***: Not in a relationship • ***Living situation***: Lived with other trans women	1. Has faced violence and discrimination for being Indigenous, trans, Latina, and immigrant 2. Lack of finances and support are challenges. 3. Resist and do not give up 4. We must visibilize and raise consciousness about our stories and the strengths of the community. 5. Her life is her work, and her work is her life. 6. Sees herself as constantly working for social justice, equality, and non-discrimination for her community 7. Working systemically for change
Vanessa	• ***Gender***: Trans woman • ***Age***: Late 20s • ***State***: North Carolina • ***Years active with the community***: Less than 5 years • ***Country of origin***: Mexico • ***Time living in the U.S. since migration***: Almost 20 years • ***Formal Education***: Completed some college. • ***Employment***: Full-time plus had her own business • ***Relationship status***: In a relationship • ***Living situation***: Lived with her partner	1. Needs and her vision 2. Becoming a trans *luchadora* 3. Feels supported, affirmed, and rewarded for doing the work 4. Supporting the women

Overview of Findings

Overall, all six participants described their experiences as generators of change in their communities similarly. They all face struggles at the micro, mezzo, and macro levels due to others' responses to their multiple identities as trans Latina immigrants. These experiences have led them to fight against their and their communities' struggles by engaging in their work as "*luchadoras sociales*," or fighters for social change. Their work is possible mainly because they are supported by their communities and other trans Latina immigrants. In this process, they also care for others, particularly other trans Latina immigrants. Next is a detailed description of this phenomenon and how it relates to each of the participants.

Thematic Patterns Across Cases

The lived experiences of the six trans Latinas who participated in this research as they generate change for their communities in the Southern U.S., how their multiple identities influence their experiences of empowerment, and how they experience and overcome challenges can be summarized in three thematic patterns across cases.[39] These three thematic patterns were constructed as follows: (1) "*Mi comunidad transgénero tiene muchas necesidades*": Trans Latina immigrants' struggles; (2) "*Me llamo luchadora social*": Being and doing social change; and (3) "*Juntas todas*": Strength in caring for each other. Table 9 contains all three thematic patterns and the related super-ordinate themes per case. Participant's super-ordinate themes are reflected on all of the thematic patterns. The lived experiences of the participants are not linear or compartmentalized. Hence, there are often overlaps between the thematic patterns—showing

[39] After the data was analyzed, five thematic patterns were constructed: (1) Trans Latina immigrant face intersectional struggles at the micro, mezzo, and macro levels; (2) Becoming a *luchadora*; (3) Strength in community support; (4) Caring for others as Latinas; and (5) Working for social change. However, the writing of the findings is another step in the data analysis process in which the data and the themes are revisited (Smith et al., 2009). This process reflects the hermeneutic circle. During the writing process, thematic patterns 2 and 5 were merged, as well as 3 and 4.

how the participants' experiences are interconnected and the complexity of their lived experiences. The thematic patterns are discussed next, following the structure for presenting findings based on an IPA methodology. Each thematic pattern is described, then the themes are linked to each participant and relevant participants' quotes, followed by the author's analytic comments (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014).

Table 9

Thematic Patterns and Related Super-Ordinate Themes by Cases

Thematic Patterns	Super-Ordinate Themes by Cases
"*Mi Comunidad Transgénero Tiene Muchas Necesidades*": Trans Latina Immigrants' Struggles	• ***Ale***- Suffering in response to being trans immigrant women. • ***Grecia***- Advocating to meet the needs • ***Lucy***- Trans Latina immigrants are affected by transphobia and xenophobia in the South; Struggling with lack of and barriers to services • ***Paloma***- Needs, challenges, and obstacles exist at the micro and macro levels • ***Samantha***- Has faced violence and discrimination for being Indigenous, trans, Latina, and immigrant; Lack of finances and support are challenges • ***Vanessa***- Needs and her vision
"*Me Llamo Luchadora Social*": Being and Doing Social Change	• ***Ale***- Fighting and succeeding in the U.S. despite the challenges of trans immigrant women; We are overcoming despite the challenges, and I feel proud of it • ***Grecia***- Models taking opportunities and facing challenges; There are rewards in *superarse* (better oneself by overcoming adversity) and in demanding respect and dignity • ***Lucy***- Doesn't see herself as a leader, but as a trusted connector, educator, and activist; I am respected, we all must be respected. • ***Paloma***- She has endured violence and has become a respected leader and activist; Change comes from working together and mutual respect; Collective activism for social change • ***Samantha***- Resist and do not give up; Working systemically for change; Sees herself as constantly working for social justice, equality, and non-discrimination for her community. • ***Vanessa***- Becoming a trans *luchadora*

Thematic Patterns	Super-Ordinate Themes by Cases
"*Juntas Todas*": Strength in Caring for Each Other	• ***Ale***- Fostering supportive and loving LGBT communities; She was helped, so now she pays it forward, and when in need, good comes back to her • ***Grecia***- Strength in numbers and community; Caring for each other as self-care • ***Lucy***- Her community is strong, united, supportive, and inclusive; Womanhood and caring roles • ***Paloma***- Motivated by family, trans activists, and her legacy • ***Samantha***- We must visibilize and raise consciousness about our stories and the strengths of the community; Her life is her work, and her work is her life • ***Vanessa***- Feels supported, affirmed, and rewarded for doing the work; Supporting the women

"*Mi Comunidad Transgénero Tiene Muchas Necesidades*": Trans Latina Immigrants' Struggles

All women reported the intersectional struggles that trans Latina immigrants endure at the micro, mezzo, and macro levels.[40] These struggles were experienced in the form of transphobia and xenophobia-related violence and discrimination in their countries of origin and in the U.S. Vanessa said, "*mi comunidad transgénero tiene muchas necesidades*" ("mi transgender community has a lot of needs."). According to the participants, some of the struggles that affect trans Latina immigrants include a lack of support from their families and communities, police violence, a lack of services and resources in the Southern U.S., the negative dynamics that emerge when they are engaging in work with their communities, and the emotional toll that these experiences take on trans Latina immigrants.

[40] Generally, micro levels include individuals and couples, mezzo levels include families and communities, and macro levels include systems that directly affect society at large (e.g., government, policies, etc.). These levels will be discussed in the context of the participants' experiences. For more information about these levels, see Bronfenbrenner (1979).

For many of the participants, transphobia was experienced in the form of violence and discrimination starting at a young age. Ale, for example, shared that she experienced a lack of family support in Honduras when she was thrown out of her house by her father at the age of 9 for wearing feminine clothes and accessories. Ale described what it was like for her to be homeless as a young child:

> *Fui una persona que vivió en las calles y dormía en los parques, en las bancas, en la calle y fue algo muy fuerte. […] Entonces fue un reto muy grande para no estar en drogas, no me fuera a pasar nada, aprender a pelear y defenderse uno en la calle para poder sobrevivir porque llegaba alguien que quería hacer daño por verte pequeño, inocente. Entonces era un reto sobrevivir en un lugar donde no tenías el apoyo de nadie, no te ibas a poder defender y tenías que sobrevivir […].*
> (I was a person who lived on the streets and slept in parks, on benches, on the street, and it was something very tough. [...] So it was a very big challenge not to be on drugs, so that nothing would happen to me, to learn to fight and defend oneself on the street in order to survive because someone would come along who wanted to hurt you because you seemed young, innocent. So it was a challenge to survive in a place where you had no support from anyone, you were not going to be able to defend yourself, and you had to survive [...]).

Being thrown out of her house as a child was the beginning of a series of hardships endured by Ale due to transphobia and xenophobia. For example, she said that she had to present as a gay man in Honduras to be able to work, since trans women were not allowed in the factory where she worked.

Once in the U.S., Ale said she has had challenges with obtaining employment due to her limited English proficiency. Financial instability led Ale and her housemates to become homeless twice in the U.S. after they were unable to pay rent. During one of the instances in which the police were almost called to evict them, Ale expressed she and her housemates feared they would face discrimination. They feared that the police would not protect them but instead judge them for their trans identities and limited English proficiency and hinder their asylum cases. Ale's experience shows a continuum of homelessness due to homophobia and transphobia that transcends geopolitical borders, and that is experienced at the familial and systemic levels. However, Ale was not the only participant who had experienced violence as a young person.

Paloma expressed that she also survived violence at age 17 in Mexico when she was walking back from school and was detained by the police. At that age, Paloma appeared what she called physically "androgynous" (e.g., long hair) and was seen as immoral by the police. This altercation ended with Paloma being stabbed by the police. During the interview, Paloma lifted her blouse and showed the scars left by being stabbed, which have marked that incident forever on her body. Like Ale, Paloma said she migrated to a bigger city within her country and then to the U.S. in search of better conditions. However, Paloma did not find a more dignified treatment in the U.S. She shared that trans women in the U.S. were treated somewhat better for their gender identity but were deported for being undocumented and doing sex work to survive. These experiences of discrimination across countries led Paloma to advocate for human rights at the international level.

Paloma reported that many of the challenges faced by trans Latina immigrants are due to not being seen as humans by politicians and society. For Paloma, trans Latina immigrants are seen as illegal in many countries, not only due to their documentation status but also due to their

gender identity—making transness, being a trans person, an illegal identity within societies. Paloma said that this leads to the biggest challenge of trans women not believing that they can affect change, gain consciousness, and use their rights. Paloma said:

> *Un reto no es conquistar históricamente legislaciones a favor nuestra. El reto es que nuestras compañeras crean que se pueden y se deben hacer cambios para que ellas levanten la voz. Ese es un reto. Ese es un reto. Porque yo si hago una legislación con algún gobierno y ganamos algo, pues si nadie accede al derecho que hemos ganado pues entonces no funciona. Entonces creo que uno de los retos es hacer que las compañeras crean realmente que podemos conquistar los temas políticos y sociales para hacer uso de ellos. […] El reto más grande es que lleguen con nosotras, creen conciencia, se empoderen y se mantengan ahí para que podamos conquistar el mundo entero.*
>
> (A challenge is not to historically conquer legislation in our favor. The challenge is for our fellow women to believe that changes can and should be made so that they can raise their voices. That is a challenge. That is a challenge. Because if I make a legislation with some government and we win something, if no one accesses the right that we have won, then it does not work. So I think that one of the challenges is to make our fellow women really believe that we can conquer political and social issues to make use of them. [...] The biggest challenge is for them to come to us, create awareness, become empowered, and stay there so that we can conquer the whole world.)

The lack of consideration towards the humanity of trans Latina immigrants at the macro level affects them emotionally at the micro and mezzo levels.

All participants agreed that the Southern U.S. is not nearly equipped to handle the needs and challenges of trans Latina immigrants as in states like California or New York. Lucy alluded to the intersectional struggles of trans Latina immigrants in the South, sharing that trans women are the most discriminated against among the LGBT community and Latinx people in North Carolina are afraid of the state's anti-immigrant sentiment. These struggles are compounded with the lack of medical and social services and resources for trans Latina immigrants in her state and the women's fear of discrimination when accessing services. Vanessa added that the trans Latina immigrant community in North Carolina is also in need of access to legal resources, being able to legally change their names on documents from their countries of origin, and mental health services. Vanessa said that these needs became even more evident during the COVID-19 pandemic. Vanessa shared about the experiences of the trans Latina women she served during the pandemic:

> *Entonces las participantes se frustraron, necesitaban esta ayuda [de salud] mental. Más que nada porque como vuelvo y te repito, empezaban a hacerles falta el dinero pues para poder seguir solventando sus gastos económicos, su renta, sus biles. Entonces creo que este fue uno de los problemas, el virus. Porque [no estaban preparadas] mentalmente para poder recibir un impacto así. Porque llegó al caso que muchas de ellas se tuvieron que mantener encerradas en sus casas. Entonces al esto pasar, obviamente, pues se frustra uno al estar encerrado en un cuarto de cuatro paredes. Pues empecé a tener muchas llamadas de chicas de, "Vanessa necesito con quien platicar."*
>
> (So the participants were frustrated, they needed this mental [health] help. More than anything else because, as I repeat, they were beginning to lack money to be

> able to continue paying their expenses, their rent, their bills. So I think this was one of the problems, the virus. Because [they were not prepared] mentally to receive such an impact. Because it came to the point that many of them had to stay locked up in their homes. So when this happened, obviously, you get frustrated being locked up in a room with four walls. Well, I started to get a lot of calls from girls, "Vanessa, I need someone to talk to.")

Like the other participants in this study, Vanessa and Lucy have been working to address the needs of trans Latina immigrants in their communities. However, in doing this work, all participants shared that they face challenges as trans Latina immigrants generating change with their communities.

The participants' work was affected by having to build resource structures, discrimination within the LGBTQ+ community, abusive collaborations with other agencies, and not being able to finance their efforts. Grecia, for example, said that she had a difficult time accessing providers in North Carolina to make connections that could result in access to services for other trans Latina immigrants. Grecia shared that medical providers in the community often doubted the legitimacy of her role and the group she was coordinating:

> *En cuestión cuando para entrar a las clínicas a hablar con doctores, eso fue lo que más trabajo me pudo haber costado a mí. Porque [los doctores] no sabían quién era. A veces pensaban que, o que estaba jugando, que era una broma, o que ni siquiera existía ese grupo.*
>
> (In terms of getting into the clinics to talk to doctors, that might have been the hardest thing for me. Because [the doctors] did not know who I was. Sometimes

they thought that either I was playing, that it was a joke, or that the group did not even exist.)

Additionally, the participants shared that even when they gained access to providers and other professional circles, they continued to endure barriers and discrimination as trans Latina immigrants.

Samantha shared that she has been blatantly discriminated against at professional conferences for being Indigenous, Latina, non-English speaker, and not dressing like the rest of the conference attendees. Moreover, as Samantha tries to form alliances that support her and her work, she finds herself and other leaders being used and abused by their community partners and organizations. Samantha said:

> *[Hay] organizaciones [a las] que tú pides ayuda, pero en realidad, el trabajo lo estamos haciendo nosotros. ¿Quién realmente está haciendo? Muchas veces solemos decir lo hicimos entre todas cuando lo hiciste tú sola. Por lo mismo, porque el sistema te obliga a decir que lo hicimos entre todos porque se supone que estás dando un ejemplo de trabajar en comunidad, pero en realidad lo hiciste tú sola, en realidad trabajaste tú sola, te moviste tú sola. Eso sería para mí como una parte de, ¿Te estás vendiendo? ¿Te estás prostituyendo? ¿Y prostituyes a la vez a tu comunidad? Únicamente para quedar bien. Únicamente para que te den dinero, para que te den apoyo. […] Pero en realidad quizás no necesitamos toda esa burocracia que es tan está regida. Lo que necesitamos es solidaridad y apoyarnos uno mismo y empezar a trabajar y educarnos entre nosotros.*
>
> ([There are] organizations [that] you ask for help, but in reality, we are doing the work ourselves. Who is really doing it? Many times, we tend to say we all did it

> together when you did it by yourself. For the same reason, because the system forces you to say that we all did it together because you are supposed to be giving an example of working in community, but in reality, you did it by yourself, in reality you worked by yourself, you moved by yourself. That would be to me like a part of, are you selling out? Are you prostituting yourself? And are you prostituting your community at the same time? Just to make yourself look good. Just to get money, just to get support. But maybe we don't really need all that bureaucracy that is so regimented. What we need is solidarity and to support each other and to start working and educating each other.)

The bureaucracy that Samantha mentioned has impacted the participants' ability to support their work financially, which further widens the gaps in services and increases the needs of trans Latina immigrants.

The communities' challenges are so prominent that when the participants were asked to describe their communities, most described them in the context of their needs and challenges. However, these intersectional struggles at the micro, mezzo, and macro levels have motivated the participants of this study to fight against injustices and work to generate change for their communities. Their work is based on the hope for a better future in which all trans Latina immigrants have respect, safety, dignity, and acceptance.

"*Me Llamo Luchadora Social*": Being and Doing Social Change

All participants identified a desire to address their struggles and the struggles of other trans Latina immigrants as a motivator for generating change in their communities. Paloma said, "*me llamo luchadora social*" ("I call myself a social fighter"). By becoming *luchadoras* for social change, the women are generating change for themselves and others, particularly other

trans Latina immigrants in the Southern U.S. As *luchadoras* for social change, the participants described their various roles, their experiences as trans Latinas generating change, and their hopes for themselves and their communities.

When asked about her roles in generating change in the community, Ale described herself as a source of refuge for others who have fled violence and discrimination. As a source of refuge, she also fights for their rights and gives them hope. She stated:

> *El trabajo que realizo pues sería mayormente siempre es el trabajo de refugio. Poner bajo un amparo a esas personas que no tienen quién [vele] por ellas, las cuales vienen inmigrando por cuestiones de discriminación, violencia, personas que están a punto de que las quieran asesinar y vienen huyendo de otros países para poder proteger sus vidas. Creo que mi trabajo en esta comunidad seria proteger, resguardeser y pelear por los derechos de los cuales la comunidad tienen pues en aquí en Estados Unidos.*
>
> (The work I do is mainly refuge for people who have no one to take care of them. To protect those people who have no one to [watch over] them, who come to the U.S. because of discrimination, violence, people who are about to be murdered, and who are fleeing from other countries in order to protect their lives. I think my job in this community would be to protect, safeguard, and fight for the rights that the community has here in the United States.)

Ale shared that she needed refuge when she first entered the U.S., so she can relate to the struggles of trans Latina immigrants who are seeking a safer life. At the beginning of this study, Ale provided housing and emotional comfort to members of the LGBTQ+ community in her

state. Unlike other participants, Ale was not employed by an agency, so her work was guided by the needs of those who sought her help.

Grecia has also helped her community beyond her official roles at work. She shared that the needs of the trans Latina women she worked with extended beyond what a single grant could offer them. By going beyond her official role, Grecia expressed that she sought to meet the challenges that she knew other trans Latina immigrants had to face, in part because of her struggles in North Carolina. Often enduring the same challenges as other trans Latina immigrants, some participants saw themselves as just generating change for the community.

Although the participants were seen in the community as trans Latinas generating change, not all of them saw themselves as leaders or activists. For instance, Lucy saw herself as someone who was trying to generate change as an equal member of her community. To describe her role, Lucy explained:

> *Quiero rectificar que yo no, yo no soy una activista. Yo no soy activista. […] Yo no me considero líder tampoco, no, no va conmigo eso. Yo no me considero un líder. Para mí, todas somos líderes porque todas tenemos un propio objetivo, todas juntas, no Lucy. […] Y yo me considero como cualquier otra chica, de chica común y corriente, transgénero, que está tratando de dar una ayuda o una poca de información a las chicas que la necesitan.*
>
> (I want to rectify that I am not, I am not an activist. I am not an activist. [...] I do not consider myself a leader either, no, that does not suit me. I do not consider myself a leader. For me, we are all leaders because we all have the same objective, all together, not Lucy. [...] And I consider myself like any other girl, as an ordinary

girl, transgender, who is trying to give some help or some information to the girls who need it.)

In this description, Lucy suggests that one does not need to be in charge of a group of people to generate change. For Lucy, her role is only possible in a collective context, one that equally distributes the capacity for change among its members and in which all the women are *luchadoras*. Doing social change and becoming a *luchadora social* transcends one individual.

After working for more than thirty years to generate changes at the local, national, and international levels, Paloma shared she now sees her main role as a community organizer and educator of emerging trans Latina leaders in Texas. Paloma stated:

> *A mí me gusta trabajar mucho con las nuevas generaciones para que ellas creen conciencia y se den cuenta de la realidad de lo que estamos pasando. Me gusta mucho formar líderes, líderes, líderes políticos, líderes activistas y que ellas creen conciencia […]. Entonces me encanta verlas a ellas poder negociar, salir a la calle y negociar con la ciudadanía, que es a la primera parte que debemos de educar.*
>
> (I like to work a lot with the new generations so that they create consciousness and realize the reality of what we are going through. I really like to train leaders, leaders, political leaders, activist leaders and that they create awareness [...]. So I love to see them being able to negotiate, to go out to the streets and negotiate with the citizens, which is the first part we have to educate.)

For Paloma, having a continuum of leaders who can generate change at the micro, mezzo, and macro levels is essential. She shared that she started doing this work as a teenager because of

other trans women of color who started a movement for social change. Therefore, new generations of leaders must emerge to continue the work that she and their ancestors have accomplished in the last several decades. Hence, being a *luchadora social* does not happen without the historical context of the trans liberation movement led by other people of color in the past. The participants' identities and those around them are part of their work.

Samantha is the founder and director of her own community-based grassroots initiative. In this role, she explained that she links trans and gender nonconforming people of color in Georgia to resources, provides education, coordinates and participates in demonstrations, advocates for change, coordinates various community efforts, and mentors other trans Latinas in the Southern U.S. However, as a *luchadora*, Samantha expressed that she has utilized her body and physical appearance as a form of resistance to generate change. Due to being discriminated against at conferences, Samantha started to reclaim and express her Indigenous identity by wearing traditional Mexican hair braids to these events. She then started to utilize her garments, like her skirt, as a way to establish her identities as an Indigenous trans Latina immigrant. Samantha's skirt has become a uniform of sorts—it is a traditional Mexican skirt made out of the white, blue, and pink colors of the trans flag and signed by members and leaders from the community. Samantha shared:

> *Esa falda está llena de ilusiones, de sueños. Y esa falda también está firmada por la creadora de la bandera trans. Y está firmada también por una de nuestras compañeras que falleció por coronavirus. Y por mamá Lupe, que todas le decimos mamá Lupe, también. So, esa falda tiene historia. Por eso es que la llevo yo donde sea, porque siento que todas ellas están ahí conmigo. Ah, y la firmó Lorena Borjas*

también. […] Es mi símbolo de resistencia. Mi símbolo de inclusión. Y siempre la llevo donde quiera que yo voy.

(That skirt is full of illusions, of dreams. And that skirt is also signed by the creator of the trans flag. And it is also signed by one of our fellow women who died of coronavirus. And by Mama Lupe, whom we all call her Mama Lupe, too. So, that skirt has a history. That's why I wear it everywhere, because I feel that all of them are there with me. Oh, and Lorena Borjas[41] signed it too. It is my symbol of resistance. My symbol of inclusion. And I always wear it wherever I go.)

Samantha's embodiment of her resistance visibilizes the multiple identities that represent the trans Latina immigrant liberation movement—and demands being included in spaces where change is possible. In these efforts, the participants seek to generate change for others in their Latinx communities.

Vanessa shared that her work goes beyond helping trans Latina immigrants in North Carolina. For example, during the pandemic, she served as a community health worker, or *promotora de salud* in Spanish, for the Latinx community in general. Hence, Vanessa said that she extended her ability to educate and generate change in the Latinx community, particularly older Latinx people. This solidarity is necessary, especially for Latinx immigrants in the U.S. The participants utilize the resources available in this country, however scarce, to address their needs.

For Ale, her work with the community is only possible in the context of being in the U.S. and the "American Dream" promise. This promise may seem contradictory to Ale's recent experience with homelessness. However, in the U.S., Ale noted more opportunities to be

[41] Lorena Borjas is considered by many a pioneer of the trans Latina immigrant movement in the U.S. Borjas passed away due to complications related to COVID-19 in early 2020. To read more about Borjas, see Gentili (2020).

resilient, including the financial support of others and her desire to continue helping others in this country. Even while experiencing homelessness, Ale shared that she continued to help the community, providing them with information and referrals to other organizations.

Vanessa also discussed her role at her agency as an opportunity that was given to her. She shared that working in her current role as coordinator of the trans Latina group has helped her grow and be more professional and patient with others. Vanessa recalled:

> *Yo cuando me ofrecieron este trabajo yo no sabía nada. Creo que la misma organización me buscó porque a veces las organizaciones buscan personas que sean serias, que traten de tener una buena reputación, yo así lo veo. Cuando ellos me buscaron me dijeron esto, o sea, yo dije, bueno puede ser una oportunidad. […] Y yo recuerdo que ese día pregunté, ¿y por qué yo y no otra persona? […] Y la respuesta fue, "porque nosotros creemos que tú puedes hacer algo mejor qué otras personas y que tal vez puedes seguir trabajando y buscando acceso a otras, a la misma comunidad transgénero."*
>
> (When they offered me this job, I did not know anything. I think the same organization sought me out because sometimes organizations look for people who are serious, who try to have a good reputation, that's how I see it. When they looked for me they told me this, I mean, I said, well it could be an opportunity. [...] And I remember that day I asked, "why me and not someone else?" [...] And the answer was, "because we believe that you can do something better than other people and that maybe you can continue working and looking for access to others, to the same transgender community.")

Having a formal position in an agency gave Vanessa the opportunity to serve her community. Vanessa became a generator of change because of this opportunity. However, generating change within a formal organization also brought challenges for some of the participants.

Lucy, who is also relatively new to her role as a health educator and group coordinator at a community agency, also shared that she was grateful for the opportunity to do this work. However, she initially experienced some challenges trying to gain the trust of the trans Latina community in her community and becoming part of it. Lucy shared how she initially overcame this challenge:

> *Bueno, el reto es de que, como le dije hace rato, nadie me conocía. Yo era una desconocida completamente, nadie me conocía. Y yo tenía mis propios miedos e inseguridades cuando empecé a trabajar. Y además, usted me ve y yo no soy la típica chica trans bien maquillada, yo no soy así, yo soy más discreta. […] Y yo entré a medianoche al night club y fue algo como qué nunca se me va a olvidar porque fue algo me temblaban las piernas [porque] yo me sentía tan insegura de mí misma. Tenía miedo decir que si me rechazaba la propia comunidad, me entiende, ese gran miedo porque pues yo no era conocida. […] So pero yo me llevé una grata sorpresa cuando una chica, entré y me agarró de la mano y me dice, "ven, siéntate con nosotros." […] Pero sí, me hicieron sentir bien y de ahí yo sentí seguridad en mí misma.*
>
> (Well, the challenge is that, as I told you earlier, nobody knew me. I was a complete stranger, nobody knew me. And I had my own fears and insecurities when I started working. And also, you see me, and I'm not the typical trans girl with makeup, I'm not like that, I'm more discreet. [...] And I went in at midnight to the nightclub, and

> it was something that I will never forget because my legs were shaking [because] I felt so insecure about myself. I was afraid [of] being rejected by my own community, you know, that big fear because I was not known. [...] So, but I got a pleasant surprise when a girl, I walked in and she grabbed me by the hand and says, "come, sit with us." [...] But yes, they made me feel good, and from there I felt self-confident.)

For Lucy, her appearance and not being know was a challenge in her new role as a generator of change. The trans Latina community embraced her and allowed her to work within the community. However, the participants are not always welcomed when trying to generate change.

For Grecia, the challenges of doing her work as a manager comes from within her organization. Grecia indicated that her colleagues have discriminated against her and have difficulty following her lead. Grecia attributes this discrimination to the *machismo* present in the Latinx community, including among her coworkers who have difficulty accepting her as a leader who is also trans. Grecia said that she overcomes these dynamics by setting firm boundaries with her coworkers. Like other participants in this study, Grecia generates change from within the context of the community agency where she works, which is different from the experiences of other participants who do not have the support of a non-profit organization.

Although some of the participants generate change for their communities from within an organization, Samantha's work involves working in what she categorized as (1) inside the system (e.g., working in an agency), (2) with the system (e.g., collaborating with politicians and academics), (3) outside of the system (e.g., working alongside agencies), and (4) without the system (e.g., community-based grassroots efforts). Samantha shared that she is able to generate change for her community by learning how and when to leverage these categories. Samantha

shared that sometimes, although she generates change using these categories, others do not venture to work this way or even misunderstand her work. For Samantha, being a *luchadora social* means that generating change requires understanding and leveraging systems for the good of her community. The local community often does not see her work making an immediate impact on their needs, so sometimes they question her commitment and ability to generate change for other trans Latinas. However, Samantha is not the only participant who has engaged larger systems when doing social change.

An example of systemic advocacy is given by Paloma, who worked directly with the community and founded multiple organizations in the U.S. and other Latin American countries, and many still operate today. Paloma was the first trans person selected by her peers to speak at the Organización de Estados Americanos (OEA), or the Organization of American States[42] in English, representing LGBTQ+ individuals from more than 30 countries. She also spoke at the United Nations. Paloma shared her reasons for speaking at the United Nations:

> *Yo veía que esta lucha no avanzaba y yo no quería hacer negociaciones con mi vecino, o sea, yo quería, no sé, tenía el sueño de abarcar cosas más históricas para poder tener como una garantía más de derechos. E insistimos [tanto] que en el [año] 2006 fuimos convocadas por primera vez en el mundo a las Naciones Unidas […] No queríamos derechos generalizados para trans, sino que en todos los derechos fuéramos incluidas nosotras.*
>
> (I saw that this fight was not advancing, and I did not want to negotiate with my neighbor, that is, I wanted, I do not know, I had the dream of embracing more

[42] The Organization of American States is the oldest regional entity composed of 35 independent countries from the Americas. This organization is dedicated to ensuring human rights, democracy, peace, justice, solidarity, and collaborations, among other goals. For more about their mission and work, see Organización de Estados Americanos (2021).

> historical things to be able to have like a guarantee of more rights. And we insisted [so much] that in 2006 we were summoned for the first time in the world to the United Nations [...] We did not want generalized rights for trans women, but that we would be included in all rights.)

For Paloma, social change needed to happen at the international policy level. She discussed the importance of negotiating and educating local communities, but meaningful and historical social change needed to happen at the highest level of policy. The humanity of trans Latina immigrants must be ensured at the grandest of scales.

For Paloma, generating change also means engaging in "real activism." As someone who has physically been to many countries to protest and march for social change, Paloma criticizes newer forms of advocacy that depend on technology or is limited to sexual health education. Paloma defined "real activism":

> *El activismo debe de ser más profundo, de lucha real, de estar con los legisladores peleando por una propuesta que tu hagas. […] [Hay que] salir a la calle y pelear con la policía, pelear con lo sociedad, educar a la gente.*
>
> (Activism should be more profound, of real fight, of being with the legislators fighting for a proposal that you make. […] [You have to] go out into the streets and fight with the police, fight with society, educate people.)

Since the needs and challenges of trans Latina immigrants happen at the micro, mezzo, and macro levels, Paloma sees a need for generating change at all levels. Being a *luchadora social* and doing social change requires physical participation, direct human interactions, and a rethinking of the ways in which the work is done today. Regardless of how the participants

approach doing social change, they all shared feeling positive about being *luchadoras sociales* and what the future may hold for trans Latina immigrants in the Southern U.S.

Being *luchadoras sociales* and generating change made the participants feel accomplished and proud of their work and the changes they see in their communities. The participants also shared being hopeful about their work's impact on future generations of trans Latina immigrants in the Southern U.S. and beyond. For all participants, change has been possible despite the challenges they have faced individually, and as a community—their ancestors could do it, they could do it, and future generations will be able to do it.

Ale stated that she feels proud of how far she has come, given her struggles since childhood and the rewarding work she is doing now. Being alive and fighting is an accomplishment for Ale. Ale explained:

> *El logro principal es estar vivas, seguir vivas, estar luchando, no detenerme por nada ni por nadie. Y aunque a veces estamos que sentimos que ya no podemos más. Pero siempre a uno le viene a la mente de dónde empecé, cuánta trayectoria tuve desde mi infancia hasta los años que tengo ahora. ¿Por qué detenerme ahora que he logrado todo lo que soy al sol de hoy?*
>
> (The main achievement is to be alive, to stay alive, to keep fighting, to not stop for anything or anyone. And even though sometimes we feel we cannot go on any longer. But it always comes to mind where I started from, how much trajectory I had from my childhood to the years I have now. Why stop now that I have achieved everything I am today?)

Being alive, surviving, and thriving, given the violent and deadly experiences endured by trans Latina immigrants, are evidence of Ale's resilience and resistance to adversity. Hence, being a

luchadora social and continuing doing social change is a must for Ale. By continuing doing their work, other participants hope to gain more rights and visibility.

Lucy shared that she hoped that the trans Latina community will gain greater visibility and that her work will lead to increased respect and dignity from others. For Lucy, thriving and ensuring respect and human rights are gained through the visibility of trans Latinas as human beings. Lucy said that she is hopeful that trans Latinas can continue to be part of society in the Sothern U.S. and all U.S. states. Increased meaningful visibility will lead to a decreased gap in trans-affirming services.

Grecia said that she is hopeful that their work will lead to increased availability and access to services for the particular needs of trans Latina immigrants in the Southern U.S. Grecia expressed:

> *Me encantaría que todas pudieran arreglar su situación en cuestión migratoria, verdad? Que tuvieran un estatus legal, eso sería ideal también. Que tuvieran aquí la ayuda para hacerse la reasignación de sexo y que fuera gratis. Y que tuvieran ayuda con cirugías y con psicólogos y que todas esas cosas fueran gratis. Eso sería, sería como ideal, así como en todas esas grande ciudades como San Francisco, Nueva York, Los Ángeles, Chicago, todas esas ciudades grandes que tienen bastante recursos.*
>
> (I would love for all of them to be able to fix their immigration status, right? To have a legal status, that would be ideal too. That they could have help here to have sex reassignment and that it would be free. And they could have help with surgeries and psychologists and all those things would be free. That would like ideal. Just

like in all those big cities like San Francisco, New York, Los Angeles, Chicago, all those big cities that have a lot of resources.)

For Grecia, as for most participants, her work in the Southern U.S. is aimed at having the same resources for trans Latina immigrants that bigger and more progressive cities in the U.S. have (e.g., access to free or affordable trans-affirming healthcare). Their work advocating for the community has increased the accessibility and availability of some trans-affirming services in the Southern U.S. However, the participants are hopeful that these opportunities will continue to increase.

When asked how she would feel if the needs of trans Latinas in North Carolina were better met, Vanessa answered:

> *Entonces yo siento que sería muy padre y me alegraría mucho porque hicieran esto porque, o sea, voy a darme cuenta que pues después de tanto nosotras quejarnos y decir a esto y decir lo otro de estos accesos, yo sé que al final y al cabo va a haber alguien que lo va a escuchar, qué va a decir, "sabes que, estos es en lo que hay que trabajar. Eso es lo que hay que hacer."*
>
> (So I feel that it would be very nice and I would be very happy if they did this because, I mean, I am going to realize that after so much complaining and saying this and that about these accesses, I know that at the end of the day there will be someone who will listen to it, who will say, "you know what, this is what we have to work on. That is what needs to be done.")

Vanessa expressed that she is hopeful that their roles as *luchadoras sociales* are not going unnoticed in their Southern states. For Vanessa, the visibility of their work and their tireless fight

for social change will generate coalitions determined to meet the needs of trans Latina immigrants. As noted below, these coalitions should be led by and for other trans Latinas.

For Paloma, continuing to generate change is only possible when it is done by other trans Latinas. Paloma asserted that becoming a *luchadora social* and generating change is based on the lived experiences of those who are in need of changes. Paloma explained:

> *Un hombre heterosexual, una mujer lesbiana, un hombre gay no sabe la verdadera historia de nosotras. No se pueden poner en nuestros zapatos. Y la lucha histórica de cualquier movimiento, de cualquier proyecto, de cualquier desarrollo, es un tema vivencial.*
>
> (A heterosexual man, a lesbian woman, a gay man does not know the real history of us. They cannot put themselves in our shoes. And the historical struggle of any movement, of any project, of any development, is a lived experience issue.)

The lived experiences of trans Latina immigrants are the foundation and primary motivator for generating social change. Hence, Paloma expressed she wants to continue living injustices like misgendering, despite her privileges, to continue generating change. Throughout her decades of work as a *luchadora social*, Paloma has learned to use instances of discrimination for generating social consciousness among society. For example, she uses people pointing out the discrepancy between her gender presentation and the name and gender marker on her IDs to educate them. If she changes her IDs, then she would not be living these experiences and would not be able to continue to generate change. In the end, it is about the collective and tangible long-term change.

Samantha shared that by being a visible *luchadora social* and doing the work to generate change in her communities, she is inspiring others and leaving a legacy. At the end of the day,

for Samantha, generating change is about the community. When asked what she thought of others seeing her as a generator of change, Samantha said:

> *Me inspira a seguir trabajando más, so para mí es un honor que ellas piensen así de mí porque eso significa que vamos haciendo bien las cosas. Y pues que si me voy de este mundo, por lo menos dejaría un legado. Aparte de eso puedo decir de hasta discípulas que han estado ahí viendo y por más que crea yo que no me están viendo, estoy siendo observada. Y por ellas es las que tengo que seguir trabajando. Sí, seguir luchando.*
>
> (It inspires me to keep working harder, so for me it is an honor that they think that way about me because it means that we are doing things right. And if I leave this world, at least I would leave a legacy. Besides that, I can say that even my disciples have been there watching me, and even though I think they are not watching me, I am being watched. And it is for them that I have to continue working. Yes, keep fighting.)

Samantha, like other participants, alluded to the importance of leaving a legacy of change and inspired trans Latinas in the Southern U.S. Hence, being a *luchadora social* is about changing systems, communities, and families, but also about changing the outlook of future generations.

All participants agreed that their work is for the wellbeing, safety, and thriving of other trans Latinas immigrants in the Southern U.S. and beyond. They also highlighted that other trans Latinas were responsible for them becoming *luchadoras sociales*, and that their work is only possible with the support of the community. Therefore, their work cannot be detached from their reciprocal relationships with other trans Latinas and their communities of support.

"*Juntas Todas*": Strength in Caring for Each Other

All participants in this study reported becoming *luchadoras sociales* and doing social change as iterative processes with their experiences of receiving and giving support to others in their communities, particularly other trans Latinas. Lucy shared that change and leadership are only possible when they work together: "*Pero yo pienso que si eres un líder tienes que agarrarte de todas. Y juntas todas, no una por delante [de las otras]*" ("But I think that if you are a leader, you have to hold on to all [the trans women]. And all [the trans women] together, not one ahead [of the others]"). These relationships served as reciprocal mentorship, support, and motivation between them and others. All participants shared their encouragement for other trans Latinas to join the fight.

Ale shared that she learned about trans activism work while living in her country Honduras. After migrating to the U.S., she then continued to learn how to support other trans individuals from the community advocate who started the support house she later ran. Ale recalled:

> *El trabajo como activista lo conocí en mi país, en Honduras, cuando empecé a aprender de las organizaciones que habían para las personas LGBT, personas trans. Entonces cuando empecé a asistir a las organizaciones me llamó la atención. […] Entonces empecé a pensar y a tener ese, esa idea de cómo empezar o cómo crear. […] Entonces ya llegando aquí [a los Estados Unidos] pues, la persona que nos ayudó a salir de la detención ya con el proyecto en pie, pues empezamos [a trabajar en él]. Y ya nos estuvo enseñando pues a todas las que nos ayudó a salir, a cómo era esto, cómo era lo otro, cómo podemos hacer esto, cómo podemos hacer*

conexiones con más personas de la comunidad que nos apoyaran. Entonces pues la que puso más atención fui yo.

(I got to know the work as an activist in my country, in Honduras, when I started to learn about the organizations that existed for LGBT people, trans people. So when I started to attend the organizations, it caught my attention. […] Then I started to think and to have this, this idea of how to start or how to create. […] So when I arrived here [in the United States], the person who helped us to get out of detention, with the project already up and running, we started [to work on it]. And she was teaching all of us whom she helped to get out, how to do this, how to do that, how we can do this, how we can make connections with more people in the community to support us. So I was the one who paid the most attention.)

Ale's experiences in her country of origin demonstrate the activism work that has existed in Latin America throughout history. Her country gave her both experiences, experiences of violence and discrimination toward trans people and experiences of empowerment and resistance by trans people. Learning from others in the community was a common experience for many of the participants.

Grecia was the only participant able to attend college in her country of origin for many years. However, when asked how she learned to coordinate and advocate for the trans Latina group in North Carolina, she identified another trans Latina as her mentor for doing this work. Grecia explained:

[Cómo hacer ese trabajo] lo aprendí cuando fui a California. Ahí lo aprendí, ahí lo aprendí. […] So me apegué mucho al grupo [de trans Latinas] y me di cuenta cómo trabajan, lo que tenían, lo que hacían. Y me junté. Había una chica que se

llamaba Rosa en ese grupo. A ella me le apegué porque vi que era una persona bastante positiva y sabía muchas cosas además. [Ella] sabía muchas cosas y creo que es algo de lo que yo, que he tenido siempre. Cuando yo veo que alguien me puede enseñar muchas cosas yo me le pego, me [45:00] junto mucho con esa persona, trato de escucharla, de entablar conversación con ella de si algo sabe y yo lo quiero aprender, si me lo puede enseñar, pues que me lo enseñe y lo aprendo.

([How to do that job] I learned it when I went to California. That is where I learned it, that is where I learned it. So, I became very connected to the group [of trans Latinas], and I realized how they work, what they had, what they did. And I got involved. There was a girl named Rosa in that group. I became close to her because I saw that she was a very positive person, and she knew a lot of things. [She] knew a lot of things, and I think that is something that I have always had. When I see that someone can teach me a lot of things I stick to them, I [45:00] get together a lot with that person, I try to listen to them, to start a conversation with them, if they know something and I want to learn it, if they can teach it to me, then they can teach it to me and I learn it.)

According to this statement, by learning from another trans Latina who facilitated a trans Latina group, Grecia combined her desire for knowledge with her passion for helping the community. Like Ale, Grecia was able to apply what she learned in another geographical location from another trans Latina to the realities of her work in the Southern U.S.

Other trans Latinas in the U.S. also supported the participant's learning processes for generating change in their communities. Lucy and Vanessa, for example, are both relatively new to their agency roles in North Carolina and have connected with each other for support. Both

participants discussed the importance of their relationship as they continue to learn how to reach their communities and increase access to services in their particular areas of the state. Lucy mentioned that although she is learning how to do her work while working alongside medical providers and academics, she was excited and relieved to connect with Vanessa. Vanessa initially learned how to do her work from Grecia, who was the trans Latina group coordinator before her. However, Vanessa said that she now relies more on the information and support she shares with Lucy. This form of mentorship and collaboration with other trans Latinas was common among participants.

Paloma expressed that she learned how to generate change for trans Latina immigrants at the micro, mezzo, and macro levels by working with other activists and leaders from a variety of countries, especially from Latin America. Paloma's historical successes were only possible in the context of mutual learning and work. Hence, Paloma sees her work as collective:

> *Entonces creo que yo cuando hablo de esas historias no me pongo una corona ni digo yo soy la primera, no. Yo digo, llegamos. Llegamos a las Naciones Unidas. Llegamos a OEA. Se llegó. Y creo que como no es una competencia, ni marco mi historia como la primera. Sino la marco como una historia que se tuvo que haber hecho y se logró.*
>
> (So I think that when I talk about these stories, I do not wear a crown or say I am the first, no. I say, we arrived. We arrived at the United Nations. We made it to the OEA. We made it. And I think that since it is not a competition, I do not mark my story as the first. I mark it as a story that should have been done and was achieved.)

For Paloma, like most participants, learning how to generate change did not come from a formal mentorship structure. At times, mentorship was an iterative process among the women and other

activists. This iterative and supportive process was motivated by their desire to engage in mutual support.

Samantha shared that she has continued to learn how to do her work by having to address the needs of other trans Latina immigrants. Although Samantha has participated in many formal training programs for community leaders, she shared that her main source of knowledge are other women. This reciprocal support and motivation among the participants and other trans Latinas was a shared experience among them.

The participants' support of the community has led to most of them being perceived as "mothers" by members of their communities. Some of the participants embraced this term, others not so much. In these maternal roles, some participants saw themselves as the caregivers that many members of the LGBTQ+ community do not have. For other participants, they see themselves as equals, friends, and mentors. In both instances, the women engage in guiding others through the negative experiences they endure in the Southern U.S. However, these relationships have persisted throughout time and have crossed many borders. For example, Grecia said that she continues to support the trans Latina women that she met in North Carolina, even though they are in other states and she is no longer the group coordinator.

The relationships between the participants and members of their communities are not without conflict. Vanessa, for example, shared that she recently had an argument with another trans Latina from her group. However, Vanessa did not stop supporting the woman, offering the woman comfort when she lost her parents due to complications related to COVID-19. For Vanessa, being a constant presence in the women's lives is imperative. The participants of this study shared that they are not only dedicated to the people in their lives at present but that there is also a need to reach out to other people in need of their support.

Paloma said that generating change comes from continuing to grow their groups that can lead to strong social movements and solidarity in their fight. The participants have continued to see this solidarity in the ways in which other people in the community, particularly other trans women, care for them in times of need. For example, between the first and second interview, Ale and her housemates had to leave their residence due to a lack of finances to afford rent. During the second interviews, Ale revealed that she was being helped by others she had helped in the past. Lucy shared a similar experienced. When Lucy is feeling emotionally unwell, the other trans women care for her. Lucy said:

> *Pero en esos días, ellas me echan la mano, me dicen, "Lucy tenemos que reunirnos." Y fíjate que lo bueno que es que no para ahí, o sea, que ya hablamos. Al siguiente día aunque sea una me está mandando [mensajes], "¿cómo sigues Lucy? Y eso es bueno porque es lo que yo necesito, a alguien que me diga, "levántate, levántate porque tienes que seguir trabajando, tienes que seguir lo mismo que has seguido haciendo estos años." Sí, sí me gusta que ellas me apoyan también en eso. Muy importante.*
>
> (But in those days, they lend me a hand, they tell me, "Lucy, we have to meet." And look how good it is that it does not stop there, I mean, [after] we talk. The next day at least one of them is sending me [messages], "how are you doing, Lucy?" And that is good because that is what I need, someone to tell me, "get up, get up because you have to keep working, you have to keep doing what you have been doing all these years." Yes, I do like that they support me in that too. Very important.)

In this example, Lucy illustrates how her relationship with the other trans Latina women is not one-directional. Her ability to continue generating change is only possible by the motivation and emotional support of others. All participants agreed that there was a need for more trans Latinas to continue supporting each other, even by becoming *luchadoras sociales* themselves.

Samantha expressed wanting to continue supporting other existing and emerging trans Latinas generators of change in the Southern U.S. Overall, all participants encouraged other trans Latinas wanting to generate change in their communities in the Southern U.S. to not give up, continue learning from others, fight for their communities, be united as a group, and rely on other trans Latinas already generating change. Samantha said:

> *Que no se rindan. Que cuenten con el apoyo de nosotres. […] Y sino, que se estén educando constantemente. Y no me estoy refiriendo a una institución académica, sino que se eduquen a través de la base comunitaria. Que resistan, que aguanten.*
> (That they do not give up. They can count on our support. And if not, they should be constantly educating themselves. And I am not referring to an academic institution, but to educate themselves through the community grassroots. That they resist, that they endure.)

For Samantha, like for other participants, caring for each other is not only about individual needs but also about supporting others in caring for their communities in other areas of the U.S., particularly the Southern U.S. The rest of the participants also shared this desire to foster new *luchadoras sociales* who meet their needs and advocate for the community.

Lucy shared that generating change is about actively working together. This collaborative and nurturing process is a strength for continuing generating change in the Southern U.S. Lucy said:

> *¿Cómo va a haber un cambio si tú no mueves, no produces, no tratas de hacer algo? No puede haber un cambio. […] Si hay un cambio, tenemos que estar todos conectados y mirar a un solo lado todos.*
>
> (How can there be a change if you do not move, do not produce, do not try to do something? There cannot be a change. [...] If there is a change, we all have to be connected and look in one direction.)

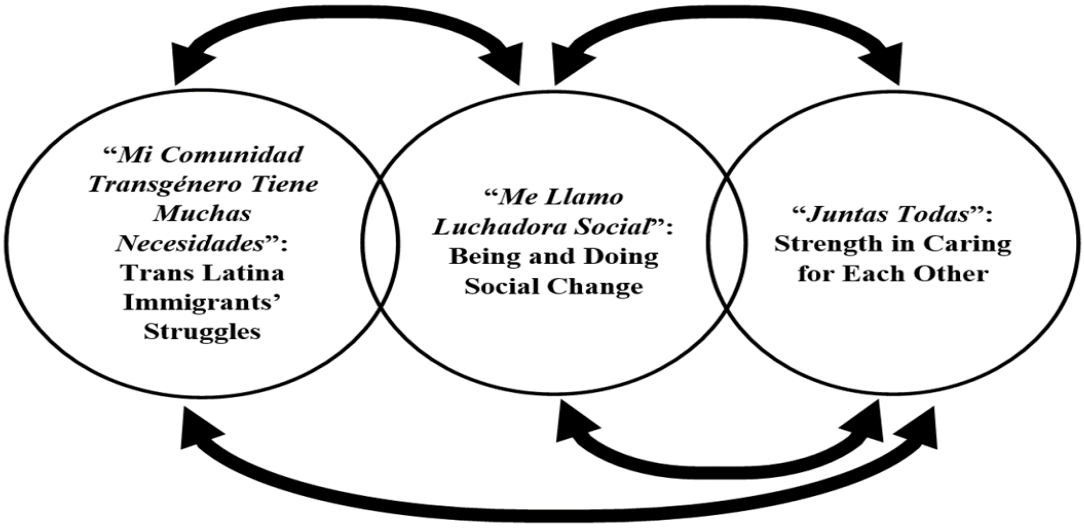
For Lucy, like for the other participants, generating change to address the needs of trans Latinas in the Southern U.S. is only possible when the women take action. This action must be done together and for the same purpose. All participants said that taking care of each other and doing social change was worth it and that they continue to reap the fruit of their work.

Summary of Findings

The essence of the phenomenon of the lived experiences of trans Latinas generating change for their communities in the Southern U.S. can be visually represented based on their *testimonios*. Figure 6 shows this essence. Overall, the lived experiences of trans Latinas generating change for their communities in the Southern U.S. originated on their experiences with intersectional violence and discrimination and the micro, mezzo, and macro challenges they face. They continue to work to overcome these challenges, in part, by building community and caring for each other. At the same time, their multiple identities as trans, Latinas, and immigrants influenced their experiences of empowerment in the Southern U.S. as they become *luchadoras sociales* and do social change. These three processes often overlap.

Figure 6

Trans Latina Immigrants' Meaning of their Lived Experiences as Generators of Change in the Southern U.S.



CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

The current study aimed to explore the meaning that trans Latinas make of their lived experiences as they generate change in the Southern U.S. by asking the research questions: (1) What are the lived experiences of trans Latinas generating change for their communities in the Southern U.S.?, (2) How do the multiple identities of trans Latinas influence their experiences of empowerment in the Southern U.S.?, and, (3) How do trans Latinas experience and overcome challenges? The interpretive phenomenological analysis (IPA) used to understand the participants' *testimonios* showed that their lived experiences are linked to their experiences with intersectional violence, discrimination, and struggles at the micro, mezzo, and macro levels (e.g., physical assault, family discrimination, anti-trans policies). By building community and caring for each other, the participants continue to overcome these challenges. Additionally, becoming *luchadoras sociales* and doing social change was informed by their identities as trans, Latinas, and immigrants. This chapter will begin with a discussion of the study's findings, followed by the limitations and research contributions of the study. Then, the implications and recommendations for TGNC leaders and activists, the researcher, and social workers (i.e., research, practice, and education) will be addressed. The chapter will end with a conclusion.

Discussion

Description of Cases

There were many similarities and some differences among the sample. All participants identified their gender as women or transgender women. Their gender identities are consistent

with the five TGNC organizations' reports by Caraves and Salcedo (2016), James and colleagues (2016), James and Salcedo (2017), Pulido and Salcedo (2019), and Salcedo and Padrón (2013), in which most Latinx participants identified as transgender women (31%-78%). The ages of the participants of this study were between the early 20s and early 50s. According to the same five reports above, the average ages across studies were between 18 and 44 years (61%-90%). Although none of the participants of this study were in their late teens and three were above age 44, many started to generate change in their communities as teenagers. Hence, there may be many other young trans Latinas generating change in the Southern U.S. who were not part of this study.

The six participants resided in Southern U.S. states, where the estimated average percentage of transgender adults who identified as Latinx (17%) is higher than the estimated average percentage of adults in the general population who identified as Latinx (13%) (Flores et al., 2016). Moreover, the average estimated percentage of Latinx adults who identified as transgender in those states (0.86%; n=65,950) is higher than the estimated percentages for White, non-Hispanic adults who identified as transgender (0.54%; n=110,550) and African-American or Black, non-Hispanic adults who identified as transgender (0.81%; n=56,850) (Flores et al., 2016). These percentages reflect the need for trans Latinas, like the participants of this study who are generating change, to continue leading efforts to address people's struggles in the Southern U.S.

Although this study did not require participants to be immigrants, all participants happened to identify as one. Their noted motivation to enter the U.S. seeking better conditions and escaping violence is consistent with research by Cerezo and colleagues (2014) and Cheney and colleagues (2017). The participants' experiences with violence and homelessness are

common among trans Latinas (James et al., 2016; James & Salcedo, 2017). The commonality of the participants' experiences with that of other trans Latinas (e.g., facing violence and resisting oppression) would explain why they are seeking change for themselves and their communities.

Three participants in the sample had not completed high school in either their countries of origin or the U.S. This percentage is close to the average percentage of people with less than a college degree (53.6%-78.7%) across participants of the five reports above. It is plausible that the participants of this study are more formally educated than the overall trans population, given their access to resources and social support and the need to complete formal education as a requirement to work at an agency.

All participants reported having strong social support from biological family, chosen family, partners, and the community. Many of them were partnered, and all lived with other people. Since social support has been considered a protective factor for trans individuals (James et al., 2016) and a source of resilience for trans Latinas (Cerezo et al., 2014; Rhodes et al., 2015), this can help to explain why the participants reported being not only able to survive but also thrive in their work.

Thematic Patterns Across Cases

"Mi Comunidad Transgénero Tiene Muchas Necesidades": Trans Latina Immigrants' Struggles

The needs, challenges, and struggles faced by trans Latinas in the Southern U.S., and reported by all participants, are consistent with the existing literature. Some of these struggles include high rates of violence and discrimination (Alessi et al., 2016; James & Salcedo, 2017); high rates of mental health issues (Gowin et al., 2017; Yamanis et al., 2018), homelessness (James et al., 2016), health disparities (Nuttbrock & Hwahng, 2017; Page et al., 2017; Palazzolo

et al., 2016); a lack of trans-affirming healthcare resources (Loza et al., 2017); anti-immigrant and anti-LGBTQ+ legislations (Bauer, 2009; Human Rights Campaign [HRC], 2018; National Center for Transgender Equality, 2019); and their criminalization for being trans, Latinas, and immigrants (James & Salcedo, 2017; Mandujano, 2021;Morales, 2013). The participants often provided their experiences as examples of these struggles, including Ale's experiences with homelessness and Paloma's experiences with police brutality. The struggles of trans Latina immigrants cannot be separated from the transphobia and xenophobia they experience, often compounded by their multiple identities.

Similar to prior research (James & Salcedo, 2017), the participants' experiences varied based on the state where they resided in the U.S., their age, income, education, social support, how long they had been presenting as women in public, how long they had been in the U.S. as immigrants, and the number of years they had been working with their communities. However, what was common among them was that their struggles were linked to the discrimination and violence they faced for being trans, Latinas, and immigrants. Living at the intersection of these identities and experiencing intersectional oppression is related to the concept of intersectionality discussed by Crenshaw (1989), Hill Collins and Bilge (2016), and many other women of color. Intersectionality poses that people holding multiple minoritized identities are often oppressed by power relations directed towards and lived at the intersection of these identities. In the case of the participants of this study, their social locations and identities can be understood through an intersectionality lens as explored by Latina feminists.

Latina feminists explore intersectionality based on a person's experiences with place, language, culture, sex, gender, sexuality, class, and ethnicity. Hence, the participants of this study experienced "a multilayered social reality" (Hurtado, 2020, p. 28). In this complex reality,

trans Latina immigrants experienced oppression depending on the context of their interactions. An example of context is when Samantha experienced discrimination for being Indigenous, Latina, non-English speaker, and not dressing like the rest of the attendees at conferences targeted to improve the health of her community. In these contexts, where being and appearing "professional" is typically the norm, Samantha was being ridiculed for not conforming to colonial rules of self-presentation (e.g., speak English, use more "western" clothing, etc.). Hence, Samantha's experiences with discrimination occur when she does not conform to the heterogeneous perception of Latinas (Ortega, 2016)—a power dynamic that attempts to erase her indigeneity and migration experiences.

Some parallels can be drawn between the motivation and work of Latina feminists and trans Latina immigrants. Similar to Latina feminists' criticism of being neglected by White feminists in the feminist movement (Martín Alcoff, 2020), trans Latina immigrants denounced being erased from LGBTQ+ movements. Moreover, like Latina feminists' response to the Chicano movement that tried to put their needs aside (Garcia, 1997), the participants are helping other trans Latina immigrants being neglected by mainstream immigrant rights movements. Trans Latina immigrants' Brownness and transness intersect in their experiences and work.

Galarte's (2021) framework provides an additional layer to understanding the oppressive intersectional experiences faced by trans Latina immigrants by considering their trans identities. Galarte (2021) calls the narratives at the intersection of transness and *latinidad* "brown[43] trans figurations" (p. 8). Brown trans figuration is "a theoretical framework to describe and draw attention to what happens when transness and brownness coexist within the social and larger queer, trans, and Chicanx/Latinx historical narratives and material contexts" (Galarte, 2021, p.

[43] For Galarte (2021), "'Brown' does not stand in for identity or culture; it indexes ways of being, belonging, and recognizing that describe *latinidad*" (p. 10, italics in original).

9). For example, when Ale and her trans Latina housemates feared an encounter with the police due to being unable to pay their rent, they were concerned about being seen as both trans and immigrants who struggled to communicate in English. The interconnections of these identities are what would have complicated their interactions with the police, given their perceived physical appearance and language abilities. In Ale's case, she and her housemates' transness and brownness could have been seen as problematic by the police, especially when their socioeconomic class is part of the intersection of their experiences. Unlike society's common perception that cisgender, White, gay and lesbian individuals have high financial capabilities, trans Latina immigrants who cannot pay their rent and speak English proficiently are often seen—and treated—as less desirable in U.S. society. Considering Galarte's (2021) framework and the work of Latina feminists, the lived experiences of trans Latina immigrants in general, and of the participants of this study in particular, are bounded by the geopolitical context of these experiences.

The intersectional oppression experienced by trans Latinas in the form of violence and discrimination is amplified for the participants of this study as they live in the Southern U.S. The macro implications of intersectional oppression have been highlighted in Crenshaw's (1989) seminal piece about the use of the law against Black women workers. For Latina feminists, the *sitios* (places) where they live are spaces of contention (Hurtado, 2020).

The trans Latina immigrants who participated in this study lived in *sitios* in the Southern U.S. where their identities were contended as "illegal." For example, across the U.S., 21 anti-trans policies were introduced in 2018, while a disproportionate number of trans individuals were killed in the Southern U.S. (HRC, 2018; 2019). Southern states are also known for introducing and adopting anti-immigrant bills in the last decade (Cruz, 2021; Levine & LeBaron, 2011).

These policies often lead to the dehumanization, marginalization, harassment, detention, and deportation of trans Latina immigrants (Luibhéid, 2020). Living in the Southern U.S. shows how Latina feminists' emphasis on locality applies to trans Latina immigrants and their intersectional oppression. The participants shared many examples of their criminalization in the Southern U.S., including Latinx immigrants' fear of anti-immigrant policies in North Carolina and bills limiting trans individuals from using public restrooms in Texas. However, the participants reclaimed these states, what some of them called the "American Dream," and their *sitios* similarly to how Anzaldúa (2012) reclaimed her plethora of identities in the U.S./Mexico border context—from the way they dressed to the mobilization of their communities.

"Me Llamo Luchadora Social": Being and Doing Social Change

All participants stated that their work as generators of change in the Southern U.S. emerged from their lived experiences and that of other trans Latina immigrants who are constantly struggling. This connection between who they are and their work was best described by Samantha, who said that her life had become her work, and her work had become her life. Samantha's statement is directly related to Isasi-Diaz's comment about *mujerismo's* praxis and embodiment: "*la lucha*–the struggle–is never-ending. That is why we have to see it as a way of life and not something we do: it is part of who we are" (Isherwood, 2011, pp. 11-12, italics in original). For the participants of this study, being and doing social change are interrelated processes.

Some participants mentioned that their roles as *luchadoras sociales* were not developed in a void and that many other trans ancestors of color were part of the historical efforts to liberate trans people from oppression. Most notably is the work of trans Latina activist Sylvia Rivera and Black trans activist Marsha P. Johnson that started in the 1960s in New York City. Sylvia Rivera,

for example, was a trans Latina who fought for the rights of trans and queer individuals, addressed the housing needs of other trans people of color, and organized her community. The work of Sylvia Rivera generated waves that currently inform the work of many activist groups and health and human service organizations (Shepard, 2013). In a way, trans Latina immigrants are continuing the work of their ancestors, just like Latina feminists' work in the U.S. is an extension of the work of revolutionary *Mexicanas* in Mexican history. For the participants of this study, being and doing social change required taking care of others, advocating for the community, and changing systems by defying their marginalized status in the Southern U.S and centering themselves through their work.

Many participants shared that they often had to speak up even when others did not expect them to advocate for themselves. By reimagining their identities from victims to generators of change, the participants challenged stereotypes related to gendered cultural norms. Their use of their voices can be compared to Anzaldúa's *rebeldía* (rebelliousness). Anzaldúa (2012) mentioned how as a young girl, she was not supposed to speak, even less to question others. Other Spanish speakers also expected this silence. Anzaldúa (2012) wrote: "Even our own people, other Spanish speakers *nos quieren poner candados en la boca* [they want to put locks on our mouths]. They would hold us back with their bag of *reglas de academia* [academic rules]" (p. 76). The participants of this study generated change even when seen as "trouble makers" (e.g., when Vanessa demanded respect for trans women at local clinics) and not using academic language (in English or Spanish) in certain settings (e.g., when Samantha used everyday language in Spanish to express herself at academic conferences).

All participants discussed their experiences navigating a variety of settings to meet the needs of their communities. They were expected to simultaneously connect with other trans

Latinas in their communities and professionals and lawmakers to generate change. The participants' experiences navigating these spaces can be understood through Anzaldúa's concept of *nepantla* and *nepantleras*. In Anzaldúa's (2015) writing, "*nepantla* represents temporal, spatial, psychic, and intellectual point(s) or crisis (among other things)" (p. 245; italics added).[44] Hence, for Anzaldúa (2015), *nepantleras* are mediators and survivors who live in between worlds and who "use these transformed perspectives to invent holistic, relational theories and tactics that enable them to reconceive or in other ways transform the various worlds in which they exist" (p. 245). The participants explained how they had transformed their worlds by serving as a bridge between the trans Latina community and healthcare professionals, lawmakers, and their agencies. Samantha also discussed how she generates change by "working inside, outside, with, and without the system." Additionally, Grecia and Vanessa shared how they helped others during the pandemic as they were also experiencing its effects. By navigating the liminality of their identities and experiences, the participants generated consciousness for themselves and others.

The participants of this study generated change in the Southern U.S. and beyond by developing consciousness among other trans Latinas. This task responds to Cotera's (1977) call for Latinas: "We need to assume *conciencia completa de nuestras necesidades* [complete consciousness of our needs]" (p. 30). Paloma, for example, shared that one of her goals was for emerging trans Latina leaders to develop *conciencia*. However, Paloma said that this was one of the most difficult challenges she faced since some of the younger women did not feel empowered. In response, Paloma continued to serve as a role model of resistance and reach out to them to educate them as activists. In continuing to resist a disempowered narrative, Paloma's

[44] Heidenreich (2020) also defined *nepantla* as "[…] a pragmatic tool for understanding and moving in our world" (p. 1). For more on how *nepantla* has been conceptualized for transgender mestizes, see Heidenreich (2020).

work reflects the words of Cotera regarding a need for resistance (1977): "Maybe then the level of consciousness will be raised, if not through goodness, at least through our resistance and unity" (p. 47).

Latina feminists focus on generating *conciencia* and using it doing social change is also extended to the ways in which they conceptualize embodiment. Latina feminists concern themselves with the lived experiences of Latinas in regards to their identities, the embodiment of those identities, and the becoming of those identities. Anzaldúa (2015), for instance, emphasized the body and embodiment of her identity categories (i.e., Chicana, feminist, and lesbian) in her analysis: "My feminism is grounded not on incorporeal abstraction but on corporal realities. The material body is center, and central. The body is the ground of thought. The body is a text" (p. 5). Embodiment is how a person experiences and performs their identities (e.g., gender, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, etc.) based on social context and the spaces they occupy.[45] For example, how a Latinx person experiences being, feeling, performing, and appearing trans in White trans spaces, would be different from their embodiment of transness in spaces where trans *Latinidad* is centered. Therefore, embodiment provides a space for exploring the materiality of Brown and trans existence and possibilities (Galarte, 2021).

Embodiment is often based on the locality of the body—from the room they are in, to their global positionality. An example of embodiment among the participants is when Samantha purposefully uses her hair and skirt as a form of reclaiming and establishing her identities in non-inclusive spaces.[46] Ale and Grecia also mentioned that by being visible to others, they embody the possibility of overcoming adversity. The body then becomes an epistemological and

[45] For more on the role of embodiment in knowledge development within feminism, see Haraway (1988). For an example of the role of embodiment in gendered queer Latinx research, see Muñoz (2016).
[46] Trans Latinas have used their bodies, appearance, and performances to generate consciousness and social change. Some examples can be found in La Fountain-Stokes (2021).

ontological force; it serves as a source of knowledge and a corporal reality of their lived experiences (Anzaldúa, 2015; Ortega, 2015). As stated by Paloma, it is their embodiment and lived experiences that allowed the participants to generate change and care for others.

"Juntas Todas": Strength in Caring for Each Other

All study participants identified their relationships, especially with other trans Latinas, as a strength that contributes to their ability to be and generate social change. The participants' experiences with social support as a significant factor in doing their work and maintaining their wellbeing are also reflected in research. Rhodes and colleagues (2015) found similar experiences among nine trans Latina women who identified their biological families and other trans Latinas as part of their strengths. Having a supportive network has been shown to be related to better mental health outcomes and a reduction in homelessness incidence (James et al., 2016).

Relationships and social support are also part of the work done by Latina feminists. Latina feminists value their relationships with others, including other women and Latinas generating change. Through these relationships with themselves, their communities, and their broader environments, Latina feminists transform their experiences and the spaces they inhabit. For Latina feminists, the collective and the use of coalitions generate healing and liberation (Moraga, 2015). The process of conscientization is not an individual one but one connected to others in belonging, praxis, and knowledge (Cotera, 1977). Being and doing Latina feminisms is a commitment for change at the physical, spiritual, and relational levels (Anzaldúa et al., 2012; Anzaldúa & Keating, 2015). Paloma, for example, shared that she was only able to speak at the United Nations and OEA because of the collective work with other trans individuals who strived for liberation at the international level. Lucy and Vanessa also shared that they were able to generate change in North Carolina by sharing knowledge and support with each other. Similar

collaborations have been reported in the media, including a Trans-Latina Worker's Co-op in Queens, New York where trans Latinas supported each other in learning cosmetology and starting their own business (Castro et al., 2016). Moreover, the relationships between the participants and members of their communities often met the void of familial and social support in the LGBTQ+ community.

Cotera (1977) asked Latinas: "what can you do for your community?" (p. 30). The participants of this study responded, in many ways, to this question by mentioning their roles as connectors, educators, activists, and supporters of others. Often, the literature about the roles of Latinas in their families and society reduces them to a maternal role. However, many Latina feminists (e.g., Pérez, 1999b) have reconceptualized the cultural bodies of Latinas and Chicanas beyond being maternal ones and into bodies of desire and resistance to Latinx patriarchal social scripts. For the participants of this study, being perceived as the "mother" of younger trans women was received with mixed feelings. Some of the participants, like Lucy and Paloma, did not want to be called "*madre*" ("mother"). In a way, Lucy and Paloma moved from a *marianista* position in which they care selflessly for others to a more *mujerista* perspective of being *comadres* who equally care for each other (Comas-Díaz, 2013). As *comadres* of sorts, Lucy and Paloma serve and care for others as equals, not as devoted caretakers. For all participants, their relationships have been reshaped depending on the context in which they generate change and others' perceptions of their identities and roles.

Limitations of the Study

The current study has multiple limitations. First, neither the researcher nor the members of the dissertation committee are trans or gender nonconforming. As people with no lived experience as trans Latina immigrants, the committee members emphasized the need for the

community's input on the design and findings of the study. Consequently, this limitation was partially addressed by doing a focus group with trans Latinas who are generating change in the Southern U.S. to obtain their feedback about the needs and strengths of their communities. This focus group also informed the aim and research questions of the study. This study was also informed by reports conducted by TGNC Latinx groups and their related recommendations for research with members of their communities. After themes were generated for each participant, member checking was conducted with five out of six of them to ensure that their experiences and voices were not misrepresented.

A second limitation of this study was that although the focus of phenomenology and IPA is to explore the lived experiences of a small homogenous group of people, this study could have been expanded by recruiting more participants. However, recruiting more participants was difficult given the exploitation endured by trans Latinas in the Southern U.S. and their resulting mistrust in academics and other professionals. Recruitment was also limited by the restrictions of doing research during a global pandemic, particularly with a population who was actively trying to meet their communities' immediate needs during this time and had limited time and energy to engage in other projects. Moreover, some potential participants expressed an interest in the study but were experiencing crisis at the time of recruitment. The ethical decision was made not to interview these individuals to avoid further burden them. The researcher responded to the crises of potential and actual study participants by being present, reaching out, and supporting them in various ways. Being available to the trans Latina community established trust, solidarity, coalition work, and a bidirectional relationship between community members and the researcher.

Research Contributions

The current study makes several contributions to the existing research. First, this study highlights the particular needs and strengths of trans Latina immigrants in the Southern U.S. The needs in this region are often neglected as most research with trans Latinas has been done in more progressive and populated cities in states like California and New York. Second, although some research studies have documented that trans Latinas migrate to the U.S. seeking safer spaces and better opportunities, this study adds a description of the roles that trans Latina immigrants play in the empowerment of their communities once in the U.S. Hence, through the use of *testimonios*, the current study provides a strengths perspective that upholds the dignity of trans Latinas and respects and visibilizes the work that they have done for many generations. Third, this study explores the lived experiences of a very specific group within the Latinx and trans and queer communities. A scoping review and content analysis by this researcher found a lack of research that focuses on the experiences of trans Latina immigrants within LGBTQ+ groups (Alvarez-Hernandez, manuscript in progress-b; manuscript in progress-c). Moreover, trans Latina immigrants face discrimination within LGBTQ+ and Latinx groups (Cheney et al., 2017; Gowin et al., 2017; Perez, 2018; Reyes, 2020). By focusing on the needs, strengths, and work of trans Latina immigrants, this study offers an opportunity to understand the particular experiences of this group. Fourth, this study adds to the existing literature that reinforces the critical role that relationships and communities serve in the mental, social, and physical health of trans individuals, particularly trans Latina immigrants (Cerezo et al., 2014; James & Salcedo, 2017; Rhodes et al., 2015). Finally, the current study provides an understanding of how the work of trans Latina immigrants generates change at the micro, mezzo, and macro levels. Not only are trans Latina immigrants addressing the needs of the community at the micro level (e.g.,

providing housing and food, etc.), but they are also generating change at the familial, community, societal, and international levels (e.g., organizing their community, proposing policy, and advocating and educating others at the international level). For example, at the micro level, Ale and Samantha were providing housing to other trans individuals. At the community and policy levels, Paloma was organizing her community to ensure that trans women were treated with respect by law enforcement and spoke before the United Nations to demand rights, respect, and dignity.

Implications and Recommendations

The findings of this study have several implications for TGNC leaders and activists, the researcher, and social workers' research, practice, and education. The findings also allow for providing recommendations in these areas. Next is a discussion of the implications and recommendations based on the current study.

Implications and Recommendations for TGNC Leaders and Activists

The current study has implications for the work of TGNC leaders and activists, particularly trans Latinas in the Southern U.S. This study provides further visibility of the work that trans Latina immigrants are doing for their communities in the Southern U.S., which is often neglected by their communities, researchers, and politicians. Trans Latinas can use the findings of this study to apply for grants, and develop policies that support their work and address the needs, hopes, and visions of their communities. Moreover, the participants' *testimonios* contained in this study could reach other trans Latinas and TGNC people of color wanting to engage in similar work. Therefore, the participants' narratives could motivate others to learn more about ways in which they can generate change and engage in this work. The findings could also aid in showing existing trans Latina leaders that they are not alone in doing this work. This

study could help connect trans Latinas immigrants and other TGNC people of color in the Southern U.S. and generate mentorship and collaborations.

Based on the implications mentioned above, some recommendations could be made to TGNC leaders and activists. It is vital for TGNC leaders and activists, especially trans Latina immigrants generating change in the Southern U.S., to continue their collaborations with other trans Latinas and building coalitions with other groups generating change in their states. Within these collaborations and coalitions, trans Latina immigrants can continue to find allies that offer specific skills that contribute to their work (e.g., grant writing, capacity building, policy analysis, resource finding, etc.). Trans Latina immigrants are also encouraged to continue using local, regional, and national conferences as spaces for connecting with others and organizing their efforts. Additionally, trans Latina immigrants are encouraged to see themselves as researchers, not just as research participants, and utilize people in academia to support them and their efforts through grant writing, financial support, research design, data analysis, among other skills.

It is also critical that trans Latina immigrants continue advocating for the priorities they have identified alongside their communities and redirect the initiatives established by government officials, community agencies, academics, and other professionals. As experts in their lived experiences, it is recommended trans Latina immigrants continue educating other professionals and demanding to be financially compensated for this work. Trans Latina immigrants can educate other professionals by delivering training about trans-affirming and culturally-relevant physical and mental health interventions, consulting on how to reach their communities for research and intervention purposes, and assessing legislative proposals, among other forms of education. Finally, trans Latina immigrants are encouraged to continue showing that their work did not emerge recently and that they exist in a continuum of historical leaders

and generators of change in the U.S. Trans Latina immigrants can generate this historical awareness by being part of Pride month events, educating younger TGNC individuals, archiving historical materials and oral histories in LGBTQ+ library archives, and making sure that their ancestors are named in proclamations and physical structures aimed to honor TGNC individuals by local, state, and national governments.

Implications and Considerations for the Researcher

By conducting the current study, I have been able to learn how to conduct community-informed ethical research. The research aim and questions were informed by members of the trans Latina immigrant community generating change in the Southern U.S. Throughout the study, I remained in contact with most participants, receiving their input and further context to their experiences through phone calls and text messages. The findings will also be disseminated with the community in an event led by TGNC Latinx individuals. Furthermore, I have learned how to uphold the dignity of TGNC individuals and honor their knowledge, often subjugated in academia. By reading reports developed by TGNC groups, gathering the *testimonios* of participants, and triangulating data by watching their videos and reading their posts, I was able to learn directly from the community.

This study has made me aware of what I need to consider in future research with TGNC individuals and community leaders. Through memoing and reflexivity, I have been able to deepen my understanding of my biases and preconceptions. As a privileged Latino cisgender man born a citizen and who has various academic degrees, my own identities and experiences with privilege and oppression cannot be ignored. I will continue to consider how the personal and professional are inseparable and how they both intersect in how I learn about the world and make sense of it. Hence, I will continue acknowledging, learning, and addressing the ways in

which I perpetuate transphobia, xenophobia, sexism, classism, and elitism in my life. I plan to do so by engaging in reflexivity and memoing in future research, continue centering the voices and experiences of TGNC individuals, and seeking peer consultation.

Implications and Recommendations for Social Workers

Social Work Research

The research design of the current study implies that social workers can engage in community-informed research with TGNC individuals. By doing so, social work researchers would be able to generate research that generates and supports change among TGNC communities, even if the findings are not generalizable to other localities or populations. One of the primary motivators for conducting this study was the researcher's practice experience with TGNC people of color in the Southern U.S. Working with these individuals, and being unable to find much clinical research to address their biopsychosocial needs, led the researcher to include TGNC community leaders in his interventions and referrals. Hence, this study demonstrates how to design practice-informed research that meets the needs and amplifies the work of TGNC individuals who are generating change in their communities. Moreover, the findings of this study show the critical role of qualitative research with small samples in ensuring social justice for marginalized communities. Specifically, this study shows how to ethically collaborate with community members by building coalitions that meet the needs and highlights the strengths of particular communities. The rich and in-depth data obtained in this study serves as an example of person-centered and strengths-based research through the use of *testimonios* that humanizes the data disseminated by national quantitative reports.

Some recommendations can be made for social work researchers. The five reports by TGNC groups discussed in this study (Caraves & Salcedo, 2016; James et al., 2016; James &

Salcedo, 2017; Pulido & Salcedo, 2019; Salcedo & Padrón, 2013), the participants of the focus group that informed the design of this study, and the individual participants of the study, provided a list of recommendations for research with TGNC individuals and communities. These recommendations can be summarized as follows:

1. Engage in community-based participatory research.
2. Provide financial and research skills support for additional research projects in order to access a larger pool of TGNC Latinx participants.
3. Fund and conduct research about TGNC Latinx individuals' mental health, experiences with family acceptance, the importance of religious institutions that support trans immigrants, the significance of spirituality in conversations of acceptance and justice, access to health care, HIV incidence and prevalence, the impact of sex work in the lives of TGNC Latinx individuals, and how TGNC individuals continue to generate change in their communities despite the lack of support and resources in their states.

Social work researchers are encouraged to investigate not only the needs of TGNC individuals but also explore their resistance to oppression.[47] Using interview questions aimed at denouncing oppression and highlighting the work of TGNC individuals could be done through the use of *testimonios*.[48]

The participants of this study highlighted the increased number of trans Latinas that continue to seek their help. Estimated percentages of the trans population in the U.S. are small. However, these estimates translate into over 100,000 trans Latinx individuals in the Southern

[47] For how to use interpretative phenomenological analysis in a participant-centered way, see Larkin and colleagues (2006).
[48] For examples about the use of *testimonios* in research with trans Latinx individuals, see Fernández (2018) and Ramírez Tovar and García Rodríguez (2018).

U.S. alone. Perhaps these reports highlight a need for community-informed research that explores further the representation of trans Latinx individuals—and other communities of color—among U.S. society in general and the Southern U.S. in particular. A better understanding of the number of trans Latinx individuals living in the Southern U.S. would allow for a more targeted approach to addressing their needs and challenges and supporting their hopes and visions. Social work researchers are also encouraged to continue striving to include and collaborate with trans Latinx individuals in quantitative and qualitative research. By including trans Latinx individuals in their studies, social work researchers would gain a unique perspective of the community and an understanding of the within differences of LGBTQ+ and Latinx groups. A way of reaching the trans Latinx community could be by engaging community leaders like those in this study and grassroots community groups. Social work researchers are encouraged to compensate trans individuals and groups for this work.

Social work researchers could also consider conducting research beyond the U.S. context. As discussed by the participants of this study, the experiences of TGNC immigrants in the U.S. exist within the migration continuum (premigration, perimigration, and postmigration). The participants also said that they have had to engage in international work and collaborations to generate significant changes that cross borders. Hence, it is critical to collaborate with communities, advocates, and researchers at the international level to establish coalitions that consider the experiences of TGNC Latinx immigrants in Latin America and the U.S. These international coalitions would provide a comprehensive understanding of the experiences of trans Latina immigrants across borders and ensure their human rights regardless of their locality and social positionality.

Social Work Practice

The current study has implications for the work of social workers. These practice recommendations must be considered in the context of the findings of this study. The experiences of trans Latina immigrants generating change in the Southern U.S. cannot be compartmentalized into their micro, mezzo, and macro needs and experiences. Therefore, although practice recommendations could be separated into micro, mezzo, and macro areas, the work of social workers must be done across levels. As discussed by the participants of this study, their individual, familial, communal, and systemic experiences are interconnected. Hence, social workers ought to work towards comprehensive change in lives of trans Latina immigrants to improve their biopsychosocial wellbeing. For example, the mental health of TGNC Latinx individuals can be improved by not limiting services to individual interventions alone. Social workers are encouraged to incorporate family education and community members into the services they provide. In instances when the social worker is not a member of the TGNC community, it is recommended that they seek paid consultation from people with TGNC lived experiences. There are many texts written by TGNC mental health professionals that can also aid social workers in learning how to work with TGNC people of color, see, for example, Singh and dickey (2017).

When addressing the mental health of TGNC Latinx individuals, social workers would benefit from understanding that many of them, including the participants of this study, are helping others as a way to respond to their individual and collective traumatic experiences. The findings of this study support that self-care is essential for trans Latina immigrants and that many of them care for themselves by engaging in reciprocal community care. Social and health-related services should consider the individual within the context of their relationships and local and

international communities. Social workers could gain this contextual understanding by attending virtual or in-person international conferences, reading practice materials developed outside of the U.S., consulting with colleagues from other countries practicing in their states, and collaborating with local agencies that serve immigrants and refugees.

Social workers are encouraged to engage the community and support the work that they are currently doing. Social workers can do so by attending community events organized by TGNC Latinx individuals, serve as pro-bono consultants to support their work, and facilitate financial assistance for their efforts. When the social worker is not a member of the community they serve, they should be allies in the liberation of these communities, support social justice, and not appropriate their efforts. These recommendations could be addressed by going beyond institutionalized services and creating community-informed programs that value and support grassroots mutual aid efforts. Additionally, social workers can create community advisory boards in their agencies to gain their insight and make them part of the mission and services of their organizations.[49]

Social workers are encouraged to advocate for the TGNC Latinx community, and support and generate policies that address their needs and ensure their dignity and human rights. The participants of this study discussed how they have been leveraging policy at the local and international levels to ensure their human rights. Hence, in their advocacy and policy development efforts, social workers must center the voices and lived experiences of trans Latina immigrants. These recommendations can be addressed not only by generating new policies and modifying existing ones but also by supporting the election of more TGNC Latinx individuals to

[49] For an example of how health care clinics have partnered with trans community members to develop and provide care, see Thornhill and Klein (2010).

political positions at the local, state, and national levels. TGNC Latinx individuals should also continue to be supported as they advocate in international human rights spaces.[50]

Particular attention must be given to the development of interventions and policies aimed at improving the wellbeing of trans individuals. According to estimates, almost half of the trans adults in the U.S. are not White, non-Hispanic (Flores et al., 2016). Hence, special attention should be given to culture-specific trans interventions and policies. When developing services or policies for trans individuals without specifying race, ethnicity, or culture, social workers engage in what critical race theorist and law professor Carbado (2013) described as colorblind intersectionality. In colorblind intersectionality, when we are not specific about the groups we are targeting, then by default, it implicitly becomes about White individuals.

Social Work Education

Based on the current study, there are implications and recommendations for social work educators. These implications and recommendations are about teaching spaces for TGNC Latinx individuals and teaching TGNC Latinx immigrant content. A recommendation from the five reports by TGNC organizations included creating safer K-12 and higher education settings. Social work educators and administrators in academic settings must ensure that TGNC Latinx educators and students are able to be themselves in educational spaces and learn in discrimination and violence-free spaces.

A report by Craig and colleagues (2015) from the Council on Social Work Education's (CSWE) Council on Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity and Expression (CSOGIE) assessed the experiences of 1,018 LGBTQ social work students in North America.[51] Of the total sample,

[50] See Swiebel (2009) for more on how LGBT individuals have leveraged international platforms in the past.
[51] According to the report, 24% were bachelor of social work students, and 76% were master of social work students at 126 programs (44 U.S. states and 7 Canadian provinces).

6.2% identified as trans, with only 0.8% identifying as trans women. Regarding race and ethnicity, 7.6% identified as White Hispanic, 2.3% as Black Hispanic, and 1.0% as Hispanic with no race provided. The report did not disclose how many students identified at the intersections of sexual orientation, gender identity, and race and ethnicity. Therefore, it is unknown how many students identified as both Hispanic and trans.

In Craig and colleagues' (2015) report, 44% of all LGBTQ students reported a lack of LGBTQ content in social work courses, and 64% reported their identities being supported in some ways by their programs. When assessing the friendliness of their academic institution, 34.8% reported friendliness toward trans people, compared to 76.7% reporting friendliness towards LGBQ people. This difference in perception of friendliness indicates the different experiences trans students have compared to their LGBQ non-trans peers. Social work educators must advocate for more acceptability of trans students through student-led initiatives, faculty and staff training, and institutional policy revisions.

According to the same report, LGBTQ students reported being introduced to more LGBQ content in their social work courses than to trans content (e.g., required readings about LGBQ people was reported at 72.7%, compared to required readings about trans people reported at 42.7%) (Craig et al., 2015). Additionally, only 38.2% of the students felt that topics related to trans people were handled well in their courses, compared to 69.6% who felt the same about LGBQ topics (Craig et al., 2015). Social work educators are encouraged to engage in continued learning about trans issues and incorporate content about their experiences in courses.[52] It is vital that this content be strengths-based—in addition to teaching about health disparities and social

[52] CSWE's CSOGIE has multiple documents online aimed at increasing faculty's knowledge about LGBTQ+ issues and how to create affirming spaces for LGBQQ and TGNC students, staff, and faculty. See Craig and colleagues (2016) and Austin, Craig, Alessi, and colleagues (2016), respectively.

determinants of health, the strengths of TGNC people must also be discussed.[53] Moreover, it is recommended that social work courses introduce students to Latina feminisms and intersectionality theory and practice and how to work with trans Latinx immigrants.[54] Finally, access to social work education must be increased for TGNC Latinx individuals by providing safe learning spaces, creating inclusive educational materials, and enhancing and providing them with scholarship and mentorship opportunities.

Social work educators must continue to consider the experiences of TGNC people at the intersection of race, ethnicity, class, disability, gender, migration status, and other social locations and identities. Social work students ought to learn about the differences within the LGBTQ+ communities and not conceptualize them as a homogenous group. It is recommended that social work educators add to their courses the work of trans Latinx individuals when discussing social change, prominent generators of change in the field, and theories related to human behavior and the social environment. Social work educators can incorporate this content by utilizing guest speakers, case examples, publicly available mass media reports and social media posts, documentaries and other publicly available videos, and materials developed by TGNC Latinx individuals and organizations.

Conclusion

This study found that trans Latina immigrants generating change in the Southern U.S. are doing so to address their and their communities' struggles. They are able to be *luchadoras sociales* by engaging in reciprocal relationships with others in their communities. Although the participants' experiences varied depending on their social locations, they all agreed that their

[53] Examples of readings that discuss the role of trans Latinas in generating social change include Alvarez-Hernandez (2019) and Shepard (2013).
[54] For an example of how to incorporate intersectionality into social work courses across the curriculum, see Alvarez-Hernandez (2021).

multiple identities led them to experience intersectional oppression. Their experiences of being and doing social change in the Southern U.S. could be understood through a Latina feminisms lens. Similar to Latina feminists, the participants sought change and liberation by engaging in embodied acts of resistance, building coalitions, navigating their identities within their communities and systemic spaces, and fostering consciousness among other trans Latinas. More specifically, for the participants of this study, their oppressive experiences led them to fight injustices in various ways. For example, Ale utilized her community relationships in Louisiana to address housing insecurity, Grecia led the first trans Latina support group in North Carolina, Lucy educated other trans Latinas about sexual health in North Carolina, Paloma mentored younger trans Latina leaders in Texas, Samantha wore her trans Indigenous clothing in Georgia, and Vanessa supported the Latinx community through the COVID-19 pandemic in North Carolina. Similar to Latina feminists, these participants sought change by using their voices and actions and supporting other women to do the same.

Although the current study has some limitations, including a lack of trans Latina immigrants in the research team and a small sample size, it also contributes to the existing body of research. This study provides a nuanced exploration of the strengths and resistance experiences of trans Latina immigrants, a specific group within Latinx and TGNC groups. It also explores the experiences of this group in the Southern U.S., an underserved and under-researched geopolitical area of the U.S. Moreover, the findings of the study and previous research lead to implications and recommendations for TGNC leaders and activists, the researcher, and social workers' research, practice, and education.

The current study highlights the importance for TGNC generators of change to continue engaging in coalition building, advocating for their human rights, and making their work visible

for others to also engage in similar work. It is critical for TGNC leaders and activists, particularly in the Southern U.S., to continue collaborating with other marginalized groups and leveraging partnerships with those outside their communities, like health care professionals and researchers. The process of designing and conducting this study also provided the researcher with an opportunity to engage in community-informed research while addressing his biases, preconceptions, and contribution to the systemic oppression of TGNC people of color. For the researcher, as a social work researcher, practitioner, and educator, it is vital to continue utilizing strengths-based, community-informed, and liberatory approaches.

Social work researchers are strongly encouraged to engage in strengths-based and liberatory approaches to doing research led and informed by TGNC people of color. Hence, it is recommended that social work researchers engage in research that highlights the resistance of oppressed groups and their contributions to change within their communities and beyond. Social work researchers can utilize official reports published by TGNC groups, use *testimonios* when collecting qualitative data, and disseminate their findings with TGNC communities. Social work practitioners are recommended to incorporate TGNC people of color in their interventions, advocate for the human rights of this group, and support systemic change that addresses the needs and struggles of the community. Social work practitioners ought to include and compensate TGNC Latinx individuals who can lead health and social services design and delivery, community mobilization, and policy design and implementation. Lastly, social work educators must create safe teaching and learning spaces for TGNC educators, students, and staff, and teach content related to the needs and strengths of TGNC people of color, especially of trans Latina immigrants. Overall, this study underscores the critical roles of trans Latina immigrants in

generating change for their communities in the Southern U.S. and beyond and how social workers can contribute to their efforts, being united in the fight—*juntas en la lucha*.

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Appendix A- Focus Group Interview Protocol for Previous Study

Group Interview Protocol

Study: The Experiences of Transgender and Gender Nonconforming Latinx individuals in the Southern U.S.

Research Goal

The purpose of my research project is to inform health and social services practices with transgender and gender non-binary (TGNB) Latinx individuals by understanding the needs, strengths, and recommendations of TGNB Latinx individuals, as directly provided by them.

Research Questions

1. What are the needs reported by TGNB Latinx individuals?
2. What are the strengths of TGNB Latinx individuals?
3. What are the recommendations of TGNB Latinx individuals for health and social services practices?
    a. What are the direct practice recommendations?
    b. What are the policy practice recommendations?

Introduction to Interview

Hello! Thank you for being here today, I really appreciate you making time to talk. I am interested in the needs and strengths of transgender and gender nonconforming Latinx individuals, and your recommendations to address these needs. This research is important because it can potentially influence the delivery of health and social services. I hope that by learning from you, we will be able to better address the needs of the community.

This interview will last about 90 minutes. If you feel uncomfortable answering any of the questions, please feel free to pass. If you need to take a break, please let me know. I will be recording our conversation on two audio recorders (the second one is for backup) and you may see me jot down some notes as we talk. Do you have any questions?

Consent

This consent form provides an overview of the study, the risks and benefits, and why you are being invited to participate. [read through consent form…] I encourage you to take some time to think this over and ask questions now and at any other time. By completing the interviews, you are agreeing to participate in the above described research project. Are there any questions?

Introductions

So let's start off with an introduction – think for a moment about a pseudonym or fake name you'd like to use for this interview. Once you've thought of a fake name, introduce yourself, and share where you are from (or the place you call home) and for how long you have been living in the U.S. and the state of Georgia.

Interview Questions

Now that we have introduced ourselves. I would like to start our conversation by engaging in a quick activity. Using a pen and piece of paper, I want to invite you to think of the needs that transgender and gender nonconforming Latinx individuals face today. You can write as many as you would like. I will give you 5 minutes to do this. (Allow 5 minutes). Now I would like you to rate five of those needs from 1-5, where one of the top need.

Let's talk about your top five needs, starting with everyone's number one need. I will keep track of your responses. Who would like to start? (Do this for all top five responses). Now let's talk about your responses.

- What stands out?
- What do these needs look like? Please describe.
- How do you know these needs exist? Please provide an example.
- Can we collectively create a list of 5 top needs?

Now that we have discussed these needs. Let's talk about your recommendations to address these needs.

- If you were to advice service providers in the community about how to address these needs. What would you tell them to do?

Let's start with number one (Do this for all top five responses).

Now that we have discussed needs and recommendations. Let's talk about your strengths. Again, using pen and paper, I want to invite you to think of the strengths that transgender and gender nonconforming Latinx individuals have. You can write as many as you would like. I will give you 5 minutes to do this. (Allow 5 minutes). Now I would like you to rate five of those strengths from 1-5, where one of the top need.

Let's talk about your top five needs, starting with everyone's number one need. I will keep track of your responses. Who would like to start? (Do this for all top five responses). Now let's talk about your responses.

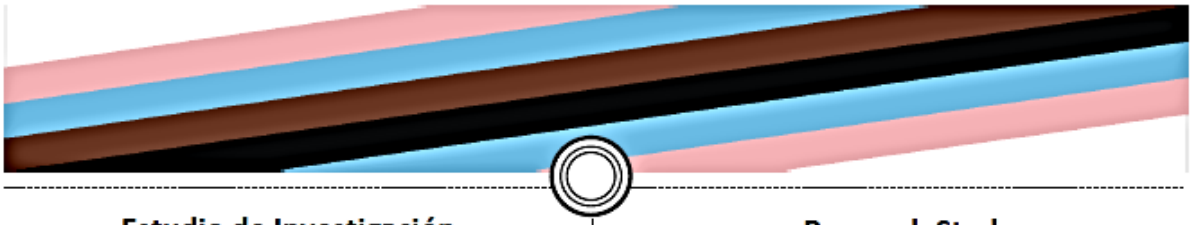
- What stands out?
- What do these strengths look like? Please describe.
- How do you know these are strengths of transgender and gender non-forming Latinx individuals? Please provide an example.
- Can we collectively create a list of 5 top strengths?

Finally, what questions should we be asking people doing similar work to the work that you do?

Conclusion

That concludes our interview. Thank you so much for sharing your experiences. If you are interested in continuing these conversations, please let me know. Also, let me know if you have any questions! Thank you again. We will now collect your responses and provide you with the incentives.

Appendix B- Recruitment Flyer for Current Study



Estudio de Investigación

¿De qué es el estudio?

Este estudio busca explorar el significado que las Latinas transgénero atribuyen a sus experiencias vividas mientras generan cambio en el Sur de los Estados Unidos.

¿Quién puede participar?

Cualquier persona que sea:

1. Mujer transgénero,
2. Latina/x/e o Chicana/x/e,
3. Generadora de cambio en sus comunidades y
4. Edad 18+

¿Qué implicaría?

Una entrevista a través de Zoom que no durará más de 2 horas.

¿Seré compensadx por mi tiempo?

Sí. Se le compensará con $50 luego de completar la entrevista.

¿Cómo puedo aprendar más o verificar si califico?

Contacte a Luis Alvarez-Hernandez vía correo electrónico: lalvarez@uga.edu

Research Study

What is the study about?

This study seeks to explore the meaning that transgender Latinas make of their lived experiences as they generate change in the Southern United States.

Who can participate?

Anyone who is:

1. Transgender woman,
2. Latina/x/e or Chicana/x/e,
3. Generator of change in their communities, and
4. Age 18+

What would it involve?

A Zoom interview lasting no more than 2 hours.

Will I be compensated for my time?

Yes. You will be compensated $50 after completing the interview.

How can I learn more or check if I qualify?

Contact Luis Alvarez-Hernandez via email: lalvarez@uga.edu

Faculty Advisor: Dr. Rebecca Matthew, PhD, MSW
University of Georgia, School of Social Work
This study had been approved by the Institutional Review Board (706-542-3199; IRB@uga.edu).

Appendix C- Consent Form in Spanish for Current Study

UNIVERSIDAD DE GEORGIA

Una Exploración de las Experiencias Vividas De Latinas Transgénero Generando Cambio en el Sur de los Estados Unidos

FORMULARIO DE CONSENTIMIENTO – ESPAÑOL

Le estamos pidiendo que sea parte de un estudio de investigación. La información en este formulario le ayudará a decidir si quiere participar en el estudio. Por favor, hágale preguntas a lxs investigadores enumerados abajo si hay algo que no está claro o si necesita más información.

Investigador: Luis R. Alvarez-Hernandez
Escuela de Trabajo Social
Teléfono: (706) 542-5445
Email: lalvarez@uga.edu

Supervisora de la Facultad: Dra. Rebecca Matthew
Escuela de Trabajo Social
Teléfono: (706) 542-5445
Email: ramatthew@uga.edu

Propósito del Estudio
Explorar el significado que las personas transgénero Latinas forman acerca de sus experiencias vividas mientras generan cambio en el Sur de los EE.UU.

Procedimiento del Estudio
Si usted está de acuerdo en participar en este estudio, le pediremos que participe en una entrevista individual que tomará aproximadamente 1-2 horas. Usted y Luis R. Alvarez-Hernandez decidirán si es necesario tener entrevistas adicionales.

Para entender mejor su trabajo, podríamos estar interesados en observar videos pregrabados o en vivo ("live"), fotos, o publicaciones ("posts") subidas por usted o su organización a cuentas en las redes sociales u otras plataformas en línea.

Se completará una hoja con información demográfica al momento de la entrevista.

Riesgos y Beneficios
Su participación es voluntaria. Usted puede reusarse a participar o a parar en cualquier momento sin penalidad alguna. Su decisión en participar no impactará su participación en ningún servicio de programas médicos o sociales.

Hay preguntas que tal vez le hagan sentir incómode. Puede saltar esas preguntas si no desea contestarlas.

Privacidad y Confidencialidad
Tomaremos pasos para proteger su privacidad, pero hay un pequeño riesgo de que su información pueda ser divulgada accidentalmente a personas no conectadas con la investigación. Para reducir este riesgo, mantendremos su información identificable separada de sus respuestas. También usaremos seudónimos en la grabación y transcripción de las entrevistas..

Hay límites a la confidencialidad absoluta de investigaciones conducidas a través del Internet. Es posible, aunque poco probable, que individuos no autorizados puedan ganar acceso a sus respuestas si usted está respondiendo en línea. La confidencialidad será mantenida al grado posible permitido por la tecnología utilizada. No se puede hacer garantía acerca de la intercepción de datos enviados a través del Internet. Sin embargo, su participación en esta entrevista en línea envuelve riesgos similares a los del uso diario del Internet de cualquier persona.

Diseminación de los Hallazgos
La información obtenida en este estudio será potencialmente utilizada o compartida después de que los identificadores sean removidos. Esto puede incluir el compartir resultados a través de formas escritas y orales en publicaciones y conferencias académicas. También podríamos compartir los hallazgos generales de este estudio con partes interesadas en la comunidad. Otros posibles esfuerzos de diseminación incluyen una página web que la comunidad pueda acceder y lecturas públicas sin identificadores.

Incentivos por su Participación
Usted recibirá $50 después de la entrevista. Usted tiene la opción de recibir este incentivo a través de: (1) Una tarjeta de regalo por correo, o (2) Un pago electrónico a través de aplicaciones como Venmo o Cashapp. Para proteger su confidencialidad, lxs investigadores escribirán una "X" en un formulario de recibo para cada pago provisto. Este recibo será compartido con la oficina de negocios del departamento de lxs investigadores.

Si Tiene Alguna Pregunta
Por favor, siéntase en la libertad de hacer preguntas acerca de este estudio en cualquier momento. Puede contactar a la Investigadora Principal, la Dra. Rebecca Matthew, Profesora Asistente al (706) 542-5445, ramatthew@uga.edu. Si tiene alguna queja o pregunta acerca de sus derechos como voluntarie en esta investigación, contacte al IRB al 706-542-3199 o por email a IRB@uga.edu.

Completando estas entrevistas está dando su acuerdo en participar en el proyecto de investigación descrito arriba.

¡Gracias por su consideración! **Por favor, quédese con esta carta para sus récords.**

Appendix D- Consent Form in English for Current Study

UNIVERSITY OF GEORGIA

An Exploration of the Lived Experiences of Transgender Latinas Generating Change in the Southern United States

CONSENT FORM – ENGLISH

You are being asked to take part in a research study. The information in this form will help you decide if you want to be in the study. Please ask the researchers below if there is anything that is not clear or if you need more information.

Investigator: Luis R. Alvarez-Hernandez
School of Social Work
Phone: (706) 542-5445
Email: lalvarez@uga.edu

Faculty Supervisor: Dr. Rebecca Matthew
School of Social Work
Phone: (706) 542-5445
Email: ramatthew@uga.edu

Purpose of the Study
To explore the meaning that transgender Latinas make of their lived experiences as they work toward change in the Southern U.S.

Study Procedures
If you agree to participate in this study, we will ask you to participate in an individual interview that will take approximately 1-2 hours. You and Luis R. Alvarez-Hernandez will decide if additional interviews are necessary.

To better understand your work, we may also be interested in observing pre-recorded or live videos, photos, or posts uploaded by you or your organization to social media accounts and other online platforms.

A demographics form will be completed at the time of the interview.

Risks and Benefits
Participation is voluntary. You can refuse to take part or stop at any time without penalty. Your decision to participate will have no impact in your participation in any medical or social services programs.

There are questions that may make you uncomfortable. You can skip these questions if you do not wish to answer them.

Privacy and Confidentiality
We will take steps to protect your privacy, but there is a small risk that your information could be accidentally disclosed to people not connected to the research. To reduce this risk we will keep your identifiable information separate from your responses. We will also use pseudonyms in interview recordings and transcripts.

There are limits to the complete confidentiality of research conducted on the Internet. It is possible, although unlikely, that unauthorized individuals could gain access to your responses if you are responding online. Confidentiality will be maintained to the degree permitted by the technology used. No guarantees can be made regarding the interception of data sent via the Internet. However, your participation in this online interview involves risks similar to a person's everyday use of the Internet.

Dissemination of the Findings
The information gathered in this study will potentially be used or shared after the identifiers have been removed. This may include sharing the results through written and oral forms in academic publications and conferences. We may also share the overall findings of this study with stakeholders in the community. Other potential dissemination efforts include a web page that the community can access and public readings of de-identified data.

Incentives for Participation
You will receive $50 after the interview. You have the option of receiving this incentive through either: (1) A gift card in the mail, or (2) An electronic payment through the applications Venmo or Cashapp. In order to further protect your confidentiality, the researchers will write an "X" on a receipt form for each payment provided. This receipt will be shared with the investigator's departmental business office.

If you Have any Questions
Please feel free to ask questions about this research at any time. You can contact the Principal Investigator, Dr. Rebecca Matthew, Assistant Professor at (706) 542-5445, ramatthew@uga.edu. If you have any complaints or questions about your rights as a research volunteer, contact the IRB at 706-542-3199 or by email at IRB@uga.edu.

By completing the interviews you are agreeing to participate in the above described research project.

Thank you for your consideration! **Please keep this letter for your records.**

Appendix E- Rationale for Interview Questions

Interview Questions for Current Study and Their Rationale

Research Questions	Interview Questions (English)	Interview Questions (Spanish)	Rationale for the Question
RQ2: How do the multiple identities of transgender Latinas influence their experiences of empowerment in the Southern U.S.?	1. Who do you see when you look at yourself in the mirror? a. How do you describe yourself? b. How do you think others see you?	1. ¿A quién ves cuando te ves en el espejo? a. ¿Cómo te describes? b. ¿Cómo crees que otros te ven?	Cotera writes in "The Chicana Feminist" manifesto (1977), "When you get up in the morning and look at yourself in the mirror, it's still you." (p. 30).
	2. In general, how do you think your identity influences the work that you do in the community?	2. En general, ¿cómo piensas que tu identidad influye en el trabajo que haces en la comunidad?	Latina feminists focus on the roles that gender, ethnicity, culture, race, nationality, space, class, spirituality, sexual orientation, and coloniality play in the experiences of individuals.
RQ1: *What are the lived experiences of transgender Latinas generating change for their communities in the Southern U.S.?*	3. How do you describe your community? 4. Please describe the work that you are doing in your community. (An example?)	3. ¿Cómo describes a tu comunidad? 4. Por favor, describe el trabajo que estás haciendo en tu comunidad. (¿Un ejemplo?)	Latina feminists explore community connections and the role of a person in that community. Cotera (1977) asks, "what can you do for your community?" (p. 30).
	5. How does your work impact the wellbeing and mental health of other people?	5. ¿Cómo tu trabajo impacta el bienestar y la salud mental de otras personas?	The literature highlights that the connections of trans Latinas with each other are beneficial for their wellbeing.
	6. What changes would you like to see, and what meaning would they have for you? (In general, in the community)	6. ¿Qué cambios quisieras ver y qué significado tendrían para ti? (En general, en la comunidad)	Latina feminists consider social change a vital process in the work that they do.
	7. You have been identified as someone who is generating changes in the community. What does this mean for you?	7. Usted ha sido identificada como alguien que está generando cambios en su comunidad. ¿Qué significa esto para ti?	Phenomenology seeks to understand the meaning that people make of their experiences.
	8. Which people or experiences motivated you to start doing this work?	8. ¿Qué personas o experiencias te motivaron a empezar a hacer este trabajo?	Latina feminists underscore the critical role of that relationships play on their work and how these motivate them.

	a. How did you learn to do this work? b. Whom or what gives you the strengths and energy to continue doing this work?	a. ¿Cómo aprendiste a hacer este trabajo? b. ¿Qué o quiénes te dan fuerza y energía para continuar haciendo este trabajo?	
RQ3: How do transgender Latinas experience and overcome challenges?	9. Tell me about the challenges or barriers you have had in doing this work in the Southern U.S. and how did you overcome them? (What or who helped you? Example)	9. Cuéntame acerca de los retos u obstáculos que has tenido haciendo este trabajo en el Sur de los Estados Unidos y cómo los has superado. (¿Qué o quién te ayudó? Ejemplo).	The literature describes the multiple challenges that TGNC Latinx individuals face when addressing their needs. Moreover, In the focus group conducted to inform this study, a participant suggested the following question for future research: How are these organizations and leaders doing grassroots community work with a lack of resources?
	10. What advice would you give to other transgender Latinas wanting to generate changes in their communities? a. And to allies?	10. ¿Qué consejo le darías a otras Latinas transgénero que quieren generar cambios en sus comunidades? a. Y a aliades?	Anzaldúa (2015) considers ancestors a necessary ontological force in the search for change.

Appendix F- Interview Protocol in Spanish for Current Study

UNIVERSITY OF GEORGIA

An Exploration of the Lived Experiences of Transgender Latinas Generating Change in the Southern United States

INTERVIEW PROTOCOL—SPANISH

Purpose of the Study
To explore the meaning that transgender Latinas make of their lived experiences as they generate change in the Southern U.S.

Research Questions

1. What are the lived experiences of TGNC Latinx individuals who seek change for their communities in the Southern U.S.?
2. How do the multiple identities of TGNC Latinx individuals influence their experiences of empowerment in the Southern U.S.?
3. How do TGNC Latinx individuals experience and overcome challenges?

Introduction to Interview
¡Hola! Gracias por estar aquí hoy, realmente aprecio el que te hayas tomado el tiempo para hablar. Estoy interesado en las experiencias de las mujeres transgénero Latinas mientras generan cambio en el Sur de los Estados Unidos. Este estudio es importante porque no sabemos mucho acerca de las experiencias de esas personas que están generando cambio en sus comunidades. Espero que al aprender de ti, podamos entender mejor tus experiencias e inspires a otres haciendo un trabajo parecido.

Esta entrevista durara entre 1-2 horas. Si te sientes incomoda contestando cualquiera de las preguntas, siéntete en la libertad de saltarla. Si necesitas tomarte un descanso, por favor déjame saber. Voy a estar grabando nuestra conversación en dos grabadoras (la segunda es para respaldo) y puede ser que me veas tomando algunas notas mientras hablamos. ¿Tienes alguna pregunta?

Consent
Esta hoja de consentimiento provee información general acerca del estudio, cuáles son los riesgos y beneficios y el por qué está siendo invitada a participar (read through consent form). Te exhorto a que te tomes un momento para pensarlo y a hacer preguntas ahora o en cualquier otro momento. Completando estas entrevistas, estas accediendo a participar en el proyecto de investigación descrito arriba. ¿Tienes alguna pregunta?

Introduction
Empecemos con una introducción – piensa por un momento en un seudónimo o nombre falso que quisieras usar para esta entrevista. Cuando hayas pensado en un nombre falso, preséntate, comparte de dónde vienes (o el lugar que llamas hogar) y en dónde vives ahora en los Estados Unidos.

Interview Questions

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS	RESEARCHER'S NOTES
Self—*Who are You?*	
1. ¿A quién ves cuando te ves en el espejo? a. ¿Cómo te describes? b. ¿Cómo crees que otros te ven?	
2. En general, ¿cómo piensas que tu identidad influye en el trabajo que haces en la comunidad?	
Community—*Who is your community?*	
3. ¿Cómo describes a tu comunidad?	
3. Por favor, describe el trabajo que estás haciendo en tu comunidad. (¿Un ejemplo?)	
4. ¿Cómo tu trabajo impacta el bienestar y la salud mental de otras personas?	
5. ¿Qué cambios quisieras ver y qué significado tendrían para ti? (En general, en la comunidad)	
Experiences as generators of change—W*hat can you do (are you doing) for your community?*	
6. Usted ha sido identificada como alguien que está generando cambios en su comunidad. ¿Qué significa esto para ti?	
8. ¿Qué personas o experiencias te motivaron a empezar a hacer este trabajo? a. ¿Cómo aprendiste a hacer este trabajo? b. ¿Qué o quiénes te dan fuerza y energía para continuar haciendo este trabajo?	
9. Cuéntame acerca de los retos u obstáculos que has tenido haciendo este trabajo en el Sur de los Estados Unidos y cómo los has superado. (¿Qué o quién te ayudó? Ejemplo).	
10. ¿Qué consejo le darías a otras Latinas transgénero que quieren generar cambios en sus comunidades? a. Y a aliades?	
Open Ended Question	
• ¿Hay algo más acerca de este tema que quisieras decir que yo no te he preguntado?	
Snowball sampling	
• ¿A quién recomendarías para este estudio?	
• ¿Por qué dirías que ellas están generando cambios?	

Demographics Form

Ahora le voy a hacer algunas preguntas acerca de usted. ¿Está bien? (Complete Demographics Form)

Conclusion

Esto concluye nuestra entrevista. Muchas gracias por compartir sus experiencias. Si está interesada en continuar estas conversaciones, por favor déjeme saber. ¡También déjeme saber si tiene cualquiera pregunta! Gracias nuevamente. Ahora le proveeré el incentivo de $50.

Appendix G- Interview Protocol in English for Current Study

UNIVERSITY OF GEORGIA

An Exploration of the Lived Experiences of Transgender Latinas Generating Change in the Southern United States

INTERVIEW PROTOCOL—ENGLISH

Purpose of the Study
To explore the meaning that transgender Latinas make of their lived experiences as they generate change in the Southern U.S.

Research Questions

4. What are the lived experiences of TGNC Latinx individuals who seek change for their communities in the Southern U.S.?
5. How do the multiple identities of TGNC Latinx individuals influence their experiences of empowerment in the Southern U.S.?
6. How do TGNC Latinx individuals experience and overcome challenges?

Introduction to Interview
Hello! Thank you for being here today, I really appreciate you making time to talk. I am interested in the experiences of transgender Latinas as they generate change in the Southern U.S. This research is important because we don't know much about the experiences of those generating change in our communities. I hope that by learning from you, we will be able to better understand your experiences and inspire others to do similar work.

This interview will last between 1-2 hours. If you feel uncomfortable answering any of the questions, please feel free to pass. If you need to take a break, please let me know. I will be recording our conversation on two audio recorders (the second one is for backup), and you may see me jot down some notes as we talk. Do you have any questions?

Consent
This consent form provides an overview of the study, what are the risks and benefits, and why you are being invited to participate (read through consent form). I encourage you to take some time to think this over and ask questions now and at any other time. By completing the interviews, you are agreeing to participate in the above described research project. Are there any questions?

Introduction
So let's start off with an introduction – think for a moment about a pseudonym or fake name you'd like to use for this interview. Once you've thought of a fake name, introduce yourself, share where you are from (or the place you call home), and where you are living now in the U.S.

Interview Questions

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS	RESEARCHER'S NOTE
Self—*Who are You?*	
1. Who do you see when you look at yourself in the mirror? a. How do you describe yourself? b. How do you think others see you?	
2. In general, how do you think your identity influences the work that you do in the community?	
Community—*Who is your community?*	
3. How do you describe your community?	
4. Please describe the work that you are doing in your community. (An example?)	
5. How does your work impact the wellbeing and mental health of other people?	
6. What changes would you like to see, and what meaning would they have for you? (In general, in the community)	
Experiences as generators of change—W*hat can you do (are you doing) for your community?*	
7. You have been identified as someone who is generating changes in the community. What does this mean for you?	
8. Which people or experiences motivated you to start doing this work? a. How did you learn to do this work? b. Whom or what gives you the strengths and energy to continue doing this work?	
9. Tell me about the challenges or barriers you have had in doing this work in the Southern U.S. and how did you overcome them? (What or who helped you? Example)	
10. What advice would you give to other transgender Latinas wanting to generate changes in their communities? b. And to allies?	
Open Ended Question	
• Is there anything else about this topic that you would like to say that I have not asked you?	
Snowball sampling	
• Who would you recommend for this study?	
• Why would you say they are generating changes?	

Demographics Form

I will now ask you a few questions about yourself. Is that okay? (Complete Demographics Form)

Conclusion

That concludes our interview. Thank you so much for sharing your experiences. If you are interested in continuing these conversations, please let me know. Also, let me know if you have any questions! Thank you again. I will now provide you with the $50 incentive.

Appendix H- Demographics Sheet

UNIVERSITY OF GEORGIA

An Exploration of the Lived Experiences of Transgender Latinas Generating Change in the Southern United States

DEMOGRAPHICS FORM

Pseudonym: _____ Date of Interview: _____

1. **What is your age? _____**

2. **In what city and state do you reside?**

   City: _____ State: _____

3. **If you migrated, how long have you been in the U.S.?**

   Number of years: _____

4. **If applicable, what country/countries did you or your families migrate from?**

   Country: _____

5. **How do you identify your gender? _____**
6. **At what age did you start presenting/outwardly living as a woman? _____**
7. **What is your sexual orientation? _____**
8. **What is your relationship status? _____**
9. **What is the highest level of education you have completed (either in the U.S. or country of origin)?**

_____

10. **What is your current living situation? _____**
11. **What is your current employment status? _____**
12. **For how long have you been working with the community? _____**
13. **How can we find you on social media or other online platforms? By providing us with this information you are giving us permission to observe your work through these platforms. Remember that the data will be de-identified.**

_____

Appendix I

Charting Template for Initial Notes and Theme Development Processes

Research Questions	***Interview Questions***	**Data (Transcript)**	**Exploratory Comments (Luis)** Normal Text=Descriptive Comments Red Text=Linguistic Comments **BOLD=Conceptual Comments**	**Exploratory Comments (Luis & Maria)** Normal Text=Descriptive Red Text=Linguistic Comments **BOLD=Conceptual Comments**	**First Round of Themes**
RQ2: How do the multiple identities of transgender Latinas influence their experiences of empowerment in the Southern U.S.?	***1. ¿A quién ves cuando te ves en el espejo?***				
	a. ¿Cómo te describes?				
	b. ¿Cómo crees que otros te ven?				
	2. En general, ¿cómo piensas que tu identidad influye en el trabajo que haces en la comunidad?				
RQ1: What are the lived experiences of transgender Latinas	***3. ¿Cómo describes a tu comunidad?***				
	4. Por favor, describe el trabajo que				

Research Questions	***Interview Questions***	**Data (Transcript)**	**Exploratory Comments (Luis)** Normal Text=Descriptive Comments Red Text=Linguistic Comments **BOLD=Conceptual Comments**	**Exploratory Comments (Luis & Maria)** Normal Text=Descriptive Red Text=Linguistic Comments **BOLD=Conceptual Comments**	**First Round of Themes**
generating change for their communities in the Southern U.S.?	***estás haciendo en tu comunidad. (¿Un ejemplo?)***				
	5. ¿Cómo tu trabajo impacta el bienestar y la salud mental de otras personas?				
	6. ¿Qué cambios quisieras ver y qué significado tendrían para ti? (En general, en la comunidad)				
	7. Usted ha sido identificada como alguien que está generando cambios en su comunidad. ¿Qué significa esto para ti?				

Research Questions	***Interview Questions***	**Data (Transcript)**	**Exploratory Comments (Luis)** Normal Text=Descriptive Comments Red Text=Linguistic Comments **BOLD=Conceptual Comments**	**Exploratory Comments (Luis & Maria)** Normal Text=Descriptive Red Text=Linguistic Comments **BOLD=Conceptual Comments**	**First Round of Themes**
	8. ¿Qué personas o experiencias te motivaron a empezar a hacer este trabajo?				
	a. ¿Cómo aprendiste a hacer este trabajo?				
	b. ¿Qué o quiénes te dan fuerza y energía para continuar haciendo este trabajo?				
RQ3: How do transgender Latinas experience and overcome challenges?	***9. Cuéntame acerca de los retos u obstáculos que has tenido haciendo este trabajo en el Sur de los Estados Unidos y cómo los has superado.***				

Research Questions	***Interview Questions***	**Data (Transcript)**	**Exploratory Comments (Luis)** Normal Text=Descriptive Comments Red Text=Linguistic Comments **BOLD=Conceptual Comments**	**Exploratory Comments (Luis & Maria)** Normal Text=Descriptive Red Text=Linguistic Comments **BOLD=Conceptual Comments**	**First Round of Themes**
	(¿Qué o quién te ayudó? Ejemplo).				
	10. ¿Qué consejo le darías a otras Latinas transgénero que quieren generar cambios en sus comunidades?				
	a. Y a aliades?				
Other					